

THE HARM OF IMMORALITY

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Abstract

A central problem in moral theory is how it is to be defended against those who think that there is no harm in being immoral, and that immorality can be in one's self-interest, assuming the perpetrator is not caught and punished. The argument presented here defends the idea that being immoral prevents one from having self-respect. If it makes sense to think that one cannot be happy without self-respect, then the conclusion follows that one cannot be both immoral and happy. Immorality is harmful because its self-disrespecting nature keeps immoralists from being happy. This is the harm of immorality.

Introduction and scope of the argument

Immorally harming others is also harmful to oneself. If immorality is understood as manifest in the intentional harm of others for the sake of one's perceived 'self-interest', or 'person gain', or mere convenience, or for the sake of the interests of one's family, or tribe, or country, etc., then there is good reason to think that it is harmful to oneself to act according to a theory that prescribes immorality. The good reason is that those who are characteristically immoral, or to a less degree, those who are occasionally immoral, are to that degree depriving themselves of self-respect, thereby making it impossible for them to be happy. The more immoral a person is the less that person can have self-respect and be happy.

The idea that immorality is harmful to its perpetrators is of course not new. Plato treated the issue in three dialogues: *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and, briefly in the 'Theaetetus digression' (176a–177b).¹ Glaucon, in *Republic*, puts the challenge in a now familiar way.¹ First, morality is seen as a 'compromise between the ideal of doing wrong without having to pay for it, and the worst situation, which

¹ Robin Waterfield, translator (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1993.

is having wrong done to one while lacking the means of exacting compensation' (359a). Next, he asks us to consider a particular immoral person who is consummate in immorality (360e), practicing it in outstandingly 'proper fashion' (361a), who is also uncatchable, due to, say, possessing magic (359c–360d), and as attractive and successful in the world as one can be (362b–c). He concludes that there is no reason left to think that immorality cannot yield a happy life, and the biblical 'green bay tree' spreads.

The obvious way to answer this challenge would be to point to a harm unavoidably suffered by all practitioners of immorality. The trick has been in pointing out a harm that cannot be avoided. The solution is to see that all members of *Homo sapiens*, considered as individual moral agents, cannot possess self-respect while also disrespecting other humans by immorally treating them as less than human or as mere objects or things. An important aspect of the moral psychology involved is the thought that how we treat other human beings in moral contexts is not isolated from how we each treat ourselves, but rather these are inextricably linked, both influencing and being influenced by the other. Our interpersonal relations are intimately related to our intra-personal (reflexive) relations, such as self-respect and integrity. Who and what we respect ramifies through if and how we respect ourselves. A point of fact that needs emphasis is that individuals who behave in characteristically immoral ways, regardless of the ways in which they may each be unique, are living in denial of what they share with everyone else, namely those aspects of us all that are singularly, particularly human; those properties all members of the species *Homo sapiens* have in common, in virtue of their shared ancestry. Since immoral people neglect these properties of themselves, they are not respecting what makes them who they are, considered as individuals. This is self-disrespect. If some people do not treat others as the latter deserve, this implies that the former do not understand how people deserve to be treated, themselves included.

The point can be put in terms of being a fool. Both Thrasymachus and Socrates can agree that a fool is a dupe: someone who thinks they are getting one thing when, in fact, they are getting another. Immoral people typically take moral people to be dupes (*Republic* 343d), as 'sheep' who have fooled themselves into thinking that we all must always do what conventional morality says. Immoral people think they make fools out of others, by manipulation or blatant acts of power, while getting away with it without

being 'punished'. The present strategy is to turn the tables on immoralists by showing how, in fact, they are only fooling themselves into thinking they have learned how to become happy. In fact, since they do not appreciate what makes them who they are as individuals, they do not know how to respect themselves, nor do they understand what happiness is for human beings. Immoralists think they know what happiness is, but they have sold themselves a false bill of goods. Some fools are fooled by others, and some fools fool themselves. If all fools are disrespected by those that fool them, then if a fool fools himself, he is disrespecting himself in the process, whether he knows it or not.

While it may strike many as a plausibly intuitive point that our inter-personal relations are intimately related to our intra-personal (reflexive) relations, the traditional difficulty has been in formulating arguments that show how immorally harming others is also harmful to the perpetrators of the immorality.

The goal of the argument is to show that being immoral is harmful. Three assumptions are in the background. The first assumption is that one lacks self-respect, if one disrespects oneself. This is supposed to be trivially, analytically true, due to the meanings of the noun 'self-respect' and the verb 'to disrespect'. The second assumption is that if something makes it impossible for an agent to live a happy life, it is harmful. So, a normative theory that ruins the life of every person who lives by it is a bad, harmful, and self-defeating theory by which to live. Again, this is meant to be uncontentious. The third premise, the original contribution of this paper, is the relevance to the debate of the relations between self-respect and happiness. Indeed, the final assumption is that it is impossible for a person to be happy without self-respect. This is treated as an assumption because it is something upon which the vast majority of moralists and immoralists can agree.

Most immoralists seem to have a very high regard of themselves; consider Thrasy-machus' claim that immoral people are 'good and clever' while moral people are the opposite (349d). Like Thrasy-machus, immoralists often take a superior attitude toward everyone else, justifying their immoral behavior in terms of their superiority. Most immoralists have a self-aggrandizing sense of self and, for that reason, tend to think they have self-respect. If they denied the third assumption, they would have no justification for their immorality, which is predicated on the idea that it can make them happy and enhance their self-respect. So, there is good reason to think that immoralists would (have to) accept this final

assumption, as they think they have self-respect and live happy lives as long as they do not get caught.² Even immoralists will not think that a person without self-respect can be happy.

Most moralists and immoralists will agree that dupes, or fools, are not really happy, even if they think they are. They do not know real happiness, but only some fraudulent version of it. Dupes have bought a false bill of goods after having been fooled into believing in it. They think they respect themselves, but since they are wrong about who they are (especially in relation to others), they do not in fact respect themselves but merely a false image of themselves. Dupes are not happy, even if they think they are; they have no self-respect even if they think they do. The harm of immorality is that it makes one into a dupe.

The only people who would reject the idea that self-respect is necessary for happiness are those who think that pleasure (or perhaps preference satisfaction) alone is sufficient for happiness. It might be misleading to call these people 'hedonists', because this is also Kant's view of happiness and Kant is anything but a hedonist, typically understood. But regardless of whether one's moral theory is cashed out in terms of hedonism or not, as a theory of happiness, hedonism is fairly absurd.³ From a common-sense point of view, a shamelessly wonton person who would do anything for pleasure, regardless of how degrading or otherwise self-destructive the act may be, does not present a picture of anything close to human happiness. Hedonists (here including Kant) are committed to such a person being happy, because they think that the only thing relevant to a person's happiness is how much pleasure they experience.

For hedonists, self-respect could have only instrumental value. (This is similar to Epicurus' treatment of all virtue.) It is not clear how one might try to argue against such a view of happiness, except to say that, to some important degree, it is both descriptively inhuman and normatively inhumane to think of human happiness as consisting in pure pleasure to the degree that one treats oneself (not to mention others) as mere 'pleasure delivery

² This leads to a *sense* of self-respect, and it is this sense of self-respect that leads the immoralists to agree with this final premise. I argue below that they have only a false sense of self-respect. Quickly: immoral people may claim to have self-respect and happiness, but they really only have a stunted sense of what these are.

³ The absurdity of what I am calling 'pure hedonism' is similar to the schizophrenia Michael Stocker finds in 'hedonic egoists' in his paper 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,' *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 73 (1976), pp. 453-66.

mechanisms' of no value of their own or in themselves. While argument on this point may ensue with a person who thinks happiness is pleasure, it should in no way engender any qualms about the third assumption.⁴

If the goal is to demonstrate the harm of immorality, the hope is to have something to say to those like Glaucon and Adeimantus from *Republic*. There are always morally 'lost causes', who will not be convinced no matter what is said (more on this below). The argument is not addressed to them, but to people who are not yet committed to morality (or are committed but want reassurance that this is not a mistake). It is aimed at those who want a reason to be moral, a justification for morality. Ultimately, the goal would be to demonstrate the benefits of morality, but the first step of such a justification is to see the harm of immorality. One begins by wanting a good reason to avoid immorality and the reason is that it prevents one from being happy. This is *not* to say that the best reason for one to avoid immorally harming others is because it prevents one's own happiness. Rather, one way to get people onto the moral path, or keep them on, is show them how stepping off is harmful. As we become mature moral people, we will see different reasons for not immorally harming others. If this is not clear to some individual, the place to begin with that individual is not by pointing to reasons that he or she is not in a position to comprehend. Rather, one begins with the harm immorality does to its perpetrators.

Intentional harm and de re disrespect

In the argument, the ideas of intentional harm and 'de re disrespect' will bear much of the conceptual load. The intentional harms we are concerned with are taken to be archetypical of those perpetrated by immoral people on their victims. Of course, there are many sorts of harms and not all are intentional, much less the result of immorality. Some harms are due to bad luck or accident, others are due to ignorance (as opposed to neglect), and still others are due to losing in a fair competition for resources. The

⁴ Eventually, the self is lost on such a view: I cannot distinguish (i) a sensation of pleasure I am having from (ii) myself qua experiencer of that sensation from (iii) myself qua 'pleasure delivery mechanism' (a phrase I owe to Bradford Zambrello).

character of the sort of harm at issue here is marked in two related ways: the first is that the perpetrator treats the victim as if he or she possesses only instrumental value, thereby failing to possess any properties or characteristics which, by themselves, warrant more consideration than need be given to, say, potentially dangerous objects; the second related mark is the fact that the only thing that would keep the immoral person from causing the harm is a perceived danger of being caught and punished. When an immoral person intentionally harms another, the perpetrator sees the victim, at best, as an opportunity to be exploited and, at worst, as merely something in the way requiring removal. The sort of harm we are considering is the result of people considering others as disposable items, as long as the ill-gotten 'goods' are subjectively perceived as constituting an adequate payoff. This seems particularly true when the ill-gotten 'good' is pleasure derived from causing others to feel pain. When these factors are present, we can say that the perpetrator has a malicious intention, intending to harm another for the perpetrator's own benefit and not merely as 'collateral damage' that is the result of the perpetrator's pursuit of self-interest. Nothing about a potential victim is perceived by the perpetrator as a sufficient or overriding reason, in itself, to refrain from the harmful action; rather it is only the perceived likelihood of detection and punishment that can 'outweigh' the payoff. The actions characteristic of the sort of immorality under consideration are determined by cost/benefit analysis, where the only 'costs' are punishments and the 'benefits' are whatever is (subjectively) perceived to be convenient to the perpetrator or in the perpetrator's supposed 'self-interest'.

As a paradigmatic example of action that bears these marks, let's consider someone, P (for 'perpetrator'), who pretends to be the friend of V (for 'victim'), when in fact P does not hesitate to 'stab V in the back' as soon as P sees, as perspicuously as possible, that P would personally gain by it without any chance of being caught by V or anyone else. There is an asymmetrical, predatory aspect to the relation, wherein on one side we find thoughts of good will and mutual trust and, on the other, thoughts of self-interest and personal gain: we describe immoral people as 'wolves in sheep's clothing'.

The argument is aimed at a broader range of immorality than that of those who are reflectively and systematically evil. The conclusion implies that the degree to which a person behaves immorally is the degree to which that person lacks self-respect. So,

otherwise upright citizens who only rarely resort to immorality to get themselves out of a tight spot of their own making, instead of taking responsibility for it, are also targeted by the argument.⁵ The disposition to be immoral when needed expresses the malady of character involved, even if the need only rarely arises, or, by good fortune, does not arise at all. Of course, as Aristotle noted, one swallow doesn't make a summer, nor will one small immoral act demonstrate that person lacks self-respect. Unsurprisingly, these are matters of degree. But we should note that torturing just one baby for the fun of it, or a man raping just one woman, is vastly more significant than a single swallow, and would itself be the expression of an already corrupted character.

The argument directly addresses a quintessential or paradigmatic range of cases of immorality in which one person harms another person. It is unclear how much of immorality is captured by the considerations below. Determining whether or not all, or how many immoral character traits are harmful to the perpetrator would entail extensive discussion. At the very least, a conceptual analysis of 'morality' would be required to determine which sorts of acts are open to evaluation in these terms.⁶ What the argument can hope to show is that people cannot be freely immoral without backlash, even if they are never 'caught'. If a paradigmatic form of immorality causes its perpetrator to disrespect him or herself, then at least that central form of immorality is harmful and if practiced will prevent happiness.

Along with immoral harm, the idea of 'de re disrespect' is also at play. This term, devolving from the Kantian tradition, names disrespect for an individual moral agent *as such*, for that agent's personal identity, or whatever it is that makes that moral agent who he or she is. This might properly be called 'de re disrespect', since one disrespects the moral thing-in-itself. De re disrespect can be understood more precisely as a failure to show a person

⁵ An apt example of this sort of character can be found in the central figure of Woody Allen's movie *Crimes and Misdemeanors*. There, a philanthropic, well-reputed doctor has an inconvenient mistress murdered, and after repressing his residual guilt, goes back to his seemingly happy life.

⁶ A common example of what I mean is that many want to say that nothing that Robinson Crusoe could do on his island is apt for moral evaluation; others want to say that his courage, wisdom, and perseverance involve his moral character. For more on these issues, see: W.D. Falk's 'Morality, Self, and Others', in *Morality and Self-Interest*, P. Bloomfield (ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); William Frankena's 'The Concept of Morality', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 66 (1963) pp. 688–696; my introduction to *Morality and Self-Interest*, as well as my contribution to that volume entitled 'Why It's Bad to Be Bad'.

what Stephen Darwall calls 'recognition respect'.⁷ People who fail to give one another recognition respect 'would recognize one another as but complicated objects in a complicated routine'.⁸ We can understand *de re* respect (or recognition respect) as recognizing another as *a person*; where 'being a person', all by itself, implies the existence of normative constraints on behavior, such that people ought not to be treated as if they were less than what in fact they are, namely people or human beings sharing a common ancestry. 'De re disrespect' can be defined for our purposes as a failure to pay proper respect to someone who is, for deeply ontological reasons, an equal.

Importantly, while the harm being discussed must be intentional, disrespect of any kind need not be. One may intentionally disrespect another, but disrespect need not be intentional. There is a sense in which the person toward whom the disrespect is directed may not be seen, or at least not seen as a person worthy of respect. But the victim need not be seen as a person at all. As moral examples, racists do not see members of other races as 'full people' but rather as something less; misogynists see women as less than men, not deserving equal respect and consideration. In expressing disrespect toward another, a person demonstrates a disregard for what makes that other person who he or she is, as an individual human being; what makes him him or her her.

Since all disrespect is a failure to demonstrate respect or represents a lack or absence of respectful behavior, it may only be entailed by what a person actually does. Like any lack or absence, non-intentional disrespect need not be directly observable, as is the case with much non-intentional behavior, such as neglectful behavior or behavior due to genuine ignorance. Non-intentional disrespect may have to be inferred from what actually does happen. *De re* disrespect is a failure to take proper account of the moral status of an individual. So, one person can express *de re* disrespect toward another without knowing it.

⁷ 'Recognition respect' is in contrast to what Darwall calls 'appraisal respect', where the latter is the sort of respect one gives or receives based upon how well one performs or what one achieves. One demonstrates appraisal respect when one respects a person for being a doctor or an artist. One demonstrates recognition respect when one treats those who get no appraisal respect according to the same basic standards of behavior that apply to all people just in virtue of being people. 'Two Kinds of Respect', *Ethics*, vol. 88, no. 1 (Oct. 1977) pp. 36–49.

⁸ To borrow an apt phrase of John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness' *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LIV, no. 22 (1957) p. 659.

As a final introductory discussion, since the idea that one may unwittingly disrespect oneself is at the heart of the argument, it may be helpful to get on the table a clear example of someone whose unwitting self-disrespect is the result of immorality. The easiest cases can be seen in those who are fanatical about their immorality.

The easy example can be imagined as 'Clayton', an enthusiastic member of the Ku Klux Klan, who regularly participates in overt and violent acts racism.⁹ We may imagine that Clayton's ancestry is racially mixed, even though he does not learn this until he is an adult; further, we may imagine him refusing to renounce his racist ways even after he learns the truth about his ancestry. If we imagine Clayton as being partly of African-American descent, he would have *always* been disrespecting himself when he was disrespecting black people, whether he knew it or not, since he himself is partly black. We can even imagine him maintaining that people who are even partly black are inferior to 'pure' whites, and that this is true whether or not they know they are partly black. In violently harming black people, Clayton may or may not have been aware that he was disrespecting them, though he of course was. Moreover, his disrespect is reflected back upon himself, given his own racial history. We see Clayton as, not just a fanatical racist, but as a downright fool, if he insists on being a racist after learning of his own mixed ancestry. We do not need, however, to appeal to Clayton's foolishness in order to see that his racist acts were self-disrespecting all along, whether he knows of his ancestry or not.

Of course, Clayton might claim to have self-respect and to be happy and may do so with as much sincerity and confidence as anyone else, even after learning about his own lineage. Indeed, when considering the examples of Socratic irony and Thrasymachus (as noted above), we should not be surprised to find people like Clayton being more likely to claim to be happy and wise than those who are, in fact, happy and wise. Such self-disrespecting immoral people, like Clayton, are fools whose sense of their own 'self-respect' and 'happiness' is founded upon faulty thinking that an ounce of objectivity could reveal; they are people who we can

⁹ Named after the character 'Clayton Bigsby', a 'blind, black White Supremacist', who is unaware of his race, developed by the comedian David Chappelle. The comic value of all such characters is well expressed by Groucho Marx saying that he wouldn't want to belong to a club that would have him as a member.

see as having no non-self-deceptive experience of self-respect and happiness for the simple reason that they have no first hand experience with what self-respect and happiness really are.

Since the argument will eventually focus on the idea of being a 'human being', an example of a different form of racism may be helpful. This example would be the slave owner who justifies slavery by denying the humanity of the slaves he owns and yet fathering children with his female slaves.¹⁰ This slave owner is no less a fool than Clayton. By denying to these people the respect due to his fellow human beings, by treating them as chattel, he shows that he does not understand what (quite literally) it is to be human and what sort of behavior is due to human beings just in virtue of being one. By disrespecting the humanity of the slaves, as well as that of his own offspring, the slave owner thereby disrespects his own humanity, just as Clayton disrespects himself as a result of his disrespect for others who are just like him. By denying the humanity of the slaves, the slave owner thereby treats them as merely complicated, and possibly dangerous commodities, not as full human beings.

Finally, once humanity is brought in properly, we can see that this very dynamic is present in each such act of immoral harm. Clayton's similarity to those he harms and the slave owner's similarity to his slaves (and his children by them), is what makes their respective immorality toward others manifest itself as self-disrespect. Whenever P, our perpetrator, intentionally harms a victim for the sake of P's perceived convenience or what P subjectively considers to be in his or her 'self-interest', P is treating the victim as an instrument, as less than human. Yet, in fact P is no more nor less a human being than the victim, so P's disrespect of the victim's humanity thereby manifests self-disrespect on P's part, whether P realizes this or not. *Mutatis mutandis*, this is true for the same reasons that Clayton is disrespecting himself, whether he knows it or not. Real life perpetrators of immorality are foolish in virtue of their thinking that they are acting in their own self-interest, when, in fact, on top of the harm they do to others, they are also disrespecting themselves and keeping themselves from being happy.¹¹

¹⁰ I owe this example to Laurence Thomas.

¹¹ This suggests that being immoral is due to foolishness, and not mere ignorance, as Socrates famously suggested.

Just as Clayton may claim to have self-respect and to be happy, and may be so stubborn as to not even be open to the possibility of his own errors, so too may immoral people *claim* to have self-respect and to be happy. They can be as sincerely or stubbornly committed to these claims as anyone can be to anything. Importantly, the argument need not be able to persuade immoral people to become moral in order to be sound.

Paradigmatically immoral people are in denial of the common humanity that they share with everyone else, just as Clayton may be in denial of his racial identity so that he may maintain his racism. Immorality may be pathological for those who are psychologically incapable of experiencing emotions like sympathy, shame, and guilt, but such pathology certainly is not a necessary condition for the sort of immorality in question. Most immoral people are not pathological. As a result, they may try to forget what they do, or excuse their behavior by telling themselves (unsurprisingly) convenient stories about who they are in particular, what makes *them* special, why their circumstances are 'truly' exceptional, and how this justifies their behavior.¹² They rationalize themselves to themselves.¹³ In so doing, they fail to recognize, appreciate, and respect the ways in which they are the same as those they harm. Their disrespect for others thereby manifests disrespect for themselves.

The argument

The argument has three central premises.

1. Individual moral agents have the identities they do (they are who they are) because each instantiates a unique set of properties, some of which may be instantiated by more than one moral agent.
2. If x immorally harms y , then x de re disrespects y .
3. When x de re disrespects y , and one of the properties which makes y who s/he is is also a property that makes x who s/he is (as described in (1)), then x de re disrespects her or himself.

¹² Joseph Butler 'Sermon X – Upon Self-Deceit' in *The works of Joseph Butler*, W. E. Gladstone (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897).

¹³ My understanding of self-deception and rationalization is in part informed by Robert Audi's article, 'Self-Deception, Rationalization, and the Ethics of Belief' in his *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Given (1)–(3) and the supposition that P and V are moral agents who both have property ϕ as one of the properties that makes them who they are, in accord with premise (1), it follows trivially that if P intentionally harms V, then, in so doing, P disrespects him or herself.

The assumptions with which we began said that if one disrespects oneself, then one lacks self-respect and without that one cannot be happy. If disrespecting oneself keeps one from being happy, then any theory prescribing action that results in such disrespect is a bad, harmful, self-defeating theory by which to live.

Defense of the Premises

Premise 1. Individual moral agents have the identities they do (they are who they are) because each instantiates a unique set of properties, some of which may be instantiated by more than one moral agent.

This is intended to be a normatively neutral, purely descriptive statement about the metaphysics of identity or agency, concerning what it takes to be an individual or unique moral agent.¹⁴ Obviously, determining which of our properties constitute our moral identities and which do not would require normative moral theory at some point, but this does not preclude everyone agreeing on some aspects of what is involved in being an individual moral agent. Surely, the number of hairs on a person's head has nothing to do with their individual moral identities, while the property of being a human being seems to have undeniable moral salience for human beings. Disagreements over tendentious

¹⁴ From a metaphysical point of view, it is also intended to be neutral between those who are realists about universals and those who are nominalists or tropists. It is also intended to be neutral on the existence of haecceities. It seems to be a condition of adequacy for a metaphysical theory of properties that it can accommodate the idea that more than one item can share or instantiate a single property. Two distinct objects that are both cubes are nevertheless the same, or identical, insofar as both are cubes. Similarly, two human beings are the same insofar as both are human beings. This is all the argument requires.

Also, the idea behind the argument is not that one must respect humanity as a type in order for one to respect oneself as a token human. On the contrary, when I respect you as a human, I may do so by considering you as a token of humanity, without reference to humanity as a type. The claims are supposed to work analogously for disrespect as well, including self-disrespect. My thanks go to David Schmitz for discussion on this latter point.

cases need not concern us. At bottom, focusing on the questions instead of answering them may be sufficient: there are the most basic and onto-existential questions of 'Who and what am I?' and how is this related to 'Who and what are we?'

Perhaps there are some completely general answers capable of characterizing all possible moral agents, as Kant thought about rationality as the essence of agency, but it seems immodest for a mere member of *Homo sapiens* to speak for all possible agents (angels, devils, and gods included), if only since the only moral agents we have had any actual contact with are ourselves. For each of us, who we are as individuals, at some important level, will ground out in the status each of us has as a member of our species (even though this may not be true of all possible moral agents). We have, at the deepest existential level, the lives we do as the result of being human, and we have every reason to believe that the forms of good life which are open to creatures like us are, probably in very large part, determined by constraints at play due to the nature of our being *Homo sapiens*, as mortal biological organisms.

For the purposes of the argument, all that is required for it to work is that, for each agent with which we are concerned, we will find included in the set named in (1), partly constituting who each agent is, the predicates of *being a member of Homo sapiens*, or, *being human*, or *instantiating humanity*; all of which, for present purposes, amount ontologically to the same thing. Primarily, we are concerned with behavior among members of our own species; we may assume that we are only talking amongst ourselves. So, the paradigmatic immorality we are considering will always be perpetrated by one of our species upon another.

An argument for thinking of being human as this sort of property can be found in Kripke's necessity of origin.¹⁵ Kripke argues that an item's origin is necessary to its identity, such that items with different origins are necessarily non-identical. The modality is *de re*. In the same way that the substance constituting an individual is essential to its identity, so too are its origins. Each of us could not have come from a fertilized ovum other than the one we actually came from. If this *de re* necessity about individual origins is present as part of what makes the individuals who they are, then

¹⁵ *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

there will also be a *de re* necessity about how species membership is present as part of what makes biological organisms who they are. Each of us is essentially human, such that we could not be who we are as individuals if we were not. In this deepest respect, we are peers, equals.

Premise 2. If x immorally harms y then x *de re* disrespects y .

This is taken to be trivial, given the meanings of 'immoral harm' and 'de re disrespect' discussed above. 'Stabbing a "friend" in the back' or betraying a supposedly reciprocal loyalty demonstrates *de re* disrespect for the 'friend' or the person betrayed, since it shows that the perpetrator does not respect the victim for who he or she is as that individual moral agent, that individual person. The victim is treated, not as an individual worthy of respect, but as a commodity, a fairly expendable 'pawn' or a 'queen' that can be sacrificed if worse comes to worse. Nothing about the victim (none of the properties which the victim instantiates) serves as a sufficient reason or motive for the perpetrator to refrain from causing the harm. Irrefutable proof of the disrespect is the intended harm suffered by the victim. *There* is the intended sadness, the intentionally broken bone; *there* is the intentionally ruined life. The failure to respect the victim, as evidenced by the intentional harm to the victim, constitutes what was called above 'de re disrespect'.

Premise 3. When x *de re* disrespects y , and one of the properties which makes y who s/he is is also a property that makes x who s/he is (as described in (1)), then x *de re* disrespects her or himself.

While (3) only makes reference to two people and a property shared by both, a good way to approach (3) is by considering a stronger generalization of it, which is interestingly relevant, though less clearly true than (3) itself.

3*. If x *de re* disrespects y , and y has property P as one of the properties that make that y who s/he is, then x *de re* disrespects all moral agents who have property P in this same way.

(3*) is not as plausible as (3), but seeing why (3*) is false will aid in seeing why (3) is true. There are at least three substitutions

of P that support a common sense recognition of (3*). The first is when P is substituted by the value of being a member of a particular family. It is very common for all the members of a family to 'take personally' any insults, crimes, or general disrespect that is directed at a particular family member. This is the root cause of many family feuds, like that between the Hatfields and the McCoys, or what more loosely takes place in gang-wars, where the harming of one family member by someone from another family begins a chain of retributive acts, perpetrated for the sake of the 'family's honor', wherein each family member 'takes personally' the disrespect done to any of them.

Second, the use and implications of racial epithets are also commonly understood to support (3*). If a racial slur is directed by a racist at a particular member of some race, there is a sense in which every member of the insulted person's race has been disrespected; any racist referring to a particular person of race X, by use of racial epithet, is disrespecting all members of race X. And this is true, regardless, of whether or not the racist intended the scope of the insult to be that broad. Saying to any individual, 'being of race X makes you inferior' is disrespectful to all members of race X, regardless of whether or not the intention behind the use of the epithet had such broad scope.

The third common sense support for (3*) can be found in the idea of 'crimes against humanity'. Certain particularly heinous crimes, typically associated with war or genocidal action, are considered as crimes against all of humanity, against each of us as individuals. So, we may find an individual on trial for perpetrating crimes upon some relatively small subset of human beings, yet we may conclude that these acts demonstrate a criminal disrespect for all humanity, for each of us, as members of the human race, even though we are not the direct victims of the crime.

While not an often recognized part of common sense, another important example that supports (3*) is the sense in which the rape of any woman may demonstrate disrespect for all women, insofar as the 'woman-hood' of one is shared by all.

Despite the persuasiveness of these examples, (3*) does seem quite strong. There is a sense in which it implies that every mugging of a victim chosen at random is, in fact, a crime against humanity, given that the mugging of that particular human would imply disrespect for every particular human, since any of us could just as easily have been the randomly chosen victim. At

bottom, there might be some truth to such a thought. Immoral acts are those in which victims are treated as objects of merely instrumental value. To this degree, any of us could have been the victim of any particular crime, had our standing in the actual victim's shoes not changed the perpetrator's cost/benefit analysis. There is a sense in which victims are being treated as fungible items, as is due to items which are of only instrumental value. The degree to which this idea about the fungibility of victims in immoral action is supported by common sense is the degree to which (3*) is supported by common sense. The defense of such a broad notion as (3*) would, however, be quite difficult and it is not actually required by the argument for the harm of immorality.

For (3), as opposed to (3*), only refers to the victim and the perpetrator of the immorality, and fungibility while possibly related is not directly the issue. (3) emphasizes the special status of the actual perpetrator and victim of the harm and what they, two, have in common with each other. (3) makes no mention of anyone else who is importantly similar to the victim in the relevant way, and would thereby be disrespected by the act at hand, were (3*) to be considered true. Limiting the scope of whom we attend to makes the premise proportionally weaker and thereby easier to defend. We do think it is particularly offensive when harms are perpetrated by people whose identity is partly constituted by a property that is shared with the victims. As a result, we have special names for when family members kill each other, like 'patricide'. People are especially horrified at the idea that Hitler might have been partly Jewish and nevertheless attempted to perpetrate genocide upon them.¹⁶ And most Jews were particularly aghast, disturbed, and ashamed by the fact that the assassin of Yitzak Rabin was himself a Jew. As another example, (hopefully) most Americans are particularly saddened when we hear in the media of the unusually high rate of so-called 'black on black' crimes in America.

¹⁶ The idea seems to arise from the fact that Hitler's father, Alois, was registered as an illegitimate child with no father. Alois' mother worked in the home of a wealthy Jew and some have speculated that a son in that household got Hitler's grandmother pregnant. There is little reason to conclude that Hitler was a Jew, but the horrific, common sense idea still remains that he might have thought himself a Jew and nevertheless went on to do as he did. See John Toland, *Adolf Hitler*, NY: Anchor Books, 1992.

Disrespecting or doing something wrong to someone who is importantly like oneself ought to make one wonder about how one feels about oneself; it ought to make one question one's self-respect (not to mention one's self-esteem). If a person has self-respect, or respect for what makes one who one is, then harming someone else who is equally like oneself in that very way, is a reflection, to that degree, of how one feels (or doesn't feel) about oneself. It is a reflection of how little one respects oneself and who one is.

More generally, if x harms y , and they share the particular property of being human, which, in part, makes each of them who they are as individuals, then x 's immorally harming y is a demonstration that x does not respect being human enough to keep from intentionally harming someone who *is* human, who instantiates humanity. y 's being human, y 's humanity, is not a sufficient justification for x to refrain from harming y , and insofar as this is true, x is demonstrating *de re* disrespect for him or herself, since x is no less human than y ; humanity is no less integral to who x is than it is to who y is. Qua 'being human', x and y are the same, they are identically and equally human; such that, if x does not respect y 's being human, then x does not respect x 's being human. And since being human is an essential part of what makes x be x , x 's disrespect of y entails x 's disrespect of him or herself.

Conclusion

Given our assumptions, if premises (1)–(3) are true, then the truth of the conclusion follows trivially. Of course, even if this is so, the argument with the immoralist would not simply end: no single argument could be expected to be so powerful. But the argument is successful insofar as it causes a dialectical shift to take place. If Thrasyarchus and Socrates argued to a draw in *Republic*, the argument above squarely places the burden of proof on the shoulders of Thrasyarchus or the immoralist, to show that being immoral is truly the way that 'clever and good' people will be, despite the fact that it prevents a person from being happy.

The immoralist could, of course, deny any of the assumptions, such as the necessity of self-respect for happiness. Or he could try to argue that deceiving oneself into believing that one has self-

respect is as good as genuine self-respect. Or he may try to argue that there is a particular property had only by people like himself, or maybe solipsistically, only he has it ('I'm special because I'm me!'), and having this property is the only thing that can make a person deserving of more than merely instrumental respect. Since taking up all these possible replies is not required for shifting the dialectical ground, putting Thrasymachus and the immoralist in general on the defensive, they may be seen as going beyond the remit of argument.¹⁷

Ultimately, what will be required to fill out the type of error the immoralist is making will be a theory of what might be called 'developmental practical rationality' or the idea that becoming morally good changes a person in ways that cannot be imagined by those who have not undergone the change.¹⁸ Becoming moral requires a re-evaluation of values, with which the immoralist never engages. To hint at how this might go, we can see the very first step in such an argument, and so the next step in the dialectic with the immoralist, has been succinctly given by Plato in *Symposium* at 204a:

The trouble with ignorance is precisely that if a person lacks virtue and knowledge, he's perfectly satisfied with the way he is. If a person isn't aware of a lack, he can't desire the thing which he isn't aware of lacking.¹⁹

Immorality keeps the immoral person from being aware of what they do not have. Immoral people are disrespecting themselves by their own immorality even though they do not know it. It is quite intuitive to think that disrespecting oneself is incompatible with being happy, and if so, then the argument above provides good reason for immoral people to change their ways.

¹⁷ I have begun the reply to some of these responses to the argument in 'Why It's Bad to Be Bad', see note 6 above.

¹⁸ This has received some attention in the literature under the name of the 'point of view defense', see John McDowell in 'The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics', reprinted in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Amelie Rorty (ed.), (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1980; and Stephen Gardiner in 'Aristotle, Egoism and the Virtuous Person's Point of View', in D. Baltzly, D. Blyth, H. Tarrant (eds), *Power and Pleasure, Virtues and Vices: Essays in ancient moral philosophy*: a supplementary volume of *Prudentia*, June 2001, 243–265.

¹⁹ Robin Waterfield, translator (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

The harm of being immoral is that one is kept from seeing the value of human life, and if one is human, then one is kept from seeing the value of one's own life.²⁰

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²⁰ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the University of Connecticut and read at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and I thank the members of these departments for discussion. I formulated the argument as a result of comments by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong on my paper 'Why It's Bad to Be Bad' (see note 6 above), and I thank him for forcing me to be clearer about it. I had a long and productive lunch with Michael P. Lynch in which he helped me to pin down the notion of 'de re disrespect' that ended up in the paper, as well as helped me get clearer on the argument's structure; I am very grateful to him. Finally, special thanks go to Robert Barnard, Donald Baxter, Scott Lehmann, Mark Timmons, Jerry Schaffer, and David Schmitz for their patient help, though, of course, all errors remain mine alone.