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Employment

Visiting Lecturer, Harvard University, 2014 to present

Postdoctoral Researcher, Love and Human Agency Project, Vassar College, 2013 to 2014

Education

Ph. D. Philosophy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013

Susan Wolf (chair), Gerald Postema, Ryan Preston-Roedder

M. A. Philosophy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008

B. A. Philosophy (high honors), Swarthmore College, 2004

Areas of Specialization

Ethics, philosophy of action, moral psychology

Areas of Competence

History of ethics, political philosophy, post-Kantian continental philosophy

Publication

“Loving Someone in Particular,” *Ethics* 125 (forthcoming in 2015)

Presentations

“Properly Proleptic Blame,” Vassar College (January 2013), The University of California at Riverside (February 2013), Stanford University (February 2013)

Teaching Experience

Harvard University

Morality and its Critics, Fall 2014

Vassar College

Philosophical Questions, Spring 2014

Special Topics: Love and Character, Fall 2013

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Existentialism, Fall 2012

Bioethics, Spring 2012, Spring 2010, Fall 2009 (online)

Feminism, Fall 2010

Service

Reviewer for the *European Journal of Philosophy* and the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*

Dissertation abstract—“*Improvisational agency*”

Consider three old puzzles in ethics.

- Plausibly, the best kind of love should affirm something special about you, and so be a selective, rational response to certain of your attractive qualities. But it should also appreciate you as the particular individual you are, not as a member of the general class of people with the qualities in question.
- Evidently, a central species of emotional, reactive blame or anger is essentially addressed to the agent of a bad action. Yet while such blame is not aptly directed toward agents who cannot be reasoned into acting better (who can only be written off), it is not plausibly limited to merely procedural failings, like ignorance, confusion, or weakness of will.
- Incompatibilists have long insisted that real freedom requires a radical ability to create yourself, by making choices about who to be that are not determined by your given past, and there seems something right about this thought. But, as has been argued at least since Hume, it seems that choices can be meaningfully attributed to you only if they are explained by facts about who you are.

Overwhelmingly, philosophers have responded to each of these puzzles by rejecting one of the propositions that generate it. This, I argue in my dissertation, is a mistake. It reflects an unduly narrow conception of practical rationality. Drawing on the phenomenology of jazz improvisation, I show how it is possible to act according to norms you make up as you go along. The content of these norms depends, both epistemically and ontologically, on the ongoing sequence of particular judgments and actions you make, and so is indeterminate in advance of them. The resulting model of agency enables solutions to all three puzzles, each a substantial improvement over its predecessors.

Thus, I argue that we love the people we do for the identities they are creating together with us. Loving someone as a particular individual is like improvising with a partner: you and your beloved jointly work out a common approach to life, by reciprocal attention and vulnerability to what the other seems to value. Because these values depend on the particular interactions you share with a beloved, they can't be equivalently instantiated in anyone else. Next, I show how blame can be more than just a reminder of considerations that mattered to you all along, since it can be indeterminate whether a bad action really embodies your values. Blame, I argue, expresses a demand to *renounce* actions that may or may not turn out to be characteristic of you—depending, in part, on your response to the blame itself. Finally, I build on my accounts of love and blame to argue that the free will required to be an apt target of the full range of reactive attitudes, and to lead a fully meaningful life, indeed requires a radical capacity to create yourself through choices that are *rationally and psychologically* underdetermined by your past—but which, in embodying the identity you're in the *process* of creating, are nevertheless attributable to you. Since this capacity is fully compatible with *causal* determinism, I thus articulate, vindicate, and ultimately defuse a perennially obscure but profound motivation for incompatibilism.