

Emotions and the virtues of self-understanding

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(Todd & Roeser, *Emotion and Value*, OUP 2014, 199-211)

‘when beliefs... become hostage to desires and wishes, they do so only as the result of hidden and indirect processes, against which the disciplines of the virtues of truth are directed’

Williams (2002: 83)

1. The thought that emotions play a central role in moral epistemology goes back at least to Aristotle. It is, of course, the centrepiece of various non-cognitivist theories, but has more recently been defended by cognitivists on the basis of cognitivist theories of emotion. Scanlon (1998), for example, talks of ‘judgment-sensitive attitudes’, which can arise from and be embedded in emotional and conative responses to the world. Such attitudes present the agent with reasons to favour or disfavour their objects, and the clarification of reasons, and so which attitudes are appropriate, proceeds by critical reflection upon them (Ch. 1, §12). The response-dependence theories of Wiggins (1987/1998) and McDowell (1985) provide further examples. I shall assume that desires and emotions (‘passions’ from now on) are, at the very least, an important source of intuitions about moral reasons (I shall focus on reasons from now on), whether one gives a cognitive or non-cognitive analysis of them.

As one might expect from attributing such a central role to emotions, such theories have remarked upon the relation between moral enquiry and developing self-understanding (e.g. Lenman 2008). But the theme has not been much elaborated upon. What follows is a contribution, though from a very specific angle.

2. We naturally seek to understand ourselves and the vision of the world presented in passion. For example, when reflecting on emotions, we look for a ‘sufficient explanation’, which either shows that the emotion is appropriate, timely, proportionate, and so on, or explains why it is not. This understanding is the ground of the judgment that the emotion is appropriate, and so presents some reason to react or act, or it is inappropriate, and so does not. For desires, we consider whether what is desired is in fact desirable. It is a commonplace that passions are not always appropriate and may mislead regarding what reasons we have to feel, want, and do. Hence, there is a need, first, to recognise when and how we go wrong, and second, to correct ourselves and, if possible, prevent or mitigate future mistakes.

One traditional model proposes that, in calmer moments, the apparent good presented by a passion can come to be understood and rationally evaluated through reflective introspection. Understand why one reacts as one does secures some control over the passion. Passions respond to reasons; reasoned accounts of the object and of the passion should therefore alter the passion if necessary. The model assumes that passions are ‘transparent’, and in two ways. First, attention to the passion in introspective reflection is sufficient for understanding it and the vision of the world and the good that it presents. The content of passions is unproblematically available for acceptance or rejection in reflection. Second, these processes are sufficient to change the passion – the question ‘what do I feel?’ gives way to the question ‘what ought I to feel?’, such that the answer to the latter determines the answer to the former.¹

Helpful though this is, it egregiously oversimplifies the complexity of the challenge. It presumes a way of identifying and then getting behind or beyond the misleading passion by sheer reflection, as though there were some intellectual space free from the influence of emotions. But

passions can skew the 'epistemic landscape' outside awareness (Goldie 2008: 159f.). When this occurs, reflection takes place within the skewed landscape that seems 'true'. Thus, even if there were an 'emotion-free' intellectual space, the grounds to be confident that one currently occupies it are often lacking. Furthermore, the process of reflection on passions and the reasons they present is itself deeply informed by further passions – sympathy, feelings of approbation, and other attitudes – that arise as reflection proceeds. This applies as much to reflecting upon the appropriateness of a passion as other forms of moral enquiry (Lacewing 2005). The role passions play in moral enquiry extends to include understandings of and reflections upon the situation and the self. A third difficulty forms the primary focus in what follows: passions are not always readily understood in reflective introspection alone; self-understanding is more demanding, and requires engagement with 'hidden and indirect processes' (Williams 2002: 83). The assumption of transparency is mistaken.²

Hursthouse's famous (1991) treatment of the debate around abortion from the perspective of virtue ethics provides a suitable example to begin with. She notes that, quite aside from the question of whether women have a moral right to have an abortion, in deciding to have an abortion on any particular occasion, a woman may be callous, light-minded, selfish, self-righteous or disloyal (1991: 235). We can expect that the woman's motivations and emotions that would make the act vicious lead her to understand the situation and possible courses of action in a particular, and inaccurate, light, and will feed into her deliberations about what to do. If she is unaware of these motivations, she fails to understand her decision for what it is. This is not improbable, since attitudes towards human life, death, parenthood, sex, and family relationships will influence attitudes toward abortion (1991: 238), and the passions surrounding such fundamental issues of human life are ambivalent and painful, to say the least. Thus, attitudes toward and deliberation on (an) abortion will be fed by many and various passions about other matters, including ambition, loyalty, fear, frustration, love, jealousy, and ambivalence, perhaps only tangentially related to the issue at hand. This is especially so when reflecting on a particular case that involves oneself, but can apply as much to forming a judgment about another's situation. To develop Hursthouse's example in a classically feminist way, if a man is unaware of his anxieties surrounding female sexuality, or unaware of their influence on his views about abortion, then his judgments may be distorted.

The line of thought so far is this: passions heavily inform moral enquiry (especially in particular cases), but because they can be inappropriate and thus misleading, the acquisition of moral knowledge requires their refinement. This is no easy matter, as they lack transparency and can influence other passions and thoughts in complex ways of which we are unaware.

3. It may be thought that the only or best counterpoint to misleading passions is provided by a communal form of moral enquiry, a process of mutual correction, as Wiggins and Lenman emphasise. But Williams (2002: 198) notes that while, in communal enquiry, 'we can help sustain each other's sense of reality, stopping wishes becoming beliefs', it may also be that 'I may reinforce your fantasies, and we may conspire in projecting wishes into a deceptive social hologram'. More generally, the structure of one's passions affects the extent to which one can both contribute to and make use of communal enquiry. Thus the virtues with which we shall be concerned, as a solution to the problem outlined, are not developed and refined *merely* by joint ethical enquiry.

4. One wish – perhaps best conceived as the central or underpinning wish – involved in many of the processes that may distort the passions, or indeed moral enquiry directly, is the wish to avoid psychological pain, such as anxiety, fear, guilt, shame and envy, particularly in relation to questions of self-esteem. There are many means by which this is done, e.g. through distortions in

understandings and experience of the self, of passions and thoughts, of others, or of the world. Psychologists call such means, when they occur unconsciously and unintentionally, 'defence mechanisms' (Vaillant 2000; Cramer 2006). This idea frames and develops aspects of our commonsense understanding of ourselves: we can immediately recognise the descriptions it gives from our experience.³ This is best shown by example.

Returning to Hursthouse's example: we noted that attitudes to such fundamental issues as life, death, parenthood, sex, and families are implicated in deliberations regarding abortion. A more fertile soil for defensive reactions is scarcely conceivable. Let us develop the idea that the decision is 'light-minded'. It fails to take proper account of the value of human life, perhaps dismissing the death of the foetus as simply the medical extirpation of unnecessary cells, no more morally taxing than the removal of a benign tumour. Such an emotional response may defend against an unconscious fear of taking responsibility for life (one's own or another's). Or again, the woman's decision is disloyal; perhaps it is even vengeful. Thoughts (which may be perfectly correct in themselves) that the decision is hers because it is her body may mask or crowd out grievances about the father, such that even if she is aware of the grievances, she fails to connect them to her decision. This kind of case applies as well when the decision is *not* to abort, e.g. the woman may wish for 'more' from her man, and having the child is her way of obtaining it symbolically.

Anna Freud (1936) discusses a case of 'false altruism'. Her example is of a woman, but it applies as well to men, so let us vary the gender. A man represses his own wishes, and projects them onto others. He then strongly identifies with other people. He therefore expresses great concern for them, but not for himself. He believes it is acceptable to fulfil their desires, and works to do so, but not to fulfil his own. However, he becomes annoyed if their desires are frustrated, as if wishes should be fulfilled without hindrance; and he becomes angry with people who are not similarly altruistic, as though this were some personal affront to him. Nietzsche (1886: §194) also comments on false altruism, though with a different emphasis:

In helpful and benevolent people one nearly always finds a clumsy cunning that first rearranges the person who is to be helped so that, for example, he 'deserves' their help, needs *their* help in particular, and will prove to be deeply grateful, dependent, subservient for all their help.

For both Anna Freud and Nietzsche, false altruism operates as a defence against various painful thoughts and feelings related to one's *own* neediness.

Our concern here is not with how such people act, but with what they know. Having this complex of passions and defences leads to a distorted understanding of the moral situation and one's reasons for acting. The passions – the desire to help, the empathetic response, the altruistic concern – will present themselves as selfless and 'other'-directed. But in fact, there is an inappropriate conceptualisation of the needs of others; a lack of recognition of the parity between oneself and others; a misunderstanding of one's relations to others who are also in a position to help; little recognition of others' responsibility for themselves, and with this, no real understanding of when, why, and how the needs of others furnish reasons to act on their behalf, the forms of response that are appropriate (which may be other than simply meeting those needs), and what reasons (for gratitude? reciprocity? resentment?) one's action supplies the other.

A third example: In a recent paper on lying, Alessandra Lemma (2005: 738) notes that '[i]n the moment of the lie, the liar creates the illusion that he can control, and therefore that he 'knows',

what the other will believe and think.’ This may serve different functions, which we may connect to different contexts of defence. In the first, ‘the intent is to attack and triumph over the duped other. The object [i.e. the other] needs to be controlled and humiliated for the self’s gratification, often to reverse an earlier experience of humiliation.’ (ibid) The liar may be unaware of these needs to control and humiliate, perhaps as part of a defence against the pain of their own humiliation (if applicable). Such lack of awareness will affect an appreciation of when a lie is justified and when it is not, and more generally, the reasons relating to treating others with respect. In quite a different context, lying may ‘represent an attempt at communication with [someone] felt to be emotionally unavailable or inscrutable. The lie is used to substitute the ‘real’ self felt to be unlovable for a ‘made-up’ version of the self felt to guarantee the [person’s] love.’ (ibid) Again, if this is not recognised by the liar, the need to please the other will distort judgments about appropriate forms of relationship, including the justification of the lie. Third, the lie may be used as protection against someone who is intrusive or controlling. In some people (Lemma 2005: 749-50), lying becomes the primary way of dealing with such relationships, and even an automatic response to intimacy (which carries a potential threat of intrusiveness). Here again, an awareness of what one is doing and why may help one to see individual situations in a clearer light, and to understand how lying may well be justified, on occasion, when dealing with intrusive and controlling people.

Defence mechanisms occur far more commonly than we might think. They are used universally in childhood and adolescence, as they are entirely necessary in psychological development. In forming a healthy self-esteem, there are many small battles in which children must first impose their wishes on their experience of reality and later relinquish such influence, maturing in themselves and their understanding as they go. The task of development involves giving up such distortions in early adulthood, but few people do so completely.⁴ The use of defence mechanisms is particularly prevalent in conditions of stress and especially when self-esteem is at issue – both of which commonly apply in morally challenging situations. (Defences may remain adaptive in certain situations in adulthood, e.g. in situations of unbearable conflict or sudden change – a clear example is their use in the grieving process.)

5. When they occur, defence mechanisms can lead to a misapprehension not only of what is felt and why, and the nature of the situation to which the passion is a response, but also, and because of this, of the reasons for acting, feeling, and desiring furnished by the situation. Thus the agent misunderstands both the reasons why he actually feels and acts as he does, generating a lack of transparency, and the reasons the situation in fact gives him to act and feel differently, generating error.

Because these distortions occur unintentionally and unconsciously, any simple form of directed introspection of the passion itself cannot reliably detect whether the passion is influenced by defences or not. If defences or their results could be identified in this way, they would not be sufficiently outside awareness to work. As Cramer (2006: 29-30) puts it,

[t]he purpose of attributing one’s own anger or envy to others [in projection] is to absolve oneself of the discomfort of harboring unacceptable thoughts or feelings. To realize that this negative perception of others is based on the attribution of one’s own negative emotions would be to acknowledge that one has such unacceptable emotions; such a realization would be a cause for self-reproach and anxiety.

Furthermore, the distortions they impose on the understanding of the self and others need not be singular, confined to this or that situation. Rather, the distortion is in one’s general view of the world:

A patient of mine inhabited a disappointing world. Although she was quite successful at work, had friends, and so on, there was no success in the social world that would not be interpreted by her under an aura of disappointment. If she got a raise at work, it was because the boss was shamed into it – he really wanted to give someone else in the office a raise, but he felt he had to give her one to appear fair. If she was invited out for a date, the person had already tried to go out with others and had failed. If someone congratulated her on some accomplishment, they were just being polite. And so on. From a distance it is clear to us, as it was not clear to her, how active she was in understanding her world in ways that were bound to disappoint. (Lear 2003: 48-9)

Given this state of affairs, it is hard to see how the woman can begin to construct an alternative set of emotional responses; the ones she has are clearly justified by how the world is (as she experiences it). Her disappointment, what motivates and sustains it, how it acts as a defence, and against what – all this is not transparent to her. Whatever the answers, reflecting on her disappointment will not be enough to reveal or transform them.

6. There is little discussion of defence mechanisms in the literature on moral epistemology. It would benefit our understanding to be able to classify their effects in epistemological terms, and not only the usual psychological ones. In this connection, it is worth noting that analysis of Roberts & Wood's (2007) excellent and extensive discussion of *intellectual vices* reveals myriad references to psychic defence, sometimes explicit but more often implicit. I present three examples here.⁵

The first comes in their discussion of Plantinga's (1993: 12) discussion of an example from Locke, providing a nice historical precedent for the case made here. Locke (1690: IV.XX.11) imagines a professor's reaction to a bright student who makes an objection that undermines his life's work. Understandably, the professor immediately assumes the student is wrong. This unwarranted belief is the product of a defence against the shame of an academic life in error, and prevents the professor from thinking clearly about the objection (Roberts & Wood 2007: 96). This may be a momentary lapse in response to sudden change (which defence mechanisms can enable us to cope with), and as such, the professor may in time be able to see it for what it is. But if the defence against shame remains in place, operating unconsciously, his conviction that the student is wrong will feel *epistemically* justified, and the possible consequences for his self-esteem, if he is aware of them at all, dismissed as irrelevant to his rejection of the objection.

Under 'failures of concern to know', a vice relative to the virtue of the love of knowledge, Roberts & Wood note that people may decline opportunities to test their cherished beliefs or offer arguments they somehow know to be inadequate (2007: 170). A negative corollary here is an 'unvirtuous concern not to know' the truth. Bernard Williams (2002: 134) points out that because it is difficult to know whether one has invested enough effort in finding out the truth about some matter, 'it is easy to convince oneself that one has taken enough pains' when one has some internal obstacle to taking more, such as 'at the most obvious level, laziness, but, more interestingly, the desires and wishes that are prone to subvert the acquisition of true belief'. Where such desires and wishes or their effects on one's epistemic states are unrecognised, the lack of concern to reach the truth, or active concern to avoid it, is either the product of defence or motivates it. The defences protect one against the anxiety that would result from facing something unwished for or a threat to one's sense of self or self-esteem.

Third, Roberts & Wood note 'the ubiquity of fear and the incidence of cowardice' in relation to self-knowledge (2007: 222), but also point out that people fear knowledge of other kinds –

criticisms of pet views, of their work, of facts that are painful to them, of others disagreeing with them, and of looking bad in front of their colleagues (2007: 219). In all these cases, what Roberts & Wood don't point out is that what people fear is tied up with issues of self-esteem, thus increasing the risk of activating defence mechanisms, which may blind them to the truth about such criticisms, facts, and disagreements.

7. These last remarks indicate that *courage* may decrease the use of defence mechanisms. But before developing that line of thought, it is worth rehearsing the importance of communal enquiry (§3). Some authors conceive this as a process of mutual correction; Williams casts his net more broadly to talk of 'sustaining each other's sense of reality' (2002: 198), which may be done by other means than correction. It is not only that if people are not defensive at same time, or over the same issues, then they may see each other's defences for what they are. As we will see, it is also that close relationship and dialogue with others is a means to the *deconstruction* of defences and the development of the virtues that enable this.

This is important, since it is not merely identifying *errors*, but (where relevant) understanding their basis in defence that is needed; and it is not merely *identifying*, but deconstructing, defence mechanisms that is the aim here, for their continued activation will continue to the misapprehensions of the past. Given that the passions are an important source of judgments about reasons to feel, desire, and act in certain ways, deconstructing defence mechanisms will contribute to moral enquiry.

We noted above that defence mechanisms lead to both a lack of transparency and error, not only with regard to one's reasons, but also in self-understanding. The deconstruction of defence mechanisms is therefore, at the same time, a gain in self-understanding.

8. Baehr (2011: 177) defines intellectual courage as 'a disposition to persist in or with a state or course of action aimed at an epistemically good end despite the fact that doing so involves an apparent threat to one's own well-being'. This is needed to face and experience the painful mental states against which defences protect. We often associate courage closely with strength of will and self-control, with being 'tough' and 'impervious' (Baehr 2011: 178), but in this context, that association can be misleading. For what is required is a kind of 'letting go'. In contrast to directed introspection or reflection, this involves an openness to one's passions, allowing them to 'surface'. The aim of control is – at least temporarily – relinquished in favour of an approach of understanding and engagement with whatever it is felt, however painful, inappropriate or irrational it seems. The challenge is compounded by the knowledge that one's emotional life is not under one's control, even if it can, over time, be transformed.

But the danger is that defence mechanisms kick in unless one actively seeks to tolerate and admit into conscious thought whatever it is one feels. Thus, the courageous exercise of will lies in making and sustaining a commitment to this openness despite the pain it brings. To put it into Baehr's terms, opening oneself to feelings that are painful, and thus pose an apparent threat to one's well-being, forms part of the deconstruction of one's defences, which is a course of action aimed at the epistemically good end of moral knowledge. Intellectual courage enables the pursuit of the project of moral enquiry in the face of the pain it brings.

9. We have seen several times that defences are connected especially to self-esteem. As often as not, mental states defended against are not intrinsically painful, but become so because the agent evaluates them negatively. They are inappropriate, unacceptable, shameful, fearful, and so on. In the final analysis, they are deemed to diminish one's value; or in more concrete psychological terms, to make one less lovable or perhaps unlovable; or yet more specifically, unlovable by

particular people. Discovering the existence of such states for a moment – which may soon be succeeded by re-establishing the defence against them – is far easier than integrating them into one's sense of self (Freud 1926: 224). The deconstruction of a defence requires a reconstruction of the self. Where parts of the self are defended against because they are inappropriate etc., what is needed is *acceptance*.

This idea needs careful understanding. Acceptance does *not* mean moral approval. Someone who only accepts in herself what she can approve of falsely conflates her real psychological self with her ideal self. Defences are often responses to, and supported by, a false and idealized sense of oneself. Again, it can be the inconsistency with one's self-image that makes the unacknowledged mental state painful (Lear 2003: 117-9). But understanding both the passion and the ideal must precede the judgment that it is the ideal that should stand firm, and the passion should give way. It can't be assumed, at the outset, that the ideals are supported by the balance of reasons if one's grasp of those reasons is only secure once self-understanding is achieved. Ideals can themselves be defences against passions (witness the cases of false altruism and abortion). Both passion and ideal need to be understood and allowed – for now – to stand as genuine expressions of the self. The tension between them may diminish as self-transformation follows upon the deconstruction of defences.

It is, in any case, a mistake to attempt to *change* one's passion before one has understood what there is of oneself in it; self-improvement should follow on from, not substitute for, self-understanding (Wollheim 2003: 35). Moran (2001) is right that, on many occasions of reflection, the question 'what *do* I feel?' may be answered by considering reasons to feel this way or that, i.e. 'what *should* I feel?'. But on many others, what is felt or desired is given to one, and awareness of the passion is arrived at quite independently of considering reasons for feeling or wanting. Of course, this way of feeling may be inappropriate, and the agent may judge it so. Moran (2001: 59-60) proposes that if such a passion is not corrected by reflection on what to feel, it is 'alien' to the agent. This is epistemologically and psychologically unsatisfactory (Wollheim 2003: 32f.). The theory of defence explains why rational reflection fails, for it cannot uncover nor undo what is sustaining the passion. But the passion is not to be disposed of by the thought that it is unworthy and therefore 'alien' to what one takes to be one's 'true' self, but is in fact one's 'idealised' self.

We may understand acceptance as involving the work of a range of intellectual virtues. First, there is the resistance to the influence of ideals (and desires to be ideal) on beliefs about the self, deriving from a 'virtuous concern to know'. Second, the truth is accorded its appropriate importance, as facts about, and experiences of, the self are neither dismissed or ignored. In this, of course, courage will play its role. A third virtue is more usually associated with character than the intellect – a form of love we may call compassion or loving kindness.

10. The passions against which people defend can only secure a place in their conception of their (imperfect) selves as they come to reject the sense that such passions make them unlovable. *Love*, therefore, plays a necessary role. If one's passions do not make one unlovable, they do not need to be hidden; honesty, at least with oneself, becomes possible.⁶ This is one role that relationships with others can provide. A model of how such relationships work may be gleaned from psychoanalysis. Contemporary psychoanalysts emphasise the nature of the therapeutic relationship as much as 'insight' in the account of how defences are deconstructed (see Lacey forthcoming for detailed discussion and empirical defence of the following sketch). The therapist retains their interest, curiosity, and care, and remains non-moralising and non-retaliatory in the face of the patient's revelations and passions. This repeated disconfirmation of the patient's

expectations challenges their sense of self and relationship, and enables their defences to be withdrawn.

This process is, at the same time, supportive of the development of self-understanding. One key expression of this supportive form of relationship is precisely the open-minded, empathic, non-defensive exploration of the patient's mind. This truthfulness is itself part of the caring relationship that corrects the patient's defensive expectations. Over time, the patient internalises both the truthfulness and the care shown by the therapist, and thus the development of self-understanding can lie in relationship with another (Eagle 2011: 285). Compassion for oneself – for one's pain and vulnerability to it, for the inevitable failure to be perfect – enables the pain against which defence mechanisms defend to be tolerated without denying reality. Compassion complements courage in its epistemic function: courage enables the pain of deconstructing defences to be endured, compassion diminishes or contains the pain as it preserves a sense of self-worth in the midst of emotions that challenge that sense.

11. It can be that the search for self-understanding itself contributes to self-transformation. Developing Cramer's example of projected anger from §5: having projected his anger onto Chrissy, Chris respond by withdrawing affection, citing 'her' anger as his reason. If he recognises that he is angry, but projected this onto Chrissy, he may understand his withdrawal as a form of punishment motivated by his anger. If he does not attempt to foreclose his self-recognition here, Chris may seek to understand his anger and why he projected it, being open to the anxiety his anger brings him (at least in relation to Chrissy) and whatever imaginings, memories, or other emotions may follow. Chris struggles here, so he asks someone with whom he can talk about such things, and remains open and alert to what arises in him in response. A vague sense of discomfort at being angry clarifies into a richer, more content-laden fear. As a result, Chris comes to understand the situation in which he considered withdrawing affection quite differently, e.g. as one in which he feared his need for love would not be met. In defence, he had imagined the need for love was Chrissy's, and punished her for the neediness by being angry with her. But this was all still too anxiety-ridden, so he projected the anger onto her, which 'justified' his withdrawal of affection – neatly turning his need for love into a fantastical act of self-sufficiency.

This kind of recognition can contribute to preventing the same defence from occurring in the future; while it is not the whole story, self-understanding can contribute to the deconstruction of defence.

12. The deconstruction of defence mechanisms is transformative. It is transformative of one's passions, for they no longer threaten one's sense of self-worth; of one's self, as the range of emotional experience in which one can be oneself, is expanded; and of self-understanding, as the passions' lack of transparency, at least as it derives from defence, yields to a sense of their meaning and significance as they come to be understood in consciousness. With this, the passions themselves may simply die away, diminish in force, take new and more acceptable forms, or become amenable to rational reflection; and the same is true of our ideals and judgments of appropriateness. But should both the passions and the judgments of their inappropriateness remain unchanged, as frequently happens, then having granted them a place in one's conscious psychology, one may at least become aware of such influence as they may have on one's sense of oneself and the situations one faces, and correct for it as best one can.

In either case, this transformation of the structure of the passions impacts directly upon moral enquiry. With defensive distortions diminished, we may re-evaluate what we have reason to do

with greater perspicuity. And from the position of greater self-understanding, we shall better contribute to and learn from communal enquiry.

13. We began from the assumption that the passions are an important source of intuitions about reasons to act, feel, and desire in certain ways. They are active not only in responses to situations, but also in processes of reflection and deliberation. But they can be misleading, and in ways that operate outside unawareness; they are lack transparency. One cause of this is the occurrence of defence mechanisms creating unconscious distortions in the agent's understanding of what he feels and why. Such distortions in turn result in distortions in his understanding of the situations to which he respond and the reasons which they furnish, as demonstrated in the examples of abortion, false altruism, and lying, and the discussion of three intellectual vices from Roberts & Wood. Thus, moral enquiry may be aided by the deconstruction of defence mechanisms. We identified the importance of close relationship and dialogue with others, together with specific forms of courage, self-acceptance, and finally compassion, as productive in this regard.

The deconstruction of defence mechanisms and the greater self-understanding that results is, of course, not sufficient for moral knowledge. But in its absence, I have argued, we may fail to understand the passions on which our moral judgments rest. The refinement of our moral sensibilities involves the deconstruction of our defences, as a step towards gaining both a finer, more nuanced and realistic grasp of the situations with which we are confronted, and refined and more appropriate responses to them, no longer distorted in ways we fail to recognise by the influence of passions that we cannot tolerate in ourselves.

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¹ The first sense is discussed (and rejected) by Cottingham 1998 and Goldie 2008; the second by Moran 2001.

² Much discussed at present are results from social psychology that support a 'dual process' model of psychology in general (Chaiken & Trope 1999; Wilson 2002; Dijksterhuis 2010), and of moral thinking in particular (Haidt 2001, 2007, Doris et al 2010). This is not my focus here. As Tiberius (2008, Ch. 5), Snow (2010), and Kennett & Fine (2009) make clear, drawing upon a wealth of empirical studies, while the challenge requires a significant re-evaluation of the nature and relation of introspection to self-knowledge, it has been somewhat overstated. There are possibilities for correcting misleading passions that arise from the kinds of non-conscious, automatic processes discussed in this literature, at least over time, if not always in the moment.

³ Experimental evidence for the idea of defence mechanisms and the psychological models it deploys is neatly marshalled and discussed in Cramer 2006.

⁴ Vaillant (1993: 132, Table 4) provides evidence that of those in the top 20% on a scale of psychosocial adjustment at 65 years old, 50% still use less than mature defences, and the percentage for those lower on the scale is considerably higher. Cramer (2006: 204) notes that neurotic defences are likely to survive into adulthood, and remarks on the widespread distribution in 'normal' samples of characteristics defining psychological disorders, e.g. depressive tendencies, phobias, pathological aggression, antisocial traits, etc. that are associated with the use of defence (224, 235).

⁵ Similar connections to those drawn below can be made for dogmatism (195), stolid perserverance (200), comprehensional rigidity (205), scrupulosity (231), vanity (237), arrogance (243-5), vices related to aspects of intellectual autonomy regarding one's relations to others (265-6, 268), and a lack of intellectual generosity (287).

⁶ As defences have a developmental history, and were often initiated for good reason, a person's sense that some passion makes them unlovable may be realistic in the context of a specific relationship. For example, she may defend against her anger, which is repressed or transformed into depression, as previous love objects, e.g. parents, did indeed withdraw their love whenever she expressed it. But, assuming she is now grown up, what she fears and expects is not just that getting angry will disrupt her current relationship with my parents, but that anger is unacceptable. But the childhood situation does not generalise, and others will not all act the same way; but neither is it right to say, simply, that the fault lies in my anger per se. A process of further self-development will involve discovering the reasonable place of anger in loving relationships.