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	Organization	Yale University
	Address	New Haven, USA
	Email	matthew.noah.smith@yale.edu
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3 **The importance of what they care about**

4 **Matthew Noah Smith**

5
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7 **Abstract** Many forms of contemporary morality treat the individual as the fun-
8 damental unit of moral importance. Perhaps the most striking example of this moral
9 vision of the individual is the contemporary global human rights regime, which
10 treats the individual as, for all intents and purposes, sacrosanct. This essay attempts
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20 derivative moral significance of cares, we ought to adopt of a commitment to
21 accommodate others' cares and a commitment not to frustrate their cares.
22

23 **Keywords** Liberalism · Ethics · Recognition · Respect · Cares ·
24 Accommodation · Individuals · Tolerance
25

26 **1 Introduction**

27 Consider this passage from Joshua 8: 24–27:

28 And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants
29 of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they

A1 M. N. Smith (✉)
A2 Department of Philosophy, Yale University, New Haven, USA
A3 e-mail: matthew.noah.smith@yale.edu

30 were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the
 31 Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it
 32 was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand,
 33 even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he
 34 stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.
 35 Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves,
 36 according unto the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua.

37 Notice this passage's stark vision of the moral importance of the individual. The
 38 passage suggests that the individual, *qua* individual, doesn't really matter at all. The
 39 primary moral subject seems to be the community.¹ What morally matters are the
 40 Aians as a group and the Hebrews as a group. If Ai has been deemed worthy of
 41 destruction, and you are an Aian, then you are worthy of destruction in virtue of
 42 your being an Aian. And if you are a Hebrew and the Hebrews are deemed worthy
 43 of great military victory, then you are worthy of enjoying that victory in virtue of
 44 being a Hebrew.

45 Contemporary liberalism, at its core, contains a rather different understanding of
 46 the moral significance of the individual. The individual, according to contemporary
 47 liberalism, is the fundamental unit of moral significance. Perhaps the most striking
 48 example of this moral vision of the individual is the contemporary global human
 49 rights regime, which treats the individual as fundamental. The human rights regime
 50 fits rather poorly with the moral vision expressed in the passage from Joshua. For,
 51 God commanded the slaughter of all the Aians, and so the slaughter was obligatory.
 52 But, that slaughter also probably involved many human rights violations. It would
 53 not be easy to square these two things—the obligation to slaughter Aians and the
 54 concomitant human rights violations. For, at the very least, each contains a starkly
 55 different vision of the moral significance of the individual.

56 This essay attempts to explore one feature of this liberal understanding of the
 57 moral status of the individual, namely the moral significance of a subject's cares and
 58 commitments. I argue that we should take a person's cares and values very seriously
 59 as partially constituting that individual as a concrete subject who is the proper object
 60 of our moral attention. In particular, I argue that a person's actual cares and values
 61 have non-derivative moral significance: simply because a person cares about
 62 something, that care is morally significant. In virtue of this non-derivative moral
 63 significance of cares, we ought to accommodate not to frustrate cares. Thus, the
 64 thesis I defend is:

65 [*The accommodation thesis*] If someone cares about something, then one
 66 ought to accommodate that care, and one ought not to frustrate that care.²

67 The accommodation thesis identifies a *pro tanto* reason. It is not proposed as a
 68 sovereign moral norm. It is just one moral norm among many. The Accommodation
 69 Thesis identifies an *agent-neutral* reason for action. That someone cares about
 70 something is not to be understood in terms of that person making a demand on or

¹ There are exceptions. Certain persons were divinely anointed and thereby mattered as individuals.

² This thesis is related to a thesis defended by Agnieszka Jaworska (2007, 1999). There are also some similarities to claims defended in Seana Shiffrin (2000, 2006).

71 issuing a claim against others. One way to put it is as follows: people's actual cares
72 morally matter.

73 2 Individualizing traits

74 By saying that a tenet of contemporary liberal morality is the significance of the
75 individual, I mean that contemporary liberal morality requires of each person that,
76 when deciding how to live, she pay practical attention to each individual *qua* an
77 individual. The thesis of this paper is that one way—but not the only way—
78 contemporary liberal morality requires us to pay practical attention to each
79 individual *qua* an individual is by accommodating that person's cares.

80 Let us first note that paying practical attention to an individual *qua* individual
81 requires focusing one's practical attitudes onto certain characteristics of that
82 individual. For, one cannot focus on the *whole* person (what would that be?). Rather,
83 in order to pay attention to someone, one must pick out certain features of that
84 person as the locus of one's attention. Which features? In the case of the practical
85 attention required in virtue of the moral significance of the individual, whatever
86 those particular features on which we ought to focus are, focusing on them as
87 opposed to other features must be part of what it is to manifest proper moral
88 attention paid to the individual. That is, focusing on those features ought to
89 appropriately capture (at least in part) the moral significance of the individual *qua*
90 an individual. Let us dub those features focus on which appropriately captures the
91 moral significance of the individual *individualizing traits*.

92 So what are individualizing traits? Let us begin by recalling the case of the
93 massacred Aians. What is so startling is not only that many people were killed.
94 What is also startling is that nothing distinctive about any individual Aian entered
95 into Joshua's moral calculus. Instead, Joshua slaughtered each person simply
96 because she was an Aian. Whoever she was, whatever features of her life mattered
97 to her, these things did not matter in any way to Joshua. Suppose one of the Aians
98 hated being Aian and desperately wanted to be a Hebrew. Suppose this person
99 protested the Aian leadership, practiced Hebrew rituals, and suffered at the hands of
100 the Aian state because of all this. None of it would have mattered to Joshua. For, she
101 was an Aian, no matter what she had done, no matter who or what she loved, no
102 matter who she planned on becoming. She was an Aian and nothing she could do
103 could change that. For that—for being an Aian—she deserved to die. The murdered
104 Aian, of course, knew she was an Aian. She could no more truthfully deny this than
105 she could truthfully deny that the Sun rises in the East. So, what is so awful about
106 Joshua killing this woman for being an Aian—or least a large part of what is so
107 awful—is not that Joshua accidentally killed a non-Aian (since he didn't), but that
108 he could not see past a feature of hers that did not matter to her, and in fact, that she
109 had thoroughly rejected. She had, we might say, no voice in determining who she
110 was, at least not for Joshua.

111 This suggests that one of Joshua's moral failings is that he did not see the world
112 through the eyes of any of the Aians he slaughtered. Each person's distinctive
113 individual perspective on the world was ignored. That each person even had such a



114 perspective was ignored. All that mattered was who each person was in Joshua's
 115 eyes. But, these facts, being fixed by each person's historical and biological
 116 characteristics, are not straightforward expressions of each Aian's identity. This
 117 suggests that insofar as a person is morally salient *qua* an individual, it is not that
 118 person's inherited historical and biological characteristics that morally matter, at
 119 least in the first instance. Rather, the primary individualizing traits—those traits
 120 onto which we ought to focus our practical attention insofar as we are going to
 121 attend to the individual *qua* an individual—are traits that are expressions of that
 122 person's identity, where 'identity' is understood as something that is not only
 123 internal to the person but that also make her the concrete, historically real individual
 124 she is.

125 Importantly, merely seeing someone as numerically distinct from others is not
 126 enough. Joshua probably appreciated the numerical distinctiveness of each Aian
 127 from any other Aian quite well, since his aim was to kill every last Aian. But, even
 128 when Joshua properly appreciates each Aian as a numerically distinct individual,
 129 Joshua still fails to see each Aian for who she is. We ought to attend to something
 130 deeper, and in particular to something that allows us a way to see the person as an
 131 individual with a determinate identity as a person. Appropriate attention to a
 132 person's individualizing traits therefore ought to manifest the proper acknowledge-
 133 ment of those characteristics that constitute the person's identity. What are those
 134 characteristics? They are a person's cares. So, within the context of deciding how to
 135 live, in order to attend to an individual in a way that properly manifests appreciation
 136 of that individual *as an individual*, we ought to attend to a person's cares.

137 This all moved quite quickly. So, let us slow down and look more carefully at
 138 how we can reach this conclusion.

139 The central claim I presented above, namely that proper moral attention on an
 140 individual requires attention to factors that are not entirely external to the object of
 141 moral attention, is essentially the denial of the claim that the moral significance of
 142 individuals can be understood in a way that makes the individual a moral *patient*. A
 143 moral patient is something that is an object of moral concern, but that lacks any say
 144 over which of its features count, morally speaking. Consider, for example, a
 145 beautiful, one-of-a-kind painting with substantial historical significance, e.g., Diego
 146 Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. Let us suppose that this painting is morally significant in
 147 the sense that there are moral considerations in favor of treating the painting in a
 148 certain manner. The manner in which we ought to treat the painting (partially)
 149 depends upon which of its traits are morally significant. But, the painting has no say
 150 over which of its parts are morally significant. Rather, we, as its spectators,
 151 determine what is morally significant (even if it is determined by an ideal spectator,
 152 the painting has no say). Even if *Las Meninas*' moral significance is an objective
 153 matter—its age, its author, what it depicts, the skill of its brush strokes, its
 154 naturalism, and the spontaneity of its depiction all together *qua* be the morally
 155 significant features of the painting—the painting *would still have* no role in
 156 determining what *its morally significant* traits are. *Whatever features of the painting*
 157 *are morally significant—whatever features we have a moral reason to, e.g.,*
 158 *preserve—are features of the painting that ought to be the focus of our moral*



159 attention. But the painting itself has no say over whether these characteristics are
 160 significant. *Las Meninas*, in this sense, morally matters but only as a moral patient.

161 This example may seem absurd. Obviously the painting does not have a say,
 162 because it *cannot* have a say. But, this is the point: persons are the sorts of beings
 163 that *can* have a say. If a person were treated the way *Las Meninas* is treated, she
 164 would lead a luxurious life, indeed, but she would also be voiceless. There are
 165 people who live such lives like, for example, people who, simply as a result of the
 166 accident of birth, are heirs to thrones, and people who are chosen at a very young
 167 age as religious leaders (e.g., as the Dalai Lama has always been). However
 168 incredible their lives may be in virtue of their apparent significance to others, we can
 169 easily understand that something has been taken away from them, namely their say
 170 over who they are and, in virtue of that, something that morally matters about them.
 171 For, what we attend to when we attend to the Dalai Lama *qua* Dalai Lama or the
 172 prince *qua* prince, and not as the particular individual who happens to be the Dalai
 173 Lama or the prince, is just the *role* of Dalai Lama or the *role* of prince. Whoever fills
 174 that role often matters to others only in the way in which he is the Dalai Lama or the
 175 prince, and not in any other way. We revere the position of Dalai Lama, not the
 176 individual who fills that position. Indeed, the condition of the Dalai Lama or a
 177 prince is, in an important way, formally similar to the condition of the Aian, the
 178 massive differences in the way this manifests itself notwithstanding: they are seen
 179 entirely in terms of a role they play (as-Aian, as-Dalai-Lama, as-prince) and not at
 180 all in terms of who each is as an individual. Insofar as each is *not* recognized for
 181 who they are as an individual, each is silenced and is a moral patient.

182 This reveals a bit about what individualizing traits are. They are those traits
 183 through which a person *has a say* in who she is as an individual. By ‘listening’ to
 184 individualizing traits, we ‘listen’ to the individual, and do not supply for that
 185 individual our own picture of who she is.

186 One might immediately think of *speech acts* as those traits to which we ought to
 187 listen insofar as we are going to attend to someone as the individual she is. A person
 188 simply tells others what matters to her. We avoid treating people as moral patients
 189 by listening to them. Had Joshua only listened to the Aians, he might have
 190 discovered that some did not care to be Aians, and he might not have slaughtered
 191 them. A person’s individualizing traits are her speech acts.

192 This is a poor proposal, though. Consider cases of deception and silence. A lie is
 193 not an expression of what matters to the deceiver, at least not in any straightforward
 194 way. Perhaps what we are looking for are just *sincere* assertions. But, this suggests
 195 that what matters is not the speech act itself but whatever it is that the speech act
 196 accurately expresses. This seems almost obvious when we consider those who are
 197 for some reason silent (i.e., those who are literally mute, afraid to speak, shy, or
 198 have taken a vow of silence, to name a few cases). They ‘lack’ speech but do not
 199 lack the individualizing traits of the sort we are looking for. They should not be
 200 rendered moral patients simply in virtue of their silence. So, we can conclude that
 201 whatever traits are individualizing traits, they are more intimate than speech acts,
 202 for they are what speech acts—at least sincere speech acts—express.

203 It is now easy to discern an important fact that separates *Las Meninas* from
 204 persons, or moral patients from persons, more generally. This is the possession of

205 something deeper and more intimate that sincere speech acts express. What is this
 206 deeper and more intimate thing? The lesson of the silent person is this: What exists
 207 despite her silence is a rich psychological and practical life and it is in virtue of this
 208 that we see her as, at least when it comes to possession of individualizing traits,
 209 exactly like the speaking person and utterly unlike *Las Meninas*. So, the question
 210 becomes: in what does this rich psychological and practical life consist?

211 Nothing more than a collection of beliefs, I think, is a poor candidate. For,
 212 beliefs, it is often said, ‘aim’ at the truth. Perfect belief formation would require
 213 perfectly responding to the world such that one’s beliefs are *true* beliefs. Thus
 214 David Velleman has written:

215 Truth must be the aim of belief, but it need not be an aim on the part of the
 216 believer; it may instead be an aim implicit in some parts of his cognitive
 217 architecture. When his beliefs change in the face of evidence or argument, he
 218 might be described as trying to arrive at the truth, as if he were motivated by a
 219 desire. But this description might be a personification of aims that are in fact
 220 sub-personal.³

221 We can infer from Velleman’s description of the aim of belief that insofar as the
 222 individual plays *any* role in forming beliefs, it is by way of adopting certain
 223 dispositions to respond to evidence in certain ways. But in the *ideal* case, the
 224 individual is passive. For in the ideal case, the individual’s beliefs are automatically
 225 updated in light of the evidence such that they—the beliefs—are most likely to be
 226 true. This makes an individual’s beliefs, considered entirely on their own, not at all
 227 something that speaks for the individual, at least not in any straightforward sense.
 228 One can, of course, seek out certain experiences and thereby come to have beliefs
 229 about those experiences as a by-product. But, in this case beliefs are playing the role
 230 of speech-acts in that they are proper objects of attention because they express
 231 something deeper, and are not, at least in the first instance, individualizing traits
 232 themselves.

233 This comes out in the following thought experiment. Suppose all people are
 234 given the same evidence. In the ideal world, the people would form the same beliefs
 235 (*modulo* the *de se* beliefs and, perhaps, normative beliefs). It would be odd if in such
 236 a world, all persons had the *exact same* individualizing traits. But this is what would
 237 be the case if beliefs (that are not *de se* or normative) were individualizing traits.⁴
 238 The explanation for this is that beliefs are responses to the world that in the ideal
 239 case are governed entirely by norms of epistemic rationality. In the ideal world,
 240 each person’s belief formation mechanism is identical, and so if only beliefs were
 241 individualizing traits, each subject *qua* individual is identical to every other subject.
 242 The subject becomes little more than a location in which belief formation takes

3FL01 ³ See David Velleman (2000, 2002); Ralph Wedgwood (2002) and Nishi Shah (2003). For a general
 3FL02 discussion of how belief has a distinctive normative relationship with truth, see Lloyd Humberstone
 3FL03 (1992).

4FL01 ⁴ Could all beliefs *de se* be individualizing traits? If so, then which ones? Surely not ones like “I am in
 4FL02 Los Angeles.” Presumably they would be beliefs like, “Trade unionism is important to me” or “He is the
 4FL03 man I love.” In such cases, the *de se* belief is about the very attitudes I identify below as individuating
 4FL04 traits.

243 place. If the subject contributes anything of herself to belief formation, she would
 244 likely making an *error* in belief formation.⁵

245 This suggests that individualizing traits are traits that may properly vary across
 246 ideal people even when they are in the same ‘external’ conditions. There is no
 247 reason to suppose that morality, much less rationality, requires of ideal beings that
 248 *all* of their psychological attitudes be identical given the same input. That is, such
 249 uniformity is not required in order for these beings to manifest rationality or
 250 conformity to moral requirements. Rather, it is partially in virtue of *different*
 251 responses to the *same* world that persons are the sorts of beings that matter as
 252 individuals. Insofar as a set of attitudes can constitute a distinctive subjective
 253 perspective on the world without violating some norm of rationality or morality,
 254 then those attitudes seem best suited to play the role of individualizing traits.

255 What are those attitudes? They are the attitudes that partially constitute a
 256 practically- and affectively-valenced subjective practical perspective on the world.
 257 Why? We rejected (non-de se and non-normative) beliefs as individualizing traits
 258 because they are responses to the world that ideally would not vary across people if
 259 those people had the same evidence. But, there is no single set of attitudes that partially
 260 constitute a practically- and affectively-valenced subjective practical perspective on
 261 the world that all persons in the same situation ought to adopt. Rather, it is morally and
 262 rationally permissible—probably even a good thing—for people to respond to the
 263 world in a wide range of ways. Some with disgust, others with joy, some with wonder,
 264 and others with boredom. Furthermore, attitudes that constitute such a practical
 265 perspective are attitudes toward how the world *ought* to be, and so are not passive
 266 responses to the world. Thus, unlike the case of belief, which conforms to the world,
 267 these attitudes aim to *craft* the world.⁶ These are the attitudes that are typically linked
 268 to action, i.e., to the individual realizing her capacity for agency.

269 But, there is a complication here. For, there are many attitudes that can move us
 270 to act, but they, in an important way, do not properly ‘speak for’ the agent. As Harry
 271 Frankfurt has noted,

272 It is not incoherent, despite the air of paradox, to say that a thought that occurs
 273 in my mind may or may not be something I think. This can be understood in
 274 much the same way as the less jarring statement that an event occurring in my
 275 body may or may not be something that *I do*.⁷

276 Frankfurt is referring to states like fleeting desires and pathological obsessions.
 277 These attitudes intrude on our identities and can move us to act. But such attitudes
 278 do not—at least in any paradigmatic way—speak for the agent. Even if we do not

5FL01 ⁵ That is, given two subjects with identical evidence, the proper explanation for differences in their
 5FL02 beliefs is appeal to *failures of rationality* on one or both of their parts. Two people cannot, on the basis of
 5FL03 the same evidential base, rationally form different beliefs.

6FL01 ⁶ For more, see Humberstone (1992).

7FL01 ⁷ Harry Frankfurt (1988), Michael Bratman writes in the same vein: “The problem [of agential authority]
 7FL02 arises when we take seriously the idea that you can sometimes have and be moved by desires that you in
 7FL03 some sense disown.” (2007). Consider also Richard Moran’s comment: “The idea of being a particular
 7FL04 person brings with it the distinction between what is ‘one’s own’ and what is experienced as other or
 7FL05 alien.” (2002, p. 190).

279 wish to entirely divorce the individual from such attitudes, there remains a
 280 significant distinction between ‘active’ attitudes one owns and ‘active’ attitudes one
 281 experiences as alien.⁸ The former, simply in virtue of the fact that they aren’t
 282 accompanied by a second-order aversion to them—a reflective rejection—are better
 283 candidates as attitudes that constitute the individual subject.⁹ In the language of
 284 Michael Bratman, what we seek are attitudes that have ‘authority’, in that action that
 285 flows from them are full-blooded cases of the *agent* acting.¹⁰ Attitudes that have this
 286 authority—attitudes from which full-blooded action flows—must have a certain
 287 robustness in the sense that they play a stable and substantial role in the realization
 288 of a person’s capacity to act.

289 We have, then, come up with a list of features that individualizing traits have.
 290 Individualizing traits give a subject a voice in the sense that they express a distinctive
 291 practical perspective on how the world ought to be and are not just passive responses
 292 to the world. In the same vein, individualizing traits are expressions of particular
 293 practical perspective that may rationally and reasonably vary given the same input.
 294 Individualizing traits also typically move the individual to act (under certain
 295 conditions). But they are not just any traits that move an individual to act. They are
 296 traits that have the authority to speak for the individual in the sense that they are
 297 attitudes from which ‘owned’ action flows and from which the subject is not typically
 298 alienated. In these ways, possession of individualizing traits make a person
 299 something *other than* a moral patient in the way that *Las Meninas* or the Dalai Lama
 300 (considered merely as the Dalai Lama) are moral patients.

301 Is there any one kind of attitude that can meet all these criteria? There is. It is a
 302 genus of attitudes that goes under the various headings of values, cares, policies, and
 303 the like. A great deal of work in philosophy of action has been done exploring the
 304 nature of this class of attitudes. And, unsurprisingly, there is substantial disagreement
 305 about the details. On the other hand, there is a substantial locus of agreement around
 306 the general picture. This agreement is as follows: the attitudes that can ‘speak for’ an
 307 agent, or that ‘have authority’ with respect to the agent, are practical attitudes that
 308 constitute a stable form of emotional and practical vulnerability to certain factors in
 309 the world, where this stability involves, at the very least, both something more robust
 310 than a temporally fleeting desire, and (at least) the absence of reflective rejection

8FL01 ⁸ See Robert Adams (1985).

9FL01 ⁹ On the other hand, these attitudes can withstand deliberate reflection even if, upon reflection, one
 9FL02 decides that the attitude generates inconveniences or is problematic in some minimal way. For, it is one
 9FL03 thing to find oneself taking a stance toward the world that one feels one ought to overcome, and it’s
 9FL04 another thing altogether to be in the grip of a pathological obsession. A person may wish to limit the
 9FL05 influence her love of ice cream has over her decision-making because eating a lot of ice cream makes her
 9FL06 fatter than she would prefer to be. Even so, she needn’t be *alienated* from her love of ice cream. She may
 9FL07 still feel the pull of this love of ice cream, see it as her own, and judge its effects as less than salubrious.
 9FL08 The love of ice cream may well be an individualizing trait, even if the ice cream lover struggles to limit its
 9FL09 role in shaping her life. This is to be contrasted with the unwilling addict, who desperately wishes she
 9FL10 could completely eradicate her desire for more heroin. The desire for heroin is experienced as a foreign
 9FL11 force that colonizes her mental life. Calling this desire an individualizing trait despite the way in which
 9FL12 the subject utterly rejects it would be perverse since a crucial functional role of the individualizing trait is
 9FL13 to be an expression of the agent’s authority over herself.

10FL01 ¹⁰ For more on this, see Bratman (2007), p. 137.

311 (where absence of reflective rejection needn't depend upon and needn't trigger
312 reflective endorsement, although it might). Such attitudes therefore explain an
313 individual's stable patterns of action and emotional responses.

314 As mentioned, there are many views about the precise constitution of cares or
315 values. Some hold that they are desires that some other desire moves one to act.¹¹
316 Some have described them as strong, life-guiding desires that lack any kind of
317 reflective or second-order component.¹² Others argue that they involve both a
318 conative state of approbation directed at something as well as a belief about that
319 thing that it is valuable.¹³ Some hold that valuing is quite complex: it is a practical
320 policy of always treating a certain desire (or other practical attitude) as a reason to
321 do something (e.g., I might have a policy to treat my desire to work on my papers as
322 a reason to work on my papers).¹⁴ Finally, there is the view that they are volitional
323 limits on the desires one can and cannot feel, such that, on the one hand, having
324 certain practical attitudes and, on the other hand, not having other practical attitudes
325 are both beyond one's volitional capacities.¹⁵

326 I shall not adjudicate between these proposals (or any of the others left
327 unmentioned). We can, as I've just noted above, focus on agreement about the
328 functional role that values or cares play as central and particularly fixed elements of
329 a person's psychology: they have the function of regularly treating (or constituting
330 dispositions to regularly treat) some object—be it a thing, a person, a practice, a
331 project, a state of affairs—as normatively significant for oneself.¹⁶ By 'normatively
332 significant', I mean that, as a matter of course, one is practically and emotionally
333 responsive to whatever the care-relevant state of the object is, e.g., its flourishing,
334 realization, continued existence, etc., such that one (consciously or sub/uncon-
335 sciously) adjusts how one lives one's life in order to realize, promote, maintain, etc.,
336 that state, and one has characteristic emotional responses to changes in the cared-for
337 object's care-relevant state.¹⁷ The care-driven behavioral adjustment needn't be the

11FL01 ¹¹ See Harry Frankfurt's early hierarchical account of caring in "The Importance of What We Care
11FL02 About" and its developments in Frankfurt (1987), respectively. He alters it later on, although it remains
11FL03 hierarchical. See, e.g., Harry Frankfurt (1999a, b, c, d).

12FL01 ¹² See Agnieszka Jaworska (2007). Let us distinguish Jaworska's and Frankfurt's accounts of caring—
12FL02 and so the account of caring that is at the heart of this essay—from thoroughly cognitive accounts of
12FL03 valuing or caring like David Velleman's notion of ideals, which in order to be practically significant must
12FL04 be accompanied by desires. See David Velleman (2002)

13FL01 ¹³ See, e.g., Samuel Scheffler (2010, pp. 15–40).

14FL01 ¹⁴ See, e.g., Gary Watson (1975), and Michael Bratman (2000).

15FL01 ¹⁵ See Frankfurt (1999b).

16FL01 ¹⁶ We also find this view expressed in Christine Korsgaard (1996a). See also Korsgaard's discussions
16FL02 (1996b, 2009). See also Susan Wolf (1987) in which Wolf discusses what she calls "real self views," i.e.,
16FL03 views in which the self is identified with the one's deepest values and commitments (see esp.
16FL04 pp. 465–486, Wolf criticizes such views as inadequate for articulating a theory of responsibility, but she
16FL05 does not deny that the "real self" is to be identified with one's deepest values and commitments). Gary
16FL06 Watson (2004), holds that the one's self can be identified with one's values, and that we *can* develop one
16FL07 form of a theory of responsibility—what Watson calls the 'aretaic appraisal' of responsibility.

17FL01 ¹⁷ What about generalized dispositions like optimism? Such dispositions are somewhat empty and so on
17FL02 the margins of the self. Optimism is a stance one takes towards *whatever* happens in the world. Optimism
17FL03 does not shape what people live for.



338 object of an intention—it could just as well be the consequence of either a settled
 339 disposition or driven by a particularly strong sentiment—and the care-driven
 340 *emotional* response also need not be the product of an intention.¹⁸ We might say that
 341 insofar as one cares about something, one tracks the care-relevant condition(s) of
 342 that thing and partially shapes one's life in light of (one's assessment of) that
 343 condition (or those conditions).

344 The entire constellation of a subject's cares gives the person a concrete
 345 existential density that constitutes that person's distinctive identity or self.¹⁹ So, as
 346 her cares change, so changes her identity. It is in this vein that John Rawls writes:

347 [People] may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from
 348 certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain
 349 enduring attachments and loyalties... These convictions and attachments help
 350 to organize and give shape to a person's way of life, what one sees oneself as
 351 doing and trying to accomplish in one's social world. We think that if we were
 352 suddenly without these particular convictions and attachments we would be
 353 disoriented and unable to carry on. In fact, there would be, we might think, no
 354 point in carrying on. But our conceptions of the good may and often do change
 355 over time, usually slowly but sometimes rather suddenly. When these changes
 356 are sudden, we are particularly likely to say that we are no longer the same
 357 person... On the road to Damascus Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul the Apostle.²⁰

358 It follows that we ought not equate the self discussed here with the persisting
 359 self—that which is identical across time. Rather, the self discussed here is the
 360 collection of characteristics that merit practical attention in virtue of the fact that the
 361 individual is morally significant. The claim here is therefore a normative claim and
 362 not entirely (what some might call) a descriptive claim. For, this account is
 363 responsive to normative considerations—considerations about what parts of an
 364 individual morally matter insofar as individuals morally matter *qua* individuals—
 365 more than metaphysical considerations about what persists through time or, for that
 366 matter, considerations regarding the individuation of one person from another. If
 367 these attitudes play a metaphysical role in the constitution of the person across time,
 368 or if these attitudes allow us to individuate one person from another, then so much
 369 the better for them.

370 We can now better appreciate why, in virtue of the moral significance of the
 371 individual, an individual's cares are her individualizing traits, i.e., why they are the
 372 characteristics onto which one ought to focus one's practical attention. By failing to
 373 attend to another's cares and instead paying attention only to one's own ideas of
 374 what's important, one 'silences' the individual. The individual has no voice in
 375 determining who she is taken to be in her interactions with others. She is, in short, a
 376 moral patient. By attending to her cares, on the other hand, we see her as the source
 377 of her own identity. She has a voice and we attend to it. In particular, if one does not

18FL01 ¹⁸ For more on intending to intend and intending to feel an emotion, see Pamela Hieronymi (2006) and
 18FL02 Angela Smith (2008)

19FL01 ¹⁹ I take the phrase 'concrete existential density' from Frederic Jameson (2005, p. 39).

20FL01 ²⁰ John Rawls (2001, p. 405).

Author Proof

378 focus one's practical attention onto another's cares, but instead decides for oneself
 379 that, e.g., someone's race or gender is the trait on which to focus one's practical
 380 attention, one claims a kind of authority over the other. This authority is the
 381 authority to make someone who she is; it is not to discover who she is. For one is
 382 seeing the other on one's own terms without allowing her to speak for herself. Thus,
 383 the authority at issue here is a kind of practical authority much like the practical
 384 authority one claims when one claims the authority to name another person, i.e., it is
 385 like the authority of parents over their child.

386 For example, suppose Frank is disabled but does not care much about the fact that he
 387 is disabled. Instead Frank cares about studying, writing, and teaching philosophy. But,
 388 people constantly see Frank primarily as a disabled person and only secondarily as a
 389 philosophy professor. Try as Frank might, he can't get people to stop focusing on his
 390 disability and to start focusing on his love of philosophy. Others understand Frank in
 391 terms of traits that do not speak for him: he is a disabled person to them, not a lover of
 392 philosophy. People have not given Frank the appropriate form of moral attention, but
 393 instead have treated him as passive with respect to his identity.

394 Frustration with suffering such a fate is expressed powerfully in the laments of
 395 those who suffered such impositions of identities, be it at the hands of colonial
 396 masters, religious or ethnic groups, the patriarchal establishment, or through any of
 397 the other mechanisms of power that have operated over history. This applies even in
 398 cases in which it is important to someone that she is, for example, Black or gay, but
 399 are seen by others almost entirely in terms of their Blackness, homosexuality, etc.,
 400 even when that person cares about much else besides.²¹ Insisting on treating
 401 someone as if, e.g., her gayness were her most salient characteristic is not consistent
 402 with treating her as the individual she is, but instead involves recognizing someone
 403 only on one's own terms.

404 **3 Accommodation, frustration, competition** 

405 Out of appreciation of the moral significance of the individual we ought to focus our
 406 practical attentions on individuals' cares. But, what form should this attention on
 407 cares take? I propose that it should take the form of a practical stance, what I am
 408 calling *accommodation*, which is a stance in which one treats others' cares have a
 409 certain kind of authority in the context of one's practical deliberations. In particular,
 410 when A accommodates B's cares, A treats B's care as a reason to adjust her
 411 behavior in deference to that care. Since B's care partially constitutes B's identity,
 412 then A is acting in deference to B, the individual. So, by treating the existence of
 413 B's care as a reason to accommodate B's care, A recognizes B as the individual she
 414 is. This is how accommodation manifests recognition of another individual as
 415 morally significant *qua* the individual she is without treating that person as a moral
 416 patient.

21FL01 ²¹ My account suggests a *political* form of recognition of the sort that has been advocated prominently by
 21FL02 Charles Taylor (1992) and Axel Honneth (1995).

417 There is another stance one might adopt: frustration. Like accommodation,
 418 frustration involves acknowledgement of another via a kind of practical attention
 419 paid to that person's cares. But frustration is different from accommodation in that it
 420 involves the adoption of a hostile attitude towards others' cares, not a deferential
 421 attitude. The purest case of this is a case in which one aims to eliminate another's
 422 care and replace it with some different care. In such a case, because one aims to
 423 change another's cares, and cares partially constitute a person's identity, frustration
 424 amounts to the aim of shaping another person's identity. That is, insofar as one
 425 attends to a person's cares when one frustrates those cares, one sees those cares only
 426 as attitudes that must be abandoned and sees other (approved) cares as cares to be
 427 adopted. Thus, when one frustrates another's cares, one aims to shape another's
 428 identity. One views the individual whose cares one is frustrating primarily as a
 429 nothing more than a location for proper cares. The individual is thereby rendered
 430 anonymous, and so is lost as an individual (except in the bare numerical sense). So,
 431 while the person may remain (in the bare numerical sense of counting as one
 432 person), the concrete, distinctive self does not. So, regardless of whether we have
 433 good reasons to aim at creating people with proper cares, frustration is not
 434 consistent with the acknowledgement of the *actual* individual whose care is being
 435 frustrated having a voice (at least realized in that care).²² So, frustration is
 436 inconsistent with appreciating the moral significance of an existing individual. But,
 437 those are the only individuals that there are. So, frustration is not consistent with the
 438 liberal requirement that we recognize the moral significance of the individual.

439 For example, suppose Audrey has certain views about what people should care
 440 about and she takes it upon herself to make sure people have those cares. In
 441 particular, Audrey believes all her friends ought to be political activists organizing
 442 around economic injustice. Belle, Audrey's friend, does not care about activism, and
 443 instead cares primarily about the financial success of her business. Audrey knows
 444 this. Audrey secretly tries to make Belle's business fail (through legal means),
 445 thinking that as things go downhill for Belle's business and finances, Audrey will be
 446 able to step in and get Belle involved in activism centered on economic justice.

447 However noble Audrey's own commitment to social justice might be—and
 448 however much better the world would be if more people were like Audrey in their
 449 commitments to social justice—Audrey is trying to make Belle into the individual
 450 Audrey wants her to be, instead of allowing Belle to determine for herself who she
 451 is. This is a case of frustration that is inconsistent with paying the appropriate form
 452 of moral attention to someone as the individual she is. For, by trying to shape
 453 Belle's life, Audrey is treating her as a location in which the right sort of cares can
 454 be fostered. Audrey takes herself to have the authority to shape Belle as if Belle
 455 were just an unformed child. By frustrating Belle's cares, Audrey is not appreciating
 456 the identity-constituting authority of Belle's existing cares. So, even though
 457 Audrey's action might improve the overall justice of the world, and even though she
 458 is acting legally, Audrey's frustration of Belle's cares fails to acknowledge properly

22FL01 ²² Drawing from the passage by Rawls quoted above, we can conclude that if one aims at the frustration
 22FL02 of all that another person cares about, then one in fact aims at completely eliminating the self that is and
 22FL03 replacing it with a self that, at least right now, isn't. Where there is Saul now, one tries to create Paul.

459 the moral significance of Belle as the individual she is.²³ Audrey sees as worth
 460 deference only what ought to be realized in the person of Belle, not what is realized
 461 in the person of Belle.²⁴

462 Frustration, considered entirely on its own, though, is no more than the willful
 463 disdain for others' cares. One simply runs over others' cares. This mirrors the failure
 464 to attend to the individual as a morally significant unit found in Joshua's treatment
 465 of the Aians. For, Joshua did not see the individual Aian, *qua* the individual she was,
 466 as having a claim on his moral attention. She was to be dealt with, not heard.
 467 Frustration untempered by deference to the individual manifests a similar absence of
 468 attention. If we consider a case in which frustration is tempered by accommodation,
 469 we can see how the addition of other considerations can make frustration seem
 470 appropriate.

471 Suppose Belle does not know she has certain cares. Audrey aims to frustrate
 472 Belle's cares in order to get Belle to see that she, Belle, in fact has these cares. Audrey
 473 attends to Belle's cares, but in this case the practical form this attention takes is
 474 frustration of Belle's cares. Insofar as this case does not seem problematic, it is
 475 because Audrey's frustration of Belle's cares actually exhibits deference towards
 476 Belle as the author of her own identity. For, what Audrey wants is for Belle to realize
 477 who she is by realizing that she actually cares about a certain thing. This frustration,
 478 then, does not involve attempting to impose an identity onto Belle. Rather, Audrey is
 479 attending to Belle as Belle has made herself, although she is doing it by way of
 480 frustrating Belle's cares. This is not frustration, full stop, but is instead frustration
 481 seasoned by accommodation. Insofar as this is less morally objectionable than the first
 482 case of pure frustration, it is because of the presence of accommodation. We can
 483 therefore factor out the morally attractive feature of this case, and that is
 484 accommodation.

485 So, accommodation manifests the deference to the authority of a person's cares
 486 that partially constitutes an appreciation of the moral significance of the individual.
 487 Frustration does not.

488 4 Accommodation and non-interference

489 Accommodation is the suite of practical attitudes associated with complying with a
 490 norm that *precludes* trying to eliminate someone's cares, trying to eliminate the
 491 object of another's cares, attempting to create either physical or psychological
 492 barriers others must overcome in order to care, and so on along similar lines.
 493 Therefore, successful accommodation requires *at the very least* standing out of the
 494 way so that others may engage their cares, i.e., permitting others to structure their
 495 lives around their cares. But is merely accidentally not interfering with someone's
 496 cares sufficient to manifest practical attention of others as individuals? No.

23FL01 ²³ If one thinks that this is a matter of consent, it might be because consent is supposed to reveal
 23FL02 something about what the consenting party genuinely cares about.

24FL01 ²⁴ What about competition? Space considerations prevent a discussion of cases of competition, but it is
 24FL02 easy to show that competition typically involves frustration only within the context of accommodation.

497 To acknowledge someone as morally significant *qua* the individual she is (and
 498 not, e.g., *qua* the individual she should be) by attending to her cares, one must
 499 somehow defer to those cares and not merely fail (out of, e.g., sheer luck) to claim
 500 authority to fix or shape the other's cares. For such acknowledgement involves an
 501 active stance one takes towards another. So, if harmoniously, one always fails to
 502 stand in the way of another engaging her cares—e.g., if *despite* one's laziness or a
 503 complete lack of interest in the other person, luck conspires to ensure that one never
 504 frustrates the other's cares—then one will still fail to properly recognize the moral
 505 significance of that individual. In short, paying attention to the moral significance of
 506 an individual requires *paying attention* and so cannot be manifested through
 507 inattention.

508 For example, suppose an employer has always employed non-religious people
 509 and so has never thought much about how the work schedule might be structured
 510 around religious holidays. Over time, though, the employer hires a few religious
 511 people, whose important holidays occur on different dates than occur the non-
 512 religious holidays. Suppose that the employer knows that his new employees are
 513 religious and he knows about their important holidays but does not in any way
 514 assign significance to this fact in planning the schedules of these workers. Despite
 515 this knowledge, he pays no attention to the religious holidays—even the holiest of
 516 those holidays—when he is making the vacation schedule. Luckily, he assigns the
 517 religious employees vacation days on their important religious holidays. An
 518 amazing coincidence! But, despite this luck, the employer has failed to recognize
 519 the religious employees in virtue of their values. The employer may not be doing
 520 something that is horribly morally wrong. But, he definitely has not made any effort
 521 to appreciate what matters to his religious employees. For this lack of recognition, it
 522 would be entirely appropriate for the religious employees to resent their boss. We
 523 can easily imagine one employee angrily saying to his boss, "Do you even care that
 524 we don't want to work on these days? We're just getting lucky that we do not have
 525 to work, but we shouldn't have to rely on luck."

526 On the other hand, it is surely too burdensome to be required to accommodate the
 527 cares of all other existing persons. This would probably have a neurotic result. For
 528 attending to all other selves requires complete self-effacement. One must extinguish
 529 all but one of one's own cares in one's efforts to accommodate the cares of all others
 530 (the one care that remains is caring about accommodating everyone else's cares).
 531 Generalizing this point such that every person (vainly) attempts to accommodate the
 532 cares of all others, we get the result of everyone suffering radical self-effacement.
 533 Accommodation of all selves leads to the absence of all selves.

534 This worry about self-effacement suggests that the requirement that we
 535 accommodate the cares of others requires a trigger of some sort. What is this
 536 trigger? Is mere knowledge of another's cares and how one's own actions impact
 537 those cares the trigger? That seems wrong: neither willful ignorance nor false beliefs
 538 due to epistemic vices are moral escape routes. There is surely a 'reasonable belief'
 539 requirement along the following lines: If it is epistemically reasonable for someone
 540 in my position to believe that my actions will frustrate another's cares, then I have
 541 moral reason to alter my actions so as to avoid frustration. But, reasonable belief
 542 may be too easy a trigger. For, if reasonable belief is sufficient to trigger the

543 applicability of the Accommodation Thesis, then a modest version of the self-
 544 effacement worry may follow. For, reasonable belief that one's actions are
 545 frustrating another person's cares is fairly easy to come by. Perhaps an additional
 546 component of the trigger is the existence of some kind of interpersonal relationship
 547 between the two people. But what kind of interpersonal relationship? This is a
 548 difficult question and unlikely to be resolved with a simple answer. But, I offer the
 549 following conjecture. If for the sake of her plans, one person relies on another, the
 550 relying agent ought at least to determine whether her relying on the other frustrates
 551 that other person's cares.²⁵ That is, the extension of one's own agential capacities—
 552 and so the extension of one's capacity to act on one's cares—through reliance on
 553 others is the trigger. Much more must be said here, but due to space restrictions and
 554 other more immediate questions, we must leave working out this part of the account
 555 until another opportunity.

556 The other immediate question is whether intentional non-interference is sufficient
 557 for accommodation. It is. Intentionally stepping aside so others may pursue their
 558 cares is a form of accommodation. For, such activity manifests the proper kind of
 559 attention toward another's cares. Suppose someone cares about gardening. You live
 560 next door. You can plant a tree that will completely shade the neighbor's yard,
 561 thereby making gardening much more difficult. If you forbear in planting that tree,
 562 you have accommodated the neighbor's care for gardening without ever affirma-
 563 tively helping her in her gardening. On the other hand, as we might infer from the
 564 case of the employer and his religious employees, it is not always the case that
 565 simply standing out of the way is enough. Sometimes we must affirmatively
 566 accommodate, and not just avoid interference. The employer might have to adjust
 567 the schedule, work on days that aren't his top preferences for working, and so on, in
 568 order to accommodate his religious employees. In this case, whether someone can
 569 pursue her cares depends upon another person taking action on the other's behalf.
 570 The line between an 'active' form of accommodation in which one affirmatively
 571 takes actions to support the care and the more 'passive' form of accommodation in
 572 which one merely forbears from acting so as to allow someone to pursue her own
 573 cares is a difficult line to draw. For this reason, I shall simply treat both cases as
 574 species of accommodation and so read the Accommodation Thesis in light of that.

575 5 Morally repugnant cares

576 Some people's cares are morally repugnant. They care, for example, about racial
 577 purity. It is easy to treat such cases as reductio of the view defended in this essay.
 578 But, that would be too quick.

579 First, the Accommodation Thesis identifies only a *pro tanto* reason and so is not
 580 the sovereign moral principle from which all other moral requirements flow. If one
 581 has a duty to resist racism, and another person values racial purity, the reason
 582 grounded by that person's value of racial purity has little practical significance.
 583 Even entirely by the Accommodation Thesis's own lights, if accommodating the

25FL01 ²⁵ See Thomas Scanlon (1998).

584 cares of one person requires frustrating the cares of another, the balance of reasons
 585 is likely no longer to be in favor of accommodation. It is highly unlikely, then, that
 586 one could, simply on the basis of the Accommodation Thesis, have an all things
 587 considered reason to accommodate someone's care for racial purity.

588 But, this kind of response misses the point of the objection. The issue is that it is
 589 incredible that one could have a reason to accommodate the care for racial purity *at*
 590 *all*—even when that reason is almost always outweighed. The line of thought is as
 591 follows. The care for racial purity is, in itself, morally awful. But, we cannot have
 592 reasons to support morally awful things. So, we cannot have a reason to
 593 accommodate the care for racial purity.

594 This line of thinking is attractive but problematic.

595 Part of seeing each other as moral equals involves a kind of deference to the
 596 moral reasoning of another person. This, I take it, is one significant problem liberals
 597 face, namely that insofar as one is a liberal, one must, to some degree, accept as
 598 legitimate manifestations of the self attitudes that appear to the liberal to be morally
 599 odious attitudes. The problem the liberal faces is how to deal with such attitudes in a
 600 liberal fashion. Attempting to destroy those attitudes would be a direct assault on the
 601 individual and so a direct assault on something that merits deference.

602 There may be instances in which a human being loses or lacks that unique status
 603 of meriting that deference. For example, it may be the case that a human is so deeply
 604 psychologically disturbed that we do not judge that human as having a self in the
 605 relevant sense (this would require taking a stand on a certain theory of what it is to
 606 care about something). Or, it may be the case that, in virtue of either having acted
 607 wrongly or being about to act wrongly, a person loses her status as morally equal to
 608 all others. But, these would be substantive additional moral claims that allow for or
 609 even require frustration. They would not count against the Accommodation Thesis;
 610 they would only limit its applicability. To that end, we would seek to justify such
 611 claims so that they were largely coherent with the justification we've given for the
 612 Accommodation Thesis.

613 But, even going this route seems to be a cop-out. Some cares are awful and
 614 *simply in virtue of being awful*, they do not merit deference. Additional factors, such
 615 as the history of the subject who has that care along with an independent moral
 616 principle, shouldn't play any role at this prior stage. Here I simply want to stand my
 617 ground, albeit with a twist. It is precisely in virtue of the same liberal commitments
 618 to the moral significance of the individual that drive us both to accept the
 619 Accommodation Thesis that we ought to reject as odious those cares that do not
 620 reflect an appropriate appreciation of the moral significance of the individual. This
 621 is one reason why a liberal morality of difference is so difficult to develop and
 622 complicated to realize in daily life. What I am offering here, then, is not a solution
 623 to a difficult moral problem but instead a diagnosis of what I take to be a central
 624 problem faced by the liberal. The problem is that the pluralism of values is not a
 625 pluralism of innocuous, morally neutral values. It's a pluralism that includes values
 626 that many liberals will, on the basis of core liberal commitments, find odious.
 627 Insofar as one is committed to the moral significance of the individual, one ought to
 628 feel *both* the pressure to accommodate those values and to challenge them. If we
 629 simply draw up a list of acceptable values and disregard individuals (or parts of

630 individuals) who fail to adopt those values, then we risk losing sight of the
631 individual and seeing only locations in which proper attitudes can be manifested.²⁶
632 We cannot stipulate away the problem of odious values without stipulating away a
633 substantive feature of liberalism.²⁷

634 For example, suppose an individual identifies with a role that compromises her
635 autonomy. For example, consider a woman who has values that are in line with her
636 own oppression. For example, this woman is committed to values according to
637 which being submissive to men, and in particular her husband, is the thing to do. My
638 claim is that liberal morality requires of others that they do not attempt to frustrate
639 this woman's commitment to living in this fashion. For, part of what morally
640 matters about this person insofar as she is an individual are her values, and she
641 values, among other things, a life as a submissive woman. So, if are to properly
642 attend to her as an individual, we ought to accommodate (or at least not frustrate)
643 this value. On the other hand, we might, in the spirit of accommodating her other
644 cares, point out that she suffers a form of self-effacement in virtue of her acceptance
645 of this oppressive value. But, by the lights of the argument in this essay, we must be
646 careful not to attempt to railroad her into being someone she isn't. She is not simply
647 a site for proper values; she is an individual who merits the same basic form of
648 deference that any other individual merits.²⁸

649 This suggests that the claim that we cannot have reasons to support morally awful
650 things is, at least for the liberal, false. We *can* have such reasons, although not quite
651 in that form. We cannot have reasons to support morally awful things under that
652 description. But, we can have reasons to support things that we also find to be
653 morally awful. Negotiating this delicate balance between moral judgment and equal
654 treatment is one challenge liberals face in virtue of the way liberal commitments
655 interact with the nature of the self.

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26FL01 ²⁶ Consider contested values. People who are not moral monsters can be wrong about the statuses of both
26FL02 their own values and the values of others. Reasonable people make such mistakes. We should not have to
26FL03 be moral experts in order to properly recognize others as individuals.

27FL01 ²⁷ One could adopt a more perfectionist form of liberalism, but the problem this faces is made clear by
27FL02 the Accommodation Thesis, namely that it threatens to legitimate all sorts of frustration of other people's
27FL03 cares in the name of realizing perfectionist goods. The individual who fails to properly align himself to
27FL04 pursuit of these goods thus is legitimately threatened by such a regime: his self is permissibly adjusted
27FL05 through frustration of his non-perfect-good-tracking cares until the person he is no longer exists.
27FL06 Perfectionists can work around this, but the fact that they feel philosophical pressure to work around it
27FL07 signals an appreciation of the philosophical attractiveness of the Accommodation Thesis.

28FL01 ²⁸ It would be interesting to consider how this squares with views like those found in, e.g., Amartya Sen
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