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On: 24 May 2014, At: 22:47

Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of Moral Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjme20>

The self and its emotions

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Published online: 22 Oct 2012.

To cite this article: Stephen A. Sherblom (2013) The self and its emotions, Journal of Moral Education, 42:1, 131-133, DOI: [10.1080/03057240.2012.734035](https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.734035)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.734035>

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their reflections with studies on the role of intuitive disgust experience in moral judgments. Against the background of their idea of thick and thin concepts, Fitzgerald and Goldie (Chapter 10) point out that the complexity of real world demands on moral reflection can never be kept by laboratory-based tests, a basic problem that is further developed in the subsequent Chapters 11 (Mackenzie) and 12 (Kennett). Malle and Guglielmo (Chapter 13) as well as McGeer (Chapter 14) deepen this discussion by raising the question of responsibility for one's actions.

In conclusion, both the empirical examples and theoretical ideas presented in this volume promise to promote a rich and deliberative discussion. But, to participate in this discussion and to fully grasp the messages, readers need advanced levels of prior knowledge, either on psychological findings or philosophical background. Nevertheless, we would like to encourage scholars from different disciplines to read this book because each chapter offers deep and multi-faceted insights. With respect to those engaged in investigating moral emotions it is a must-have, as it triggers innovative ideas – all outlined by Christensen and Sutton in their closing Chapter 15 – which might help to overcome some of the limitations of the current research activities in this field.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.732297>

The self and its emotions

Kristján Kristjánsson, 2010
 New York, Cambridge University Press
 \$85.00 (hbk), 288 pp.
 ISBN 978-0-521-11478-3

In his new book, philosopher of morals and emotions Kristján Kristjánsson argues that, with regard to inquiries into morality and moral development, we are in *the age of the self*. The belief in the centrality of the concept of human *selves* to understanding human behaviour and functioning, particularly moral agency, characterizes moral philosophy, moral psychology and moral education in the present

period. Kristjánsson cogently presents the case that despite its pivotal role in most aspects of moral experience—from perception, to deliberation, to being a repository of moral experience and growth—what we assume about selves, the development of these selves and the place of selfhood in moral functioning has not been adequately addressed. In framing the discussion in historical context, he says:

Part of moral psychology's Kohlbergian legacy is the gap to be found between moral cognition and moral behaviour. ... Looming large in contemporary personality psychology is the suggestion that the construction or non-construction of a moral self constitutes the central explanatory concept in moral functioning: the missing link between cognition and action. (p. 9)

Kristjánsson illuminates some of the central challenges currently faced in redirecting the focus of moral theory and research.

The self and its emotions provides a substantive exploration of how conceptions of the self are used in moral discourse, highlighting the important implications of different versions of the *self*. Kristjánsson begins with a 'commonsense view of the self,' describing it as 'the set of a person's core commitments, traits, aspirations, and ideals: the characteristics that are most central to him or her' (p. 5). This folk-psychology view that each of us has a self, or in some ways even *is* a self (dubbed the *realist* position), has been under a prolonged philosophical attack by *anti-realists*, who contend that this idea of an ongoing self is illusion. Kristjánsson notes that 'realism about selves has fallen on hard times of late; my aim is to get it back on track' (p. 25). These questions of how, or if, or in what ways our selves are *real*; and what the alternatives are to being real, seem of central importance to philosophers, psychologists and educators. If moral development is not, as most of us believe, connected to a developing self in some way, then what conception should replace this one to make better sense of the world around us in moral terms? While the answer to this question is beyond the scope of the book, the discussions presented help us think about how to frame the right questions.

An interesting finding comes from anthropological studies that suggest cultures differ in how their members tend to describe themselves and their place in the social group: more *interdependently* (in Asian and African cultures) or more *independently* (in Western cultures). 'These conceptions, it turns out, involve not only different psychological self-images, but also radically divergent ways of feeling, seeing, acting, and being in the world' Kristjánsson concludes (p. 168). The author guides the reader through the literature, concluding that 'the existence of conflicting independent versus interdependent self-concepts is one thing, the question of whether or not they are psychologically and morally irreconcilable is quite another' (p. 180).

In articulating varying conceptions regarding the self, Kristjánsson explores the psychological and philosophical literature regarding such corollary concepts as self-esteem, self-respect, self-concept and self-confidence. The nuanced differences between these concepts and the overlap among them is as important as it is complex, and Kristjánsson's discussion is benefited generally from his familiarity with

both disciplines. Recognizing the strength of this approach, the author advocates the necessity of greater dialogue between philosophers and psychologists to bring the best of each discipline to questions of mutual interest. Kristjánsson recognizes past and present difficulties with this kind of cross-disciplinary border-crossing and briefly contrasts alternative emphases, demarcated in the literature as ‘moralized psychology’ versus ‘psychologized morality’ (pp. 53–55). The author argues that while philosophers and psychologists across the spectrum recommend further cooperation across disciplinary borders, they differ on whether ‘it is psychology or philosophy that should assume the leading or defining role in such cooperation’ (p. 55). Any approach starting from a position that one discipline should lead and the other follow, however, begs the question of what these theorists mean by *cooperation*. It is precisely the limitations of disciplines that make intellectual engagement with others outside the field potentially liberating and constructive.

Kristjánsson makes a major contribution to this much-needed discourse with this book-length treatment regarding the self and its emotions. If much of what we wish to say about moral life rests upon a conception of self and a cluster of self-related concepts, then let us make sure we have adequately critiqued the underlying assumptions, philosophical and psychological, and have a working model that is both logically consistent and empirically sound. Further, the author asserts, we need to move beyond a model that simply recognizes the importance of both sides of past debates (cognition and emotion, for example) to a true integration of the self, which he refers to as his ‘alternative’ paradigm of the self—‘a unified moral self of rationally grounded emotion’ (p. 97). Unfortunately, this alternative paradigm of the self is left more implicit than made explicit. A final chapter summarizing and consolidating this alternative paradigm of the self would have strengthened the book, allowing the author to tie together the many provocative threads discussed.

Even without proposing a thorough model of the self, Kristjánsson contributes greatly through his detailed discussions of important questions, his explication of the variety of proposed answers and his delving into the assumptional skeletons in each closet. Kristjánsson writes philosophy for non-philosophers, and most readers will find the book interesting and accessible. Additionally, he demonstrates through his own writing the potency of bringing philosophical critique to psychological ideas and psychological critique to philosophical ideas. The resulting discussion is a beacon and a guide, pointing the way to better questions, if not to immediate answers.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2012.734035>