

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

FEATURING SPEAKER DR. *Justin Coates*

“Gratitude and Resentment: Some Asymmetries”

ABSTRACT

Beginning with Adam Smith’s pioneering work on the moral sentiments of gratitude and resentment, these two emotions have been treated as being more or less identical in all but their valences. But though this view is widespread, this account of the relationship between gratitude and resentment belies some real asymmetries in these emotions that go far beyond the fact that gratitude is a response to good will and resentment is a response to ill will. First, the norms of gratitude and resentment are independent. This means that the conditions under which gratitude is a fitting response (for a good action) are importantly distinct from those in which resentment would be a fitting response (for a bad action). Susan Wolf (1990) and Dana Nelkin (2011) have adduced powerful arguments in defense of this view, but here I will develop a new, more general argument that the kind of normative competence that is necessary for being an apt target of gratitude is not isomorphic to the kind of normative competence required for being an apt target of resentment. Second, I argue that the value of gratitude is distinct from the value of resentment. Resentment, I claim, is significantly less valuable from the moral point of view than many have supposed (cf. Murphy 2002, Wallace 2011, Franklin 2013). By contrast, gratitude is a great deal more valuable from the moral point than many have supposed. Indeed, it plays a vital, perhaps even an essential, role in structuring our relationships with others. Together, these normative and axiological asymmetries imply that we shouldn’t focus so exclusively on resentment, and that we need to finally give gratitude the attention that it deserves.



Thursday, September 28,
2017 3:45 p.m. -5:00 p.m.



LIBERAL ARTS
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY