

**Philosophy of Attention Session 6:
Salience as an indicator of moral virtue**
(Yetter Chappell & Yetter-Chappell 2015)

- Our moral character is influenced by what we find salient
- “What we find salient reveals what we care about”

- The influence of salience on moral character can be direct or indirect.
- Direct influence: Many virtues *require* us to find certain things salient.
- Indirect influence: Agents that ignore more salient moral demands are *evaluated* as having a worse moral character.

Salience

- F is salient to S at $t = F$ exerts an involuntary draw on S’s attention at t
- What is salient is “pushed into our awareness”
- Non-perceptual features can be salient
- Relation between salience and attention: Salience is a disposition to attend

Indirect influence of salience on virtue: Quality of the will

Act Evaluation: We ought to save a drowning child, and we *ought to* donate to charity.
(Singer 1972)

Character Evaluation: If we don’t save a drowning child, we are morally *monstruous*.
So are we if we do not donate to charity.

Puzzle: Why is Act Evaluation plausible, but not Character Evaluation?

- “We cannot constantly feel the force of everything that we care about”
- The more salient a moral obligation is, the greatest lack of concern is needed to ignore them

- Factors determining salience:
 - Physical proximity
 - Social proximity
 - In-group/out-group status
 - ...?

- “It is worse to notice and not care, than not noticing”

Direct influence of salience on virtue: Virtues of salience

Ignorance accounts	Salience accounts
<p>Modesty: To be modest, you must ignore or underestimate your own good qualities (Driver 1998, 1999)</p>	<p>To be modest, your own good qualities must not be too salient to you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You must “care less” about your own good qualities. - You must not lack a disposition to dwell too much on your own good qualities.

<p>Counterexamples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Albert the physicist underestimates his good qualities and still is immodest. - Bob does not ignore his good qualities, but he is still modest. 	<p>The Fate of the World test: Shows that ignorance is not necessary for modesty, but salience is.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claire might know her own good qualities accurately, but she is still modest because these qualities are not salient to her. <p>An advantage: It allows modesty to be intrinsically valuable (not just instrumentally valuable)</p>
<p>Friendship: To be a good friend, you must think of your friends better than the evidence warrants.</p>	<p>To be a good friend, you must find your friends' positive attributes salient.</p>

Virtues of salience vs. Virtues of attention

1. "Mere attention is insufficient" – for solving the Act vs. Character Evaluation puzzle (p. 454)
 - What is needed is not that we just pay attention to the right things
 - We might pay attention to the right things for the wrong reasons
 - What is needed is that we find the right things attention-grabbing

2. What is required for virtue is a disposition to find something attention-grabbing, rather than actually attending to it (as opposed to Bommarito 2013, who holds the latter; see note 12 on p. 456).
 - Attention is something we do momentarily, but some virtues require a more stable character trait
 - To support this: Fate of the World test again

3. Some virtues are of attention rather than of salience
 - E.g., gratitude: It requires you to actually attend rather than just being disposed to attend
 - Potential problem: This virtue could be achieved by setting an alarm