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The small man thinks that small acts of goodness are of no benefit, and does not do them; and that small deeds of evil do no harm, and does not refrain from them. Hence, his wickedness becomes so great that it cannot be concealed, and his guilt so great that it cannot be pardoned.

CONFUCIUS, *The Wisdom of Confucius*

Introduction

Let me begin this chapter with two competing aphorisms, both of which are meant to capture some truth about our approach to life and its problems. My grandmother was known for giving, if not herself actually following, the pithy British financial advice, "Watch out for the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves." On this way of thinking, small stuff adds up. You might not care about pennies. By themselves they are too small to be significant, but they add up to pounds, and you do care about pounds and so you ought to care about pennies. Today, I am more likely to hear "Don't sweat the small stuff." On this view, small stuff does not matter so much and we should focus instead on the big picture. Details bog us down and we lose sight of what really matters. We should not lose sight of the forest for the trees. In this paper I want to argue, in the context of discussions about micro-inequities and their moral importance that both of these sayings get something right.

This chapter is about micro-inequities and their connection to the problem of implicit bias. It begins by defining micro-inequities, goes on to discuss what makes them wrong and what solutions might be appropriate given the institutional context in which they occur.

The moral problem posed by micro-inequities is connected to three areas of scholarship in Philosophy in which I have an interest.

First, there is an emerging area of scholarship in Philosophy on the problem of implicit bias of which this volume is part. Jennifer Saul's *Implicit Bias & Philosophy International Research Project* at the University of Sheffield describes the project this way, "Unconscious biases against members of stigmatised groups have been studied by psychologists for decades,

but only recently have philosophers explored this phenomenon. This project brings researchers from both fields together with policy professionals to work through the implications.”

Second, I have an ongoing research interest in problems about moral aggregation. Moral aggregation concerns the addition of goods and bads (on the value side of moral philosophy) or the addition of rights and wrongs (on the right action side of moral philosophy). For example, in value theory we might ask how to compare the disvalue of many people suffering from the common cold to the disvalue of a much smaller number of people experiencing an early death. This isn't just a philosopher's idle thought experiment. Such problems of moral aggregation matter if decisions about directing funding for medical research. When thinking about right action, we might ask whether it's worse morally for one person to steal \$100 or for 100 people to each steal \$1.

In my development of the “threshold account of rights,” according to which rights are overridable on the basis of the good results that can be brought about by doing so, I have had to struggle with questions about the aggregation of small harms. If your account of rights is an account of absolute rights, then it does not matter at all what else hangs in the balance. No amount of good at stake can justify infringing an absolute right. The situation is more complicated when you believe that there are circumstances which justify infringing a right. Is it just a matter of the total amount of good that hangs in the balance or are there restrictions on how this total is met? One counter-example against overridable rights plays on the aggregation of small harms. Here's the short version of the “no lives for headaches” trade off with which you're probably familiar: If rights not be killed are overridable on the basis of aggregated harms to others, then there is some number of headaches which would be great enough to add up to justify taking a life.ⁱ That conclusion rests on the mistaken assumption that there are no limits on moral aggregation and so rights with thresholds can be overridden in the face of a great many small benefits that can be brought about by infringing the right or small harms that be avoided by doing so. I have also written about aggregation in the context of debates about inequality.ⁱⁱ

Third, there is Philosophy's recent willingness to subject our own practises related to diversity and exclusion to philosophical scrutiny. As a Department Chair, a member of the Women in Philosophy Taskforce, a member of the Canadian Philosophical Association's Equity Committee, as a blogger with the Feminist Philosophers Blog, and simply as a feminist and a concerned member of our profession, I've spent time thinking and writing about how we might to better. Drawing on these experiences I have contributed to the growing literature within Philosophy about our discipline's gender problem.ⁱⁱⁱ

How are micro-inequities connected to the problem of implicit bias? An emerging story about the persistence of workplace inequality--in the absence of formal barriers to entry and progress for women, minorities, and disabled persons-- looks to the twin causes of implicit bias and micro-inequities. The Barnard Report on Women, Work, and the Academy describes these causes of inequality in the academy in these terms: “The first is that biases operating below the

threshold of deliberate consciousness, biases in interaction that are unrecognized and unintended, can systematically put women and minorities at a disadvantage. Second, although individual instances of these “micro-inequities” may seem trivial, their cumulative effects can account for large-scale differences in outcome; those who benefit from greater opportunity and a reinforcing environment find their advantages compounded, while deficits of support and recognition ramify for those who are comparatively disadvantaged (MIT 1999: 10).”

What can philosophers contribute to our understandings of micro-inequities and their moral importance? An earlier paper on micro-inequities set out to examine micro-inequities in the context of women’s careers in the academic discipline of philosophy.^{iv} That paper offered a short philosophical analysis of micro-inequities and looked at some explanations of why moral philosophy has struggled with the problem of small harms. There I argued that we need to rethink the moral significance of micro-inequities. While the initial idea of a micro-inequity is easy to understand—specific examples, useful analogies, and colourful metaphors abound—what seems missing is careful moral analysis of the micro-inequities. This is the contribution which moral philosophers can make to the discussion of micro-inequities and which this paper sets out to make.

That said, there are aspects of this problem which this chapter will not be addressing. Specifically, I will not be addressing the mechanisms by which micro-inequities add up to larger harms. This chapter will assume this happens, in the ways that workplace sociologists claim it does, but will leave the details of that account to people with other disciplinary skills. ^vThere are also aspects of the problem relevant to moral philosophy that I will not address. Specifically, I will not be talking about praise and blame and moral responsibility directly, but what I will say may be relevant to questions about moral responsibility.” There are hard and interesting questions here about collective responsibility and workplace climate which I do not have the expertise to address and which fall outside the scope of this essay.^{vi}

There are also some claims I’m **not** making and I want to be clear about these at the outset. It is important to note that I am not claiming that micro-inequities are the *only* problem facing women, the disabled, and other minorities in the workplace. There are still persistent big problems that are not in any sense “micro.” Sexual harassment, for example, isn’t a micro-inequity and it still matters very much. I take seriously Claudia Card’s claims about the danger of focusing on equality over evil (though I also think that inequalities are connected to evils in ways that matter).^{vii} The issue is even worse if we are focusing on micro-inequities over evils.

There are three reasons I am interested in understanding micro-inequities.

First, I do think they are a big part of the story of how racism, sexism, and ableism persist in places in which on the face of it there are rules which prohibit bias and in which most of the people would support those rules.

Second, I'm also by temperament much more interested in cases of wrongdoing by good people, that is, by people who think they are doing the right thing but who end up with an outcome they do not endorse. For example, consider the problem of justice in the home. It is no surprise that couples who hold particular conservative views about gender roles have an uneven division of household labour. After all, that particular division of work is what they want. It is much more puzzling when opposite couples with egalitarian commitments end up with a traditional division of household work.

Third, I am interested in hard problems in ethics and the hardest problems in ethics are not necessarily about the cases that involve the most wrong. Let me explain. There are cases in ethics that just are not that difficult. Lying to hurt a friend or murdering a dog to make your neighbour cry are both bad acts, done for bad reasons, and they bring about terrible results. Their wrongness is over-determined. They are terribly wrong but not terribly morally controversial. Unfortunately, much of life is like that. Understanding *why* people do wrong is a tough problem in moral psychology but it is easy to see *that* these acts are wrong.

1. Defining micro-inequities

Micro-inequities are small, unjust inequalities often pointed to as part of the larger story about larger scale inequalities, such as women's unequal place in the workforce. But one does not find anything close to a precise definition of a micro-inequity in the literature on workplace ethics and equity. What exactly is a micro-inequity? People often contrast inequities with mere inequalities, where the former are taken to be unjust inequalities. The latter term, 'inequality', is a normatively neutral term while 'inequity' assumes there is some injustice involved. An inequity is a harm that derives its wrongness from being an undeserved inequality. Micro-inequities are very small inequalities in which the "smallness" is measured by their results.. As far as I know there are inequities and micro-inequities. No one talks about mini-inequities which would be halfway between a full-sized inequity and a micro-inequity. So the term "micro-inequity" is used for any size of inequity which falls shy of a counting as a full blown inequity on the basis of its size.

If size is the determining feature of a micro-inequity, what is the relevant size? It seems unlikely to me that we will find an answer that works across the board. My general view about the size of harms and their moral relevance is that it depends on what we are comparing them against. The answers to such questions are context dependent rather than a matter of underlying moral metaphysics. Let's look then at the context in which this discussion is taking place. For practical purposes, in the university and workplace context, I suggest that we think of micro-inequities as inequalities that fall beneath the threshold of legislation or actionability. Imagine a person walking into a university equity office and presenting that one example of unequal treatment. If that unequal treatment had only small effects and there was only that one instance, it would likely be dismissed as not being, on its own, the sort of thing with which the equity office was charged to deal.

The following are some definitions of micro-inequity from the literature on workplace climate:

1. According to Bernice Sandler, 'micro-inequity' refers to the ways in which individuals are "either singled out, or overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted" based on an unchangeable characteristic such as race or gender. A micro-inequity generally takes the form of a gesture, different kind of language, treatment, or even tone of voice."^{viii} It is suggested that the perceptions that cause the manifestation of micro-inequities are deeply rooted and unconscious. The cumulative effect of micro-inequities can impair a person's performance in the workplace or classroom, damage self-esteem, and may eventually lead to that person's withdrawal from the situation.

2. Mary Rowe, responsible for introducing the term, defines 'micro-inequities' as "apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard-to-prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator, which occur wherever people are perceived to be 'different.'"

Rowe named one of her articles the "Saturn's Rings Phenomenon" because the planet Saturn is surrounded by rings, which obscure the planet, but are made just of tiny bits of ice and sand. Rowe writes that her interest in these phenomena began with an incredible opportunity: "In 1973 I took a job at MIT, working for the then new President and Chancellor. I was charged, among other things, with learning how the workplace could improve with respect to people who were under-represented at MIT—as examples, men and women of colour, white women, and people with disabilities. As an economist I had expected to learn about big issues standing in the way of progress." She writes that she did find a few big issues but not as many as she expected and not enough to account for the scope of the problems. What struck her instead were all of the 'little issues.' She writes that little acts of disrespect, and failures in performance feedback, seemed to corrode some professional relationships like bits of sand and ice.

What are some examples of micro-inequities? Philosopher Berit Brogaard gives the following list in her blog post about micro-inequities for Psychology Today^{ix}:

- checking emails or texting during a face-to-face conversation
- consistently mispronouncing a person's name
- interrupting a person mid-sentence
- making eye-contact only with males while talking to a group containing both males and females
- taking more questions from men than women
- confusing a person of a certain ethnicity with another person of the same ethnicity

- rolling your eyes
- sighing loudly
- raising your voice, even though the other person has no difficulties hearing you
- mentioning the achievements of some people at a meeting but not others whose achievements are equally relevant
- consistently ignoring a person's emails for no good reason
- only reading half of a person's email and then asking the person about the content later
- making jokes aimed at certain minority groups
- being completely unpredictable in your grading of certain people's term papers
- issuing invitations that are uncomfortable for certain groups ("Please feel free to bring your wife," "There is a link below to childcare options for female speakers who plan to bring their children," "There will be a belly-dancer at the party," "Our annual Christmas party will be held on December 18," "Please bring pork chops to the potluck dinner")

You can also find many more at the blog, "What is it like to be a woman in Philosophy," although unfortunately most of what's there is too big to count as a micro-inequity.

When I have needed an example of an implicit bias related micro-inequity that is clearly trivial I have turned to the example of waiting times in coffee shops. This example illustrates both how trivial and how pervasive micro-inequities can be. Economists (and their graduate students) set out to measure how long different people waited once they placed an order for coffee.^x It turns out women wait, on average, 20 seconds longer than men do for a comparable order. This isn't a case of women ordering fancy, high maintenance beverages and men ordering plain black coffee. African Americans also waited longer than white Americans and the less attractive waited longer than the more attractive. In and of themselves the extra time waiting is not much of a harm. Likely it is not even noticed by those preparing the drinks or those waiting. The extra twenty seconds even compounded over days, months, years of ordering coffee in a sexist society is not a big deal. Would you organize a protest? Likely not.

But aggregate these micro-inequities—or as I've called them elsewhere everyday inequalities, across all aspect of one's life and they begin to make a difference.

I also think it is important to distinguish micro-inequities from another term that is used in discussions of workplace climate, "micro-aggressions."

Micro-aggressions are defined as “subtle verbal and nonverbal insults directed toward non-whites, often done automatically and unconsciously. They are layered insults based on one’s race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname.” The term was coined in 1970 by a psychiatrist to describe acts of racism so subtle that neither the “perpetrator” nor the “victim” is even fully conscious of what is happening. “The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than hate crimes or the overt and deliberate acts of White supremacists such as the Klan and Skinheads,” writes Derald Wing Sue, in *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*.

What’s the distinction between micro-inequities and micro-aggressions? Note that while neither requires active intention on the part of the person whose actions bring about the micro-inequity or micro-aggression, micro-aggressions are defined primarily in terms of “insults.” Not all micro-inequities involve the expression of a view about a particular group or individual. As well, some micro-inequities result from small positive acts unjustly distributed. Again, this shows that that all micro-inequities are micro-aggressions.^{xi} I find it helpful to think of micro-aggressions as a sub-class of micro-inequities. One thing that is clear in the literature on micro-inequities is that they can be brought about by a member of the group in question—i.e. women are as likely as men to perpetuate them against women as are men—and that seems harder to make sense of in the case of micro-aggressions. My worry about the language of “micro-aggression” is that wrong-doing and culpability for the result seem built into the idea of aggression and aggressive behaviour and that is not the case for micro-inequities. Indeed, the question of wrong-doing and micro-inequities is part of what is at issue here.

2. Useful metaphors

While coming up with a single definition of “micro-inequity” is not easy, there are many colourful metaphors that capture what is philosophically interesting about them. Here I will mention three of them and say something about the specific aspect of the problem posed by micro-inequities that they help illuminate.

Marilyn Frye’s birdcage metaphor helps us understand why focussing on each individual micro-inequity is a mistake. Instead, what is interesting from the perspective of understanding how oppressed groups are treated in the workplace and in universities is the pattern formed by the micro-inequities. Each individual instance, looked at alone, cannot explain the larger wrong-doing. Frye writes:

“Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if, one day at

a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would give trouble going past the wires to get anywhere. There is no physical property of any one wire, nothing that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers. It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon. It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced.”^{xii}

Or consider the metaphor of a “ton of feathers” which is often used to describe the kinds of things that go on in chilly climates.^{xiii} The idea is that having a single feather land on you is harmless, at worst annoying, but a ton of them is deadly.^{xiv} While the birdcage metaphor is useful in helping to show why we do not see micro-inequities, the “ton of feathers” analogy explains why we do not mind or even notice one or two micro-inequities, but large numbers matter.

Or consider the metaphor of “boiling frogs.” I do not know how true the story is but it is said that if you throw a frog into boiling water, it will quickly jump out. However, if you turn up the heat gradually you can boil frogs alive because each small increase in temperature is insufficient to get them to jump out of the pot. Whatever its basis in fact, the boiling frog analogy is sometimes used to illustrate how the person who is the victim of harm does not notice if each individual increase in harm is small enough. Toxic work environments can creep up on people, unnoticed, just like the warming water creeping up on the frog.

These metaphors also relate to two different aspects of the invisibility of micro-inequities. Micro-inequities are sometimes said to be invisible because of an epistemological shortcoming on the part of moral agents, as both the perpetrators of micro-inequities and the victims of micro-inequities. We do not see them because our moral sensors are not tuned to see sufficiently small harms. If we looked at the birdcage properly we would notice the way it is functioning and the role it plays in constraining the bird, for example. Or if we, the frogs, noticed that the water was gradually getting warmer, we would flee the pot. The feathers analogy is a bit different. One feather landing on your head is no harm at all. It’s not that it is a small harm that we do not see. Rather, the size of the feather and the lack of impact it causes means it is invisible as a harm because it is not a harm at all. I return to these two different ways that micro-inequities can be invisible when I talk about what makes micro-inequities wrong.

3. How are micro-inequities connected to implicit bias?

The Barnard Report calls micro-inequities and implicit bias the twin causes of women's inequality in the academy. This way of describing implicit bias and micro-inequities makes it sound as if they were two completely different phenomena. Other places in the literature researchers will run implicit bias together with micro-inequity and you might, after reading, wonder what the difference is between them. It is my view that these categories will often overlap though they need not. Not every micro-inequity will be the result of implicit bias and not all cases of implicit bias will result in micro-inequities.

For example, a micro-inequity could follow from an intentional act of bias. I could, on the basis of some prejudice I willingly admit, grade some students more harshly than others. For example, a lecturer who repeatedly passes over female students' contributions could be aware of doing so and intend to because of a conviction that the contributions will not be valuable. In this case, each time a female student is not called on a micro-inequity results but it isn't one that results from *implicit* bias. Likewise, the inequalities that result from implicit bias might be large and substantial. They might be not "micro" at all. Consider the case of "shooter bias" in which White police officers and undergraduate students mistakenly shoot unarmed Black suspects more than White suspects on computerized shoot/don't shoot tasks. This can result from implicit bias and the results are very serious indeed.^{xv}

Why do they usually go together? I have some suggestions. First, it is rare for a person to intend another person a small harm. That is, even if my bias is up front, I usually will not want to wrong someone a little bit.^{xvi} If I am right about this, then intentional harms, harms that come about as a result of explicit bias, are rarely small. Second, and I'm less certain about this one, I think we would come to notice our implicit biases if they regularly brought about large differences in treatment. Part of what keeps implicit biases unnoticed is that the resulting harms are quite small. It is only in the aggregate that they noticed.

4. What makes micro-inequities wrong?

In canvassing plausible views about the wrongness of micro-inequities there is one view I want to note at the outset, reject, and then move on. I think we ought to reject the view that micro-inequities are not usually wrong because of the just discussed connection with implicit bias. One answer to the question of micro-inequities and their wrongness is that micro-inequities aren't wrong unless they were intentional. Of course there are some complications here. What does my intention have to be? My view is that an intention to do wrong is not necessary for wrongness. Consider the standard example from utilitarian moral reasoning in which we choose to promote our own good rather than donate money to a worthy charity. I might forgo the Oxfam change box and instead, spend my coins on coffee. In such a case I need not intend the child's death but it still might be wrong to bring about an outcome in which I get a coffee and a child dies.

Let us assume then, with me, that intention is not required for wrongness. Intention might be required for blameworthiness but praise and blame are a different matter from right and wrong. We should not assume from the claim that it would be a mistake to blame someone if they intended no harm that what they did was not wrong.

We can then ask, what makes micro-inequities wrong? Or to put the question differently, in what does the wrongness of micro-inequities consist?

One obvious answer is that the wrongness of micro-inequities stems from their connection to morally objectionable macro-inequities. But do micro inequities have any moral significance independent of the fact that they are relevant for explaining an objectionable macro inequity? How might we think about the status of the micro-inequities taken in isolation?

Here are two possible answers:

1, Threshold wrongness: Consider a threshold view where the micro-inequities are each themselves, taken individually, too small to count to make a moral difference. We could describe them as causing badness that is beneath the threshold for wrongness. But they cumulatively cause the morally objectionable macro inequity. So individually they are not wrong, but they can add up to a wrong.

Let me explain in a bit more detail. Suppose for a given bad effect, it needed to be bad to a level of some arbitrary number, say 3, for it to be wrong. And suppose what we had were lots of actions that resulted in 2s. If someone were the recipient of twenty such 2 level actions, that would be bad indeed. A great wrong would be have perpetrated even though none of the individual actions was wrong.

2. Strict Additive wrongness: We could say instead, that the micro-inequities are only a little morally objectionable taken in isolation. They are bad and wrong but not wrong enough to take action against them, as a practical matter. They cumulatively cause the morally objectionable macro inequity. So individually, they are a little bit wrong, and they add up to a larger wrong.

This view preserves the idea of strict decomposition. The wrong of the whole is a direct additive function of the parts. But there are some other possible ways this might work.

3. Organic Whole Wrongness: the wrong of the whole can be greater than the wrong of the parts. Obviously I am borrowing language here from G.E. Moore's discussion of Organic Unities.^{xvii} The idea here is that each small action is wrong but the wrongness of the collection is worse than the sum of the wrongness of each of the parts. This version preserves monotonicity, each increase in the small level wrongs leads to an increase in the overall wrongness, but the function that takes us from the micro-inequities to the larger wrong need not be strictly additive.

4. Not wrong at all, too small: It's also possible that micro-inequities are not wrong at all. They are too small to be wrong and it's only the macro-inequities that are wrong. If that is right, then we need to give an account of collective responsibility for the large scale macro-inequalities.

Now the problem of small harms is not new. In my earlier paper on micro-inequities I looked at some of the reasons why moral and political philosophers have overlooked them and then explored some of the work that's been done on small harms, usually from the perspective of environmental harm. Here I will just mention one of them because it's a work that will be familiar to most people who work in ethics.

Derek Parfit draws our attention to small harms in *Reasons and Persons*.^{xviii} Parfit considers a series of mistakes in moral mathematics including the mistake of ignoring small or imperceptible effects. Even if imperceptible, bad effects with sufficient extent or repetition can be very terrible indeed. Parfit's examples concern environmental issues such as overfishing and pollution, but his lesson can be just as important for small injuries and insults that are part and parcel of academic life for some people. If we view each act individually we might miss out on the aggregative effects and on the patterns that are relevant to understanding bias and discrimination.

My position is that the question of whether some benefits and burdens are so small that they don't count morally cannot be answered outside of the context in which they occur and that we lose sight of morally important factors if we push all of the time to see wrongness in its smallest possible units. This is especially true given how much of the rightness/wrongness question here rests on harm and harm is a very lumpy good. What do I mean by "lumpy good"? Economists use this term to explain cases in which value does not add up and decompose in the units one might expect. Here is a standard example from economics. If I need 100 feet of fence to enclose my backyard because I have a dog I like to let roam freely without risk of escape, then 99 feet of fence isn't almost as good as 100. Instead, it is almost as good as no fence at all, though perhaps just a little bit better. Now consider an example from workplace climate: I might merrily endure an ongoing series of small slights from colleagues until one day, someone says something, not terribly mean or hurtful, and I am plunged into depression. If it's genuinely true that I suffer no ill effects until one remark tips me into a serious depression, then what I've experienced is a lumpy bad. Stopping one remark earlier and I'd have experienced no harm, just like stopping one foot of fence shy of enclosing the garden is no good at all. Paying too much attention to that one act of speech misses the point I think.

There are also further wrinkles and other factors we need to talk about when we are thinking about workplace wrongs. It's useful to distinguish between different kinds of wrongs. Some micro-inequities are wrong purely because of facts about distribution. In the academy we might think that academic service work is neutral but if women bear more than our fair share of committee work, the only wrongness comes from the unequal distribution. Other things might be positive—say for example, research grants—and again, wrongness would stem from an unjust

distribution. In other cases, inequality is a smaller part of the story. Sexual harassment is wrong simpliciter. How much of an improvement would it be if it occurred equally between the sexes?

5. Is focussing on individual act wrongness a mistake?

But while the question of an individual act's wrongness is important I worry that focusing too much on it may cause us to lose sight of the forest for the trees. My own answer is that sometimes the individual micro-inequities will be wrong, even though we may not be in a position to blame anyone. Other micro-inequities may be neither wrong nor blameworthy. Some might worry that not addressing the wrongness of the individual micro-inequities may seem to be letting people off the hook too easily, but it does allow us to shift our focus to collective solutions to the problem. As a group we have responsibilities for the outcome and group based solutions are likely to be much more effective than individual ones. Finally, some may worry that the focus on micro-inequities lets us all off the hook for the large scale culpable wrongs that do occur in the academy. There are also important questions about why we have the implicit biases that we do. Aren't we as a society responsible for our sexist, racist, homophobic and ableist beliefs even if they are implicit in our thinking?^{xix} My answer here is that there are questions both larger (for example, the societal beliefs that inform implicit bias) and smaller, (for example, individual responsibility) but that the most practical place to address the issues is that the level of the group in which we find ourselves, in the middle, at the department and university level.

6. In favour of institutional solutions:

Why then do philosophers spend most of our time thinking about micro-inequities in the context of wrong actions, rather than in the context of changing the contexts in which they occur so as to make them less likely or to repay those who unfairly bear the costs? I think it is a bit like the analogy of looking for lost keys under a lamplight. We look there, not because that is where the keys fell, but rather because that is where the light is. Moral philosophy has a rich vocabulary about individual moral wrongs but as Tracy Isaacs notes we are less able to deal with those wrongs that occur in collective contexts.^{xx}

I am not saying that the individual wrongs that are associated with micro-inequities are unimportant. I am saying they are only part of larger picture and we get it wrong when we ignore other aspects of the problem. Consider these three different sites of moral inquiry: 1. Circumstances under which decisions and choices are made, 2. The acts themselves, and 3. The results. I argue that focussing on 2, the question about the wrongness of the acts themselves, is potentially dangerous for movements interested in social change. It's an important question in moral theory but it might not be the most important question for us.

Let us begin by considering an older argument from political philosophy, Robert Nozick's Wilt Chamberlain case.

"Wilt Chamberlain is greatly in demand by basketball teams, being a great gate attraction. (Also suppose contracts run only for a year, with players being free agents.) He signs the following sort of contract with a team: In each home game twenty-five cents from the price of each ticket of admission goes to him. (We ignore the question of whether he is "gouging" the owners, letting them look out for themselves.) ... Let us suppose that in one season one million persons attend his home games, and Wilt Chamberlain ends up with \$250,000, a much larger sum than the average income and larger even than anyone else has. Is he entitled to his income? Is this new distribution D2 unjust?"...

Put differently: Nozick asks us to imagine a just starting point. Let us suppose we are egalitarians and that the just starting point is an equal distribution of goods. Through a series of very small free exchanges we end up in a situation that is very unequal in terms of wealth. Wilt Chamberlain has a lot more money than everyone else. But if it is wrong that Chamberlain has lots more than the rest of us, how did the wrong come about? Nozick pushes us to either accept that the situation where Wilt is rich and everyone else is not as just, or admit that each act of giving Wilt a quarter to play basketball was morally wrong. Nozick's view is that wrongs can't be mysterious and that the only way big wrongs can come about is through the aggregation of small wrongs. If none of the acts of giving Wilt a quarter to see him play was wrong then the outcome can't be wrong. This relates to the previous discussion, because we can think of the choice to give Chamberlain a quarter as bringing about a micro-inequity. Note that Nozick's answer assumes that Strict Additive Wrongness is correct. We can think of the "quarter for basketball" exchanges as small wrongs which do add up to one larger wrong. That is what strict additive wrongness demands. On Nozick's view Threshold Wrongness is incorrect. It's mysterious. Big wrongness can only come from small wrongness on his view. According to Threshold Wrongness each little act could be inequality-making but not enough to make it wrong. Wrongness is an emergent property. It comes about when the harms and inequalities are large enough.

Let us suppose though that Nozick is right. Let's give him Strict Additive Wrongness. Does that mean that the acts of giving Chamberlain a quarter to watch him play should be forbidden? Not necessarily. Banning the transaction at the level of individual exchanges isn't the only possible response. We may have other choices. For example, suppose that banning the transactions and allowing them and fixing the inequalities that result through taxation bring about the same result. For example, it may be that we infringe liberties less when we fix things like Chamberlain's extra income on an annual basis, through taxation, for example.

Let me give you another example of this sort. I favour my own children, both in social ways that benefit them and also in financial ways. This favouritism produces inequalities. Inequalities occur both because I have more income to pay for classes and activities that benefit my children

but also because I might have more time to devote to reading to them, for example. But does that mean that the state should interfere with my parenting to produce a more equal outcome? No. Clearly there are less liberty-infringing ways to bring about a more equal outcome. One can tax income, use taxation revenue to develop and promote programs for needy children, and address inequalities through a well-funded system of public education.

In summary, I think there are three reasons not to move too quickly to the level of individual action and its wrongness.

First, there are very hard questions about the facts of how harms and inequalities add up in any given case. Second, the dispute in moral philosophy between Threshold Wrongness and Additive Wrongness will be difficult to resolve. I think Threshold Wrongness is correct but I take it that many will be unpersuaded. If a lot rode on getting this right, then we ought to persevere, but my next point is that whether or not these small inequality producing acts are wrong won't have much import. That's because, third, there are costs to interfering with individual actions that are hard to bear. These costs are both in terms of implementation and in terms of liberty. It's better in the case of small inequalities to create contexts in which they are less likely to come about.

Let me now turn to some objections.

First, does this let those who bring about micro-inequities off the hook too easily? Is there nothing we can do?

No. It's not the case that we need do nothing. I have in fact three suggestions.

One obvious tool at our disposal is that of blame. Now, not all micro-inequity producing actions will be blameworthy. As I said at the outset I won't outline the conditions that make actions worthy of praise or blame. It might be that the person needs to know they are causing harm, for example. Suppose these conditions are met, it's still going to be true that they are to blame for a small. In a paper I'm writing with Meghan Winsby, a Western PhD student we are proposing micro-sanctions as an appropriate interpersonal response to those who contribute in a small way to chilly workplace climates.^{xxi} Examples of micro-sanctions include failing to give uptake to a racist joke and correcting a speaker who uses sexist language, Alex Madva and Michael Brownstein have proposed "implicit reactive attitudes" –subtle gestures expressing praise/blame—as ways of coping.^{xxii}

Second, while we might use micro-sanctions to indicate our disapproval to those who knowingly bring micro-inequities about, I have suggested micro-affirmations as a way of reaching out to those who suffer from micro-inequities. Micro-affirmations may take the shape of deliberately reaching out to a student, colleague or co-worker who is isolated. One might make a special point of recognizing this person's contribution in the workplace. The idea is the positive micro-messaging can redress and rebalance the harms caused by micro-inequities. For example, not all celebrations of a person's research need involve awards, banquets, and trophies. Respectfully

engaging colleagues in discussions of their ideas may be more professionally valuable. Mentioning that colleague's work when relevant, in a way that demonstrates your awareness of it, might also be a micro-affirmation.^{xxiii}

Third, there will be obligations that fall on those who bring about micro-inequities once we know about implicit bias and about how unsuccessful individual attempts to "try hard and do better" can be. There is indeed some evidence that mere awareness coupled with a resolution to "to be objective" might actually bring about worse results. But some active de-biasing programs have been shown to have a positive effect.^{xxivxxv}

A second objection comes from the work of libertarian economist Bryan Caplan.^{xxvi} Caplan argues that bias is not just an issue in the workplace for the traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and the disabled. It also affects—recall my coffee example, the ugly, the overweight, and the generally unlikable. Caplan continues in a reductio of the argument against aggregation and bias that bias doesn't end at the door of the academy. Implicit bias and micro-inequities affect almost all of the fabric of our personal lives from dating and friendship, to retail and banking exchanges. Back when we waited for bank tellers to fetch us our cash, no doubt some of us waited longer than others. Should the banks have mailed a waiting bonus to women, to African Americans, and to the less attractive bank customers? Caplan thinks this result is clearly absurd and so we are wrong to worry about bias and about small harms.

My response to Caplan is two-fold. In the first instance, I'll bite his bullet and agree that we ought to work towards eliminating all sorts of bias. An advantage of institutional solutions such as anonymous grading is that they protect others outside the scope of what we call in Canada, target groups (in Canada, women, disabled, racial minorities and indigenous persons). In the second, I deny that there are justice based obligations to reform our personal lives though there may well be moral reasons for doing so. It may well be morally required of to diversify my group of friends and/or not choose to date people on the basis of their attractiveness but such a moral obligation is hardly the sort of thing that the state can enforce.

In conclusion, I've argued that micro-inequities are morally significant but that the best response to them is at the institutional level. We should think more about the contexts in which micro-inequities occur and about how to respond to them collectively and focus less on the wrongness of individual micro-inequities.

ⁱ See "Thresholds for Rights," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Summer 1995, 33 (2): 143-168 and "Moral Rights and Moral Math: Three Arguments Against Aggregation," in *A Question of Values: New Canadian Perspectives in Ethics and Political Philosophy*, Samantha Brennan, Tracy Isaacs and Michael Milde (editors), Rodopi Press, 1997, pp. 29-38

ⁱⁱ See “Feminist Ethics and Everyday Inequalities,” *Hypatia*, Special Issue, Oppression and Moral Agency: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card, Winter 2009, 24 (1): 141-159.

ⁱⁱⁱ See “Rethinking the Moral Significance of Micro-Inequities: The Case of Women in Philosophy,” in *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?*, Fiona Jenkins and Katrina Hutchison (editors), Oxford University Press 2013 and “Reflections on Creating a Warmer Environment for Women in the Mathematical Sciences and in Philosophy,” with Robert Corless, *Atlantis*, 2009, 23 (2): 54-61

^{iv} “Rethinking the Moral Significance of Micro-Inequities: The Case of Women in Philosophy,” in *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?*, Fiona Jenkins and Katrina Hutchinson, editors, Oxford University Press, 2013.

^v See for example Virginia Valian’s discussion of “accumulated advantages” in *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women*, MIT Press, 1999.

^{vi} See work by my Western colleague, Tracy Isaacs, *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

^{vii} See “Feminist Ethics and Everyday Inequalities,” *Hypatia*, Special Issue, Oppression and Moral Agency: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card, Number 1, Volume 24 (Winter 2009), pp. 141-159.

^{viii} I am not endorsing Sandler’s definition. Note that it is so broad as to include things we properly think are macro-inequities.

^{ix} See *Micro-Inequities: 40 Years Later*, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-superhuman-mind/201304/micro-inequities-40-years-later>

^x Caitlin Knowles Myers & Marcus Bellows & Hiba Fakhoury & Douglas Hale & Alexander Hall & Kaitlin Ofman, 2010. "Ladies first? A field study of discrimination in coffee shops," *Applied Economics*, Taylor & Francis Journals, vol. 42(14), pages 1761-1769

^{xi} Thanks to Jennifer Saul for this point.

^{xii} Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1983

^{xiii} See Caplan, P.J. (1994). *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving the Academic World*. University of Toronto Press.

^{xiv} See *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World* by Paula J. Caplan, University of Toronto Press, 1993.

^{xv} See Joshua Correll, Bernadette Park, Charles M. Judd, and Bernd Wittenbrink, “The influence of stereotypes on decisions to shoot,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 37, 1102–1117 (2007) Published online 3 July 2007 in Wiley InterScience

^{xvi} I’m not suggesting that we all follow Machiavelli’s advice: "Upon this, one has to remark that men ought either to be well treated or crushed, because they can avenge themselves of lighter injuries, of more serious ones they cannot; therefore the injury that is to be done to a man ought to be of such a kind that one does not stand in fear of revenge." (*The Prince*, 1513) This is often paraphrased as “never do an enemy a small injury.”

^{xvii} See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*.

^{xviii} Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, 1984.

^{xix} See chapters from *Implicit Bias and Philosophy: Volume 1, Metaphysics and Epistemology* by Frankish, Huebner, Machery, and Mallon.

^{xx} Isaacs, Tracy. *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011

^{xxi} “Micro-Sanctions: a Philosophical Exploration,” by Meghan Winsby and Samantha Brennan, in progress.

^{xxii} Michael Brownstein and Alex Madva, “Ethical Automaticity,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* published online 15 December 2011 DOI: 10.1177/0048393111426402

^{xxiii} For other examples of positive micro-affirmations, see Stephen Young, *Micro Messaging: Why Great Leadership is Beyond Words*, McGraw-Hill, 2007.

^{xxiv} Uhlmann, E. and Cohen, G. 2007. ““I think it, therefore it’s true”: Effects of self-perceived objectivity on hiring discrimination”, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 207-223.

^{xxv} Tim Kenyon, ‘False polarization: Debiasing as applied social epistemology’ *Synthese*; Tim Kenyon and Beaulac, *Critical thinking and the scope of debiasing in moral thinking*, 2013.

^{xxvi} Bryan Caplan, personal correspondence