Be Sensible: Emotions in Social Work Ethics and Education

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Abstract

This article argues that emotions are relevant for moral decision-making and therefore social work ethics training and education should pay attention to emotions. The article starts with a short review of recent research on moral decision-making. This research indicates that emotions influence moral decision-making. The usefulness of emotions is then discussed, illustrating that emotions can be beneficial for moral decision-making. Although emotions are supposed to be partial, and not under the control of the moral agent, a variety of authors argue that emotions can also be informative and may act as a moral marker and motivator. Therefore, emotions are relevant to the process of moral decision-making, and social workers should reflect on the moral significance of their emotions. The article finally explicates two ways to address emotions in social work ethics and education: first, social workers should reflect on their moral identity and perform emotion work. This can be supported by in-depth learning, but also by using moral reflection tools or conversation models. Thus, second, several suggestions are offered to integrate reflection on emotions into these tools and models.

Keywords: Ethics, moral judgement, moral decision-making, emotion

Introduction

'Robots complement healthcare, but need to get more sensitive': an article with this title appeared in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* in 2012 (Pontier, 2012) in which the author makes a case for the use of robots in the care

sector. These machines are becoming increasingly sophisticated and are able to support professional care-givers in their professional tasks. Today, it is even possible to equip robots with a notion of morality, as engineers have designed software to consider moral principles. This permits robots to make decisions when confronted with medical–ethical dilemmas that are similar to the decisions of human experts. However, something more is needed, according to Pontier. In order to make human moral decisions, the robots should also be provided with software supporting emotional intelligence. In this way, rational as well as emotive deliberation will influence the moral decision-making of robots.

The effort to provide care robots with emotional intelligence so they can function morally and make moral decisions is striking. As emotions are traditionally considered to have an unfavourable influence on moral judgement and moral decision-making (De Sousa, 1987; Callahan, 1991; Pizarro, 2000; Wallace, 1993), why is it that emotions are considered to be so important for moral decision-making? This article, formulates an answer to this question and considers its relevance for social work ethics and education.

This paper is structured as follows. First, I will briefly elaborate on the concept of emotion and the use of the phrase 'moral decision-making'. Second, an overview of recent research on moral judgement is provided, illustrating the influence of emotions on moral judgement. Third, the usefulness of emotions with regard to moral decision-making will be discussed, considering the dysfunctionality of emotions as well as the possible functions of emotions. Fourth, the focus moves to social work. I will examine how social work professionals can integrate emotions into their moral decision-making. In order to do that they need to reflect on their moral identity. Therefore, I will also suggest a few possibilities for examining emotions in existing moral reflection and conversation tools.

Concepts and clarifications

As this article is all about emotions and moral decision-making, both of these concepts need some further elaboration. However, due to the fact that these terms are used in a variety of ways, I cannot provide a full description of them. Rather, I will explain to the reader how they are used in this article.

Emotions

When it comes to describing the 'inner state' of human beings, several distinct concepts are used, such as moods, feelings, emotions, sentiments, affections. Quite often, concepts are used interchangeably, for example by applying the terms 'feelings' and 'emotions' to the same phenomenon (Duyvendak, 2009). Therefore, it is safe to say that the concept of emotion is surrounded by debate

and there is no consensus on a clear-cut definition (Duyvendak, 2009; Van Kleef, 2012).

Literature and studies on emotions and moral judgement reflect this lack of conceptual consensus. Quite often, no definition of emotions is provided (e.g. Huebner *et al.*, 2009), studies are limited to one emotion (empathy for example, e.g. Pizarro (2000), or disgust, e.g. Schnall *et al.* (2008)) or various concepts (e.g. feelings, affections, sentiments, emotions) are used interchangeably (e.g. Wallace, 1993). Consequently, it is important to be aware of the fact that research and thinking on the subject cover a wide range of emotions, which are sometimes ill defined. In the remainder of this paper, I will mention as far as possible the concrete emotion (e.g. empathy, disgust) that is studied by specific authors, in an attempt to prudently deal with this issue.

However, as the concept of 'emotion' is frequently used in daily practice and evokes diverse connotations, it is also necessary to discern what counts as an emotion. In this article, I will use the term 'emotion' in line with the work of Nussbaum (2004). It is distinctive for emotions that they have a cognitive element. This means that emotions are evaluative and hold information about an object external to the person who experiences the emotion. Because of this relatedness to an object, intentionality is considered an important characteristic of emotions. Psychological feelings and physical changes (e.g. crying or frowning) may accompany emotions but, in Nussbaum's view, emotions cannot be reduced to these feelings and changes. Despite the lack of consensus on a definition of emotions, this cognitive and intentional approach to emotions is visible in the work of other authors in the field of ethics and in social work as well (e.g. Banks and Gallagher, 2009).

Moral decision-making

Another important concept in this article is moral decision-making. Decision-making is generally considered to be a core characteristic of professional expertise and professional wisdom (De Jonge, 2012; Banks and Gallagher, 2009) and, consequently, decision-making is an important element of professional *moral* wisdom. The process of moral decision-making can be divided into three stages: (i) a stage of deliberation, (ii) the decision itself and (iii) (the command that leads to) action (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, p. 79). The term 'moral decision-making' thus refers to this entire process, whereas concepts such as judgements, decisions and actions refer to the separate stages in this process. More precisely, a moral judgement can be defined as an evaluation of a situation, followed by a moral decision about how to act and the act itself.

In the remainder of the article, I refer to studies of specific elements of this moral decision-making process. Quite often, much of this research studies the responses to fictive moral dilemmas. This has two consequences.

First, the results of studies on fictive moral dilemmas are only applicable to judgements (what do you think?), and to some extent to decisions (what is best, what would you do?), and are not applicable to the full process of moral decision-making. In real life, people may exhibit behaviour that is contradictory to their 'fictive' decisions. Moreover, with regard to moral decision-making, several studies use the terms 'judgements' and 'decisions' interchangeably without disentangling them. Consequently, when discussing the role of emotions in moral decision-making (the next section), this article focuses on the first *phase* of moral decision-making. However, when discussing whether emotions have a value for the process of moral decision-making the discussion will be expanded to the entire process of judging, deciding and acting.

Second, a more fundamental issue arises. When referring to studies that use fictive moral dilemmas to study moral judgements and/or decision-making, one may easily get the impression that professional moral wisdom is all about solving moral dilemmas. In my opinion, this 'narrow' approach to professional ethics does not do justice to the moral dimension of social work. Social work professionals continuously judge, decide and act in their daily practices, even when things are running smoothly and no dilemmas arise. When I speak of moral decision-making, I refer to this daily practice of judging, deciding and acting by professionals. However, I am not familiar with research that has studied moral judgements in these daily routines, or judgements that are made in situations that are not puzzling. Therefore, studies on moral dilemmas—which are, of course, also part of social work practice—are very helpful in understanding the role of emotions in moral decision-making.

Emotions and moral decision-making

The use of robots referred to at the beginning of this article has not only been tested in the care sector, but in many other domains as well, including law and justice. One of the most puzzling and interesting questions that was posed in this domain, predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s, is whether robots can replace human judges in court. Some academics, such as Van den Herik (1991), thought they could. The basic idea was that it is possible to create formulas, based on variables such as law, jurisprudence, and recidivism, which enable computers/robots to deliver a solid verdict. The added benefit was that computerised judicial law would reduce the arbitrariness of verdicts. Although much of the work of lawyers and judges has become digitalised in recent decades, the computerised judge has not yet become reality, and expectations with regard to the 'robot-judge' have tempered. However, the optimism of the 1980s and 1990s is interesting, as it reveals a classic rational approach to moral decision-making. This rational approach is inspired by principle-based ethics, and considers moral decision-making to be a reasoning process, in which moral actors deliberately consider alternatives before

deciding what to do. When faced with a moral dilemma, actors should carefully and deliberately consider relevant principles and make a deliberate judgement, without emotions interfering in this process. Apparently, many believe that a robot would be able to perform such a task.

However, this rational approach to moral decision-making has been criticised over recent decades. Research findings have suggested that moral judgements are not primarily the result of conscious deliberation, but also of automatic, emotional responses referred to as 'intuitions'. No deliberate and conscious weighing of arguments preludes these judgements, rather they just seem to spring to mind.

One of the most influential theories which explains the limited role of conscious reasoning and emphasises the importance of automatic, affective responses is the social intuitionist model by Haidt (2001). According to Haidt, moral judgements are the result of quick, automatic intuitions, followed by slow, conscious reasoning. These reasoning processes are, in Haidt's view, post hoc justifications and by no means can be considered motives for moral judgements or moral actions. The social intuitionist model is built on research findings concerning phenomena such as 'moral dumbfounding' where people are unable to provide arguments for their judgements, which represent distinct moral principles. Haidt considers this lack of arguments evidence for the absence of a conscious reasoning process prior to a moral judgement. A second example of empirical research is the well-known work of Damasio (1994, in Haidt, 2001). Damasio studied patients with damage to the frontal lobe, especially the VMPFC (ventromedial prefrontal cortex), resulting in difficulties in social decision-making and expressing and experiencing emotions. As such, patients with this condition show a mild resemblance to sociopaths. It appears that patients with damage to the VMPFC have more difficulty resolving ethical dilemmas, supposedly because they lack the ability to experience emotions (Haidt, 2001; Damm, 2010).

In recent years, much more research has been conducted on moral judgements, using a diverse range of research methods. For example, neuropsychological research that uses fMRI scans repeatedly indicates that emotions play a major role in moral judgements (Greene and Haidt, 2002). Schnall *et al.* (2008) performed four experiments, in which participants were invited to make moral judgements while they were experiencing—manipulated—feelings of disgust. Their judgements were influenced by these manipulated emotions, which also supports the hypothesis that emotions and moral judgements are indissolubly intertwined. In another study, Hauser *et al.* (2007) performed digital research, in which they asked people to resolve moral dilemmas and to elaborate their motives for choosing this solution. They found that a considerable number of the participants were not able to justify their judgement. Hauser *et al.* therefore concluded that conscious and deliberate weighing of solutions and arguments does not play a major role in decision-making, but instead moral

judgements are automatic responses. These findings refer to the phenomenon of moral dumbfounding, already explained by Haidt (2001).

The growing evidence for the presence of automatic and emotional responses in moral judgement does not naturally imply that rational models of moral judgement should be dismissed. Deliberate thought continues to be of importance, according to most researchers. For example, Greene *et al.* (2008) suggest that dual processes are active in making moral judgements. Utilitarian responses, aimed at maximising benefits and minimising costs for individuals involved in a moral dilemma, are driven by controlled cognitive processes. Non-utilitarian judgements, however, are driven by automatic emotional responses. In accordance with this argument, Cushman, Young and Hauser (2006) also found variations in the role of conscious reasoning and intuition, depending on which moral principles are at stake.

In summary, recent research indicates that moral judgements are not simply the result of deliberate and conscious reasoning, nor are they solely the result of automatic affective responses. The traditional rationalist approach to moral decision-making, however, is insufficient to grasp how judgements and decisions arise, as automatic, emotional responses do play a major role. That is not to say, however, that emotions *should* also play a role in moral decision-making. Proponents of a rational approach may acknowledge the co-occurrence of emotions and moral decision-making, but this does not necessarily imply that emotions are also useful to the process of moral decision-making. In the next section, I will examine the issue of the 'usefulness of emotions' in more detail, by discussing the dysfunctionality and functionality of emotions with regard to moral decision-making.

The usefulness of emotions

Although research findings suggest that emotions influence moral decision-making, these findings do not unambiguously show when or how emotions come into play when people render a judgement or make a decision (Huebner *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, researchers and philosophers are still debating the role and function of emotions in moral decision-making. One of the central issues in this debate deals with the usefulness of emotions to moral decision-making: Do emotions interfer with the process of moral decision-making (dysfunctionality)? Or can this process benefit from emotions (functionality)?

Dysfunctionality

> Distinct commitment is the best. You cannot be objective and forceful once you are too committed and too involved. ... When I have compassion, and

> literally feel the suffering (of a client), then it is difficult to make a good judg-
> ment, a value judgment. . . . Your objectivity is gone (Outreach family coun-
> selor, quotation from a study into moral reasoning of social work
> practitioners).

Although emotions are present in the process of moral decision-making, the rational approach implies that emotions provide bad counsel. There are several assumptions about this supposed dysfunctionality of emotions. Two of the most prominent assumptions are discussed below, accompanied by counter-arguments.

First, as becomes evident in the citation above, it is said that emotions cloud the judgement of a moral agent, because they are not 'objective' (De Sousa, 1987), but 'partial' and 'arbitrary' (Pizarro, 2000) and, as such, 'unreliable' (Wallace, 1993). More precisely, it is said that emotions arise due to irrelevant features of a moral situation (a bad smell, for example) and are a reflection of personal preferences. Therefore, judgements, decisions and actions that are based on emotions are not to be taken seriously.

Second, it is generally assumed that emotions are not under the control of the moral agent (De Sousa, 1987; Pizarro, 2000; Wallace, 1993; Callahan, 1991). This is considered problematic, as it implies that a moral agent cannot regulate the influence of an emotion on the process of moral decision-making.

To start with the second assumption, different authors (De Sousa, 1987; Pizarro, 2000; Callahan, 1991) argue that emotions are not passively experienced, but that people have some control over emotions. For example, an emotion can be evoked by behavior that functions as a physical sign that accompanies it, such as crying or frowning. Emotions can also be kept in check, for instance when someone withholds their tears. Furthermore, Pizarro (2000) describes a mechanism called 'emotion-regulation': when affective responses and moral beliefs in a specific situation collide, people are able to either change their moral beliefs (bottom-up), or regulate their affective response (top-down). An example provided by Pizarro is that of a visitor to an abattoir, who becomes a vegetarian (bottom-up) after feeling nauseous at the sight of death and slaughter, or that of the Nazi tormentor, who suppresses feelings of compassion for his victims, convinced by the righteousness of his ideals. Emotion-regulation mechanisms suggest that moral agents have control over emotions. As a consequence, their influence on moral decision-making is also regulated by the agent.

The emotion-regulation mechanism is also relevant with regard to the first assumption about the dysfunctionality of emotions—that is, that emotions are not objective, but partial and arbitrary. The main reason to refute this argument, put forward by both Pizarro and De Sousa, is that emotions *may* indeed be subjective, but they also provide information about a moral situation. Emotions are not always partial and arbitrary and, as a consequence, emotions may be relevant to moral judgement (see also Wallace, 1993). De Sousa, for example, argues that emotions are neither objective nor subjective,

but on the cutting edge of objectivity and subjectivity. This means that personal observations of a given reality hold objective and subjective elements. At this point, the relevance of intentionality—an important defining characteristic of emotions—becomes clear. We must realise that all emotions, even if a result of an interpretation of an incident, are related to these incidents and thus are not fully subjective. Because of their 'rootedness' in reality, emotions are informative with regard to this reality. Furthermore, the emotion-regulation mechanism mentioned by Pizarro is useful in combating the partiality and arbitrariness of emotions, as we can use this mechanism to regulate emotions which are not relevant in a certain situation. Consequently, the mechanism helps to overcome some possible dysfunctional elements of the experience of a certain emotion.

Functionality

> As a social work professional, I use my personality as a tool. However, that is impossible without emotions. It's impossible. Without emotions, I would act like a robot, and I refuse to do that (Outreach family counselor, quotation from a study into moral reasoning of social work practitioners).

While we started the previous section with a citation of a family counselor, who stated that one has to be objective to render a sound judgement, that same counselor told us that it is impossible to work completely without emotions, because then 'I would act like a robot' and, apparently, that is not an appealing idea to this counselor. These contradictory statements seem at odds with one another, but shed light on the functionality of emotions. According to this counselor, one needs emotions in order to judge, decide and act morally. Consequently, emotions may be beneficial for the process of moral decision-making. In this section, two characteristics of emotions which could be helpful with regard to moral decision-making will be discussed.

First, the cognitive nature of emotions, and their intentionality, entail that they are informative. The experience of an emotion signals that values are at stake and moral judgement is required. Pizarro (2000) suggests that the presence of empathic feelings may act as a 'moral marker', to indicate that a morally relevant event is taking place. He assumes that this analysis applies to other emotions as well (Pizarro, 2000, p. 359). The previous section already hinted at this function of emotions, insofar as emotions are not purely subjective but also related to reality. Therefore, emotions are relevant in decision-making processes and it is legitimate to involve emotions in moral judgements and decisions (Dewey, 1922, in Hartman, 2012, p. 71). The relatedness of emotions to reality also implies that they are significant in recognising the moral characteristics of a specific situation. Consequently, emotions can be viewed as important elements of a professional's ethical

sensitivity, which is considered a relevant feature of 'professional wisdom' (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, p. 85) and a component of ethical expertise (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005, p. 154). Identifying, expressing and fine-tuning emotions are all important skills with regard to this ethical sensitivity (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005).

Emotions are also informative with regard to our moral beliefs. As a consequence, emotions may help us in decision-making processes, because they instantly reveal our values, moral priorities and to whom these should be applied (Pizarro, 2000). An example may illustrate this. A confrontation with a homeless person, who begs you for money on the street, can evoke different emotions such as empathy, pity or annoyance. The emotion not only tells a moral actor that a morally relevant scene is being encountered, but is also related to their moral beliefs. People may attach value to benevolence and autonomy and, depending on their moral priorities with regard to these values, may predominantly experience empathy or annoyance, respectively. Thus, value systems and the emotion a moral actor experiences when confronted with a moral scene are related. It could be useful for social work professionals to examine their emotions with regard to a moral issue, since they indicate one's value system and help to bring to light this system in discussion with others.

Second, emotions are considered important motivators for moral action, for example in the view of Stark (2004) and Callahan (1991). This argument is rooted in the thinking of Aristotle, and considers that a person can only be a true moral actor if he or she experiences the appropriate feelings in a moral situation. Stark, for example, argues that, according to various philosophical traditions, moral agents should act out of the right internal state. For Kant, moral actions should be based on moral principles, whereas, for Aristotle, it is important that moral actions are based on a good understanding of a certain situation (Stark, 2004). For both, however, the correct understanding of a situation and the correct response are needed. The relevance of this 'correct response' is perceivable in real-life situations, where some emotions are considered inappropriate: laughter at a funeral is generally considered to be out of place. For De Sousa (1987), this is actually an argument for the reasonableness of emotions. While some emotions are appropriate or reasonable in a certain situation, the lack of emotions can also be considered problematic, according to Stark. Actors who do not experience emotions when confronted with a moral scene do not adequately respond to that situation and, consequently, cannot be considered true moral actors. Returning to the idea of the 'moral robot' introduced at the start of this paper, picture such a robot donating money in response to a fund-raising activity to combat famine among children in third-world countries. The robot is naturally not affected by the action and images of starving children. Although it decides to make a donation, no emotions are felt in making it. The question is: Do we consider a robot to be a moral actor? According to Stark, we should not. Merely knowing and performing the correct action in a situation is not

enough, one also has to feel whether something is morally acceptable or not. The citation at the beginning of this section from the outreach family counsellor precisely refers to this argument: without emotions, a professional acts like a robot, and not like a true moral agent.

A similar argument is made by Damm (2010), although she uses—unlike Stark, who relies heavily on philosophical insights—empirical research to prove her point. Damm formulates two criteria for moral agency, the first being the capacity for engaging in moral reasoning that leads to a moral judgement, which presupposes that moral agents understand the moral concepts involved in the reasoning process. Second, moral agents have to act 'in virtue of a moral motivation' and 'this requires that an individual possesses a distinctly moral concern' (Damm, 2010, p. 276). Moral concern refers to the urge people feel to do the 'right' thing. Research on people with autism, psychopaths and patients with damage to the VMPFC (ventromedial prefrontal cortex), all of whom to some extent lack emotional and affective abilities, indicates that these groups also display a disability in one or both of the criteria for moral agency. Consequently, they experience difficulties in various stages of the process of moral decision-making. For example, psychopaths are not able to grasp moral concepts and fully understand moral judgements, while people with autism show a lack of moral concern, and patients with damage to the VMPFC area experience minimal difficulties in making moral judgements and experience more serious difficulty with regard to moral motivation: their actions quite often do not match their judgements. According to Damm, these limited abilities in moral reasoning and moral concern are caused by the limited emotional and affective abilities of these groups. She argues that emotions are not necessary to display morally acceptable behaviour, but emotions are needed to understand why this behaviour is right. Emotions contribute to this moral motivation in three ways. First, an affective response is necessary to understand moral concepts: without emotions, concepts such as 'justice' are meaningless. Second, moral concern presupposes that a moral agent understands the emotions of the other and, third, emotions are embodied knowledge, which helps moral agents to act in line with their moral judgements and decisions (Damm, 2010). Consequently, emotions are relevant for the process of moral decision-making, as they enable a moral agent to judge, decide and act on these decisions.

Emotions in social work practice and education

The final question that remains is: How is the discussion of the role of emotions in moral decision-making relevant to social work practice and education? I hope that I have convincingly shown that emotions influence moral decision-making, and are relevant to that process. By ignoring emotions, we ignore a relevant moral source in dealing with the moral dimension of social work practice. How, then, should social work practice and education deal with this issue?

Moral identity and ethics work

To start with, emotions seem to be at the core of the professional's moral identity. After all, emotions are not only informative about professional practices, but also reveal the—personal and professional—value system of a professional. Therefore, in order to deal with emotions in moral decision-making, a social worker should be aware of their own value system and accompanying emotions, and should be able to reflect on them. In practice, this means that a professional moral identity should be developed, and should be the object of continuous reflection. The writings of Banks (2012) on ethics work offer an important lead with regard to the development of professional moral identity. Ethics work as Banks describes it is 'the effort people put into seeing ethical aspects of situations, developing themselves as good practitioners, working out the right course of action and justifying who they are and what they have done' (Banks, 2012, p. 14). With regard to moral decision-making and emotions, professionals should do ethics work, that is: signalling what is morally relevant, judging the situation and deciding what to do, performing an action, and justifying it, but also reflecting on who you are and developing oneself as a good practitioner. In this process, special attention needs to be paid to emotion work. According to Banks (2012), emotion work refers to the creation and management of emotions in professional work, displaying them in an appropriate way at appropriate moments, and suppressing them on other occasions. However, considering the characteristics of emotions described above, and their relevance to the process of moral decision-making, I think more emotion work should be done by the professional. First of all, it is important that spontaneous emotions are not ignored or neutralised, but that professionals examine the signalling function of these emotions: Do they provide information about the values that are at stake in a certain situation? Emotions may sensitise the professional to the moral dimension in their work, and reflection on emotions may help to obtain a clear picture of morally relevant scenes. However, professionals should also realise that the emotions they experience are related to their own value systems, and that they reveal something about their moral identity. Reflection on these value systems and identity is also in order: Are professional and personal values reconcilable, for example? Are they relevant to the situation encountered? Second, it is important to realise that emotions are necessary motivators of moral action. Without emotions, concepts such as 'justice' or 'care' are meaningless and the simple fact that we—for example—feel pity for a client or annoyed by injustices we encounter makes it easier to judge and act on these principles. Therefore, professionals should also be aware of this motivating function of emotions. How does an emotion interfere with our moral action, or can we use it to come to moral action in specific situations?

First and foremost, the social work professional is responsible for doing ethics work—and more specifically emotion work. However, it is also

important that professionals are taught to do this. Therefore, it is necessary to consider ethics work to be an integral part of professional thinking and acting. In educating social work practitioners, it is not enough to provide them with relevant knowledge and protocols (e.g. ethical theories and ethical codes). In addition, professional training and social work education should also aim at 'in-depth learning', that is learning about a practitioner's beliefs and identity (Knoope and Goossensen, 2011) and, in addition, about emotions that are tied up with this identity and that emerge in social work practices. Professionals can be taught to reflect on and develop their moral identity by themselves but, of course, collegial support is also in order. This support can be organised by using conversation models and moral reflection tools. Social work textbooks already mention a variety of these tools. The next section will address the question of how moral reflection on emotions may make use of these tools and models.

Moral reflection and conversation tools

Although studies increasingly emphasise the relevance of emotions to moral decision-making and moral agency (e.g. Banks and Gallagher, 2009; Baart and Carbo, 2013), moral reflection tools and models in the field of social work should pay more attention to them. For example, in research I performed on moral agency for the KSI, I met several social work professionals who said that they were taught to be neutral and did not want emotions to 'get into the way' of performing their job. Furthermore, it should be noticed that several tools are available for social workers and social work students when faced with a moral dilemma, but very few of them pay attention to emotions. For example, social work textbooks quite often describe problem-solving models (e.g. the General Decision-Making Model by Dolgoff *et al.*, 2012, p. 73), which represent a quite narrow view on professional ethics, and which are often designed to 'overcome the emotionally chosen positions which prevent an accurate understanding of a situation' (Manschot and van Dartel, 2003, p. 24). Examples of problem-solving models that do pay attention to emotions (e.g. Hill *et al.*, 1998) are rather scarce. Other models are available, however, which are not designed to solve moral problems, but to structure a dialogue or conversation about the moral dimension of social work practice, such as Socratic Dialogue and Moral Case Deliberation. These models offer ample opportunity to discuss emotions and examine their worth in the process of moral decision-making. Molewijk, Kleinlugtenbelt and Widdershoven (2011) describe three ways of dealing with emotions through moral reflection and conversation tools in clinical settings. These are highly relevant to social work practice as well, and can be used to perform emotion work.

According to Molewijk, Kleinlugtenbelt and Widdershoven (2011), the first way of dealing with emotions is to simply explain them at the start of

any deliberation. For example, some of my colleagues have developed a model of moral case deliberation which starts with the presentation of a case, followed by the question 'What affects you?' (Kanne and Grootoonk, 2013). Subsequently, each participant explains his or her emotions, and these emotions and accompanying frames of reference are subject to moral inquiry during the deliberation. In this way, two of the above mentioned functions of emotions can be addressed. First, by explaining one's emotions and the thoughts that accompany them, the core issue of the case becomes more visible. In this respect, moral case deliberation uses the informative function of emotions. Second, paying attention to emotions may stimulate the involvement of professionals in the case (Molewijk *et al.*, 2011). The motivating function of emotions is used here, to enhance the quality and focus of the participants to the moral case deliberation.

A second way concerns the extension of all sorts of moral reflection tools and conversation models with questions about emotions (Molewijk *et al.*, 2011). Emotions can be subject to Socratic Dialogue, for example, when discussing whether emotions are appropriate in certain practice situations. Even problem-solving tools that traditionally remain distanced and have a neutralised character can be expanded by questions on emotions. This is not just to neutralise them or set them aside, but to examine them, such as with regard to the values which are at stake. An example of a problem-solving model in social work literature that does pay attention to emotions is the 'Feminist model for ethical decision-making' by Hill, Glaser and Harden (1998). This model comprises seven steps, which loosely resemble the steps of other problem-solving models. However, each step is attentive to emotions. In the first step of the model—recognising a problem—for example, the authors acknowledge that moral issues are most frequently recognised by a feeling of discomfort. They recommend that professionals identify aspects of those feelings that are not relevant to the matter in hand. This advice relates to the supposed partiality of emotions discussed earlier in this paper, and tries to overcome this partiality. However, Hill, Glaser and Harden also focus on the functionality of emotions. In the second step of their model—defining the problem—the professional 'can begin to use her or his felt experience as additional information about the ethical dilemma' (1998, p. 112). Hill, Glaser and Harden thus acknowledge that emotions can provide information about a moral situation.

A third option is to start a 'meta-conversation' (Molewijk *et al.*, 2011) about emotions. When emotions dominate moral issues, and/or seem to hinder a solid moral judgement, decision or action, it can be quite fruitful to examine these emotions, discuss them and reduce them to acceptable proportions.

Finally, Molewijk, Kleinlugtenbelt and Widdershoven (2011) describe an Aristotelian conversation method for a moral inquiry into emotions. The method comprises five steps, which all focus on emotions. I find the method especially interesting because of its rationale: the method explicitly aims at overcoming an overly rationalised and distant attitude of the

participating professionals. Participants are invited to become personally involved and relate their emotions to personal values and judgements. Consequently, the method enables participants to discuss judgements and actions and, in addition, offers scope to discuss what it means to be a good professional. In my opinion, this also creates the possibility to discuss the moral identity of the participating professionals. As such, this method is a very useful tool to perform ethics and emotion work.

Conclusion and discussion

In this article, I examined the role of emotions in the process of moral decision-making. An overview of relevant research with regard to automatic, affective responses to moral issues suggested that emotions influence moral judgements. The usefulness of emotions in the process of moral judgement and decision-making was also discussed. Although emotions are generally considered subjective, partial and not under the control of a moral actor, this is not to say that they always negatively affect moral judgement. Emotions can also be informative and are important as motivators of moral action. Therefore, social work professionals should examine the emotions they experience in daily practice, as their moral judgements, decisions and actions are influenced by them. The current paper suggested two ways to do this.

First, dealing with emotions in moral decision-making is not just a matter of acquiring knowledge or developing the right competencies. Rather, the professional moral identity of the social worker is at stake here, as emotions reveal the—personal and professional—value system of a professional. Consequently, professionals should develop and reflect on this moral identity and reflect on the moral relevance of emotions—that is, they should perform ethics and emotion work. Social work education can support this by using strategies aimed at in-depth learning, in addition to teaching theory and developing competences.

Second, a variety of tools and models is available for social work professionals in dealing with the moral dimension of their work, such as problem-solving models, Socratic Dialogue, Moral Case Deliberation, etc. There are several ways to give space to emotions with these tools and models, and to use their informative and motivating character. These tools may assist professionals to pay more attention to emotions in daily practice.

However, there are some risks attached to any call to pay more attention to emotions. To start with, it is of the utmost importance to emphasise that dealing with emotions in relation to moral decision-making should not be confined to the use of tools. The personal development of a professional's identity and the use of tools should go hand in hand. Another risk is that such a call will tip the scales. Although I advocate the thesis that emotions are beneficial to the decision-making process, I do not advocate a

professional ethics dominated by emotions. After all, research has shown that reason is also necessary and consequently professionals need knowledge, such as about ethical theory and ethical codes. Finally, we should be aware of sentimentalism ([Baart and Carbo, 2013](#)) and the tendency to counsel the professional: when reflection on emotions only aims at taking away the burden of them, then we overshoot the mark. Instead of focusing on the psychological impact of emotions, we should examine their value to the process of moral decision-making, in the broadest sense. In this way, social work professionals will not, like robots, only rationally weigh principles but also use their human emotions to become sensible moral agents.

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