CONDITIONS ON ZOE JOHNSON-KING, “THE SLOW CLAP PHENOMENON”
Liz Jackson, Ryerson University
Notre Dame/ACU Ethics Conference

1. SUMMARY OF PAPER

Slow-clap cases present us with a **puzzle**: there seems to be a tight connection between morally right action and praise-eligible/praiseworthy action. However, slow-clap actions are intuitively morally right, but don’t seem to be praise-eligible/praiseworthy.

Three ways to resolve the puzzle:

1) The agents in slow-clap cases actually are praiseworthy for acting rightly, at least under certain stipulations about their epistemic and conative states.

2) There are different kinds of rightness (some more connected to praise than others).

3) There’s more to praiseworthiness for a feature F of an action than someone’s having the right epistemic/conative states toward F and F’s being praise-eligible.

Johnson-King argues for a version of view 3:

**HYPOTHESIS**: Behaviors elicit slow-clap reactions iff and because nobody who met the standards for adequate caring would struggle to muster the effort involved in performing them.

2. TWO QUESTIONS

1. Is there more to the easiness/obviousness explanation?

The more difficult (and maybe less obviously morally right) a slow-clap action is for a person, the more my slow-clap intuitions about the case fade.

- For example: If a family is low-income, so it is very hard to put food on the table every day, but they find a way to do so anyway, I don’t have slow clap intuitions.

I wonder if this explanation deserves a second look.

2. Is **disproportionality** part of the problem? Are agents in slow-clap cases “1% praiseworthy”?

Praiseworthiness seems to come in degrees. One feature that seems to unite slow clap cases is that there seems to be something **disproportionate**: the degree of praise is not proportional to the relevant moral features of the case.

What if agents in slow-clap cases are a tiny, tiny bit praiseworthy, but getting/asking for much more praise than they deserve?

To make this work, you’d need an account of what determines degree of praiseworthiness; and some may not be willing to swallow the idea that agents in slow-clap cases are praiseworthy in any sense. But it does seem like praiseworthiness comes in degrees, and it seems like disproportionality might be (part of) the diagnosis for / problem with slow clap cases.