

## Introduction

[N]o part of morals has been more defectively treated than this of the duties to oneself. Nobody has framed a correct concept of such duties; it has been considered a trifling matter, and mentioned only at the end, as a supplement to morality, in the belief that once a man has fulfilled all his duties, he may finally also think about himself. In this portion, therefore, all philosophical systems of morality are false.

—Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*<sup>1</sup>

### §1. A Moral Philosophy with Duties to Self?

To say of someone that *she has a duty to herself*, or that *she owes it to herself* to do this or that, isn't likely to raise the eyebrow of the proverbial person on the street. These forms of words often find their way into everyday talk without bringing the proceedings to a pause for clarification. With these phrases, we frequently urge others to take care of themselves, or reassure ourselves about the propriety of “looking out for number one.” Popular R&B and dance songs have titles like “Owe It to Yourself” and “I Owe it to Myself.”<sup>2</sup> The bookstore's self-help shelves display volumes such as *You Owe It to Yourself: Effective Keys to a Happier Marriage* and *You Owe It to Yourself: Divorce and Relationships*.<sup>3</sup> A recent TED Talk tells us: “You owe it to yourself to experience a total solar eclipse.”<sup>4</sup> Columnists recommend to advice-seekers not simply that they discharge their duties to others, but that they also mind their duties to themselves.<sup>5</sup> The language of self-directed duty, it seems, is not just familiar, but pervasive.

Beyond everyday language, the *concept* of duty to self seems often to undergird our thought and feelings, if only implicitly. Many narrative works, for instance, rely on it. Consider the science-fiction film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. In it, a heartbroken man desperate to forget a recent breakup appeals to “Lacuna, Inc.,” a company whose futuristic technology allows clients to remove painful memories. The attractions of this technology are unequivocal at first, with moral troubles emerging only as the story unfolds. Attempting to tease out the philosophy informing the film, Christopher Grau locates our increasing distress in a Kantian concern for duties to the self:

In cases of . . . memory removal, we see agents treating themselves solely as a means to an end rather than as ends in themselves. This is a failure of self-respect, and this imparts the tragic sense that someone has, out of desperation, failed to recognize his or her own worth. This harmonizes well with the mood of *Eternal Sunshine*, as the film offers up exactly this sort of tragic situation in which individuals are blind to their own worth . . . The film suggests that what [the characters] have done is both sad and wrong; Kant’s moral theory [of duties to oneself] helps make this suggestion comprehensible (2006, 125).

It doesn’t seem to me that Grau is advocating a reading of the film on which the very concept of a self-directed duty is at issue—that a person *does* bear a moral relationship to herself is taken for granted, baked into the premise. The film’s preoccupation, according to Grau, is with whether acts performed by the principal characters are among those forbidden by the morality of what one owes to oneself—whether they violate a kind of duty that audiences can be assumed already to believe in when they enter the theater.

Outside of commonplace thought and talk, duties to the self have been a frequent subject

of investigation throughout the history of philosophy. Indeed, writers in the early modern period typically approached the topic not with a cautious willingness to entertain the notion, but with something like an unhesitating assumption that there was a topic to be remarked upon. Thomas Reid, for one, exhibits no unease when opining about a moral relation to oneself:

It is true, indeed, that men's passions and appetites too often draw them to act contrary to their cool judgment and opinion of what is best for them. *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* [I see and approve of the better, but follow the worse] is the case in every willful deviation from our true interest and our duty. When this is the case, the man is self-condemned; he sees that he acted the part of a brute when he ought to have acted the part of a man . . . When he feels the bad effects of his conduct, he imputes them to himself, and would be stung with remorse for his folly, though he had no account to make to a superior being. He has sinned against himself, and brought upon his own head the punishment which his folly deserved (1872, 582, spelling altered).

Talk of self-directed duty isn't, for Reid, merely rhetorical flourish. In the passage, duty to self is placed into contact with a range of other inter-connected moral concepts—in a short passage, we see connections drawn to *condemnation*, *remorse*, *sin*, *desert*, and *punishment*. Duties to self thus find themselves embedded within an intricate web of moral practices pertaining to self-treatment, suggesting that in dealing with herself, a person is navigating terrain that is decidedly moral. In other words, the dangers in navigating such terrain involve not merely the possibility of being foolish, imprudent, or insufficiently rational, but involve the more harrowing possibility of moral trespass—of *sinning*—against one's own self.<sup>6</sup>

Bishop Butler approaches the topic of self-directed duty with similar seriousness, writing

in his *Dissertation Upon the Nature of Virtue*:

[I]t deserves to be considered whether men are more at liberty, in point of morals, to make themselves miserable without reason than to make other people so, or dissolutely to neglect their own greater good, for the sake of a present lesser gratification, than they are to neglect the good of others whom nature has committed to their care. It should seem that a due concern about our own interest or happiness, and a reasonable endeavor to secure and promote it . . . is virtue, and the contrary behavior faulty and blamable, since, in the calmest way of reflection, we approve of the first, and condemn the other conduct, both in ourselves and others (1983, 72).

Placing the idea of duty to self within the broader context of moral practice, Butler here insists that self-regarding considerations frequently carry with them morality's distinctive normative force. For since it is characteristic of morality that it prescribes certain treatment for persons generally, and since one of the persons subjected to an individual's treatment is *that individual herself*, we should expect morality's prescriptions to apply to her treatment of herself. To repurpose Thomas Nagel's formulation from the twentieth century, each individual is "a person among others equally real" (1970, 14).<sup>7</sup> But whereas this Nagelian formulation is most apt to highlight that a person is *just* one among others, Butler draws attention to the fact that each person is *indeed* one among others. Whatever orientation we are bound, by our acknowledgement of their reality, to have toward others, we're bound to have toward ourselves as well. We ourselves are "equally real."

Once we appreciate Butler's point, it should seem only natural that Kant became the modern era's most forceful defender of duties to the self. For Kant, wrongful action most often stems from an impulse to make an exception of oneself. And what is the denial of duties to self,

other than an attempt to excuse oneself from giving one person the treatment that she owes to all? When introducing his study of morality's foundations in the *Groundwork*, Kant writes: "We shall now enumerate a few duties in accordance with the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and to other human beings and into perfect and imperfect duties" (1997b, 31). What's striking here is that duties to the self are not simply admitted to exist or begrudgingly countenanced, but are said to constitute a principal obligation-type around which the Kantian system will be constructed. Such duties are placed on a footing with other-directed obligations, rather than being a mere afterthought. In fact, it is most accurate to say that they're given a position of privilege:

So far from these duties being the lowest, they actually take first place, and are the most important of all . . . He who violates duties toward himself, throws away his humanity, and is no longer in a position to perform duties to others (1997a, 122-123).

In order to apprehend another as an object of moral concern, says this passage, a person must acknowledge the humanity in herself. Self-directed duties possess a sort of logical priority—a proper account of duty owed to others is not possible until the concept of duty to self is already on the table. Thus, the notion of self-directed duty was, for the eighteenth century's greatest moralist, not merely a respectable object of intellectual curiosity, but a notion of fundamental moral importance.

That self-directed duties find themselves largely absent from the contemporary philosophical scene, then, ought to strike the reader as mysterious. Widespread use of the notion in everyday talk and thought, to say nothing of its prominence in great works of moral philosophy, ought to pique philosophical curiosities—yet it doesn't seem to be happening. The

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, typically comprehensive in its coverage, includes no stand-alone entry for duties to self, while also leaving the topic unaddressed within seemingly relevant entries—“Deontological Ethics” (Alexander & Moore 2016) to give a glaring example, makes no mention of it. Few syllabi for ethics courses offered in anglophone philosophy departments reserve *any* space for the study of these duties, much less devote to them sustained attention. But all of this, one supposes, is only to be expected, given that of the tens of thousands of philosophy articles published in journals over the last half-century, only a small number give mention to the topic at all. Even sprawling books on moral theory, which otherwise evince no scruples about excessive scope, tend to proceed with scant mention of what a person owes to herself.<sup>8</sup> And on the rare occasions when contemporary philosophers (setting aside a few admirable exceptions<sup>9</sup>) *do* mention self-directed duties, they tend to do so in reference to debates of the distant past—debates about what Kant was up to, in the majority of instances—without showing much interest in bringing those debates into conversation with philosophy of the present day.<sup>10</sup>

The simple explanation for this neglect may be that the majority of today’s professional philosophers believe that self-directed duties do not exist. Many seem simply to default to the position that morality is *for others*—its subject matter is “what we owe to each other,” to coin a phrase. Consider a passage from Bernard Williams’s *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*:

[I]f we have accepted general and indeterminate obligations to further various moral objectives, as [modern moral philosophy] encourages us to do, they will be waiting to provide work for idle hands, and the thought can gain a footing . . . that I could be better employed than in doing something I am under no obligation to do, and, if I could be, then I ought to be: I am under an obligation not to waste

time in doing things I am under no obligation to do. At this stage, certainly, only an obligation can beat an obligation, and in order to do what I wanted to do, *I shall need one of those fraudulent items, a duty to myself* (1985, 201-202, my emphasis).

The supposed fraudulence of duties to the self isn't Williams' primary focus here—but that is precisely what makes the passage remarkable. In context, Williams is attempting an assault on the whole of modern morality. The non-existence of self-directed duties serves, here, as an unsupported premise in that argument. Insofar as modern morality depends for its plausibility upon the existence of self-directed duties, this calls into question the entire institution—at least according to Williams. That this argument could be offered in one of the most celebrated works of moral philosophy in the past half-century speaks to the extent to which opinion has coalesced around the non-existence of these duties.

If contemporary philosophers are indeed skeptical of duties to the self, then it's to be expected that they'd dedicate little space to discussing them. Nevertheless, in the interest of good philosophical practice, we might heed Aristotle's dictum to take seriously the *endoxa*—that is, to adopt a posture of the mind open to hearing out the opinions of the majority and the wise (1984a, 167). There is, after all, something unsavory about the present-day philosophical elite dismissing out of hand a concept that seems to serve reliably the population at large and has been treated as a legitimate object of inquiry by our intellectual forebears.<sup>11</sup> Thus, I propose we should welcome a philosophical investigation of the possibility of duties to the self.

The thesis of this book is that duties to the self comprise a genuine moral category, and that we have every reason to think that there exist such duties. To ignore this topic, as has been common practice over the past century or more, is to shutter our view of a vast region of the

normative domain, skewing and undermining our philosophical understanding of morality. I believe steps ought be taken to reintroduce self-directed duty into mainstream practical philosophy, and intend this book as one such step.

## §2. Appeals to Self-Duty by Contemporary Kantians

Those familiar with the literature might, however, charge the previous section with misrepresenting the state of the field, noting the considerable frequency with which present-day Kantians avail themselves of self-directed moral concepts. Most famously, perhaps, Christine Korsgaard constructs her neo-Kantian account atop a conception of the person as a self-legislator:

The source of obligation is a legislator . . . [T]his is a legislator whose authority is beyond question and does not need to be established. It is the authority of your own mind and will. So [the voluntarists] were right. It is not the bare fact that it would be a good idea to perform a certain action that obligates us to perform it. It is the fact that we *command ourselves* to do what we find it would be a good idea to do (1996a, 104-105).

Through this act of authoritative self-targeted command, a person comes to owe the performance of particular actions to herself. A similar appeal to self-directed morals is found in the work of Stephen Darwall. According to him:

To intelligibly hold someone responsible, we must assume that she can *hold herself responsible* in her own reasoning and thought. And to do that she must be able to take up a second-person standpoint on herself and *make and acknowledge demands of herself* from that point of view (2006, 23, my emphasis).

It is a condition of being a moral agent at all, thinks Darwall, that a person possesses a particular sort of practical competence, whereby she is able to move herself to action through the representation of these “internally addressed demands” (2006, 23). A person’s relation to her own self is thus deeply entangled with morality.

Despite its place of prominence in the writings of these two eminent Kantians, the notion of self-duty arguably remains under-defended and under-theorized. The Kantians mentioned above help themselves to it with characteristic boldness, but neither Korsgaard nor Darwall gives much indication that there is much to puzzle over in the very idea of duty to self. Korsgaard talks of legislating for oneself, as a sovereign might for her citizens. But is such talk coherent? A person who legislates for herself must, it would seem, address herself. Must she then acknowledge the address, as a person might when spoken to by a superior? Or might she ignore the address—or push back, even? In this decidedly peculiar set of questions, some will find nothing but a nonsensical attempt to apply inherently social phenomena to an individual person (Lavin 2014; Haase 2014a; Moran 2018, 190-220). But Korsgaard does not seem particularly alive to the worries of those who recoil from talk of an individual enacting law to which she herself is subject, as her mentions of self-legislation are made without apology or embarrassment. Much the same can be said of Darwall, who makes free use of the idea of a person’s addressing a demand to herself. And so there’s real danger that these accounts will simply alienate many readers at their outset. This is, of course, *not* to suggest that Korsgaard and Darwall are in the wrong, nor to imply that the accounts they go on to develop lack materials with which to answer the worries gestured at here. The considerations mooted above amount to suspicions or concerns, rather than decisive refutations. But if the suspicions and concerns are

left unremarked upon, it becomes easy to see self-duty talk as a quirk of the Kantian literature, rather than a subject worthy of broad philosophical attention.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond Korsgaard and Darwall, scattered texts in contemporary applied ethics, authored almost exclusively by philosophers of Kantian temperament, make appeal to self-directed duty. Discussions of suicide (Velleman 1999), mental health (Hoffman 2013), cognitive enhancement (Bauer 2018), and resistance to oppression (Hay 2013) have been presented with a focus on what a person owes to herself. While the authors of these pieces are keen to argue for the existence of *particular* duties to the self, they tend to leave unaddressed questions about the moral category *per se*. That is, it is uncommon for these authors to address doubts about whether a person can indeed relate to herself morally, or wrong herself, or legislate for herself, and it is also uncommon for them to address at any length the significance of having a duty to oneself, as opposed to, say, a prudential reason to treat oneself in a certain way.<sup>13</sup> So here too, in the Kantian quarters where self-duty is mostly likely to make an appearance, the notion of a duty to self goes unscrutinized. And because of widespread skepticism about it, the insights contained in these pieces of applied ethics are, I fear, too easily dismissed.

My conjecture, then, is that the prevailing view that duties to self don't exist, combined with the Kantian tendency to find the notion entirely unproblematic, has given rise to a milieu in which the very idea of duty to the self isn't treated as a proper philosophical topic by the discipline. This is the background against which the present project is offered.

### §3. A Kantian Architectonic: On the Division of Our Topic into the Moral and the Political

A philosophical treatment of duties to the self has potential to bear on both moral theory and political philosophy. Prohibitions on and requirements to treat oneself in particular ways

would, of course, bring with them broad implications for our thinking on how an individual ought to live as a private person. And although duties to the self *needn't* be politically relevant, they certainly *might* be—anyone who countenances their existence ought at least to be open to the possibility that some self-directed duties concern political right, licensing the state to coercively ensure their discharge.<sup>14</sup> Both the moral and the political facets of this topic will be taken up in the ensuing investigation. But rather than treating politics as a special domain within which principles from the broader moral domain are to be applied, I've organized the book so as to treat moral and political topics separately. The reasons for this choice might not be immediately obvious, so I'll devote some space here to articulating them.

That moral and political philosophy demand independent treatments is today a philosophical commonplace, even if it's not a proposition embraced universally.<sup>15</sup> The primary historical antecedent of this commitment is *The Metaphysics of Morals*, wherein Kant writes:

In contrast to laws of nature, these laws of freedom are called *moral laws*. As directed merely to external actions and their conformity to law they are called *juridical laws*; but if they also require that they (the laws) themselves be the determining grounds of actions, they are *ethical laws*, and then one says that conformity with juridical laws is the *legality* of an action and conformity with ethical laws is its *morality*. The freedom to which the former laws refer can be only freedom in the *external* use of choice, but the freedom to which the latter refer is freedom in both the external and the internal use of choice, insofar as it is determined by laws of reason (1996, 16).

This passage brings to the fore a distinction that structures the whole of Kant's practical philosophy, which is the distinction between an act's conforming to the requirements of

politically enacted law and a person's conforming her will to the dictates of the moral law. Moral philosophy concerns itself with the latter—its focus is not just *what* a person does, but also her *grounds*.<sup>16</sup> Consider Kant's case of the shopkeeper, deciding whether to make correct change for a vulnerable customer (1997b, 11). The specifically moral matter at issue, for Kant, is what's ultimately behind the shopkeeper's decision—whether recognition of the customer as deserving of respect explains his honesty, for instance, or whether he's instead motivated by concern for his reputation. Moral philosophy's primary business thus consists in discerning which are the proper principles of action for an individual to deploy when deciding what to do, explaining why those principles are indeed the proper ones, demonstrating how these sorts of principles of the will are *possible*, and so on.

Political philosophy, in contrast, concerns principles governing the interactions between persons *qua* embodied physical objects, or as Arthur Ripstein puts it, “[P]rinciples of right [govern] persons represented as occupying space” (2009, 12). Its focus, then, is not on the will's determining ground, but on the normative principles regulating interactions between physically embodied beings.<sup>17</sup> Returning to the shopkeeper, the specifically *legal* matters in the case pertain to whether the change belongs in the hands of the customer, whether the customer has the right to take it back if the store owner withholds it, and whether a third party is entitled to forcibly redistribute the change to the proper owner—regardless of what anyone's ultimate motivations are for acting as they do. Thus, political philosophy's primary business consists in discerning the conditions under which a person may touch another's body, determining who is entitled to claim particular physical objects as their own, identifying which individuals are entitled to enforce rules about touching and about property, and so on.

To clarify, now, my reasons for treating these two topics separately, consider that it's uncertain whether conclusions arrived at within the domain of moral philosophy will carry over into politics. Let's grant, returning to our example, that the question of whether the shopkeeper is motivated by recognition of the moral law is a matter of legitimate ethical concern—that this question bears decisively, in some absolute sense, on whether the shopkeeper's action was right or wrong. Even so, *could* the state concern itself with this question? Evidently not. The state isn't, after all, in any way equipped to identify instances of improper inner determinations of a person's will. More to the point, it simply does not follow from the fact that principles of morality require a person to act a particular way that she may be made to perform the act by her government. A duty to aid a family member, grounded either in reciprocity or in the familial relation itself, doesn't seem to license *any* sort of action on the part of the state. The salience of this point becomes especially pronounced when we reflect on the law's connection to the use of force.<sup>18</sup> That a person has a moral right to demand of another that she fulfill the terms of an agreement doesn't indicate one way or the other whether *coercion* may be exercised to compel performance.<sup>19</sup> From the fact that an act is required by moral duty, it simply does not follow that there exists any person or institution with a right to compel someone else to perform it.

I appeal to this Kantian architectonic not to signal a general embrace of Kant's philosophy, but simply to clarify my reasons for structuring the book as I have. Applied to our topic, the idea is that investigation into the *moral* issues surrounding duties to the self will involve thinking about whether there exist moral principles that an individual is required to deploy when deliberating about how to treat herself, discerning which principles there are, considering why those principles are the correct ones, and so on. But even if we conclude that a person indeed has self-directed duties, no political implications will follow, absent further

argument. Whether a person has self-directed duties of *right*—duties that the state may force her to discharge—answers to a different set of questions and concerns, which will be addressed in a different part of the book (Chapters 5 and 6).

#### §4. Duties to the Self: Potential Grounds for State Paternalism

The portion of this project falling under the umbrella of core moral philosophy, being fairly straightforward in its focus and aims, requires little in the way of further elaboration. It will address itself to questions about whether the concept of duty may be properly applied in one's dealings with oneself, and about the implications of accepting or denying that they may. The political portion requires more elaboration, however, for as will become plain, I've linked my study of self-directed duties to the topic of paternalism, and the relevance of these two issues to one another might not be immediately apparent.

In politics, “paternalism” refers to coercion of a person, by the state, *for her own sake*—it refers to enactment of laws that are justified by their propensity to protect a person from her own decisions. That paternalism is *prima facie* troubling is the default position of many, requiring those who see some space in the state's role for paternalism to offer special justification.

Attempts to supply such justification are now a standard part of the philosophical literature, with a few well-known types of argument giving the debate about paternalism its shape.

Consequentialists, for instance, often argue that when a paternalistic policy protects a person from bad overall outcomes, this is sufficient to justify it (Conly 2013), whereas liberals have frequently argued that paternalism, while illicit as a general matter, is permissible in cases where a person *would* choose to protect her own interests more carefully were she to make her choice under ideal conditions (Rawls 1999, 219; Dworkin 1972). However, a genuinely novel argument

for paternalistic law is, I believe, suggested by the possible existence of self-directed duties.

What I have in mind is that the state could have permission to protect a person from herself *not* on grounds that doing so would bring about the best overall outcome, or that it would satisfy her deepest preferences, or that it would evince a kind of parently care for her, but instead on grounds that she is bound by a duty to herself. Of course, the fact that a person has a duty is never itself sufficient to license state action, as was emphasized in the previous section.

Demonstrating that the state is so licensed requires additional discussion of what makes for genuine political duties of the type a person may be coerced to discharge. This is a topic to which I will turn in later chapters (Chapters 5 and 6).

This argumentative strategy will inevitably inspire some measure of surprise. Those most welcoming to the notion of duties to the self, characteristically Kantian in disposition, are typically those most strongly opposed to using the law for paternalistic purposes. Kant himself, of course, championed duties to the self while consistently expressing hostility toward paternalism,<sup>20</sup> denying throughout his mature work the existence of self-directed duties of right. So the line I propose to pursue here can be seen as a sort of provocation to this particular camp. But beyond its running afoul of Kantian orthodoxies, the view serves to challenge mainstream liberal dogma. The default posture among liberals is broadly anti-paternalistic, as their commitment to freedom militates strongly, they think, against the enactment of paternalistic policy.<sup>21</sup> Of course, all admit that coercion is permitted when necessary to ensure that a person discharges her duties to promote freedom and to realize justice—it's for this reason that liberals believe the state to be necessary in the first place. But the startling feature of the view I'll eventually advocate is its appeal to liberal commitments in order to defend paternalistic policies generally thought to be antithetical to them. The appeal of the view, however, will be that it does

not presume a blanket license to meddle in people's lives out of concern for aggregate utility or out of a presumption that the state may play the role of care-giver, but nevertheless makes room for a state to protect an individual from herself.

## §5. Ambitions of the Project

Vindicating the category of duties to self, both moral and political, is the primary ambition of this book. Though I will discuss the possibility of duties grounded in concern for wellbeing, autonomy, flourishing, dignity, freedom, and justice, it isn't my intention to establish any particular duties to self as the ones by which we are gripped, or to advocate for a list of acts and attitudes that a person owes herself. The project is most concerned with the metaphysics of morals, rather than the content of morality. Though it will be clear that I find some duties to self to be more plausible candidates than others, the hope is to create space within which to argue about the content of these duties, rather than to settle such debates.

The book, however, should not leave the reader at a complete loss when thinking about which duties one owes to oneself. For it is reasonable, I think, to take the moral considerations one already believes to be relevant within the realm of the interpersonal and to attempt to apply them intrapersonally. So if one believes there to be interpersonal moral norms related to wellbeing, autonomy, or individual flourishing, a natural first step will be to provisionally assume that those norms govern a person's moral relationship to herself as well. Then one might begin to ask whether there is reason to amend and to alter those norms in cases where they are intrapersonally applied. Undoubtedly, discussion of this point will eventually be necessary. If the book inspires it, then it will have succeeded.

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<sup>1</sup> Kant 1997a, 122.

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<sup>2</sup> These titles were released by the R&B funk band The Gap Band and by the electronic dance music producer Grades, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Malach 1999 and Cooper 2014, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> The talk is by author David Baron, available at:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_baron\\_you\\_owe\\_it\\_to\\_yourself\\_to\\_experience\\_a\\_total\\_solar\\_eclipse](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_baron_you_owe_it_to_yourself_to_experience_a_total_solar_eclipse) (retrieved online 7/25/2018).

<sup>5</sup> When advising a woman whose father requested that she destroy, after his death, the contents of a certain box he'd stashed away, Slate.com's Dear Prudence counsels, "You owe it to your father to put his mind at ease, and you owe it to yourself to find out just what's in the box."

[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear\\_prudence/2009/06/daddy\\_issues.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear_prudence/2009/06/daddy_issues.html) (retrieved online 6/15/2017).

Sex advice columnist Dan Savage, along similar lines, informs a reader that he not only owes it to his boyfriend to tell him that the reason he's breaking up with him is that he finds him annoying, but that he "owes it to himself" as well.

<http://www.thestranger.com/columns/savage-love/2016/02/10/23548259/savage-love> (retrieved online 6/15/2017).

<sup>6</sup> Much philosophy from the modern period is ambiguous as to whether there exist genuine duties owed to the self, or whether instead certain self-treatment is simply owed to God—for instance, Locke's famous treatment of the duty against suicide is, I think, most naturally read as a duty owed to a deity (1988, 270-271). The Reid quotation here contains no such ambiguity, however, even as he deploys theologically-tinged language. A person might sin *against herself*, according to him, leaving little doubt about whom the violated duty is owed to when the wrongful deed is committed.

<sup>7</sup> While the formulation is Nagel's, he never in *The Possibility of Altruism* emphasizes that a person must recognize herself to be in possession of moral standing, as one among the many. A lengthy discussion of the normative relationship a person bears to herself over time *does* occupy a significant portion of that monograph (29-76), and that discussion *does* take up the Butlerian concern about "dissolutely [neglecting one's] own greater good, for the sake of a present lesser gratification." But curiously, Nagel treats the issue under the umbrella of mere prudence as opposed to morality.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in the first two volumes of Derek Parfit's *On What Matters* (2011)—a massive tome concerned with all things moral and normative—I find only two passing mentions of self-directed duties (see Vol. 1, 141 and 325).

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Carol Hay's *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism: Resisting Oppression* (2013).

<sup>10</sup> For examples of scholarly articles that take this topic seriously, see Hill 1973, Paton 1990, Reath 1997, and Timmermann 2006. For a book-length treatment of the issue, see Denis 2001. All of these are written from a Kantian point of view, and most are primarily interested in Kant exegesis, or at the very least in reconstructing Kant in such a way as to render his position plausible. The character of the literature thus encourages, or perhaps simply reflects, the widespread belief that the topic of duties to the self is mostly a historical curiosity associated exclusively with the Kantian project.

<sup>11</sup> A willingness to challenge common opinion is, of course, unproblematic for a philosopher generally, and for Aristotle in particular. The point is simply that it is imperative to take seriously the common view as a starting point for inquiry.

<sup>12</sup> In private conversation, it was suggested to me that appeals to a person's owing herself something are merely habitual to "a Kantian way of talking," and so can be confidently dismissed.

<sup>13</sup> Even in Carol Hay's book-length argument that the oppressed owe it to themselves to resist their oppressors, discussion of such issues is relatively cursory and relatively confined—the section of the book entitled "Are Obligations to the Self Possible?" constitutes only two pages of the whole (2013, 66-68). This isn't to criticize the book, which is insightful and important. It *is* to say, however, that Hay's argument and others like it would benefit from a more thorough vindication of duty to the self as a category.

<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge, this isn't a possibility that has been considered elsewhere. Why it has not is a bit of a mystery, though perhaps the association of duties to the self with Kantianism, coupled with the strong anti-paternalist sentiments prevalent among Kantians, explains this. More on this issue below.

<sup>15</sup> The view that these topics should be so divided becomes especially popular in the wake of the later Rawls, particularly with his clarification in *Political Liberalism* that he intends justice as fairness not to be a comprehensive ethical doctrine (1993). While much twentieth century political philosophy seems to assume that moral principles could be applied to politics, the worry eventually arose that coercive institutions that citizens are unable to opt out of cannot impose a controversial morality without danger of wronging some members. This is the insight underlying political liberalism, the dominant school of political thought over the past quarter century.

<sup>16</sup> See Kant 1996, 10-14.

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<sup>17</sup> Kant writes: “Duties in accordance with rightful lawgiving can only be external duties, since this lawgiving does not require that the idea of this duty, which is internal, itself be the determining ground of the agent’s choice” (1996, 21). This issue about morality’s concern with the will’s determining ground, and the absence of such a concern within the domain of politics, has received a fair amount of treatment in the secondary literature. See Ebels-Duggan 2009 and Pogge 2002.

<sup>18</sup> This connection is a commonly acknowledged one, though Kant offers a (somewhat compressed) argument for it in §D and §E of *The Doctrine of Right* within *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1996, 25-26). For a contemporary Kantian defense of this idea, see Ripstein 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See Kant 1996, 21.

<sup>20</sup> For an example of his anti-paternalism, see Kant 1991, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, those working within these traditions often use paternalism to illustrate how the state might bestow benefits on the populace while nevertheless using its power illicitly. See Neuhaus 2014, 127-131; Hodgson 2010, 899; Pallikkathayil 2016, 20-22.