

On the Existence of Duties to the Self (and Their Significance for Moral Philosophy)

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Contemporary philosophers generally ignore the topic of duties to the self. I contend that they are mistaken to do so. The question of whether there are such duties, I argue, is of genuine significance when constructing theories of practical reasoning and moral psychology. In this essay, I show that much of the potential importance of duties to the self stems from what has been called the “second-personal” character of moral duties—the fact that the performance of a duty is “owed to” someone. But this is problematic, as there is reason to doubt whether a person can genuinely owe to herself the performance of an action. Responding to this worry, I show that temporal divisions within an agent’s life enable her to relate to herself second-personally, in the way required by morality. The upshots, I argue, are that we need an intra-personal theory of justice that specifies the extent of a person’s authority over herself, and that we need to rethink our theories of moral emotions in order to specify how an individual ought to respond to attacks on her interests and autonomy that she herself perpetrates.

1. Introduction

At a critical moment in the *Groundwork*, Kant announces: “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.”¹ Writing in the late 1700s, it is unremarkable that Kant considered duties to the self to be among the usual divisions. Moral

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 31 (4:421).

philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries—including Pufendorf, Clarke, Wollaston, Butler, and Price—tended simply to assume that a proper treatise on ethics would include an account of duties to the self. Things are different today, however. Contemporary monographs on ethics are generally silent on the topic, and if it *is* mentioned at all, the mention comes only in passing.² It is hard to know precisely why this is, but I suspect that many authors believe duties to the self to be non-existent—Bernard Williams, for instance, dismisses the whole idea as “fraudulent.”³ Or if not that, then they find the notion to be a bit trite—perhaps invoking a duty to the self might make for a useful rhetorical flourish when, say, reminding a self-denying loved one to look out for herself once in a while, but this alone is unlikely to be of much theoretical interest. It is my conviction that any account of practical reasoning and moral psychology that is silent about the application of moral concepts and practices to an agent’s reasoning about her own interests and ends will necessarily be incomplete. My intention here is to make some headway toward establishing the truth of this conviction.

Let us begin by sketching examples of two kinds of moral wrongs, and then inquire as to whether an individual can perpetrate these kinds of wrongs against *herself*. First, there are wrongs that consist in foisting harms onto someone. Imagine that I operate a chemical plant, and that in an attempt to increase profits, I dispose of hazardous waste in an unregulated foreign country, fully expecting to inflict great harm upon its inhabitants. Depending upon how we fill in further details of the case, it is likely that such actions will constitute a serious moral wrong. Second, there are wrongs that consist in a failure to properly respect someone’s autonomy. Imagine that I’m a Christian who wants others to subscribe only to the faith that I regard as true, and so I use force to prevent some Muslims from erecting a mosque in our city. Many would agree that, all else being equal,

² There are, however, scattered examples of essays from the past few decades which, at the very least, express some sympathy with the notion of duties to the self—usually from a Kantian perspective. (See Margaret Paton, “A Reconsideration of Kant’s Treatment of Duties to Oneself,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, 40 (1990), pp. 222–233; Andrews Reath, “Self-Legislation and Duties to Oneself,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Supplement) 36 (1997), pp. 103–123; Jens Timmermann, “Kantian Duties to the Self, Explained and Defended,” *Philosophy* 81 (2006), pp. 505–530; Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “Servility and Self-Respect,” *The Monist* 57 (1973), pp. 87–104.) These treatments of the topic are all illuminating, but unlike most of these authors, my purpose is to make a case for duties to the self that does not rely upon and that is not motivated by the details of Kant’s practical philosophy.

³ See his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 202.

I will have wronged the Muslims, having refused to show proper regard for their autonomy.⁴

Now consider two analogous cases, which differ from those above primarily in that they involve a single individual rather than multiple persons. First, imagine an eighteen-year-old who maintains a smoking habit because of the pleasure it affords her. She fully expects to develop emphysema later, but continues to smoke anyway, ensuring that she'll suffer greatly sometime in the distant future. Second, imagine a young socialist Russian nobleman who expects to become more conservative as he ages. In an attempt to thwart his future self, he transfers control of his fortune to his wife, instructing her to prevent him from pursuing the political ends he'll judge to be worthy later on, and to grant him access to funds only for the purpose of supporting the socialist cause.⁵

These two cases parallel closely our examples of moral wrongings. In the former, the smoker foists serious burdens onto herself (albeit burdens that she'll suffer at a different time). In the latter, the nobleman plots to undermine his ability to pursue his autonomously chosen ends (albeit ends he'll endorse only in the future). Nearly everyone will admit that there exists such a thing as agential error consisting in a failure to properly protect one's future interests and autonomy (even if some doubt that the smoker and the nobleman actually err in these scenarios, so described). But many would insist that these are mere *prudential* errors, rather than *moral* mistakes.⁶ The smoker and the nobleman are, after all, only undermining themselves.

My contention is that individual agents can indeed wrong themselves. I will begin in section 2 by discussing why it matters one way or another whether we have moral duties to ourselves, as opposed to mere prudential reasons to treat ourselves in particular ways. Then in section 3, I will suggest that the distinctive characteristics of *moral* reasons—the characteristics that explain why the designation “moral” is significant—are

⁴ For examples of authors who believe that an agent's freely chosen ends ought to command respect merely because they were chosen by a rational agent, and not necessarily because of the intrinsic value of the ends themselves, see Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Japa Pallikkathayil, “Deriving Morality from Politics: Rethinking the Formula of Humanity,” *Ethics* 121 (2010), pp. 116–147.

⁵ This example is Derek Parfit's. (See his *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 327–328.) Importantly, it is not that the nobleman expects to give into temptation and betray his values in a fit of akrasia. Rather, he thinks he will experience a genuine shift in his values. So, in the example, he is seeking to ensure that his future self will be powerless to act on the values he will genuinely endorse at the time.

⁶ The classic example is chapter 4 of John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 78–79.

tightly linked to their being “second-personal.” But this, I will show, threatens to render incoherent the notion of a duty to the self, as there is reason to deny the possibility of owing something to oneself. In section 4, I will answer this worry, appealing to the temporal divisions within an agent’s life in order to make sense of the idea that an agent owes to herself particular kinds of treatment. Having established that there are duties to the self, in section 5 I will conclude by considering in a bit more depth the significance of such duties for theories of practical reason and moral emotions. First, I will suggest that a complete theory of practical reason must contain a theory of intra-personal justice, specifying what an agent may or may not do to herself in pursuit of her good and her ends. Then I will suggest a way that we should refine our theory of moral emotions in order to accommodate the possibility of an agent wronging herself.

2. Why it Matters Whether There Are Duties to the Self

Some readers will immediately balk at this project on grounds that it aspires to do nothing more than settle a terminological dispute. Certainly everyone will concede that individuals have weighty reasons to advance their own interests and to ensure that they’ll be able to autonomously pursue their ends in the future. So why concern ourselves with whether to call these reasons “moral reasons”? In this section, I will give three reasons for thinking that the issue isn’t merely terminological.

First, designating a consideration a “moral reason” implies that it ought to *preempt* or *silence* other considerations that would otherwise be relevant to an agent’s practical reasoning—or, at least, that it ought to preempt a significant subset of such considerations. It is common, after all, to talk of morality’s “authority,” and authority is most often associated with the capacity to preempt considerations that would typically bear on the question of what to do. So if I have a moral duty to repay a loan today, and am deliberating about whether to do so, it wouldn’t be proper for me to weigh the fact that I have an obligation against the fact that I would like to go hiking instead, the fact that I would prefer to spend the money on a fancy dinner, the fact that I am in no mood to talk to the person who loaned me the money, and so on. To say that I am morally obligated to repay the loan implies that these other considerations ought not factor into my deliberations at all. So to say that a person has a moral duty *to herself* is to say that she shouldn’t treat all of the considerations regarding her interests or ends as considerations to be “weighed” into her decision, alongside all other potentially relevant considerations. Whatever duties she has to herself preempt or silence these other considerations. Thus, an agent who accepts—for whatever reason—that she has a moral duty to avoid giving herself emphysema accepts that she is not supposed to weigh the pain of suffering from the disease against the pleasure of smoking. She instead accepts that the looming threat of

lung disease compels her to abstain from tobacco use, irrespective of how much pleasure the habit would afford her over the years.

Second, many believe that functioning properly as a moral agent sometimes requires acting out of recognition of one's duty, rather than merely acting in accordance with the duty. Imagine that I've borrowed money from you, and that when I repay you, I say, "I'm giving this to you because I like making people happy." The fact that an action would promote someone's happiness is usually a perfectly respectable—even admirable—reason for performing it. Nevertheless, despite my otherwise praiseworthy motive, and despite the fact that I acted quite properly in repaying you, it seems as if something goes wrong with my practical reasoning here. While I arguably act for a genuinely good reason—that is, I act on a consideration that counts in favor of doing what I did⁷—it still appears that I act for *the wrong kind of reason*. Indeed, you might even take umbrage at the mistake and reply, "You're not supposed to repay the money out of concern for my happiness. *You had a duty to repay me*. To act on the kind of consideration that you did is to misunderstand what is required of you here." (I will return shortly to this notion of a "wrong kind of reason." Here I simply want to make the intuitive point that the concept of "duty" is not easily expunged from an account of proper practical reasoning.⁸) So, returning now to our smoker, my point is that if she is indeed morally obligated to quit smoking, but she does so merely out of a generic concern for herself, then it's possible that she errs despite abandoning the habit. Like the borrower who repays the loan out of generic concern for the lender's happiness, the smoker, one might think, goes wrong by failing to acknowledge that she is supposed to act for reasons of duty or justice.⁹

⁷ It is extremely common these days for philosophers to define a reason as a consideration that counts in favor of acting. (See, for instance, Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.))

⁸ It is not necessarily impossible to do so, however. Hume famously refused to make the motive of duty foundational in his moral psychology (though he nevertheless attempted to give an account of what such a motivation would come to). And an act utilitarian might claim that an agent functions perfectly well when she maximizes utility, even if she lacks the concept of "duty" altogether. Resolving this issue is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

⁹ Of course, there is controversy about whether an agent must act for reasons of duty in *all* situations in which she has a duty. After all, although it's plausible to say that I have an obligation to visit my close friend when she is sick in the hospital, many would contend that a desire to cheer her up—and not a recognition of this duty—is the proper motive for making a visit. I myself do not find this view compelling—I believe that acting simply out of desire constitutes a failure to acknowledge what is required of me as a friend. But regardless of my personal intuitions about such cases, my point is just that it is *sometimes* the case that when an individual has a duty, she ought to act out of an acknowledgment that she has the duty, and so *if* there are indeed duties to the self, it will be an open question whether an individual would go wrong by failing to act out of recognition of such duties.

Third, it is a commonplace to associate the notion of moral wrongdoing with certain emotions and attitudes. For instance, the judgment that “X would wrong Y were X to ϕ ” implies that it would be proper for Y to experience certain emotions were X to ϕ —emotions such as resentment. Now, when an agent acts imprudently and suffers adverse consequences as a result, we expect her to experience regret. But if we conclude that an agent has *moral* reasons to treat herself in particular ways, then we might also conclude that when she acts contrary to those reasons (and thus violates her duties to herself), it is appropriate for her to experience a more morally-charged emotion—perhaps something that we might describe as self-directed resentment.

It now seems clear that acknowledging the existence of duties to the self will impact our views about how an agent ought to reason about what to do, our views about which kinds of reasons she ought to act for, and our views about which emotions it is proper for her to experience. Thus, to claim that persons have duties to themselves is not merely to insist on using certain terminology to describe an agent’s self-regarding reasons, but to advance a substantive philosophical thesis.¹⁰

3. A Problem for the Notion of Duties to the Self

If an individual can have moral reasons to treat *other parties* in particular ways, might we then simply insist that she can have moral reasons to treat *herself* in particular ways as well? Alison Hills, in one of the few recent defenses of duties to the self, does just this.¹¹ Hills asserts that, “everyone

¹⁰ But if we do indeed have *moral* reasons for treating ourselves in particular ways, what becomes of ordinary prudence? One possibility that suggests itself: prudential reasons retain their normative force as a general matter, but are constrained by duties to the self. So, one might hold (as Kant does) that prudence counsels an agent to take the means necessary to maximally satisfy her desires over time, or one might hold (as Sidgwick does) that prudence counsels an agent to act so as to maximize her pleasure over time. Then, in some instances, an agent will have duties to herself that preempt this counsel, requiring her to settle for fewer desires satisfied or less pleasure experienced over the course of her life. (I will discuss this possibility a bit more in section 5.) An alternative possibility—and an intriguing one—is that persons have a duty to themselves to be prudent, and that this duty supplies prudential reasons with their normative force. Recently, Christine Korsgaard has argued that in order to establish that “the principle of prudence” has normative grip, we must show that the principle is one that unifies an individual’s agency. But for Korsgaard, principles that unify an individual’s agency are *moral laws*. So she seems to be driving at the idea that if one is required to be prudent, it’s because being prudent is demanded by morality. (See her *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 52–58.) The possibility I’m raising here is Korsgaardian in spirit: perhaps the fact that I *owe it to myself*, morally speaking, to be prudent explains the normativity of prudential reasons. Unfortunately, I haven’t enough space to explore this possibility here.

¹¹ “Duties and Duties to the Self,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 40 (2003), pp. 131–142.

has a duty to promote others' well-being," by which she means that everyone has, "[forceful] reasons [to promote others' well-being] that do not depend on [one's] wanting to promote their well-being," and that, "override other reasons for action."¹² She then says that because reasons for action are universal, we must conclude that, "if you have a reason of a certain normative force to promote the well-being of others, you have a reason of the same normative force to promote your own well-being."¹³ What Hills says here is compelling, as far as it goes. Yet the issue cannot be settled quite so easily. In what follows, I will suggest, following several contemporary authors, that the distinctive characteristics of moral reasons are best explained by their "second-personal" character.¹⁴ I will then demonstrate that there is cause for skepticism about whether a person can relate to herself second-personally, in the way morality demands. The big worry, then, is that the very feature that makes moral reasons distinctive and worthy of special attention is also the feature that precludes the possibility of duties to the self. But before I elaborate on this thought, I need to say more about what it means for a reason to be "second-personal."

Michael Thompson has noticed that there is something common to judgments of the form, "X *wrongs* Y," "X *has a right against* Y," and, "X *has a duty to* Y."¹⁵ Such judgments express a relation between two individuals that appears absent from judgments of the form, "X ought to ϕ ," or, "It would be good for X to ϕ ," even when ϕ -ing involves doing something *to* Y, or *for* Y. Those, like Thompson, who emphasize this point often maintain that this sort of "bipolarity" is an irreducible notion, making it difficult to define properly. But to help illustrate what is distinctive about this species of judgment, consider a case discussed by Stephen Darwall. Imagine an individual who steps on another's foot, causing her pain. The offending individual, most would agree, has reason to remove her foot. An argument that she does could be made by noticing, with G. E. Moore, that, "doing so will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any possible

¹² Ibid., p. 135.

¹³ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁴ Some recent works that emphasize this aspect of morality include: T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*; Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Michael Thompson, "What is it to Wrong Someone?: A Puzzle About Justice," in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, eds. R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 333–384; R. Jay Wallace, "The Deontic Structure of Morality," in *Thinking about Reasons: Themes from the Philosophy of Jonathan Dancy*, eds. David Bakhurst, Brad Hooker, and Margaret Little (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Manuscript available at: <http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/file/2/Deonticstructure-final.pdf> (accessed February 28, 2013).

¹⁵ Thompson, "What is it to Wrong Someone?" p. 336.

alternative.”¹⁶ As such, the owner of the offending foot has a strong reason to remove it—a duty to do so, Moore thinks. The judgment arrived at here is of the form, “X *ought to* ϕ ,” or, “X *has a duty to* ϕ .” But according to Darwall, a foot-stomper who acts *merely* on the basis of this type of judgment fails to acknowledge the unique position that the owner of the trampled-upon foot occupies with respect to her action. Darwall thus introduces the notion of a second-personal reason—a kind of reason that an agent, by acting from it, acknowledges that she owes it *to a particular person* to act.¹⁷ The genuinely moral individual, he thinks, is sensitive to second-personal reasons, and thus makes judgments such as: “If I fail to remove my foot, I will *wrong this person*,” or, “This person *has a right against me*, requiring me to remove my foot,” or, “I *owe it to this person* to remove my foot.”

In the previous section, I gave three reasons why it matters that we designate some reasons “moral reasons.” Let me briefly mention some ways in which these three reasons relate to morality’s second-personal character. First, according to some authors at least, the preemptory character of moral reasons is best explained by the fact that the performance of a duty is *owed to* someone.¹⁸ This is most apparent in cases concerning rights.¹⁹ If I have a right to determine whether you touch me, or a right to demand repayment of a loan from you, or a right to ban you from my property, then I have the authority to make certain demands on your behavior. If you make your decision about whether to touch me, or whether to repay me, or whether to walk on my land, by weighing my demands against your own desires and ends, then you go wrong by failing to recognize my authority to make the ultimate decision about such matters. With respect to these issues, you owe it to me to act according to *my* judgment, regardless of what you judge the balance of reasons to favor.

Second, it is part of a view like Darwall’s that when an agent has a duty, she goes wrong if she fails to recognize and act for a reason that is second-personal.²⁰ Second-personal reasons are, in Darwall’s words, sometimes the

¹⁶ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Dover, 2004), p. 148.

¹⁷ The foot example is discussed in Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 5–10.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 91–100, and also Darwall’s “Authority and Reasons: Exclusionary and Second-Personal,” *Ethics* 120 (2010), pp. 257–278. Wallace also links the “deontic structure” of moral reasons to their being, “implicated in complexes of relational (or “bipolar”) normativity.” (See his “The Deontic Structure of Morality,” p. 19, online.)

¹⁹ Rights, it is often said, function as “side-constraints,” forbidding certain actions regardless of how weighty the reasons in favor of performing them are. (See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 30–35.)

²⁰ In fact, Darwall is explicit that one of his aims in the book is to show that a person who fails to act on second-personal reasons errs by acting for reasons of the wrong kind. (See *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 15–17, 120–121.)

“right kind of reasons” upon which to act. In recent years, philosophers have identified a range of cases in which an agent has a reason to believe, to intend, or to act, while nevertheless being rationally required to not believe, intend, or act upon that reason, due to the character of the reason itself. There are far too many of these cases to discuss here, but allow me to give a very rough illustration of one kind of case.²¹ Imagine that I am on a baseball team, and that I hit the ball and run to first base. When asked why I ran to first, I reply, “Running is good for my heart. I need exercise.” Certainly this is a genuine reason—the fact that running strengthens one’s heart is *a* consideration that counts in favor of running. But a baseball player who acts for this reason seems confused—he’s supposed to run to first base in order to try to win the game, or because this is his role on the team. So he’s criticizable, despite the fact that he acts for an otherwise respectable reason. Darwall understands the foot-stomper similarly: when the foot-stomper is deliberating about what to do, the fact that lifting his foot would increase the total amount of goodness in the universe might well be *a* consideration that counts in favor of performing the action, but it’s not a reason of the sort that a properly functioning agent will act upon in such a circumstance. She will instead act for a second-personal reason—she will act out of deference to the person whose foot is being trampled upon. Looking back, now, to the person who repays a loan out of concern for the lender’s happiness, one thing that seems to be missing from her practical thinking is the idea that the act is *owed* to the lender. Her mistake is to overlook the second-personal reason upon which she is required to act.

Third, some moral emotions are properly felt only in response to wrongs committed against oneself. For instance, philosophers commonly draw a distinction between resentment and indignation. Indignation is an emotion that I may feel in response to any morally bad action on the part of another, whereas resentment may only be directed toward those who have failed in their obligations *to me*.²² So whether or not some individual has a

²¹ A lot of the examples of “reasons of the wrong kind” are very different from the one I am highlighting here. For instance, a lot of the current discussion about this issue stems from the work of Christian Piller and Derek Parfit, who were interested specifically in the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic reasons for having a particular belief. (See Piller, “Normative Practical Reasoning,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Supplement) 25 (2001), pp. 195–216; Parfit, “Rationality and Reasons,” in *Exploring Practical Philosophy*, eds. Don Egonsson, Jonas Jeseffson, Björn Petersson, and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 17–39.) The debate has expanded to include other cases of wrong kinds of reasons, and there are debates about whether or not all of the cases are really examples of the same phenomenon. I cannot delve into those issues, though I do not think I need to sort them out in order to make my point here.

²² The classic statement of this view is given by Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, in *The Works of Bishop Butler, Vol. 1*, ed. J. H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1900), sermons VIII and IX.

genuinely second-personal reason for treating me in a particular way will often dictate which moral emotions are called for in the event that the individual fails to act upon her reason.

So up to this point, I have argued that there are several reasons why the designation “moral reasons” is significant, and I have suggested that these reasons are all closely linked to morality’s second-personal character.²³ So the important question for us in trying to determine whether there are duties to the self is whether an agent can have second-personal reasons to protect her own interests and autonomy. We need to determine whether we can properly make judgments such as, “X *wrongs* Y,” “X *has a right against* Y,” and, “X *has a duty to* Y,” in instances where X and Y are identical. But as we’ll now see, there is reason to question whether such judgments are even coherent.

There is no problem, as a general matter, with suggesting that a person can relate to herself in ways that she typically relates to others. A person can love herself, care for herself, know herself well, stand in judgment of herself, and so on. There is, however, an important objection to the very possibility of an individual standing in a moral relationship to herself. Kant—who ultimately marshals some rather arcane arguments in support of the view that there *are* duties to the self—articulates the objection by pointing out that, “the [agent] imposing the obligation could always release the [agent] put under obligation from the obligation, so that (if both are one and the same subject) he would not be bound at all to a duty he lays upon himself.”²⁴ More recently, Marcus Singer makes a similar argument, writing: “(1) If A has a duty to B, then B has a right against (or with respect to) A; (2) if B has a right against A, he can give it up and release A from the obligation; and (3) no one can release himself from an obligation. From this it [follows] that if one could have a duty to oneself... that this alleged

²³ While I do not want to insist that all reasons that we designate “moral reasons” have this second-personal character, those that do certainly comprise an important subset of our moral reasons, and it is these reasons that will be of primary interest to me here.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 173 (6: 417). Kant initially responds to this objection by asserting that all duties depend upon duties to the self. So if there are no duties to the self, then there are, Kant thinks, no duties at all. But since we know that there are duties, we must infer that there are duties to the self. So Kant concludes that the argument purporting to expose the self-contradictory nature of duties to the self is an antinomy. In attempting to resolve the antinomy, Kant distinguishes between the noumenal and phenomenal self. This allows him to divide the self into two, with one aspect possessing authority and the other owing (morally) its obedience to the other. Dividing the self in order to explain how an individual can have a duty to herself is a strategy that is attractive to me, but my argument will appeal to temporal divisions within a life rather than to the more mysterious Kantian notions of phenomena and noumena.

duty to oneself would be a ‘duty’ from which one could release oneself at will, which is self-contradictory.”²⁵ Both Kant and Singer are appealing to the idea that duties are second-personal. Because a duty is *owed to* someone in particular, that particular person possesses the authority to waive it. Thus, if a person were to owe the performance of a duty to herself, she could escape it through an act of sheer will.

This argument aspires to undermine the notion of duties to the self in a rather fundamental way. To see how, consider for a moment Hobbes’ argument in *Leviathan*, purporting to prove that a sovereign cannot be subject to the civil law: “[H]aving the power to make, and repeal laws, he may when he pleases, free himself from that subjection, by repealing those laws that trouble him... [H]e that can bind, can release; and therefore he that is bound to himself only, is not bound.”²⁶ Hobbes’ point is that civil laws fail to bind a sovereign in the way characteristic of genuine law. As such, we can know a priori that the civil law could never be a law *for the sovereign*. A similar insight lurks behind Kant and Singer’s attack on duties to the self. Because an individual would be able to release herself from any apparent duty to herself, the apparent duty would necessarily fail to bind her in the way characteristic of moral obligations. To be under a requirement that one can waive is, we might say, to be under no requirement at all. Thus, the notion of a duty to the self appears internally incoherent.

One might have misgivings about the assumption, made by both Kant and Singer, that an individual may always release others from duties owed to her. Some believe, for instance, that persons have inalienable rights, and that A necessarily wrongs B if she violates B’s inalienable rights, regardless of whether B consents. And along similar lines, Hills includes in her argument the premise—which she needs in order to avoid the Kant-Singer objection—that some duties are “unwaivable,” by which she means that individuals to whom such duties are owed are not permitted to release others from them.²⁷ However, I wish to resist resting my argument upon these claims for two reasons. First, whether or not inalienable rights or unwaivable duties exist is a matter of longstanding controversy. Hills insists, appealing mostly to intuition, that it is “very plausible” to claim that some duties are unwaivable. But to rest content with such an assertion would be to fail to take sufficiently seriously the thrust of Kant and Singer’s complaint. At the very least, we should grant them that there is an

²⁵ Marcus Singer, “Duties and Duties to Oneself,” *Ethics* 73 (1963), pp. 133–142 (quotation from p. 133).

²⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 184. (I have modified some of the spelling in the quotation.)

²⁷ “Duties and Duties to the Self,” p. 135.

air of mystery in the claim that A lacks the authority to release B from a duty, given that the duty itself is grounded in a claim that A has on B. If a duty is really owed *to A*, then how could A's decision about whether the duty ought to be observed be irrelevant?

Second, even if inalienable rights and unwaivable duties exist, they constitute a rather limited subset of all rights and duties (as even those who believe in such duties and rights will readily admit). Some think that a duty not to torture qualifies—perhaps a duty not to kill does as well. But few think that unwaivable duties extend far beyond this. So an attempt to rescue duties to the self by appealing to the existence of inalienable rights and unwaivable duties would, at best, leave us with duties to the self that are rather limited in their scope. These considerations, I think, should motivate us to consider whether we might answer the Kant-Singer objection in a different way. This is what I aim to do in the next section.

4. A Reply to the Kant-Singer Objection

The Kant-Singer objection gets purchase because in cases like those of the smoker and the nobleman, the “two persons” in the purported second-personal relationship are actually identical. It is the fact that the potential wrongdoer is identical with the victim that explains why she cannot be normatively bound by the purported duty. One tempting way to escape the objection, then, is to claim that temporal stages within a person's life are non-identical, metaphysically distinct entities—items that some authors refer to as “temporal parts.”²⁸ So, in our examples, the stage of the smoker's life that actually does the smoking would be treated as a distinct entity from the one that suffers from emphysema, and the stage of the nobleman's life that constrains the fortune would be treated as a distinct entity from the one that is eventually constrained. We could then say that the earlier stage owes it to the later stage to act in a particular way (either to quit smoking or to refrain from constraining the fortune), and that since the earlier stage isn't identical with the later stage, it cannot waive the duty. The objection is sidestepped, then, by reinterpreting our examples so that when we say, “X *owes it to Y*,” we *do not* consider X and Y to be identical. Unfortunately, this

²⁸ For a defense of the view that all persisting objects (including persons) are comprised of “temporal parts,” see Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). And while Parfit does not accept the metaphysical view that persisting objects are composed of temporal parts, he does deny that there is anything more to a temporally extended person than clusters of mental states at distinct moments, and the causal connections between them. So Parfit could treat a cluster of mental states at one moment as an entity that is distinct from (or that is not identical with) a cluster of mental states that exists later on—even when both belong to what we would normally consider to be the same person. (See *Reasons and Persons*, Part III).

approach brings with it some significant difficulties. Chief among them is that many metaphysicians object that it is either implausible or incoherent to claim that a temporally extended object is constituted by metaphysically distinct temporal parts.²⁹ So were we to pursue this strategy, the success of our argument for duties to the self would be contingent upon our successfully carrying out an ambitious and somewhat revisionary metaphysical project.

I do not think that carrying out such a project is necessary, however. In this section, I will offer an explanation of how our smoker can relate to herself over time, and our nobleman can relate to himself over time, in a manner that mirrors the way that two distinct persons relate to each other—and I will do this while assuming that a person is a single enduring entity, rather than a composite of metaphysically distinct temporal parts. To do this, I will argue that it isn't actually their metaphysical distinctness that ultimately explains why two persons can relate to each other second-personally. The explanation is that they each have distinct "perspectives" or occupy distinct "standpoints." After arguing for this, I will then proceed to demonstrate that an individual person herself occupies a succession of distinct perspectives over time, which is what ultimately enables her to relate to herself second-personally.

Since my argument will make heavy use of the idea of a perspective or standpoint, I wish to say a bit to clarify these notions. Very roughly, a perspective or a standpoint is a point of view from which one perceives, or feels emotions, or has sensations, or judges a proposition to be true, or wills some particular action, and so on. Most typically, these notions are appealed to in order to highlight asymmetries between the actual points of view of distinct individuals. We say, for instance, that, "The policy is desirable from Sally's perspective, but not from the perspectives of the others affected," or, "From Lisa's perspective, ϕ -ing seems reasonable, whereas from everyone else's perspective it seems reasonable for her to not ϕ ." However, some authors extend talk of perspectives in a way that abstracts away from individuals' *actual* points of view. For instance, Thomas Nagel famously talks of the "objective" perspective, from which the individual transcends the particularities of her own point of view and gains knowledge of the world as it is rather than as it appears.³⁰ To give another well-known example, John Rawls argues that members of a society should choose principles of justice not from their actual perspectives, but from a perspective from which they are deprived of knowledge of their

²⁹ See Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Parthood and Identity Across Time," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), pp. 201–220; Peter van Inwagen, "Four-Dimensional Objects," *Nous* 24 (1990), pp. 245–255.

³⁰ *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

particular personal characteristics.³¹ And, to give one final example, Christine Korsgaard suggests that an agent might deliberate about what to do from the perspective of one of her practical identities or social roles. So she might abstract away from her actual point of view, and consider what she has reason to do *qua* teacher, *qua* mother, *qua* Quaker, and so on.³²

Now, from the very beginning of his book, Darwall appeals to the notion of a perspective, saying that the second-person standpoint is a perspective from which one makes or acknowledges claims on the will and conduct of another.³³ On his account, second-personal reasons are generated either when an individual *actually* issues a justifiable demand from this standpoint, or when she could *hypothetically* issue one.³⁴ The notion of a perspective here serves two purposes. First, it highlights the fact that there exist distinct points of view from which ends and interests conflict. Second, it sets the stage for a story about how demands made from one point of view (on the basis of such ends and interests) can alter the normative situation faced from another perspective. To illustrate with a straightforward example involving actual perspectives of distinct individuals, imagine that Smith has a mild desire to stand where Jones is, and so steps on Jones' foot, which happens to be broken. (Let's stipulate that the incident occurs on a crowded bus, where invasions of one's personal space are expected, so long as no one is caused any pain.) From Smith's perspective, things go reasonably well, as his desire is satisfied. From Jones' perspective, things go terribly, as having his broken foot trampled upon is excruciating. Jones, as the occupier of the perspective from which things go badly, calls attention to the fact that he is in pain and demands that Smith remove his foot. If Smith refuses, then Jones judges that he is wronged by Smith. If Smith obliges, then Smith takes himself to be acting on a second-personal reason, recognizing that he owes it to Jones to remove his foot.

In this story, Smith and Jones are obviously metaphysically distinct persons. But, if I understand Darwall correctly, nothing of importance depends upon this. It is the fact that the two have distinct perspectives—and not their numerical distinctness *per se*—that enables them to stand in this

³¹ *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

³² *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, UK., Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 101–107.

³³ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, p. 3.

³⁴ Darwall's language is voluntarist throughout much of his book, leading some to conclude that the account itself is overly voluntarist. (See R. Jay Wallace, "Reasons, Relations, and Commands: Reflections on Darwall," *Ethics* 118 (2007), pp. 24–36.) But he does, in some places, appeal to the idea of a hypothetical moral community that makes demands on its members. (For a discussion of this point, see Darwall, "Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace, and Watson," *Ethics* 118 (2007), pp. 52–69, (esp. pp. 64–65).)

sort relationship to each other. That is to say, the relevant facts appear to be: there are distinct perspectives, the interests had from those perspectives conflict, and on the basis of the interests had from his perspective, Jones makes demands that Smith, from his perspective, takes to be reason-giving. This is how a second-personal reason is generated and acted upon. The distinctness of the persons might, in instances such as this, help explain why there exist distinct perspectives in the first place. But it's the *perspectives* that ultimately seem to be doing all of the philosophical work in the account. As such, nothing, as far as I can tell, stands in the way of our maintaining that second-personal reasons can be generated from perspectives other than the actual perspectives occupied by distinct persons. Of course, one might deny that second-personal reasons can be generated from some particular perspective by arguing that such a perspective does not exist, or that no one ever occupies it, or that no interests and ends attach to it. However, if we *can* tell a story involving two perspectives that contains all of the essential elements of our Jones and Smith tale from above, then we'll have every reason to believe that second-personal reasons can indeed be generated from those perspectives.

Given what I have been arguing, it appears that the possibility of an individual taking up the Darwallian second-person standpoint with respect to herself, and of generating second-personal reasons from it, is contingent upon her occupying a number of distinct perspectives from which demands could be issued and acknowledged. I shall now argue that an individual agent does just this. Let us consider, first, demands regarding wellbeing. Some burdens are essentially suffered from a particular *temporal* perspective.³⁵ That is, the fact that the sufferer has a special kind of perspective on the burdensome occurrence—a perspective characteristically had only from the first-person present standpoint—is essential to its being a burden at all.³⁶ Momentary pains or discomforts are paradigmatic examples. For instance, when an individual receives an inoculation at the hospital, the needle's pinch counts as a burden because of how things seem from the (first-person present) perspective she occupies while the needle is inserted. If there weren't some way that the

³⁵ Importantly, not all burdens are like this. If I hit my head and suffer amnesia, some argue that my life goes worse because many of the connections between the earlier and later perspectives are destroyed. This, despite there being no perspective at all from which that burden is suffered. (See Diane Jeske, "Persons, Compensation, and Utilitarianism," *The Philosophical Review* 100 (1993), pp. 541–575 (esp. pp. 558–560).)

³⁶ It is common to talk of burdens that are suffered at a particular time. But the set of burdens essentially suffered from a temporal perspective is arguably a mere subset of all such burdens. One might think, for instance, that an investor suffers significant burdens and, as a result, has a very bad day, even if she does not yet know that the market crashed and thus has no perspective on the event at all.

needle felt for a duration of time for the particular person, then receiving the needle would not constitute a burden. Now, perspectives of this sort are continuously gained and lost as time passes—a momentary perspective barely comes into existence before being replaced by another. Because of this, we are able to make judgments not only about how well things go for an individual person *simpliciter*, but also about how well they go for her from one temporal perspective or another. So we can say that things go fine from her perspective on her way to the doctor's office, badly from her perspective while the needle is inserted, a bit better from her perspective for the rest of the day as she nurses a sore arm, and then back to fine the next day.

With this, we are in a position to give an account of how the eighteen-year-old can have second-personal reasons to quit smoking. Early on, the smoker occupies a perspective from which she enjoys the pleasures of tobacco. Call this perspective "P₁." Later, she occupies a perspective from which she suffers from emphysema. Call this perspective "P₂." From P₁, the smoker could judge that she would, were she presently occupying P₂, issue a justifiable demand that she quit smoking. (Again, on Darwall's view, a hypothetical demand is sufficient to generate second-personal reasons.) Upon recognizing this, she could regulate her action so as to conform to the hypothetical demand. Here we have all the features that we said are relevant to the generation of second-personal reasons. There is the fact that there are distinct perspectives—P₁ and P₂. There is the fact that from P₁ and P₂, our smoker has interests that conflict. And there is the fact that on the basis of the interests had from P₂, the smoker could make (hypothetical) demands that she herself, from P₁, takes to be reason-giving. Thus, it seems that we have a coherent account of what it would mean to take up the second-person standpoint with respect to oneself, and to generate and act upon second-personal reasons from it. And, importantly, our account doesn't rest upon the claim that a person is composed of metaphysically distinct temporal parts. Instead, we showed that because a single person occupies many distinct temporal perspectives, it is possible for her—a single enduring entity—to play the role of both wrongdoer and victim.

Now, we could tell a similar story involving any two perspectives that an individual can occupy, so long as it's possible for the individual to make and acknowledge demands from those perspectives. For instance, earlier I mentioned Korsgaard's view that an individual can deliberate from perspectives relative to her particular practical identities or social roles. Building on this, one might plausibly suggest that the individual has interests from those perspectives that could ground justifiable demands—demands that she expects to be acknowledged from the point of view of one of her other practical identities. So she might, from her standpoint as a

professor, have an interest in having time to prepare for class, and she might demand that this interest be respected when she's deliberating from her standpoint as a mother. This would be sufficient to get our "second-personal" story going.³⁷ However, at this point we run up against the worry raised by Kant and Singer. A woman who has two practical identities simultaneously would be in the position, one might think, to waive whatever apparent duties are generated from the perspective of either of those identities. That is, while we might allow that the woman could be in a position to make a demand as a professor, we might also think that she is in the position to withhold the demand, or to release herself from the obligation generated when she makes it. If this is right, then the putative duty would fail to bind her in the way characteristic of moral duties—that is to say, it would be no duty at all.³⁸ However, putative duties generated when demands are issued from one temporal perspective to another are different in this regard, which is why I've emphasized them. When a duty is generated from a particular temporal perspective, it stands to reason that were it to be waived, it would have to be waived from the standpoint from which the (hypothetical) demand that generated the second-personal reason was issued. So in the smoker case, since the (hypothetical) demand that generated the reason is issued from P_2 , it is from P_2 that she would have to waive the duty. But, the offending act occurs prior to her coming to occupy P_2 , and so even if the duty was waivable in principle, securing the release would nevertheless be impossible. We can thus conclude that reasons to protect one's own wellbeing generated through demands issued from a particular temporal perspective can indeed bind an individual in the way characteristic of moral duties.

Let's turn now to the nobleman. Consider, first, the fact that his ends are adopted, and are pursued, from a particular temporal perspective. It is, after all, from his perspective as a young man that he endorses socialist values and then pursues ends that those values support. Call this perspective " P_3 ." From his perspective as an older man, the nobleman endorses conservative values—values diametrically opposed to the socialist ideals he endorsed earlier—and adopts ends based upon them. Call this perspective " P_4 ." So

³⁷ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to address this possibility.

³⁸ I don't myself, however, want to insist that it would not be possible to generate duties from the perspective of a particular practical identity or social role. In fact, I suspect it might be. What's needed in order to establish that it is indeed possible is an argument showing that a person would sometimes be unable to waive the apparent duties from perspectives associated with her practical identities. One possible approach involves arguing that an individual like the one we've been discussing cannot waive some duties without abdicating her identity as a professor or a mother, and that this fact might render the duties associated with those roles unwaivable. I can't pursue this thought here, however.

just like the Christian and the Muslim who have different, incompatible ends endorsed from their own perspectives, the nobleman has conflicting ends endorsed from different perspectives (albeit ends endorsed at different times). Now, from P_3 , the nobleman might judge that he would justifiably demand from P_4 that he not manipulate his finances so as to force his continued support for the socialist cause. Then he might, from P_3 , regulate his action so as to conform to the hypothetical demand. Here again, we see the features relevant to the generation of second-personal reasons. We have the fact that there are distinct perspectives— P_3 and P_4 . We have the fact that ends endorsed from these perspectives conflict. (In this case, it is ends rather than interests that conflict. But this makes little difference.) Appealing from P_4 to the importance of being able to autonomously pursue his own ends at a particular time, the nobleman makes (hypothetical) demands that he, from P_3 , takes to be reason-giving. Thus, to say that the nobleman owes it to himself not to constrain the fortune is simply to say that from P_4 he could issue a legitimate demand that he not do so.

Here too, since the second-personal reason is generated from a particular temporal perspective, it stands to reason that were the duty associated with it waivable in principle, it would have to be waived from the perspective from which the (hypothetical) demand that generated the reason was issued. So because the demand that generated the reason is issued from P_4 , it is from *that* perspective that the nobleman would have to release himself from the obligation. But, since the offending act occurs prior to the nobleman's coming to occupy P_4 , securing the release is impossible.

It seems, then, that we've answered the Kant-Singer objection without appealing either to the existence of unwaivable duties, or to the view that persons are composed of metaphysically distinct temporal person-parts. So what does this establish? On its face, merely that duties to the self are *possible*—seemingly a minor step toward establishing that they are *actual*. But as we noted earlier, if we acknowledge the existence of moral reasons to treat persons in certain ways generally, then absent some explanation about why such reasons would not apply to oneself, an agent should accept that she has moral reasons to treat *herself* in certain ways. The Kant-Singer objection was, of course, an attempt to provide such an explanation. But since we've answered that objection, we may now comfortably conclude that we indeed have duties to the self—duties that preempt other considerations, duties that we are sometimes supposed to acknowledge when we act, duties that call for certain morally-charged emotions.

I wish to conclude this section, now, by considering a worry about the account I've just given.³⁹ Darwall never talks of “Smith from his perspective at t_1 ” owing things to “Jones from his perspective at t_1 .” He

³⁹ I want to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to address this point.

simply talks of “Smith’s perspective” and “Jones’ perspective,” and the duties that can be generated from each. My point has been that a temporal perspective seems to have the features necessary to generate second-personal reasons. But given Darwall’s exclusive focus on perspectives like “Smith’s perspective” and “Jones’ perspective,” a reader might have the lingering worry that there exist such things as “the perspective of Smith overall” and “the perspective of Jones overall,” and that there is something about *these* standpoints in particular—something that mere temporal perspectives lack—that renders them the morally relevant ones.

Now, I don’t object to talking of a “perspective of a person overall,” by which I mean a point of view from which an individual abstracts away from the temporal perspective she actually occupies, and discerns which states of affairs are preferable and which courses of action are best when her life is considered *as a whole*. But as far as I’m aware, neither Darwall nor anyone else who has developed an account of morality’s second-personal character offers any reason for thinking that duties must be generated from such a perspective. In fact, although nothing I’ve said rules out the possibility of discovering such a reason, I believe my account actually casts significant doubt upon the suggestion that the “perspective of a person overall” is the only perspective from which duties could be generated.

To see how it does, consider for a moment Rawls’ celebrated argument against classical utilitarianism in *A Theory of Justice*. According to Rawls, the utilitarian attempts to discern the content of morality from the perspective of an “impartial spectator,” who organizes, “the desires of all persons into one coherent system of desire,” such that, “many persons are fused into one.”⁴⁰ Rawls objects that in so doing, the utilitarian illicitly ignores the *distribution* of goods among individuals. “Utilitarianism,” he writes, “does not take seriously the distinction between persons.”⁴¹ The argument has obvious appeal for any reader who already believes that we should take seriously the distinction between persons (and who has just failed to notice utilitarianism’s deficiency in this regard). But I suspect that the account owes much of its influence to the fact that it also pressures the reader to take the distinction seriously, if she hadn’t previously.⁴² It does so, I believe, through implicit appeal to the notion of a standpoint. Rawls

⁴⁰ *Revised Edition*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Rawls is not explicit about whether he intends only to address a reader already convinced that the distinction between persons should be taken seriously, or whether he intends to convince the unconvinced that it should be. Admittedly, there are lines in the text that suggest the former intention. But regardless of his actual intentions, I believe that his account actually does provide us with some reason for taking the distinction seriously.

calls our attention to the fact that each person occupies a standpoint of her own, from which she has ends and interests that differ from those of others. Because of this, a contribution to the aggregate good of all does not constitute a contribution to each person's good—indeed, it might require diminishing significantly some persons' wellbeing. From the standpoint of those who suffer, the course of action chosen from the perspective of the impartial spectator will be unwelcome. This, I take it, is supposed to inspire us to question the utilitarian's assumption that we may simply ignore issues of distribution, and inspire us to contemplate—with Darwall—which demands might be made from the standpoints from which the burdens will be suffered.⁴³

Rawls' argument is obviously far from the final word on this matter—there are still utilitarians among us, after all. But his account has inspired many authors to develop views in moral philosophy that take seriously the distinction between persons, and it has compelled utilitarians to confront the fact that pleasure and satisfaction are ultimately enjoyed from a plurality of distinct perspectives. I hope that the account I've offered in this section can accomplish something analogous, which is to cast doubt upon the suggestion that we can simply abstract away from and then overlook an individual's temporal perspectives, while privileging the perspective of the person overall. Some interests and ends, I've argued, attach to temporal perspectives, and a contribution to the good of the person overall will not necessarily constitute a contribution to the good enjoyed from each of those perspectives. Indeed, advancing the good of a person overall might require significant suffering from some perspectives. From the standpoint from which the burdens are suffered, the course of action chosen from the perspective of the person overall will be unwelcome. So just as Rawls' account calls into doubt the assumption that we may ignore issues of distribution between persons, I hope that my account calls into doubt the assumption that we may simply ignore issues of distribution within a life.

None of this implies that the perspective of a person overall is irrelevant to moral philosophy, nor does it imply that duties cannot be generated from it. In fact, since I think that there is such a standpoint, and since I suspect that there are interests had from it, I am inclined to think that the standpoint *is* relevant.⁴⁴ My purpose here is simply to question whether this standpoint is the *only* perspective from which duties can be generated, which I hope to

⁴³ In fact, Darwall explicitly states that in giving his account, he's exploring a potential way of grounding contractualism—the moral theory, inspired largely by Rawls, that one's actions must be justifiable from the point of view of all those affected. (See *The Second-Person Standpoint*, pp. 35–38.)

⁴⁴ Here the analogy with Rawls breaks down, as he *is* interested in denying that demands made from the perspective of the impartial spectator are morally significant.

have accomplished by putting pressure on the reader to take seriously the distinction between separate temporal perspectives within a life.⁴⁵

5. Intra-Personal Justice and Self-Resentment

I will conclude this essay by briefly considering two striking implications of my account. First, I will suggest that my account challenges some widely-held views about what proper practical reasoning consists in by implying that a theory of practical reason ought to contain within it a theory of intra-personal justice. Second, I will suggest that we should, in light of my account, rethink some of our views about moral emotions, specifically with regard to resentment.

To begin, consider this famous passage from Rawls: “[E]ach person is certainly free to balance his own losses against his own gains. We may impose a sacrifice on ourselves now for the sake of a greater advantage later. A person quite properly acts, at least when others are not affected, to achieve his own greatest good, [and] to advance his rational ends as far as possible.”⁴⁶ Rawls’ intention here is to say something uncontroversial. So obvious are these basic assumptions, Rawls thinks, that it is tempting to apply them illicitly to an entire community. Indeed, these assumptions to which he gives voice are rarely called into question. But given what we said in the previous section about taking seriously the distinction between separate temporal perspectives within a life, it’s clear that some reconsideration of these assumptions is in order.

So let’s return first to the smoker case. On the received view, what the smoker should do, from her perspective as a young person, is attempt to balance the wellbeing she will enjoy at various moments over the course of her life so as to realize her greatest good overall—that is, she should smoke if she expects the pleasure of smoking to outweigh the suffering later on. But since we’ve concluded that we ought to take seriously the distinction between temporal perspectives, we need to consider the decision from the standpoint that the smoker occupies as she suffers from the lung disease. And it seems to me that she would have, at the very least, *prima facie* grounds for objecting to the smoking; after all, smoking would cause terrible suffering from that perspective. The upshot is that the prospect of suffering burdens from a particular temporal perspective can provide an individual with a moral reason for acting a particular way—a reason that would preempt or silence

⁴⁵ This interestingly suggests the possibility that duties that hold between distinct persons are sometimes or are often generated from temporal perspectives, rather than from a person’s overall perspective. It also raises questions about how to understand the moral relationship between a person’s overall perspective, and the individual temporal perspectives that she occupies over the course of her life.

⁴⁶ *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, p. 21.

considerations about her overall wellbeing. That is to say, it's possible for the self-imposition of burdens to be morally impermissible *even when the imposition of those burdens leaves the individual better off on the whole than she otherwise would have been*. If this is right, then what we've established is that an agent is sometimes forbidden from engaging in the sort of interest-balancing, and good-maximizing that philosophers, economists, and social scientists often associate with rational prudence.⁴⁷

But perhaps our smoker would be permitted to use tobacco after all. If there is indeed a "perspective of the person overall," it's possible that the smoker could reasonably demand from that standpoint that she be allowed to smoke. My purpose here isn't to settle this particular moral issue one way or the other, but to point out that once we take seriously the distinction between separate temporal perspectives, and acknowledge the existence of duties to the self, we need to confront questions about whether and when it is permissible to impose burdens upon oneself for the sake of advancing one's overall good—questions whose answers might not be as obvious as it would initially seem.

Now let us return to the nobleman case. In the case as we described it, the nobleman, as an older man, runs up against a constraint on his choice that eventuates from an exercise of his own autonomy—albeit one that occurred at an earlier time. Intuitively, this seems morally different from having his choice situation constrained through an exercise of *someone else's* autonomy, as occurs in the case of the Muslims who are prevented by a Christian from building the mosque. Might this imply that the nobleman commits no moral wrong after all? Perhaps. But there's a complication here. Just as one might think that it matters whether an individual suffers burdens from a particular temporal perspective, one might think that it matters whether an individual is able to exercise her autonomy at particular moments. This is why, I take it, we feel a bit uncomfortable with the nobleman plotting against himself in the way he does. The thought of the old conservative being constrained so that he must support the socialist cause seems troubling, on account of the apparent lack of autonomy he exhibits in his old age. I think this is also the reason why most liberals are concerned to protect an individual's *ongoing* ability to exercise autonomy, rather than merely her ability to commit herself to whatever long-term plan she pleases. (Most liberals, for instance, deny that an individual may permissibly contract to sell herself into slavery.) Thus, it seems to me that the nobleman, from his perspective as an older man, would have *prima facie* grounds for objecting to his plotting against himself in the way he does in the example.

⁴⁷ This is basically the first possibility I discussed in footnote 10—prudence is constrained by duties to the self.

Once again, my primary purpose here isn't to argue that a person has any particular duty to himself, and so I'm not claiming that the nobleman is definitely forbidden from plotting against himself. But the existence of duties to the self raises the question of whether a person can sometimes have his reasons for pursuing his preferred long-term plans preempted by moral considerations pertaining to his ability to exercise his autonomy at particular times in the future—an issue that I believe merits further investigation.

It thus seems, based upon the considerations laid out above, that we need something like a theory of justice for individual persons as they persist through time—one that doesn't simply assume that an individual possesses a general moral permission to balance and weigh her own interests and ends in order to decide what she'll do, but that instead takes seriously the possibility that considerations of justice silence some considerations that would otherwise factor into her deliberations. After all, when Rawls claims that an individual is free to impose burdens upon herself in order to advance her overall good and her rational ends, he's drawing attention to what he takes to be a profound difference between the intra-personal and the inter-personal—a difference that inspires him to offer a theory of inter-personal justice. But in casting doubt upon Rawls' assumptions about what individual persons may permissibly do, I've undermined any basis for thinking that we don't need an intra-personal theory of justice. So it seems reasonable to conclude that we do, in fact, need a theory of intra-personal justice specifying what one owes to oneself, and from which perspectives one owes it. And developing such a theory would, no doubt, require seriously rethinking many of our assumptions about how we should reason about what to do.

Now I will move on to my discussion of moral emotions. The smoker and the Russian nobleman might, when they are older, eventually come to regret their actions. But if we have genuine duties to ourselves, generic regret might not be sufficient. They should, perhaps, feel something with more moral charge—something akin to resentment. The word “resentment” is rarely used to describe any emotion that an individual directs toward herself. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that a self-directed emotion that functions like resentment is among the moral emotions that an individual ought sometimes to experience. This becomes plausible once we consider resentment's purpose. Jeffrie Murphy writes, “resentment (in its range from righteous anger to righteous hatred) functions primarily in defense... of certain *values of the self*.” In particular, Murphy thinks that resentment is a proper reaction to wrongful injury or to a violation of one's rights—it is a way of asserting one's value or standing in the face of an attack.⁴⁸ An

⁴⁸ Jeffrie Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” in *Forgiveness and Mercy*, eds. Jeffrie Murphy and Jean Hampton (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 14–34 (quotation from p. 16).

attitudinal or emotional push-back in response to a particular affront is, according to Murphy, a healthy display of self-respect. In fact, the absence of such a response is often problematic. Even Jean Hampton, who expresses significant skepticism about whether resentment is generally a manifestation of emotional health, admits that some situations seem to demand the emotion. Her example is a rape victim who fails to resent her attacker. Such a lack of resentment shows, we might think, a problematic unwillingness on the part of the victim to properly acknowledge and assert her own worth.⁴⁹

But if it's important to assert one's worth in the face of attacks from others, and if our way of doing so involves adopting certain attitudes and experiencing certain emotions, then what reason could there be to deny that similar attitudes and emotions are called for in order to assert one's worth when the attack comes from oneself? That is to say, for the very same reason that we would criticize the rape victim for *merely* regretting that she was raped, we might also criticize our smoker and noblemen for *merely* regretting their actions. The disregard that resulted in their suffering or their lack of autonomy is, it seems to me, an affront that should be addressed for the very same reason that inter-personal affronts should be.

Now, I don't want to insist that self-directed resentment will *feel* the same as other-directed resentment. Nor do I mean to imply that the implications of resenting oneself will be precisely the same as the implications of resenting others. The fact that the individual is both the wrongdoer and victim might change things in important ways. My point is just that the emotional and attitudinal implications of having duties to oneself deserve more philosophical attention than they've received as of late. Indeed, my purpose generally in this essay has not been settle all of the issues surrounding the topic of duties to the self, but instead to suggest that the authors of the 17th and 18th centuries were correct—the topic should be among those that we inquire into when we engage in moral philosophy.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Jean Hampton, "Forgiveness, Resentment and Hatred," in *ibid.*, pp. 35–87 (the rape victim example is mentioned on p. 55).

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