

Part I: *Second-Personal Reason*

Chapter 1: Introduction—Second-Personal Reason and Judgment

When I confront a human being as my Thou and speak the basic word I-Thou to him, then he is no thing among things nor does he consist of things. He is no longer He or She, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition to be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborliness and seamless, he is Thou and fills the firmament.

—Martin Buber, *I and Thou*¹

§1. Second-Personal Thought and Talk

Everyday thought and talk are saturated with practical judgments that connect and oppose distinct persons, one to another. We speak in ordinary life not just of a person's doing good and bad, acting rightly and wrongly, or being virtuous and vicious. We speak also of their *owing something to* someone, of *wronging* someone, and of *having a right against* someone. These latter formulations represent not just a distinctive mode of rhetoric, but invoke a family of ideas that characteristically inform the understanding of mature human agents. Consider: When Cain struck his brother down, he did wrong as well as exhibit the vice of envy. But one would have to be morally inept not to conceive of the wrong done, and the viciousness displayed, as perpetrated specifically *against Abel*. Claudius did bad when he poisoned the king, manifesting greed and ambitiousness as he executed his coup. But the morally attuned theatergoer will note as well that Claudius's wretchedness constitutes a violation *against a particular individual*, King Hamlet.

¹ Buber 1970, 59.

Mayella Ewell transgressed against both civil and moral law when she perjured herself at trial, manifesting grievous and inexcusable dishonesty. But her words *victimized specifically the object of her slander*, the innocent Tom Robinson, and the special ethical position occupied by him in Harper Lee's tale is very much part of the point.

Attention to the “second-personal” aspect of these cases—the aspect that relates two persons to one another as a *Thou* or a *You*, such that they might say “You owed this to me” or “I wronged You”—is necessary for any nuanced understanding of them, as well as for grasping the implications of what's gone on.² That Cain murdered his brother distinguishes his actions from those of Eve when she bit the forbidden apple. The latter's behavior is indicative of defect, for sure, and its consequences were dire. But the former's indicate a willingness to violate another person, another human. The Cain story thus tells of a specific variety of evil to which creatures like us are prone, one that sets us against each other as wrongdoers to victims. Claudius's murder of the elder Hamlet serves not just to mark his ruthlessness, but to invite theatergoers into a specifically second-personal mode of engagement. The form his viciousness takes, after all, is relevant not just to the state of his moral character, but drives the narrative in crucial respects, determining who must be avenged and who must do the avenging. Mayella's false testimony focuses the reader's attention not just on the unfortunate dishonesty tarnishing the courtroom, but on the specific racially-motivated wrong perpetrated by her against Tom. The slander is inflicted upon a particular victim by a particular wrongdoer, each with a particular historically-relevant

² What I call “second-personal,” others call “bipolar” or “dyadic.” I'll favor the former, though my reasons for doing so are stylistic rather than philosophical.

identity, and readers of *To Kill a Mockingbird* are expected to recognize this and connect it to the thought of countless others who have been done similar injustice.

Of course, as inheritors of the Biblical text, as theatergoers, and as connoisseurs of literature, we render these judgements from the perspective of a spectator—we notice from afar that others are normatively connected and opposed, rather than judging that we ourselves are so implicated. But when any of us steps out into the world and encounters another person, this second-personal moral order becomes *practically* relevant, demanding action and guiding our behavior. I want to steal your cloak, but resist the urge because doing so would violate *you*. You steal my cloak, and I resent *you*, and demand compensation from *you*, and carry out a campaign of revenge against *you*. Someone slanders me, ruining my reputation, and I judge that I have been wronged *by that person* and seek compensation *from them*. I occupy a public office and can implement an ordinance that unfairly advantages my family. But I do not, because I serve the public, and I owe fairness and impartiality *to each of them*. I am the defendant in civil court. The plaintiff has filed a claim *against me*. When the judge renders a verdict, she finds *for the plaintiff*, and demands that I make restitution *to her*.³ Second-personal thinking is as relevant

³ It is a dominant theme in Ernest Weinrib's *The Idea of Private Law* (1995) that the whole of private law is shot through with the kinds of second-personal judgments I'm invoking here. In today's context, this means all our political and economic practices as well, given the way private law shapes, structures, and constitutes them. So, if Weinrib is correct, it stands to reason that second-personal judgment saturates not only our everyday thought and talk, but the entirety of our institutional world.

from the perspective of the agent as it is from the perspective of the spectator—probably more so.⁴

Second-personal thought and talk is as familiar as it is pervasive. Our engagement with art, the news, the law, office holders, and institutions are all mediated by judgments of this sort, and whenever we confront others in the world, our relationships are shaped, constituted, and regulated by them. Describe a complex scenario or tell a story that involves multiple people interacting, and try to do it without adverting to second-personal notions—the task will, more often than not, reveal itself to be impossible.⁵ So ubiquitous is the second-person that, like the proverbial fish who overlooks the water in which it swims, we might well fail to take note of it at all.

⁴ Arguably, second-personal normativity governs, or ought to govern, a person's relationship to herself as well. We talk of a person owing something *to herself*, for instance, which suggests that she confronts herself second-personally in the way that she confronts other metaphysically distinct persons. Whether a person does or can relate to herself in this way is a controversial matter, and so I will set that issue to the side. However, my previous project is a book-length defense of the claim that a person does indeed relate to herself second-personally, and does in fact owe moral duties to herself (Schofield 2021a).

⁵ It's possible that this is culturally-specific. There is, for instance, a debate about whether Confucian cultures make use of second-personal normativity at all. (For a discussion of this, see Seung-hwan Lee's "Was There a Conception of Rights in Confucian Virtue-Based Morality?" (1992).) For the moment, though, the most important thing is to fix on the relevant ideas. If Confucian societies do indeed lack second-personal concepts, then what I am doing here is pointing to the thing that some cultures have that others—for worse, or possibly for better—lack.

§2. Philosophy and the Second-Person

Given their penchant for interrogating the familiar and the pervasive, one might expect that philosophers would have placed this topic squarely within their study of ethics, politics, and practical rationality. Yet, the status of the second-person in contemporary philosophy is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, the notions of owing, wronging, and rights fill the pages of ethics texts—one can hardly introduce a moral dilemma, ask about how one ought to live, or probe the nature of right and wrong without deploying them, and so they find their way into the conversation regardless of whether they are ever consciously introduced. On the other hand, second-personal judgment and reason *per se* often go unremarked upon, passed over with little curiosity or wonder, left untouched by the philosopher’s characteristic scrutiny.

Consider, for instance, the way that an introductory ethics course will prod the notions of good, right, and virtuous, with an eye to problematizing them and to raising the possibility that we do not truly understand them. “What is it for an action *to be good*?”, “What is it for someone *to do the right thing*?” “What does it even mean to *possess a virtue*?” These are questions with which philosophical instruction typically commences, and with which philosophical curiosity is typically provoked. Left out, though, are questions such as “What is it *to owe something to someone*?” and “What does it mean for one person *to wrong another*?”⁶ Absent is the Socratic

⁶ Russ Shafer-Landau’s excellent *A Concise Introduction to Ethics* (2020) is typical in this regard. Chapters are devoted to consequentialism, Kantianism, virtue ethics, and ethics of care, and significant space is spent on the concepts of right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and vicious. But no chapter is devoted to what it is to owe someone something, or to wrong someone, and within the chapters themselves these issues are taken up only implicitly, if at all. This is not to criticize the text, which accurately reflects the preoccupations of contemporary

worry that these notions are deployed without sufficient understanding, and that we fail to grasp the difference between, say, doing wrong and wronging someone, or having a reason to act and owing it to someone to act. And even the notion of having a right against someone, which is much more likely to be broached as part of a standard philosophical education, is apt to be treated as a special topic in the philosophy of law instead of one that pervades the whole of practical philosophy. Hohfeldian claim-rights, everyone knows, correlate with duties had by those against whom the right is held, and this will be highlighted in any elementary discussion of rights theory (Hohfeld 1913). But Hohfeld himself is clear that his interests pertain specifically to *legal* rights, of the sort introduced through positive law. The second-personal nature of moral rights, and what it might mean for people to be connected second-personally outside the confines of a legal system, are topics left to the side by him and many students of his thought.

Philosophy begins to seem a bit more alive to the second-person, perhaps, once we look beyond the standard first-year undergraduate curriculum. A familiar controversy in the promising literature, for instance, concerns whether honoring an agreement is rightful because doing so sustains a useful social practice, or if it is rightful instead because fidelity is in some sense *owed to the promisee*.⁷ An act of infidelity might, of course, chip away at the entire institution of promising, and with it the efficiency and utility that it secures. But, it is sometimes said, the ultimate problem with infidelity seems to consist not in these losses, but in the wrong inflicted by

ethics. But it does suggest that the second-personal concepts I'm referring to do not occupy a place of centrality in ethical theory as it's currently practiced.

⁷ The target here is typically Rawls's rule-utilitarian defense of promise-keeping in his "Two Concepts of Rules" (1955), which detractors such as Melden (1977) and Scanlon (1990) contend fails to properly represent the promiser's normative relation to the promisee.

the promisor on the one she betrays—a contention that makes explicit appeal to second-personal notions. And in the animal ethics literature, to give another example, controversy has sometimes arisen over whether maltreatment of animals is wrongful because of its tendency to harden the hearts of the abusers, or if it is instead wrongful because decency is *owed to the animals themselves*.⁸ Again, the whole discussion centers on second-personal notions, as the debate concerns not just how animals ought be treated, but whether they are owed anything, whether they can be wronged, and whether they have rights against us. Thus, it appears that this topic I'm claiming has been ignored can be found in at least some regions of contemporary practical philosophy.

Yet, even as these notions are invoked, their precise character typically goes unscrutinized. “But what does it mean to say that I owe *to you* the keeping of my promise, beyond that I have a reason to keep it?” “But what does it mean to say that I owe decent treatment *to the workhorse*, beyond that I have some reason to act decently with respect to her?” Such questions have tended not to take center stage, if they're even raised at all. But this should lead us to wonder: Would any of us be able explain this notion of ‘owing to’ if challenged by an interlocutor? Or would our confidence in what we thought we knew dissipate under the weight of Socratic interrogation? Would the account of ‘owing to’ offered by each of us coincide,

⁸ Kant denies that we have direct duties to non-human animals, claiming instead that certain sorts of treatment toward them are necessary for proper development and maintenance of the virtues (2001, 212-213). Whatever duty we humans have toward them is thus indirect, according to him. A common response here is incredulity at the idea that a duty to refrain from torturing the animal is directed toward myself, or my fellow humans, rather than the animal, with Tom Regan offering the most well-known expression of the complaint in his *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983, 174-185).

revealing broad agreement in our collective understanding? Or would we discover that we interpret these forms of words in wildly divergent, perhaps inconsistent, and perhaps irreconcilable, ways? The absence of sustained inquiry into the second-person makes it impossible to know for certain. But the possibility that we don't, in fact, know what we mean is suggested, more or less, by the entire history of philosophy. And so we oughtn't be content to thump the table, emphatically declaring that, "Promises are **owed to** the promisee!", or to italicize repeatedly phrases like "*to the animals*" when distinguishing the retrograde view from more enlightened ones. It is a philosophical imperative, here, that we push for the kind of deeper understanding that the discipline typically seeks.

Recent years, however, have brought with them some increase in the level of attention paid to these topics. Much of this is due to Stephen Darwall's magisterial treatise *The Second-Person Standpoint* (2006), which insists upon the centrality of the second-person for any meta-ethics worth pursuing.⁹ Here, notions such as *owing to*, *wronging*, and *have a right against* are identified as among the most significant in all of modern morality, with the interrelations among them and the implications of our using them serving as the primary topics of investigation throughout. Yet, readers of that text sometimes express bewilderment at the very idea of a second-personal reason. Yes, proficiency with second-personal concepts is a crucial aspect of human agency, and yes, such concepts are indispensable for understanding ethics—it is the

⁹ Important contemporary discussions of second-personal issues predate Darwall. Ernest Weinrib (1995) emphasizes ways in which private law connects one person to another. Christine Korsgaard (1996) incorporates second-personal elements into her neo-Kantian account. Michael Thompson (2004) raises concerns about whether various practical philosophical traditions can make room for second-personal normativity. But Darwall's book brought significant attention to the topic and remains at the center of ongoing debates.

crowning achievement of the book that it makes this case so thoroughly, so compellingly. But what do we say to our Socratic interlocutor, who professes puzzlement over all such talk, agitating for a proper philosophical account of its metaphysics and nature? Has Darwall given us sufficient resources to meet this challenge? Some readers, even admiring ones, have doubts, and this is where the bewilderment begins to creep in.¹⁰ For if we lack the resources to meet this challenge, then it appears that we are left thumping the table, italicizing words, insisting on the monumental importance of owing something *to a person*, all without truly understanding what it is that we say—a rather dismal state to be in, for those convinced of the second-person’s philosophical significance.

§3. Is an Account of the Second-Person Necessary?

Of course, one possibility is that there’s nothing particularly deep here to give an account of. It’s not uncommon for philosophers to make too much of some familiar phrases or concepts, insisting on mystifying them without good reason. And here, one might suspect that any insistence on mystifying the notions of *owing to another*, *wronging another*, or *having a right against another* reflects a tendency toward unmotivated theorizing more than it does any sense that our understanding is deficient. But whether such suspicions are warranted, or instead are overly dismissive, should itself be treated as an unsettled matter. There is, after all, a venerable philosophical tradition premised on both the fundamentality and deep significance of second-personal reason and judgment, populated by thinkers who are both celebrated as profound and

¹⁰ For doubts about whether Darwall has managed to account for the second-personality of certain reasons and about whether there really does exist a distinctively second-personal sort of normativity, see Lavin 2008, 2014, Haase 2014a, 2014b, and Raz 2010.

denigrated as obscurantist. Rousseau introduces his social philosophy with puzzlement about how one person can constitute a source of reasons for another. Fichte argues that self-consciousness is achieved only once a person has demands placed upon her by another. Hegel believes that recognition of the other is a social-historical achievement at which all ethics and politics aim. Buber talks of the transformation in my thinking when I treat another person as a Thou, rather than a He, a She, or a They. Levinas is preoccupied with an individual's encounter with the Other, which catalyzes a new ethical form of acting and being. But these philosophers, while they are known, are often not read. Those who do read them tend to identify more with the "continental" philosophical camp than with the "analytic" camp. And contemporary audiences are as likely to find them confused as they are to find them insightful. If there is a lesson here, it is this: the status of the second-person within contemporary philosophy is at best uncertain, ambiguous, and equivocal.

My contention, which motivates the first part of this book, is that it is worth considering what status it *ought* to have. Whether the second-personal notions at the heart of these thinkers' works serve only to confuse matters, or instead point toward a body of distinctive concepts requiring attention of their own, is a question in need of an answer. My task in the next few chapters will be to convince the reader that we haven't a sufficient grasp of the second-person, and then to offer the beginnings of an account of it. Only then will we be in a position to discern the proper place of second-personal normativity in practical philosophy more generally, and to deploy it properly in ethical, political, and legal theory.

Chapter 2: Can We Account for Second-Personal Reason?

Some judgments rendered by human agents bear a form that is, at least on its surface, distinctively second-personal:

X owes it to Y that she φ

X wrongs Y by φ -ing

X has a right against Y that she not φ

Insofar as a person occupies the X position within any of these, and acts from consciousness of its italicized portion, she acts with special consideration of a specific other person—the occupant of Y. So, when deciding what to do, I might be moved to action by the fact that I *owe to Fred* the money, that *Alice has a right against me* that I leave her home, or that I’d *wrong Chester* by telling him a lie. Such reasons are “second-personal” in an intuitive sense, and are among those that a person needs in order to competently navigate the social world. To ignore them would, it’s fair to say, amount to a significant oversight.¹

This isn’t yet to say that second-personal reasons should be of particular philosophical interest, however. After all, it would also amount to a significant oversight were I to fail, say, to recognize certain *culinary* reasons pertaining to the temperature and tenderness of the vegetables I sauté, or to the fragrance of the spices that I toast in the pan—such reasons are needed as I

¹ In his classic paper “The Nature and Value of Rights” (1970), Joel Feinberg imagines the fictitious land of ‘Nowheresville’, whose inhabitants possess all our familiar ethical concepts, but for that of a right and its correlative duties. The point of the thought experiment is to suggest that such a place would be good in many respects, but would lack important second-personal dimensions of moral life that involve making claims on one another. Nowheresville will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

navigate the kitchen, and they can be said to constitute a kind or a type, if anything can. But no one would suggest on these grounds that special philosophical attention be paid to them, nor that an investigation into their distinctive metaphysics is in order. It's an open question, then, whether and in what respect second-personal reasons form a philosophically interesting, metaphysically distinctive kind, deserving of attention from theorists in a way that mere culinary reasons are not.

In this chapter, I expound on the intuition, which I myself hold, that a philosophy of the second-person is indeed warranted. However, I argue too that we philosophers haven't sufficiently articulated what second-personal reasons are, how they are distinctive, and what their significance is. The absence of such articulation, I maintain, leaves theories of second-personal rationality vulnerable to suspicions that there is no genuine philosophical subject matter here after all. Thus, the need for a positive account of the second-person, which I will ultimately offer and defend in subsequent chapters.

§1. Standpoints and Reasons

That reasons may be categorized by reference to the standpoint from which they are accessed is a philosophical commonplace. This thesis draws implicitly upon a metaphor with perception: visually observing the world from one location rather than another renders an agent privy to some facts rather than others, and, similarly, deliberating from one agential standpoint rather than another renders an agent privy to some reasons rather than others.² Thus,

² Though he is by no means the first to talk this way, Thomas Nagel places the idea of different practical standpoints at the center of his discussion in *The View From Nowhere* (1986), and many philosophers have since followed his lead. The key point for Nagel is that each of us occupies a particular "perspective" from which she has a subjective

understanding second-personal reasons as a metaphysically distinct category would seemingly involve understanding them as emanating from a special standpoint—one distinct from those most often recognized in the practical rationality literature. The present section seeks to clarify and render plausible this thought.

It is sometimes said that a reason is made *third-personal* by virtue of its being graspable from the “standpoint of the universe” (Sidgwick 1981, 382).³ This standpoint is one from which a person considers all possible states of affairs, and then renders an impartial judgment about which of them is good. To judge from this perspective that a state of affairs is good is to judge there to be reason to pursue its realization, and to judge that it is best is to judge there to be a decisive reason for realizing it.⁴ G. E. Moore understands reasons of obligation in precisely this way, equating the claim that one has a moral duty with the claim, “This action will produce the greatest possible amount of good in the universe” (2004, 147). To illustrate: I consider assaulting

“view”—visual metaphors, both—and that the ability to transcend that perspective and gain a more objective view is ethically important.

³ Some prefer the term “impersonal,” which comes to the same thing. I favor “third-personal” here, as it emphasizes the contrast with “second-personal.”

⁴ It’s tempting to simply equate the third-person standpoint with the notion of impartiality, but this would be a mistake. As Paul Hurley argues—persuasively, in my view—an impartial disposition, which favors neither oneself nor one’s friends and associates, can be taken up with respect to things other than states of affairs. “There is a distinct conception of impartiality appropriate for the evaluation of actions as right and wrong,” he writes. And it “differs markedly from the impartiality as impersonality [or third-personality] appropriate for the evaluating overall states of affairs as better or worse” (2009, 30). Thus, the third-person standpoint encourages impartiality of a particular sort, but isn’t to be equated with impartiality *per se*.

John. Doing so would satisfy me. But when I shed my subjective perspective, I notice that my assault would devastate him, and those who love him, leaving the world significantly worse off than had I refrained. The considerations canvassed here, discerned and evaluated from the impersonal standpoint of the universe, each constitute a third-personal reason to refrain. This classification derives not from these considerations' distinctive subject matter, as with culinary reasons—their being third-personal has nothing to do with what they're *about*. Rather, the reasons are classified as they are on account of the perspective from which the agent accesses them.

It is said, alternatively, that a reason is *first-personal* by virtue of its being generated from the standpoint of a self-conscious rational agent. This standpoint is the “deliberative perspective” occupied by beings whose “reflective nature gives [them] a choice about what to do” (Korsgaard 1996, 96). If that standpoint contains considerations or principles that favor a particular action, such considerations or principles constitute first-personal reasons. To illustrate: I consider assaulting John. Doing so would satisfy me. However, it is a condition of my being a self-conscious agent (according to some familiar, but contentious doctrines) that I subject myself to particular norms—for instance, the categorical imperative, forbidding me from treating others as a mere means. To assault John would be to use him as a means for my satisfaction. Thus, I refrain. The considerations canvassed here, generated in the way they are, together constitute a first-personal reason not to assault John.⁵ So, whereas the third-person standpoint forces us to

⁵ To give an example with a less Kantian flavor, in her monograph *Intention*, G. E. M. Anscombe claims that there are reasons that exist by virtue of a certain sort of ‘Why?’ question having application to a self-conscious individual (1957, 9). The thought, roughly, is that a person can only be said to perform an intentional action by virtue of the fact that she can be called upon, from her subjective standpoint, to supply a particular kind of explanation for what

reflect on which states of affairs are best, and then derives reasons for action from this, the first-person standpoint forces us to reflect instead on which actions are favored by principles of agency, and derive reasons for action from that. And here again, this classification derives not from the reasons' distinctive subject matter, as with culinary reasons. That they're first-personal has nothing to do with what the reasons are *about*. Rather, the reasons are classified as they are on account of the perspective from which the agent accesses them.

It's natural, then, to read philosophers of the second-person as introducing into the discussion a third kind of reason, generated and accessed from its own distinctive standpoint. This is, in fact, Stephen Darwall's signature move. Philosophy, he urges, needs to get to know better the *second-person standpoint*—"the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will" (2006, 3)—and with it, its reasons. The claim-making and claim-acknowledging that occurs within it enables interaction centered on

she does. When someone is put the question "Why are you crossing the road?," the answer that is sought usually does not involve the invocation of brain states ("these particular neurons were firing") or sociological facts ("members of my class tend to behave like this"). What is sought is a description of what the person is doing that displays her reasons—for instance, "I am going to look in that shop" (1957, 35). In answering, the agent doesn't merely draw upon resources available from a third-personal standpoint, as a neuroscientist or sociologist might—or, at least, she needn't merely do this. For she herself is specially positioned to display the rational character of what she does. Indeed, the act's possessing this rational character at all depends upon her being able to display it by offering, from her perspective, an answer to the 'Why?' question. This, according to Anscombe, is what makes what the agent does an intentional action in the first place. The suggestion, then, is that "I am going to look in that shop," when offered as an answer to this particular kind of 'Why?' question, constitutes a reason of a distinctively first-personal sort.

owing, wronging, and rights, thus rendering the standpoint indispensable to our theory of practical rationality.

But it is here that doubt begins to creep in as to whether there exists anything like a genuinely second-personal standpoint at all. Richard Kimberly Heck writes:

Consider the indexical “you”. As a matter of its standing meaning, an utterance of “you” refers to the person addressed in that utterance. But in the sense that there is such a thing as a self-conscious, first-person belief, there is no such thing as a second-person belief, or so it seems to me. Of course, I can identify someone descriptively, as the person to whom I am now speaking, and may have beliefs whose contents involve that descriptive identification. But that is not what I mean to deny: I mean to deny that there is any such thing as an essentially indexical second-person belief. The phenomenon of the second-person is a linguistic one, bound up with the fact that utterances, as we make them, are typically directed to people, not just made to the cosmos. (If there were speakers of a language who never directed their utterances to their fellows, they would have no use for the second-person.) The word “you” has no correlate at the level of thought: if not, then the contents of the beliefs we express using the word “you” have very little to do with its standing meaning. (2002, 12)

Unlike first- and third-personal notions, Heck insists that second-personal notions haven’t a distinct standpoint with which they are associated. Second-personal linguistic formulations are just that—linguistic formulations, whose purpose it is to facilitate the expression of ideas or concepts already graspable from either the first- or third-person perspectives. To say that I owe *to you* the performance of an act is just to say that I have first- or third-personal reasons to act,

while using an indexical to locate myself relative to others within the relevant context. Thus, any attempt to augment our understanding by exploring a specifically second-personal standpoint would simply be wrongheaded, as there is no such standpoint to be found. Really, second-personal reasons are like culinary reasons after all—they are reasons accessed from either the first- or third-personal standpoint, pertaining to a specific subject matter (here, the treatment of other people rather than spices and vegetables).

Some will object that Heck's skepticism is warrantless.⁶ But, what is it, precisely, that friends of second-personal reason insist we account for, but that cannot be grasped from either the first- or third-personal standpoints alone? What is the second-person standpoint, as distinct from a purely first- or third-personal one? What is this thing that Darwall champions, the existence of which Heck denies? In what follows, I begin to take up these questions, ultimately concluding that we philosophers haven't yet found adequate answers to them.

§2. The Inadequacy of First- and Third Personal Reasons

In motivating a philosophy of the second-person, it is customary to highlight the supposed inadequacy of theories that appeal only to reasons of a first- or third-personal sort. For instance, it is typically said that exclusive reliance on the third-person perspective leads us to mischaracterize and misunderstand the relationship that we human beings bear to one another. When a person views another individual from the detached perspective of the universe, she represents that individual just as any other person might, and the reasons made available to her

⁶ Heck doesn't defend this assertion, and the main interests of the paper lie elsewhere. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the skepticism Heck voices should be taken seriously. For a similar expression of skepticism, also undefended but also worth taking seriously, see Peacocke 2013, 10.

are just those available to any other person who takes up the standpoint. To illustrate: If I were to assault John, this would result in a bad state of affairs. This badness is represented just as easily by you as by me. As such, the two of us stand symmetrically with respect to the reasons for realizing or preventing it, all things equal. And insofar as my position as the potential perpetrator of harm is special at all, it is because my location makes bringing about the better result more convenient.⁷

But all of this is to neglect that I, as the potential assailant, am not merely one among many who have reason to ensure John's safety. For as the potential assailant, I stand poised to *wrong, violate the rights of, or trespasses against* John—a particular person who is specially placed to complain against, claim compensation from, or feel resentment toward me if I assault him. The basic thought here is that the aggressor and victim are not mere loci of good or bad occurrences, capable of doing things and having things done to them that contribute to the aggregate goodness in the world—they are not mere constituents of states of affairs that might be judged either good or bad, better or worse, generating reasons equally for any and all persons who are positioned to affect what happens. They bear a special relationship to one another, as wrongdoer to wronged. As Darwall puts it, it is only proper that an agent take “a perspective [on the other] and implicitly relate *to* them in a way that is different than when we view them in an ‘objective’ or third-personal way” (Darwall 2013a, xi).⁸

⁷ From the standpoint of the universe, it is good if Mrs. O'Leary's cow does not kick over the lantern. Any person who takes up the standpoint should grasp this, and so grasp a reason for preventing it. It's just that O'Leary, and those in her immediate vicinity, are best placed to act upon the reason.

⁸ For related arguments about the inadequacy of a third-personal perspective, see Darwall 2006, 5-7, 36-38, and also Wallace 2019, 39.

Charges of inadequacy may be similarly registered against any theory that relies exclusively upon an unqualifiedly first-person perspective.⁹ Consider a Kantian account, on which the moral law makes its way into the world through the activity of self-conscious agents, legislating for themselves. On one version of the view, such agents value their own humanity insofar as they deliberate about how to act, and this commits them to valuing the humanity of others (Gewirth 1978, 104-112). Such a commitment prohibits treating others as a mere means. As such, prohibitions on stealing, lying, or cheating are accessed from the standpoint of the thinking agent, rather than from the detached standpoint of the universe. Of course, whether self-consciousness actually requires any of this of us is deeply contentious. The point I wish to make is that even if such self-consciousness gave us access to first-personal reason of this sort, such would still be insufficient to characterize the relationship that we human beings bear to one another. For such an account, absent further elaboration, can seem to imply that we ought to treat other persons as mere occasions for the application of a general norm, rather than as persons to whom each of us owes rightful treatment.

To clarify, consider the way in which positive law could be enlisted to protect an inanimate object, such as a work of art. The legislature might determine that objects with certain special properties possess intrinsic value, and thus mustn't be destroyed. If some piece of art possesses these properties, the law would then regulate citizens' action *with respect to it*, prohibiting them from doing certain things to it or acting upon it in certain ways. But this would

⁹ I say "unqualifiedly first-personal" because the second-person standpoint is sometimes characterized as a particular subspecies the first-person standpoint, or as a particular determinate of a first-personal perspective. Darwall writes: "Since second-personal reasons are fundamentally agent-relative, the second-person stance is a version of the first-person standpoint" (2006, 9). The point is that it is not the first-person standpoint *simpliciter*.

not imply that anything is owed *to the art*. For all we've said, the art is an occasion for the application of the law—a law protecting valuable objects that are incapable of having anything owed to them at all. This remains true even if the properties are ultimately determined to be so valuable as to justify law that not only protects the art against destruction, but requires treating it as sacred or as an object of veneration, something that is *above all price*. All of this is still compatible with its being incapable of having anything owed to it. Nothing in this implies that anything is owed to the art itself.

Consider, now, the way in which a first-personally legislated moral norm could be enlisted to protect an animate being, such as a particular human. A self-conscious agent might determine that beings with particular properties—the capacity for rational choice, perhaps—possess intrinsic value, and thus mustn't be treated as mere means. If some particular person possesses this relevant property, then the first-personally legislated norm would regulate the agent's action *with respect to the other person*, prohibiting dishonest or abusive treatment. But, here again, this does not yet imply that anything is owed *to the person*. For all we've said, the case parallels that of the artwork, and thus, for all we've said, the person is an occasion for the application of a norm, just as the artwork was. If we're to contend that persons are owed certain treatment, in the way that art is not, then something else, or something more, is needed.

Unqualifiedly first-personal reason isn't sufficient.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Kantian, it bears emphasizing, is not naïve about any of this, and might well agree with all I've said here. Korsgaard, for instance, is taken with all these concerns, inspiring her to elaborate her account in ways intended to bring the other into view. This is part of what motivates her in Lecture IV of *The Sources of Normativity* (1996, 131-166), and also in her response to Darwall (Korsgaard 2007). Ultimately, she admits the need for the second-person. Whether the Kantian can actually succeed in accounting for second-personal reason is, as of now, up for debate. I

* * *

In the *Discourse of Inequality*, Rousseau invites us to imagine a savage man, stripped of basic practical capacities that we most often associate with humanity. The inability of the savage to suppress present desire with an eye to long-term flourishing, for instance, renders his form of life quite unlike ours, and the point of the thought experiment is to highlight that an account of human nature must include prudential reason (1997, 143). The considerations surveyed in this section serve a similar purpose. If we're to imagine Rousseau's savage, confronting another for the first time with nothing but the resources of the first- and third-person standpoints at his disposal, the charge is that he will be in some way deficient *qua* human reasoner. To ascend to the standpoint of the universe and cognize the other as a mere constituent of a state of affairs is insufficient. To assume the standpoint of a self-conscious agent and treat the other according to rational norms, just as one might any other object, is insufficient as well. Fully-fledged practical rationality requires more than this. Thus the call to recognize a distinct standpoint, with reasons of its own, instructing the agent to treat the other as a *You*.

§3. But What *is* the Second-Person?

At the outset, I promised to expound on the intuition that a philosophy of the second-person is needed. But I promised as well to raise worries about whether we truly understand what

will not pronounce on the Kantian project one way or the other here (but see Michael Thompson's expression of skepticism at the conclusion of his paper "What is it to Wrong Someone?" (2004, 383-384)). My purpose is simply to raise trouble for the possibility of limiting oneself to the first-person standpoint, absent any further qualification.

we're saying when we demand recognition for second-personal reasons. This will be my task in the present section. Together, these sections suggest a need to recognize something more than first- and third-personal reason, but indicate we remain in the dark about what this "something more" is. This is cause for philosophical puzzlement—puzzlement that will motivate the account offered in subsequent chapters.

What, exactly, would making room in one's account for the second-person amount to? It would, of course, involve appeal to a "second-person standpoint." But what is *that*, precisely? It is, we said, the perspective from which agents make and recognize claims on each other (Darwall 2006, 3). But this only takes us only so far, as there is undoubtedly *some* sense in which a person can be said to make a claim, or to recognize one, from the other widely-acknowledged agential standpoints. "The claim is made," "John makes a claim," and "Paul recognizes the claim" are all states of affairs that could be judged good or bad from the detached standpoint of the universe, for instance. So what, then, is absent from the third-person perspective that requires the introduction of an additional standpoint? What more is needed?

One answer, perhaps, is that the third-person standpoint fails to represent the claim-makers and claim-receivers *as persons*, rendering them instead as mere parts of various states of affairs. But here too, one might wonder what the complaint is, exactly. A being who makes a demand that she not be assaulted, and one who acknowledges the demand, are each human individuals. Each have names, each are conscious, each have wills. All of this, presumably, is cognizable from the third-person standpoint. What more is there to representing a being *as a person* than this? What is needed that can't be secured with the theoretical resources already in our possession?

It is sometimes suggested that we can grasp the significance of the second-person standpoint by reflecting upon concepts and ideas that are endemic to it. Demands, according to Darwall, alter the reasons an agent has by virtue of their being “*addressed to* those to whom they apply” (2013a, 135). When one agent addresses a demand to another, this is an attempt to “*hold her responsible*” (2013a, 10). When one engages in second-personal thinking, one does not simply think *about* an object, but engages in a particular mode of “*relating to*” her (2013a, 10). When one exhibits respect for another, this is “not just to regulate one’s conduct by the fact that one is accountable to him . . . [but] to *make oneself or be* accountable to him” (2013b, 21). Throughout, the second-person standpoint, along with its practical significance, is distinguished by emphasizing words like “hold”, “address”, and “relate.”

Yet, it’s still not obvious that any of this is sufficient to clarify the second-person or to establish its importance. One might, for instance, wonder how an attitude manages to not just be *about* another person, but to “hold” that person accountable—indeed, one might seek further understanding of what this distinction even amounts to. If you merely have legitimate, well-grounded, correct thoughts about how I should stop harming you—thoughts of the sort that would be available to all of us from the third-person standpoint—how have I escaped being *held* responsible by you? “Blaine is being assaulted by Paul. Blaine justifiably judges that Paul should cease. You are Blaine. I am Paul.” A philosopher of the third-person can say all of this. In what sense have I, Paul, escaped being held responsible by you, Blaine? And what are the implications of my having escaped?

One might similarly wonder how a demand manages to “address” another in a way that doesn’t amount merely to calling their attention to some consideration. If Blaine announces in my presence that the norm I’ve legislated for myself requires that I return the wallet I’ve pilfered

from him, and does so simply by pointing to considerations available to me first-personally, in what sense has Blaine failed to *address to me* a reason to return the wallet? He's called my attention to a reason I have, and to my wrongdoing. What more is needed? And if, indeed, there is a genuine distinction to be uncovered between second-personal address and what goes on between Blaine and me, what's the practical upshot for the two of us? What follows from the fact that Blaine failed to address to me this reason in a characteristically second-personal way?

Finally, one might wonder about the suggestion that "relating to" another person is possible only from the second-person standpoint. Whatever we have in mind, the notion of "relation" at play here can't be a generic one, carrying the same sense as when I say I'm related through blood to my sister, or when I report how I am spatiotemporally related to a fellow bus passenger. For such senses of relation can be found and represented from *any* standpoint. But what, then, *is* the relevant sense of "relating to"? Perhaps one might say that it is the relation between assailant and victim. But then, proponents of traditional accounts of practical reason will certainly claim they have the resources to represent this relation perfectly well. If I intentionally bring about a state of affairs in which Blaine suffers, this relation between Blaine and me will be cognizable from virtually any standpoint we take up. Surely any person, taking up the standpoint of the universe, will be able to see and understand *this*. What more, then, is being insisted upon? What is this special sense of "relating to" that cannot be captured without the second-person standpoint?¹¹

¹¹ I voice these worries in my review of Darwall's two-volume collection of essays on second-personal ethics (Schofield 2014). My stance in the review is the same as the one I take here: Darwall has pointed us to a topic of deep significance, but has left us with more work to do.

One who had, in her possession, a full grasp of the very idea of second-personal reasoning would be equipped to offer answers to these questions, and to draw the requested distinctions. My concern is that in the current moment, we have only the vaguest sense of how to do any of this, signaling that our grasp of this topic and its associated ideas is more tenuous than we might have expected, or hoped. Without a more positive statement of what a second-personal standpoint is, or of what a second-personal reason is, we might even begin to wonder whether there exist such things at all—it's possible, after all, to set out to understand a concept, only to discover that it is incoherent, convoluted, confused, muddled, or has no referent. Thus, if we're to make the case that practical philosophy needs the second-person, we cannot rest content with the arguments made in the previous section. For someone who is skeptical about the very existence of a second-personal thought, standpoint, or reason—someone like Heck, for instance—will remain unmoved in the absence of a more detailed specification of the second-personal concepts that they're being asked to acknowledge. And for those of us who weren't initially skeptical, the lack of a positive account might begin to weaken our resolve.

* * *

This section began with that which we thought we knew—the insufficiency of our theory of practical reason, the need to account for second-personal reason. As it turned out, we knew less than we thought—this notion of second-personal reason is elusive, if there's even a notion there to grasp at all. Our choices seem to be either to succumb to skepticism about the second-person, or to set out to give the positive account we currently lack. This is the philosophical crossroads at which we find ourselves.

§4. A Positive Account of Second-Personal Reason?

Progress toward a positive account is impeded, however, by the fact that second-personal concepts are most often taken to be irreducible to first- and third-personal ones. As Darwall puts it:

These notions—second-personal authority, valid claim or demand, second-personal reason, and responsibility to—[constitute] an interdefinable circle; each implies all the rest. Moreover, I contend, there is no way to break into this circle from outside it. Propositions formulated only with normative and evaluative concepts that are not already implicitly second-personal cannot adequately ground propositions formulated with concepts within the circle. (2006, 12)

Thus, if one seeks to explain what it is to *hold someone accountable*, one can appeal to the notions of *addressing claims to someone*, or *relating to someone*, as a way of helping us locate it within the circle. But such an appeal will presuppose understanding of the circle itself—any particular second-personal concept can be accounted for only through appeals to other second-personal concepts. For this reason, it can seem as if a positive account of the second-person *per se* will, of necessity, remain elusive.

It is tempting, then, to conclude that no account of the second-person can be given. All we can do, apparently, is gesture toward second-personal notions, hoping others will grasp them by observing their instances. There will be events in sports that prove illustrative—an ice-dancer let down by her partner, glaring so as to hold him accountable (Darwall 2006, 42n5). There will be works of narrative fiction that do so as well—the sociopathic Henry Graham in Elaine May's *A New Leaf*, coming to relate as a person for the first time to the woman he intends to murder (Schofield 2021b). Metaphors will be adduced to clarify things—beings stand to one another

second-personally when they relate “like the opposing poles of an electrical apparatus” with “an arc of normative current . . . passing between the agent-poles,” one could say (Thompson 2004, 335). Maybe, in the end, this is the best we can hope for.

But to settle for this is too hasty, as it simply isn't true that philosophical understanding is achieved only by defining less familiar notions in terms of more familiar ones. Understanding is achieved as well through genealogical accounts, functional explanations, and by meditating on the use to which certain notions are put in human life. Second-personal reason might not be reducible. But we could describe how it works, or detail how it relates individuals to one another. We could compare and contrast its metaphysics with the metaphysics of the first- and third-person. We could come to grasp it by more fully by grounding it in an account of our nature. Thus, even if the second-person is in fact irreducible, a more thorough philosophical accounting remains a live possibility—a possibility that I hope to at least to begin realizing in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: An Account of Second-Personal Reason

The call to recognize second-personal reason is motivated by dissatisfaction with theories that make no room for it. Theories that are exclusively first- and third-personal, we discovered, leave us wanting something more. But, upon reflection, what that something more is turns out to be elusive, and whether it is anything at all is thrown into doubt. Our intuitions, it seems, can be coaxed in such a way that we feel the need for the second-person, while our intellects are left struggling to articulate what the second-person even is. This is the problematic established in the previous chapter.

Developing a positive conception of second-personal reason is the business of the present chapter. Our inquiry will concern the very idea of such a thing—we'll seek to determine what a distinctively second-personal reason is, if such a thing there be. This, it bears emphasizing, leaves open the possibility that second-personal reasoning is ultimately invalid, not to be undertaken. For once we come to see with clarity what it was that we were seeking, it's possible we'll find it unfamiliar, bizarre, or rebarbative—it's possible we'll discover it is not *for us*. All of this is consistent with the line of argument I shall pursue presently. My purpose, here, isn't yet to advocate for second-personal reason, but to illuminate the idea of it so as to clarify what we are affirming if we affirm its existence, what we are denying if we deny it, and to establish that there really is an idea there to affirm or to deny.¹ The possibility that we humans really do have use for it, and that it really is *for us*, will be taken up in Chapter 4.

¹ My method can be compared to Kant's in the *Groundwork*. There Kant proceeds "analytically" at first, discerning what morality is without claiming that it applies to us. Then, in the final third of the work, he argues that morality as he has depicted it in the earlier sections binds us human agents, placing us under its authority (1996, 5-6). Thus, it

§1. Treating Something as Other Than an Object

From the third-person standpoint, individuals appear as constituents of states of affairs, and from a purely first-person one, they appear as occasions for the application of a general norm. In both cases, human individuals are represented just as any object might be. Any object that renders a state of affairs better or worse can generate a third-personal reason. An individual human is one such object. Any object that is protected by an agent's self-consciously legislated norm is one that she has first-personal reasons to treat in certain ways. An individual human is one such object. Our complaint was that theories which treat individuals exclusively *as objects upon which to act* fail to treat them *as persons to whom action is owed*. The distinction that grounds the complaint can seem opaque, however. What option is there, but to treat other humans as objects to be acted upon? Perhaps they are special objects, given their capacities for suffering, choice, or reason, and perhaps this means that they are afforded special protections from the first- and third-person standpoints. But beyond this, what more could there be?² In this

would be a mistake to look for an answer to the question "Why be moral?" in the first two sections. Similarly, it would be a mistake to look for an answer to the question "Why reason second-personally?" in this chapter.

² Of course, on a common way of speaking, to refuse to treat someone as an object involves attending to the fact that she is conscious and possesses agency of her own, and refusing to treat her in certain ways because of this. It is impermissible to treat a person as an item that is just there to be used, like a stone, a lampshade, or a knife, and we often express this thought by denying that a person is a mere object. But *this* cannot be what's meant by philosophers of the second-person when they call for treating individuals as something other than objects. After all, theories that appeal exclusively to first- and third-personal reasons can certainly accommodate the idea that we have reasons to treat conscious agents differently than stones, lampshades, and knives.

section, I attempt to bring into view the notion of treating something as other than an object, which will ultimately be the key to discerning a distinctively second-personal type of reason.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguishes between an agent's capacity for self-movement in general and her ability to move herself "*qua* other" (1984, 1609). The latter consists in treating herself as a patient—that which is changed by virtue of its being acted upon, as opposed to by acting. Imagine, for instance, that my spouse requests I make room for her on the sofa where I've spread out, and that in response, I grasp my legs with both hands as I would errant pieces of clutter, lift them, and then drop them in another location (perhaps my legs have fallen asleep; perhaps I am attempting to amuse her with a philosophical joke). Here, I approach myself and my movement *qua* other—I treat my legs as objects to be acted upon, and I move them as any other person might when looking to clear some space. This can be contrasted with the case in which I move my legs in the way my spouse (presumably) was expecting. In *this* instance, I perform "according to choice" (1984, 1609). I do not act *upon myself*, but simply act. When I move my legs in this sense, what gets done is not something that anyone else could be in the position to do, as when I lifted my legs with my hands. It is an instance of my own agential exercise.

A similar distinction can be drawn with respect to self-movement effectuated over time. Imagine I plan to travel home for the holiday, but expect that when the moment arrives to pack the car, I will balk, finding a convenient excuse to stay put. Thus, I pay someone to restrain me, place me in the trunk, and drive me to my destination on the appropriate date. In this instance, I plan to travel home in the same sense that I might plan that a package I mail travels there—I move myself *qua* other. Or, to complicate things, imagine that instead of arranging my own kidnapping, I enter into a legally binding contract wherein I lose a sum of money if I fail to make

the trip, ensuring I will feel compelled to travel even when I change my mind about the desirability of doing so.³ Here, when I travel home, there is *some* sense in which I exercise my agency straightforwardly—I walk myself to the car and drive it, rather than being bound and locked up. But on the other hand, I also manipulate myself, attempting to effectuate movement through incentive architecture, just as a third party might. And in *this* sense, I get myself home for the holiday *qua* other. This contrasts with a case in which I simply judge that travelling home is good, and then make the trip in accordance with that judgment. Here, I do not execute my plan by acting upon my own motivations, psychological states, or will, like they are lumps of clay there to be molded.⁴ I execute my plan directly through agential exercise.

To note this distinction isn't to imply anything one way or the other about the ethical propriety of treating oneself *qua* other. To lift one's legs with one's hands is neither right nor wrong, neither virtuous nor vicious, but simply a way of moving oneself. Manipulating one's future self is a bit more fraught. Incentivizing oneself in some contexts seem is straightforwardly permissible, or even advisable, as when a dieter rids her house of snacks. But a person who plots against herself constantly, ensuring she'll violate convictions she expects to have in the future,

³ Cases like this are relatively common in the philosophical literature, the most famous being Derek Parfit's case of the Russian nobleman who arranges his finances so as to ensure that he continues to support the socialist cause even after he grows old and conservative (1984, 327-328).

⁴ To put this as Aristotle might, the distinction is between treating my will as purely active—which involves choosing according to the good—or instead treating it also as a patient that will suffer effects that it imposes upon itself, as if it were a distinct object.

seems more troubling.⁵ These matters of normative ethics aside, however, my point for the moment is that a theory of agency that made room only for self-movement “*qua* other” would be deficient. A person doesn’t reason just about objects and how they ought to be acted upon. She reasons, too, about how to act, in such a way that she herself is not treated as an object at all.

This distinction might help clarify what is sought by those who call for a philosophy of the second-person. Standard theories of practical reason have it that each of us reasons about other individuals “*qua* other,” deliberating about how to act *upon* them. Other individuals are constituents of states of affairs that an agent can help bring about, or they are occasions for the application of a general norm specifying how a self-conscious agent should treat beings of a particular kind.⁶ The theories thus render them “objects” or “other” in the relevant sense. As we’ve been observing, though, treating a being as an “object” or “other” is not our only option. A person might treat herself “*qua* subject,” and reason about how she will act rather than about how to act upon herself. A philosophy of the second-person, I want to propose, will recognize the possibility of treating another individual not merely as an object to be acted upon, or “*qua* other,” but also the possibility of treating her “*qua* subject”—we might refer to this as treating her *as a person*, as a way of highlighting the proposed distinction between person and object. Something like this is, perhaps, what Levinas is getting at when he calls for a way of

⁵ I take it that this is part of what Parfit’s example of the Russian nobleman is intended to get us to realize, or at least wonder about. I argue elsewhere that some such acts of self-manipulation run afoul of moral duties we owe to ourselves (Schofield 2021a, 71-74, 98-101).

⁶ These remarks are fleshed out in more detail in Chapter 2.

representing another person as “coming from beyond the world,” but at the same time “committing me to human fraternity” (1969, 215).⁷

Yet, all of this is at least as mystifying as it is clarifying. For what could it even mean to treat another distinct, separate person in this way? Certainly not that I could move a stranger’s legs in the way I typically move my own, or that I can flail another’s arms about simply by setting my mind to it. But if not this, then what? The answer is not at all obvious. But giving sense to the very idea of a distinctively second-personal mode of reason seems to depend upon our ability to answer these difficult questions.

§2. Seeking the Second-Person in the First-Person Plural

That an agent can approach another *qua* subject, rather than as *qua* other, is the thesis of an illuminating paper by Jane Heal. Heal’s hope, like ours, is to make sense of the second-person. Here is the crux of her position:

So where . . . might we find thought which we could label ‘second person’? I propose the following as a sufficient condition. Where one person thinks of another that she is F, conceiving of her in the ‘we minus I’ way . . . and also the co-operative activity going on is of the face-to-face character . . . then the first agent’s thought is second person. (2014, 326)

You are a ‘You’ for me when together we constitute a ‘We’—second-personal reasoning is just first-person reasoning made plural. Imagine a group that decides to knock off a mob boss. Each

⁷ She is not a mere constituent of the world to be acted upon. But somehow, the sense in which she is of another world renders her *closer* to me, as opposed to opening up a gap between us.

operates on the understanding that the boss is too-be-murdered, that the others share this understanding, and that they each have roles to play in the doing of the deed. The members understand themselves as acting *upon* the boss, in a straightforward sense. Their relationship to each other, however, is like an agent's relationship to his future self when he plans to take a trip and then does so. The assassins relate *qua* subject. And within the context of this relationship, they might talk of *owing it to* the others to play their roles, utilizing the familiar language of second-personal reason. Such a group can be contrasted with a multitude in which each member takes action that contributes to the boss's demise, but does so as a result of threatening or coercive behavior of other members—possibly without even knowing the purpose served by their action, as when the getaway driver is threatened with a beating and is told to ask no questions. In this latter case, members treat others as objects to be acted upon, structuring each other's incentives and molding their behavior so as to achieve a desired result. Heal's thought is that in the former case, unlike latter case, the members form a 'We', and that this is sufficient for their relating second-personally.⁸

Although I agree with the letter of Heal's view, I also think it is extremely tempting to understand it in a way that would be inimical to an account of second-personal reason. When we talk about a group agent, or a 'We', it is typical to think of multitude oriented around a shared end—painting a house, performing the symphony, robbing the bank, and so on. Though members might disagree about means, and each might have their own reasons for participating, the group is deeply cooperative in that the members have a common end. But *this* way of

⁸ There is now a considerable literature that teases out the niceties of this distinction between acting together collectively and acting upon one another in aggregate (Gilbert 1989; Tuomela 1989; Searle 1990; Bratman 2014). The details don't matter for my purposes. I am simply referencing the distinction itself.

thinking of things seems unhelpful if our task is to clarify the notion of a second-personal reason. For reasons of the sort seem most appropriate not to wholly cooperative relationships, but to relationships that are essentially adversarial—my interests as opposed to yours, my ends as opposed to yours, my flourishing as opposed to yours, my judgment as opposed to yours, and so on. The ‘You’ of the second-person isn’t merely a potential collaborator, but also a potential competitor, nemesis, or enemy. The problem is that the relevant oppositions have a tendency to melt away when we talk of a collective agent, modelled on an individual person. When there is disagreement between you and me, understood as two distinct agents, one of us might demand that they be deferred to by the other. But a single individual agent, even when she has conflicting desires, does not *defer to herself*—the very coherence of deferring seems to presume the presence of separate individuals.⁹ So, once we understand you and me as a single unified ‘We’, we are in danger of losing the possibility of deferring and being deferred to that is part and parcel of second-personal interaction. To give another example, when one of my actions harms you, you might demand that I compensate you. But a single individual agent, even when she has inflicted serious harm on herself that she tries to undo, doesn’t *compensate herself*. Here too, the

⁹ On the possibility of deferring to oneself, Richard Moran writes:

[W]ith regard to other people I can be obliged to *defer* to their desires and preferences, even when I find them misguided, even when I believe they would regret their choices if they saw things as I do. Such deference makes no sense with regard to my own desires and preferences. To recognize my own preference as misguided or misinformed is itself to call that preference into question, if not to abandon it outright. I might continue to feel the pull of the rejected preference, I might even feel that it is hopeless to fight against it and that I should plan on it getting the better of me at the moment of choices, but none of this is deferring to *myself* (2018, 203).

very coherence of compensation seems to presume the presence of more than one agent. So, once we understand you and me as a single unified ‘We’, we are again in danger of losing the possibility of compensating and being compensated that is a familiar part of second-personal give and take. Finally, when you act against a second-personal reason, you *violate* me. But when a single agent acts counter to a reason she has, we most often say not that she’s committed a violation, but simply that she’s made a regretful mistake.¹⁰ Thus, if you and me are to be understood on the model of a single agent, acting together with shared purpose, then we seemingly eliminate the possibility of interpersonal violation that so interests the philosopher of the second-person.¹¹

If we aren’t cautious, then, an attempt to characterize the You-I relationship in terms of the first-person plural risks implying that you could never defer to me, and I never to you, and you could never compensate me, and I never you, and nothing I do could be said to violate you, nor could anything you do be said to violate me, because you and I are a ‘We’, modeled on the first-personal ‘I’. We’ll then be left with judgments of the form:

¹⁰ This example is a bit more controversial, because in at least some cases, it seems right to say that a person has wronged themselves (Schofield 2021a). Nevertheless, it’s obviously true that not every case of foolishly harming oneself constitutes a wrong.

¹¹ Registering these oppositions becomes especially important if we hope second-personal reasons to be relevant to morality—at least insofar as we harbor concerns about the separateness of persons. The great fear, after all, is that the individual’s ends, interests, and flourishing will be swallowed up in our moral thought by an undifferentiated collective (Rawls 1999, 24; Nozick 1974, 32-33; Nagel 1970, 134). And if various oppositions go missing in our account of morality, and we appeal to the reasons of a collective ‘We’, we risk countenancing a morally intolerable totalitarianism.

(X and Y) ought to ϕ

(X and Y) has most reason to ϕ

It would be good were (X and Y) to ϕ

instead of:

X owes it to Y that she ϕ

X has a right against Y that she not ϕ

X wrongs Y by ϕ -ing

Both sets of judgments represent the other individual as something more than, or other than, a mere object to be acted upon. But only the second trio represents the kinds of oppositions that are characteristic of the second-person. How, then, can the agencies of distinct individuals be combined in such a way that they treat each other *qua* subject, rather than as objects to be acted upon, while making possible judgments of the sort contained in the second trio.

§3. Second-Personal Reason

In what follows, I advance an account on which second-personal reasons are generated from a standpoint that combines the agency of distinct persons. This is intended to capture the sense in which an agent might treat another as a person, *qua* subject. However, on my account, occupants of the standpoint assume distinct roles that place them (potentially) in opposition to one another, pushing against the tendency to unify them into a fully integrated ‘We’. This addition is intended to address our concerns, voiced in the previous section, about grounding second-personal reason in a standpoint that is too thoroughly cooperative.

I begin this section by identifying two phases of an agential act, undertaken by a single individual. Then, I raise the possibility of two separate persons carrying out such an act, each

being responsible for one of its phases. This possibility, I contend, is the possibility of a genuinely second-person standpoint. By virtue of sharing in a single act, occupants of the standpoint treat one another as a subject, just as an individual treats herself as one when she exercises her agency alone. By virtue of being distinct and separate individuals, occupants of the standpoint are set up to disagree, compete, or clash, just as individuals typically do when their interests and judgments don't align. My proposal thus represents multiple persons as at once unified and separate, connected and conflicted, joined and opposed—it represents them as second-personally related, in the sense we're after.

Deliberation, Decision, Action

To exercise one's agential capacity as an individual person is to engage in a temporally extended process, unfolding in distinct phases. One phase consists in deliberation, identifying what it is good to do, or what ought to be done, and the other consists in moving one's body, or executing one's decision. I might, to revisit our earlier example, deliberate about travelling home for the holiday, concluding that the case in favor is decisive (phase 1), and then set about doing it, packing the car and driving out toward the highway (phase 2). Philosophers clash over how exactly to characterize the two phases and the relationship between them; the nature of deliberation, how explicit it must be, what the normative relationship between a faulty decision and subsequent action is, are all matters that remain in dispute. But the partition of agency into a

deliberative moment and the movement that follows is one that any philosopher of action will typically acknowledge.¹²

Contemporary Kantian thought marks this partition in dramatic fashion, dividing the self in two: a *legislator* on the one hand, and a *subject* on the other. Inspiration here is drawn from Kant's dictum that a human being is "subject only to laws given by himself" (1998, 40). An individual *gives laws* in his legislative capacity, and is *subjected to them* in his capacity as actor—two phases of a unified agential sequence, undertaken by a single persisting person. For Christine Korsgaard, this explains "how we can attribute a movement to an agent as the agent's own" (2009, 158). The individual performs an action that is her own when she moves in accord with her decision, as expressed in a piece of legislation that she herself issues.¹³

¹² This division is central to debates about weakness of will, akrasia, and incontinence. For those discussions concern whether and how it is possible to endorse and decide upon a particular course of action, but nevertheless proceed to act in ways that do not accord with one's decision.

¹³ Kantians will, of course, be the ones most likely to find this way of putting things congenial. But one needn't embrace the Kantian framing in order to affirm the basic distinction to which I'm pointing. An Aristotelian, for instance, can distinguish between the *deliberative process* through which one considers what ought to be done, and the *choice* as embodied in an agent's actions—two parts that together comprise a complete exercise of practical reason. Inspiration for this thought can be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where the person of practical wisdom is characterized both as thinking about "what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general" (1984, 1800) and choosing to move herself "with a view to an end" selected through deliberation (1984, 1798). The interpretive issues here are fraught, but, roughly, the distinction is between the part of agency that settles on principles specifying the broad activities that ought to be carried out if one is to live well versus the part that consists in taking steps toward the discharge of those principles.

The phases identified here constitute different moments in the temporal unfolding of an agential act, or in a complete sequence of agential exercise. An individual proceeds from left to right on the diagram (Figure 1), thinking and moving with self-conscious awareness of where she falls within the progression of the sequence.

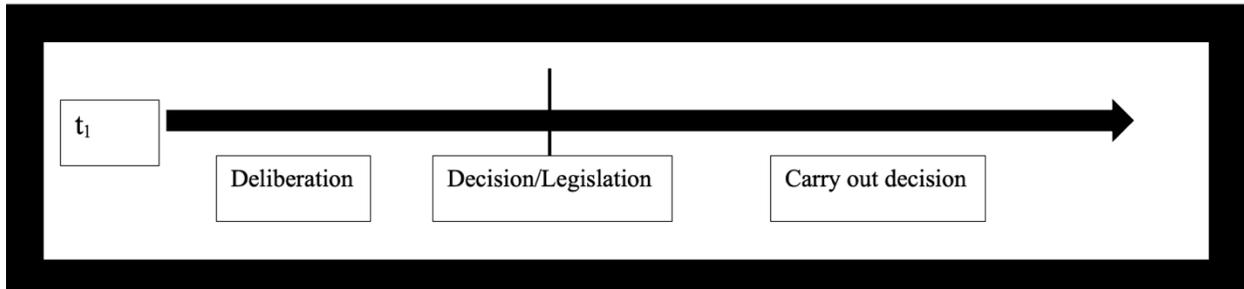


Figure 1: Individual Agential Exercise

It is crucial, for our purposes, to recognize that the connections between the various parts of this figure aren't merely causal—rather than depicting empirically observed regularities, the sequence represents a “space of reasons.”¹⁴ As the agent moves from left to right on the diagram, she engages in a process whose parts are *normatively* connected, regardless of whatever physical or chemical processes happen to underlie them. The purpose of deliberation is to make a decision. When the agent arrives at one, this isn't simply a predictable result. It is what is *supposed to* have happened, given that she was deliberating. The same is true when she ultimately moves her body. The purpose of deciding is to initiate a course of activity, and so

¹⁴ Wilfrid Sellars used the phrase to discuss knowledge in his classic essay “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (1997, 76). Michael Thompson advocates a view on which a temporally extended action, unfolding in time, itself represents a space of reasons (2008, 85-146).

when she moves, this is what she is *supposed to* do, given that she's exercising her agency.¹⁵ Finally, if the moment for action arrives and she balks, but does so reasonably—perhaps because she's decided to commit an atrocity, and has had second thoughts—then she's *supposed to* backtrack on the diagram, revisiting her deliberations and possibly revising her decision.¹⁶ The whole process is infused with norms, reason, and rationality.

An individual engaged in this process bears responsibility for adhering to the norms. The norms governing deliberation, decision, activity, and the transitions between them are ones to which the agent herself is responsible for following. If she deliberates poorly, then *she* fails, and if she doesn't carry out activity that accords with her decision out of laziness or fear, then *she* fails. In paradigmatic cases, though, acting from such norms involves treating oneself *qua* subject, in the special sense identified in section 1. The ideally-functioning self-conscious agent doesn't hire kidnappers to take her home against her will, knowing she'll never carry out her decision if left to her own devices.¹⁷ As a self-conscious subject, she locates herself within the

¹⁵ The norms here, it bears emphasizing, are ones accessed from the standpoint of the agent rather than the standpoint of the universe. On the Kantian version of this view, it is the reflective structure of the self-conscious mind that makes apparent the relationship between legislator and subject.

¹⁶ Some theorists of practical reason have argued that the rational requirement to act according one's best judgement is "wide-scope," meaning that an agent is required *either* to act on one's best judgment *or* to revise their judgment (Broome 2004). My point is just that this claim can be accommodated on the picture I am sketching here.

¹⁷ Maybe this is the best she can do. But it nevertheless seems like an agential flaw when a person is unable to carry out her decisions without externally arranged interventions (even if she's the one arranging those interventions). This is why we refer to her as weak-willed, and why she herself might well describe her interventions as an attempt

temporal unfolding of the agential process, packing the car and driving away with the understanding that she's deliberated, made a decision, and now packing and driving is what she's *supposed to* do next. My contention, in what follows, is that if there is to be such a thing as a distinctively second-personal form of reason, it will consist of two distinct agents placed into distinct roles within the unfolding of a single agential process. Doing so will represent distinct persons as relating to one another *qua* subjects, it will represent them as connected normatively, and it will represent them as potentially clashing, thus delivering what we claimed to want when we asked more something beyond a theory of first- and third-personal reason.

Two Persons, One Space of Reasons

Consider someone who deliberates to a conclusion about what another person ought to do—she decides, let's say, that it would be best for her lover who lives in her home to depart, telling him that he needs to gather his things and go. When our deliberator arrives at this decision, she represents it as good, supported by the weightiest considerations, and in this regard resembles the person who decides to drive himself home for the holiday. But, here, rather than legislating a course of action *for herself*, she addresses a demand *to a separate person*, initiating a process wherein he eventually packs his bags and heads to the highway.

Sometimes, a demand such as this motivates through implicit threat—the next step, if it isn't heeded, involves physical altercation, calling the police, or rounding up a posse. Sometimes, a demand motivates through psychological pressure—refusing a demand makes some people

to deal with her own flaws, rather than just saying she tends to follow through on her decisions as well as anyone could.

nervous, uncomfortable, anxious, or scared. And sometimes a demand motivates because heeding it is instrumental to some other desired end—obeying the demand might lead to greater peace, stability, or make it more likely that one will be deferred to by others next time. But Fichte, in *The Foundations of Natural Right*, detects another possibility—another way in which demand might, perhaps, function in the thought and talk of rational agents. There, he imagines a type of activity that is “by no means to be determined and necessitated by the summons [the demand] in the way that – under the concept of causality – an effect is determined and necessitated by its cause” (2000, 35).¹⁸ Instead of compliance caused by threat, psychological inclination, or appeal to some other desired end, we’re to imagine the possibility of compliance that “can be explained only by reference to a rational cause” (2000, 35).¹⁹

Whether, how often, and under which conditions we humans conform to this Fichtean alternative is all up for debate. Demands do operate through purely causal influence, at least some of the time. And maybe this is *the only* way they ever actually function. But for present purposes, our focus is on the very idea of a second-personal reason, and on what it could even mean for there to be such a thing. Whether any of us engages in it, how often we do, whether we

¹⁸ The German word *Aufforderung* is typically translated into English as “summons,” though the meaning is broader than this translation implies. While this English rendering could be thought to imply a mere “calling for” or “request”, Fichte’s commentators have tended to read him as meaning something closer to “demand.” Frederick Neuhouser, for instance, writes, “The summons is a call to act, a call to realize one’s free efficacy, which takes the form of an imperative” (2000, xv).

¹⁹ In this way, Fichte recalls Hobbes’s notion of a “command,” which he says is “where a man says ‘Do this’ or ‘Do not this,’ without expecting other reason than the will of him who says it” (1991, 166). The command, in other words, is meant to itself constitute a reason.

should, under what conditions, and so on, are questions downstream from the present one, which concerns what we might be talking about when we refer to it in the first place.

I propose that the Fichtean model can be fleshed out in such a way as to give sense to the notion of second-person reason, carried out from a distinctively second-person standpoint. Consider the following diagram (Figure 2), which parallels in broad strokes our earlier depiction of individual agential exercise:

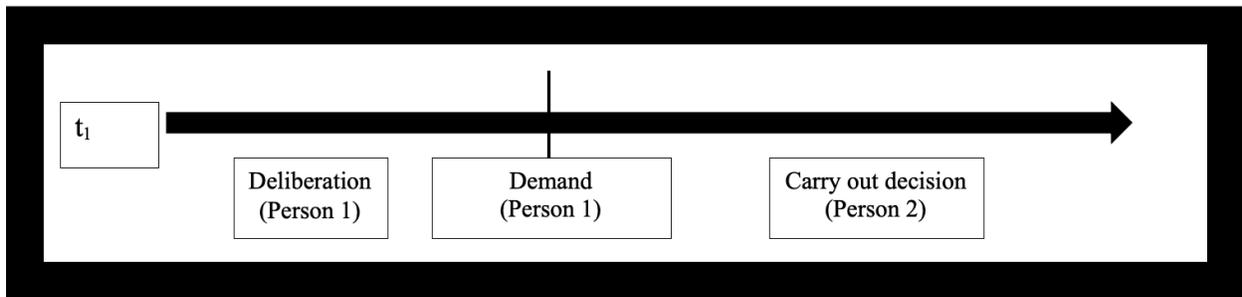


Figure 2: Second-Person Reasoning

As with individual agency, the diagram depicts a temporally extended sequence, unfolding in distinct phases—one consisting in deliberation, the other in activity. And, as with individual agency, the sequence depicted is normative—each part is carried out by a self-conscious agent who locates herself in its unfolding, drawing the normative connections between the various parts and acting accordingly. But unlike with individual agency, the diagram joins together two distinct agents who together carry out a single sequence. Person 1 deliberates and demands, and does so with the thought that someone else is *supposed to* complete this process she's initiated. Person 2 acts in accord with the demand, completing the sequence with the understanding that this is what is *supposed to* come next.

It might appear, then, that the second-person standpoint is just first-personal agency pluralized after all. The agents represent themselves as sharing an activity, initiated by one

person and completed by the other. Thus, the participants do not represent themselves as merely *acting upon* each other, but represent each other *qua* subject—just as a person represents her future self when she makes plans that she’ll carry out. However, second-personal reasoning is also distinguished quite sharply from purely individual exercises of agency, in the crucial respect that it accommodates tensions and conflicts that individual reasoning positively resists. Consider that a properly-functioning agent, when reasoning alone, acts in accordance with her own deliberation and judgment. Ideally, if she’s ϕ -ing, she will hold that ϕ -ing is to-be-done, and if she holds that she oughtn’t ϕ , she will not be ϕ -ing. Mismatch between judgment and action is taken to be indicative of agential error. Our diagram, however, depicts a radically different possibility. Here, an individual might reject as unsound the judgment arrived at through the other agent’s deliberation, and so disagree with her judgment and ultimately the content of her demand, but nevertheless proceed to comply—all while functioning flawlessly, committing no error at all. The agent, for instance, might reason:

“*She* deliberated and judged that life would be better with us apart, and therefore demands that I depart. *I* disagree with this judgment, as I think life would be better together. But I take the results of *her* deliberations to be decisive (under certain conditions), in the same way I take my own deliberations to be when I reason alone. Thus, I pack my bags and drive away.”

The Fichtean model sees nothing inherently troubling with this. Indeed, the possibility of such opposition, conflict, and even strife is precisely what the account is intended to capture. You think we should live together, I think you should leave; You want your money back, and I want to keep it; You want your body left alone, and I want to sock you in the jaw. This is the stuff of second-personal interaction. Our model represents the possibility of persons who conflict and

disagree, who are not bound together by or oriented toward shared projects or ends (in any straightforward sense), but who nevertheless relate to one another *qua* subject, occupying a common space of reasons. In other words, the model gives sense to the notion of second-personal reason, which has been the object of our query.

The foregoing focuses on second-personal reason at its most rudimentary. One person issuing a one-off demand to another, who then complies, represents the elemental instance of this reasoning-form. But from here, we can begin to scale up, bringing these basic second-personal notions to bear on the complexities of real life. Perhaps a person makes a demand, and the other encourages her to revisit her deliberations, thinking she made an obvious error of some sort. When would this be appropriate, and when not? Perhaps a demand is issued, and the recipient challenges whether the background conditions are such as to place her in the role of decider. Who is Person 1, who is Person 2, and how does this get negotiated when two agents clash? Perhaps no demand is issued, but it is known that one would have been issued had conditions been more ideal. Does a hypothetical demand like this carry any sort of normative weight? Perhaps some demands will be egregious or cruel, demeaning or humiliating, disrespectful or disparaging. Can the force of such demands be silenced or negated, and if so, when and on what grounds? As with any account of practical rationality, the simplest examples and illustrations serve as a gateway into the more complex. The Fichtean account as represented by our diagram seems to me to be just such a gateway.

§4. The Second-Person: *Owing*, *Wronging*, and *Having a Right Against*

What, then, are we to say about judgments that make use of notions such as *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against*, which motivated the call for a philosophy of the second-

person in the first place? I propose that to account for such judgments, and for their second-personal character, we need simply to specify their role in second-personal reasoning. So, for instance, to say of myself that I owe it to someone to return his pocket watch involves locating myself in a sequence of second-personal reasoning that joins me to him. In a paradigm instance, the other makes a demand, and I return the watch in order to complete the sequence. If the possibility represented in our diagram is in fact realized, and if I am person 2, the other will not be merely informing me that it is good to return the watch, or that the world would be a better place if the watch were returned, in a way that any other person could have. Instead, I will be placed under normative pressure to complete an agential sequence that he—person 1—initiated. He—the other—is not incidental here, which is what I indicate when I say “I *owed it to him*” rather than “I followed his good counsel,” or even “I did what I was supposed to.”

Judgments involving wronging and having a right against someone can be analyzed along similar lines. Wronging occurs when a person owes an action to another, but fails to perform it, or owes it to another to cease or to refrain, but fails to do so. A person has a right against another when she makes a valid second-personal demand, and is constrained by another’s right when they have issued a valid demand. In both cases, the sense in which the judgments are second-personal in character is clarified by the role they play when acting within the second-person standpoint, which involves treating the other as a subject rather than an object to be acted upon.

The notions of *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against* also highlight the possibility of opposition between the principal participants in a second-personal interaction. If one says that X *owes it to* Y that she ϕ , one alludes to the possibility that X and Y’s judgments and interests will not fully align. The notion of owing calls to mind a ledger, which tracks separate persons whose holdings and titles cannot simply be agglomerated. Something ought to be taken from one

and given to the other; someone's judgement should be prioritized over the other; one should benefit and the other burdened. This is even clearer in the cases of *wronging* and *having a right against*. If *X has a right against Y*, then *X's will* should be prioritized over *Y's*. *Y* might have a preference, only to be trumped by *Y's demand*. If *Y* acts anyway, then she has *wronged X*, acting against the will or interests of a metaphysically distinct person. Indeed, the presence of two distinct agents, and the possibility of conflict that this introduces, is what makes it plausible to render judgments using such notions. When a single agent decides to act and then does, we're less inclined to talk about her owing something to herself or having a right against herself, and more inclined to talk of her making a decision and successfully following through. But this dissimilarity between the judgments-types we make when there is one person on the scene as opposed to several can be explained rather straightforwardly: *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against* all allude to oppositions we most often expect to witness between distinct and separate persons, rather than intra-personally.²⁰

Thus, these forms of judgment, which seemed to some to cry out for a second-personal rendering, have been given one. When used in a second-personal sense, they express thoughts that draw upon the second-person standpoint—the standpoint taken by the persons represented on our diagram, making and acknowledging claims on one another, both joined and opposed within a single space of reasons.

²⁰ Whether intrapersonal application of these notions is *ever* appropriate is a matter of controversy. For the thought that a single unified person could exhibit sufficient disunity to license judgements that she owes something to herself, wrongs herself, or has a right against herself can seem dubious, if not incoherent. My book *Duty to Self* (2021a) outlines these worries and ultimately argues in favor of the possibility of treating oneself second-personally.

§5. Distinctively Second-Personal

If a mode of reasoning is to be distinct from third-personal reasoning, it must involve something other than judging which states of affairs are best from the standpoint of the universe. My proposal meets this criterion. If a mode of reasoning is to be distinct from purely first-personal reasoning, it must involve something other than acting upon others as if they were merely an occasion for applying norms or laws of rationality, like any other object might be. My proposal meets this criterion. If a mode of reasoning is to generate judgments involving *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against*, it must account for the kinds of oppositions in judgments and interests that arise between distinct persons. My proposal meets this criterion.

Philosophers of the second-person have insisted that practical reason must make room for the idea of a distinctively second-personal form of reasoning and thinking. Now we have identified what such a thing would look like. And its appearance, it's fair to say, is in certain respects familiar, and in certain respects peculiar. It's completely ordinary, after all, to treat the demand of another as a legitimate reason for acting, even when we disagree with its content. But it's less ordinary to think of demands, issued by another person, as the normative equivalent of an individual's decision about what she herself will do. Whether the view will ultimately strengthen convictions about the need for the second-person in human life and practice, or if instead will cause those convictions to dissipate, is thus fairly uncertain. But now that we've discerned the very idea of a second-personal reason, we're better positioned to determine what use we have for it, if we have any at all.

Chapter 4: Is Second-Person Reason *For Us*?

Having arrived at a positive characterization of second-personal reason, the natural question is whether it applies to us. After all, in all the excitement of clarifying what such a thing could possibly be, it's easy to get carried away and forget that the goal is to say something about human life. And what use is the theory if the type of reason it describes is appropriate only for an alien species, or fictional beings, rather than us bearers of the human form? Of course, philosophers of the second-person are unified in the belief that human life is shot through with this type of reason. As evidence, they cite the prevalence of second-personal words embedded in our normative talk, and of second-personal concepts structuring our normative thought. But whether these words and concepts, so familiar from everyday life, correspond to anything in the account laid out in Chapter 3 is an open question, and so one might still wonder whether the sort of reason described there is ultimately *for us*.

To demonstrate that it is indeed *for us* is a prodigious undertaking. In what follows, I take some initial steps. My hope, here, is not just to highlight the promise of my account, but also to suggest that the account is sufficiently broad to be incorporated into a variety of philosophical systems and to appeal to a variety of philosophical sensibilities.

§1. A World Without the Second-Person

In his classic essay "The Nature and Value of Rights" (1970), Joel Feinberg argues for the importance of individual rights by inviting us to imagine a world without them. Such a world, we're told, is one in which persons still possess many of the virtues, act out of compassion for others, exhibit benevolence, and are motivated accordingly. What is missing is the ability to

make second-personal claims on one another, or the ability to have duties in the sense of something being *due to* others, as such notions are linked conceptually with rights. However wonderful this world might be in other respects, Feinberg insists that it is lacking in this one way:

Having rights, of course, makes claiming possible; but it is claiming that gives rights their special moral significance. This feature of rights is connected in a way with the customary rhetoric about what it is to be a human being. Having rights enables us to “stand up like men,” to look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone. To think of oneself as the holder of rights is not to be unduly but properly proud, to have that minimal self-respect that is necessary to be worthy of the love and esteem of others. Indeed, respect for others may simply be respect for their rights, so there cannot be one without the other To respect a person then, or to think of him as possessed of human dignity, simply *is* to think of him as a potential maker of claims. (1970, 252)

A world without rights is a world without second-personal claims. A world without second-personal claims is a world without respect and dignity. A world without respect and dignity is deficient, as it is a truism that respect and dignity are morally important. Thus, the second-person is important and we ought to recognize it. We have use for it, after all.

Feinberg’s thought experiment is instructive, if for no other reason that it trains our attention on the stakes of these debates about the second-person. But it’s unlikely to convince a reader who is skeptical about second-personal normativity and its significance. That respect and dignity require second-personal rights is likely to be denied by many utilitarians, for instance, who can claim that respect and dignity are afforded to all by taking everyone’s interests equally

into account.¹ A most harrowing form of dehumanization, after all, is one in which one's happiness and suffering count for nothing in the eyes of others, and so we might think that a way to begin to realize human dignity and respect involves taking seriously the good of each. Feinberg's argument is also likely to meet resistance from cultures that either deny or downplay the importance of individual rights, as with Confucian societies that claim to give respect and dignity by affording persons a social role. Participating, contributing, cooperating, and helping, all work to realize one's humanity in a Confucian culture, and thus promote respect and dignity—all, according to some scholars, without any recognition of rights.²

Of course, one might insist that what goes missing in a world without rights is respect or dignity of a particular species—namely, the kind one is afforded through second-personal recognition. But even if this were true, it would show only that a world without second-personal rights would be a world without *second-personal* respect and *second-personal* dignity, which

¹ Utilitarians tend to eschew the language of respect and dignity, no doubt because of their association with Kantianism. But it's unlikely that any of them would simply accept that they countenance disrespect for persons, or that they deny persons their dignity. Respecting people and treating them with dignity will simply involve regarding their interests properly when deciding what to do. At least, this seems like the natural thing for a utilitarian to say, if pushed to take a stance on such notions.

² Craig Ihara (2004) acknowledges that there is a scholarly debate about whether Confucian societies do, in fact, have the notion of a right. But he makes the point that even if they don't, this isn't reason for thinking that such societies have no place for respect or for dignity. It's this point that matters for my purposes here.

quite obviously doesn't take us very far in terms of establishing the importance of the second-person in general.³ Feinberg thus leaves us in want of further argument.

§2. The Second-Person and the Human Person

Feinberg invites us to imagine ourselves into a world without the second-person, intending to show that it would be wanting in certain respects. But is this thing we're being asked to imagine even coherent? Yes, we could conceive of a world populated by creatures who made no use of the second-person. But could a human world bereft of the second-person be a *human* world? Would its inhabitants be recognizable to us *as us*? If not, then this suggests a different use for Feinberg's thought experiment. Its upshot would not be that we lose something of value without the second-person standpoint. Rather, it would be that the second-person standpoint is so essential to our very being that we simply cannot think ourselves without it. Second-personal reason is *for us* not because it gets us something of worth, but because it is part of what it is to be us at all. Securing this conclusion would require developing a picture of the human person that incorporates second-personal reason in a deep way. It's the sort of thing often done well in art— narrative fiction, film, memoirs, and so on. In this section, I draw upon some of Frederick Douglass's autobiographical work in hopes of connecting our theory of the second-person to our understanding of human nature and society.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass famously chronicles the horrors of his enslavement and the triumph of his escape. But the book offers as well a rich and nuanced

³ It also seems not to be what Feinberg had in mind. For this kind of account would make it true almost by definition that respect and dignity are to be equated with treating a person as a potential maker of claims, and Feinberg explicitly denies that his point is definitional (1970, 252-253).

account of human nature, as revealed under circumstances of extraordinary injustice. And throughout he represents second-personal interaction and reason as central, inevitable, and inescapable for beings of our kind. Consider, for instance, this episode involving an enslaved girl, who sets out to confront her master about an overseer's treatment of her:

This poor girl, on arriving at our house, presented a pitiable appearance. She had left in haste, and without preparation; and, probably, without the knowledge of [the overseer]. She had travelled twelve miles, bare-footed, bare-necked and bare-headed. Her neck and shoulders were covered in scars, newly made; and, not content with marring her neck and shoulders, with the cowhide, the cowardly brute had dealt her a blow on the head with a hickory club, which cut a horrible gash, and left her face literally covered in blood. In this condition, the poor woman came down, to implore the protections of my old master. I expected him to boil over with rage at the revolting deed, and to hear him fill the air with curses upon the brutal [overseer]; but I was disappointed. He sternly told her, in an angry tone, he "believed she deserved every bit of it," and, if she did not go home instantly, he would himself take the remaining skin from her neck and back. Thus was the poor girl compelled to return, without redress. (1994, 173)

Though there is no attempt here to downplay the physical trauma, Douglass seems anxious here to highlight a specific form of indignity to which we are susceptible as beings who can make demands on one another. While the girl suffers in a way that any sentient creature might, she also issues a valid claim, and is then rebuffed, which seems to constitute an indignity that other sorts of beings *cannot* suffer. Indeed, it's fair to say that we'd miss something crucial about the wrongness of slavery—and possibly about injustice in general—if we overlooked our capacity to

suffer indignities of this sort and to inflict them upon others. But this, it would seem, requires thinking of ourselves as something more than mere constituents of states of affairs, cognizable and assessable from a purely third-personal standpoint, capable of contributing to the world going better or worse. The second-person standpoint accommodates this insight and clarifies the intuition behind it.

The relationship between master and slave is adversarial, as is easily seen. “My interests were in direct opposition to [my mistress’s],” Douglass writes, “and we both had our own private thoughts and plans” (1994, 228). This is precisely the kind of conflict that, we’ve said, helps to characterize the second-person standpoint. But opposition is only part of the story. When demands are made and received, the two parties are in some sense united as well, bound together inextricably by their shared humanity. This is true even when the demand is ultimately resisted. Consider a second incident, now with Douglass himself confronting a particularly cruel master regarding his treatment at the hands of an overseer:

On gaining my master’s store, I presented an appearance of wretchedness and woe, fitted to move any but a heart of stone. From the crown of my head to the sole of my feet, there were marks of blood. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood, and the back of my shirt was literally stiff with the same . . . Had I escaped from a den of tigers, I could not have looked worse than I did on reaching St. Michael’s. In this unhappy plight, I appeared before my professedly *christian* master, humbly to invoke the imposition of his power and authority, to protect me from further abuse and violence . . . At first, Master Thomas seemed somewhat affected by the story of my wrongs, but he soon repressed his feelings and become cold as iron. It was impossible—as I stood before him at first—for him to

seem indifferent. I distinctly saw his human nature asserting its conviction against the slave system . . . He first walked the floor, apparently much agitated by my story, and the sad spectacle I presented; but, presently, it was *his* turn to talk. He began moderately, by finding excuses for [the overseer], and ending with a full justification of him, and a passionate condemnation of me. “He had no doubt I deserved the flogging. He did not believe I was sick.; I was only endeavoring to get rid of work. My dizziness was laziness, and covey did right to flog me, as he had done.” After thus annihilating me, and rousing himself by his own eloquence, he fiercely demanded what I wished *him* to do in the case! (1994, 274-275)

When Douglass confronts his master with his list of grievances, the force of the call for redress has an inevitable effect—to be on the receiving end of a demand from one’s fellow humans is to have one’s practical circumstances shaped or altered by them. Even when the master ultimately rebuffs Douglass’s claims, he feels the need to answer them, to justify himself, and ultimately to issue his own demands in return.⁴ The two are thus represented as connected, or united, in addition to being opposed. Even the institution of slavery, which encourages masters to treat

⁴ Fascinatingly, Douglass in return feels the need to explain why it was permissible for him to steal from his master, and offers a nuanced justification. His thought is not simply he needs the food, the master is brutal and is keeping it from him, and so he should take it. Rather, the thought is that he ultimately has a right to demand the food, and the master has no claim to deny it to him. So even here, he conceives of himself and his master united in sharing a common normative space (1994, 246-247).

their slaves as if they are livestock, isn't able to fully sever this connection in this moment of face-to-face address.⁵

Importantly, the master and slave seem to be united *directly*, at least on Douglass's telling. For despite his willingness throughout his work to invoke the authority of God's law, these episodes focus on the significance of person-to-person confrontation without adverting to divinely legislated norms.⁶ What's crucial, and what's underscored, isn't that the master adheres to God's command by entertaining to Douglass's claims, nor that he flouts God's command by brushing them off. Instead, what's mainly at issue is between Douglass and his master directly. This coming together of two persons who have a direct normative effect on each other anticipates, I think, the famous line from Levinas: "the face speaks to me . . . [t]here is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me . . . I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call" (1969, 198). It is not that God law's tells me to respond to the other's demand, nor is it just that I legislate from the first-person standpoint a norm telling me to do so. The other is themselves a source of normativity. The second-person standpoint accommodates this insight and clarifies the intuition behind it.

⁵ And Douglass himself is quite explicit that the system of slavery as a whole does indeed tend toward dehumanization. In his earlier autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, he writes, "We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine . . . all holding the same rank in the scale of being" (1994, 46). What's remarkable is that in such a context, a master would nevertheless feel the pull of Douglass's address, inspiring the felt need to respond and to issue his own demands, as opposed to simply dismissing him.

⁶ In the quoted passage, he does mention the master's professed Christianity, though the point there just seems to be to highlight the irony inherent in a person of faith's acting so viciously.

The second-person standpoint is so deeply embedded in our nature that we can see it *even* amongst inhabitants of a society purporting to divide humanity into people and property. That Douglass underscores this point, and returns repeatedly to it, suggests to me that he might well consider Feinberg's imagined world to be, in a way, *unimaginable*—as least insofar as its occupants are said to be us. For a society of beings who lacked altogether this capacity for second-personal interchange—for directly affecting another's normative situation through demanding, and for being so affected by the demands of another—wouldn't be recognizable as a society of creatures like us. It would appear, we might say, as a society of alien beings, bearers of a very different form of life.

This is consistent, it should be emphasized, with the existence of individual members who lack the capacity for second-personal reason because of psychopathy, sociopathy, disability, or even (perhaps) ideology. That there exists individual fish who lack the capacity to swim in no way severs the deep connection between fish-hood and swimming. That there exist psychopaths in no way severs the deep connection between humanity and the second-person. But just as we tend to look for an explanation when we encounter an individual guppy who sinks to the bottom of the aquarium, so too do we search for an explanation when we encounter a person who receives the demands of another and shrugs. In fact, one of Douglass's preoccupations in *My Bondage* concerns slavery's ability to disrupt or weaken the second-personal capacities of some individuals. One of his preoccupations concerns *how* the institution of slavery manages this. For he sees slavery, insofar as it dilutes the second-person, as running counter to much of what makes us human (1994, 171, 222, 228).⁷

⁷ It's for this reason that Douglass insists, repeatedly, that slavery is bad *for the slaveowner* (1994, 171, 215).

It would be impossible to do justice to the entirety of Douglass's account, here. What I want to suggest is merely that Douglass's work, when read alongside the account I offer here, can begin to bring together our philosophical rendering of the second-person with a compelling picture of humanity. In this way, we might come to understand second-personal reason as indeed being *for us*.

§3. The Second-Person as Synthesis

But if the second-person is so deeply embedded in our humanity, why have philosophers ignored and even rejected it? How does one square this insistence that the second-person is connected to our very being with its existence being so often overlooked or denied? The answer, I think, is that the second-person standpoint combines two aspects of our conception of humanity that philosophers typically treat as in tension with one another, and this tends to obscure what might otherwise be obvious. To see what I have in mind, consider two lines of thought that pervade the whole of moral and political philosophy. The first is that persons have individual interests and ends of their own, and that it matters that these ends and interests be protected. If we deny this, and insist instead that the human good consists solely in the flourishing of the whole independent of the fate of its individual members, then we seem to have adopted a picture more apt to characterize ants, honeybees, or the Borg, than to characterize persons. The second line of thought holds that persons are social beings, who flourish when they act collectively as groups, families, communities, and societies. If we deny this, and insist instead that the human being and the human good are to be understood in isolation from the rest of humanity, then we seem to have adopted a picture more apt to characterize a menagerie of various organisms, thrown together with members of other unfamiliar species, each trying to flourish on its own

terms, than to characterize persons. The former view expresses a flatfooted individualist or liberal view, the latter a flatfooted collectivist or communitarian one. Both can seem deeply implausible. Philosophers have convinced themselves that they have to pick between them.

The second-person standpoint captures both the sense in which persons have interests and ends of their own, and the sense in which they are social beings who are made to act together. Within that standpoint, separate persons' interests, ends, and judgments conflict, and serve as the basis for demands that generate reasons. In this way, persons conceive of themselves as distinct from others, and of others as distinct from them. But, also within the second-person standpoint, persons are unified as a collective subject, carrying out a single sustained exercise of agency. In this way, persons conceive of themselves as inextricably linked. Thus, the second-person standpoint sustains a conception of the person in which we are simultaneously unified with and separate from others. Rather than take a side in the seemingly irresolvable debates between individualists and collectivists, or liberals and communitarians, a philosopher of the second-person can claim to resolve the apparent opposition through a kind of dialectical synthesis, and in so doing give expression to a vision of human nature that is adequate to our self-understanding.⁸

The possibility of such a synthesis might even be welcome news to those who have customarily resisted a philosophy of the second-person. Consider that Aristotelians and Confucian philosophers often oppose rights talk, usually highlighting these traditions' focus on our communal and social natures.⁹ The worry, of course, is that by eschewing second-personal

⁸ Indeed, among the various dualisms that Hegel attempts to undermine through his dialectical method is that of liberalism and communitarianism (though he tended not to use these terms).

⁹ For one such Aristotelian, see McIntyre (1981). For a discussion of Confucianism, see Lee (1992).

notions like *owing*, *wrong*, and *rights*, such philosophers obliterate the distinction between separate persons, overlooking the ways in which our interests and ends collide. This inevitably inspires some philosophers to try to incorporate rights into Aristotelian or Confucian frameworks,¹⁰ which, to some, means doing violence to the essentially communitarian aspects of these doctrines. One possibility, though, is that the impulse to oppose the second-person is just a symptom of thinking of individuality and collectivity as inherently in tension with one another, or of thinking that to accept one is to deny the other. But if we begin to see the second-person standpoint as *incorporating* the social aspect of our nature, rather than running counter to it, and thereby representing person as *connected* in addition to be opposed, then perhaps the second-person may find friends within the camps that have traditionally had little time for it. Thus, by synthesizing these aspects of our conception of the person, we end up with a conception that is more compelling to all, suggesting that second-personal reasoning fit comfortably with our understanding of what it is to be human. It is, once again, *for us*.

§4. Vindicating the Second-Person

Yet, for all that's been said, we might wonder whether a reflective individual, understanding fully the second-person and aware of its centrality to human life, might decide to beg off. If I'm Frederick Douglass, enslaved by my masters, why couldn't I just choose to see the others as obstacles to be overcome or defeated, rather than as fellow persons?¹¹ If I'm his master,

¹⁰ For an attempt to reconcile Aristotle and rights, see Kraut 1996. For an attempt to reconcile Confucianism and rights, see Sim 2004.

¹¹ Like in *Django Unchained* (2012).

why couldn't I just choose to treat his demands like white noise, rather than responding, justifying myself, and offering counter-demands? As one author says of the second-person standpoint, "Why can't I, like Rousseau's solitary walker, just opt out of the whole business? What would be the mistake in that?" (Lavin 2008).

This section gestures at various ways of addressing this question, grounded in the empiricist, eudaemonist, and German Idealist traditions. I've organized the discussion so as to ascend from what I think most will consider to be the least ambitious philosophical view to the most ambitious one, and, conversely, to descend from what I think most will consider to be the more promising and plausible view to the most intolerably extravagant. All the views have much to be said for and against them, and I won't try to adjudicate matters here.

Empiricism

Some philosophers will be drawn to the view that the second-person standpoint, along with the practical concepts made available within it, are given to us *empirically*. It is, one might contend, a contingent fact about human psychology that we *just do* reason in the way described in Chapter 3, and there is no deeper grounding of the second-personal standpoint to be had—nor is one needed. Should most persons find the standpoint psychologically irresistible, then we can, as a matter of course, reason together from it, make claims from it, act according to it, and appeal to it when justifying ourselves.

Darwall apparently believes something like this.¹² For he never, when advocating for his account, argues that a person must enter the second-person standpoint on pain of irrationality or incoherence, but instead appeals to empirical observations meant to convince us of the standpoint's ubiquity. *Even Stalin*, he assures us, was a vigorous wielder of second-personal concepts (2006, 139-140). And so even the most self-conceited among us seem to be in the business of issuing and responding to demands. Beyond this, Darwall attempts to confirm the existence of the second-person standpoint, and its purchase on us, by turning to empirical psychology (2006, 151-180). Study of human behavior and of the human mind uncovers considerable evidence for the prevalence of the second-person—Darwall pays special attention to the experiments of Stanley Milgram, which can be read as indicating a strong human impulse toward the second-person. And this, indeed, is where the second-personal standpoint finds its

¹² This might seem surprising, given Darwall's reputation as a broadly Kantian thinker. Indeed, such surprise is prominent in Lavin's review of the book, where he writes:

Chapter 7 asks how the capacity to occupy the second-person standpoint could possibly be realized in "human psychology, naturalistically conceived" (151), and answers that experimental psychology confirms what armchair reflection suggests -- the conduct of human beings is nearly everywhere influenced by "distinctively second-personal normative psychological capacities" (180) such as other-directed feelings like empathy or resentment. But such answers reveal that Darwall's questions are not, as one initially might have thought, the expression of astonishment at the very possibility of, say, empathy, resentment, or romantic love, or quite generally at occupying the second-person standpoint, an astonishment familiar from Rousseau and Sartre and other philosophers of the second-person (2008).

Lavin intends this as criticism, though there's not necessarily anything illicit about the supposition that the second-person is presented to us empirically.

ultimate grounds. “What armchair moral philosophical and psychological speculation suggests,” Darwall writes, “experimental psychology confirms” (2006, 180).

This leaves us with little to say to anyone who expresses incredulosity about the second-person standpoint. While it’s plausible enough that most of us take it up, philosophy is not in position to undertake something so ambitious as a grounding of it. Investigation into the second-person begins with philosophy. But the theoretician must ultimately hand off the baton to the scientist, who will tell us whether and to what extent our armchair speculation from Chapter 3 has any real basis in human psychology.

Eudaimonism

Those working within the Aristotelian tradition will seek grounding for the second-person standpoint by reflecting upon the human form, rather than upon contingent empirical psychology. What makes for right thought and action, according to the Aristotelian eudaimonist, is determined by what makes for a good human life, and typically the human good is given full articulation through an account of the virtues. The virtuous human will be sensitive to particular sorts of considerations, and will be motivated to feel and act as the situation requires. This is, after all, what it is to be a flourishing human, as opposed to a cat, houseplant, or Martian. As such, a full ethical account will consist in an investigation of the very sorts of considerations to which the virtuous human agent is sensitive.

The eudaemonist philosopher of the second-person will contend, then, that the *just* individual is one who responds to others as persons in the way dictated by the second-person standpoint. They will contend, as Mark Lebar does, that: “[W]e have the same reason for occupying the second-person standpoint that we do for being virtuous generally: doing so is

crucially important for living well” (2009, 650). The good life involves orienting oneself toward others second-personally. Our human flourishing depends upon it.

It is a matter of controversy what sort of investigation would be needed in order to follow through on the sort of account hinted at here. The focus on the concrete form of life “human,” as opposed to some more abstract notion such as “rational agent,” might suggest that what we’re dealing with is a biological category, best studied and explicated by empirical scientists.¹³ But some are taken with the thought that we humans bear a special epistemological relationship to our own form. In being human, we’re able to apprehend *a priori* that which is good for us, or bad, what is virtuous and what is vicious, and what our flourishing consists in.¹⁴ It’s a bold proposal, likely to invite skepticism among the many who find the Aristotelian worldview deeply alien. But, if there is something to it, and if truth does lie with the Aristotelian, then the vindication of the second-person wouldn’t require handing off the baton to the empirical researcher after all, but would instead require the kind of speculation that is the province of the philosopher.

German Idealism

Finally, we might propose, audaciously, that the very possibility of self-conscious agency hinges upon one’s taking up the second-person standpoint. Such a thought has its roots in the

¹³ Philippa Foot’s (2001) neo-Aristotelian account of natural goodness likens human moral goodness to the goodness of robust roots on a mighty oak, or the goodness of a thick warm coat of fur on a polar bear, perhaps implying that the human form is just one of many to be investigated by the biologist.

¹⁴ This is the position of Michael Thompson, defended in his paper “Apprehending the Human Form” (2004).

hallowed tradition of German Idealism. Fichte contends, famously, that an agent is only capable of knowing herself *qua* agent insofar as she is in some way limited by, or distinguished from, something other than herself (2000, 30-31). And while the details the argument needn't be rehearsed here, he ultimately insists that the external world and its objects are insufficient to supply the requisite limit, and that it must be supplied through the free address of another, making a claim upon one's action.¹⁵ “[T]he rational being cannot posit itself as such,” Fichte writes, “except in response to a summons calling upon it to act freely” (2000, 37). When the summons is responded to properly—that is to say, in the way necessary for self-consciousness—the person on its receiving end determines herself to act in light of the demand being made upon her:

Thus the relation of free beings to one another is necessarily determined in the following way, and is posited as thus determined: one individual's knowledge of the other is conditioned by the fact that the other treats the first as a free being (i.e. limits its freedom through the concept of the freedom of the first). But this manner of treatment is conditioned by the first's treatment of the other, and the first's treatment of the other is conditioned by the other's treatment and knowledge of the first, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus the relation of free beings to one another is a relation of reciprocal interaction through intelligence and freedom. (2000, 42)

¹⁵ For helpful discussions of this difficult argument, see Darwall 2013a, McNulty 2016, and Wood 2016, 85-91.

Receiving the summons constitutes a transcendental condition of self-consciousness, while at the same time requiring recognition of the other as a being with the standing to place restrictions on one's will. The demand is normative, in other words. It constitutes a second-personal reason.

The promise of such an argument is of the sort that philosophers often dream of making good on—foundational normative claims, derived irrefutably from the very act of thinking itself! The checkered history of such arguments, though, might serve to curb our enthusiasm. Perhaps we should settle for something less philosophically airtight. Perhaps we should hand things over to the scientists after all. But if we do decide to hold out hope for a more ambitious vindication of the second-person, the path forward may well be the one initiated by the German Idealists, and success might well consist in the completion of the project that they began.¹⁶

¹⁶ On whether we should pursue the ambitious path, I tend to agree with T. M. Scanlon, who on the occasion of his retirement delivered the following admonition:

What is important, I want to stress, is not to lose this confidence. Because philosophical problems are so difficult – otherwise, they wouldn't be philosophical problems – there's always a temptation to reduce them to something else. Historicism, psychologism, various kinds of scientism, and other reductionist views are always appealing, and we seem to be in a moment when such views are gaining in popularity in many quarters; that is to say, we are in one of those recurring moments of loss of nerve in philosophy.

These reductive views do not in fact provide answers to philosophical problems, because they always presuppose such answers; but these answers are just kept in the background, or off-stage, so that people don't actually have to worry about them. Keeping these problems out in front, at center stage, involves a willingness to admit their difficulty, to recognize that we will inevitably be getting them wrong in important ways, while nonetheless remaining confident that we can make

progress, and increase our understanding, by facing them directly, and thinking about them carefully (2016).