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On the *Owing to* in Owing Duties to Self

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ABSTRACT

Philosophical discussions of self-directed duties concern not merely those duties one has *regarding* oneself, but those one owes specifically *to oneself*. In this paper, I take up the question of what it even means to owe something to oneself in the first place. A proper appreciation of what it means, I argue, will help answer skeptics who doubt the coherence of duties to self.

1. DUTY TO SELF AND *OWING TO*

Discussions of duties to self typically commence with a clarification: the topic concerns not the duties one has that merely *regard oneself*, but concerns, rather, those duties one owes specifically *to oneself* (Hills 2003; Kanygina 2022; Muñoz 2020; Schaab 2021; Schofield 2021). The distinction is most often clarified by contrasting examples like those in the lefthand column with those in the righthand one:

Duty Regarding Oneself	Duty to Self
Suicide is impermissible because you have a duty as a citizen to contribute to the polis.	Suicide is impermissible because you *owe it to yourself* to refrain from self-harm.
Quitting smoking is required because you promised your mother you would.	Quitting smoking is required because you *owe it to yourself* to be healthy.
Standing up for yourself is obligatory because servility will demoralize your comrades.	Standing up for yourself is obligatory because you *owe it to yourself* to resist subordination.

Figure 1. Duties regarding oneself vs. duties to self

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All admit that judgments like those in the lefthand column are legitimate. It's the judgments on the right that are apt to stir controversy. For once the topic itself has been clarified, philosophers are divided over whether judgments in the righthand column express bits of commonsense or, instead, are incoherent.[1] Obviously, much will hinge on how the phrase *owe it to* is understood—the sense given to this particular form of words will determine whether or not saying that I owe something to myself is, in fact, coherent. So, this is an issue toward which we should turn our attention.

My task in this essay will be to subject judgments about 'owing to' to some scrutiny, specifically insofar as they are deployed intrapersonally. In so doing, I hope to better understand some of the skepticism philosophers have directed toward the notion of duties to self, and ultimately suggest a way that that skepticism might be overcome. More specifically, I propose a way of understanding what it is for two distinct persons to owe something to each other that, when applied to a single person interacting only with herself, dissolves the skepticism about duties to the self.

2. SECOND-PERSONAL REASON AND DUTY TO SELF

Philosophers often distinguish between two forms of practical normativity: *monadic* normativity, which simply places an individual agent under some evaluative standard, and *bipolar* normativity, which essentially implicates multiple agents who relate to one to another (Thompson 2004; Darwall 2006; Wallace 2019). The distinction is best grasped by considering pairs of contrasting judgments:

Monadic	Bipolar
X has reason to φ.	X *owes it to Y* that she φ.
X does wrong by φ-ing.	X *wrongs Y* by φ-ing.
X is not permitted to φ.	X *has a right against Y* that she not φ.

Figure 2. Monadic vs. bipolar normativity

Simon Căbulea May notes that judgments in the righthand column represent "a three-place relation between the agent (or *subject*), the required action (or *content*) and the party (or *object*) who stands to be wronged," whereas those in the lefthand column represent "only a two-place relationship between subject and content" (2015, 523). By expressing a three-place relation, bipolar judgments depict the way in which an agent's actions can be not just suboptimal, irrational, or wrongheaded, but actually victimize a particular person.

To say that a person owes a duty to herself, then, is to deploy a judgment of the sort that we find in our righthand column, while representing a single agent as standing in for both the X and the Y variables. So, a self-directed duty consists *not* simply in, say, Aristotle having reason to stand up for himself, in it being wrong for him to smoke, or in the impermissibility of his ending his own life. It consists, instead, in Aristotle *owing it to Aristotle* that he stand up for himself, in it *wronging Aristotle* when Aristotle smokes, or in it being the case that Aristotle *would violate the rights of Aristotle* by killing himself. The idea here is that the intuitive distinction gestured at in Figure 1, which distinguishes between a duty with respect to oneself and a duty owed to oneself, can be further elucidated by the distinction depicted in Figure 2. To owe something to oneself would be to relate to oneself as both poles in a bipolar relationship.

Whether the bipolar judgment form can support an X and a Y who are identical is thus the crucial question. Of course, there exists no problem per se with a judgment that relates a person to herself. Stanley Cavell writes that, "We speak of standing in various relations to our selves, e.g., of hating and loving ourselves, of being disgusted with or proud of ourselves, of knowing and believing in ourselves, of finding and losing ourselves" (1979, 384). Yet, from this, it does not follow that just *any* judgment relating one person to another can coherently be applied intrapersonally. Cavell continues:

> In a relation to myself there is no reciprocity.... If I love myself am I loved by myself? Can I love myself back? Narcissus did not die of love but of love unrequited, or unrequitable.... It is said that there are occasions on which, if I am to be forgiven, I must forgive myself. On such occasions, forgiveness would have to be forthcoming without the condition of apology, since I cannot apologize to myself. Could I forgive myself, as I might others, for not being able to apologize? If I can love myself, I suppose I can be jealous of myself, regard myself as my possession and carefully monitor my possession's company. (Like God.) But could I envy myself? (1979, 384–86)

Cavell, here, cautions against thoughtlessly applying to a single person those judgement-forms that paradigmatically relate two distinct persons. For to do so is to risk saying things that intuitively seem absurd.

Those who balk at the very idea of a duty to self often seek to convince us that the notion belongs on the list of intuitively incoherent intrapersonal judgments that Cavell has begun. Most famously, philosophers have argued about the so-called Paradox of Duties to Oneself, which holds that a self-directed duty can't be a genuine duty, because a self-directed duty is one that the agent herself could always waive at will, and a duty one can waive at will doesn't seem to be a duty at all.[2] But some think that the paradox is a symptom of a broader problem, which is that attempts to apply moral notions intrapersonally end up seeming absurd as a quite general matter. Here is Matthias Haase:

> [Suppose I wrong myself]. And I only have myself to blame. Should I apologize to myself? And if I do, should I forgive myself? How do I make myself trust myself again? Perhaps I have already damaged my relation to myself too severely and it is time to part ways. This last bit is patent nonsense. No one would be left after the divorce. (2014, 365)

We could go on from here. Could I plead with myself for forgiveness? If I'm dying for forgiveness, can't I just give it? Could I, having been wronged by myself, take up a campaign of revenge against myself? Could I demand compensation? If I compensate myself, could I then give myself a handshake and consider myself reconciled with myself? Haase admits that we use some phrases like "forgive oneself," which usually involves letting go of regret or guilt. But his point is that when we use morality talk in all its complexity to speak of a single individual interacting with only herself, things quickly begin to seem incoherent. It's like giving testimony to yourself, or asking yourself for permission to do something, or shaking your own hand to finalize an agreement with yourself. It seems incoherent because morality is, generally, made for two. All we've said, though, is that it can seem incoherent. In the next section, I offer a suggestion as to why talk of moral duty applied intrapersonally can seem vulnerable to this charge.

3. JOINED AND OPPOSED

In introducing the notion of a bipolar judgment, Michael Thompson offers the following metaphor:

> In all such judging, whatever the determinate form, I may be said to view a pair of distinct agents as joined and opposed in a formally distinctive type of practical nexus. They are for me like the opposing poles of an electrical apparatus: in filling one of these forms with concrete content, I represent an arc of normative current as passing between the agent-poles, and as taking a certain path. (2004, 335)

The image of poles that are both "joined and opposed" is a useful one, and I'll try to unpack it with the aim of understanding better why one might find the notion of a self-directed duty to be incoherent. Those who stand in the *owed to* relation with respect to one another are joined, or connected, by certain shared norms. This enables them not just to affect one another, like independent atoms in physical space, but relate in some deeper sense that the philosopher of bipolar normativity hopes to better understand. Equally important, however, is that those who stand in the *owed to* relation with respect to one another are also opposed—at least potentially—in that their ends, interests, and judgments are potentially in tension with one another.

To illustrate, the bipolar domain might be likened to a ledger, tracking debts and transfer payments between various individuals. Those whose names are listed on the ledger are unified by virtue of their inclusion on the ledger, as well as through the relationships that the ledger itself specifies. They are in tension by virtue of the fact that all the people listed are separate individuals whose interests and ends potentially conflict. The whole reason for keeping a ledger, after all, is that the various holdings cannot be agglomerated, as if belonging to a single agent. To transfer funds from one individual to another is to advance the interests of one, while setting back the interests of the other.[3]

Of course, this rough illustration leaves us with a question about what *precisely* it means for persons to be joined in a bipolar way. Persons are metaphysically distinct entities, capable of affecting one another just as they affect any distinct object, and how exactly they could be any more connected than this is an open question. But when talking about duty to self, the opposite question presses itself upon us. An individual person is a single metaphysical unit, bearing a single consciousness, thereby exhibiting a strong form of unity. And so the question becomes whether it is even possible for a person, so unified, to stand in potential opposition to herself in the way necessary for her to owe something to herself. The ledger example is helpful here. Should it list me as owing myself a certain amount, or as having transferred a certain sum to myself, we quickly lose a grip on what relationship it is even trying to represent. To transfer cash to myself and to not do so seem indistinguishable, because I'm too unified for this to make any sense.

In the final chapter of *The Exchange of Words*, Richard Moran argues that what seems to be true of the ledger is true of the moral domain more generally. He notes, for instance, that I am frequently "obliged to *defer*" to someone whose judgments I believe are wrongheaded—I disagree with my child's decision to go to law school but support them anyway because it's their career; I don't interfere with my friend's lackluster romantic relationship because it's their life to live; and I don't try to get my spouse to leave their weird church because they're entitled to their own beliefs. But, Moran thinks, to take stances such as these toward one's own self would be incoherent. I cannot reject the wisdom of my own decision to attend law school, to marry, or to join a religious organization, but then defer to myself out of respect. For "[t]o recognize my own preferences as misguided or misinformed is itself to call that preference into question, if not to abandon it outright" (2018, 203).

Moran offers a diagnosis for this: a single agent, bearing a single consciousness, exhibits a unity that a multitude made up of many agents does not. When I make an all-things-considered judgment that I ought to eat my vegetables, I've made up my mind about what to do, and it is a sign that something has gone wrong when I do not eat them. When I make an all-things-considered

judgment that my elderly parents ought to eat their vegetables, I haven't in any way determined what they'll do. For they might simply disagree with me, and the vegetables might remain uneaten because of the way *my parents* determine *their* wills. This possible opposition between their judgment and mine creates space for the thought that I owe it to my parents to defer to them, or for them to demand that I defer to them regardless of my own preferences. But there exists no analogous opening in the case of my own thought. To say that I demand it of myself that I eat my vegetables is for me to simply express that I have made up my mind about what I ought to do—possibly despite having some countervailing desires—and to defer to myself, or to obey myself, would simply be to act according to my own judgment. Such is the case with the *owing to* relationship, quite generally—at least according to Moran. *Owing to* implies the possibility of a particular kind of opposition, conflict, or tension between agents. But the individual self is unified in a way that precludes the requisite opposition, making it impossible for a person to owe something to themselves.

Of course, none of this means that there must be *actual* opposition of any sort. My spouse and I might be so in sync that our judgments and interests all manage to align, but I still might owe it to her to defer to her in some cases were it ever to happen that we did disagree. Moran's point is that the reason we have concepts surrounding moral duty, as opposed to just ones that urge us to perform some optimum act, is to adjudicate conflicts should they arise. So to talk of moral duty in instances where there could not be, even in principle, such opposition, is not just certain to be pointless. It shows a misunderstanding of what moral duties are, and is about as coherent as attempting to make an agreement with myself and finalize it by shaking my own hand.

4. FINDING OPPOSITION WITHIN THE SELF: SOME DIFFICULTIES

Is there a plausible way of talking about the self that could render a person opposed to herself in the requisite sense? I am going to consider a couple of ways that we might go about arguing that it *is* plausible, based loosely on arguments I've developed more fully elsewhere (Schofield 2021). Obviously, I am sympathetic. But I will also suggest reasons for thinking that one who is skeptical of duties to self will not be fully assuaged, leaving these arguments in need of further buttressing and elaboration—buttressing and elaboration that I will eventually attempt to provide in section 5.

Consider an approach that attempts to render a person in possible opposition to herself by reifying her past, present, and future 'selves.' Of course, it's commonplace to talk of one's "future self" in a way that makes it out to be something like a metaphysically distinct individual—far off in the future, I affect him like I might indirectly affect someone in a far-off nation, either harming him for my own benefit or sacrificing my interests now for his. But this, understood literally, leaves us with an apparently distorted picture of the self. If my present self treats my future self as a metaphysically distinct other, then I treat my own self as an external object upon which I act rather than the bearer of a subjectivity numerically identical to my own. And this is, we might worry, an implausible way of viewing oneself.

To illustrate, imagine I decide that I will go to the store at 3:00. I expect not to want to go when the time arrives. So, I hire someone to kidnap me, put me in the trunk, and then take me there. Or, less dramatically, I arrange to incentivize my future self in the same way I might incentivize another—perhaps I arrange to reward myself should I go to the store, manipulating my motives and engaging in a bit of "choice architecture." In doing this, I seem to act upon myself, much in the way I act upon distinct other persons to get them to do something they don't desire to do. This, as opposed to my deciding for myself what I will do and then simply carrying out the decision.[4]

To the extent that I cognize my future self in the way I would cognize a distinct other, I might seem to open up space for conflict and tension of the sort that would engage me morally—if my future self would object to going to the store, should I not then consider the possibility that I'm obligated to refrain from sending him there? The worry, though, is that a person's relationship to themselves isn't typically so fractured as this. Indeed, we might think that what is actually being entertained here is actually a kind of defective or degenerate agency. Think of how we would speak of someone who frequently strategizes against her future self—we might characterize her as guarding against *weakness of will*, or *irrationality*. But in the healthy case, where a person decides how to act and then just follows through, the gap that enables us to talk sensibly about owing duties to oneself begins to close. If there's no separate individual, and only a single subjectivity, can there really be conflict that parallels in its essentials the conflict between persons? I demand that my future self finish a project. The time comes and he does not. If my present and future selves are like different persons, then it makes sense to talk about intrapersonal justice, fairness over time, or what I owe to myself. If my attitude toward my future self is that it is just me, then it seems less like I am shirking an obligation generated by the demand, and more like I'm simply changing my mind or failing to follow through on my intention.[5]

Consider a second attempt to open space for opposition within a single person, now by talking of 'selves' associated with a person's practical identities. This strategy would align with a common way of talking as well—maybe my "professional self" and my "parental self" aren't seeing eye to eye about time allocation, so I characterize them as being in conflict and talk of the various demands emanating from both sides. But this too, one might worry, leaves us with a distorted picture of the self. Imagine that I am reasoning about my professional self from the point of view of my parental self. If, in such an instance, I take myself literally to be interacting with something like a metaphysically distinct other—my "professional self"—then it's not immediately clear to what extent *I* ever make up my own mind. Instead, what we have are just parts or aspects of a self interacting. Take Kierkegaard in his *Four Upbuilding Discourses*. There, he imagines an internal conflict between the "first self," which is the part of a person driven by capricious inclination, and the "deeper self," which is the part of a person that is more reflective. The two selves end up in conflict:

> [T]here is danger afoot—both of them, both the first self and the deeper self, notice it, and the latter sits there as concerned as the experienced pilot, while a secret council is held on whether it is best to throw the pilot overboard since he is creating a contrary wind.... The first self cannot move from the spot, and yet, yet it is clear that the moment of joy is in a hurry, and that fortune is already in flight. Therefore people do indeed say that if one does not make use of the moment at once, it is soon too late. And who is to blame? Who else but that deeper self? But even this scream does not help. (1997, 89)

There does seem to be some conflict—some internal drama—here. But how literally are we to take this talk of various of our own selves opposing one another, trying to convince one another, trying to defeat one another, and so on? Does the person themself have to step in and adjudicate between the two selves? Or does the person step back and let the two resolve their conflict? Is this a good model for thinking about how a perfectly healthy agent deliberates? Here, we might wonder, along with Kierkegaard himself: "When such a thing occurs in a person's soul, does it not mean he's beginning to lose his mind?"[6]

In the healthy case, a person weighs reasons for and against some course of action, and then makes up her mind about what to do. It's possible, for dramatic effect, to personify the various values and considerations being weighed—those associated with inclination versus reflection, for instance, or those associated with career versus parenting. But if we're going to take the idea

of owing something to oneself seriously, it seems like we need something more than a single person with two sets of values he's deliberating about. And Moran, in particular, worries that we do not have this:

> A person, a human being, is someone who occupies different roles and can experience conflicts of values. And we do not individuate persons in terms of single, univocal values; a particular human being is someone who embodies many different roles and values and is not identical with any particular one of them. The language of different "selves" encourages equivocation on this point. Either we are shifting between talk of persons (actual individuals) who have aims and values, and talk about the aims and values themselves; or we are favoring a form of expression such that that each value can be seen as "offering attractions" or "making demands" in much the same way that an actual living individual can make demands, and that such conflict can be understood the way we understand conflict between people. But the meaning of this latter form of expression (i.e., a value making particular demands) is difficult to distinguish from the purely formal claim that different aims and values provide the person with different motivating reasons for incompatible actions, which is after all the role of differing values, and doesn't itself provide reason to divide the person into different "selves." (2018, 209–10)

The metaphorical talk is fine, or course, so long as we recognize it for what it is. But the worry is that in order make sense of duties to ourselves, we need to take the notion of separate selves literally, and that by taking it literally, we destroy the unity that constitutes a single self in the first place.

I've tried to understand and develop further a form of skepticism toward duties to the self—one that is a bit broader and more general than the Paradox of Duties to Oneself, which has tended to dominate the discussion in the literature. In the final section, I will sketch one possible way of answering the skepticism. The idea will be to show that a certain kind of unity can be retained in the face of divisions within the self, thus dissolving the concerns about the argumentative strategies considered above. Due to space constraints, I will develop the response to the skepticism only from a broadly Kantian point of view, which focuses on the generation of duties through the issuing of legitimate demands. I do so because the view I have developed of duties to self elsewhere is broadly Kantian, as is Darwall's view from which I draw. But this will, of course, leave more work to be done for those who endorse non-Kantian accounts.[7]

5. UNITED SELF, BUT WITH OPPOSITION

In *The Second-Person Standpoint*, Stephen Darwall argues that we persons take up a distinct practical standpoint when we reason about what we owe to each other—one within which you and I "make and acknowledge claims on one another's wills" (2006, 3). In the paradigm case, an individual makes a demand on some other individual, obligating them to undertake some course of action. "Take your hand off my shoulder," said by a woman to a man obligates him to do exactly that. Then he, a metaphysically distinct person, removes his hand, and does it because he owes it to her to do so. The case involves the connection between a person issuing a demand to another, and the opposition involves his wanting his hand on the woman's shoulder while she doesn't want it there. In laying out his view, Darwall draws upon Johann Gottlieb Fichte's account of second-personal interaction as presented in his *Foundations of the Philosophy of Right*. For Fichte, a person gives a bipolar reason to another by means of summoning her, or by making a demand (2000, 28–39). The summons, here, does not coerce or intimidate. Rather, a person receiving the summons responds of his own free volition, taking the demand to be a reason for action.

As I understand it, the suggestion here is that a bipolar interaction between two people is something that unfolds according to a rational structure that both self-consciously use to guide their activity. So, the first person issues a demand with an eye to determining what the other will do. It is the goal, or the *telos*, of reasoning about what to demand that one eventually give the second person a reason, which she will self-consciously act upon. This can be represented with the following diagram:

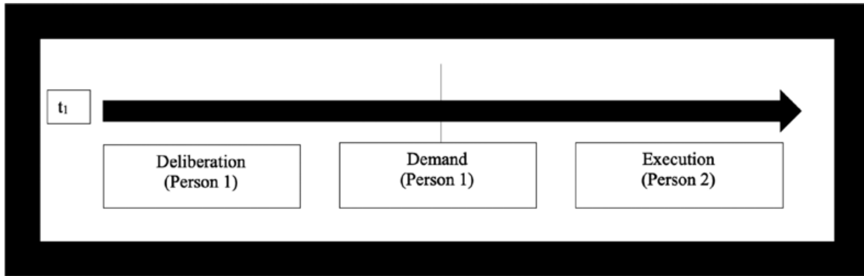

Figure 3. Two-person sequence

Two things are important here. First, the two agents, Person 1 and Person 2, are connected by virtue of the unity exhibited by the whole. Each of the elements is the element it is by virtue of its function—like organs that constitute an organism.[8] So, Person 1's bipolar deliberation is what it is by virtue of its being directed toward the issuing of a demand. The demand is what it is by virtue of its mediating between execution and deliberation. And Person 2's execution is the completion of the entire sequence—a self-consciousness bringing to a proper close the process that was initiated earlier. Second, the two agents—Person 1 and Person 2—stand in potential opposition. They are metaphysically distinct. They are capable of rendering conflicting judgments about which course of action is best. They are capable of having opposing interests. When Person 2 executes the demand, they might think the demand's content is ridiculous or suboptimal, but nevertheless carry it out. This picture, then, renders the two agents joined and opposed. In this way, it exhibits an essential feature of the bipolar relationship as discussed in section 3.[9]

That a single individual person could engage in and carry out a single line of thinking by herself wouldn't be at all surprising. The picture would, in broad outline, parallel the one involving multiple persons:

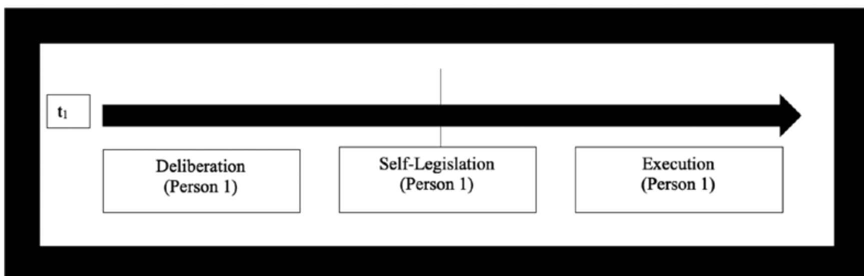

Figure 4. Single-person sequence

Here too, this whole process exhibits a kind of unity. Each of the elements is the element it is by virtue of its function. So, deliberation is what it is by virtue of its being directed toward the making of a decision—the legislating or deciding for oneself. The legislation simply is that which mediates between execution and deliberation. And the execution is the completion of the entire thought—a self-consciousness bringing to completion the process that she herself initiated earlier. Like the case of two persons (Figure 3), the line of thinking is normative. A person who deliberates without making a decision fails to do what she is supposed to do by virtue of having deliberated. The person who does not execute the decision, or act upon the legislation, fails as well. In this sense, she relates to future self not as an external, independent object upon which to act, but as a subjectivity that is numerically identical to her own.

So, we have an individual person, who is unified from one moment to the next as the subject of a single process. In unifying a person in this way, do we foreclose the possibility of intrapersonal conflict? Or can a single person be both joined and opposed, as I suggested that two distinct persons could be? I believe that a single unified self can, in fact, exhibit the requisite tension and opposition. Consider a suggestion I've made elsewhere (2021) that a duty to oneself could be generated in the following way: A person initiates a project. She demands of herself that she complete it. The demand, let's say, is a reasonable one. The person continues to carry out the project. Eventually, her preferences change. Now she does not want to carry it out. Under some circumstances, she would simply change her mind about what she is to do. But this is not simply an instance in which she formed an intention. Instead, she promised herself, or demanded of herself, that she continue. Even if she doesn't want to carry out the plan, she does so because she was on the receiving end of a demand from a perspective that thinks differently about things, and that has interests different from hers. Time itself creates enough of a divide between one and the other for there to be opposition. The normative structure exhibited in our figure combines the two, however, so that it's not just one entity acting upon another, trying to coerce or manipulate it. This is what is meant what I say I *owe to* myself the performance of an act. Furthermore, because of the conflict between the various temporal perspectives, it's possible to talk sensibly about fairness over the course of a life. If a person imposes a burden on her future self in order to benefit herself now, it is just one single person being both benefitted and harmed. But it's not incoherent to suggest that this involves a kind of tension or opposition that we might represent on a ledger. Even though she's a single individual, she is in tension with herself from various perspectives and it is, on this basis, sensible to talk about how justice demands she distribute burdens and benefits over the course of a life.

Now consider practical identities. I've argued elsewhere (2021) that a duty to oneself can be generated in the following way: A person identifies as a parent, which involves having a set of interconnected values. She also identifies as a philosopher, which involves having an entirely different set of interconnected values. From the former perspective, she issues a demand to the latter that she make more time in her life for parental activities. When deciding what to do, she does not simply step back and decide what she most wants to do overall, or weigh all the reasons in aggregate. This is not just a mundane instance of making up her mind. Instead, she considers the demand from her perspective as a professional, takes it to be reasonable, and thus takes herself to be required to comply. In accepting that she *owes it to herself* to act in this way, she exercises her own freedom—it's not as if she's coerced her professional self, so much as she appeals to it in the ways a person might appeal to a distinct individual. But she does so, perhaps, in the midst of conflict generated by two inconsistent sets of values that each constitute part of her identity.

My hope is that the Fichtean account articulated here will dissolve the skepticism about whether a person can bear a bipolar relationship to herself. The worry, discussed in section 4, was that if an individual exhibits divisions and tensions within her own life sufficient to relate in

a bipolar way, she will fail to treat herself as a unified individual. There will be no self left, and so no duties to self. This worry, I've tried to show, is grounded in an assumption that a single person is simply too unified for the notion of duty to be applied to her coherently. But I've now provided a sketch intended to show that a single individual agent can be both joined and opposed in a way characteristic of a bipolar relationship, treating herself in ways that mirror the way she treats another but without fracturing herself so significantly as to no longer be a unified agent.

6. CONCLUSION

In a famous passage in *The Sources of Normativity*, Christine Korsgaard imagines a person who demands that another person quit bullying her. The person on the receiving end of the demand, she says, can no longer go on in the way she had before. "Oh you can proceed all right, but not just as you did before," she writes. "For I have obligated you to stop" (1996, 142–43). What she describes, here, is the generation of a bipolar obligation—a duty *owed to* another. In Korsgaard's view, this parallels what happens what an individual makes a demand of herself, or legislates for herself. Not all second-personal interactions involve answering to another. Some of them require responding to "the voice of the second person within" (2007, 23).

Her idea is that both self-directed and other-directed duties are species of a common genus: bipolar duties. In showing how both might join and oppose the person who is owed something to the one who owes it, I hope to have given sense to the suggestion that they do, in fact, belong to common genus. Now, it's certainly the case that there remain questions about the form of normativity characteristic of this genus—for instance, whether we can prove that we actually must reason in the way demanded by bipolar reason. But the lesson of the investigation here is twofold. First, there is no particular reason to rule out the possibility of a person relating to herself second-personally, and so there is no particular worry about the coherence of a person owing something to themselves. Second, to better understand the *owing to* relationship, we need to attend to the way it manifests in both the inter- and intrapersonal cases.[10]

NOTES

1. Those who consider self-directed duties to be unproblematic or even necessary include Darwall ("To intelligibly hold someone responsible... [an agent] must be able to take up a second-person standpoint on herself" [2006, 23]) and Korsgaard ("I think that every rational agent stands in what Darwall would call a second-personal relation to herself—she has a second-personal voice within" [2007, 11]). Those who are skeptical include Haase (2014), Lavin (2014), and Moran (2018).
2. Hobbes gives one of the earliest articulations of the paradox, arguing that the sovereign obligate himself by issuing a law directed at himself (1996, 184). In the twentieth century, Marcus Singer put forward an argument of the same form, intended to show that the notion of a self-directed moral duty is incoherent (1959). For more contemporary discussions of the paradox, see Muñoz (2020) and Schofield (2021, 42–57).
3. Importantly, the ledger doesn't—or doesn't merely—stipulate a distributive pattern needed in order to achieve justice. So, it doesn't say that resources should be equally distributed, or that flutes should go to the most talented musicians. Rather, it concerns itself with particular instances of things owed to one particular person by another. So, when the ledger records that Aristotle owes Plato a flute, it's not representing a cosmic judgment about what Plato is owed in a perfect world or society, but a more localized judgment about the state of these two's relationship and what is required for justice between *them*.
4. Relevant, here, is Aristotle's distinction between acting upon oneself—say, by lifting one's leg using one's arms or a pulley—as opposed to simply moving one's leg (1984a, 1019a 20–25).
5. Or, to put it as Haase does, if I really do obligate my future self when I make a decision, and am thereby bound to my past self, changing one's mind would be disallowed. "If this were so," he says, "we probably all would have ruined our lives by our adolescent resolutions" (2014, 367).

6. Kierkegaard ultimately thinks not, but reasonable people can disagree on how to answer this question.
7. Most importantly, perhaps, I will not be exploring how someone who defends an interest-based account of bipolarity—an account such as Joseph Raz's (1986, 168–76)—could answer the concern expressed here. For more on such theories, see May (2015, 528–31).
8. In the *Politics*, Aristotle characterizes a hand as being a hand in virtue of its playing a particular role in the life and overall functioning of an entire organism (1984b, 1253a 20–25).
9. An anonymous referee objected that the kind of unity I am discussing isn't really necessary for a bipolar duty, as it is possible to owe something to a nonhuman animal even though the animal cannot treat our demand as a reason for acting. This is a fraught issue in all discussion of bipolar relationships, especially for Kantian versions of the sort I'm discussing here. The most common way of addressing the issue is to offer an account of representative authority, where a rational agent stands in for the being who cannot reason, and makes demands in her name. (Darwall has a complicated account of this, the rudiments of which are sketched in his 2006, 23–24). This is the sort of strategy I favor, though working out the details would require another essay.

   The referee also worries that exhibiting this unity is insufficient for a bipolar duty. This is because it would be possible to deliberate together with another about a shared project without generating any duties. But this, I would argue, is a different form of deliberation altogether—one that aims at generating a joint intention, rather than generating a demand that one person issues to another. It is only the latter form of deliberation that interests me here. Now, even here, one might still wonder whether deliberating in the way I have described is sufficient to generate duties. This is because I could demand something of someone without generating a duty at all—imagine that I demand that a stranger tie my shoe, for instance, or fetch me a coffee. I absolutely agree that this is insufficient for the generation of a duty. More needs to be said about the conditions under which a demand does, in fact, generate a genuine duty. (Darwall does this through appeal to an idealized moral community, which endorses some demands but not others.) My purpose here, though, isn't to sort out these important details. I am, instead, suggesting a way of understanding what it would even mean to be joined and opposed, so that we can proceed to inquire about whether an individual agent can be joined and opposed.
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