

PRACTICAL IDENTITY AND DUTIES TO THE SELF

Paul Schofield

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I appeal to the notion of practical identity in order to defend the possibility of synchronic duties to the self—that is, self-directed duties focused on one’s present self as opposed to one’s future self. While many dismiss the idea of self-directed duties, I show that a person may be morally required to act in ways that advance her present interests and autonomy by virtue of her occupying multiple practical identities at a single moment.

I. INTRODUCTION

In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant introduces his discussion of duties to the self by rehearsing the most persistent objection to the notion, which is that if such things existed, “[The agent] imposing the obligation could always release the [agent] put under obligation from the obligation, so that (if both are one and the same subject) he would not be bound at all to a duty he lays upon himself”¹ (Kant 1996, 176). In other words: Because any purported duty to the self can be waived by the very person it purports to bind, it will necessarily fail to bind in the way that a genuine duty must. Kant counters with a somewhat abstruse argument, defending self-directed duties through appeal to his distinction between phenomena and noumena. But his defense hasn’t proved especially compelling to contemporary thinkers, and as a consequence the notion of duties to the self—a staple of works in moral theory during the early modern period—has mostly been ignored or dismissed by philosophers over the past century.

Of the few recent defenses of self-directed duties, some—including my own—have made much of the fact that a single enduring individual occupies multiple temporal perspectives over the course of her life (Schofield 2015, Cholbi 2015). The idea, in brief, is that a person can owe to herself moral obligations because of how her present actions affect her interests and autonomy later on, when she occupies a future perspective. Such obligations turn out to be un-waivable, the story goes, because a person cannot waive in the present the duties owed to her future self. Thus, such a view establishes the possibility of *diachronic* duties to the self. Yet, it leaves undefended a traditionally recognized kind of self-directed duty, which we might call a *synchronic* duty to the self. The view doesn’t explain, for instance, how a person could be duty-bound to defend her dignity, to push back against disrespectful treatment, or to look out for her interests, when the harm or disrespect would be suffered in the present rather than in the future. In this paper, I will build on the diachronic account’s insights with the aim of advancing a case for synchronic duties to

the self. In so doing, I hope to work toward a more complete account of self-directed duties.

I will begin with a brief discussion of our topic's significance (section 2). I will then elaborate on some difficulties one inevitably encounters when defending duties to the self, explaining how morality's second-personal character makes an account of self-directed duties particularly vulnerable to the objection articulated above (section 3). Finally, I'll mount a defense of synchronic self-directed duties (sections 4–5). To do this, I will adopt a strategy that parallels, in important ways, the diachronic account mentioned above. Specifically, I will argue that a person can occupy multiple perspectives at a single moment, from which she can make and respond to moral demands—just as she does when she persists over time. But whereas the fact that a person occupies multiple temporal perspectives is due to her temporal extension, my idea here is that an individual person occupies multiple perspectives at a single moment by virtue of her multiple *practical identities*. From the perspective of these identities, a person can, I contend, engage in a form of second-personal moral address that is directed at herself rather than at some other person. I will conclude by appealing to the works of Christine Korsgaard and Harry Frankfurt in order to show how demands that are un-waivable might be issued from the perspective of some of our practical identities, thereby generating genuine synchronic self-directed duties.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DUTIES TO THE SELF

Insofar as an individual person is a fully developed rational adult, she will—most believe—be subject to rational requirements prescribing particular forms of self-treatment. A person has strong reasons, for instance, to protect her own interests, or to do things that promote her own flourishing, which we

typically discuss under the rubric of “rational prudence.”² My question, however, is not whether a person has self-regarding reasons, but whether some of the self-regarding reasons she has are *moral* reasons—reasons that she *owes it to herself* to act upon insofar as she's a well-functioning moral agent. Now, one might suspect that a dispute over whether some of a person's self-regarding reasons are moral in character must be merely terminological, of little consequence for moral thought and practice. So before proceeding, I'll mention four reasons why it matters whether some of our self-regarding reasons turn out to be reasons of moral duty.

First, it's commonly thought that moral reasons have a kind of a peremptory character, or that they take priority over other reasons. So, if I have a duty to not kill a person, it's not just that I have a reason to avoid killing her—a reason to be weighed and balanced alongside reasons that might militate in favor of doing her in. Rather, my duty to not kill the person takes priority over, or preempts, whatever other reasons I have. Thus, if I posit that a person has a duty to herself, I'll be suggesting something stronger than just that she has a self-regarding or prudential reason. I'll be suggesting that she has a self-regarding reason that takes priority over other reasons. And this has the potential to affect in significant ways how a person reasons about what she ought to do and which actions she has all-things-considered reason to perform.

Second, when a person has moral reasons for acting, she's often supposed to act out of recognition of the fact that she owes something to another. So, if someone has borrowed money from me, it's fair to say that she commits an error if she repays the loan because she cares for my wellbeing or because she's feeling generous. Benevolent though her motives are, she's supposed to return the money *because she owes it to me* to do so, and she seems to miss something important about our relationship if she acts

without recognition of this fact. Likewise, if a person has a moral duty to herself, it seems natural to say that she commits an error if she acts without recognition of what she owes to herself. So, if a person has a duty to stand up for herself in the face of demeaning harassment, she seems to miss something important about her relationship to herself if she does so simply because it gives her an adrenaline rush to confront a bully.

Third, when a person is morally wronged there are particular emotional responses that are called for. For instance, it's typical to say that a victim of wrongdoing is not simply permitted to resent her wrongdoer, but that she *ought* to resent the wrongdoer. To do so is to exhibit proper respect for herself, the story goes. Now, often when a person commits a normative error that affects only herself, we think that regret or embarrassment are the most appropriate attitudinal responses. However, should there exist self-directed moral duties, this would raise the possibility that self-directed resentment, or something in its vicinity, might be the appropriate response in some instances—for example, if a person sits back and accepts abuse rather than stand up for herself.³

Finally, certain of our duties are ones that the state is permitted to force us to carry out. While most liberals believe that it isn't the state's place to coerce a person for her own good, liberals do tend to believe that the state may permissibly coerce its people to perform some of their duties—specifically, duties of *right* (to use Kantian language). Now, liberals are, as a general matter, hesitant to interfere with individuals who are affecting only themselves. But the possibility of duties to the self at the very least raises the question of whether there exist duties of right owed to the self, justifying state intervention on an individual's behalf even when she's affecting only herself.⁴

Much more could be said about each of these points. But for my purposes, this should

suffice to show that the dispute over whether a person's self-regarding reasons can be moral in character is not merely terminological, but is instead about whether our moral practices are properly applied in some cases that are intra-personal.

3. DUTIES TO THE SELF AND THE SECOND-PERSON STANDPOINT

In this section, I will discuss my recent defense of diachronic (or cross-temporal) duties to the self. Then, in the remainder of the paper, I will build on that defense in order to give an account of synchronic self-directed duties. To begin, many moral philosophers have begun paying attention to what Stephen Darwall calls the *second-personal* nature of morality. The idea, in brief, is that the fundamental concepts we deploy in the moral realm are ones that characterize relations of accountability between distinct persons (2006). For example, we say things like, "Molly *owes it to* Maggie to treat her with respect," or "Molly *has a right against* Maggie that she not treat her in some particular way," and it's these kinds of judgments that, many believe, form the foundation of our moral thought and practice.⁵ The intuitive appeal of this view is that moral wrongs are wrong because they wrong *someone*, and that moral wrongdoing involves victimizing someone whose wellbeing or rights are undermined—even if it's not the whole of morality, a significant portion of the moral domain involves wronging, rights, accountability, and other second-personal concepts. Now, the notion of a duty to the self makes use of the idea of a *duty to*—an idea that is central to second-personal moral reasoning. But this arguably gives us reason for doubting the very possibility of such duties. After all, it's only natural to assume that two distinct persons are required for the application of any second-personal concept—one who owes something and one to whom something is owed. And this, I believe, gets to the very heart of the objection to self-directed duties

mentioned at the outset: If performance of an action is *owed to* a person, then that person seems to have special authority over whether the required act must be performed—an authority licensing her to release the other from doing what’s owed. But in the case of a duty owed to herself, the person will always be in a position to waive the duty supposedly owed to her, apparently sapping it of its normative force.

Some might balk at the suggestion that the preceding gives us any reason at all to doubt the existence of self-directed duties. There are, we might think, certain duties that we owe to others that cannot be waived through consent—duties tied to fundamental rights, like the right not to be tortured, for instance. And so why can we not simply insist that there could similarly be duties owed to the self that are un-waivable?⁶ The answer, I think, is that if duties are owed to someone, as we’re supposing here, then they are conceptually tied to a person’s authority over herself. If the person to whom the duties are owed exercises her authority and gives someone permission to do something to her that she would otherwise not be permitted to do, then why wouldn’t the act simply become permissible? This, of course, is the way things normally work. If I owe it to someone else not to put my hands on her, then her consent will remove my reason for not being allowed to touch her. Now, in cases where fundamental human rights are involved, we’ll often be justifiably wary of expressions of consent. If a person says, for instance, that she wishes to be killed or to have torturous pain inflicted upon her, we’ll be concerned about whether she’s in the right frame of mind to give genuine consent. But if we learn that she wants to be killed in order to avoid the pain associated with late-stage cancer, or if we learn that she wants to be tortured as part of a sexual experience, and if we know that she’s in full possession of her faculties, it then seems much less clear why her consent wouldn’t be relevant.

So, the Darwallian view about the second-personal nature of moral duties seems on its face to undermine the notion of duties to the self. However, I’ve argued elsewhere that the Darwallian view contains within it the raw materials out of which a defense of duties to the self may be fashioned (Schofield 2015). The defense begins with Darwall’s claim that moral duties and rights are made possible by the fact that we persons take up the *second-person standpoint*, which he describes as a perspective from which persons “make and acknowledge claims on one another’s conduct and will” (Darwall 2006, p. 3). To illustrate, imagine a scenario in which Maggie steps on Molly’s toe. Maggie, we might suppose, is doing what she wants, is taking pleasure in the act, and is achieving her goal of occupying a particular space. So, things go well from her perspective. But from Molly’s perspective, things look different. She feels pain—or at least irritation. And she has her ends frustrated insofar as she’s impeded from using her foot for her own purposes. In other words, there’s a clash between the interests and ends that attach to Maggie’s perspective, and the interests and ends that attach to Molly’s perspective. Responding to this conflict, Molly might, from her perspective, address a demand to Maggie that she remove her foot. And Maggie might, from her perspective, take this demand to be a legitimate one, and thus take it to be a reason to remove her foot. So, the Darwallian upshot is simply that from one perspective, demands can be made that alter someone’s reasons from another perspective, and that this is what second-personal morality consists in.

The key to this defense of self-directed duties is that nothing about this story suggests that second-personal relations of accountability actually require two metaphysically distinct persons. All the philosophical work is done by the fact that there exist distinct *perspectives* to which interests and ends attach, and from which demands can be made

and acknowledged.⁷ So, the defense of diachronic duties to the self is that an individual person—by virtue of her temporal extension—occupies multiple perspectives over the course of her life, enabling her to relate to herself in much the way that two distinct individuals relate to each other in the Darwinian story. That is, a person has interests and ends that she endorses from distinct temporal perspectives, and can address herself from one perspective to another, demanding regard for those interests and for her ability to pursue her own ends from that perspective—just as when one person takes up the second-person standpoint with respect to another person.

To illustrate: It might be in Marcia's interest to smoke right now, as smoking is pleasurable. It's also possible that from her future perspective, she'll suffer if she smokes now, as she'll end up with emphysema. So, she has interests from one temporal perspective that conflict with the interests she has from another perspective. Such inter-perspectival conflicts between her interests mirror the kinds of conflicts that can arise inter-personally, as in the case of Molly and Maggie. And so, Marcia, when deciding whether to smoke, can consider whether she might legitimately demand from a future perspective that she not do so. As a result, she might quit smoking not necessarily because she wants to, or even because she thinks it would make her life go best overall, but instead because she recognizes that she owes it to herself to respond to legitimate demands that could be made from her future perspective. To give another illustration, a Russian nobleman might, from his perspective as a younger man, wish to use his fortune to advance the socialist cause.⁸ But it's possible that from his future perspective, he'll endorse an entirely different set of values, and thus wish to advance more conservative causes with the fortune that is his. So, he has some ends that he endorses from one temporal perspective, other ends that he endorses from another perspective, and the

two sets of ends conflict with each other. Such inter-perspectival conflicts among his ends mirror the kinds of conflicts that can arise inter-personally, as when two distinct people have two goals that cannot both be realized. Now, the nobleman might plan, as a way of undermining himself in the future, to structure his finances so that he'll lose control over them as he becomes more conservative—he might find a way to ensure that he continues to support the socialist cause as he ages, even as he no longer endorses it. But in considering this plan, he might come to believe that from his future temporal perspective, he could legitimately demand some respect for his ability to exercise his autonomy from that later perspective. If so, then he might refrain from structuring his finances this way, not necessarily because he wants to, but because he believes he owes it to himself to do so.

The basic strategy, then, is to point out ways in which an individual person can relate to herself that mirror the way she relates to others, so as to reveal the possibility of a person's relating to herself second-personally. Now, nothing in the account above is intended to tell us the content of our duties—nothing in the account tells us which demands a person may legitimately address to herself from her future standpoint. However, the account would, if successful, provide a clean answer to the objection to self-directed duties raised at the outset. A person might owe a duty to herself by virtue of occupying a perspective sometime in the future to which interests and ends attach. And since she cannot, in the present, get a release from the future perspective that generated the duty—because the perspective is in the future, of course—it seems that the duty *could* actually bind in the way characteristic of genuine moral duties after all.

So, this account purports to rescue what I've been calling diachronic duties to the self—duties a person owes to herself because of demands that could be issued from a future

perspective of hers. However, it doesn't yet give us any way of understanding how a person might have synchronic duties to herself—duties to act certain ways *not* because of demands that could be issued from a future perspective of hers, but out of concern for how things go for her *in the present*. For instance, the account is in no position to argue that a person has a duty of self-respect to push back in a moment when she's being bullied or being demeaned, as it has nothing to say about why the person couldn't simply waive whatever duty she might have to stand up for herself. But in what follows, I will attempt to build upon the diachronic account, suggesting that a person can actually relate second-personally to herself in a single moment, just as she can relate to herself second-personally over time.

4. PRACTICAL IDENTITY AND THE SECOND-PERSON STANDPOINT

Just as a person can occupy multiple perspectives over time by virtue of being temporally extended, so too can a person occupy multiple perspectives at a single moment by virtue of having more than one *practical identity*. And because a person occupies these multiple perspectives generated by her practical identities, she's able to relate to herself second-personally at a single moment, making second-personal demands from the perspective of one practical identity and acknowledging them from the perspective of another. Or so I shall argue in this section. The upshot will be that a person can have reasons that are both self-regarding and synchronically second-personal.

To begin, a practical identity is, very roughly, a characterization of who or what an individual is that entails she has particular reasons for acting. The most obvious examples are those associated with socially constructed roles. So, to say of someone that she "is a philosopher" is to say something about who she is, or what she is, or what socially-constructed

role she plays, while at the same time offering a broad characterization of how she ought to structure her activity. More specifically, to say that someone is a philosopher is to say she has reason to write philosophy, or read philosophy, or teach philosophy, or meet with colleagues to discuss philosophy, or some combination of these. Thus, were we to ask a person why she routinely takes time from her day to participate in these activities, "I'm a philosopher" would be a perfectly intelligible response, and were she to deny that she had reason to do any of these things, we'd surely take this as a denial that she's a philosopher at all. To give another example, we might say of someone that she "is a mother" in a sense *not* meant to signal any biological relation she bears to another person, but rather meant to characterize a socially constructed role associated with a broad set of practical reasons. So, by virtue of being a mother, a person might have reason to take an interest in the life of her child, to prioritize spending time with the child, to save for the child's future, and so on. And here again, for someone to see no reason to do these things—for her to think herself under no normative pressure to act in these ways—simply constitutes a failure to see herself as a mother at all. To give one last example, we might say of someone that she "is a citizen" of a particular country. Understood as a statement about the person's practical identity, we'd be implying that the person has reason to vote, reason to take part in public life, reason to care specifically about the character of her country, and so forth.

Now, persons deliberate about what to do *from the perspective* of a practical identity. A person might approach a situation as a philosopher, or as a mother, or as a citizen, for instance. And this kind of perspective—like the temporal perspectives discussed in section 3—is of a sort to which interests can attach and from which ends can be adopted. For instance, from someone's standpoint as a philosopher, it might be *good for her* to read

and write philosophy. It might *advance her interests* when she does so, in a way that it wouldn't were she not to have this particular practical identity. Furthermore, a person might have values and ends that come into view specifically when she takes up the perspective of a philosopher—certain probing philosophical conversations, or time spent alone thinking on abstruse topics, might seem especially valuable or worthwhile from the standpoint of someone who is a philosopher, and less valuable or worthwhile from the standpoint of someone who is not.

Recall, now, that what's necessary for genuine second-personal accountability is *not* the presence of two metaphysically distinct persons. What's needed, we noted in section 3, are two distinct perspectives. And most people, it's fair to say, occupy many distinct perspectives that attach to multiple practical identities. A person isn't likely to be *just* a philosopher, after all. She'll also be a mother, perhaps, and maybe a citizen, and many other things besides. So, at a given moment, any person is likely to have various sets of interests, values, and ends that emanate from the perspective of each of her practical identities—which means that an individual person, relating to herself through her different practical identities at a single moment, is actually a viable candidate for second-personal accountability. Indeed, we'll have very strong reason to believe that a person can be second-personally accountable to herself insofar as she can relate to herself through the perspective of her practical identities in ways that mirror the inter-personal relationship that we said drives distinct persons into the second-person standpoint, and that mirror the intra-personal relationship that we said should drive an individual person to take up a second-personal standpoint with regard to her future.

So, to draw the needed parallel, we should begin by noting that the values, ends, and interests that attach to distinct perspectives

associated with a person's practical identities can come into conflict—much in the way that those that attach to the perspectives of separate persons can, and much in the way that those that attach to an individual's various temporal perspectives can. To continue with the examples from above, an individual might have two distinct practical identities: that of a philosopher and that of a citizen. From the perspective of a philosopher, she might well see great value in endless conversation about a topic, whereas from the standpoint of a citizen, she might value reaching a decision even if it's imperfect. Or to give another example, an individual might have two distinct practical identities: that of a philosopher and that of a mother. From her perspective as a philosopher, it might well be in her interest to spend lots of time traveling to conferences, whereas from her perspective as a mother it might be good for her to spend more time at home. Then, because of the multiplicity of perspectives associated with a person's various practical identities, and the inter-perspectival conflicts that can arise as a result, a person might address herself from one perspective, making demands that will be received from another of her perspectives. So, she might, for instance, demand from her perspective as a philosopher that her family life not always preempt her professional life, or she might demand from her perspective as a citizen that she act impartially, in a way that's in tension with the partial values she embraces from her perspective as a mother. Indeed, while people don't usually address themselves aloud, our linguistic practices seem to capture well the phenomenon to which I'm pointing. We often talk of the "competing demands" placed upon a person by her various roles and identities, or of a person's being "torn" between two roles or aspects of herself. In both cases, we acknowledge the possibility of a divided self—a self that recognizes normative pressure applied in opposite directions from competing perspectives that she occupies.

Of course, in order for it to generate normative pressure, a demand will need to be a *legitimate* one. Just as bizarre or outrageous demands issued from one person to another will fail to generate inter-personal normative force, so too will bizarre or outrageous demands issued from one practical identity to another, and so too will demands issued from the standpoint of a bizarre or outrageous identity. Although my purpose at the moment isn't to identify which demands in particular are the legitimate ones, or which identities generate legitimate demands, it's not difficult to point to some promising candidates. For our identities as professionals, family members, and citizens—to name a few—seem intuitively to be the basis for legitimate intra-personal demands: a person might demand that others respect what she needs to do as a philosopher, a mother, a citizen of the United States, and so forth. It thus seems plausible to suggest that these same identities would ground demands that are legitimate when they're issued intra-personally as well.

To recap: If a demand is addressed from the standpoint of one of a person's practical identities to herself qua occupier of another standpoint, and the content of that demand renders it legitimate, we seem to have all the essential features of reason-generating second-personal address—when the demand issued from the person's perspective qua philosopher is addressed to her from her perspective qua mother, she's altering her own normative situation by holding herself second-personally accountable. So, I've pointed to ways in which an individual can sensibly be said to relate to herself at a single moment that mirror the way she relates to others, and that mirror the way that she relates to herself over time. If the cases are, as I'm suggesting, relevantly alike in their essential details, then they ought to be treated similarly. That is, insofar as details like these allow us to tell a story about how a person is driven into inter-personal second-personal relationships

of accountability with others, and insofar as they allow us to tell a story about how a person is driven into intra-personal second-personal relationships of accountability with herself over time, it seems that they reveal the possibility of a person's relating to herself second-personally at a single moment.

5. INESCAPABLE PRACTICAL IDENTITIES AND SYNCHRONIC DUTIES TO THE SELF

The previous section's argument is, unfortunately, not sufficient to disarm the objection with which we began. That worry, recall, is that any person who is supposedly under a duty to herself would be able to waive the duty, suggesting that the duty can't really bind her in the way that a genuine duty must. In the case of diachronic duties, we said that the problem could be addressed by appealing to the fact that waiving such duties would have to be done from a person's future perspective—something that cannot happen, obviously, when the duty requires action in the present. The difficulty with synchronic duties is that it *does* seem that a person is able to waive duties from her present perspective. If, for instance, a person issues a demand from her perspective as a philosopher, insisting that family considerations not trump her professional work, she seems to be in a position to simply rescind the demand. "Should I leave the demand in force, or should I just go ahead and permit my role as a mother to take precedence?" she might ask herself. But if this is truly up to her—if she can just decide whether or not to rescind the demand at will—then it doesn't seem like her identity as a philosopher could be the source of genuine self-directed duties at all.

Vindicating the possibility of synchronic duties to the self, then, will require showing that there exist practical identities that bring with them some kind of necessity—that is, identities that bring with them obligations that cannot simply be waived by the person to whom they are owed. If such practical

identities exist, and if a person makes demands from the perspective of one of them, then the duties that they generate will be un-waivable, and we'll have found a way of defending synchronic duties to the self. To explore this possibility, I will consider two philosophers who write on practical identity, and who make a place for practical necessity in their theory: Christine Korsgaard and Harry Frankfurt. My goal will not be to defend either's account in its entirety, but rather to convince the reader that these influential views supply resources that may be plausibly deployed in defense of synchronic duties to the self.

Korsgaard's Kantian Account of Practical Identity

According to Christine Korsgaard, practical identity for any given person will be a "complex matter," as the typical individual will have a "jumble" of identities (1996a, p. 101). To use our earlier examples, a person can at once be a philosopher, a parent, and a citizen, for instance. Obligations, says Korsgaard, are products of a person's practical identities—they "spring from what [a practical] identity forbids" (1996a, p. 101). There are, in other words, certain things that a person mustn't do if she's a philosopher, or a mother, or a citizen (and certain things that she must do, as well).

So, what happens when the demands placed upon a person by one of her practical identities conflict with the demands placed upon her by another one? One option is for the person to shed an identity. If it isn't possible to be a mother and a philosopher simultaneously because what's required by the one renders fulfilling the obligations associated with the other impossible, then the person faces a choice—be a philosopher or be a mother (1996a, p. 120). And so, a person will have to decide which identity is more important, valuable, worthwhile, and so on. However, according to Korsgaard's

neo-Kantian account, it isn't the case that a person may shed just any of her practical identities. For at least one of her identities is an identity that all persons have necessarily, and thus is a source of obligations requiring persons to shed other identities should push come to shove. She writes:

What is not contingent is that you must be governed by *some* conception of your practical identity. For unless you are committed to some conception of your practical identity, you will lose your grip on yourself as having any reason to do one thing rather than another . . . But *this* reason for conforming to your particular [contingent] practical identities is not a reason that *springs from* one of those particular identities. It is a reason that springs from your humanity itself, from your identity as a *human being*, a reflective animal who needs reasons to act and to live (19996a, pp. 120–121).

Unlike the other practical identities we've considered, this one is *not* associated with a socially constructed role. Whereas what is required of a philosopher, a mother, or a citizen, is determined largely by social practice, what is required of a person qua human being is determined by her nature—at least according to Korsgaard. Furthermore, an individual's identity as a human being—her identity as a reflective, rational animal—is not contingent and it's not possible for her to shed it. This identity is one that a person has by virtue of her very being. Thus, any demands or obligations that flow from this identity are ones that a person cannot simply jettison by disowning it. Demands placed upon persons by their practical identity qua human beings are *inescapable*, in other words.

True to her Kantian roots, Korsgaard believes that an individual's identity as a human being requires that she "value [her] humanity as an end in itself" (1996a, p. 125). The argument for this claim is famously complicated, but the basics are that an individual's reflective nature makes it so that she must act, and her humanity is the source of all

reasons enabling her to do so (1996a, 123). So, her humanity itself is something she's bound to value. Now, valuing one's humanity in the way required by one's identity as a human involves recognizing that there are certain things she's forbidden from doing, and recognizing that there are certain things she must do. She must not, for instance, allow her capacity for rational agency to be undermined or usurped by another, and she must take steps to promote or to perfect her rational capacities.⁹ To deny that one is required to act in these ways is to deny one's humanity. Or so the view goes.

Here, then, is a sketch of a neo-Kantian account of self-directed synchronic duties: There's a particular identity that all of us have *necessarily*—namely, our identity as human beings. Specific things are required of us, practically speaking, by virtue of our having this identity. We're required, for instance, to protect and to promote our rational capacities. Because the identity that is the source of these requirements is not contingent, none of us can give up the identity. And because of *this*, none of us can waive the requirements associated with it. Now the only thing that needs to be added to this account is the claim that the demands issued on the basis of what's required by one's humanity are *legitimate*. It's no exaggeration to say that defending this claim is a central aim of all Korsgaard's work, and arguably central to all of Kant's practical philosophy as well. But very roughly, the idea is that "the reflective structure of human consciousness" gives authority to us qua human beings, forcing us to make laws or issue demands that are normative for us (1996a, pp.128–129). This is so because the normativity of reasons associated with any practical identity is, according to Korsgaard, contingent on the normativity of demands associated with one's humanity. So, from the standpoint of humanity, certain demands must be issued, and these demands must be viewed as legitimate and viewed as carrying

with them the force of authority.¹⁰ And this, at last, gives us what's needed for an account of synchronic duties to the self.

To illustrate, imagine a scenario in which an African American is required by social convention to simply comply with what others decide, ignoring her own thoughts about what she should do. Imagine that while it wouldn't endanger her physical security, standing up for herself would be profoundly uncomfortable. After all, she thinks of herself as someone who's easy to get along with and accommodating, as opposed to a righteous agitator who relishes rocking the boat. So from her perspective as an accommodating, easy-going individual, she sees good reason to just let the bullying continue. However, from her perspective as a human being, she sees that what's demanded here is that she stand up for herself. And the demand is inescapable and cannot be waived, because her humanity is something with which she *must* identify. This would amount to a story about how she owes a synchronic duty to herself to stand up for herself.

Of course, philosophers have leveled objections to all parts of Korsgaard's view, making the above defense of duties to the self extremely controversial. My point, though, is not to convince anyone that Korsgaard is correct. Rather, the point is to convince those who agree with her, or those who think something in the vicinity of her neo-Kantian view is on track, that they have resources for arguing that a person has a genuine self-directed duty to stand up for herself—a synchronic duty, owed to herself, to push back against assaults on her humanity.

Frankfurt's Non-Kantian Account of Practical Identity

As Kant is undoubtedly history's most famous defender of duties to the self, it's perhaps not surprising that resources for contemporary defenders can be located in a neo-Kantian view. So here I want to consider

the possibility of defending synchronic self-directed duties without appealing to an explicitly Kantian account. Harry Frankfurt's view is that individuals have practical identities that are contingent, but that are nevertheless inescapable. That is, a person can have an identity that she might not have had, but given that she does have it, it's impossible for her to shed it. Frankfurt makes this claim in the context of discussing love, writing:

Love is irredeemably a matter of personal circumstance. There are no necessary truths or a priori principles by which it can be established what we are to love; nor do the constraints that bind the lover to his beloved also impartially and indifferently bind everyone else to it as well. On the other hand, devoted love and its commands are often strictly unconditional. Like the impersonal mandates of duty, the imperatives of love too may be starkly uncompromising, providing no loopholes and offering no recourse. The claims that are made upon us by our love of our children, or of our countries, or of our ideals may be just as unequivocally categorical as those that are made upon us by the moral law (1999, p. 130).

Indeed, a person's loving attachments are such that they constitute what Frankfurt calls "an element of his established volitional nature" and thus are integral to "his identity as a person" (1999, p. 137). The plausible thought here is that part of who or what a person is is determined by who or what a person loves. And if that's right, then we can expect that some of a person's ends and interests will be set for her from her perspective as the lover of particular things and people.

So, Frankfurt differs from Korsgaard both in his belief that all of a person's practical identities are contingent, and in his belief that there is no one practical identity possessed by all persons. But, crucially, Frankfurt *agrees* with Korsgaard that a person's practical identity can place categorical constraints on her actions, or make categorical demands upon her, as her loving attachments define who she

is and make it so that there are certain things she simply cannot do no matter how much she desires to do them. An individual who loves her son, for instance, might not be able to turn him into the authorities for a crime she knows he committed, even if she acknowledges that justice demands that she do so. Or someone who loves her country might feel compelled to give her life for it, even if she very much doesn't want to die. Nothing about persons like these suggests that it was inevitable that they would have the particular identities that they have. The former person could, after all, have decided to forego having children, and the latter could have been taken from her country by her parents at a young age. But Frankfurt's master thought is that once a person does become a lover of her child or of her country, the demands made upon her by her identity *qua* lover are categorical.

This insight can, I think, be deployed in a fairly straightforward manner to demonstrate the possibility of synchronic duties to the self: Imagine a person who loves creating art, and who loves the art she creates, to the point that it defines who she is. Such a person, from her perspective as an artist, will have certain ends and interests. Perhaps it will be her goal to reserve a good portion of her week for creating art, and perhaps if she isn't afforded the time to create, or if certain of her works are destroyed, it will adversely affect her wellbeing—it will be *bad for* her. Now, this person will undoubtedly have other practical identities, and we can imagine that, on some occasions, her identity as an artist will come into sharp conflict with some of these. For instance, perhaps her community needs her to devote time, resources, and energy that would require she give up on being an artist. What we have, then, is a person genuinely torn between two identities. So, from her perspective as an artist, she might issue a demand to herself, telling her to give up on what is required of her as a community member in order to ensure that she does what's required of her as

an artist. And if she does issue this demand, she may well be in no position to retract it, or to waive the duty generated by it, on account of her identity as an artist—an identity that was likely acquired contingently, but that now generates categorical demands. Now the only thing that needs to be added to the account is a claim that demands issued on the basis of what's required by her identity as a lover can be legitimate. In the case of Korsgaard, demands made from one's standpoint as a human were necessarily legitimate. Frankfurt, however, does *not* think that our objects of love are necessarily good or moral—in fact he explicitly denies this—and so we should certainly deny that just any demand made on the basis of things a person loves would serve this purpose (2001). Rather, the suggestion must be that the demand will generate normative force, that the demand will not be waivable, and that the demand thus can serve as the basis for self-directed duties *only in those instances in which the person's demand is legitimate*. Of course, this requires that we determine which objects of love can and which objects of love cannot serve as grounds for legitimate second-personal demands—a question I certainly haven't taken up here. But it's reasonable to suppose that at the very least, some of the things that we love will serve to ground legitimate intra-personal demands just as they serve to ground legitimate inter-personal demands. That is, while I cannot legitimately demand that another person respect and refrain from interfering with my identity as an arsonist, I *can* legitimately demand that another person respect and refrain from interfering with my identity as a poet. And so, it seems plausible to suppose that I could make legitimate demands of myself qua poet and not qua arsonist.

Identifying the substance of one's duties to oneself would thus require appeal to other principles specifying which demands are legitimate and which are not—for instance,

principles specifying that demands must be the kind that others could not reasonably reject, or be consistent with personal integrity, or that they could be similarly demanded by all. My goal, though, hasn't been to offer a substantive account of the precise duties we owe to ourselves. It has instead been to show how duties to the self are possible, and to supply a general meta-ethical account of how to understand them.

6. CONCLUSION

This essay has focused the bulk of its attention on the formal question of whether self-directed synchronic duties are possible, while withholding judgment about the specific content of such duties. Nevertheless, as suggested by many of the examples I've chosen, I believe the essay opens up space for us to affirm specific self-directed duties that thinkers throughout history have considered to be among the most important—duties that might be classified broadly as duties of self-respect. These duties involve a concern for one's present interests and wellbeing, a commitment to stand up for one's autonomy and rights, and an obligation to protect the things that one loves—duties that go beyond those enjoining a person to care for her future self. If we accept that we indeed have these duties, then, as we said in section 2, the implications for our moral thought and practice will be substantial. For instance, our reasons for standing up for ourselves might sometimes preempt our other reasons, rather than simply outweighing them. To give another example, an agent might be required to acknowledge that self-care and concern for her own interests are things *she owes to herself*, just as a person repaying a loan is required to think of her act as owed to the lender. To give yet another example, a person who simply doesn't stand up for herself might be correct in directing some sort of self-directed resentment, holding herself morally accountable with her

emotions for her moral failure. And finally, if some of the synchronic duties owed to oneself are in fact duties of *right*, then perhaps the state will be licensed to intervene and force a person to give to herself something which

she owes herself at a particular moment. All these topics, I believe, are worthy of further exploration.

Bates College

NOTES

For helpful conversation about and comments on this paper, I would like to thank David Cummiskey, E. Sonny Elizondo, Mark Okrent, Susan Stark, and two anonymous referees, one of whom revealed himself to be Jason Raibley. I'd also like to thank Yuliya Kanygina, whose trenchant comments on my earlier work helped me to better formulate the view I've worked out here. Finally, I presented a version of this paper at the 2017 American Philosophical Association Pacific Division meeting in Seattle, and benefited very much from the audience discussion there.

1. For a famous articulation of the same objection, see Singer 1963.
2. Here I'm simply speaking of prudential reasons, and beings capable of acting upon them through their capacity to reason. There is a different sense of "prudence" that refers to an individual's ability to look out for herself, but lacks the capacity to do so through recognition of a reason, which is not the sense I mean to employ.
3. For a discussion of this possibility, see Schofield 2015, esp. pp. 527–528.
4. For a view like this, see Schofield 2018.
5. Two others who have focused on this aspect of morality include Scanlon 1998 and Thompson 2004.
6. I thank an anonymous referee and E. Sonny Elizondo for independently pressing me on this point.
7. Darwall apparently agrees, clarifying in a later work that "*second-personal* does not imply *second party*" (2013, p. 62).
8. This is an adaptation of a case considered by Parfit (1984, pp. 327–328).
9. For a lengthy discussion on this point, see Korsgaard 1996b.
10. There is, of course, a difficulty here in clarifying the sense in which a person *must* identify with her humanity. After all, if a person isn't able to escape her standpoint as a human, then we might wonder about how it was ever possible to take up a competing standpoint in the first place. While it's certainly only a gesture at an answer, I think what someone sympathetic to Korsgaard would have to say is that it's possible to adopt a competing practical identity by ignoring or overlooking one's identity as a human, or by misconstruing to oneself what is required by that identity. What a person cannot do is escape the normative requirement—however we choose to characterize the sense of necessity associated with normativity—by jettisoning her identity as a human being (in the way she *can* escape other normative requirements by jettisoning the practical identities from which they emanate).

REFERENCES

- Cholbi, Michael. 2015. "On Marcus Singer's 'On Duties to Oneself,'" *Ethics*, vol. 125, no. 3, pp. 851–853.

- Darwall, Stephen. 2006. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- . 2013. “Justice and Retaliation,” in *Honor, History, and Relationship: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 50–71.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 1999. “Autonomy, Necessity, and Love,” in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 129–141.
- . 2001. “The Dear Self,” *Philosophers’ Imprint*, vol. 1, pp. 1–14.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1996. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- Korsgaard, Christine. 1996a. *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
- . 1996b. “Kant’s Formula of Humanity,” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 106–132.
- Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Scanlon, T.M. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Schofield, Paul. 2015. “On the Existence of Duties to the Self (and Their Significance for Moral Philosophy),” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 90, no. 3, pp. 505–528.
- . 2018. “Paternalism and Right,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 68–83.
- Singer, Marcus. 1963. “Duties and Duties to Oneself,” *Ethics*, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 133–142.
- Thompson, Michael. 2004. “What is it to Wrong Someone? A Puzzle About Justice,” in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, ed. R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 333–384.