What Would it Mean to Reason Second-Personally?

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Abstract: We humans reason and act in light of what we owe to one another. Philosophers sometimes insist that this must involve a special "second-personal" form of reasoning. In this essay, I argue that the literature has yet to articulate satisfactorily what it would mean to reason second-personally. Then, I proceed to remedy this, offering a positive account of second-personal reason. My view is that second-personal reason must involve treating other persons, whose interests and ends are potentially opposed to one's own, as something *other than a mere object upon which to act*. Much of the essay is devoted to spelling out what this means and why practical philosophy needs to make a place for this sort of reasoning.

Everyday thought and talk are saturated with practical judgments that connect and oppose distinct individuals, one to another. We speak in ordinary life not just of a person's doing good or bad, acting rightly or wrongly, and being virtuous or vicious. We speak also of their *owing something to* someone, *wronging* someone, and *having a right against* someone. These latter formulations don't just constitute a distinctive mode of rhetoric, but invoke a family of ideas that inform the practical understanding of mature human agents. Consider: when Cain struck his brother down, he both acted wrongfully and exhibited the vice of envy. But one would 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. And Mayella Ewell transgressed against both civil and moral law when she perjured herself at trial, manifesting grievous dishonesty. But we'd miss the point almost entirely were we to overlook that her words *victimized specifically the object of her slander*, the innocent Tom Robinson.

Attention to the practical standpoint of the agents implicated in these judgments has inspired some to posit a specifically "second-personal" type of reason.[1] If I am Cain, I don't just have a reason to refrain from fratricide, but owe it *to you*, Abel. If I am Claudius, I don't just have a reason to avoid regicide, but owe it *to you*, King Hamlet. And if I am Mayella, I don't just have a reason to avoid perjury, but owe it *to you*, Tom. Each of these cases thus requires I act on a reason that is second-personal—I am to act in light of you. And were I to overlook such reasons, it would amount in each instance to a relatively severe oversight.[2]

Yet, the claim that these reasons ought to command special philosophical attention isn't established by the bare fact of their importance. Reasons instructing me to chop and sauté vegetables in a particular manner constitute an important reason-type, insofar as I'm a creature

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[1] This terminology is introduced by Stephen Darwall in *The Second-Person Standpoint*. Other contemporary philosophers who have attended to second-personal reason include Thompson (2004), Korsgaard (1996, 2007), Wallace (2019), and Zylberman (2021). Historically, second-personal reason has been associated with Fichte (2000), Hegel (2019), Buber (1970), and Levinas (1969).

[2] In his classic paper "The Nature and Value of Rights" (1970), Joel Feinberg imagines a realm whose inhabitants possess all our familiar ethical concepts, but for that of a right and its correlative duties. He argues there that whatever goodness could be found in such a place, it would lack important second-personal dimensions of moral life that involve making and acknowledging claims on one another.

who eats. But no one suggests on this basis that we carry out an investigation into the distinctive metaphysics of culinary reasons. Same with automotive reasons, or reasons pertaining to archery. So, the thought must be that second-personal reasons are not merely reasons of an important type, but that they differ from others in some more formal or abstract sense.

Exactly *why* the presence of another person should warrant such a dramatic shift at the level of thought and reason, and what such a shift could possibly consist in, is the topic of this essay. I will argue, first, that philosophers have yet to adequately explain why reasoning that involves other persons should require such a shift. An encounter, in the kitchen, with a carrot that needs preparing doesn't require that I reason in a way that is formally, abstractly, or metaphysically idiosyncratic. Why an encounter with another person *does* require this is a question that needs an answer, and I aim to provide one. Second, I will advance a positive vision about what this type of reasoning must look like if it is to register what is special, or transformative, about other persons whom we encounter. For it is only once this is spelled out in detail that we can confidently introduce the second person into our theory of practical rationality and begin integrating it into our moral and political philosophy. My view is that second-personal reason must involve treating other persons, whose interests and ends are potentially opposed to my own, as something *other than a mere object upon which to act*—a thought that will be clarified significantly in due course.

§1. Categorizing Reasons by Standpoint

Distinguishing reasons on the basis of what they're about—persons versus produce, for instance—won't point us to the philosophically significant difference between second-personal reasons and all the rest. However, philosophers have long appealed to the various standpoints

from which reasons are accessed in order to formally categorize them. In this section, I explain how the notion of a standpoint gets enlisted for this purpose, and then speculate about the possibility of a second-personal standpoint from which a distinctive kind of reason is made available.

It is sometimes said that a reason is *third-personal* by virtue of its being grasped from the "standpoint of the universe."[3] This standpoint is one to which an agent ascends in order to survey possible states of affairs and to assess them impartially. For instance, an agent might judge a state of affairs to be *fitting*—one in which talent is rewarded, evil is punished, or accomplishment is recognized.[4] Or she might judge a state of affairs to be *good*—one in which pain is alleviated, desire is satisfied, or wellbeing is advanced.[5] A common view is that states of affairs that warrant positive assessments such as these are ones an agent has reason to realize. To illustrate: I consider assaulting 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 worse off than had I refrained. I notice also that it would be unfitting—he has done nothing wrong, and so doesn't deserve this. Such considerations constitute third-personal reasons

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[3] The phrase "standpoint of the universe" was introduced by Sidgwick (1981, 382).

[4] In his *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, C. D. Broad proposes "fittingness" as a dimension along which we might judge states of affairs. Broad intends this as a contrast with those views that evaluate states of affairs on the basis of the good or utility alone. I bring this up to emphasize that appeal to the third-person standpoint needn't result in a utilitarian ethics—especially if considerations of fittingness are thought to function as deontic constraints on choice.

[5] G. E. Moore understands reasons of obligation in 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).

not to assault John. This classification derives not from the reasons' distinctive subject matter, as with culinary reasons, but from the particular perspective they're accessed from.

Along the same lines, it is said that a reason is *first-personal* by virtue of its being generated from an agent's "deliberative perspective."[6] As opposed to ascending to a detached standpoint from which to evaluate states of affairs, the theorist of the first-person looks for normative resources inherent to *my* personal perspective as an agent, from which I decide what to do. This might involve drawing upon deeply-held, but contingent values that I happen to endorse.[7] More ambitiously, it might involve appealing to requirements forced upon me, simply by virtue of my occupying the deliberative perspective—requirements to seek good overall outcomes, perhaps, or to treat persons as ends in themselves.[8] To act for a first-personal reason is to act according to such values or requirements. To illustrate: I consider assaulting John. Doing so would satisfy me. However, it is a condition of my being a deliberating agent that I subject myself to particular norms—for instance, the Categorical Imperative. To assault John would be to use him as a mere means to my satisfaction. Thus, I refrain. So, whereas the third-person standpoint forces individuals to impersonally reflect on how things should go with the world, the first-person standpoint forces us to reflect on what my personal values tell me about what I should do.

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[6] The phrase "deliberative perspective" has been popularized by Korsgaard (1996, 96).

[7] For an example of one such account, see Street (2012).

[8] An example of the former is Cummiskey's *Kantian Consequentialism*, and an example of the latter is Korsgaard's *The Sources of Normativity*. I bring this up to emphasize, as I did when discussing the third-person standpoint, that the standpoint is not necessarily associated with any specific ethical theory.

These formulations are admittedly a bit rough, and some accounts will resist neat categorization as either one or the other. It's possible, for instance, to start with the first-person deliberative standpoint and then ask what "one" should do from a perspective that abstracts away from some set of first-personal commitments, thereby appealing to a third-personal grammatical form without necessarily shifting the focus to states of affairs.[9] It's possible as well to start with the third-person detached standpoint and then ask which states of affairs would be fitting or good for "me," thereby utilizing a first-personal grammatical formulation while retaining the focus on states of affairs.[10] For present purposes, the point isn't to cleanly taxonomize views as either third- or first-personal. The point is to raise the possibility that these two standpoints and their various crossbreeds aren't exhaustive. Perhaps, in order to account for notions like *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against*, philosophy needs to make room for a *second-personal standpoint*—what Stephen Darwall characterizes as "the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will" (2006, 3).[11]

> But is there really any such thing as this? Richard Kimberly Heck expresses skepticism:
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> 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

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[9] This is roughly Nagel's view in *The View from Nowhere*.

[10] Sidgwick's analysis of egoism in *The Methods of Ethics* sounds roughly like this.

[11] Darwall sometimes characterizes the second-person standpoint as a particular subspecies, or determinate of, the first-person standpoint (2006, 9). Because this complication makes little difference to what I say here, I will place it to the side.

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 . .

. 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)

Second-personal linguistic formulations, Heck thinks, are just that—*linguistic formulations*,

whose purpose it is to express ideas already graspable from other standpoints. To say that I owe

to you the performance of an act is just to say that I have third- or first-personal reasons while

using the pronoun "you" to locate myself relative to others within the relevant context. If this is

right, then we cannot represent second-personal reasons as formally distinctive by appealing to

the standpoint from which they're accessed, as there's no distinctively second-personal

standpoint to appeal to.

  Heck's skepticism, it seems to me, brings to light two important issues. First, if we're to

insist on the indispensability of distinctively second-personal reasons, it's incumbent upon us to

show that there is something that is not—or that cannot be—captured from either the third- or the

first-person standpoints. Specifically, it's incumbent upon us to show that second-personal

notions like *owing to, wronging,* and *having a right against* are not merely linguistic

formulations that reference practical concepts already available from more familiar standpoints.

Second, if we do eventually determine that the third- and first-person standpoints leave us

without second-personal notions that we need, it's similarly incumbent upon us to offer a

positive characterization of what the second-personal standpoint is, such that it manages to satisfy this need.

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

To motivate a philosophy of the second person, it helps to highlight inadequacies of theories that make no room for it. Consider, first, how theories that rely exclusively upon the third-person standpoint are apt to mischaracterize interpersonal relationships. When a person views another from the detached perspective of the universe, she represents that individual just as any other person might, and draws upon reasons available to anyone who might take 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 the assault, all things equal. And insofar as my position as the potential perpetrator of harm is special at all, it is just because my physical location makes bringing about the preferred state of affairs more convenient.[12]

But all of this is to neglect the fact that I, as the potential assailant, am not merely one among many who have reason to ensure John's safety. For I stand poised to *wrong*, *violate the rights of*, or *trespass against* John—a particular individual who is specially placed to complain to me, or claim compensation from me, if I carry out the deed. The thought here is that the aggressor and victim are not mere loci of good or bad occurrences, or constituents of states of affairs that are either fitting or not. They bear a special relationship to one another, wrongdoer to

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[12] 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 is best placed to act upon the reason.

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" (2013a, xi).[13]

Charges of inadequacy may be similarly registered against theories that are unqualifiedly first-personal. Consider Kantian accounts on which the moral law makes its way into the world through the deliberative activity of individual agents. On one such view, agents necessarily value their own humanity insofar as they deliberate about how to act, and this commits them to the value of others.[14] This commitment, it is said, forbids treating others as mere means. As such, prohibitions on stealing, lying, and cheating are legislated from the standpoint of the agent, rather than from the detached standpoint of the universe. But even if it succeeds on its own terms, such a view is also apt to mischaracterize the relationship we humans bear to one another. For it implies, absent further elaboration, that we ought to treat others as mere occasions for the application of a general norm, rather than as persons to whom each of us owes rightful treatment.

To see this, consider the way in which the positive law could be enlisted to protect an inanimate object. A legislature, let's imagine, might determine that some pieces of art possess intrinsic value, and thus mustn't be destroyed. It might even deem the art to be above all price, and thus to be treated as sacred. In such a case, the law would regulate citizens' action *with respect to* the art. But nothing in this yet implies that anything is owed *to the art*. For all we've said, the art is merely an occasion for the application of a general law—a law protecting valuable

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[13] For related arguments, see Darwall (2006, 5-7, 36-38), Wallace (2019, 39), and, although he doesn't put it in terms of standpoints, Thompson (2004, 333-334).

[14] This view is similar to one espoused by Gewirth (1978, 104-112).

objects that may well be incapable of having anything owed to them at all. Consider, now, the way in which a first-personally legislated moral norm could be enlisted to protect an animate being, such as a human. An 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 another person possesses this relevant property, then the norm would regulate the agent's action *with respect to* that person, prohibiting dishonest or abusive treatment. But, here again, nothing in this implies that anything is owed *to the person*. For all we've said, the case parallels in its essentials that of the artwork, and thus, for all we've said, the person is a mere occasion for the application of a norm, just as the artwork was. So if we're to contend that persons are owed certain treatment in the way that art cannot be, then something else, or something more, is needed.[15]

Thus, exclusively third- and first-personal theories of practical reason are each vulnerable to their own distinct criticism. But those distinct criticisms point to a truly striking commonality: both theories, in some sense, treat individual humans *as objects upon which to act* as opposed to *persons to whom action is owed*. From the standpoint of the universe, persons are objects that we must act upon in order to produce certain states of affairs. From the perspective of a deliberating agent, persons are objects that our first-personally generated norms tell us to act upon in particular ways. In this sense, other persons are treated just as *any* object might be! But this is dissatisfying. Even if, by virtue of their sentience or rationality, persons are considered from these standpoints to be very special objects that require privileged treatment, this implies only

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[15] The Kantian is not necessarily naïve about any of this, and might well agree with all I've said here. Korsgaard, for instance, is certainly alive to the issue (1996, 133-134).

that we have especially pressing or stringent reasons to act upon them in certain ways. It doesn't yet imply that anything is owed to them.

§3. But What *is* the Second Person?

The felt need for a philosophy of the second person stems, then, from an impulse to treat individual humans as persons to whom action is owed. More needs to be said, however, if we're to understand what exactly it is that we feel we need and why standard theories of practical reason can't supply it. To see this, think of how one might try to capture second-personal notions from the third-person standpoint: "The promise of a Sunday visit is made by Peter," "John demands that Peter make the promised visit," and "Peter visits," are all states of affairs that can be cognized and judged to be good or bad, fitting or unfitting. Here, we might say that Peter has reason to visit John, John demands that Peter act upon this reason, and then Peter acts because it is good when promises are kept. This sounds as if Peter has acted on his promise and according to John's demand, and all this seems graspable from the standpoint of the universe, if anything is. So what, then, is absent from the third-person perspective that requires we recognize an additional standpoint?

As a first pass, we might complain that the third-person standpoint fails to represent the promiser and promissee *as persons*. But this alone cannot be sufficient. John and Peter are both human individuals. Each has a name, each is conscious, each has a will. What more is there to representing them *as persons* than this, and why think it cannot be accomplished from the third-person standpoint?

Darwall moves beyond this first pass by pointing to those concepts that seem most essentially second-personal. Demands, according to him, 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 with respect to a fellow person, one does not simply think about her, 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). Darwall's body of work thus trains our attention on precisely those places where the need for the second-person is most acutely felt.

It also, I believe, points our attention to places where further elucidation is needed. Throughout, words like "hold", "address", and "relate" are emphasized in order to bring the second person into view. But have we, here, sufficient understanding of how these terms differ from those available from the third- and first-personal perspectives? Consider the notion of "holding responsible." Yes, practical philosophy must accommodate it. But one might still ask how an attitude manages to not just be *about* another person, but to "hold" that person accountable. If you 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?

Or consider the notion of "address." Demands are said to be distinctively second-personal by virtue of their being "addressed to" someone. But here again, one might 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 first-personal values I avow require me to return the wallet I've pilfered from him, in what sense has he failed to *address to me* a reason? And if there is indeed a genuine distinction to be uncovered between

second-personal address and what goes on between Blaine and me, what's the upshot for the two of us?

Or, finally, consider "relating to." This notion is said to characterize the mode of interaction between individuals within the second-person standpoint. But we might here wonder what's distinctively second-personal about it. If Blaine vandalizes my car, I might relate to him in the thin sense that I notice what he did. I might also relate to him in that he caused me harm, in that I pointed out what he did was wrong, and in that I collected money to cover the cost of repair. "I notice Blaine," "Blaine harms me," "I point out Blaine's wrongdoing," and, "I receive payment from Blaine" are all states of affairs that I could represent from the third-person standpoint, and they all involve my relating to Blaine in some sense. Presumably Darwall's thought is that if I relate to Blaine in only these ways, there is some deeper sense in which Blaine and I have failed to relate. But what is that sense, exactly? What could it even mean to say that we stand in relations of my having noticed him, of him having harmed me, of my having pointed this out, and of my having received compensation from him, but that we nevertheless fail to *relate to* one another?

My concern is that as of yet, we lack answers to these questions, signaling that our grasp of this topic and its associated ideas is more tenuous than we might have hoped. Thus, a conundrum: We've uncovered reasons for thinking that practical rationality needs the second-person, but we seem to lack understanding of what this thing that we think we need even is. There's a certain tension between the impulse to say that exclusively third- and first-person theories are lacking, and our limited ability to articulate *what* is lacking. And without a more positive accounting of the very idea of a second-person standpoint, we might well begin to wonder along with Heck whether there's even a coherent idea to account for.

§4. Prolegomena to a Theory: Treating Something as *Other Than a Mere Object*

Our general complaint about exclusively third- and first-personal theories, recall, was that that there is some sense in which they treat individual humans as mere objects, rather than as persons (§2). But upon further reflection, it became clear that we did not fully grasp the alternative that second-personal rationality was supposed to provide (§3). In this section, I investigate a specific sense of treating something as an object—and, conversely, of treating something as *other than a mere object*—with hopes of shedding light on what we're after when we seek an account of the second person.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguishes between an agent's capacity for self-movement "in general" and her ability to move herself as an object (1984b, 1019ª15-16). 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 asks me to make room for her on the sofa, and I respond by grasping my leg with both hands as I would an errant piece of clutter, lifting it, and then dropping it in another location (perhaps my leg has fallen asleep; perhaps I am attempting to amuse her with a philosophical joke). Here, I approach myself and my movement *qua* object—I treat my leg as something to be acted upon, and I move it as any other person might when looking to clear some space. This can be contrasted with a case in which I move my leg in the way my spouse was presumably expecting. In *this* instance, I perform "according to choice" (1984b, 1019ª20-25). I do not act *upon myself*, but simply act. When I move my leg in this sense, what gets done is not something that just anyone could be in the position to do. It is an instance of my own direct agential exercise.

A related 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 cancel. I thus 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 that I travel home in the way that I might plan that a package I mail travels there—I move myself *qua* object. Or, to complicate things, imagine that instead of arranging my own kidnapping, I enter into a 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.[16] 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 I also manipulate myself, attempting to effectuate movement through incentive architecture, just as a third party might—I manipulate my own motivations, psychological states, or will, like they are lumps of clay, there waiting to be molded. This contrasts with a case in which I act directly, judging that travelling home is good, and then making the trip in accordance with that judgment.[17]

To note this distinction isn't yet to say anything one way or the other about the ethical propriety of treating oneself *qua* object. To lift one's legs with one's hands is neither right nor

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[16] Cases like this are relatively common in the literature, the most famous being Parfit's tale 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).

[17] 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.

wrong, but simply a way of moving oneself. Perhaps manipulating and plotting against oneself is sometimes problematic, but it needn't be. My point is simply that a theory of agency that makes room only for self-movement *qua* object is deficient. A person doesn't reason only about objects and how they ought to be acted upon. She reasons, too, about how to act. I make this point in hopes of clarifying what is sought by those who call for a philosophy of the second person. Third- and first-personal theories, we complained, treat persons as constituents of states of affairs or as things protected by first-personally generated norms. They thus render other persons as mere objects in the relevant sense. But as we've now noted, treating a being as a mere object isn't 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 propose, should recognize the possibility of treating another individual *qua* subject as well—we might even refer to this as treating her *as a person*, in order to highlight the proposed distinction between person and mere object.

Yet, all of this raises as many questions as it answers. For what could it even mean to treat another person in this way? Certainly not that I move a stranger's legs in exactly the way I typically move my own, or that I flail another's arms simply by setting my mind to it. But if not this, then what?

§5. An Initial Attempt: Seeking the Second-Person in the First-Person Plural

In an illuminating article, Jane Heal argues that the key to understanding second-personal reasoning is to appreciate the way in which an agent can approach another *as a person*, rather than a mere object. Her account is instructive both for the progress it makes toward a robust account of the second person, as well as for the respects in which it leaves us in need of further

elaboration. I'll thus present it as a prelude to my own positive view. 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 goes hand-in-hand with the first-person plural, she thinks. Imagine a group aiming to knock off the mob boss. Each operates on the understanding that the boss is too-be-murdered, and it is common knowledge that all share this understanding. The members, in a straightforward sense, seek to act *upon* the boss. Their relationship to each other is quite different, however, in that they treat each other *qua* subject, or *qua* person. Unified by a common conception of what they're doing, the members relate much as a person relates to her future self, insofar as she carries out her plan to take a trip. These people form a robust 'We,' a collective subject.[18] Heal's thought is that insofar as they do, each is bound to the others in that they owe it to them to perform their respective roles. This, she proposes, is sufficient for second-personal relation.

That participants must be so unified in order to engage second-personally is, I think, absolutely correct. That this is *sufficient* for second-personal intercourse, however, is a claim I want to resist. Many groups that act together are deeply cooperative, with members who seek a

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[18] There is a considerable literature that teases out the niceties of what it is to act as a collective subject (Gilbert 1989; Tuomela 1989; Searle 1990; Bratman 2014). The nicities don't matter for my purposes. I am, here, simply appealing to the concept of collective agency itself.

high degree of harmony in their purposes and activity—a construction crew, a basketball team, burglars pulling off the big heist. But such groups fail to display an essential feature of second-personal relationships, which is that they are potentially adversarial, and deeply so—paradigm instances concern my interests as opposed to yours, my ends as opposed to yours, my flourishing as opposed to yours, my judgment as opposed to yours. The 'You' of the second-person isn't merely a potential collaborator, but also a potential competitor, nemesis, or enemy.

The problem is that when we talk of collective agents that are unified in their purposes, in the way that our individual agent carrying out a course of action is, the relevant oppositions have a tendency to melt away. When there is disagreement between you and me, understood as two distinct agents, you might demand that I defer to you, or vice versa. But a single individual agent, even when she must resolve conflicting desires, isn't typically said to *defer to herself*—the very possibility of deferring seems to presume the presence of separate individuals.[19] Thus, if you and I understand ourselves as a single 'We', unified strongly by common understanding and common purpose, we risk losing the possibility of deferring and of 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, isn't typically said to *compensate herself*—an intra-personal transfer of cash, for instance, would be no transfer at all, and thus couldn't be compensatory. Here too, the very possibility of compensation seems to presume the presence of more than one agent, or at least some sort of cleavage that the unified 'We' could well eliminate. To give a final example, when you act against a second-personal reason, you

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[19] On the impossibility of deferring to oneself, see Moran (2018, 203).

violate me. But when a single individual agent acts counter to a reason she has, we most often say not that she's wronged anyone, but simply that she's made a regrettable mistake. Thus, if you and I are to be understood on the model of a single individual, acting together with a shared purpose, the possibility of inter-personal violation that so interests the philosopher of the second person might well evaporate.[20]

Registering these oppositions becomes especially important if we hope second-personal reasons will be relevant to moral reasoning—at least insofar as we harbor concerns about what philosophers call the "separateness of persons." The great fear, after all, is that the individual's ends, interests, and flourishing will be swallowed up by an undifferentiated collective.[21] The great hope, however, is that a theory of second-personal reasoning will furnish us with resources to resist this rebarbative outcome. What is needed, then—and what we do not yet have—is a view that preserves Heal's insight that individuals can relate to one another as persons rather than as objects to be acted upon, while ensuring that the possibility of interpersonal opposition remains.

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[20] Whether we can *never* say of a person that she wrongs herself is a matter of controversy. Many philosophers have thought it possible. But to account for such talk, one would need to identify some sort of cleavage within the person that can mimic the cleavage that separates distinct persons, enabling clashes between interests and ends. In his book *Duty to Self*, Paul Schofield argues that the temporal divisions within a person's life disrupt the unity that makes intra-personal wronging seem impossible. However, the whole reason he has to argue for this in the first place is that a single self is so unified as to make self-directed duty (as well as self-deferral and self-compensation, for that matter) seem impossible. Thus, to the extent that we model a group on a unified individual subject, there is danger that we'll eliminate the very oppositions that make wronging possible.

[21] Rawls 1999, 24; Nozick 1974, 32-33; Nagel 1970, 134.

§6. A Theory of Second-Personal Reason

At last, I will advance my own positive account. In this section, I describe a standpoint that unifies the agency of distinct persons, à la Heal, but that also ensures that persons remain always in potential opposition to one another. The former aspect is intended to capture the sense in which an agent might treat another as a person rather than an object, whereas the latter is intended to capture the sense in which the two must treat each other as *separate*. As my goal in this essay is to understand what it would even mean to reason second-personally, I will proceed "analytically" in the way Kant does in the first two sections of the *Groundwork*. So, just as Kant attempts in those sections to discern what morality is without yet claiming that it applies to us, I will attempt to discern what second-personal reasoning is without yet arguing that we do, or ought to, or can engage in it. Vindicating the second-person—or discrediting it, for that matter— is only possible once we have some idea of what it is in the first place, and my task here is to put us in possession of that very idea.

6.1 Individual Reasoning: Deliberation, Decision, Action

According to the view I'm about to articulate, second-personal reasoning involves two persons taking on specific roles in the execution of a single agential act. In assuming these roles, participants divide the agential labor that a rational individual often performs on her own. To get a sense of what this division of labor consists in, it will help to consider a person exercising her rational agency all by herself. In paradigmatic instances, such a person is apt to engage in a temporally extended process that unfolds in distinct phases: one consisting in deliberation, the other in executing one's decision. So I might, to revisit our earlier example, deliberate about traveling home for the holiday, concluding that the case in favor is decisive (phase 1), and then

set about 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 is between a faulty decision and subsequent action is, are all matters of dispute. But this partition of rational agency into a deliberative phase and the movement that follows is what sets the stage for these disagreements in the first place.[22]

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 an actor—two phases of a unified agential sequence, undertaken by a single enduring person. According to Christine Korsgaard, this explains "how we can attribute a movement to an agent as the agent's own" (2009, 158). The individual acts when she moves in accord with her decision, as expressed in a piece of legislation that she herself issues. But one needn't embrace this Kantian framing in order to affirm the basic distinction. An Aristotelian, for instance, can distinguish between the *deliberative process* through which one considers what ought to be done, and the *choice* embodied in one's actions. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the person of practical wisdom is characterized both as thinking about "what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general" (1984a, 1140ᵃ 25-30) and choosing to move herself "with a view to an end"

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

selected through deliberation (1984a, 1139ᵃ 30-40)—two phases that together constitute a robust exercise of rational agency.

To represent this visually, we can imagine an individual proceeding from left to right on the following diagram (Figure 1), locating herself in its progression and exercising her agency accordingly.
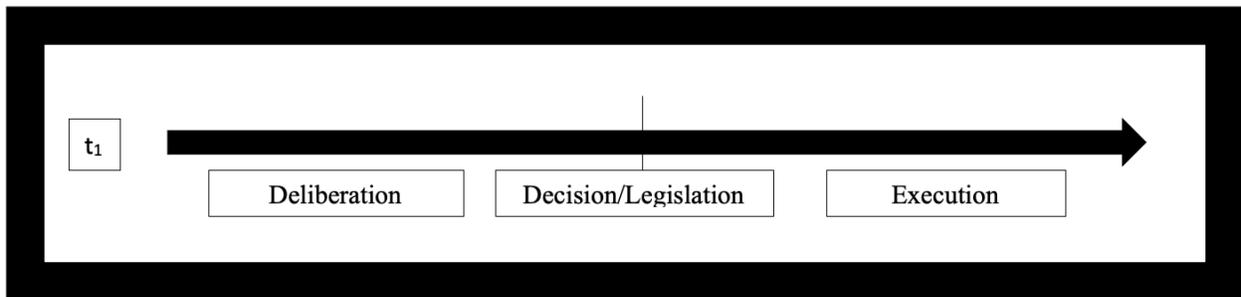

Figure 1: Individual Rational Agency

In a given instance, the "Decision/Legislation" line might be pushed farther to the left, as when an agent settles on taking a long journey with only momentary consideration, or it may be pushed to the right, as when an agent spends a month weighing reasons for and against before deciding to punch his nemesis in the mouth. Either way, the agent bears a special relationship to the happenings on the righthand side of the figure by virtue of its relation to the considerations she endorses as a result of the happenings on the lefthand side.

Crucially, the connections between the items in our figure aren't merely causal—rather than depicting empirically observed regularities, the sequence represents a "space of reasons."[23]

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[23] This phrase is Wilfrid Sellars', which he introduced when discussing knowledge in his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (76).

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 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 the agent is *supposed to* have done, given that she was deliberating. The same is true when she ultimately executes her decision. The whole purpose of deciding is to initiate a course of activity. And so when she does, this again is what she is *supposed to* do.

The figure represents rational agency in one of its most basic guises. One can imagine complications. But they can, I think, be accommodated. Imagine, for instance, that the moment for action arrives and our agent balks, but does so reasonably—perhaps because she's decided to commit an atrocity and is having second thoughts. Of such a person, we don't typically say she'd best go through with it. Stopping mid-stream is sometimes exactly what a person should do. However, there does seem to be *something* amiss if she decides to commit the atrocity, and then allows the intention simply to dissipate without further thought, consideration, or deliberation. If she's functioning well, she might respond to her doubts by backtracking on the figure, revisiting her deliberations and possibly revising her decision, thus setting herself on a new path.[24] None of

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[24] Because acting on one's decision isn't always the best thing to do, some have argued that an agent is required *either* to act on one's best judgment *or* to revise their judgment (Broome 2004). Without engaging the large literature on this topic, I'll simply note that nothing in my view implies that a person must follow through with whatever terrible intentions she has. She can, as I say, backtrack. Nevertheless, I do believe that acting on one's best judgment is what happens when all goes well. To stop and redeliberate—to backtrack on Figure 1—is a symptom of *something's* having gone wrong along the way.

this require abandoning the space of reasons as represented in the diagram. It simply requires navigating it adeptly.

Note, importantly, that any agent navigating this space of reasons—either in the ideal case or in one of the departures from it—treats herself *qua* person or subject, in the special sense identified earlier (§4). The agent here doesn't execute temporally extended endeavors by acting *upon* herself—for instance, by hiring kidnappers to take her home, knowing she'll never carry out her decision if left to her own devices.[25] She instead locates herself within the temporal unfolding of the agential process, packing the car and driving away with the understanding that she's deliberated, made a decision, and so now packing and driving is what she's *supposed to* do next.

6.2 Two Persons, One Space of Reasons

Entertain, now, the possibility of deliberating with the aim of determining what *some other person* will do. An agent, let's say, weighs reasons for expelling her lover from her home, eventually telling him that he needs to gather his things. When our deliberator arrives at this decision, she represents it as good, supported by the best considerations, and in this regard resembles the individual reasoner 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 that distinct individual eventually heads to the highway.

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[25] Maybe this is the best she can do. But if so, she appears to be agentially flawed. This is why we'd refer to her as "weak-willed," and why we'd describe her interventions as attempts to manage her volitional frailty, rather than just saying she tends to follow through on her decisions as well as anyone could.

Sometimes a directive motivates the person to whom it is addressed through implicit threat—the next step, if one's words aren't heeded, involves physical altercation, the police, or a posse. Sometimes, a directive motivates through psychological pressure—ignoring an imperative makes some people nervous, uncomfortable, or scared. And sometimes a directive motivates because heeding it is instrumental to some other desired end—obeying might lead to greater peace or stability. But Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in *The Foundations of Natural Right* (2000), detects another possibility—another way in which a directive might function in the thought and talk of rational agents. There, he imagines a type of activity in which a rational being simply and directly "determine[s] itself in consequence of the summons [the demand]" (2000, 35).[26] Instead of compliance caused by threat, psychological inclination, or appeal to some other desired end, we're to imagine a demand that compels by virtue of its being normative in itself.[27]

Without pronouncing on the extent to which we humans actually engage in this form of reasoning, I propose that the Fichtean model can be fleshed out in such a way as to *give sense to the very idea of reasoning second-personally*. Consider the following diagram (Figure 2), which parallels our earlier representation of individual rational agency:

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[26] 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." (See Neuhouser 2000, xv).

[27] 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).
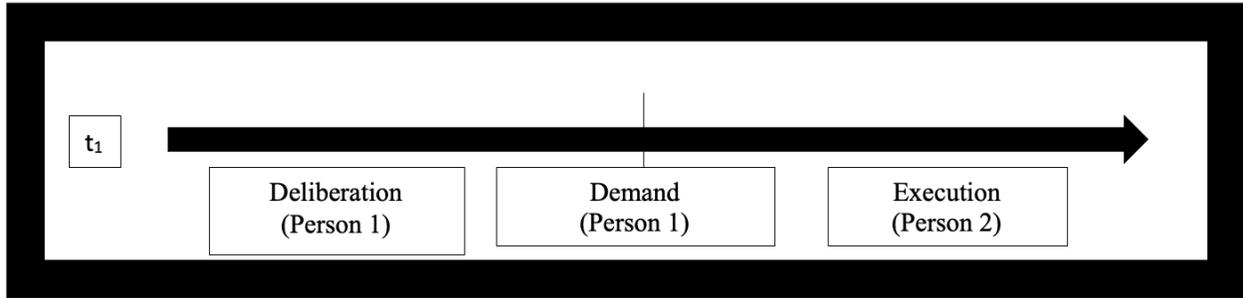
Figure 2: Second-Personal Reasoning

As with individual agency, the diagram depicts a temporally extended sequence, unfolding in distinct phases—beginning in deliberation, and issuing in activity. And, as with individual agency, the sequence depicted is a "space of reasons"—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 determining herself to act according to its prescriptions. But unlike with individual agency, the new 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 her addressee is *supposed to* complete this process she's initiated. Such deliberation might be instantaneous, or it might be drawn out—the "Demand" line might be pushed far to the left, or farther to the right instead. What matters is just that the demand is backed by considerations the agent endorses. Person 2 then receives the demand and acts in accord with it, completing the sequence with the understanding that this is what is *supposed to* come next. The two distinct persons are thus connected by the demand, which sets up standards of success and failure, of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, for the interaction. Like a personal decision that a single agent can either succeed or fail in carrying out, a demand reaches out into the future and succeeds when its target abides it.

It might appear, then, that second-personal agency is just first-personal agency pluralized after all. However, second-personal reasoning of the sort depicted here is also distinguished from purely individual exercises of agency in the crucial respect that it accommodates tensions, conflicts, and oppositions that individual reasoning positively resists. Consider that a properly-functioning agent, when reasoning alone, exhibits consonance between decision and action. 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 indicative of agential error. The Fichtean view (Figure 2) depicts a radically different possibility, however. Here, an individual might reject as unsound the judgment arrived at through the other agent's deliberation, and so disagree with 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 I ought to leave, and therefore demanded that I depart. *I* disagree with this judgment, as I think life together would be grand. But I take the results of *her* deliberations to be decisive (under certain conditions; under *these* 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 wrongheaded in this. Indeed, the possibility of such opposition 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, I want to keep it; You want your body left alone, I want to sock you in the jaw. 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* persons, occupying a common space of reasons.

A person who places herself within the space of reasons depicted in Figure 2, and locates herself within its temporal progression, takes up a perspective distinct from either the third- or first-person standpoints. Neither does she ascend to the detached standpoint of the universe to impartially possible states of affairs, nor does she retract into her personal deliberative perspective, drawing upon resources inherent to in order to decide what she will do. Rather, she takes up a perspective characterized by our figure, wherein two are joined in their agency, but are always potentially opposed in their interests and wills. This is the second-person standpoint: the perspective that enables reasoning of a distinctively second-personal sort.

The foregoing focuses on the second person at its most rudimentary: One person issues a one-off demand to another, who then complies. But from here, we can scale up, bringing 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. 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 truly place her in the role of decider. Who is Person 1, who is Person 2, and how does this get negotiated? 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 normative weight? 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?[28] As with any account of practical rationality, the most

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[28] Such complications are handled by Darwall through his account of the "moral community," which he characterizes as an idealized commonwealth of rational agents possessing the power to ratify or veto the actual demands of actual persons (2006, 7-9, 69-79). Alternatively, Axel Honneth (2021) suggests that questions of who is licensed to demand what is determined by one's non-idealized community, wherein norms and practices develop

basic instances serve as a gateway to the more complex. I don't intend to answer these questions here, but simply note that they are brought into focus once we have a clearer sense of what it even means to reason second-personally. If the account offered here bears fruit, it will be because it opens the door to more inquiry, as opposed to offering the final word.

§7. Owing, Wronging, Having a Right Against, and Second-Personal Reason

To recount our journey: The philosophical literature emphasizes a battery of second-personal concepts. These concepts are important in that they undergird a lot of human interaction. But as things stand, we hanker for an account of what renders such concepts second-personal in the first place. We want to better understand what unifies them together under the genus "second-personal." We ask: What does it mean for me to *address to* you a reason, as opposed to simply pointing out to you the reasons that you have? What does it mean for me to *relate to* you second-personally, as opposed to relating as distinct objects in the causal nexus? These questions arose for us because we lacked sufficient grasp of the second person and its concepts. In supplying my theory, my hope has been to put the understanding in touch with this battery of second-personal concepts—a battery of concepts we could only point to before.

Consider the concepts that motivated our call for a philosophy of the second person in the first place: *owing*, *wronging*, and *having a right against*. A philosophical articulation of each can now be supplied by specifying their role in second-personal agency. So, for instance, to say of myself that I owe it to someone to return his pocket watch involves locating myself in a sequence

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through interaction and negotiation between real persons. At this juncture, I'm not yet addressing how to determine which second-personal interactions are ideal or legitimate. Rather, I'm interested to account for the more formal features that render them second-personal in the first place.

of second-personal agency that joins me to him. In a paradigm instance (one uncomplicated by the factors discussed at the end of the previous section), the other demands that I return the watch, I acknowledge the demand, and then I comply in order to complete the sequence. In such a case, the other doesn't merely inform me that it is good to return the watch, in a way that *any* other person could have. Instead, the other normatively compels me to complete the agential sequence that he initiated. Crucially, he—the other person—is not incidental here. For it *his* demand that I seek to satisfy. This 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 similarly analyzed. Wronging occurs when a person owes an action to another but fails to perform it, or owes it to another to refrain from performing an action, but performs it anyway. 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 is clarified by the role they play for the agent within the second-person standpoint, which involves treating the other as a subject rather than an object to be acted upon.

Our core second-personal judgments, we've just shown, *join* two persons in a particular way. They also, I believe, represent the possibility of *opposition* between the principal actors. 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's; 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 X's demand. If Y acts anyway, then she has *wronged* X, acting against the will or interests of a metaphysically distinct person.

Finally, the notion of a second-personal reason itself. To say a person has one is to say that she is Person 2 in our figure, having been addressed a legitimate demand. To say that she gives one is to say she's Person 1. Such a reason is defined by the role it plays in second-personal reasoning. And it is distinctively second-personal not in virtue of what it is *about*, or in virtue of its subject matter—it's not rendered second-personal in anything like the way a culinary reason is rendered culinary. It is second-personal in virtue of the distinctive standpoint from it is accessed, from which it plays its special role in human life.

§8. Conclusion

Theories that make room only for third- or first-personal reason leave us in want of something more. The account I've developed tells us what that something more would look like. What it looks like is in certain respects familiar—it's fairly ordinary, after all, to treat the demand of another as a legitimate reason for acting. But it's much 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—as if deliberating toward the issuing a demand were like deliberating about what another person *will* do, or receiving a demand were like having another make a decision for me. Whether this semi-mundane, semi-extraordinary form of reasoning is one we really all ought to engage in is deep question for practical philosophy. Some will argue that taking up the second-person standpoint—situating oneself with respect to others in the way depicted in Figure 2—is something we all just happen to do as a matter of empirical psychology

(Darwall 2006). Some will argue instead that doing so is necessary for human flourishing, as it is required by virtue (Lebar 2009). Some might even argue, audaciously, that doing so is a necessary condition for self-consciousness (Fichte 2000). These are debates for another time. But, with an account of what it would mean to reason second-personally in hand, they're debates we're now better prepared to have.

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