WHAT WE OWE TO OURSELVES: AN ESSAY ON DUTIES TO ONESELF

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SUBMITTED TO
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SUPERVISOR:
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BUDAPEST, MAY 2018

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May 31, 2018

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I defend the view that, apart from duties to others, we also have duties to ourselves. In order to defend this claim, I rely on the intrinsic value of personhood, autonomy, and the capacity for well-being, and the resulting account is meant to appeal both to scholars sympathetic to Kant's moral theory and those skeptical of it.

I begin by rebutting two classical objections to the idea of duties to oneself. First, I consider the charge that the notion of a duty to oneself is self-contradictory. In response, I argue that the explanation of why we can release others from their duties to us at will lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from duties to ourselves in a similar way. Instead, the moral justification for releasing oneself from a duty to oneself derives from the value and significance autonomy, and thus requires us to act consistently with it (Chapter 1). Second, I examine the objection that, since morality is essentially social, purely self-regarding actions fall outside of moral realm. In response, I argue that this objection would rule out the possibility of genuinely moral duties to oneself only on the presupposition that it provides a definition of morality. Such a definition, however, cannot be established prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry. Additionally, I address the skepticism stemming from the connection between wrongdoing and blame and argue that, while we have the standing to blame the person who treats herself badly, the importance of personal growth and of self-trust renders the expression of our blame inappropriate (Chapter 2).

My argument is then further developed by critically engaging with two arguments for duties to oneself. First, I consider and reject Kant's argument on account of its being too closely tied to a single aspect of our rational nature, namely, our capacity for moral reasoning. I suggest instead that a plausible view of persons' value is hybrid which among other factors includes persons' capacity to form emotional ties and to autonomously set up and pursue meaningful goals (Chapter 3). Second, I examine a recent attempt by Paul Schofield to ground duties to oneself by relying on Stephen Darwall's second-personal framework of morality. I argue that this view is ultimately unsuccessful, because it is phenomenologically suspect, it is vulnerable to an intra-personal version of the non-identity problem, and it cannot provide a plausible account for choosing between a course of action that will result in greater aggregate benefit of a cluster of perspectives and another course of action that will produce greater benefit per perspective (Chapter 4).

Having cleared the ground for my own proposal, I argue that the value we have as persons grounds two standing duties to ourselves: the duty of self-respect and the duty of well-being. I focus on the duty of well-being and show that the duty of care for the well-being of others is importantly different from the duty of well-being that we owe to ourselves. The nature of persons' well-being is such that it is partly up to the agent herself to realize it. Given the intrinsic value of persons and given the critical relation between person's well-being and her autonomy, I conclude that we have a duty to strive to realize our well-being and that those who fail at it, fail morally (Chapter 5).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to my supervisor, Andrés Moles, for his relentless work in steering my doctoral research. His patience in reading and commenting on countless drafts is astounding and a mark of a rare professional ethics. His dedication, support, and friendliness made it easier for me to walk the path of graduate school. I am truly lucky to have been working with Andrés. I am also very grateful to my associate supervisor, János Kis, for commenting on various drafts of my dissertation. It was very beneficial and a real privilege to have his opinion.

I am grateful for the opportunities to stay as a visiting graduate student at various universities and research centers. I have benefited from the expertise of Brad Hooker and Philip Stratton-Lake, who served as my advisors during my Erasmus stay at the University of Reading, that of Christine Tappolet, who advised me during my research stay at the Center for Research in Ethics at the University of Montreal, and that of Peter Schaber, who supervised my research during the year I spent at the Center for Ethics at the University of Zurich. Additionally, I am thankful to David Archard, Emma Bullock, Alison Hills, Simon Rippon, Connie Rosati, Thomas Schmidt, Paul Schofield, and Nicholas Southwood for either having read and commented on parts of my work, or for having shared their manuscripts with me, or for having otherwise dedicated their time to discuss my ideas with me.

I would like to thank Anton Markoč for giving me the start I needed. Without it, this dissertation might not have seen light. I also would like to thank my friends and colleagues who

made my years in the graduate school enjoyable – Jelena Belic, Friedemann Bieber, David Bitter, Zlata Bozac, Bálint Kékedi, Anton Markoč, Julia Mosquera, Attila Mráz, Hichem Naar, Lukas Naegeli, Jennifer Page, Michele Palmira, Ioana Petre, Margaryta Rymanenko, Georgiana Turculet, and Miklós Zala. Special thanks are due to Bálint Kékedi and Máté Veres for generously proofreading the manuscript.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the people who are a big part of my life and whose love and support I am lucky to have – Maria Davydova, Maxim Kanygin, Olga Kanygina, Raïsa Pechkovskaya, Máté Veres, Ágnes Veres, and István Veres.

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INTRODUCTION

Outside of Kantian scholarship, the idea that we have moral duties to ourselves invites suspicion. The very notion of a duty owed to oneself appears self-contradictory. The idea that a person can be meaningfully, normatively bound by a duty from which she can release herself at any time at will is certainly puzzling. Moreover, in theorizing about various aspects of moral theory, some philosophers assume or even explicitly state that the modern conception of morality is essentially social. In other words, they take morality to determine the code of conduct that governs our relation with others. If something like duties to oneself exist, the suggestion goes, they fall outside of the distinctively moral realm.

The objections that were once laid at its door proved so successful that even seemingly acceptable responses fail to bring the discussion of duties to oneself back on our philosophical radar. If moral philosophers consider duties to oneself at all, they often do so by way of an afterthought.[1] If they deny their existence altogether, they may suggest that what some of us call a

1. Notable exceptions are Paul Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self (and their Significance for Moral Philosophy)," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, No. 3 (May 2015): 505-528; Connie S. Rosati, "The Importance of Self-Promises," in Promises and Agreements: Philosophical Essays, ed. Hanoch Sheinman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107-131; Jean Hampton, "Selflessness and the Loss of Self," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 135-165; Robin S. Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," *American Philosophical*

duty to oneself is just a metaphorical way to say that a person deserves something, such as a vacation after a year of hard work.[2] Alternatively, they claim that duties to oneself are fraudulent: in order to give weight to the currency of desire, persons in pursuit of their happiness disguise their interests as duties to oneself.[3]

In this dissertation, my aim is to provide a defense of the claim that we have duties to ourselves that could in principle appeal both to Kantians and to those who are skeptical about Kant's moral theory. I shall argue that we have duties to ourselves by virtue of the intrinsic value that we have as persons, our autonomy and our capacity for well-being. In terms of structure, my argument is threefold and proceeds as follows.

In the first two chapters, I offer a negative argument for duties to oneself. I examine and reject two objections against these duties. In chapter 1, I examine the objection according to which the notion of a duty to oneself is internally incoherent, because if one had such a duty one would be able to release oneself from it at one's discretion. I consider two partially successful responses to this objection and claim that, although they make important progress in the debate, they nevertheless miss the crux of the matter. The question turns not on the fact that we can release ourselves from purported duties to oneself but rather on whether we can do so by simply opting

Quarterly 29, no. 2 (April 1992): 125-139; Robin S. Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," *Ethics* 112, no. 1 (October 2001): 53-83; Victor Tadros, "Consent to Harm," in Wrongs and Crimes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 268-74, Oxford Scholarship Online; Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), ch. 9; Michael Cholbi, "On Marcus Singer's "On Duties to Oneself"," Ethics 125, no. 3 (April 2015): 851-3.

2. Marcus G. Singer, "On Duties to Oneself," *Ethics* 69. No. 3 (April 1959): 203.

3. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 51.

out of them without offering justification for doing so. Furthermore, I provide a more fundamental argument which, while compatible with the existing solutions, addresses the crux of the objection. I argue that to the extent that we can release others from their duties to us without having to justify our decision, the explanation of why that is so lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from duties to oneself in a similar way. Instead, moral justification for releasing oneself from a duty to oneself derives from the value and significance the agent's autonomy.

In the second chapter, I respond to the objection that, since morality is essentially social, the notion of a duty owed to oneself is fraudulent. I claim that any characterization of morality that blocks the possibility of duties to oneself must constitute an attempt to find morality's defining feature. I further identify two popular ideas concerning the modern conception of morality which fit its characterization as social and which appear to rule out the possibility of duties to oneself: (i) its exclusive other-regardingness and (ii) its connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes. I show that neither can be established as the distinctive feature of morality with a high degree of certainty prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry. Additionally, the connection between morality and blame-constituting attitudes on its own does not warrant skepticism about duties to oneself. I contend, first, that blame can be dispassionate and inner. Second, the importance of personal growth, self-understanding, and self-trust renders the expression of a third party's blame inappropriate. This mainly concludes my negative argument for duties to oneself.

Having responded to these important concerns, I proceed to examine two existing approaches to defending duties to oneself. In chapter 3, I consider the argument for duties to oneself in the moral theory of Immanuel Kant and show that the central element of this argument, namely, Kant's view on the value of persons, is implausibly thin. It excludes vitally important psychological facts about our nature as persons, such as the capacity to feel pain and to love as

well as the need for the sympathy and love of others. I suggest that, in exercising our rationality, we deploy various sets of capabilities, including the capacity to form strong emotional ties and the capacity to set and pursue meaningful goals, which are critically interrelated and which together help us to define what is important about persons. A successful account of moral duties to oneself will have to rely on such a thicker notion of the value of personhood.

In chapter 4, I examine an alternative way to account for duties to oneself, formulated by Paul Schofield, that appeals to Darwall's second-personal moral framework. According to this view, duties to oneself arise as a result of a hypothetical second-personal relation that obtains between temporally divided perspectives within a person's life. I argue that the view is problematic in its own right. First, it faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, if the validity of a claim is at least partially sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, then Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem. One cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply with legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed. On the other hand, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective, and the ends and interests held at any perspective are fixed in virtue of some moral principle which is not sensitive to identities of perspectives, then the fact of the second-personal address of a claim is superfluous in explaining what duties to ourselves we have. Second, I show that the view cannot accommodate our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at a specific time in order to achieve an even greater benefit overall.

Finally, in chapter 5, I propose that we have duties to ourselves based on our intrinsic value, our autonomy and our capacity for well-being. I assume that persons are intrinsically valuable and rely on the view according to which, in order to delineate what is important about persons, we

should consider various complex and partially overlapping capabilities. These include, among others, the capability to form strong emotional ties and to set up and pursue meaningful goals. Since persons matter and matter impartially, I suggest that just as we have the duty to respect others and the duty to improve the well-being of others, we also have the duty to respect ourselves and the duty to improve and realize our own well-being.

To defend this proposal, I examine and reject the challenge stemming from the widely endorsed tenet of self-other asymmetry. Roughly put, this tenet entails that one's own self-interest, well-being, or happiness does not matter from the moral point of view, as opposed to the self-interest, well-being, or happiness of others, which does. I claim, firstly, that this view is poorly motivated, since it conflicts with permissible partiality. Secondly, and more importantly, I argue that the asymmetry is best explained by an unexpressed presupposition that whenever an agent sacrifices her self-interests and well-being, she implicitly consents to this sacrifice. From this it follows that the asymmetry is not a deep feature of morality and that it is not necessarily captured by the substantive ideal of moral impartiality.

I then return to the question of the value and significance of autonomy discussed in chapter 1, and complement my argument there by suggesting that, from the first-person deliberative standpoint, the decisiveness of a person's self-regarding will depends upon it being consistent with protecting and promoting her overall well-being. Having cleared up the complications, I show that the duty of care for the well-being of others is importantly different from the duty of well-being that we owe to ourselves. This is because the nature of persons' well-being is such that it is partly up to the agent herself to realize it. I conclude that we have a duty to strive to realize and improve our well-being and that those who fail at it, fail morally.

The project accomplished in my dissertation opens up future avenues of inquiry. I do not here discuss the duty to improve and realize one's well-being in light of different conceptions of well-being. Nor do I address the question of the relation between duties to oneself and duties owed to others, including their potential conflicts. I do not address either the ways in which political institutions could help us fulfil our duties to oneself or the ways in which they may impede their fulfilment. However, if the arguments in this dissertation are correct, then – contrary to where we started off from – it is a mistake to exclude duties to oneself from the moral domain, and any reasonably complete account of moral theory will have at the very least to take notice of the possibility of failing oneself.

CHAPTER 1: ON THE ALLEGED INCOHERENCE OF DUTIES TO ONESELF

A moral duty to oneself is a requirement of morality regarding oneself and, most importantly, owed to oneself. It is the kind of requirement of which the subject, i.e., the person who is required to act (or refrain from acting), and the object, i.e., the person who requires to act (or refrain from acting), are one and the same person.[4] This very feature makes it problematic that duties to oneself exist at all.

According to an uncompromising objection, the very notion of a duty to oneself is self-contradictory. It is in the nature of a duty that no one can release oneself from it. But if an agent had a duty to herself, she would be able to release herself from it at any moment at will, just as she can release others from duties owed to her at her discretion.[5] This charge has been much discussed and at least partially rebutted.

4. I use the terminology introduced by Alison Hills. See Alison Hills, "Duties and Duties to the Self," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (April 2003): 132.

5. Marcus G. Singer, "On Duties to Oneself," 202-5. Singer's paper was discussed by Daniel Kading, "Are There Really "No Duties to Oneself"?" *Ethics* 70, no. 2 (January 1960): 155-7; Warner Wick, "More About Duties to Oneself," *Ethics* 70, no. 2 (January 1960): 158-62; Mary Mothersill, "Professor Wick on Duties to Oneself," *Ethics* 71, no. 3 (April 1961): 205-8; Frank H. Knight, "I, Me, My Self, and My Duties," *Ethics* 71, no. 3 (April 1961): 209-12; Warner Wick, "Still More About Duties to Oneself," *Ethics* 71, no. 3 (April 1961): 213-7; and Marcus G. Singer, "Duties and Duties to Oneself," *Ethics* 73, no. 2 (January 1963): 133-42. For a recent reaction to Singer's 1959 paper

In this chapter, I first consider two partially successful responses to this objection and claim that, although they make progress in the debate, they nevertheless miss the crux of the matter. It consists, I contend, not in the fact that we can release ourselves from purported duties to oneself but rather in the fact that we can do so by simply opting out of them without offering justification for doing so. Thus, my main objective is to provide a more fundamental argument, that, while compatible with the existing solutions, addresses the crux of the objection. I argue that the objection rests on a mistake. The explanation of why we can release others from their duties towards us lends no support to the claim that we can opt out of duties to ourselves. Our power to release others from duties owed to us is the normative power of consent which cannot be exercised intra-personally. Finally, assuming that the power of consent ultimately derives from the value and significance of our autonomy, I rely on a subjectivist historical conception of autonomy in order to show that one can release oneself from a duty to oneself only when doing so is necessary to maintain a meaningfully autonomous life.

My argument proceeds as follows. In section 1, I outline the above-mentioned objection. In section 2, I examine two partially successful responses: one which appeals to inalienable rights and one which relies on the right for self-direction. I argue that both responses are implausibly restrictive, insofar as they imply that duties to oneself are rare exceptions in a primarily other-regarding moral domain. More importantly, I show that both responses merely avoid facing up to the challenge posed by the objection. Finally, in section 3, I offer what I take to be the best solution: I argue that our power to release others from their duties to us should be explained by the value

see Michael Cholbi, "On Marcus Singer's "On Duties to Oneself"," 851-3. Prior to Singer, Immanuel Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals* spells out the objection and offers a solution along the lines of his moral doctrine. See MS 417.

and significance of our autonomy, a plausible conception of which does not warrant indiscriminate release.

1. The Challenge

A familiar objection to the possibility of genuine moral duties owed to oneself runs as follows. On the one hand, duties are by their nature such that, if one has a duty, one cannot release oneself from it (P1). On the other hand, if there were duties to oneself, these would be duties from which one could release oneself at one's discretion (P2). It follows that the very notion of a duty to oneself is internally incoherent.

Both (P1) and (P2) are taken to be uncontroversial. (P1) follows analytically from the very concept of a duty, since it is in the nature of a duty that it is binding. If it were possible for anyone who has a duty to φ to release oneself at one's discretion from φ-ing, such a duty would not be binding in any meaningful sense.[6] Hence, as Marcus Singer puts it, "[i]t is essential to the nature

6. Note that this inference is controversial. For from the fact that I can release you from your duty to me, it does not follow that you were never really bound by it in the first place. By the same token, from the fact that I can release myself from a duty that I have towards myself, it does not follow that I am not really bound by that duty. Indeed, as long as I have not released myself from that duty, I am bound by it. Compare with Allen Habib, "Promises to the Self," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 4 (December 2009): 546-550, Project MUSE. Compare also with Connie S. Rosati, "The Importance of Self-Promises," 135. Nevertheless, skepticism about the binding force of a duty to oneself is not unwarranted. As long as we accept that one can release oneself from such a duty by simply opting out of it, it is inconsequential whether it is binding prior to release.

of a duty that no one can release oneself from it by not wishing to perform it or by deciding not to perform it, or, indeed, in any other way whatsoever".[7]

As for (P2), it follows from the contention that, even though it is against the nature of a duty that its subject cannot release herself from it, most people agree that it is possible to be released from it by its object. From this it follows that if *A* has a duty to *A* to *φ*, then even though *A*, *qua* subject of that duty, cannot release herself from it on pain of contradiction, *A*, *qua* object of that duty, can do so. And since *A*, *qua* subject of a duty, and *A*, *qua* object of a duty, are identical, *A* can release herself from the duty to herself. In the rest of this chapter I shall refer to this objection formed by the conjunction of (P1) and (P2) as 'the Challenge'.

2. Rights-Based Solutions

One common strategy to meet the Challenge invokes the widely shared intuition that some rights are inalienable. Thus Alison Hills endeavours to vindicate the idea of duties to oneself by claiming that duties correlative to inalienable rights are non-releasable, irrespective of whether they are owed to others or to oneself.[8] A person may welcome her death; She may ask or encourage

7. Singer, "On Duties to Oneself," 202.

8. Alison Hills, "Duties and Duties to the Self." For others who maintain that some rights are inalienable see Neil MacCormick, "Rights in Legislation," in *Law, Morality and Society: Essays in Honour of H.L.A Hart*, eds. Peter Hacker and Joseph Raz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 197; Diana T. Meyers, *Inalienable Rights: A Defense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Terrance McConnell, *Inalienable Rights: The Limits of Consent in Medicine and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alison Hills, *The Beloved Self: Morality and the Challenge from Egoism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 50-51. For a critique of the idea of inalienable rights see Allen Buchanan, "What's So Special About Rights?" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1984): 79;

someone to kill her. Yet, if the right to life is inalienable, then a person cannot waive this right by consenting to, say, being beaten to death.[9] Thus, if a person cannot waive her right to life, consequently, she cannot release herself or someone else from the duty not to kill her.

Hill's suggestion reveals that (P2), namely, the claim that if there were duties to oneself, these would be duties from which one could release oneself at one's discretion, is problematic. By appealing to inalienable rights and their correlative duties, Hills shows that non-releasable duties to oneself are possible, hence, the idea of such duties cannot be rejected on conceptual grounds.

Although this makes for important progress in the debate, Hill's argument does not cover all the conceptual space it opens up. For her argument relies not only on the intuition about inalienable rights, but also on a widely held view that, barring exceptions[10], reasons for action are universal.[11] On this latter view, if a certain consideration is a reason for action for a person *A* in circumstance *C*, then *ceteris paribus* it also is a reason for action for a person *B* if *B* finds herself in the circumstance *C*. Thus, Hill's argument implies that for every duty we have towards others, if we find ourselves in a similar circumstance we have a similar self-regarding duty to ourselves.

Baruch A. Brody, *Life and Death Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22; Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 58; Hillel Steiner, "Directed Duties and Inalienable Rights," *Ethics* 123, no. 2 (January 2013): 230-44.

9. Note that this line of argument implies the existence of rights against oneself, which some might take to provide yet another reason for skepticism about duties to oneself. See Singer, "On Duties to Oneself," 202. I maintain that this line of criticism is misconceived. What really is at stake in the formal structure of both moral and jural relations is the possibility of accountability. I address the question of moral accountability to oneself in the next chapter.

10. For the exception of agent-relative reasons.

11. Alison Hills, "Duties and Duties to the Self," 136.

In the meantime, if the advocates of duties to oneself had nothing better to fall back on but our intuition that some rights cannot be waived, the prospects for those duties would not look bright. It is not only that the case for duties to oneself would appear weak, but also investigating these duties would not be interesting in its own right. For the solution from inalienable rights implies that duties to oneself are just rare exceptions in an otherwise other-regarding moral domain, and, moreover, it virtually precludes any further theorizing about them.[12] Both the subject-matter and the moral significance of non-releasable duties are predetermined by our intuitions about inalienable rights. The usual examples of rights which intuitively are such that one cannot waive them include the right not to be killed,[13] the right not to be enslaved,[14] or the right not to be deceived.[15] Provided that there are no other non-inalienable rights, any other harmful self-regarding action, such as making oneself an object of ridicule or leading an unreflective life, would not be protected by morality because one could always release oneself from them at one's discretion.

12. Granted, not all moral duties are like the promissory ones. The duty of beneficence, for example, seems to constitute an exception. For, intuitively, it would be wrong of me not to help someone who is in dire need, if I can do so easily, even if she told me not to bother. However, first, by adding the duty of beneficence to the list of those non-releasable duties would hardly makes a stronger case for duties to oneself. Second, as I argue below, the need for a different response to the Challenge is motivated not so much by the strength of Hill's solution but by the fact that it does not address the crux of the objection, namely that, supposedly, we can release ourselves from the *releasable* duties to ourselves by simply *opting out* of them.

13. McConnell, *Inalienable Rights*, 8-9.

14. MacComrick, "Rights in Legislation," 195-6.

15. Hills, *The Beloved Self*, 50.

Another attempt to meet the Challenge involves an appeal to the normative significance of choice. Tim Oakley argues contra (P1) that, no matter who the object of a duty is, an agent *qua* subject of that duty could occasionally release oneself from it.[16] Oakley claims that our *pro tanto* moral right for self-direction gives moral significance to the course of action that we decide upon. So it is possible that by choosing some course of action we can change what *on balance* we ought to do, and thereby release ourselves from what would otherwise have been our all-things-considered duty.[17]

Oakley's argument makes progress insofar as it shows that one can release oneself from a duty while maintaining that duties are by their nature binding. However, just as the appeal to inalienable rights does not dispel the second premise of the Challenge as regards releasable duties, Oakley's formula leaves the first premise ultimately intact. For even if one, *qua* subject of a duty to oneself or to others, can release oneself from that duty by making a choice which changes what one ought to do all-things-considered, it still stands that it is in the nature of a duty that no one can release oneself from it by simply opting out from it. That is, on all those occasions when our choice does not change what on balance we ought to do, it is morally impermissible to opt out of a duty

16. Tim Oakley, "How to Release Oneself from an Obligation: Good News for Duties to Oneself," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95, no. 1 (2017): 70-80.

17. Cf. Dale Dorsey, "The Normative Significance of Self," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (June 2017). As opposed to Oakley, who argues that by making a choice we can create reasons in favor of a chosen course of action, Dorsey claims that our normative power can only make already existing reasons more significant for us in light of the existential choices we make, but it can never create reasons. Even though these intricacies are significant, they do not affect the conclusion that by making choices (for Dorsey, existential choices), we may change what we ought to do all-things-considered, thereby releasing ourselves from a *pro tanto* duty. For the view similar to that of Oakley's, see Joseph Raz, *Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 388-9.

that we have. Thus, although Hill's and Oakley's views allow us to conclude that duties to oneself are possible, they fail to show that such duties constitute an important category of moral requirements which deserves systematic treatment.

In the rest of this chapter I provide an argument that, while compatible with the solutions provided by Hills and Oakley, is superior to theirs is one important respect. As opposed to their solutions, my argument aims at addressing the crux of the Challenge. The principal difficulty that the Challenge presents consists not in the fact that we can release ourselves from purported duties to oneself but rather in the fact that we can do so by simply opting out of them without offering justification for doing so. The problem for the idea of duties to oneself lies with this claim. Allow me to elaborate.

There are two axiomatic ways to account for cases where φ-ing is morally required but φ-ing does not occur.[18] On one account, (a) φ-ing does not occur because the subject of the duty, i.e. the person who is required to φ, fails to φ without excuse. Since a moral duty is by definition a normative requirement, by failing to φ without excuse, the subject of the duty *violates* her moral duty with regard to φ-ing and is blameworthy for it. Alternatively, (b) φ-ing does not occur because the object of the duty released the subject of that duty, having thereby made it the case that φ-ing was no longer required. In this case no violation of a moral duty took place, and no one is liable to blame. The difference between these two cases can also be captured in the following way. The normative nature of a releasable moral duty is such that *qua* subject of a duty one cannot make it

18. I do not mean to suggest that these two explanations are exhaustive. One could, for instance, fail to φ but, having an appropriate excuse, not be blameworthy for it. However, the two explanations I offer are the only ones relevant to my present purpose.

the case that φ-ing is no longer required by simply *opting out* from φ-ing, while one can do so *qua* object of a duty.

This presents a problem for the notion of a duty to oneself, for if a duty is owed to oneself, there seems to be no way to discriminate between cases like (a) and (b). Moreover and most importantly, since the person to whom φ-ing is owed can release, without any reason whatsoever, the person who is required to φ, it seems that, when a duty is owed to oneself, there is no *substantive* distinction to be drawn between (a) and (b). If I can legitimately release someone from a duty she owes me without having to justify my decision, that is, simply because I no longer wish that she φ-s, then it follows that when I owe φ-ing to myself and I do not φ simply because I do not wish to, then what happens is not a violation of a moral duty, as in (a), but a release from that duty, as in (b). It follows that when I owe a duty to myself to φ and I do not φ, it cannot be the case that I do something wrong, and thus I cannot be liable to sanctions for it. It is not a duty after all. This is another and the main reason for why the advocates of duties to oneself should not be content with the existing answers to the Challenge. I believe that there is a better solution available, one which addresses the core of the Challenge. In what follows I outline this solution.

3. Consent, Autonomy and Opting Out

Despite the progress made by the aforementioned attempts to meet the Challenge, philosophers theorizing about first-order morality still largely ignore the idea of duties to oneself. Earlier in this chapter I suggested that the reason for this being so is that the mere circumvention of the Challenge presents a poor defense of duties to oneself as it leaves the crux of the Challenge intact. The crux

of the Challenge, I contend, consists primarily not in the fact that we can release ourselves from the purported duties to oneself but in the fact that we can do so by simply opting out of them without offering justification to do so. This is the implication of the critics' rationale behind the second premise of the Challenge, according to which, if there were duties to oneself, these would be the duties from which one could release oneself at one's discretion (P2).

In what follows I examine the rationale behind (P2). I show that the standard justification for (P2) proceeds from the analogy that supposedly holds between duties to oneself and duties to others. I assert that this analogy, as it is standardly conceived, does not hold. For to the extent that we can release others from their duties to us without having to justify our decision,[19] the explanation of why that is so lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from duties to oneself in a similar way. When we release others from their duties to us, though this may happen in various ways, it is the normative significance of consent that underpins the transformation of the normative relation between the parties. It is valid consent that makes it impermissible for an object of a duty to further demand from its subject that the duty be fulfilled. From this it follows that the analogy between duties to oneself and duties to others, as it is standardly conceived, does not hold because it requires the false presupposition that it is possible to consent intra-personally, and hence, (P2) is unsupported.

Furthermore, I consider a possible response that (P2) is in fact justified by the appeal to the value of autonomy. Specifically, if the transformative force of consent is to be explained by considerations of autonomy, then it is irrelevant that the idea of intra-personal consent is

19. One might think that releasing someone from a duty, in fact, always requires justification even though we are often permitted not to express it for the reasons of privacy. This, however, does not change my question, which remains still "What justifies releasing someone from a duty and whether it can be applied to purely self-regarding actions?"

implausible. For if it is the significance of autonomy that explains our power to render self-regarding actions that would be wrong in the absence of consent, then it would be contradictory to suggest that we lack the power to render wrongful self-regarding actions permissible when no one else is involved. Against this contention I argue that the appeal to the value of autonomy does not provide us with a *carte blanche* in the self-regarding domain. Instead, it calls for a principled distinction between cases where one is justified in releasing oneself from a duty to oneself and cases where one is not.[20]

To get the gist of the standard and crucial line the critiques advance against the notion of a duty to oneself, consider what Singer writes to justify the claim that, if we had duties to ourselves, these would be the duties from which we could release ourselves.

> It is essential to the nature of an obligation that no one can release himself from an obligation by not wishing to perform it or by deciding not to perform it, or, indeed, in any other way whatsoever. […] One can, however, be released from an obligation by the person to whom he has the obligation, just as one can be released from a promise by the person to whom he has made it. *For one can give up his right against someone, or decide not to exercise it, and by this means release someone else from an obligation. But a duty to oneself, then, would be a duty from which one could release oneself at will* […].[21]

20. I will say more about the relation between duties to oneself and autonomy in chapter 5.

21. Singer, "On Duties to Oneself," 202-3 (my emphasis).

Singer draws an analogy between the duties to others and the purported duties to oneself. To put it roughly, if the purported duties to oneself exist, and if they are genuine (that is, not fraudulent) moral duties, then they must have similar characteristics as our duties to others. Consequently, since duties to others are such that their objects have the power and discretion to release their subjects from them, then duties to oneself must also be such that their objects have the power and discretion to release their subjects from them.

Singer seems to be taking his argument from analogy as self-evident. However, on further investigation, the analogy as drawn by Singer does not hold. For it is generally assumed that the power individuals exercise when they release others from their duties to them is the normative power of consent.[22] Indeed, suppose that *A* has a duty to *B* to φ, but *B* releases *A* from it by telling her that she does not need to φ. By releasing *A* from her duty to φ, *B* also waives her correlative right [claim-right] to complain that *A* does not φ or to demand that *A* φ-s. Suppose, however, that later on *B* starts insisting on *A* φ-ing. Other things being equal, everyone would agree that *A* would be in her own rights to tell *B* to get off her case. What justifies *A*'s response is that *B* had previously *consented* that *A* does not φ ("You told me I could keep this book I had borrowed from you!"; "You told me I could take your car keys!"; "You agreed!").[23]

22. See Vera Bergelson, "The Right to be Hurt – Testing the Boundaries of Consent," *George Washington Law Review* 75, no. 2 (February 2007): 165-236, https://ssrn.com/abstract=903422; Larry Alexander, "The Ontology of Consent," *Analytic Philosophy* 55, no. 1 (March 2014): 102-13; Richard Healey, "The Ontology of Consent: A Reply to Alexander," *Analytic Philosophy*, 56, no. 4 (December 2015): 354-363.

23. It might be pointed out that, our power to release others from their duties towards us is not that of consent but some other normative power. To this, my response is two-fold. First, intuitively, it seems that the effectiveness of a release depends on the same requirements which must be met for the consent to be effective. For instance, it would be

Now, if the power we have to release others from the duties they owe us is the power of consent, then by analogy, the explanation for why we can release ourselves from the duties to oneself at our discretion is that we can exercise the power of consent intra-personally. In other words, the standard justification for the Challenge against the idea of duties to oneself contains a hidden presupposition, namely, that it is possible to exercise the transformative power of consent intra-personally. On this basis, one can point out that the crucial premise of the Challenge, namely, the claim that if we had duties to oneself these would be the duties from which we could release ourselves at our discretion, is unsupported. For the presupposition that one can consent intra-personally is implausible. The nature of consent is such that it necessarily involves another party, which means that the analogy drawn between duties to others and duties to ourselves with respect to the object's power to release its subject from them is mistaken.[24]

problematic for the subject of a duty to consider herself 'off the hook', if the object of that duty was drunk or obviously misinformed while telling that she not longer needs to fulfill it. Second, and more importantly, as I argue below, one needs not rely on the controversial notion of an intra-personal consent after all, but on the conditions for the autonomous agency which (party) ground the normative force of consent. Whether it is the power of consent that is at work when we release others from duties or some other normative power, it seems hard to deny the crucial role that the value and significance of autonomy plays in the matter at hand.

24. One might object that I am too quick to deny the possibility of intra-personal consent. Some philosophers advocate for the view that consenting requires nothing over and above an appropriate (often termed 'consenting') mental state. See Heidi Hurd, "The Moral Magic of Consent," *Legal Theory*, 2, no. 2 (June 1996): 121-46; Alexander, "The Ontology of Consent,". Although advocates of this view (the so-called 'Mental View') assume that consent is essentially inter-personal, it is theoretically possible on their view that, as long as an agent acts with a consenting mental state, her action is consensual – even if no one else is involved. However, the fact that the proposition can be accommodated within the Mental View does not yet provide us with a good reason for accepting it. On the one hand, there has to be a compelling argument to support the idea of an intra-personal consent. On the other hand, an account

One might point out that my refusal to concede to the suggested analogy based on the fact that consent is not something which has place in our relationship with ourselves obscures something important. Instead of focusing on the grammar of consent, one must be looking at the source of its transformative force. For although it might be true that intra-personal consent does not exist, the explanation for why it is so might have more to do with the lack of its apparent use in our practice rather than with its conceptual impossibility.

On the consensus view, the transformative force of consent derives from its function to provide us with control over our bodies, property, and various other spheres of life protected by autonomy rights.[25] In other words, the value of autonomy gives us the autonomy-derived-rights that constrain what others can do to us without our consent. But whenever our actions are purely self-regarding, then autonomy-derived-rights are not engaged.[26] So if our power to release others from their duties towards us (make it permissible for them to act contrary to their duties) derives from our autonomy, and if we can always release others from their [releasable] duties towards us,

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of the nature of consent is not independent of an account of the normative force and epistemic authority of consent. The power of consent to transform the normative situation between the consenter and the consentee is usually explained in relation to whatever makes consent morally significant. If this is correct, then the fact that intra-personal consent seems possible within the Mental View at best gives us only half of the story. For in order to show that intra-personal consent has the power to change the normative environment, akin to inter-personal consent, there should be a compelling explanation of why intra-personal consent is morally significant. Until there is such a story, any speculation about the possibility of intra-personal consent because of its nature is neither here nor there.

25. See Hurd, "The Moral Magic of Consent," 121-46; Cf. Healey, "The Ontology of Consent: A Reply to Alexander."

26. See Victor Tadros, "Consent to Harm," in *Wrongs and Crimes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 268-74, Oxford Scholarship Online.

then it would follow, from analogy, that we are permitted to act with regard to ourselves however we please. The idea is that inter-personally we exercise autonomy and control through consent. The fact that there is no intra-personal consent does not mean that there are no other, similar, forms to exercise our autonomy. For instance, while intra-personally we may consent by saying "yes", an intra-personal consent might have the form of an inner resolve.

This is a serious objection to my contention that the Challenge to the idea of duties to oneself is rendered unsuccessful by its reliance on the unwarranted analogy between duties to others and duties to ourselves. For while it is implausible to suggest that the power of consent can be exercised intra-personally, once we acknowledge that the normative force of a consent is to be explained by considerations of autonomy, the disanalogy dissipates. The purported fact that my autonomy renders any self-regarding [consented-to] morally wrongful actions permissible implies that, as a matter of simple consistency, my autonomy warrants my rendering any purely self-regarding morally wrongful action permissible. Unless the involvement of another party makes a morally significant difference, it would be contradictory to hold that autonomy justifies consentual harm inflicted by others but not the self-inflicted harm.

Let us pause for a moment to consider what the above-mentioned contention, if true, seems to imply. First, if it is the consideration of an agent's autonomy that explains the transformative power of her consent, then it seems to follow that whenever she acts non-autonomously, her consent should not be effective. That is, one could permissibly disregard consent (or non-consent) of an agent who acts non-autonomously. Indeed, one could think of a number of situations in regards to which this implication is the case. We believe that children lack the power to consent to surgery or sex precisely because they are not fully autonomous. Similarly, a drunk (drugged, manipulated, hypnotized) person's consent is invalid because their autonomous agency is

compromised by alcohol (drugs, manipulation, hypnosis). Yet, there are cases where it seems at the very least controversial to suggest that one is permitted to disregard the consent (or the lack thereof) of a person who did not act autonomously in giving (or withholding) it. Imagine a person who looks up to her lover so much that she consents to an unnecessary medical procedure (a cosmetic surgery, perhaps) *just because* the lover told her to. Such consent would not stem from an autonomous agency, yet we believe that it would not necessarily lack its normative force to the extent that it would be impermissible for a doctor to proceed. I shall return to this point later.

Second, if it is [the value and significance of] autonomy that justifies rendering the otherwise morally wrongful self-regarding actions permissible, then it follows that on those occasions when a person is non-autonomous, a self-regarding morally wrongful action would not be justified.[27] This means that the contention that the considerations of autonomy render self-regarding morally wrongful actions permissible does not provide support for (P2) after all. In other words, the claim that if there were duties to oneself these would be such that one could simply opt

27. The two implications of the contention that it is the value and significance of autonomy which explains the normative power of consent – that (1) non-autonomous consent is ineffective, and that (2) a non-autonomous agent cannot justifiably render morally wrongful self-regarding action permissible – appear equivalent. Indeed, if an otherwise wrongful self-regarding action, when consented-to, is justified (i.e. it gets transformed into a morally permissible action) and if the transformative power of consent is explained by the considerations of the consenter's autonomy, then to claim that a non-autonomous person cannot give effective consent amounts to saying that the wrongful self-regarding action of a non-autonomous person is unjustified. Nevertheless, I treat (1) and (2) as separate implications because they have different scope. The first implication concerns what we think about consent and therefore has a broader context since not every consented-to action is self-regarding. The second implication does not necessarily involve consent, since its scope encompasses self-inflicted self-regarding actions where, as I suggested earlier, there is no place for consent.

out of them is unwarranted.

I thus contend that, other things being equal,[28] one can justifiably release oneself from a duty to oneself only when (i) one is autonomous in doing it and (ii) when acting contrary to the requirement in question is compatible with leading a meaningfully autonomous life.[29] Therefore, on those occasions when an agent's flouting her duty to herself is incompatible with the maintenance of a meaningfully autonomous life, or if she is not acting autonomously in doing it,

28. Arguably, it is possible to morally wrong oneself even if an action contrary to what morality requires of one does not obstruct one's autonomy in any way. For not every moral duty to oneself would be grounded in the moral significance of autonomy.

29. Connie Rosati argues for the possibility and importance of genuine self-promises. Rosati defends the notion of a promise to oneself by addressing a similar conceptual objection discussed in this chapter. Rosati's argument can be summarized as follows. First, the source of some of moral duties is in the normative status we have as persons. Such duties are non-releasable because we cannot disregard or simply give up our moral status as persons. Second, there are two kinds of promises: those that are based on pre-existing duties and those that are not. Third, if a promise is based on a pre-existing duty, such as, my promise not to kill you, then the promisee cannot release the promisor from it because it would manifest disregard for her moral status as person. Fourth, if a promise is not based on a pre-existing duty, then it seems as though it would be possible for a promisee to release the promisor from it *at will*. However, such promises are still based on a pre-existing duty, which is "[…] to act in ways that respond appropriately to the value of persons – that respect them as autonomous agents and manifest a proper regard for their good." (134) The bare fact of a promise made would be without normative significance. One can, thus, only release a person from a promise for what one takes to be good reasons. If the fulfillment of a promise manifests neither respect for her autonomy, nor a proper regard for her good, the promisee would be justified to release the promisor from having to keep it. See Connie Rosati, "The Importance of Self-Promises," 127-136. Rosati also briefly addresses the conceptual objection to the broader case of duties to oneself. Her response, however, seems to be similar to that of Alison Hills, that is, it involves the appeal to non-inalienable rights.

she *violates* the duty in question and thereby morally wrongs herself.[30] In what follows, I will construct several hypothetical scenarios illustrating various ways in which an agent violates her duty to herself rather than releases herself from it when acting non-autonomously. In considering those hypothetical scenarios, I will assume – rather than argue for – a subjectivist historical conception of autonomy.[31]

According to the subjectivist historical account of autonomy, a competent[32] agent is autonomous with regard to her values and commitments if, upon sustained critical reflection,[33] she accepts those values and commitments as her own in light of her life's narrative. On this view, to accept the values and commitments as one's own means not to actively repudiate them, or not to be alienated from them upon reflection on the processes that led to their formation. By specifying the requirement of acceptance in this weak sense, this conception of autonomy allows for

30. This is a part of my thesis's conclusion. I will come back to it in chapter 5.

31. John Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch. 7. By relying on a subjectivist view about autonomy I make my claim that a non-autonomous person cannot release oneself from a duty to oneself independent of the content of a particular duty in question. For a content-dependent view on insufficiency of consent see Tadros, "Consent to Harm."

32. An agent is competent if she is capable to critically reflect on her values and commitments as well as other motivating elements in her psychological make-up. Competence also includes the capacity to effectively form intentions and act upon them in the absence of obstacles. See Christman, *The Political of Persons […]*, 155.

33. The condition of sustained critical reflection must not be understood as the requiredment of continuous critical reflection. More promising would be to understand it as requiring one to be disposed to revise one's attitude towards the values and commitments guiding their actions upon the emergence of new relevant information. See Richard Arneson, "Autonomy and Preference Formation" in Jules Coleman and Allen Buchanan (eds), *In Harm's Way: Essays in Honour of Joel Feinberg* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 49; See also Andrés Moles, "Autonomy, Free Speech, and Automatic Behaviour," *Res Publica* 13, no. 1 (March 2007): 60-61.

significant latitude in our attitudes towards the values and commitments which guide our behavior. If, as is often the case, a person is ambivalent about her second-order attitudes to her commitments or struggles to reach the desired level of self-understanding, we would not necessarily need to say that she is thereby globally non-autonomous.[34]

Global autonomy refers to an overall degree of autonomy in the life of an individual which can be captured by considering both external and internal conditions for autonomy. Thus, an agent is globally non-autonomous if she lives in an environment not conducive to autonomous functioning or if she lacks a general decision-making competence. For example, an agent is globally non-autonomous if she is rather generally confused where she is and why and does not have an adequate grasp of the risks and benefits of various options she is deliberating about. Local autonomy, on the other hand, refers to akratic or impulsive actions as well as to other kinds of occasional lapses in judgment.[35]

The virtue of a subjectivist historical account of autonomy is that it takes seriously the idea of the diachronic nature of persons. It has been widely acknowledged that generally healthy persons possess a psychologically unified mental life.[36] Roughly, this means that there exists a

34. Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, 155.

35. Akratic actions are not necessarily performed non-autonomous. If, for instance, an action is not compulsive but at the same time is done in full awareness of an agent that there is a superior course of action, then such an action is akratic but autonomous.

36. See Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (October 1970): 269–285; Sydney Shoemaker, "Self and Substance," *Noûs* 31, n. s11 (1997): 283–319; Sydney Shoemaker, "Self, Body, and Coincidence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 73 (1999): 287-306; Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," *Philosophical Review* 80, no. 1 (January 1971): 3-27; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 202-9; David Lewis, "Survival and Identity," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Rorty

special kind of connectedness among perspectives, experiences, and all sorts of happenings within the life of an individual which does not exist among the perspectives and happenings of metaphysically separate individuals. Developmental psychologists maintain that default human cognition engages in reflective self-interpretation of those experiences, events and happenings in one's life.[37] By means of such self-interpretation, the myriad of elements within a person's life emerges as a coherent sequence, or a narrative.[38] As a result, persons integrate different events and facts of life into a meaningful autobiographical narrative and form their diachronic personal identities.[39]

An account that conceives of autonomy in relation to the autobiographical narratives of individuals can also capture the following intuition. Someone who acts in accordance with values and commitments that she has acquired as a result of, say, oppressive upbringing or persistent brainwashing is not really autonomous in relation to those values and commitments. For these are not really her own. Such a person may act upon these values and commitment with agential authority, yet realize upon reflection that she deeply resents the way those values were imposed on her, and judge that they do not fit into her accepted narrative identity. It is possible, of course,

(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 17-40; Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

37. See Jonathan M. Adler, "Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 2 (February 2012): 367-389.

38. Christman, *The Politics of Persons*, 70; Cf. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves;* and Marya Schechtman, "Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Persistence," *Philosophical Explorations* 4, no. 2 (September 2007): 95-111.

39. I discuss diachronic aspects of duties to oneself in chapter 4.

that a person comes to embrace those values as her own, all the while acknowledging the flawed manner in which they were originally acquired. Such a person, according to the subjectivist historical account of autonomy, would not be non-autonomous with regards to those values.

If this understanding of autonomy is convincing, and if it is the consideration of our autonomy that enables us to release ourselves from the (releasable) duties to oneself, then it follows that a non-autonomous person cannot successfully release herself from a duty to herself. More importantly, if this argument is successful, then there is a principled way to distinguish between a failure to fulfill one's duty to oneself and a legitimate release from such a duty. It can be captured by the following principle:

> *Autonomous Release Principle (ARP)*: A morally wrongful self-regarding action can be rendered permissible only if, (i) an agent in so acting would be autonomous and if (ii) it would be compatible with maintaining her meaningfully autonomous existence.

Assume that one has a *prima facie* duty to oneself that forbids causing oneself gratuitous harm. There are many ways one could violate this duty, for the notion of harm encompasses a variety of things, ranging from physical or mental injury to frustration of important projects and relationships to all sort of losses and death. Imagine a young scientist, Bobette, who was invited to a team conducting research on a project matching her professional interest, but turned down the offer due to her very traditional upbringing which prioritises the ideal of marriage and motherhood. If Bobette abandoned her pursuit of a career despite never having felt any particular pull toward a family life, she thereby harmed herself by frustrating an important project of hers, and thereby acted against her *prima facie* duty not to cause herself gratuitous harm.

But does she wrong herself? The answer to this question depends on whether she acts autonomously when choosing family over her career. In a world where, upon sustained reflection, she embraces the traditional values with which she was raised, she might even recognize the unfairness of never having been presented with a choice, but still accept without resistance her role as a wife and a mother. In such scenario, her autonomy renders her choice permissible. In a different world where she never feels content in relation to the traditional values that were imposed upon her, she might feel intense inner resistance while making that choice, and will feel deeply alienated in her new role in life. As long as she was able to decide otherwise, her harming herself by frustrating an important project was unjustified, and thus impermissible.

Consider another example. Bob, a student of medicine who passes an internship in a science lab, causes himself a severe and lasting migraine by having injected himself with an experimental drug for fun. Imagine that Bob disapproves of his own action and regrets it. What he really wishes is to be taken seriously by his colleagues as their peer and understands that his action is not conducive to the realization of this desire. Occasionally, however, Bob's insecurity gets the worst out of him and he somewhat compulsively seeks his colleagues' approval by means which do not reflect his real values. Bob could not be justified in causing himself a severe migraine and thereby causing himself a gratuitous harm because he was non-autonomous in relation to his true motivating values and commitments.

Compare Bob to Saloni – the leading scientist in a project – who similarly injects herself with the drug with the same result but for the different reasons. Imagine that Saloni believes herself to be on the verge of a scientific breakthrough. Saloni has just one last test left to make but she cannot find a volunteer to test the durg. So in full awareness of the likelihood of harm, she decides to test the drug on herself. It seems pretty obvious that although Saloni harms herself by causing

herself severe migraine, she is justified in doing this by the fact that she acts in line with her values and commitments in light of her autobiographical narrative. Hence, the considerations of Saloni's autonomy justify her releasing herself from the *prima facie* duty not to cause herself gratuitous harm.

One might point out that the *ARP* implies, as mentioned earlier, that it is permissible to disregard the consent or refusal to consent of a person who is non-autonomous in relation to values guiding her decision. For if the transformative force of consent is justified by the appeal to the consenter's autonomy, then the consent of a non-autonomous person would lack exactly this force. This, surely, is controversial. We do not want to concede that non-autonomous Bobette's engagement with the person her family approves of is not really consensual. Similarly, it would be implausible to suggest that a doctor who gives blood transfusion to a person who, although autonomous in her belief that blood transfusions is sinful, consents to the procedure only because she is overtaken by the fear of death.

In response to this worry one could claim that the appeal to autonomy, though necessary, is not sufficient to explain the authoritative nature of consent. Richard Healey, for example, argues that control over our spheres of life protected by the value of autonomy is not the only function of consent.[40] Healey reminds us that apart from providing us with control over our bodies, private properties and various other spheres protected by autonomy rights, consent also regulates normative relations *between* individuals. It serves to enable individuals to engage with one another in valuable relations of mutual recognition and respect. For example, by actively seeking another person's consent prior to engaging in a sexual relation with them, we thereby demonstrate that we recognize their authority over their body. When we knock on the door of another person's office,

40. Healey, "The Ontology of Consent: A Reply to Alexander."

we show respect for this person's right to privacy. Similarly, it is important for us to be seen as someone who recognizes other people' control over their bodies, private property, *et cetera*, and acts accordingly. In sum, consent does not only serve to provide control over spheres protected by autonomy rights. It also makes possible for individuals to treat each other as having such control, thereby promoting mutual recognition and respect.[41] In virtue of the interpersonal nature of the situations where consent occurs, in order for consent to be effective, it must also be explicit. And it seems that consent can have this function only if an agent's explicit consent is taken as authoritative. The promotion and maintenance of mutually valuable relations is possible only if an agent, having asked for my explicit consent to enter my property, is guided by it, and not by their considerations of whether I am fully autonomous. These considerations, however, are irrelevant when it comes to purely self-regarding actions. Consideration of autonomy, thus, is sufficient to ascertain permissibility of releasing oneself from a moral duty to oneself.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the objection against the possibility of duties to oneself, according to which the very notion of a duty to oneself is internally incoherent, as this would be a duty from which one could release oneself at one's discretion. I examined two responses to the objection and argued that, although partly successful, they miss the crux of the Challenge. It consists not in the fact that we can release ourselves from duties to oneself but in the fact that we can do so by simply

41. Healey, "The Ontology of Consent: A Reply to Alexander."

opting out of them without offering justification to do so. It is implied by the claim that, if there were duties to oneself, these would be the duties from which one could release oneself at one's discretion.

I argued that this claim rests on the false analogy which supposedly holds between duties to oneself and duties to others. For to the extent that we can release others from duties they have towards us, the explanation why it is the case lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from our duties to ourselves. This is so because consent, the means through which we release others from their duties towards us, is by its nature inter-subjective. Consent has no place in a relationship we have with ourselves, hence the claim that if an agent had a duty to herself she could release herself from it by simply remouncing it is unsupported.

Finally, I argued that since it is the consideration of autonomy that explains the transformative force of a consent, the justification for releasing oneself from a duty to oneself must be linked to the consideration of the agent's autonomy. I offered the autonomy-based principle to delineate legitimate release from a duty to oneself and its violation, which I called the *Autonomous Release Principle*. If my argument is correct then an agent can release herself from a duty to herself if, and only if, in so acting she would be autonomous and this action would be compatible with maintaining her meaningfully autonomous existence.

In the next chapter I shall consider another objection to the idea that apart from duties to others, we have genuine and non-derivative duties to oneself. The objection stems from the presupposition that morality is in some essential sense a social enterprise, hence it cannot be concerned with purely self-regarding actions. I shall clarify the precise connection between the antecedent and the conclusion and show that, upon closer inspection, the argument against duties to oneself premised on the assertion that morality is social is not cogent.

CHAPTER 2: DUTIES TO ONESELF WITHIN SOCIETY-CENTERED MORALITY

The key consequence of the arguments in the previous chapter is that, if there were duties to ourselves, there would be a principled way to distinguish between a violation of such a duty and a release from it. The solution derives from the value and significance of autonomous agency. An agent can release herself from a duty to herself if, and only if, in so doing she acts autonomously and the resulting state of affairs is compatible with her maintaining a meaningfully autonomous life. If my autonomy-based solution is correct, then not only the possibility of duties to oneself cannot be rejected on conceptual grounds, but also the scope and content of such duties are not limited to our intuitions about inalienable rights. Note that the logic of the objection from internal incoherence discussed in the previous chapter is such that it needs to presuppose the existence of duties to oneself in order to then show something about them, i.e., that their very notion involves self-contradiction. So, having rejected the objection, we did not come any closer to showing that duties to oneself actually exist.

Before I defend duties to oneself in chapter 5, in this chapter, I will address another objection to the idea of duties to oneself. It stems from the presupposition that morality is in some essential sense a social enterprise, hence it cannot be concerned with purely self-regarding actions. Although the proverbial skeptic about duties to oneself often evokes the idea that our modern conception of morality is social and hence the notion of a duty owed to oneself is fraudulent, the

precise connection between the antecedent and the conclusion is rarely spelled out explicitly.[42] Thus part of my objective in this chapter is to clarify the meaning of the social conception of morality in light of the skeptic's claim that it supposedly rules out the possibility of genuine duties to oneself. My aim is to show that, upon closer inspection, the argument against duties to oneself premised on the assertion that morality is social is not cogent.

My argument in this chapter proceeds as follows. The next section clarifies the objection by reasoning backwards. Starting from the assumption that morality is social and that, as such, it blocks the idea of duties to oneself, I specify the interpretations of the general characterization of morality as social that could rule out the possibility of duties to oneself. I claim that any characterization of morality that blocks the possibility of duties to oneself must constitute an attempt to find the *defining* feature of morality. I further maintain that we can distinguish two popular ideas about the modern conception of morality which could be seen as suggesting the defining feature of morality and which could at the same time rule out the possibility of duties to oneself. First, perhaps duties to oneself do not exist because morality is concerned exclusively with the interests of others. Second, one might think that duties to oneself do not exist because, according to our common-sense morality, it is not appropriate to blame persons who treat themselves badly, and because morality is characterized by reference to its connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes.

In section 2, I first address the popular but rather obscure distinction between morality in the "wide" sense and morality in the "narrow" sense. Morality in the "narrow" sense is often characterized as dealing with our relations to each other, while morality in the "wide" sense is

42. On this point, see Paul D. Eisenberg, "Duties to Oneself and the Concept of Morality," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 1-4 (January 1968): 129-154.

more like an all-inclusive code of conduct.[43] I argue that both features – other-regardingness and the connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes – must be understood as characterizing morality in the "narrow" sense. For rejecting the possibility of duties to oneself by accepting the definition of morality in the "wide" sense involves the fallacy of begging the question. Then I explore both features and show that neither can be established as definitional, prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry.

In section 3, I return to the connection between morality and the appropriate reactive attitudes. I concede that, even if it is not conceived as the defining feature of morality, the link between blameworthiness and blame could, on its own, be seen as providing a reason to be skeptical about duties to oneself. For while we blame people for (wrongfully) harming others, we do not tend to blame people for similar, *albeit* self-inflicted harms. We tend to consider such people irrational or foolish, but we do not, or so the claim goes, blame them.

I argue that this problem is misconceived. First and foremost, it overlooks the logical gap between blameworthiness and the moral standing to blame, that is, between the conditions that must obtain for the agent to deserve blame and the conditions that must obtain for others to actually blame the wrongdoer. There is a growing body of research that convincingly demonstrates how various circumstances, such as epistemic limitations or past crimes of the would-be-blam*er* can

43. Another way to characterize this distinction is by claiming that morality in the "narrow" sense is about what reasons for action we have, while morality in the "wide" sense, or ethics, relates to axiology. See Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 11-12; Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs*, 191. Dworkin believes, however, that morality in the "wide" sense also includes demands rather than only options. If the arguments in this dissertation are successful, then they would support Dworkin's characterization of morality in the "wide" sense.

lead to the loss of a person's moral standing to blame the blameworthy.[44] I claim, additionally, that although a third party might have the moral standing to feel blame, she might lack the standing to express it. The distinction between the standing to feel blame and the standing to express it is easy to overlook if one holds that blame is constituted by *hostile* emotional reactions. This view, however, is far from uncontroversial.

I maintain that there are two possible ways to account for the common-sense moral view that we do not blame people for treating themselves badly. According to the first view, third parties do not have the moral standing to feel blame because, due to their limited epistemic access, they are unjustified in believing that the wrongdoer deserves blame. Alternatively, and ultimately more plausibly, I think, third parties have the standing to feel blame but not to express it. The importance of personal growth, self-understanding, and self-trust render the expression of a third party's blame inappropriate. Thus, apart from its reliance on a controversial view about the nature of blame, the objection also conflates the appropriateness to feel blame with the appropriateness to express it.

1. Clarifying the Question

44. See, among others, Roger Wertheimer, "Constraining Condemning," *Ethics* 108, no. 3 (April 1998): 489–501; Carl Ginet, "The Epistemic Requirements for Moral Responsibility," *Noûs* 34, no. s14 (October 2000): 267–277; G. A. Cohen, "Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 58 (May 2006): 113–136; Angela M. Smith, "On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible," *The Journal of Ethics* 11, no. 4 (December 2007): 465–484; Marilyn Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsibly," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 47, no. 3 (September 2013): 271-284.

There are two ways to understand the idea that morality is in some essential sense a social enterprise. On one understanding, this idea refers to a transcendental or historical condition for moral reasoning. According to this view, our morally salient conative states, such as evaluative emotional reactions, desires and sentiments, as well as cognitive states, such as the capacity to form moral beliefs and the capacity for normative guidance, *evolved* due to their tendency to promote reproductive success. This means that we exhibit certain morally salient emotional reactions because the link between these particular reactions and certain circumstances is reproductively advantageous.[45] Upon this understanding, morality would not exist in the absence of society during our evolutionary time.

Those theorists who are convinced by the evolutionary hypothesis of morality's origin take it as having the potential to shed light on our normative moral judgements, principles, emotions and other components of moral reasoning. Naturally, they believe that morality is uniquely aimed at the promotion of social cohesion and cooperation, as these are the most conducive to our reproductive success. Philip Kitcher, for example, claims that our capacity for normative guidance has evolved in order to promote social cohesion, stability and cooperation.[46]

On the alternative understanding, the idea of morality being social picks out normative reasons, rather than offering a naturalistic theory that explains moral phenomena. It describes the unique driving force and unifying feature behind our *ideal* moral judgments, principles, emotions

45. See, for example, Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (January 2006): 127; Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 117; Philip Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 175-181.

46. Kitcher, "Biology and Ethics," 172-173.

and other constituents of moral reasoning. This understanding of morality as an ideal code of conduct is wholly independent of any biological explanation. According to it, morality is the ideal code of conduct that similarly promotes social cooperation and cohesion. It serves to solve problems of relations or conflicts of interests between individuals. This view is motivated by the conviction that people are naturally inclined to consider their own goals, interests, and desires as having outmost importance, as compared to the goals, interests, and desires of others. The scarcity of resources needed to satisfy our goals, interests, and desires leads to the state of affairs where everybody is worse off. The combination of these two features – limited sympathies and scarcity of resources – generates the conditions that some theorists branded as 'the human predicament' or 'the state of nature'.[47] Thus, morality is social because it has a unique function which is, to borrow J. L. Mackie's term, to solve 'the problem of sociality'. As Mackie puts it, morality is a problem-solving device, "the device […][that] is beneficial because of certain contingent features of the human condition."[48] The content of morality is thus uniquely connected to its problem-solving function.

Although both understandings of morality as a social enterprise presented above take morality to be aimed at social stability, cooperation, and cohesion, there is a logical gap between them. That is, the influence of natural selection processes on our phenomena of moral psychology and the capacity for moral reasoning cannot provide an explanation of the content of morality as the subject of normative inquiry. The fact that we have evolved to have certain dispositions and

47. Geoffrey Warnock, *The Object of Morality* (London: Methuen 1971), ch. 2; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) (London: Penguin Books, 1968), Part 1, ch. 13. For a similar view about the source of morality, see Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View: A Rational Basis of Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1958), 216-217, 309.

48. J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Group 1990), 121.

emotional reactions to a specific behaviour does not logically entail anything concrete about the moral status of such behaviour. Morality as a theoretical subject treats those dispositions and emotional reactions as pre-reflexive responses which normative inquiry about morality examines, questions, criticizes and, perhaps, rejects. The content of normative morality is to be explained by the means of rational and moral justification, both of which are internal to the field itself.[49] Therefore, in what follows, I shall not be concerned with the evolutionary hypothesis of the origin of moral reasoning. It matters little whether in the absence of society morality would exist. So long as we accept that it bears very little on the content of moral judgments, it cannot rule out the possibility of duties to oneself. Thus, whenever I talk of the characterization of morality as a social enterprise, I have in mind the understanding of morality that picks out normative reasons, rather than a naturalistic theory that explains moral phenomena.

Now, precisely how can the understanding of morality as a problem-solving device block the idea of duties to oneself? I claim that in order for the skeptical conclusion about duties to oneself to follow from the contention that morality is a problem-solving device, this latter contention must be understood as informing us about the definition or the distinctive feature of morality incompatible with such duties. Consider then what Mackie takes his own thesis to suggest: "morality is a system of a particular sort of constraints on conduct – one whose central task is to protect the interests of persons *other than the agent* and which present themselves to the agent as checks on his natural inclinations and spontaneous tendencies to act."[50] In other words,

49. Thomas Nagel, "Ethics without Biology," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 142-146.

50. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 106 (my emphasis). Other philosophers who similarly maintain that morality is exclusively other-regarding include Warnock, *The Object of Morality*, 16, 26, 72-3; Williams, *Ethics and*

Mackie takes it to suggest that morality must be the code of conduct concerned exclusively with how we treat others and never with how we treat ourselves. If this interpretation of morality were correct, then the case of moral duties to oneself would be hopeless. Morality would include self-regarding requirements only when they had bearing on the lives of others by, for instance, affecting their well-being or their rights. In that case, however, these requirements could no longer qualify as *owed to* oneself. Whether they would be granted the name of duties to oneself is inconsequential since such requirements would derive their normative significance from the effects they have on others.

Another suggestion lies in the vicinity of the same idea that morality is a device which serves to regulate our largely selfish behavior by imposing constraints on it. In accordance with it, some philosophers propose to demarcate morality's boundary by reference to its connection to appropriate reactive attitudes. Consider the words of John Stuart Mill:

> We do not call anything wrong, unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it; if not by law, by the opinion of his fellow-creatures; if not by opinion, by the reproaches of his own conscience.

the Limits of Philosophy, 12; David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 1; Bernard Gert, *Morality: Its Nature and Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9. Oxford Scholarship Online; Nicholas Southwood, *Contractualism and the Foundations of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), ch. 2, ft. 48, ch. 4, ft. 1.

> This seems the real turning point of the distinction between morality and simple expediency.[51]

This position appears similarly incompatible with the idea of duties to ourselves. For according to common-sense morality, we do not respond to moral wrongdoings with blame only when we are immediate victims, that is, from the perspective of a participant.[52] We also blame wrongdoers if we are just third parties to the situation, that is, from the perspective of a bystander. However, we do not usually blame a person who treats themselves badly. We think of such people as fools but, arguably, we do not blame them for harming themselves.

We can thus discern two specific suggestions about the distinctive feature of morality inspired by its characterization as essentially social. Both are rooted in the idea that morality serves to solve problems that arise from the problem of sociality. Despite having a common source, the two suggestions as to what constitutes the defining feature of morality threaten the idea of duties to oneself each in its unique way. In what follows I explore other-regardingness and the connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes and argue that neither can be established as the defining feature of morality prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry.

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51. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1861), 14, reprinted in Roger Crisp ed. *J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 93.

52. Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1968): 1–25, reprinted in *Free Will* ed. Gary Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59-80. See also Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 66.

2. Duties to Oneself and the Distinctiveness of Morality

In the previous section I stated that in order for the skeptical conclusion about duties to oneself to follow from the contention that morality is in some essential sense social, this latter contention must be understood as informing us about the definition or the distinctive feature of morality. I further identified two positions that suggest the distinctive feature of morality and, at the same time, seem incompatible with the purported duties to oneself. In what follows, I examine the following two claims. First, that the 'moral' is to be defined by the reference to its *other-regardingness*. Second, that the 'moral' is to be defined by reference to the conceptual connection to the appropriate *reactive attitudes*.

In order to appreciate the strength of the objection that the two above-mentioned distinctive features of morality present to the possibility of duties to oneself, let us digress and consider the issue that inevitably arises whenever one endeavours to appraise the definition of morality. It became common among moral philosophers to distinguish between two senses of morality: "narrow" and "wide". Morality in the "narrow" sense is but one part, albeit the more important one, of morality in the "wide" sense.[53] Thus, we must first understand whether duties to oneself are ruled out by or are incompatible with the definition or the distinctive feature of morality in the "wide" or in the "narrow" sense.

53. For one notable example of applying this distinction, see Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 6. See also Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, ch. 1; Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 73-81.

This task is made difficult by the fact that the distinction between "wide" and "narrow" morality, although not uncommon, is vague. The problem of vagueness especially concerns morality in the "wide" sense, since attempts to delimit morality's boundary are mainly focused on morality in the "narrow" sense. However, as ideal as it would be for our present purpose to have the subject-matter of morality in both its "narrow" and "wide" senses neatly specified, it is, I think, unnecessary.[54] For, as I suggested earlier, it might be possible to rule out the possibility of duties to oneself by specifying other distinctive features of morality (in either of the two senses), such as other-regardingness or the connection to appropriate reactive attitudes. Therefore, in order to evaluate the force of the objection that duties to oneself are ruled out by the definition of morality, we can proceed by simply assuming different senses of morality presupposed by the objection in question.

Consider the thought that duties to oneself do not exist, because morality in the "wide" sense concerns exclusively how we should behave towards others and never how we should behave towards ourselves. Bernard Williams seems to hold such a view:

54. This is not to say, of course, that the only way to specify the boundary of a distinctive normative domain is through identifying its distinctive subject-matter. A number of philosophers tried to define the 'moral' by reference to its formal characteristic, such, as universalizability, or distinctive normative force. See, for example, Richard M. Hare, "Universalizability," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954-5): 295–312, reprinted in Richard M. Hare, *Essays on the Moral Concepts* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 13-28. However, these attempts have turned out to be less promising, as they radically overdetermine what we intuitively believe to morally relevant. For criticism see, for example, Alasdair McIntyre, "What Morality Is Not," *Philosophy* 32, no. 123 (October 1957): 325-335, reprinted in Gerald Wallace and Arthur D. M. Walker (eds.) *The Definition of Morality* (London: Methuen, 1970), 26-39.

> However vague it may initially be, we have a conception of the ethical that understandably relates to us and our actions the demands, needs, claims, desires, and, generally, the lives of *other people*, and it is helpful to preserve this conception in that we are prepared to call an ethical consideration.[55]

Now, if this were the correct conception of morality in the "wide" sense, the case of duties to oneself would be hopeless. Morality would include self-regarding requirements only when they had bearing on the lives of others by, for instance, affecting their well-being or their rights. In that case, however, these requirements could no longer qualify as *owed to* oneself. Whether they would be granted the name of duties to oneself is inconsequential, since such requirements would derive their normative significance from the effects they have on others.

Having said that, however, the critics of duties to oneself cannot appeal to this conception of morality in the "wide" sense in order to establish the impossibility of such duties on pain of

55. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 11-12 (my emphasis). Williams delimits the domain of ethics partly by focusing on considerations that are obviously non-ethical, chief examples among which are egoistical considerations, such as those concerned with seeking one's own advantage, comfort, or power. Hence, Williams deems it necessary to "preserve" an exclusively other-regarding conception of morality in the "wide" sense, or of ethics, in his own terms, because this way it reflects the truism that morality and self-interest conflict. I think, however, that we should oppose the thought that the intuitive immorality of expedient actions warrants the blanket exclusion of the entire spectrum of self-regarding actions from the domain of morality in the "wide" sense. For although self-interest and considerations of well-being are largely coextensive, they can come apart. One example concerns the way self-interest and well-being are affected by the frustration of our biological needs. While self-interest is always negatively affected by it, well-being need not be. For one may be willing to endure significant deprivation in order to advance the successful pursuit of a major goal. See Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 296-299.

begging the question. For their argument would presuppose what it would seek to establish, and, as such, it would beg the question against the claim that, apart from duties to others, we also have genuine non-derivative duties to ourselves.[56]

Consider now the thought that the purported duties to oneself are excluded from the scope of the moral domain conceived in the "narrow" sense. Morality in the "narrow" sense is roughly specified as comprising a set of *distinctly significant* considerations. Consider this time the characterization of morality in the "narrow" sense offered by Thomas Scanlon. Scanlon writes:

> What I have presented is […] a narrower domain of morality having to do with our duties to *other people*, including such things as requirements to aid them, and prohibitions against harming, killing, coercion, and deception. […] But while it is an important part of morality, as generally understood, it is only a part, not the whole. […] So I have taken the phrase 'what we owe to each other' as the name for this part of morality […].[57]

Now, if Scanlon is right and duties to oneself are not part of morality in the "narrow" sense, this, of course, does not rule out completely the possibility of such duties. For they could simply be a part of morality in the extended or "wide" sense.[58] However, the idea of duties to oneself

56. See, for example, Brad Hooker, "What makes a Judgment a Moral Judgment," *Journal of Political Theory and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (December 2017): 103.

57. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 6-7 (my emphasis).

58. Scanlon admits that there are self-regarding acts that a person has conclusive reasons to undertake or to avoid. A failure to recognize and to act on these reasons is a failure to properly respond to the values involved. Although

would face another problem. The objection would be then not that duties to oneself do not exist but that they are less important. That is, given the special normative significance that Scanlon and like-minded others attach to morality in the "narrow" sense, it would follow that whenever a duty to oneself conflicts with a duty to someone else, the latter would inevitably outweigh the former. In such a scenario, it would be wrong, all things considered, to act upon one's duty to oneself. Therefore, the contention that the purported duties to oneself are ruled out by the definition of morality in the "narrow" sense presents a major problem for an advocate of these duties.[59]

In view of these considerations, in what follows, I consider 'other-regardingness' and 'the connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes' as the distinctive features of morality in the "narrow" sense (henceforth, morality). I rely extensively on the argumentation of Dale Dorsey, who offers the methodological argument that the search for the definition or the distinctive feature of morality had better not be prior to the substantive first-order moral inquiry.[60] If these arguments

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Scanlon admits, however cautiously, that a failure to respond to values in self-regarding behavior is a moral matter, he is explicit about it not being the matter of morality narrowly conceived. However, although it is important to recognize the existence of reasons that flow from proper response to value in self-regarding behavior and that they are distinct from the reasons we have to care about morality in the "narrow" sense, Scanlon ultimately does not deem it important to call them moral reasons. See Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other*, 171-177; Thomas Scanlon, "The Primacy of the Moral", interview by Eugene Chislenko, *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 93-94; Thomas Scanlon, "What is Morality", a lecture at the University of Guelph, College of Arts (2013), Video, 49:20-58:50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXrVyVqqzJ0&t=3451s.

59. Scanlon writes: "[T]he idea that we have reason to avoid actions that could not be justified […] [to others on grounds that they, if appropriately motivated, could not reasonably reject] accounts for the *distinctive* normative force of moral wrongness." Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 5 (my emphasis).

60. Dorsey plausibly points out that if, prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry, a certain feature or a property is claimed to distinguish the 'moral' from the 'non-moral', then it must have a special epistemic status. In order to

are on target, then neither the possibility of duties to oneself, nor their importance can be rejected prior to substantive first-order moral inquiry. For without having the distinctive feature of morality established with high degree of confidence, we cannot limit our first-order moral inquiry in a way that would rule out the possibility of duties to oneself.

2.1. Other-Regardingness

Consider the idea that what distinguishes a moral judgment from a non-moral one is that the former concerns itself exclusively with how one should relate to other rational beings, and, on broader definition, to other sentient creatures. It determines the 'moral' through identifying its unique content or subject-matter. To define morality as other-regarding is to claim that a judgment is

serve its purpose, namely, to help us judge what considerations are and what are not admissible into our first-order moral inquiry, we must have a very high degree of confidence in this property being the one that distinguishes the morally relevant from the morally irrelevant. It must be, as Dorsey puts it, sufficiently coarse- and fine-grained at the same time. Being coarse-grained is one of the criteria of success for the suggested defining feature that is needed precisely in order to avoid the fallacy of begging the question. For if, prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry, one suggests a feature or a property that purportedly defines the 'moral', and then discovers that that feature or the property is incompatible with the propositions implied by a *viable* first-order moral theory, then it stands to reason that we cannot be confident that this property is the one that distinguishes the morally relevant from the morally irrelevant. In short, if we insist upon such a feature to be the one that defines the 'moral', then we inevitably beg the question against those propositions which are implied by the viable moral theories and with which the suggested defining feature of morality is incompatible. See Dale Dorsey, "Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry," *Ethics* 126, no. 3 (March 2016): 748-757.

distinctively moral *if and only if* it refers to the effect an action would have on others. It follows that a requirement to φ cannot be moral if there is no one other than the agent herself whom φ-ing would affect.

On its own, other-regardingness cannot plausibly be the defining feature of morality, since there are judgments which can be characterized as exclusively other-regarding about which we are nevertheless confident that they do not belong to the moral domain. Consider our judgments of etiquette, e.g. that chewing with an open mouth, eating with one's hands, putting one's feet on the table or getting in bed with one's shoes on are considered rude in specific situations. We judge each of those actions and people with such manners negatively precisely because of the effect they have on others. Eating with my hands or with my mouth open is not rude if there is no one to find it repulsive. Similarly, getting in bed with one's shoes on is not impolite if one does not share this bed with anyone else. Or consider the sportsmanship code. A judgment about what makes for a good sport, or a judgment about which actions are sportsmanly and which are not, is never purely self-regarding. Such judgments always presuppose generous or fair/unfair treatment of other players.[61]

Suppose, however, that it is not other-regardingness solely that is to be regarded as the distinctive feature of morality but the concern for *the well-being of others*. This would have the effect of excluding from the resulting domain the considerations which intuitively belong to non-moral domains, such as those of etiquette. If 'other-regardingness' and 'the concern for the well-being of persons' together constituted the distinctive feature of the 'moral', then it would follow that *the only* intuitively plausible explanation for *all* of our moral judgements must ultimately

61. Dale Dorsey, "Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry," 757; Hooker, "What makes a Judgment a Moral Judgment," section III.

appeal to these two criteria. For if other explanations were plausibly admissible, then we would no longer be entitled to claim with high degree of confidence that the concern for the well-being of others is indeed the distinctive feature of morality.

With this in mind, think of the intuition that, other things being equal, it is wrong to disregard the last wishes of the deceased. Imagine that the last wish of the dying Stan was that his piece of old costume jewelry was given to his long-lost sweetheart. However, after Stan's death, his nephew Johnny sells the piece of jewelry and gambles the money away.[62] Many people share the intuition that it was morally wrong of Johnny to violate his uncle's last wish. Yet, how plausible is it to explain the wrongness of Johnny's action by saying that it compromised Stan's well-being? And, more importantly, would this be the only plausible explanation? The answer seems to be "no". Granted, one may think that the appeal to Stan's well-being, albeit posthumously, indeed constitutes the most plausible explanation for our intuitive moral judgment. If, as many of us think, personal good partly depends on success in our important projects, it may be argued that events that occur after our deaths affect how good our lives were.[63] (Perhaps Stan has been looking for his sweetheart for years in order to give her that piece of jewelry). However, insofar as reasonable doubt about these issues is possible, we cannot be certain that the 'concern for the well-being of others' is the distinctive feature of morality.

62. The example is from Dorsey, "Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry," 758.

63. See, for example, Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979): 1-10.

2.2. Appropriate Reactive Attitudes

Some philosophers propose to characterize morality with reference to its connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes.[64] Arguably, it is an inescapable part of our nature as rational beings that we evaluate and react to the actions and character traits of other persons as well as our own. We blame others when they freely and knowingly commit moral wrong or exhibit a serious character flaw. And we blame ourselves by feeling guilty when we fail to act morally. Blame is thus an essential constituent of our practice of holding each other morally responsible and, as such, it is characteristic of our lives as moral agents.[65]

Following Peter Strawson's seminal essay *Freedom and Resentment*, some philosophers take blame to be constituted by a set of specific emotional responses, such as resentment, indignation, and guilt. If they are right, then it follows that moral requirements are to be distinguished from non-moral ones by their connection to a set of specific, often hostile reactive attitudes which seem appropriate upon violation of those requirements. Therefore an act is morally wrong if and only if it warrants a negative reactive attitude, such as resentment, indignation, or guilt.[66]

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64. See, for example, Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. See also R. Jay Wallace, "The Deontic Structure of Morality," in eds. David Bakhurst, Margaret Olivia Little & Brad Hooker, *Thinking About Reasons: Themes From the Philosophy of Jonathan Dancy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 137-167. Oxford Scholarship Online.

65. See Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 59-80.

66. See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Timothy L.S. Sprigge, "Definition of a Moral Judgment," *Philosophy* 39, no. 150 (October 1964): 301-322. This contention, however, is implausibly strong. As I say below, it is possible for an action to be

This view appears incompatible with the idea that apart from moral duties to others, we also have duties to ourselves. For according to common-sense morality, we do not only respond to moral wrongdoings with blame when we are immediate victims, or, in Strawson's terms, from the perspective of a participant. We also blame perpetrators even if we are just third parties to the wrongdoing, that is, from the perspective of a bystander.[67] For example, as a resident of Budapest, I am not an immediate victim of the atrocities committed by Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate for me to feel indignation towards Mugabe and his actions. Some might even argue that there would be something wrong with me as a moral agent if I felt nothing upon, say, reading about the crimes committed by Mugabe in a newspaper. So the reason for skepticism about the idea of duties to oneself is that we do not usually exhibit reactive attitudes

morally wrong and yet it would not be appropriate to blame the wrongdoer. For example, if an agent does wrong unknowingly, or if she has a good excuse. Similarly, it is possible for an action to be morally right and yet it seems appropriate to blame the agent. Suppose that Alfred, who wife is dying, wishes to hasten her death. He buys what he thinks is poison, but unbeknown to Alfred, the substance actually cures his wife. It seems that although Alfred's actions are permissible, he is blameworthy for intending to kill his wife. See Judith Jarvis Thomson, "Self-Defense," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 293-294. See also Frances Myrna Kamm, *Intricate Ethics: Rights, Responsibilities, and Permissible Harm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217; Thomas Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), ch. 4; and Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 158-174. For the opposing view, that is, for the view according to which intentions matter not only for blameworthiness but also for the permissibility of an action, see Victor Tadros, "Wrongful Intentions Without Closeness," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 43, no. 1 (April 2015): 57. I what follows I proceed with under the general idea that there is a connection between permissibility and blameworthiness.

67. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 74; Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 66-67.

when a person treats herself badly. Admittedly, we think of such people as fools, but we do not blame them for harming themselves. As John Stuart Mill writes:

> The distinction between the loss of consideration which a person may rightly incur by defect of prudence or of personal dignity, and the reprobation which is due to him for an offence against the rights of others, is not merely nominal distinction. It makes a vast difference both in our feelings and in our conduct towards him, whether he displeases us in things in which we think we have a right to control him, or in things in which we know that we have not. If he displeases us, we may express our distaste, and we may stand aloof from a person, as well as from a thing that displeases us; but we shall not therefore feel called on to make his life uncomfortable. […] instead of wishing to punish him, we shall rather endeavour to alleviate his punishment, by showing him how we may avoid or cure the evils his conduct tends to bring upon him. He may be to us an object of pity, perhaps of dislike, but not of anger or resentment.[68]

Be that as it may, the connection to appropriate reactive attitudes cannot be established as the distinctive feature of the 'moral' prior to substantive first-order moral inquiry. The argument for this is twofold. First, the view that moral requirements can be distinguished from non-moral ones by reference to their connection to the appropriate reactive attitude relies on an assumption about morality's *distinctive normative authority*. Second, morality's distinctive normative

68. John Stuart Mill, "*On Liberty" and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 79 (emphasis added). Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought.

authority requires an explanation which in turn involves reference to a further factor, such as morality's distinctive content. The distinctive content of morality, however, cannot be established prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry.[69]

Consider the following scenario. In the end of the month *quite wealthy Bob* has some money to spare. Suppose that Bob is deliberating among several options. He could either give this money to *hungry homeless Joe*, buy himself another pony, save it for his retirement, or burn the bills in his fireplace. What we have here designed is the situation where an agent has four incompatible options for action, two among which are normative; the two normative options *compete* for Bob's rational attention. On the one hand, Bob ought rationally to recognize the urgency of Joe's plight and to give him the money. On the other hand, Bob ought rationally to provide for his own old age and to put the money into his retirement fund. Intuitively, it seems clear that the former 'ought' is the moral ought, and thus it gives Bob the distinctively moral reason for action. The latter 'ought' is the prudential one, as the reason Bob has to save money for old age is prudential.

If moral requirements are defined by reference to their connection to appropriate reactive attitudes, then it stands to reason that if Bob does not give money to Joe, we can justifiably blame him. But surely this depends on whether Bob's reason to give money to Joe is the decisive one. Perhaps, provided the urgency of Joe's plight, and given Bob's wealth, Bob ought, all things considered, give his spare money to Joe.

Suppose, however, that it is not so. Imagine that quite wealthy Bob's income is unstable. In addition, while Bob earns good money at the moment, he also donates a lot to the charity and provides for his extended family. If this were the case, intuitively, it seems plausible to think that

69. Dale Dorsey, "How *Not* to Argue Against Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 1 (January 2015): 36-41; See also, Dorsey, "Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry," 766-769.

Bob would have a *sufficient reason* to save the money for his old age. And in this case it seems *inappropriate* for others to blame Bob for not giving his money to hungry homeless Joe. It therefore seems that the contention that it is always appropriate to blame an agent who flouts her moral requirement rests on the presupposition that morality has distinctive normative authority. It is, in other words, always overriding.[70]

Morality's distinctive normative authority, however, cannot be established prior to the substantive first-order moral inquiry. We cannot, prior to such an inquiry, posit morality's distinctive normative authority as *analytic* truth because in doing so we would deny that the requirements of non-moral normative domains, such as prudence, can ever plausibly compete with moral requirements. The proper understanding of moral requirements would make morality's distinctive normative authority known. However, it seems odd to suggest that whenever we deliberate about the comparative weight of prudential requirements versus moral ones, we simply misunderstand moral requirements.[71]

Another option would be to establish distinctive normative authority through finding some property that is generally possessed and *a priori* established as present in all moral requirements; and this property would explain the ascription of special importance to distinctively moral requirements. Potential candidates for such a property are motivational capacities, distinctive

70. See Dorsey, "How *Not* to Argue Against Consequentialism," 35-39. Dorsey mounts an additional argument in support of his claim that the connection to appropriate reactive attitudes as the distinctive feature of morality presupposes morality's distinctive normative authority, or, in his own words, moral rationalism. He claims that without presupposing moral rationalism, we cannot explain inappropriateness of blame in the presence of a good excuse for immorally. Sometimes we act wrongly but are not blameworthy for it.

71. Dorsey, "How *Not* to Argue Against Consequentialism," section 5; Dorsey, "Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry," 767.

content, and distinctive ground. None of these potential candidates succeeds, though. First, to suggest that moral requirements are distinctively authoritative because they have distinctive motivational force would be to err in the order of explanation. It seems more plausible to think that a requirement's motivational capacity is explained by its normative significance, rather than the other way around.[72] Second, the distinctive content of which the plausible candidate is the 'concern for the well-being of others' cannot explain morality's distinctive normative authority prior to substantive first-order moral inquiry because, as we have seen in the previous section, the appeal to the well-being of the wronged party does not constitute the best explanation for some of our moral judgements. Finally, to argue that morality's distinctive authority can be explained by its distinctive ground, one must first show that morality has a distinctive ground. However, given the controversy surrounding the question of morality's ground, it is hardly possible to establish any such ground as a distinctive feature of morality with the required degree of confidence[73] so that it be useful for further moral theorising.

My interim conclusion is that the objection according to which our morality is an essentially social enterprise, and hence the notion of a duty owed to oneself must be fraudulent, is unsuccessful. When the precise connection between the antecedent and the consequent is spelled out explicitly, it becomes apparent that one cannot establish the skeptical conclusion prior to substantive first-order moral inquiry.

72. Derek Parfit and John Broome, "Reasons and Motivation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volumes 71 (1997): 99-146.

73. See footnote 16 above.

3. Reactive Attitudes and Intra-Agential Accountability

It is an important conclusion of the previous section that one cannot refute the idea of duties to oneself simply by insisting upon a definition or a distinctive feature of morality that is incompatible with such duties. Whether it is the definition of morality in the "wide" or "narrow" sense, its potency as a premise in an argument depends on the degree of certainty with which it can be held. As we saw, however, prior to the substantive inquiry into the first-order moral judgments, an attempt to establish a definition of morality with a high degree of certainty has little promise. This includes the attempt to define morality by reference to its connection to appropriate reactive attitudes. Hence, the verdict on the issue of duties to oneself has to wait for the results of such an inquiry.

One might point out that, even though claiming that the appropriateness of blame as a reaction to moral wrongness is the feature that *defines* the 'moral' (prior to a substantive moral inquiry) is methodologically suspect, this does not mean that it cannot be true after all. It would certainly be implausible to deny that, if an agent freely and knowingly flouts her moral duty, she is thereby blameworthy for it. It follows, then, that the link between moral wrongness and blameworthiness presents an independent reason for skepticism about the existence of duties to oneself.[74]

More specifically, the doubt arises because, while we blame people for (wrongfully) harming others, we do not tend to blame people for similar, *albeit* self-inflicted harms.[75] We tend

74. See my footnote 25 above.

75. Granted, not every harm is morally wrong. Here and elsewhere in this section when I write about self-inflicted harm, I presume that it is a morally wrongful harm.

to think that such people are irrational or foolish, but we do not blame them, or so the claim goes. While we consider it appropriate to blame someone for treating others badly, we do not consider it *appropriate* to blame a person for harming herself. Imagine the following scenario. Albert tattoos the word "moron" on his forehead for fun. It seems undeniable, or so I hope, that Albert harmed himself and, assume just for now, wrongfully so. If a stranger on the street reproaches Albert, it seems, intuitively, that Albert would be in his own rights to reply: "What is it to you?! How is it any of your business?!"[76]

I suggest that this position presupposes that other-directed blame is constituted solely by *hostile* reactive attitudes, such as Strawsonian resentment or indignation.[77] However, even if this view on the nature of blame were correct, it would still not imply that an agent cannot wrong herself, or so I argue. To begin with, many philosophers convincingly argue that there is a logical

76. For convenience I shall refer to this type of response as the "none-of-your-business objection".

77. For views according to which blame is constituted by a hostile emotional reactions see Jay R. Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); Jay R. Wallace, "Dispassionate Opprobrium: On Blame and the Reactive Sentiments," in Jay R. Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman (eds.), *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 348–372; Susan Wolf, "Blame, Italian Style," in Jay R. Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman (eds.), *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T. M. Scanlon*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 332-347; Macalester Bell, "The Standing to Blame: A Critique," in Justine D. Coates and Neal A. Tognazzini eds. *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 263–281. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013; Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

gap between the attributability of responsibility and the appropriateness of blame.[78] They explore various factors, such as epistemic limitations or past crimes of the would-be-blam*er* mainly to argue that the moral *standing to blame* is not entailed by the attributability of responsibility.

It is crucial for the problem here discussed that there is an important debate going on in the philosophical literature on moral responsibility concerning necessary and sufficient conditions for the moral standing to blame. Appropriateness of blame, as it is now widely thought, depends not only on whether a person deserves to be blamed, but also on whether others have the standing to blame the blameworthy. And while the conditions for blameworthiness lie with the wrongdoer, the conditions for the standing to blame lie primarily with the others. Blameworthiness is, of course, necessary for the standing to blame, but it is possible for another person to lack the standing to blame the wrongdoer, even when all of the conditions for the wrongdoer's blameworthiness are satisfied. Therefore the fact that others might lack the standing to blame the person who wrongs herself might actually have nothing to do with the fact of her blameworthiness.[79]

78. Roger Wertheimer, "Constraining Condemning," 489–501; Carl Ginet, "The Epistemic Requirements for Moral Responsibility," 267–277; G. A. Cohen, "Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?," 113–136; Angela M. Smith, "On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible," 465–484.

79. Note that I would not like to, nor do I believe I have to, take a stand on whether this contention is correct. My intention is to flag the ongoing debate. Although it seems plausible that one would lack the standing to blame if one were *unjustified in believing* that the target of blame deserves it, I also think that the *prima facie* moral standing to blame is universal. That is, everyone has the standing to blame everyone else. My intuition here goes against those who claim that past crimes can make one lose one's moral standing to blame. I tend to think that I have the standing to blame the person who treats me badly even if I had previously treated someone else in a similar manner. The issue here, rather, is whether I feel guilty for having committed the wrong myself. If I fail to acknowledge my own

The conditions for the standing to blame are, as Patrick Todd puts it, the conditions under which a person can *lose* her standing to blame.[80] Some have argued, for example, that one must be warranted in believing that the target of blame is blameworthy.[81] Consider the following example. Two friends meet at a restaurant. One friend confides to the other that she is unhappy in her marriage and that she started dating another person. The waiter overhears the dialogue and starts reproaching: "Not to be nosey, but you should be ashamed. Did you even try to work things out?"[82] Now, many have the intuition that in the situation like the one just described, although the cheating woman does appear to be blameworthy, a party so remote to her situation as a waiter is not warranted in believing it. (For all we know, the woman might be in an open marriage.) Consequently, it seems plausible that a waiter, or any other stranger for that matter, lacks the standing to *feel* blame, let alone to express it.[83]

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wrongdoing and to feel remorse for having done it, I am blameworthy myself. See Cohen, "Casting the First Stone: Who Can, and Who Can't, Condemn the Terrorists?," 113–136.

80. Patrick Todd, "A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame," *Noûs* (August 2017): 1. There are four conditions which can be found in the literature: (1) blame must not be hypocritical; (2) one must not be involved in the wrongful action for which one aspires to blame the wrongdoer; (3) one is warranted in thinking that the wrongdoer is blameworthy; and (4) the wrongdoing in question is of one's business. See, for example, Macalester Bell, "The Standing to Blame: A Critique," 263–281. Todd defends what he called a 'unified' account of the *basic* moral standing to blame where the only condition relevant for losing it is (1). Condition (2), according to Todd, collapses into (1), while conditions (3) and (4) are not conditions for the standing to feel blame but rather, - for something else, such as the standing to express it.

81. See, for example, Marilyn Friedman, "How to Blame People Responsibly," 271-284.

82. Amy McKiernan, "Standing Conditions and Blame," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 32, no. 1 (January 2016): 145.

83. Amy McKiernan constructs this thought experiment to support the so-called "business condition" of the standing to blame. This is confused. According to the business condition, it must be *some of one's business* in order for one to

Now, it is possible that the blame directed by a third party to an agent who is blameworthy for wronging herself is much like the waiter's blame. As third parties we do not tend to blame, because as third parties we are often not in the position to be warranted in believing that the agent is indeed worthy of blame. Moreover, when a stranger "jumps" to a conclusion about another person's blameworthiness without being epistemically well positioned to judge about it, she can be justifiably blamed for it herself.

Alternatively, and ultimately more plausibly, I think, one might reject the view on the nature of blame according to which it necessarily involves *hostile* reactive attitudes. A number of philosophers aptly note that blame can be dispassionate, hence, hostile emotional reactions are unnecessary for it.[84] For example, George Sher writes:

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have the standing to blame the blameworthy. However, since McKiernan holds, and aptly so, that it is not appropriate for the waiter to *feel* blame, it is unfortunate that she classifies the waiter's blame as inappropriate because it violates the business condition. It is certainly true that it is none of the waiter's business to meddle into the conversation. However, a view which takes the business condition to be the condition for *feeling* blame has counterintuitive implications. It implies that any third party lacks the standing to blame the wrongdoer. And yet few would disagree that, say, a citizen of Iceland lacks the standing to blame Robert Mugabe for his crimes. In the meantime, since McKiernan, despite seeking to support the business condition, appeals to epistemic considerations to further explain the case, we can conclude that the waiter lacks the standing to blame *primarily* because, as McKiernan says herself, she is not warranted to believe the woman to be blameworthy. See McKiernan, "Standing Conditions and Blame," 145.

84. George Sher, *In Praise of Blame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Oxford Scholarship Online; Pamela Hieronymi, "The Force and Fairness of Blame," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (November 2004): 115–148; Thomas Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame*; Elisa A. Hurley and Coleen Macnamara, "Beyond Belief: Toward a Theory of the Reactive Attitudes," *Philosophical Papers* 39, no. 3 (November 2010): 373–399.

> We may, for example, feel no hostility toward the loved one whom we blame for failing to tell a sensitive acquaintance a hard truth, the criminal whom we blame for a burglary we read about in the newspaper, or the historical figure whom we blame for the misdeeds he performed long ago. […] it seems perfectly consistent to suppose […] that the stance I take toward my daughter for shading the truth about how much of her homework she has done is genuine blame […].[85]

To agree with Sher is not to deny that on most occasions blame is accompanied by a hostile emotion. Nevertheless, if blame is not *constituted* by it, then the claim that we tend not to blame people for treating themselves badly no longer seems plausible.[86] For it seems true that we do often

85. Sher, *In Praise of Blame*, 88.

86. Additionally, it seems plausible to suppose that those who hold that blame is constituted solely by hostile emotional reactions also believe that in blaming we are motivated primarily by the desire for retribution. However, empirical studies in moral psychology do not support the retributive theory of moral motivation in blaming. Instead, they strongly support the claim that in blaming we are motivated primarily by the desire that the wrongdoer holds *herself* accountable. For example, a study that explores the effect of apology on forgiveness finds that genuine forgiveness occurs only when the perpetrator acknowledges her guilt, demonstrates remorse, apologizes and seeks amends. Given that to forgive means to give up the resentment against or the desire to punish the offender, this study's findings support the hypothesis that the condemnatory motive is satisfied when the wrongdoer holds herself accountable. In a different study, subjects were given the opportunity to punish a confederate who had treated them unfairly. After punishing, some of the subjects have received a message from the confederate communicating the understanding that he (the confederate) deserves the punishment which they (the subjects) interpreted as admission of guilt, demonstration of remorse, and offer of an apology. The study finds that those subjects who received the message felt significantly more satisfied than those who did not receive it. Importantly, those subjects who punished the offender but did not

evaluate negatively, albeit, perhaps, dispassionately and discretely, those people who treat themselves badly. More importantly, however, this view is better equipped to explain a number of cases where intuitively it seems inappropriate to blame. For one, consider a situation where it has become known among a group of co-workers that one of their colleagues is cheating on her spouse. Now, unlike the waiter in the case above, the cheater's co-workers are warranted in believing that she is blameworthy. Still, many of us judge intuitively that it would be inappropriate to *confront* the wrongdoer about it. To explain such a case, some theorists have distinguished between the standing to *feel* blame and the standing to *express* it.[87] The distinction concerns exclusively the appropriateness of third parties' blame: although third parties might have the standing to feel blame, in order for them to have the standing to *express* it, the wrongdoing must be *some of their business*.

Consider the following example. You walk down the street and observe a father verbally abusing his scared and sad-looking child. His tirade culminates with a slap. Now, it seems clear, if childhood psychology has taught us anything, that this is a wrong way to treat a child. The father

receive the message, or received an openly unrepentant message instead, reported feeling not more satisfied than those who have not punished the offender at all. See Brendan de Kenessey and Stephen Darwall, "Moral Psychology as Accountability," in *Moral Psychology and Human Agency: Philosophical Essays on the Science of Ethics*, ed. by Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40-83. The article was originally published under the name Brendan Dill (and Stephen Darwall).

87. See, most notably, Linda Radzik, "On Minding Your Own Business: Differentiating Accountability Relations Within the Moral Community," *Social Theory and Practice* 37, no. 4 (October 2011): 574-578. (henceforth, "On Minding Your Own Business."); Patrick Todd, "A Unified Account of the Moral Standing to Blame," 1-28.

is clearly worthy of blame, and accordingly you feel very angry. And yet many people believe that it would be inappropriate for you to express your blame.[88]

Linda Radzik identifies three types of wrongdoings where, judging by our shared moral experience, it seems inappropriate for a third party to "meddle": cases where an agent wrongs oneself; cases where the wronged party is someone with whom the wrongdoer is in a special relationship, such as romantic relationship, family relations or friendship; and cases where bystander's blame "[...] would interfere with the victim's ability to find vindication in the aftermath of wrongdoing."[89] Radzik argues that in all of those cases, provided that they are warranted in believing that the target of blame is blameworthy, third parties do have the standing to feel blame. However, they would not be warranted to *express* it.[90]

With respect to self-regarding wrongs, Radzik maintains that expressing blame can be wrongful because it would limit the space one needs to explore and to develop one's agency, perhaps even through making mistakes. She writes: "Social sanctioning of purely self-regarding wrongs undermines […] the agent's ability to develop trust in her own judgment. The individual

88. Note that the 'business condition' for the standing to express blame is sensitive to the magnitude of harm. If you see a father beating his child, it is no longer inappropriate for you to keep your blame to yourself. Indeed, it would be wrong of you not to interfere!

89. Radzik, "On Minding Your Own Business," 597.

90. It is an important question in the literature on moral responsibility whether standing to blame is universal. Radzik, for example, follows Stephen Darwall in claiming that as members of the moral community, that is, as free and rational agents, third parties do have standing to blame the wrongdoers. Yet, sometimes respect for another person's agency requires us not to *express* it. Patrick Todd seconds Radzik in distinguishing between standing to blame and expressing it, and claims that the 'business condition' is irrelevant for an account of standing to blame. Rather, it is the criterion for the appropriateness of *expressing* blame (2017 online only). I cannot address this question for the reasons of space.

could rightfully protest against them that they are creating an atmosphere that inhibits her ability to develop and exercise her own rational powers and freedom of choice."[91] Note that in neither of the three categories is prohibition absolute. Grave wrongs committed within special relationships justify meddling. Similarly, it is plausible to think that grave wrongs committed to oneself justify paternalistic interference. The common denominator, however, is that the meddling requires justification.

Given everything considered above, I conclude that, contrary to the appearances, it *is* appropriate for a third party to blame the person who treats herself badly. Such blame might not have the same hostility which we often exhibit when we blame someone who treats us unjustly. Nor does a third-party blame have to – though it might – involve punishment, such as withdrawal of one's good opinion or refusal to befriend. To insist upon hostility as the necessary feature of blame is to presuppose a theory of the nature of blame that is by no means uncontroversial. Blame can and often is dispassionate; and, as we saw earlier, the retributive theory of moral motivation in blaming is not supported by findings in moral psychology. Blame directed at someone who treats *herself* badly is mostly kept to oneself, for it seems plausible to think that epistemic limitations as well as the importance of personal growth, self-understanding, and self-trust provide us with normative reasons not to express it.

4. Conclusion

91. Radzik, "On Minding Your Own Business," 593.

In this chapter I engaged with the objection to the idea of duties to oneself according to which morality is in some essential sense a social enterprise, and hence it cannot be concerned with purely self-regarding actions. I asserted that, in order for the skeptical conclusion to follow, the claim about the social conception of morality must be understood as informing us about the defining or distinctive feature of morality in the "narrow" sense.

On this basis, I explored two features characteristic of the social conception of morality that appear to rule out the possibility of duties to oneself: other-regardingness and the connection to the appropriate reactive attitudes. I showed that neither of the two can be established as defining morality prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry. However, without having the distinctive feature of morality established with a high degree of confidence, we cannot limit our first-order moral inquiry in a way that would rule out the possibility of duties to oneself.

Finally, I considered a further objection based on the idea that the conceptual or constitutive connection holds between blame and moral wrongness. According to this objection, we have reason to be skeptical about intra-agential moral wrongness because, supposedly, we do not blame people who treat themselves badly. I argued that this problem is misconceived. I contend that when a person wrongs herself others may lack the moral standing to express blame, but it is still appropriate for them to feel it. Considerations of personal growth, self-understanding, and self-trust render the expression of a third party's blame for an intra-agential wrongdoing inappropriate.

This mainly concludes the negative argument in this dissertation. In the next two chapters I will examine two distinct ways to account for duties to oneself, starting with the argument for said duties formulated in the moral theory of Immanuel Kant. Leaving exegetical questions aside, I shall outline Kant's argument for duties to oneself in chapter 3. I shall claim that the Kantian argument is to be understood through the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, that

is, through the Formula of Humanity, and show that the argument suffers from being grounded in an implausibly thin view about the value of humanity. I will then turn in chapter 4 to an account that defends duties to oneself as based on Darwall's second-person standpoint moral framework.

CHAPTER 3: DUTIES TO ONESELF IN THE MORAL THEORY OF IMMANUEL KANT

In the previous two chapters I have explored two objections against the idea of duties to oneself. First, I examined the objection according to which the very notion of a duty to oneself is self-contradictory. The objection goes as follows. It is in the nature of a duty that no one whose duty it is can release oneself from it. But if an agent had a duty to herself, she would be able to release herself from it at any moment at will, just as she can release others from duties owed to her at her discretion. In response, I have argued that the crux of the objection rests on a false analogy which supposedly holds between duties to oneself and duties to others. To the extent that we can release others from duties they have towards us, the explanation why it is the case lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from our duties to ourselves. I offered a new solution to the problem of incoherence based on the consideration of the value and significance of the agent's autonomy. I have argued that an agent can release herself from a duty to herself only if in so acting she would be autonomous and this action would be compatible with maintaining her meaningfully autonomous existence.

Second, I have addressed an objection that stems from the presupposition that morality is in some essential sense a social enterprise, which is taken to imply that it cannot be concerned with purely self-regarding actions. I have stated that any characterization of morality that blocks the

possibility of duties to oneself must constitute an attempt at defining it. I have claimed that there are two widely shared ideas about the social conception of morality which could be seen as suggesting the defining feature of morality and which could at the same time rule out the possibility of duties to oneself: its other-regardingness and its connection to appropriate reactive attitudes. I explored both of these ideas to the extent necessary to show that neither can be established as definitional, at least prior to a substantive first-order moral inquiry.

Having addressed the objections, I now turn to a positive argument for duties to oneself. In this chapter, I consider what is clearly the most influential and systematically developed argument for duties to oneself, namely, that of Immanuel Kant. My objective at this point is not to show that Kant's account of duties to oneself is unacceptable. Rather, it is to motivate my departure from Kantian scholarship in order to pursue my defense of duties to oneself that is independent of the Kantian moral theoretical framework.

My argument proceeds as follows. In section 1, I sketch out Kant's account of moral duties with a thick brush by outlining its fundamental subject matter, the supreme principle that he takes to guide our moral behaviour. In section 2, I claim that Kant's argument for duties to oneself is best understood by considering the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, that is, the Formula of Humanity. This section shows that Kant's view on the value of humanity and the conception of autonomy that grounds it are at the heart of his justification for duties to oneself.

In section 3, I argue that Kant's view on the value of humanity is implausibly thin: it is expressly opposed to vitally important psychological facts about our nature as persons.[92] I focus

92. For Kant, the capacity to will freely is not based on any empirical capacity which persons have in virtue of their nature. Hence, he is committed to the view that we owe persons respect not in virtue of their empirical characteristics

on the capacity to feel pain and to love as well as the need for the sympathy and love of others, and argue that these features of personhood indicate a unique and vital aspect of what is important about persons. An account of human worth need not rely on any single property: the capabilities of human beings are numerous, complex and partially overlapping, and together they help us to get a grasp on what is important about persons.

1. Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory

Immanuel Kant famously argues that we have moral duties to ourselves. These duties are an organic part of Kant's moral theory and, like duties to others, they derive from the supreme principle of morality – the Categorical Imperative.[93] While some duties to oneself which Kant claims we have come across as rather counterintuitive nowadays, his account of these duties is nonetheless still the most influential and systematically developed to date.[94] It is therefore hardly

but in respect of the transcendental characteristic of the will being free and rational. In this chapter, I consider Kant's account for duties to oneself without devoting attention to its transcendental basis.

93. In fact, Kant thinks that duties to oneself are of primary importance. He writes: "Far from ranking lowest in the scale of precedence our duties toward ourselves are of primary importance and should have pride of place […] He who transgresses against himself loses his manliness and becomes incapable of doing his duty towards his fellows. A man who performed his duty to other badly, who lacked generosity, kindness and sympathy, but who nevertheless did his duty to himself by leading a proper life, might yet possess a certain inner worth; but he who has transgressed his duty towards himself, can have no inner worth whatever." See LE, 117-118.

94. For example, Kant notoriously argues that it is wrong to engage in sexual intercourse if it is not with the aim of procreation. See MS 424-5.

surprising that many of those moral philosophers who are sympathetic to the idea of duties to oneself pursue their defense within Kantian theoretical framework.[95] In what follows, I outline Kant's account of moral duties with a thick brush. In doing so, my aim is not to provide a thorough interpretation of Kant's view, but rather to focus on those aspects of his account that motivate my departure from it.

According to Kant, all moral duties are determined by the supreme principle of morality or, in his own terminology, the Categorical Imperative. The Categorical Imperative is *the standard of reason* which is internal to or constitutive of reason itself.[96] The Categorical Imperative, Kant

95. See, for example, Lara Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 2012); Robert N. Johnson, *Self-Improvement: An Essay in Kantian Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robin S. Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," 53-83.

96. Cf. John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Barbara Herman and Christine M. Korsgaard (eds.), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 240-4; Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 36-7; Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 18-9; Carla Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), section 2.1. URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/constructivism-metaethics/>. Kant's view that the supreme principle of morality must be the standard of reason originated as a rejoinder to the so-called dogmatic rationalism, an intuitionist version of moral realism defended by Wolff and Leibniz, as well as to moral sentimentalism, a version of non-cognitivism which links moral concepts and claims to emotions and desires, associated with the founding fathers of the Scottish Enlightenment – Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. See Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 235ff; Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics," 2.1. Kant argued that these views are false because they are, in his words, heteronomous, by which he meant that they locate the authority of moral obligations not in the self-legislative and thus autonomous practical reason, but in desires and emotions (in the case of sentimentalism) or in some external facts existing independently of it (in the case of dogmatic rationalism). Kant's objection was that these

argues, requires us "to act only in accordance with that maxim[97] through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law."[98] There are two straightforward ways to interpret this principle. First, you ought not to act in a way which cannot be *conceived* as a universal law. For example, consider the maxim "I will borrow money by making a false promise about returning it." Now, to will to do so in a world where "borrow money by making a false promise about returning it" is a universal law is a contradiction, because if that law were to hold, nobody in a clear state of mind would lend money to another person any more. So, by willing to act on such a maxim one would be at the same time willing the state of affairs in which one could not successfully act on that maxim.

According to the second interpretation, you ought not to act in a way which, although the relevant rule may be conceived as a universal law, it cannot be *willed* as such. Consider the maxim "I will only be concerned with my own interests." Although this maxim is conceivable as a universal law, a person cannot rationally will it without contradiction. "For […] many cases could occur in which one would need the love and sympathy of others and in which, by such a law of nature arisen from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself."[99] A contradiction of this type derives from Kant's convictions concerning human nature.

views have trouble explaining the binding nature of moral obligations, for if sentimentalism were true, moral obligations would depend on contingent emotions and, if dogmatic realism were true, they would depend on motivationally inert facts of the relevant situation. See G 4: 441, 443.

97. A "maxim" is Kant's term for the subjective principle of volition on which an agent acts. See G 4:421.

98. G 4: 421.

99. Note that the conception of a contradiction at question is actually more complicated and controversial than one might induce from the given examples. There is a debate among Kantians on what sort of contradiction the Categorical

Every rational being, Kant thinks, wills as an end one's own happiness and realizes that, in order to achieve it, it is sometimes necessary to appeal to the skills and the assistance of others. If everybody were concerned only with their narrowly conceived self-interest, then supposedly no one would be able reach the end of being happy.[100]

The requirement to act in accordance with a maxim which can be willed as a universal law is but one formulation of the Categorical Imperative, namely, the Formula of Universal Law. Upon another formulation – the Formula of Humanity – the Categorical Imperative demands to "act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means."[101] Through this formulation, the Categorical Imperative reveals that morality is sensitive to certain aspects of our nature as rational and autonomous beings and commands respect for it. In particular, "[…] the capacity to set oneself an end – any end whatsoever – is what characterizes humanity (as distinguished from animality)."[102]

The train of thought behind this claim runs as follows. As opposed to non-human animals, we can reflect upon our desires and instincts and take a stand upon them. We nearly always reflect upon desires involuntarily and mechanically. It follows then that, in order to act, the human being is predisposed to seek for a reason, that is, for a consideration counting in favor of a particular

Imperative forbids: a logical, teleological, or practical one. This debate, however, is beyond the scope of my present discussion. See G 4: 422-3.

100. See G 4: 421, 424. See also Robert N. Johnson, *Self-Improvement: An Essay in Kantian Ethics*, 18. This is the logic behind Kant's justification for the imperfect duty of beneficence and, as I show below, behind the imperfect duty to improve oneself.

101. G 4: 429.

102. MS 392.

course of action. This makes persons the only creatures capable of understanding the concept of the good and of acting from reason.[103]

Crucially, however, Kant maintains that it is our ability to act for a reason and *reason alone* that makes "humanity" uniquely valuable from the moral point of view.[104] As he writes: "[T]he will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason *independently of inclination* cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good."[105] And in virtue of this ability, humanity, as Kant often says, has dignity, an unconditional and incomparable value intrinsic to it.[106] Thus, the command of the Categorical Imperative to always treat humanity in oneself and in others as an end in itself and never merely as a means expresses the idea that we owe respect to people in virtue of their ability to act from reason alone and often in the face of opposing inclinations. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes:

> […] a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a *person* [….] he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as

103. See Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Normativity of Instrumental Reason," In *Ethics and Practical Reason*, Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 92-3; Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55.

104. The contrast here is with the standard of reason that is constitutive of the Hypothetical Imperative. As opposed to the Categorical Imperative which commands unconditionally, the demands of the Hypothetical Imperative are conditional upon some willed end. It requires one to take the means to that end, or abandon the end.

105. G 4: 412 (second emphasis added by me).

106. "Morality and humanity, insofar as it is capable of morality, alone have dignity." G 4: 435.

> an end in itself, that is, he possesses a dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts *respect* from all other rational beings in the world.[107]

Kant's conviction that the worth or the special value of morally good actions is unconnected to desires or inclinations and is thereby not conditional upon them stems from his reflections on ordinary moral beliefs. The special value in question resides in a *good will* that these actions evince, and it is special because it is unrelated to anything outside itself. To arrive at this conclusion, Kant considers the positive pro-attitude that we generally have toward morally good actions, and establishes that it is independent from the consequences of such actions. He writes:

> Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune or by a niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose – if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and only the good will were left (not, of course, as a mere wish but as the summoning of all means insofar as they are in our control) – then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself.[108]

107. MS 434-435.

108. G 4:394. Kant considers three general motives for (a morally good) action: motives arising from immediate inclinations, from a non-immediate inclination, and by respect for moral law. He argues that it is only when we do morally good actions out of respect for moral law that our actions have true moral worth. The worth of morally good actions cannot be contingent upon an inclination to act in a way which incidentally coincides with what we are morally required to do. This is because we have very little control over our desires and inclinations. He writes: "Suppose […] the mind of a philanthropist were overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, and that while he still had the means to benefit others in distress their troubles did not move him because he had enough to do with his own." G 4: 397-398. Furthermore, Kant claims that other "qualities of temperament" that

Upon the common-sense understanding of the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, it is wrong to treat others in ways to which they would not consent. Or, on a broader interpretation, we treat others and ourselves as mere means when our actions do not manifest recognition of the fact that that we all are beings capable of rational deliberation with the ability to set ends for ourselves. For example, we use people as mere means when we lie to them in order to derive some benefit from doing so. More controversially, Kant thinks that we use our rational nature as mere means and thus wrong ourselves if, after a major disappointment in life, we commit suicide in order to avoid living in despair.[109] As he puts it on one occasion, "disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end is debasing humanity in one's person, to which man was nevertheless entrusted for preservation."[110]

Finally, Kant offers the third formulation of the Categorical Imperative, according to which we are instructed to "act on a maxim which at the same time contains in itself its own universal validity for every

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are traditionally considered as undoubtedly good, such as courage or perseverance, cannot be what makes an action morally good. For all of these qualities can be used for evil if they do not proceed from the good will. So courage, perseverance, wealth and even happiness are good only conditionally, depending on their being combined with the good will. See G 4: 393-4; See also Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 21-6.

109. See G 4: 429-430. Kant seems to allow, although never fully explicitly, for the possibility that the duty not to commit suicide admits of exceptions in circumstances where violating it would be the only way to respect human rational nature in oneself. For example, when a person is taken by a serious illness that inevitably leads to a condition in which she loses her capacity for self-direction, suicide can reasonably be seen as an attempt to save oneself from the loss of human dignity. See MS 423-4.

110. MS 423.

rational being"[111] or, upon an alternative formulation, to "act in accordance with the maxims of a member legislating universal laws for a merely possible realm of ends […]."[112] In this third formulation Kant combines the form of the Categorical Imperative specified in the Formula of Universal Law and the matter specified in the Formula of Humanity, and seems to tell us that all maxims must ultimately harmonize with each other.[113]

Therefore, on Kant's view, all moral duties – whether owed to oneself or to others – are determined by the supreme principle of morality, the Categorical Imperative, which is the precept of reason constitutive of reason itself. The Categorical Imperative binds unconditionally, and comes in three formulations which, Kant claims, are practically equivalent. Scholars interpret this claim of equivalence as saying that the formulas would give quantitatively and qualitatively equivalent results with regard to moral requirements.[114] This means that each formula of the Categorical Imperative in isolation would provide the same results concerning the number, subject matter, and stringency of moral obligations as the other two.

2. The Formula of Humanity as the Ground for Duties to Oneself

111. G 4: 438.

112. G 4: 439.

113. G 4: 436. See Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 51; Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 158.

114. Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 51; See Robert N. Johnson and Adam Cureton, "Kant's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/kant-moral/>.

If Kant intended the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative to be practically equivalent, that is, as delivering the same results with regards to what moral duties we have, then it follows that whatever duties to oneself we have, we would be able to derive them from any of the three formulations. I shall set aside any dispute about the interpretation of the equivalence claim, since going into the depth of Kant's scholarship is neither my intention in this chapter nor necessary for my present purposes. What is relevant, however, is that there are some obvious considerations which point to the Formula of Humanity as the most suitable formulation for understanding Kant's justification of the duties to oneself.[115] In what follows, I offer these considerations and then close with a brief discussion on the particular duties to oneself which are taken to follow from Kant's moral theory.

First, when Kant talks about duties to oneself, both in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, he almost exclusively appeals to the Formula of Humanity. Kant says that the Formula of Humanity expresses the Categorical Imperative in terms of the 'matter' or 'ends' of moral maxims.[116] What he means by this is that the Formula of Humanity specifies the ends that an agent ought to set for herself. The sum of those ends comprises what Kant calls 'the doctrine of ends' or 'the doctrine of virtue' which is the concept he uses for all duties that have to do with ends that an agent ought to adopt for herself.[117] "The human being," Kant writes, "is an end for himself as well as for others, and it is not enough that he is not authorized to make use either of himself or of others merely as a means […] it is in itself his duty to make the human being in general his end."[118] In other words, as a formulation of the

115. See, for example, Allen Wood, "Duties to Oneself, Duties of Respect to Others," in *The Blackwell Guide to Kant's Ethics*, (ed.) Thomas E. Hill Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 229-251; Johnson, *Self-Improvement: An Essay in Kantian Ethics*, chs. 3, 5; Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 76-84.

116. G 4: 436.

117. MS 419. Cf. Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 78.

118. MS 395.

Categorical Imperative for adopting ends, the Formula of Humanity seems more suitable than any of the other formulas to apprehend Kant's justification for duties to oneself.

For Kant, duties to oneself are moral requirements which demand that we make our own human rational nature an end for ourselves. This involves both positive and negative conduct: we are to set such ends that respect the absolute worth of humanity or human rational nature (where the two notions are used interchangeably), for example the duty of self-improvement, and to refrain from setting such actions that disregard it, such as the duty not to kill oneself, the duty not to engage in gluttony, and so on. Lara Denis notes that the Formula of Humanity is the only formulation of the Categorical Imperative which defines duties in relation to their objects, that is to say, on whether they imply that we ought to set as an end one's own humanity or that of other people.[119]

Second, the Formula of Humanity is the most obvious foundation of duties to oneself because it is the only formulation which, in its content, explicitly appeals to the value of humanity found in one's own being. By saying that we ought to treat humanity in ourselves as an end in itself, Kant posits the Formula of Humanity as the most straightforward way in which practical reason demands self-regarding actions. In comparison to the Formula of Universal Law, the Formula of Humanity involves concepts, such as 'humanity' and its derivatives or correlates 'self-worth', 'dignity' *et cetera*, that are more intuitively accessible than, for instance, 'universality'.[120] When we represent maxims as laws, it seems more natural to see them as implying particular duties to oneself if they are tested against the requirement of humanity as an end in itself rather than against universality.

One might point out that the principle of equity, or the golden rule that is embedded in the Formula of Universal Law, is just as intuitive. This formulation involves a kind of universality which entails that, whatever treatment we owe to others, we owe it to ourselves as well. Even so, it is still difficult to generate moral requirements to oneself as Kant conceived of them from the Formula of Universal Law. Consider,

119. Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 79.

120. Cf. Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 81-3.

for example, the imperfect duty of self-perfection. Kant argues that every person has a moral duty to adopt her own self-perfection as an end.[121] The argument for the derivation of the duty of self-perfection from the Formula of Universal Law would be analogous to the one which Kant offers for the imperfect duty of beneficence. Roughly, it would proceed as follows:[122]

1. Every rational being wills her own happiness as an end;
2. Insofar as one is rational, one also wills the necessary means to one's ends;
3. The necessary means to the end of one's happiness entail that someone at some time develops one's abilities to some extent;
4. I adopt the maxim "I do not develop my abilities in order to make my life easier";
5. The Categorical Imperative requires me to act only on those maxims which can be willed as universal laws of nature without contradiction;
6. My maxim "I do not develop my abilities in order to make my life easier" contradicts with (5);
7. Therefore, I ought not to adopt the maxim of not developing my abilities in order to make my life easier.

The problem with this argument, however, is that it only establishes that one sometimes develops some abilities to some extent, perhaps in an accidental manner. It does not thereby establish that one shall adopt the end of self-perfection. The conclusion seems especially problematic if we consider the scope of the duty of self-perfection as Kant conceives of it. According to Kant, we are to cultivate the "powers of spirit" that include developing abstract reasoning "[…] of the sort to be found in mathematics, logic, and the metaphysics of nature"; we are to cultivate our "powers of mind" which include "memory, imagination,

121. MS 386, 392-393.

122. Cf. Johnson, *Self-Improvement: An Essay in Kantian Ethics*, 63.

and the like, on which can be built learning, taste […], and so forth, which furnish instruments for a variety of purposes";[123] and we are to cultivate the "powers of the body" as well:

> We must strengthen it [one's body], harden it in every useful way, and take care of it, but without pampering; we must not allow it to become inveterate in any of its pleasures, but must so regulate it that it is able to dispense with everything but necessaries, to be content with inferior fare and to be bear up cheerfully in hardship and misfortune.[124]

Finally, and perhaps more importantly, we are to cultivate our moral powers, an activity which consists in developing the *disposition* to act only from duty and in striving as much as possible to *fulfill* all of one's moral duties.[125] So it seems that the argument for the duty of self-perfection based on the Formula of Universal Law does not deliver the desired results. Kant argues that we ought to perfect ourselves in a systematic way. However, what seems rationally incumbent upon us to will that others do in order for us to sustain the practically necessary end of our happiness, it does not seem to be their perfection.[126]

The Formula of Humanity, on the other hand, that commands to always treat the humanity in oneself and in others as an end in itself and never as a mere means, explains the duty of self-perfection much more successfully. As I said in the previous section, the Formula of Humanity relies on a claim about the intrinsic value of our rational nature. Applicably to the notion of a duty to oneself, the test of the Formula of Humanity requires one (a) to check whether a maxim expresses disregards for humanity in oneself or (b)

123. MS 444ff.

124. LE, 158.

125. MS 447.

126. Johnson, *Self-Improvement: An Essay in Kantian Ethics*, 64.

if a maxim in an end, the adoption of which constitutes a commitment to fuller realize one's rational nature.[127]

Consider again the duty of self-perfection. Arguably, given the criteria provided by the Formula of Humanity, it does not constitute a problem to show how self-improvement in various domains is conducive to the realization of rational nature. The perfection of our natural powers, such as those of spirit, mind and body, improves the very capacities on which we depend in our pursuit of all sorts of ends.[128] "Man owes it to himself (as a rational being)," Kant writes, "not to leave idle and, as it were, rusting away the natural predispositions and capacities that his reason can someday use."[129] Similarly, since for Kant the supreme principle of morality is the standard of reason, perfecting one's moral powers seems to naturally commit one to striving for a fuller realization of one's rational nature, that is, to bringing one's will as much as possible in conformity with pure reason. Therefore, within the Kantian construal, the Formula of Humanity is the most plausible foundation for duties to oneself.

According to Kant, we have seven perfect duties and one imperfect duty to ourselves.[130] Perfect duties to oneself are categorized into three groups by their origin: we have duties arising from our animality

127. See Lara Denis, "Kant's Ethics and Duties to Oneself," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (December 1997): 327-332; Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 85.

128. Another option is to think that self-improvement itself is a form of realizing human nature, since it requires planning, effort, discipline, *et cetera*. This understanding would be clearly implausible, however, since it would entail that, a person could realize her human nature by masterminding a genocidal campaign.

129. MS 444.

130. The clearest way in which Kant determines whether a duty is perfect or imperfect involves the test of the Formula of Universal Law. A duty is perfect if it forbids acting on maxims which are impossible to *conceive* as universal laws. See G 4:421. A duty is imperfect if an action prescribed by it, though can be conceived as universal law of nature, cannot rationally be willed as such. In the *Groundwork* Kant writes: "Some actions are so constituted that their maxim cannot even be *thought* without contradiction as a universal law of nature, far less could one *will* that it *should* become such. In the case of others that inner impossibility is indeed not to be found, but it is still impossible to *will* that their

(the duty not to commit suicide, the duty not to defile oneself from lust, and the duty not to stupefy oneself through food and drink), duties arising from our moral nature (the duty not to lie, the duty forbidding avarice, and the duty not to be servile) and the fundamental duty of conscience.[131] Finally, as I mentioned earlier, we also have an imperfect duty of self-perfection.[132]

3. The Value of Humanity

In the previous section, I have argued that duties to oneself in Kant's moral theory are best understood through the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative, that is, through the Formula of Humanity. Now, there are various worries associated with Kant's derivation of the Formula of Humanity. For one thing, the arguments that Kant offers in the *Groundwork* for the claim that rational nature is an end in itself are problematic.[133] For another, the criteria set by the Formula of Humanity seems rather vague or

maxim to be raised to the universality of law of nature because such a will would contradict itself. It is easy to see that the first is opposed to strict or narrower duty [perfect], the second only to wide duty." See G 4: 424. But it is also possible to distinguish perfect duties from imperfect ones by applying the test of the Formula of Humanity. Upon this procedure, a duty is perfect and negative if the maxim of an action disregards the value of humanity in oneself or in another person. The duty is imperfect and positive if the maxim involves the adoption of an end and constitutes commitment to the realization of one's rational nature. See Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 85-86.

131. MS 421-444.

132. MS 445-447.

133. See, for example, Denis, *Moral Self-Regard: Duties to Oneself in Kant's Moral Theory*, 58ff; Richard Dean, *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88, 92, ch. 6; Donald H.

insufficiently substantive: What behavior constitutes disregard for the value of rational nature? These and other worries I shall leave to Kantian scholarship. Whatever the problems with the Formula of Humanity are, its central idea, namely, that human beings are intrinsically valuable, is fairly intuitive. In what follows, however, I argue that Kant's view on what makes persons intrinsically valuable creatures is insufficiently substantive, as it virtually excludes psychological facts that are of vital importance to understand our nature as persons. I focus on the capacity to feel pain and to love, as well as on the need for the sympathy and love of others, and argue that these indicate a unique and vital aspect of what is important about persons.[134]

As we have seen, Kant maintains that the value of humanity is to be found in our rational nature. Specifically, it is to be found in that aspect of our rational nature that makes it possible for us to engage in *moral reasoning*. That is, it is our ability to understand the concept of the good and our disposition to act from reason even in the face of opposing inclinations that grounds the value of humanity in us and commands respect towards it. As Kant writes:

> [M]orality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality, is that which alone has dignity. […] fidelity in promises and benevolence from basic principles (not from instincts) have an inner worth. […] Such actions […] need no recommendation from any subjective disposition or taste […] they present the will that practices them as *the object of an immediate respect*. […] This estimation therefore lets the worth of such a cast of mind be cognized as dignity and puts it infinitely above all price, with which it

Regan, "The Value of Rational Nature," *Ethics* 112, No. 2 (January 2002): 267-291; David Sussman, "The Authority of Humanity," *Ethics* 113, No. 2 (January 2003): 350-366.

134. David Velleman tries to reconcile respect and love in David J. Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (January 1999): 338-374.

> cannot be brought into comparison or competition at all without, as it were, assaulting its holiness.[135]

Thus, the aspect of rational nature in virtue of which humanity has dignity or intrinsic worth is our *moral* agency, that is, the capacity to act from reasons and reasons alone. In its turn, our capacity to act from reasons or, in Kant's terms, "in accordance with one's idea of moral laws", amounts to that property of the will that makes it *autonomous*, that is, capable of giving laws to itself.[136] These intricately connected ideas – moral agency as the ground for the value of humanity and the conception of moral autonomy as the capacity of the will to act from moral reasons – are the kernel of Kant's moral theory.

However, if the value of humanity in us is to be the matter of the supreme principle of morality that guides our moral behaviour, then Kant's view on what grounds the value of humanity is implausibly thin. As a matter of fact, it stands in direct opposition to our nature as beings with the capacity and the standing motivation and disposition to design our lives according to our freely chosen conceptions of the good.[137] The dichotomy implied in Kant's moral theory between our nature as moral agents and our nature as members of a biological kind is puzzling. Though Kant acknowledges that every rational being wills his or her own personal good (happiness)[138], he seems to think that this good consists entirely in the satisfaction

135. G 4: 435 (my emphasis).

136. Note that, for Kant, autonomy as the property of our will is a transcendental characteristic. It does not depend on natural capacities. As noted above, I leave the transcendental basis aside and consider Kant's view on the value of humanity on its own.

137. On the intrinsic desire for self-understanding, and the inclination towards autonomy as constitutive of agency, see David J. Velleman, "The Possibility of Practical Reason," *Ethics* 106, no. 4 (July 1996): 719-726.

138. G 4: 396. See also G 4: 415. "[…] *one* end that can be presupposed as actual in the case of all rational beings […], and therefore one purpose that they not merely *could* have but that we can safely presuppose they all actually *do have* by a natural necessity, and that purpose is *happiness*."

of our basic instincts and the lower-order feelings and emotions that arise from our animality. For Kant, personal good is essentially in opposition to and almost entirely irrelevant in moral theorizing. "The principle of *one's own happiness*, Kant writes, – […] is the most objectionable because it bases morality on incentives that undermine it and destroy all its sublimity […]."[139] Kant also notes that grounding a duty in the end of our happiness runs into the problem of normativity:

> Duties we owe to ourselves do not depend on the relation of the action to the end of happiness. If they did, they would depend on our inclinations and so be governed by rules of prudence. Such rules are not moral, since they indicate only the necessity of the means for the satisfaction of inclinations, and cannot therefore bind us.[140]

There are, however, various aspects of our personal good that are distinctive of our human nature. While the good of persons does consist partly in the satisfaction of the instincts and needs that arise from our nature as members of a biological kind, it also consists, quite importantly, in the realization and success of our freely chosen projects and goals with which we strongly identify, as well as in the development of strong personal ties among each other. As autonomous agents, we exercise our practical reason not only and not even primarily in order to satisfy our basic desires and instincts, but in order to create the self to be governed. We act on the basis of deliberation that is governed by the complex cross-temporal structure of freely formed plans and personal policies with which we identify.[141] As agents, we have the capacity to reflect upon our first-order desires, emotional reactions, and other mental states, and to form second-order attitudes about them. This involves the capacity to distance oneself from one's first-order desires and

139. G 4: 442.

140. LE 120-121.

141. Michael Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," *Philosophical Review* 109, no. 1 (January 2000): 35-61.

attitudes and, upon reflection, either to endorse or to reject them. In other words, as agents, we can 'take a stand' on our first-order desires and attitudes.[142] The endorsement or rejection of our first-order motives is governed by deliberation that features our plans, personal policies, and various other ideas that compose our conceptions of the good life.

When Bernard Williams was pondering on the feature or the property in virtue of which human beings are owed respect, he emphasized the capacity to feel various forms of pain and affection.[143] Like Williams, I think that the capacity to feel pain, to suffer, and to love, as well as the need for the sympathy and love of others, is a unique and vitally important aspect of our nature as persons. One way to judge the importance of these psychological factors is by trying to grasp the immense suffering that people experience when they are deprived of the love and sympathy of others for a prolonged period of time. Another way to do so is by trying to show the extent to which our happiness goes hand-in-hand with our rational nature.

Imagine someone who is an outcast, ostracized by every person she meets in her way. Perhaps she is so hideous that, like Frankenstein's Monster, people run away repulsed and scared by her appearance. Like Frankenstein's Monster deprived of companionship, the outcast is not only deprived of the emotional and physical benefits it offers; she is made to feel *unfit* for companionship and *unworthy* of the sympathetic concern. It is important to recognise that companionship and loving connections with others do not only give us pleasures of physical and emotional contact, they also give us the acknowledgement of our status of valuable beings.[144] The outcast is thus deprived of the sense of her own worth.

The sense of self-worth is a kind of "a filter" through which a person sees the world and interacts with it. It orients a person to a variety of self-regarding attitudes. Consequently, a person whose sense of

142. Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 38.

143. Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality," in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 232.

144. Manuscript by Connie Rosati, "Autonomy, Decency, and Personal Good: Lessons from Frankenstein's Monster." See also Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, originally published in 1818).

self-worth is seriously frustrated is likely to be unable to see herself as someone who can claim respect and decent treatment from others.[145] Importantly, moreover, the life of a person with diminished self-worth can hardly be and feel good for that person. The sense of self-worth is, thus, itself a vital constitutive element of our well-being. That is, our well-being consists partly in being treated according to the value we have in virtue of certain feature or features of our nature as human beings.[146]

Consider further the idea that happiness and autonomy are critically interrelated. By this I do not just mean that the nature of our well-being depends partly on our nature as autonomous agents. Rather, following an argument of Connie Rosati, I invite you to consider that our sense of self-worth (as a constitutive element of our well-being) affects our autonomous functioning. If we consider the behaviour of a person whose sense of self-worth has been virtually destroyed, it seems plausible to say that her conduct falls short of being fully autonomous.

Consider the life of a serial killer, Aileen Wuornos. That Aileen had an unfortunate formation does not even begin to describe her situation. She was the second child of a 16-years-old mother who, by the time Aileen was born, had left her biological father. When Aileen was not even 4 years old, her mother left her and her brother to the care of their grandparents. Aileen's grandfather assaulted her both sexually and

145. Compare to what Robin S. Dillon calls "basal self-respect". Dillon writes: "Basal self-respect concerns our primordial interpretation of self and self-worth, the invisible lens through which everything connected with the self is viewed and presumed to be disclosed, that is, experienced as real and true." See Robin S. Dillon, "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political," *Ethics* 107, no. 2 (January 1997): 241. Basal self-respect, Dillon suggests, is the precondition for other forms of self-respect. Compare also Williams's claim that it is part of what it is to be human that we have a certain "desire for self-respect" by which he means "[…] a certain human desire to be identified with what one is doing, to be able to realize purposes of one's own, and not to be the instrument of another's will unless one has willingly accepted such a role." See Williams, "The Idea of Equality," 234. For an insightful discussion on self-respect and how it is the most important social good see Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 386-391.

146. Manuscript by Connie Rosati, "Autonomy, Decency, and Personal Good: Lessons from Frankenstein's Monster."

physically. She had frequent outbursts of anger which left her largely ostracized at school. At the age of 14, Aileen became pregnant after having been sexually assaulted by her grandfather's friend. She gave birth to a child who was immediately given away for adoption. She was not even allowed to see the baby, just as she was not offered any psychological support. Aileen was prostituting herself from a very early age. After her grandfather kicked her out, she continued to earn her living the only way she knew how. She met Tyria Moore, who became her lover when she was 30 years old. It became Aileen's first and only lasting companionship. She grew very attached to Tyria and was striving to provide and care for her. Besides earning money by prostitution, we now know that Aileen murdered and robbed 7 men while doing so.

It seems clear that Aileen's formative experiences were not conducive to the development of a stable sense of self-worth. Having been left by her mother, beaten and sexually assaulted by her grandfather and his friend, ostracized by the kids at school, Aileen could not have had an adequate sense of her own value as a person. And as it seems apparent from her written confession (addressed to Jesus Christ) which she wrote in prison, Aileen's actions were not fully autonomous. Partly, they were motivated by the intense fear of losing her only companion Tyria, and partly by her hate towards men. By no means I am trying to suggest that Aileen was not responsible for her crimes. It nevertheless seems that, as someone who acted out of fear and impulse motivated by hatred, she was not fully autonomous. The circumstances of her upbringing led her to become obsessively attached to the only companion she ever had and filled her with hatred towards men. Having been charged with murder, she *asked* for the death penalty.[147]

This shows, I think, that our capacity to feel pain (in various forms) and to love as well as the need for the sympathy and love of others is a unique and vital feature of our nature. Although I have focused in the above example on our capacity to feel pain and to love, it is clearly not the only property that a successful

147. Cf. Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in Gary Watson, *Agency and Answerability: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 219-259. Oxford Scholarship Online. Watson points out how our reactive attitudes in response to a murderer Robert Harris change once we become aware of the unfortunate childhood he had.

theory of the value of persons needs to accommodate. Jeremy Waldron suggests that an account of human worth need not rely on any single property, but rather on various capabilities of human beings that are complex and partially overlapping. These properties together help us define what is important about human beings.[148] In this respect, I agree with Waldron's analysis, and I have tried to show in this chapter how our capacity for autonomy interrelates with our capacity to feel strong emotions. At the end of the day, it is a serious shortcoming of Kant's view on the value of rational nature that it excludes these important properties from consideration.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Immanuel Kant's approach to duties to oneself. My aim was to motivate my decision not to pursue the defense of duties to oneself within Kant's moral theoretical framework. With this in mind, I have outlined the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative and argued that Kant's argument for duties to oneself is to be best understood through the Formula of Humanity. The Formula of Humanity commands to "act [so] that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means."[149] Kant's view on the value of humanity plays a central role in the derivation of this formula. In effect, it turns out to be the central idea through which Kant justifies our various duties to oneself. I have claimed that Kant's view on the value of humanity is implausible, because it does not take into account various psychological factors that are constitutive of our nature as rational creatures. Although I chose to focus on our capacity to feel pain and

148. Jeremy Waldron, *One Another's Equal: The Basis For Human Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 84-127.

149. G 4: 429.

to love, arguing that it is a unique and vital property that partly defines what is important of us as persons, I did not intend it as the single property relevant for the account of the value of persons. An account of human worth need not rely on any single property, but rather on various capabilities of human beings that are complex and partially overlapping, and together they help us to delineate what is important about persons.

Although my discussion in this chapter assumed, rather than established, that persons are intrinsically valuable creatures, I maintain that this assumption, though controversial, is quite intuitive, and I rely on it in my argument for duties to oneself in chapter 5. Before I do so, however, I consider an altogether different approach to accounting for duties to oneself. In the next chapter, I explore the possibility that a successful account of duties to oneself might be diachronic, that is, an account that appeals to temporal slices within a person's life. I shall argue that such an account is problematic, and a different approach is needed.

CHAPTER 4: A DIACHRONIC ACCOUNT OF DUTIES TO ONESELF

In the previous chapter I have considered the argument for duties to oneself in the moral theory of Immanuel Kant. Without going into its depth and glossing over exegetical issues, I outlined the three formulations of the Categorical Imperative and argued that Kant's argument for duties to oneself is to be understood through the Formula of Humanity. As the formula commands us to respect humanity in others as well as in ourselves by using it only as an end in itself and never merely as a means, Kantian foundation for duties to oneself depends critically on his ideas concerning what is important about human nature. Kant famously claims that what is valuable about persons is their capacity for rationality. In particular, it is the capacity to act on reason and reason alone that warrants respect above all else, according to Kant.[150]

The idea that persons are valuable beings and that it matters how we are treated is attractive. It certainly appears to us that, due to persons' capacity for autonomy, we have reasons to respect them by not treating them as a mere means to our ends. However, we also think that, due to persons' capacity for well-being, we have reasons to be concerned with (the well-being of) people.

[150]. The capacity to will freely, for Kant, of course is not based on any empirical capacities which persons have in virtue of their nature. Hence, we owe persons respect not in virtue of their empirical characteristics but in respect of the transcendental characteristic of the will being free and rational. However, since transcendental arguments are problematic, I consider Kant's account for duties to oneself without its transcendental basis.

Kant's view on what is important about persons fails to accommodate this intuition. It excludes vitally important psychological facts about our nature as persons such as our capacity to feel pain and to love as well as the need for the sympathy and love of others. I claimed that it is a unique and vital aspect of what is important about persons and assented to the position that an account of human worth need not rely on any single property. Various capabilities of human beings are complex and partially overlapping and together they help us to define what is important about persons.

In this chapter, I turn to the idea that a successful account of duties to oneself might be diachronic, that is, an account that appeals to temporal slices within a person's life. I consider a formulation of such an account that was recently advanced by Paul Schofield.[151] According to Schofield, one can have a duty to oneself to *φ if* a hypothetical justified claim is issued from one perspective occupied at time *t* to another perspective at time *t'*. In offering this account, Schofield endorses Stephen Darwall's view that moral duties are irreducibly second-personal and extrapolates it into the sphere of the relationship a person has with herself. He does so by asserting that, in addressing a valid claim, it is not the metaphysical distinctness of the relating parties that matters, but rather the fact that parties occupy different perspectives, and that interests composing these perspectives conflict.

I argue that Schofield's diachronic account of duties to oneself is problematic. My argument proceeds as follows. In the next section, I outline Schofield's diachronic account of duties to oneself. In section 2, I show that the account does not square well with a widely shared view on what a psychologically unified mental life is like. On this view, generally healthy

151. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 505-528.

individuals interpret various events, mental states and happenings in their lives as belonging to a unique narrative. Distinct episodes in a person's life partially but necessarily take their meaning in connection with the broader context of the narrative to which they belong. They do not have lives of their own, as Schofield's account seems to suggest, and cannot be intelligible without taking into consideration their place in the whole configuration of episodes which together form the unique narrative. That is, the very meaning of different episodes and judgements about them is partially provided by the narrative and their place in it.

In section 3, I argue that the diachronic account of duties to oneself faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, if the validity of a claim is at least partially sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, then Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem. One cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply with the legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed. On the other hand, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective, and the ends and interests held at any perspective are fixed in virtue of some moral principle which is not sensitive to the identities of perspectives, then the fact of second-personal address of a claim is superfluous in explaining what duties to ourselves we have. Furthermore, I show that, if we are to take the separateness of perspectives seriously, and if the moral principle guiding self-regarding behavior is to be justifiable to each perspective, then the diachronic account of duties to oneself cannot explain our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at time *t* in order to achieve an even greater benefit overall.

1. Diachronic Account of Duties to Oneself

Paul Schofield has recently developed a diachronic account of duties to oneself. Schofield's ambition was, on the one hand, to vindicate the claim that, apart from duties to others, we also have duties to ourselves, and on the other hand, to show that duties to oneself are not just rare exceptions in an otherwise primarily other-regarding moral realm, but they compose a rather numerous category of moral requirements and, for that reason, should be taken seriously. On his view, an account of duties to oneself which supposedly hits both targets turns out to be diachronic.

Schofield contends that moral duties can arise as a result of the *diachronic hypothetical relation* an agent has with oneself. Parties in this intra-personal relation are distinct, temporarily divided perspectives within an agent's life. Schofield defines perspective, somewhat vaguely, as "[…] a point of view from which one perceives, or feels emotions, or has sensations, or judges a proposition to be true, or wills some particular action, and so on".[152] Thus, one has a duty to oneself to φ *if* a hypothetical justified claim could be issued from one perspective occupied at time *t* to another perspective at time *t'*, thereby giving one a moral reason to φ.[153] For illustration, consider the following example. Imagine a 18-year-old smoker called Anna. Although Anna is fully aware of the related health risks, she maintains the habit for the pleasure of smoking. Anna is harming herself, and Schofield's way to argue for the moral impermissibility of this harm is to point out

[152]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 517.

153. Schofield does not argue that all duties to oneself are diachronic. Whether we also have synchronic duties to ourselves is a question he deliberately puts aside. See Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 514, ft.23; 521, ft.38.

that from the perspective of, say, the 50-year-old Anna who suffers from emphysema, a hypothetical demand could be made on her 18-year-old self to stop smoking immediately.[154]

Schofield claims that the resulting account of duties to oneself is immune to the charge of incoherence. Recall that, according to this objection, if the same person is the subject and the object of a duty, that person is in the position to release herself from that duty at will, which contradicts the very notion of a duty. Schofield maintains that when a duty is generated by a valid claim issued from a perspective distinct in time from the actual one, an individual could only waive such a duty from the perspective from which the claim had been issued. Since it is impossible to do so, the view is immune to the charge of incoherence.[155]

Schofield accepts the view that morality has an irreducibly second-personal character and argues for the possibility of second-personal, albeit diachronic, duties to oneself from which one cannot release oneself. One can have a duty to oneself to φ *if* a hypothetical justified claim is issued from one perspective occupied at time *t* to another perspective at time *t'*. His argument can be summarized as follows:

(1) : Most moral duties are irreducibly second-personal, that is, they are generated through a legitimate (actual or hypothetical) address of a claim;

(2) : What matters in addressing a legitimate claim is the existence of different perspectives with conflicting interests, and not the metaphysical distinctness of entities to which these perspectives belong;

(3) : There is a myriad of perspectives within one person's life, and sometimes interests attached to them conflict;

[154]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 507, 520-521.

[155]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 521.

(4) : Therefore, it is possible that a hypothetical legitimate claim can be issued by one perspective against another perspective intra-personally, thereby giving rise to a moral duty.

Schofield endorses Darwall's view that moral reasons and accordingly duties are irreducibly second-personal.[156] They are given through a legitimate (actual or hypothetical) address of a claim or of a demand. That kind of address, Darwall writes, is made from a second-person perspective, which he defines as "[...] the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will".[157] Schofield then extrapolates the Darwallian account into the sphere of the relationship a person has with herself. He does so by asserting that, in addressing a valid claim, it is not the metaphysical distinctness of the relating parties that matters, but rather the fact that parties occupy different perspectives, and that interests composing these perspectives conflict.[158] What allows Schofield to make this assertion is Darwall's view, expressed on one of many occasions as follows: "It is the perspective one assumes in addressing practical thought or speech to, or acknowledging address from, another […] and, in so doing making or acknowledging a claim or demand on the will".[159] As I already said, Schofield defines a perspective as "[...] a point of view from which one perceives, or feels emotions, or has

[156]. See Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 511. This formulation suggests that second-personal address is the only way to generate moral reasons and, consequently, that all moral reasons are irreducibly second-personal. Although Schofield's argument rests on Darwall's view, Schofield allows for the possibility that not all moral reasons are second-personal. See Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 514, ft. 23.

[157]. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 3.

[158]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 518-519.

[159]. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 9.

sensations, or judges a proposition to be true, or wills some particular action, and so on".[160] He then suggests that when we examine different examples of individuals inflicting harm on themselves, we notice that a similar story can be told which involves all the relevant elements of interpersonal second-personal reasoning, albeit (often, yet not always) diachronically. Granted, one of the two perspectives is actual and the other one is hypothetical, but nothing of consequence, Schofield insists, depends upon this. He writes: "[…] if we can tell a story involving two perspectives that contains all the essential elements [...] then we'll have every reason to believe that second-personal reasons can indeed be generated from those perspectives."[161] Schofield concludes that we have non-releasable diachronic duties to oneself.

Moreover, according to Schofield when a duty is generated by a valid claim issued from a hypothetical perspective distinct in time from the actual one, an agent cannot release herself from it. This is so because an agent could only waive a valid claim from the perspective from which the claim had been issued. Yet in order to be able to exercise that power the person has to stand in the *actual* perspective. Since it is impossible to waive a claim hypothetically, diachronic duties to oneself are not vulnerable to the charge of incoherence, or so Schofield argues.[162]

[160]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 517.

[161]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 619.

[162]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 521. To be fair, nothing in Schofield's argument limits his account of duties to oneself to just duties to our future selves. In principle, the account implies that we can also have duties to our past selves. I believe, however, that the idea of duties to our past selves is implausible as one could never hold oneself accountable for failing to comply with them.

2. Personhood and Psychological Unity

Consider the crucial claim in Schofield's argument: "[…] it isn't actually their metaphysical distinctness that ultimately explains why two persons can relate to each other second-personally. The explanation is that they each have distinct 'perspectives' or occupy distinct 'standpoints.'"[163] This claim, together with the empirical fact that there is a myriad of distinct perspectives within our lives, allows Schofield to conclude that genuine second-personal reason-giving address on an intra-personal level is possible. In what follows, I shall argue for the following claim. Schofield's conclusion that the metaphysical distinctness of persons does not play any relevant role in explaining why two persons can relate to each other second-personally is unwarranted. This holds even if we grant that Schofield is justified in asserting that it is the existence of distinct perspectives which ultimately explains the possibility of second-personal relation.

On a plausible and widely recognized view, generally healthy persons possess a psychologically unified mental life.[164] That is to say, there exists among intra-personal perspectives a special kind of connectedness which does not exist among the distinct perspectives of metaphysically separate individuals. Quite a few developmental psychologists[165] and

163. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 517.

164. See Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, ch. 10, sec. 78; Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch. 1.

165. See Dan P. McAdams and Erika Manczak, "Personality and the life story," in Mario Mikulincer, Phillip R. Shaver, Lynne M. Cooper, Randy J. Larsen (eds.) *APA handbook of personality and social psychology, Volume 4: Personality processes and individual differences.* APA Handbooks in Psychology Series (Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association 2015), 425-446; Adler, "Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a

philosophers[166] argued that this amounts to the capacity and disposition to form one's life into a narrative. According to them, various experiences, actions, mental states and other elements within a human life can count as that of a single individual or of a single self if they are arranged into a unique narrative. I shall rely on a minimalistic core of such views.[167]

According to developmental psychologists, default human cognition engages in reflective self-interpretation of experiences, events and happenings in one's life.[168] By means of such a self-interpretation, the myriad of elements within a person's life emerges as a coherent sequence, or a narrative. On the one hand, this self-interpretation is driven by a person's striving to understand

longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy," 367-389; Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, "Narratives of the Self," in L. P. Hinchman and S. K. Hinchman (eds.) *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 161-184.

166. See Daniel Dennett, "The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity," in Frank S. Kessel, Pamela M. Cole, and Dale L., Johnson (eds.) *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 103-115; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1985), ch. 15; Peter Goldie, "Dramatic Irony, Narrative, and the External Perspective," in Daniel Hutto (ed.) *Narrative and Understanding Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69-84; David Velleman, "The Self as Narrator," in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203-223; Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, ch. 5; Marya Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View," in Daniel Hutto (ed.) *Narrative and Understanding Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 155-178.

167. For a brief taxonomy of existing views, see Marya Schechtman, "The Narrative Self," in Shaun Gallagher (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 394-416.

168. See Adler, "Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy," 367-389.

different happenings in her life. On the other hand, the need to explain parts of our lives in the course of social interactions further motivates the construction of a meaningful narrative, yet also puts some constraints on it.[169] First, the resulting narrative should be realistic, that is, it should not involve stories of being abducted by aliens or having seen a flesh-and-blood Godzilla on the streets of New York. Second, the narrative should be constructed using socially acceptable concepts.

One important feature of this process is that the distinct episodes in a person's life partially but necessarily take their meaning in connection with the broader context of the narrative to which they belong. They do not have lives of their own, as Schofield's account seems to suggest. They cannot be fully intelligible without taking into consideration their place in the whole configuration of episodes which together form the unique narrative. The meaning of different episodes and judgements about them made by the person whose episodes they are is partially provided by the narrative and their place in it. To put it more simply, our judgments concerning different happenings in our lives and the perspectives we hold at different times are neither independent of our past experiences and judgments, nor are they made without anticipation of our future.

The access to our past experiences and events in life is provided through memory. Memory, therefore, plays a very important role in a person's sense of self and in the process of self-interpretation. Multiple studies demonstrate that memory is not a passive retrieval of literally recorded parts of reality to our consciousness. While recalling some event or experience, we actively reconstruct it. And just as the "recording" itself is not free from affect and emotion, nor is

[169]. See Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves*, 70-72; Cf. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 96; Schechtman, "Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Persistence," 95-111.

its later reconstruction in the course of recall judgment-free.[170] In other words, the way we remember things is not independent from our feelings toward them. Apart from our evaluative judgment in relation to the recalled happening, remembering is affected by current social settings, the purpose of the recall, as well as by the pressure to find coherence within the narrative. This explains the often observed changes in our memories. Our perceptions and understandings of things, and therefore the meanings we attribute to them, change as we go through life, in the light of new experiences. Note that this shift happens not only in descriptive but also in evaluative terms over time.[171]

If the narrativity thesis offers an accurate characterization of the psychologically unified mental life of a healthy adult individual, then Schofield's way to conceive of the relation of intra-personal perspectives appears to be fundamentally misguided. Schofield treats intra-personal perspectives as independent entities. Such treatment fails to take notice or perhaps deems irrelevant the deep connectedness existing between these perspectives. And it is not only that Schofield's account appears to presuppose that intra-personal perspectives are independent entities. What is more, inspired by John Rawls's critique of utilitarianism, Schofield claims that we should take seriously the separateness of intra-personal perspectives.[172] Schofield, therefore, fails to notice the ways in which the metaphysical identity of perspectives affects their ability to engage in genuine reason-giving second-personal address.

[170]. Christman, *The Politics of Persons. Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves*, 89-91.

[171]. See, for example, Gergen and Gergen, "Narratives of the Self," 165; Christman, *The Politics of Persons. Individual Autonomy and Socio-historical Selves*, 71.

[172]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 526.

3. Justifiability to Each Perspective

In what follows I argue that Schofield's diachronic account of duties to oneself has more serious problems than the misguided view underlying his characterization of the mental life of individuals. I argue that its reliance on temporal perspectives makes the account problematic in the following two ways. First, it is vulnerable to its very own version of the non-identity problem. Second, it delivers counterintuitive implications whenever a choice must be made between doing what will result in the greater aggregate benefit of a cluster of perspectives and doing what will produce greater benefit per perspective.

Roughly, a moral doctrine faces *the non-identity problem* when it implies that the victim of a wrongdoing lacks grounds to complaint because the very act by which she was made worse-off also caused her to exist, and thereby benefited her. So long as the victim's life is worth living, the benefit of existence outweighs the loss in well-being caused by the same act, thus making incoherent the victim's complaint that she has been morally wronged.[173]

According to Schofield, one can have a duty to oneself to φ if a hypothetical justified claim is issued from one perspective (*P*) occupied at time *t* to another perspective (*P'*) occupied at time *t'*. This view is such that the wrongful action from the perspective P is *by design* the one which causes the perspective *P* to exist. Can we make sense of the complaint issued from the perspective *P* at time t?

[173]. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, ch.16.

Consider the following example. Imagine 15-year-old Bob who decides not to exercise. This decision leads to him being mildly overweight at the age of 60. Although from the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob life is worth living, his weight causes some minor health issues such as elevated blood pressure and general discomfort, and prevents him from going mountain hiking with his friends. Counterfactually, if 15-year-old Bob chose to exercise, it would lead to him being a fit 60-year-old who does not suffer from elevated blood pressure and is able to enjoy beautiful sunsets with his mountaineering friends. From the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob, it was morally wrong of 15-year-old Bob to decide not to exercise. Yet this very decision is also what caused the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob to exist. If 15-year-old Bob chose to exercise, the perspective of very fit 60-year-old Bob would exist, and not that of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob.

Now, even though it is true that from the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob life is worth living, and it is also true that from the same perspective it appears that Bob was wronged, it would be too hasty to conclude that the complaint issued from the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob is incoherent. On the original formulation of the non-identity problem, one is wronged by being made worse-off.[174] However, according to the account of moral wrongness which is at work in the second-person standpoint framework of morality, being made worse-off is not a necessary condition for being wronged. Thus, even though our 60-year-old Bob might have been made worse-off by his younger self, it does not necessarily follow that he has been wronged by it.[175]

[174]. Rahul Kumar, "Who Can Be Wronged," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31, no. 2 (April 2003): 99-118.

[175]. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 300-302.

According to the second-person standpoint framework, one is morally wronged if and because one's legitimate (actual or hypothetical) claim to which one is entitled in virtue of a valid moral principle has been flouted. So from the perspective of 60-year-old Bob, his younger self wronged him because it failed to treat him in a certain way, as required by a valid moral principle. Now, although Schofield does not tell us which moral principle guides an *intra*-personal second-personal relation, it is natural to suppose that, by adopting Darwall's *inter*-personal second-person standpoint framework, Schofield also adopts his inclination for contractualism. Moreover, there are other things said by Schofield that point towards a contractualist moral principle. Inspired by John Rawls's observation that utilitarianism does not take seriously the separateness of persons, Schofield suggests that we should take seriously the distinction between perspectives. He writes: "Some interests and ends […] attach to temporal perspectives, and a contribution to the good of the person overall will not necessarily constitute a contribution to the good enjoyed from each of those perspectives. Indeed, advancing the good of a person overall might require significant suffering from some perspectives".[176] It follows that whatever the moral principle guiding the *intra*-personal relation is, if we are to take seriously the separateness of perspectives, it must be justifiable to each perspective.

It appears, then, that Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem after all. For how can we make sense of the complaint that 15-year-old Bob wronged himself *from the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob*, if this particular perspective had not even existed at the moment when the offending act occurred? In sum, the non-identity problem for Schofield's account does not consist in the idea that the wronged party benefited more from the

[176]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 524.

offending action and therefore lacks the ground for complaining. Rather, it consists in the following. From future Bob's perspective, the complaint that the decision not to exercise is morally wrongful does not make sense, since this (future Bob's) perspective did not yet exist at the moment when the offending act took place.

Schofield might reply that ends and interests attached to each perspective are not sensitive to the psychological identity of those perspectives. They are ends and interests a person is expected to have from any perspective understood as a *type*. They are interests and ends that we have in virtue of being persons, and they are fixed, i.e. independent of the identity of a perspective to which they are taken to be attached. One is entitled to think that those interests and ends are respected no matter in which perspective a person stands, just as a matter of, for example, respect for the status of a person as an enduring entity. Then it would not matter that the perspective of mildly overweight 60-year-old Bob did not exist at the moment of the offending act. 15 year-old-Bob could already know what he owes to his future self from any standpoint at any time.

Now, the problem with this response is that it renders the account vulnerable to the so-called *spare wheel* objection.[177] An account is subject to the spare wheel objection when it functions akin to a spare wheel on a vehicle, that is, without doing any work. If what we owe to ourselves is not sensitive to the identity of perspectives from which the claims are addressed, then it seems that the fact of second-personal address of a (hypothetical) claim is not needed for explaining what duties there are. In other words, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the particular psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, but is fixed in virtue of, say, our status as persons, then it follows that it is not the fact of a claim (or complaint) which

[177]. Brad Hooker, "Contractualism, Spare Wheel, Aggregation," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 5 (2002), 53-76.

explains what moral duties we have, but the moral principle of respect we owe to ourselves as persons. It seems, therefore, that the fact of second-personal address does not explain what makes an action wrong, but instead presupposes its wrongness. In order to decide to what we would justifiably object, we must appeal, at least sometimes, to moral distinctions. It appears as though the whole story of hypothetical claims of perspectives is superfluous in explaining what duties to oneself we have.

In the remaining part of this section I will show that Schofield's account also runs into problem where aggregate good is at stake, that is, in those cases where a choice must be made between doing what will result in the greater aggregate benefit of a cluster of perspectives and doing what will produce greater benefit per perspective.

As I have already noted, Schofield claims that we should take seriously the separateness of perspectives and the distribution of good among them within a person's life. He also claims that if his account is correct, then we need to re-evaluate the basic assumption that any person is free to balance her gains against her losses.

> My purpose here …[is] to point out that once we take seriously the distinction between separate temporal perspectives, and acknowledge the existence of duties to the self, we need to confront questions about whether and when it is permissible to impose burdens upon oneself for the sake of advancing one's overall good—questions whose answers might not be as obvious as it would initially seem.[178]

[178]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 526.

So while determining which perspective we should give weight to, we cannot consider goods or losses of many perspectives added together. Instead, we are to compare the reasons for objecting to a choice of an action held from one perspective against the reasons for objecting to an alternative choice of action held from another perspective. In other words, Schofield's account seems to presuppose only a pair-wise comparison of claims.

Imagine the case where at time T1 you are told that you should better undergo a painful surgery that will cause you 100 units of pain. If you do not undergo this surgery, you will suffer chronic pain for the rest of your life, the total units of which would amount to 600. Many people would have the intuition that it is permissible for you to get the surgery now in order to avoid 600 units of future chronic pain. Moreover, it seems that it is the most rational thing to do. Now since Schofield urges us to take the separateness of perspectives seriously, imagine further that your life can be divided into 10 perspectives, and from the point of view of each of those perspectives, there will be only 60 units of pain to suffer.

If we are to consider the situation from the point of view of a particular perspective and never from the point of view of a life taken overall, then Schofield cannot accommodate this intuition. From the point of view of each perspective, the present perspective is worse-off. Your current perspective, taken individually, would certainly object to suffering 100 units of pain. At the same time, if you do not undergo the surgery, each and every one of your 10 future perspectives would object to suffering 60 units of pain. Thus we arrive at the counterintuitive result that, unless the claims of perspectives can be added up, it would at best be supererogatory for you to get the operation. This perplexing situation would not arise if you considered the costs and benefits of

surgery from the point of view of your life overall. However, one of the implications of Schofield's view is that prudential considerations are constrained by duties to oneself.[179]

> The upshot is that the prospect of suffering burdens from a particular temporal perspective can provide an individual with a moral reason for acting a particular way – a reason that would preempt or silence considerations about her overall well-being. That is to say it's possible for the self-imposition of burdens to be morally impermissible *even when the imposition of those burdens leaves the individual better off on the whole when she otherwise would have been*.[180]

In sum, I contend that Schofield's account, and indeed any diachronic account of duties to oneself, faces two serious problems. The first problem is best put in the form of a dilemma. On the one hand, if the validity of a claim is at least partially sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, then Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem. One cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply with the legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting, there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed. On the other hand, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective, and the ends and interests held at any perspective are fixed in virtue of some moral principle which is not sensitive to identities of perspectives, then the fact of second-personal address of a claim is superfluous in explaining what duties to ourselves we have.

[179]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 525-6, fn.47.

[180]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 525-6 (emphasis in the original).

Second, if we are to take the separateness of perspectives seriously, and a moral principles guiding our self-regarding behavior is to be justifiable to each perspective, then the diachronic account of duties to oneself cannot not explain our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at time *t* in order to achieve even greater benefit overall. I conclude that, despite its ingenuity, Schofield's diachronic account of duties to oneself is unsuccessful.

Finally, note that Schofield's solution is just another attempt to circumvent the objection discussed in the first chapter. By arguing that it is never possible to release oneself from diachronic duties to oneself, Schofield does nothing to dispel the claims that synchronic duties to oneself are self-contradictory. At the same time, he does not argue that there can only be diachronic duties to oneself. To the contrary, Schofield allows for the possibility of synchronic second-personal duties to oneself but, knowing that they would be vulnerable to the given objection, he chooses to concentrate on the diachronic ones.[181]

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored a diachronic account of duties to oneself. I argued that, ultimately, such an account cannot be accepted, as it is problematic in two crucial ways. First, it faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, if the validity of a claim is at least partially sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, then Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem. One cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply

[181]. Schofield, "On the Existence of Duties to the Self," 521.

with the legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed. On the other hand, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective, and the ends and interests held at any perspective are fixed in virtue of some moral principle which is not sensitive to the identities of perspectives, then the fact of second-personal address of a claim is superfluous in explaining what duties to ourselves we have. Second, if we are to take the separateness of perspectives seriously, and if the moral principle guiding self-regarding behavior is to be justifiable to each perspective, then the diachronic account of duties to oneself cannot explain our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at time *t* in order to achieve even greater benefit overall. If my arguments in this chapter are on target, then a successful account of duties to oneself is unlikely to be diachronic.

In the last chapter I pick up where I left off in chapter 3, that is, with the assumption about the equal moral status of persons. I claim that, since we matter and matter impartially, we have standing duties to respect ourselves and to show proper regard for our own well-being. I defend this claim against the conjecture of "the self-other asymmetry," according to which, from the moral point of view, one's self-interest, well-being, or happiness does not matter, as opposed to the self-interest, well-being, or happiness of others, which does. Furthermore, I claim that, since our autonomy and our well-being are critically interrelated, and since our well-being is partly up to us, we have a special duty to ourselves to strive to create our own good.

CHAPTER 5: THE VALUE OF PERSONS AND THE DUTY OF WELL-BEING

The main outcome of the arguments in the previous chapter is that a successful account of duties to oneself is probably not diachronic. Having explored the view that duties to oneself arise as a result of intra-agential diachronic hypothetical relations, and having pointed to its shortcomings, I maintain that my conclusion applies to the diachronic approach in general. To reiterate, an appeal to temporal slices within a person's life falls short in two critical ways. First, either the claims of perspectives do not make sense because one cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply with the legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting, there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed; or the appeal to temporal slices is superfluous. Second, the diachronic approach cannot accommodate our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at a specific time in order to achieve an even greater benefit overall.

In view of these considerations, I pick up the thread in this chapter where I left off in chapter 3. There I have claimed that there is an insufficiently substantive account of the value of persons at the heart of Kant's argument for duties to oneself. For Kant, the value of persons consists in their rational nature conceived as the capacity to act from reason and reason alone. "Our own will," Kant writes in *Groundwork*, "provided it were to act only under the condition of being able to make universal law by means of its maxims – this ideal will which can be ours is the proper object of reverence."[182] I have claimed that our capacity to feel pain and to love, as well as our need for the sympathy and love of others, is a unique and

182. G 4: 440.

vital aspect of our nature as persons. A view that conceives of the moral importance of persons in opposition with these features of personhood is therefore inevitably lacking. At the end of chapter 3, I have expressed my agreement with Jeremy Waldron's position, according to which an account of persons' value need not rely on any single property. This is because our various capabilities are complex and partially overlapping, and together they help us define what is important about persons.

In this chapter, I propose that we have duties to ourselves based on our intrinsic value, our autonomy and our capacity for well-being. I assume that persons are intrinsically valuable and rely on the view according to which, in order to delineate what is important about persons, we should consider various complex and partially overlapping capabilities. Among others, this includes the capability to form strong emotional ties and set up and pursue meaningful goals. I start the next section with the assumption that something like this view is true. Furthermore, I rely on one of our deepest convictions, namely, that morality is essentially impartial, in order to suggest that just as we have the duty to respect others and the duty to improve the well-being of others, we also have the duty to respect ourselves and the duty to improve and realize our own well-being.

In sub-section 1.1, I introduce the challenge that stems from our ordinary moral beliefs. To be more precise, since we evaluate actions differently (or asymmetrically) depending merely on whether they affect the moral agent herself or someone else, we seem committed to the view that a fundamental moral distinction holds between oneself and others. As a result, one's self-interest, well-being, or happiness do not matter from the moral point of view, as opposed to the self-interest, well-being, or happiness of others, which do.

In section 2, I reply to the challenge from this asymmetry. I claim, firstly, that it is poorly motivated, since it conflicts with both permissible partiality and impartiality. Secondly, and more importantly, I argue that the asymmetry is best explained by an unexpressed presupposition that whenever an agent sacrifices her self-interests and well-being, she implicitly consents to this sacrifice. I thus conclude that the asymmetry is not a deep feature of morality and that it is not necessarily captured by the substantive ideal of moral

impartiality. Instead, it can be explained by appealing to the moral significance of consent. In section 3, I return to the question of the value and significance of autonomy discussed in chapter 1. I complement my argument there by suggesting that, from the first-person deliberative standpoint, the decisiveness of a person's self-regarding will depends upon it being consistent with protecting and promoting her overall well-being.

Finally, in section 5, I focus on the duty to strive to improve and to realize one's own well-being. I show that the duty of care for the well-being of others is importantly different from the duty of well-being that we owe to ourselves. This is because the nature of persons' well-being is such that it is partly up to the agent herself to realize it. I conclude that we have a duty to strive to realize and improve our well-being and that those who fail at it, fail morally.

1. Important Assumptions

It appears to us that we have reasons to respect and to show concern for one another, and arguably, for ourselves. One possible and frequently offered answer to the question of why that is so involves the fundamental assumption that persons are intrinsically valuable.[183] That is, as persons, we seem to have a normative standing that entitles us to the respect and concern of others and, as I argue, requires respect and concern from ourselves.

183. Sarah Buss argues that persons have instrumental, though not merely instrumental value. She considers both our sentience and rationality, concluding that both sets of capabilities have a *special instrumental value*. She writes: "It is reasonable to treat human being as 'ends in themselves,' […] because this is a reasonable way of acknowledging the very special way they have as means." See Sarah Buss, "The Value of Humanity," *The Journal of Philosophy* 109, no. 5/6 (June 2012): 344.

The basis for the claim that persons have intrinsic value is a question of great importance in moral and political philosophy. I cannot attempt to undertake its defense here. Instead, following my discussion of Kant's view on the value of humanity in chapter 3, I assert that there is no one set of abilities that grounds persons' intrinsic value, but rather a set of partially overlapping complex capabilities does so.[184] This is because in exercising our rationality we deploy various capabilities which are critically interrelated and which together help us define what is important about persons.

The assumption that persons have intrinsic value arguably underpins one of our most fundamental convictions about morality, namely, that it is essentially impartial. Despite the lack of consensus as to how precisely to understand the precept of moral impartiality, our intuition that morality does not discriminate upon any arbitrary or irrelevant basis runs very deep. It stands to reason that this conviction should be reflected in our correct moral judgments and principles. Furthermore, should we find that we deny someone equal moral concern on an irrelevant basis, this recognition will constitute a strong reason to revise the judgement or a principle that prescribes it.

Moral impartiality is a complex *substantive ideal* which cannot be captured merely through conceptual analysis of impartiality. This is because we have strong intuitions that it is at least sometimes wrong to engage in a purely impartial decision-making procedure, such as a coin flip. Consider the decision of choosing the charity to which one donates one's money. Many of us share the intuition that one would be wrong to flip a coin to decide. Instead, one would be right to decide to donate to the charity which consistently proves to be the most effective in pursuing their

184. Jeremy Waldron, *One Another's Equals*, ch. 3.

worthwhile goals.[185] Thus, to be impartial from the moral point of view means that sometimes we are required *not* to be impartial, but rather to be guided by the criteria that seem morally relevant for the kind of decision in question.

Upon its most general understanding, moral impartiality is based on the idea that every individual matters equally or that every individual has equal importance for moral concern. Specifically, the welfare and the will of any one person has the same importance as the welfare or the will of any other person. With respect to welfare, this means that, from the moral point of view, any addition to or subtraction from one person's welfare is as important as the same size addition to or subtraction from any other person's welfare. Similarly, with respect to the will, the valid consent or non-consent of any given person is equally as important for moral justification as the valid consent or non-consent of any other person.[186]

However, the general characterization given above is too thin to capture the substantive nature of moral impartiality. Consider a professor who is grading her students' written exam. The quality of the students' work is clearly relevant for the decision in question. However, if the professor's decision were guided solely by the consideration of her students' well-being as well as by respect for their will, she would probably end up giving everyone the highest mark. In order to avoid such an outcome in favour of a more intuitively acceptable alternative, impartial moral justification must be sensitive to the considerations which we intuitively consider to be relevant

185. For a thorough discussion of the features that are morally relevant for the decision to donate our money or time to a charity, see William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make a Difference* (London: Guardian Books, 2016), Part I.

186. Brad Hooker, "Egoism, Partiality, and Impartiality," in Roger Crisp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 711.

for the decision in question. By the same token, in applying moral principles, one's actions should be guided solely by the distinctions which the principle in question identifies as morally relevant.[187]

Along these lines, I claim that if persons are intrinsically valuable, then we have *at least* as strong reasons to respect and show concern for ourselves as the reasons we have to respect and show concern for others are. More specifically, if a person's behaviour manifests and is motivated by the belief that her interests, feelings and various concerns are *intrinsically* less important than those of others, she is failing to properly respond to her own value.[188] Moreover, if a person fails to take herself seriously by way of failing to strive for the good life, this equally constitutes a moral failure to properly respond to her value. Finally, I also claim that, due to the intimate acquaintance with our goals and projects, special vulnerability to one's autonomy, persons are sometimes required to prioritize themselves over others, even if it fails to promote overall well-being. In what follows, I defend these claims.

1.1 A Complication

187. Hooker, "Egoism, Partiality, and Impartiality," 710, 720. See also Brad Hooker, "When Is Impartiality Morally Appropriate," in Brian Feltham and John Cottingham (eds.) *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships, and the Wider World*, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-41.

188. In what follows, I shall not focus my attention on the duty of self-respect. For some very illuminating discussions on the importance of self-respect, see Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," 125-139; Collection of essays in Robin S. Dillon (ed.), *Dignity, Character and Self-Respect* (London: Routledge, 1995); Dillon, "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political," 226-249; Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," 53-83; Robin S. Dillon, "Arrogance, Self-Respect, and Personhood," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 14 (November 2007): 101-126.

Several philosophers maintain that a fundamental distinction holds between oneself and others.[189] They derive this distinction from the fact that, according to our common-sense morality, we evaluate actions differently (or asymmetrically) depending *merely* on whether they affect the moral agent or someone else. In analyzing our intuitive asymmetrical judgments, some theorists reason that morality assigns moral value to the well-being or happiness of others, while it does not assign moral value to the well-being or happiness of the moral agent herself.[190] Others assert that the fact that an action advances the self-interest of a moral agent does not constitute a moral reason for doing it, while the fact that an action advances the self-interest of someone else does.[191] Roughly put, the self-other asymmetry can be described as follows:

189. See, for example, David W. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics: The Gifford Lectures delivered in the University of Aberdeen, 1935-6 by W.D. Ross* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 72, 74, 272-9; Cf. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edition (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1981), 431ff; Michael Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), ch. 1; Douglas Portmore, "Position-Relative Consequentialism, Agent-Centered Options, and Supererogation," *Ethics* 113, no. 2 (January 2003): 307-12; Hooker, "Egoism, Partiality, and Impartiality," 719. The self-other asymmetry is usually invoked in order to show how act-utilitarianism and act-consequentialism departs from our common-sense morality. Contrary to the precepts of these doctrines, we intuitively judge that an agent is permitted to forgo pleasure, or to sacrifice something of great significance for herself, *even if* by doing so she fails to bring about the greatest good possible. See Ross, *Foundations of Ethics*, 72; Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, 10, 16-7.

190. See Michael Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, ch. 1; Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 13-6.

191. See Douglas Portmore, "Position-Relative Consequentialism, Agent-Centered Options, and Supererogation," *Ethics* 113, no. 2 (January 2003): 307-12; Douglas Portmore, *Commonsense Consequentialism: Wherein Morality Meets Rationality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 247. For Portmore, a reason in favour of φ-ing is moral if and only if it generates a moral requirement to φ in the absence of countervailing reasons (moral or non-moral). If,

The Self-Other Asymmetry: From the moral point of view, one's self-interest, well-being, or happiness do not matter, as opposed to the self-interest, well-being, or happiness of others, which do.[192]

It appears that the tenet of common-sense morality that I have labeled the self-other asymmetry (henceforth the asymmetry) is prompted by widespread moral intuitions. Furthermore, the asymmetry grounds the contention that it is one of the *fundamental* features of morality that it [i.e. morality] concerns itself with the welfare of others but never with that of the moral agent herself. The asymmetry, then, presents a challenge to my argument from moral impartiality for the possibility of duties to oneself. For if the asymmetry points at a fundamental feature of morality,

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then, the advancement of an agent's self-interest does not constitute a moral reason, then she cannot be morally required to advance her self-interest even if she has no countervailing reasons (moral or non-moral). See Portmore, "Position-Relative Consequentialism […]," 309.

192. On a less radical formulation of the self-other asymmetry, the self-interest, well-being or happiness of the agent *matters less* than that of others. However, by adopting a weaker formulation one would fail to appreciate the fact that, although sacrificing one's life in order to secure a small benefit for someone else might seem irrational and outright foolish, it is not, according to our common-sense morality, wrong for an agent to do so. For example, Slote writes: "Even if one may not cut up another person to furnish healthy organs that will save the lives of five injured or sick individuals, there is no immediate moral bar on to cutting oneself up in order to save five other people. There is no fundamental moral reason why someone should not sacrifice *himself* to save five people who need organ transplants, and the side-constraints built into ordinary morality concern only harm *done to others* in the name of good results." Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, 13 (emphasis in the original).

then a proper account of the substantive nature of moral impartiality would take it into account, just as it takes into account other relevant distinctions.

It is important to note that, in order for the asymmetry to qualify as a fundamental feature of morality, it must constitute the final court of appeal in explaining our asymmetrical moral appraisal of self-regarding and other-regarding actions.[193] If we can explain our moral intuitions without having to postulate the fundamental distinction between oneself and others, then we would not be justified in thinking that this distinction constitutes a deep feature of morality or, as a matter of fact, that there is any such distinction at all. In the following section, I explore the asymmetry and the intuitions behind it, and offer an alternative explanation for them.

2. The Asymmetry

The claim of the asymmetry rests on a number of widely-shared intuitions, mainly concerning the permissibility of self-harming and risk-taking actions, as well as about the praiseworthiness of self-sacrificing. These intuitions demonstrate that we systematically evaluate self-regarding and other-regarding actions asymmetrically. Consider four generic formulations of such asymmetrical evaluations:[194]

193. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 112-118.

194. I do not mean to suggest that these four statements exhaust the instances of the asymmetry. Whether or not they do, however, is not crucial for my purpose.

(1) while we ordinarily judge that it would be wrong to allow harm (or risk of harm) to befall someone else, we intuitively judge that it is permissible do it to oneself;

(2) while many of us judge that, other things being equal, it is wrong not to confer some benefit on someone else if you can do it easily, we also judge, intuitively, that it is permissible for an agent not to confer that benefit onto herself;

(3) whenever an agent chooses to sacrifice some benefit to herself or to go through a great deal of inconvenience for the sake of a small benefit to another person, we consider her action to be worthy of praise, provided that she was not required to benefit that person;[195]

(4) if, while benefiting someone, an agent takes the opportunity to simultaneously advance her self-interest, many of us have the intuition that it takes away from the praiseworthiness of her action.

For illustration, consider the bacteriologist Walter Fane, the hero from Somerset Maugham's novel *The Painted Veil*, who volunteered to go to the cholera-infested mainland of China to help end the epidemic. We admire Dr. Fane's action for the risk he took upon himself for the sake of the noble aim of saving lives, and when he ends up contracting the disease and dies in painful agony, this only increases our admiration towards his behaviour.

Imagine that, in his attempts to stop the epidemic of cholera, Dr. Fane was not as successful as one wished he would turned out to be. Suppose that the treatment damaged his patients' kidneys,

195. Admittedly, this intuition runs out if the gap between the harm or the loss of benefit to oneself and the benefit to another person is too big. To use an extreme example, we would not find it worthy of praise if an agent were to light herself on fire in order to cheer up her sad friend. Yet common sense seems to condemn such actions as foolish or irrational, but not as being immoral.

so that they survived but had to live on dialysis, which significantly shortened their life span. Intuitively, give or take our disagreements about negligence and recklessness, we tend to believe that this takes away from the praiseworthiness of Dr. Fane's actions. Moreover, if we consider this in conjunction with the earlier statement that Fane's death makes us admire him even more, it follows that, while the harm which accrues to the patients takes away from the praiseworthiness of the doctor's actions, the harm which accrues to the agent [i.e. to the doctor] adds to it. Imagine, furthermore, that while successfully and whole-heartedly battling the epidemic, Dr. Fane took the opportunity for conducting research with the aim of advancing his career. The thought that the agent might have been to some degree motivated by self-interest similarly makes his actions morally suspect and therefore less praiseworthy.[196]

As I stated in the previous section, some philosophers claim that these intuitions point at some deep or fundamental feature of morality. Specifically, they take them to indicate that, from the moral point of view, the welfare of the agent simply does not matter. I maintain that this derivation is mistaken. To begin with, I contend that the position is poorly motivated. The contention that the welfare on an agent has no moral significance is in tension with an important tenet of common-sense morality, according to which an agent is morally permitted, and perhaps sometimes even required to accord some degree of partiality towards her near and dear, as well as towards herself.[197] In addition, when considered together with the axiom of moral impartiality, the

196. Cf. Scanlon, *Moral Dimensions*, 151-152.

197. See Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), chs.1-3; also Simon Keller, *Partiality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Note that it is widely accepted that the partiality towards the agent's near and dear is permissible if the former seeks to allocate her private resources, such as

claim that there is an asymmetry generates the following paradox. On the one hand, it is one of our deepest convictions that from the moral point of view the welfare of any one person has the same importance as the welfare of any other person. On the other hand, the asymmetry supposedly indicates that, as opposed to the welfare of others, the agent's welfare does not matter morally. On the face of it, these two claims cannot be vindicated simultaneously. More importantly, however, I argue that we can explain our intuitions without having to postulate the asymmetry as a deep feature of morality. Rather, our intuition that self-sacrificing actions are permissible and praiseworthy rests on an implicit presupposition that, in sacrificing her welfare, an agent implicitly consents to its sacrifice.[198]

2.1. Permissible and Required Partiality

It is widely held that the degree of closeness in the existing ties between the agent and others matters so as to allow the agent to weigh the welfare of significant others out of proportion to the utility that a unit of benefit actually makes to their lives. This line of thought seems to uncover a

her money or time. It is controversial, I think, whether partiality can ever be permissible in cases where an agent is in the position to allocate non-private resources. This complexity, however, is irrelevant to my point.

198. In the first chapter, I took the position that consent has no place in intra-personal relations. I also claimed that, since the transformative power of consent is explained and justified by the value and significance of autonomy, whenever it seems pertinent to talk about intra-personal consent, we should be focusing on individual autonomy and its conditions, rather than assuming the dubious notion of intra-personal consent. In this chapter, although I use the notion of an intra-personal consent out of convenience of expression, whether it actually obtains depends entirely on whether the conditions of autonomy are satisfied.

tension between the self-other asymmetry and the moral permissibility of partiality. On the one hand, an agent is permitted to assign greater importance to the welfare of her near and dear as well as to that of her own.[199] This intuition is captured by our common-sense morality in that the strength of moral requirements seems to grow in proportion to the strength of existing ties between the moral agent and others. That is, other things being equal, the duty of beneficence is stronger and more urgent if the beneficiary is the agent's friend rather than a stranger, and even more so if the beneficiary is a family member rather than a friend. On the other hand, if we accept the self-other asymmetry, then it means that the importance of the agent's own welfare is not captured in a similar way in our moral reasoning.[200]

Consider now the contention that partiality towards our near and dear is not only morally permissible but also, at least sometimes, required.[201] Imagine a situation where an agent could either save her own child or the child of another person from drowning, but not both. Or if an agent had just one vaccine for the much needed inoculation, while her child and her neighbour's child both needed it. It still seems intuitively wrong of an agent to decide in favour of a stranger's or neighbour's child, or even just to make a decision by flipping a coin. All other things being equal, the moral agent has more reason to save her own child.

199. See, for example, Tadros, "Consent to Harm," 29. Tadros claims that, intuitively, we are not required to rescue a child at the costs of losing an arm.

200. Cf. Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, 14.

201. See, for example, Roger Crisp, "Practical Reason," in *Reasons and the Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 142-143.

Following Simon Keller, I hold that reasons of partiality are generally grounded in the value of persons.[202] The phenomenology of our experience of acting on reasons of partiality supports the view that when we act partially, we are responding to the value of those individuals who benefit from our actions, over those views on which reasons of partiality are grounded in the intrinsic value of special relationships or in the importance of our personal projects.[203] By being in a special relationship with someone, we are uniquely positioned to benefit that person in the sense that the good we can provide for that person is special. When I comfort my friend, I am not only providing her with comfort, I am providing her with the special good which is "the comfort of *her friend*." Additionally, by being her friend, I am likely to know the exact way in which she needs to be comforted. Benefiting a stranger is different in precisely this respect.[204] Reasons of partiality,

202. See Keller, *Partiality*, especially chs. 4, 5.

203. For the defense of the view that reasons of partiality are grounded in the intrinsic value of relationships, see Joseph Raz, "Liberating Duties," in *Ethics in the Public Domain: Essays in the Morality of Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18-21; Samuel Scheffler, "Relationships and Responsibilities," in, *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and responsibility in Liberal Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100-101, 121-122; Samuel Scheffler, "Projects, Relationships and Reasons," in R. Jay Wallace (ed.), *Reason and Value: Themes From the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 247-252; See Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing Relationship," *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 2003): 150-151. For the defense of the view that reasons of partiality are grounded in the importance of personal projects, see Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12-18; see also Susan Wolf, "Morality and Partiality," *Philosophical Perspectives* 6 (1992): 252.

204. See Simon Keller, *Limits of Loyalty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 6; Cf. Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, ch. 14. Raz claims that, due to the fact that our good largely consists in the successful pursuit of our goals and projects, we cannot do an awful lot to benefit them. Apart from helping others to meet their biological needs, we

Keller claims, are entertained from the imaginative standpoint of the person who is near and dear to you.[205] From the perspective of that person, the benefit which you can provide in response to the value of another person instead of providing the benefit in response to her value cannot compensate her for the loss. From the point of view of a child whose father (a university professor) could either spend time with her or help his students further improve their work, the loss of childhood mirth cannot be compensated by the gain in the quality of the student's work. The good of partiality, that is, albeit comparable, is often incommensurable.

By the same token, we can have strong reasons of partiality to benefit ourselves. The intimate acquaintance with our goals and projects and the special vulnerability that we have with regard to what we can do to ourselves support the idea that we are occasionally required to be partial towards ourselves. Think of the following situation. Emma lives far from her friends and family. Suppose that she returns to her family home for Christmas but, having an important deadline for a project she is passionate about, she has to enclose herself at home and work. She would spend time with her family, but not with her friends. It seems clear that Emma has reasons of partiality to visit and spend time with her friends. These reasons, suppose, are quite strong. They haven't seen each other for a long time, and Emma's friends long for her kind and compassionate attention. There are things happening in their life that they wish to share with their friend. It seems to me, however, that on that particular occasion, Emma has stronger reasons, reasons that generate the requirement to stay at home and finish her project.

can only either try to convince others to abandon bad projects, or provide (often limited) support for the good projects they already have.

205. Keller, *Partiality*, 142-144.

It seems, therefore, that there is a genuine tension between the self-other asymmetry and moral partiality. Furthermore, even if these two might be ultimately compatible, the tension itself urges us to cast a critical eye over the self-other asymmetry.

Finally, consider the paradox which the asymmetry and the axiom of moral impartiality together generate. On the one hand, we are convinced that morality is impartial in the sense that it regards a unit of welfare of *any* one person equally as important as the same size unit of welfare of any other person. On the other hand, the claim of the asymmetry, derived from our intuitions, is that the agent's own welfare does not matter morally. Granted, if we understand the asymmetry as revealing a *fundamental* feature of morality, then the substantive nature of the ideal of moral impartiality would incorporate it, and the paradox would not arise. In opposition to this, I claim that the very idea that there is a fundamental moral distinction between oneself and others is counterintuitive. I suggest that a more organic and, hence, superior explanation is available which spares us from having to postulate such a distinction. I have stated above that the suggested alternative consists in the conjecture that our intuitions about the permissibility and praiseworthiness of self-sacrifice stem from the implicit presupposition that in so acting, an agent implicitly consents to its sacrifice.

2.2. Response to the Asymmetry

Consider the following point. If we accept the view that the welfare of an agent does not matter from the moral point of view, it follows that the fact that a given action advances the agent's welfare does not constitute a *moral* reason for doing it. In addition, if we also accept, as many

philosophers do, that morality has a special normative significance, then it follows that, faced with a choice between sacrificing a unit of benefit to herself for the sake of the same size unit of benefit to another person, an agent is actually *required* to choose the alternative that benefits another person. In other words, in such a scenario, an agent would have a decisive reason to sacrifice the unit of benefit to herself. Not only is this strongly counterintuitive,[206] but – and most importantly – it also conflicts with the very intuitions which supposedly ground the asymmetry. For, according to these intuitions, it is *permissible* for an agent to engage in self-sacrifice for the sake of others, but *not required*.[207] As a result, by insisting on agent-sacrificing *permissions*, our common-sense morality accords ultimate significance in the moral justification of self-regarding behaviour to the agent's will.

Consider the following example. Suppose that Bob is unconscious in a hospital and is in need of a heart transplant. There is another person in the same hospital who also needs a new heart, but Bob happens to be the first on the waiting list. Suppose also that the surgery involves more risks for Bob, due to some pre-existing condition that he has, than for the other patient awaiting transplant in the same hospital. According to the radical claim of asymmetry, were Bob conscious,

206. Consider the following scenario. Two persons, Green and Brown, are trapped under a collapsed building through no fault of their own. Suppose that they can free themselves either by cutting Green's finger or by chopping off Brown's finger. Suppose further that Brown is unconscious and Green is the only one in the position to act. Intuitively, it seems that Green is permitted to chop Brown's finger off and spare her own finger. However, as opposed to Green's welfare, Brown's welfare constitutes a distinctively *moral* reason for action, and therefore it has distinctive normative significance. It then follows that Green has a decisive reason to cut his leg off. Naturally, one could object by saying that moral reasons do not have distinctive normative significance.

207. Note that the same would follow if we accepted the less radical formulation of the asymmetry, according to which the welfare of the agent matters but matters less than the welfare of others.

it would be permissible for him to forgo the operation and allow for the heart to be transplanted into another person, thereby sacrificing his life for the sake of another. As it happens, however, Bob is unconscious, and his girlfriend Saloni is his medical proxy. Saloni knows that Bob wants the surgery and would have never chosen to give up his life for that of a stranger. However, Saloni refuses to consent for the surgery because she does not want to expose him to such a great risk and the vital organ goes to another person. Intuitively it seems that, although as Bob's medical proxy, Saloni is in the position to withdraw her consent, it is morally wrong of her to do so.

This example is aimed at demonstrating the intuitive significance of the agent's will with regard to permissible harmful self-regarding acts.[208] Many people share the intuition that it would be permissible for Bob to give up the heart for the sake of a stranger. However, this seems to be the case only on the condition that this is what Bob wills. Were Bob's will permissibly substituted by the will of another person who makes the opposite choice, our intuition with regard to the permissibility of the action would reverse. In other words, even if someone else is in a position to affect Bob's life by exercising their will, if anything, their will counts less than the will of Bob in the justification of Bob-regarding behaviour. Although Bob's will is permissibly substituted by that of Saloni, and even though it would be permissible for a person to sacrifice his or her own life for that of another, it is morally wrong of Saloni to superimpose her will on that of Bob.

208. The example presupposes that refusing the transplant ultimately makes Bob worse-off. Now, if the situation was different – if Bob did not want the transplant but Saloni decided that he should have one and used her power as a proxy to proceed with the surgery – it is possible that we would judge Saloni's action as intuitively permissible. This is because there seems to be an asymmetry between harms and benefits. It might be that it is easier to justify benefiting someone without her consent than harming her with her consent. See Seana Valentine Shiffrin, "Harm and Its Moral Significance," *Legal Theory* 18, no. 3 (September 2012): 358-366.

Michael Slote argues that the asymmetry cannot be explained by the presupposition of an implicit consent, because consent (or the lack thereof) makes no difference to our intuitions. To substantiate his claim, Slote offers three different scenarios for consideration. First, *the presence of consent* makes no difference, because when others exercise their will by consenting to actions which would harm them, it is nonetheless intuitively more wrong for the agent to perform them. Slote writes: "If someone irrationally asks me to harm or kill him, it will presumably be […] wrong of me to kill him, more wrong at any rate than if I irrationally choose to kill myself […]".[209] While I agree that it would be wrong to kill someone who irrationally asks to be killed, I do not share Slote's intuition that it would be more wrong than an *equally irrational* suicide. Killing someone who irrationally wishes to be killed is wrong because consent is necessary but not sufficient for harming.[210] My intuition is that the same applies to self-inflicted harms.

Second, Slote claims that *the absence of consent* makes no difference either. Slote's intuition is that it is worse to negligently and thus unintentionally kill another person than to negligently kill oneself. Again, I must admit I am not persuaded. Perhaps we should fill out the details in order to clarify the intuitions about such case. Suppose that neither the agent nor the other person have any relatives or friends whose grief would magnify the badness of the event. Suppose also that the agent negligently forgot to switch the oven off which resulted in a gas leak. Now, whether it is the agent herself who died or another person who accidentally happened to be in the room, both are accidents with regrettable outcomes and none is worse than the other. It would appear that Slote's judgement presupposes rather than establishes the asymmetry.

209. Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, 20.

210. Seana Shiffrin argue that the asymmetry between intuitive moral significance of harm and benefit shows that harm has greater reason-requiring force. See Shiffrin, "Harm and Its Moral Significance," 361.

Finally and, according to Slote, "most persuasively," it is intuitively permissible for *A* to endure a longer period of pain in order to spare *B* a shorter one even if both *A* and *B* agree that it would be a foolish thing to do and *B* does not consent to *A*'s choosing a longer period of pain.[211] Let us consider this formulation in the following manner. To begin with, note that the fact of *B*'s consent or non-consent is irrelevant, since consent is fundamentally self-regarding. If both *A* and *B* are adults, and it is not incumbent upon them by any prior agreement, then *B* cannot consent or not consent to *A*'s behavior. Therefore, *by assumption,* the permissibility of *A*'s taking it upon herself to endure a longer period of pain in order to save *B* a shorter one depends on whether *A* consents to it. Slote states that both *A* and *B* believe that it would be "foolish" for *A* to choose a longer period of pain. So perhaps it would be *irrational* for *A* to choose a longer period of pain over a shorter one, provided that *B* consents to undergoing a longer period of pain, and provided that *A* thinks that it would be foolish for her to choose a longer period of pain. But does this mean that it cannot be consensual? Or, to put it more accurately, does this mean that *A*'s choice of something that she deems foolish cannot be autonomous?

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I have argued that the source of the transformative force of consent is to be located in the value and significance of autonomy. I have also claimed

211. Slote's exact wording is this: "If I can either avoid enduring pain to myself, or a short-lived one to you, you and I might both agree that it would be foolish of me to prevent the shorter one to you; judging the matter objectively, you might not consent to my taking the longer period of pain upon myself in order to save you from the shorter period of pain. Yet, there would be nothing morally wrong, from a common-sense standpoint, in such a sacrifice." Slote, *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism*, 21.

that the most plausible conception of autonomy is subjectivist and historical. A competent[212] agent is autonomous with regard to her values and commitments if, upon sustained critical reflection, she accepts those values and commitments as her own in light of her life's narrative. Having assented to this much, suppose that, while thinking that it would be foolish to choose a longer period of pain, *A* believes that it would be a kind thing to do. Then, it seems, she would be autonomous in so acting.

Slote further claims that intuitively it would be wrong of *A* to choose a shorter period of pain and thereby to let *B* suffer a longer one *even if B consents to it*. I am puzzled by this judgment. If *B*'s consent is valid and normatively effective, that is, if it successfully renders what would otherwise be wrong for *A* to do permissible, then I do not find it intuitive to judge that it would be wrong of *A* to choose a shorter period of pain for herself.

In view of these considerations, I contend that the asymmetry in our intuitive appraisal is best explained by the supposition that in sacrificing her welfare the agent implicitly consents to its sacrifice. If this is correct, however, then it follows that the self-other asymmetry is not a deep feature of morality, but rather something that can be explained and justified by the moral significance of consent.

3. The Authority of the Will and the First-Person Standpoint

212. An agent is competent if she is capable to critically reflect on her values and commitments as well as other motivating elements in her psychological make-up. Competence also includes the capacity to effectively form intentions and act upon them in the absence of obstacles. See Christman, *The Political of Persons*, 155.

In the previous section, I have argued that the asymmetry in our intuitions with regard to the moral status of self-regarding and other-regarding actions is best explained by the moral significance of consent. In other words, if an agent chooses for instance to sacrifice something that is of great importance for her in order to secure a small benefit to someone else, we naturally presuppose that she consents to this sacrifice. If this is correct, then the intuitive moral permissibility of this action is to be explained by the moral significance of consent and not by the idea that the agent's welfare does not matter morally. This explanation, if correct, commits us to the thesis that, so long as her behaviour does not affect anybody else, a person has absolute moral authority with regard to her life. I shall refer to this thesis as *Absolute Moral Authority of Self-Regarding Will*, or *Absolute Self-Regarding Authority*, for short.

The Absolute Moral Authority of Self-Regarding Will: In the purely self-regarding domain, a person's will is always morally decisive.

The thesis of *Absolute Self-Regarding Authority* is motivated by the liberal conviction that individuals should be free to live according to their own conceptions of the good and unburdened by the interference from others. Note that, according to this conviction, and individual's will concerning purely self-regarding actions is generally morally decisive in the agent's *other*-regarding behaviour. That is, if treating another person as a being with welfare favours φ-ing, but that person's will is bent on γ-ing which is incompatible with φ-ing, then, *other things being equal*, morality requires the agent to respect that person's choice. It would be morally wrong of the agent to φ under such conditions.

There are some notable exceptions to this principle. For example, paternalists argue that, in acting for the good of another person, we can be permitted to overrule that person's will, provided that she is deemed incompetent, either in general or with respect to the particular decision in question. A person is incompetent not only if she is severely cognitively disabled, but also if she is, for example, generally confused about the means for her goals. Arguably, however, if a person is competent, then our shared moral practice of other-regarding behavior supports the thesis of *Absolute Self-Regarding Authority*.[213]

To say that the agent's purely self-regarding will is always morally decisive *for her* means that, whenever the decision concerns her and only her, it cannot be morally wrong of her to act as she decides. As I argued in chapter 1, however, the claim about the decisiveness of a person's self-regarding will stems from the value and significance of that person's autonomy. In my answer to the claim that duties to oneself are internally incoherent, I argued that the decisiveness of a purely self-regarding will depends on that will being autonomous and consistent with the meaningfully

213. The qualification of competence is important since, if a person is ignorant of facts and thus does not know what she is choosing, or if she is incompetent to choose in virtue of, say, a cognitive disability, many of us judge that it is permissible to intervene in her actions. For example, if I know that my friend, unbeknownst to her, is about to set foot on a broken bridge, it is permissible or perhaps even required of me to stop her from doing so. Cf. John Stuart Mill, "*On Liberty" and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 96-97. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. On the other end of the spectrum, Sarah Conly, for instance, argues that, since people are generally poor choosers, it is permissible to interfere with their choice on the level of policy. It is permissible, for instance, to forbid cigarettes or remove certain unhealthy dietary options. Sarah Conly, *Against Autonomy: Justifying Coercive Paternalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). The position I am defending here allows me to be agnostic about the moral status of paternalism in cases when a person is sufficiently autonomous. For my purposes, all I claim is that we have liberty-rights, as opposed to claim-rights.

autonomous life of the individual whose will it is. My argument was roughly as follows. First, I claimed that the objection proceeds from the analogy that presumably holds between duties to oneself and duties to others. Specifically, if we can release others from duties they owe us at our discretion, then, by analogy, it follows that if we had duties to ourselves, we would be able to opt out of them. Second, I argued that to the extent that we can release others from their duties to us without having to justify our decision, the explanation of why that is so lends no support to the claim that we have a *carte blanche* with regard to the duties owed to ourselves. For when we release others from their duties to us, though this may happen in various ways, it is the normative significance of consent that underpins the transformation of the normative relation between the parties. In other words, it is valid consent that makes it impermissible for the object of a duty to further demand from its subject that the duty be fulfilled. Finally, I argued that, since the normative force of consent derives largely from the value and significance of autonomy, then if a person has a duty to herself, she could release herself from it, provided that she would be doing it autonomously and consistently with maintaining a meaningfully autonomous life.

If this argument is roughly on target, then the thesis of Absolute Self-Regarding Authority should be qualified as follows:

Moral Authority of Self-Regarding Will: In the purely self-regarding domain, a person's will is decisive if and only if the decision about an action is reached autonomously and is consistent with the maintenance of a meaningfully autonomous life.

Note that one might find the thesis of *Moral Authority of Self-Regarding Will* (*Self-Regarding Authority*, for short) implausible because it seemingly implies that, whenever a person

is non-autonomous, others do not have a decisive reason not to interfere. For example, a woman might refuse to terminate a life-threatening pregnancy *only because* her church forbids it. If as a matter of fact she does not believe in this particular tenet of religious doctrine, and provided that the normative power of consent derives from the value of autonomy, it follows that her non-consent to this medical procedure lacks normative force. The thesis of *Self-Regarding Authority* is thus highly controversial, and we should rather accept the thesis of *Absolute Self-Regarding Authority*. Now I claimed earlier that one possible way to circumvent this worry is by recognizing that, although the normative power of consent largely derives from the value and significance of autonomy, it cannot be fully explained by it. An additional justification of the authoritative force of consent consists in pointing to its role in protecting and promoting the relationship of mutual recognition and respect.

In what follows, I further defend the thesis of *Self-Regarding Authority* by arguing that, contrary to the appearances, it does not imply that others have a *prima facie* permission to interfere with the agent's self-regarding actions whenever these actions result from decisions that have not been reached autonomously or are inconsistent with leading a meaningfully autonomous life. I hold that we can accept the view that the authority of the will of a competent adult grounds a side constraint on what others can do to her without her valid consent, without thereby committing ourselves to the previously abandoned thesis of *Absolute Self-Regarding Authority*. This is because, from the first-person standpoint, the authority of the agent's will depends on its role in making her life go best. At the end of the day I argue that, from the first-person standpoint, the decisiveness of a person's will depends upon it being consistent with protecting and promoting her overall well-being.

Consider two ways in which a person's (purely self-regarding) will can feature in our deliberation.[214] First, we think that it matters whether a person wants something or not because generally a person's life goes better, at least in one way, if she gets things she wants. Simply put, people like to have it their way. We like to lead our lives as we see fit, and we often feel miserable when our freedom of choice is unjustifiably restricted. Moreover, as evidenced by the fact that our moral justification often tracks various considerations of a person's welfare, these considerations are clearly relevant for how we ought to treat people. Therefore, a person's will is morally salient because conforming to it increases that person's welfare. We have a justificatory moral reason to conform to the will of persons because it affects their welfare.

The justificatory reason to conform to a person's will that stems from its role in protecting and promoting that person's welfare is not necessarily a decisive reason. Its normative force depends on the overall balance of considerations that bear on a person's overall well-being. Consider the following scenario. Suppose that a 15-year-old Mary wishes to have her healthy left leg amputated. On the one hand, Mary's mother has a reason to allow for the amputation *because Mary wants it*. Having her desire satisfied would make her happier. On the other hand, her mother could plausibly believe that a life with one leg is worse than a life with two, provided that there is no good medical reason to amputate a healthy leg. It is safe to assume that consideration of Mary's overall well-being gives her mother a decisive reason to withhold her consent for the amputation.

Suppose, however, on an alternative version of this thought experiment, that Mary suffers from a rare disorder which causes her to perceive her leg as alien to the rest of her body, the so-called Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID). In this scenario, Mary's everyday existence is

214. Cf. Daniel Groll, "Paternalism, Respect, and the Will," *Ethics* 122, no. 4 (July 2012): 692-720.

affected negatively by this condition, so much so that at some point she even tried to self-amputate. If this were the case, Mary's mother would have a *decisive* reason to conform with Mary's will and consent to the surgery. The consideration of Mary's overall well-being can outweigh the consideration of Mary's will because the reason which the consideration of Mary's will provides her mother with is *derivative* for the reason provided by Mary's overall well-being.

Second, most of us also think that *adult, competent* persons' (purely self-regarding) acts of will matter because, as creatures who are capable of making choices, including choices that shape our lives, we have the right for self-determination. The right for self-determination is the right to govern one's life as one sees fit. In this role, a person's will grounds a legitimate demand on others that they do not interfere with that person's decisions, even if they plausibly judge that it would affect badly that person's overall well-being.[215] In other words, the will or autonomy of a competent adult person acts in this role as a side-constraint on the actions of others. Arguably, when a person's will grounds a legitimate demand, others have a *decisive* reason not to interfere with it.

Now, when we deliberate about our other-regarding actions, both of the above-mentioned ways in which a person's will can feature in our deliberation are relevant for moral justification. When we ponder about our other-regarding actions, it is not unusual for us to gauge the will of others in both of the roles described above. Suppose, for example, that I ponder about sabotaging my sister's choice of a partner because I have it on good authority that he is trouble. Suppose also that my sister has a very mild form of a disorder that somewhat challenges her competence. It is natural and appropriate for me to consider my sister's will in my deliberation insofar as I know

215. See, for example, Stephen Darwall, "The Value of Autonomy and Autonomy of the Will," *Ethics* 116, no. 2 (January 2006): 268.

that she enjoys being as independent and ordinary as her condition allows her. Alternatively, suppose that my sister is a competent adult with unimpaired cognitive functions. My decision not to interfere is (and ought to be) motivated by my appreciation of the fact that she has the ultimate authority in the choice of her romantic relationships.

However, when we deliberate about our own choices, our reasoning is settled by various considerations of our well-being. When we deliberate about which career to pursue or which avocation to take up, we deliberate whether a particular career is worthwhile or a particular avocation is a good fit for us. Granted, we do consider our autonomy in purely self-regarding decision-making. This consideration, however, is sensitive to our well-being. For example, in thinking whether to move to another country, I may give great weight to the fact that the socio-cultural environment in that particular country is conducive to and supporting of an autonomous functioning. Alternatively, burdened by the extreme amount of options and the stress of a metropolis, I may decide to move to a small city. Autonomy, insofar as it concerns the amount of available options one is compelled to consider, may be a legitimate factor in self-regarding deliberation, but it is not independent from its role in making my life go best.

In view of these considerations, it seems plausible to suppose that, from the first-person standpoint, the consideration of a person's will in its role where it serves to ground side-constraints is unavailable. From the first-person standpoint, we value autonomy only insofar as it allows us to form and pursue our conceptions of the good life. Therefore, it is implausible to claim that the thesis of *Self-Regarding Authority* implies that others have a *prima facie* permission to interfere with the agent's self-regarding actions whenever these actions result from decisions that have not been reached autonomously or are inconsistent with leading a meaningfully autonomous life. This is because, while many of us agree that the will of persons grounds side-constraints on how we

can treat them, the justificatory force of the agent's will in her self-regarding domain is sensitive to her well-being.

4. A Duty of Well-Being

Let us take stock. Firstly, it is one of our deepest convictions that morality is fundamentally impartial. This conviction, I suggested, stems from the assumption of the equal moral status of persons. Secondly, in accordance with this conviction, we should establish a presumption in favour of duties to ourselves. Thirdly, the self-other asymmetry, a perceived threat to such a presumption, is to be explained by the unexpressed presupposition that voluntary self-regarding actions are consensual. Hence the asymmetry cannot constitute a basic feature of morality and thwart the cogency of the presumption in favour of duties to oneself.

Furthermore, since the normative power of consent largely derives from the value and significance of autonomy, in theorizing about moral status of voluntary self-regarding actions, we should assign crucial role to the characteristics of autonomous functioning. In the meantime, I have argued in the previous section that it is a mistake to draw a parallel between the roles a person's will can play in the agent's deliberation concerning other-directed actions and the role it plays in the deliberation about her purely self-regarding actions. From the first-person standpoint, the moral authority of a person's self-regarding will depends upon it being consistent with protecting and promoting her overall well-being.

In what follows, I propose that what is morally required of oneself is grounded in a function of an agent's well-being and autonomy. Before I elaborate, consider the following two scenarios.

Joe:

Imagine a person who is drifting through life, a certain Joe, who is a regular employee in the company 'Fish & Chips'. Joe is a nice, ordinary man with no noticeable talents. Having graduated from university, Joe took a clerical job in 'Fish & Chips' where he has been working for the past fifteen years. Joe has no health complaints; he is perhaps a little overweight due to his sedentary life style. He meets his friends and goes out on dates from time to time. Mostly importantly, however, Joe is unhappy. He finds his job excruciatingly boring. The real intimacy of a special relationship eludes him. And he is known to complain a lot. Despite his unhappiness, Joe does nothing to improve upon his predicament. Many people in his town live similar lives. And if we ask him what he would want, he could not tell. Joe never really considered what sort of life he wants to have. Joe has been drifting through life without aspiring for anything better.

Amelia:

Consider Amelia Sedley, one of the main characters from William Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*. Amelia is an impoverished young widow whose life has been filled with reminiscence about her dead husband as well as by the care and adoration for their son. Amelia's own father lost his fortune as a result of a bad business transaction, for which reason the father of Amelia's then-fiancé refused to accept her as his daughter-in-law and ostracized his son after he had married her. After her husband's death, Amelia and her son were forced to live with her destitute parents and to support the family on the little money she has.

> The continuous and unsuccessful attempts of Amelia's father to start a new business further worsened the financial situation of the family. At the same time, Amelia's father-in-law warmed up to his grandson and suggested that the boy be given into his care, while his mother would be insured with a reasonable income for life. Amelia was appalled by the offer. She could not imagine parting with her son and giving him into the care of the man who had previously treated them so badly. However, later on, as a result of emotional blackmail from her mother, Amelia felt compelled to give the boy into the care of her rich father-in-law. Amelia was told that it is selfish of her to deprive the boy of the lifestyle and opportunities his rich grandfather could provide him.[216] Ultimately, she acceded.

I contend that Joe's passivity with respect to his own good and Amelia Sedley's selflessness are both examples of the violation of moral duties to oneself. Persons are intrinsically valuable beings whose well-being matters morally. Moreover, as autonomous agents, our well-being is partly up to us. That is, things are good for us because of the choices we make, or, more generally, because of how we conceive ourselves as autonomous agents. We embark on different career paths, adopt various avocations, or try different life styles. In short, the goodness of life for the person whose life it is depends not only, and perhaps not even primarily, on gaining things that are good for her in virtue of her nature as a member of a biological kind, but on the success in her autonomously chosen goals and projects, that is, on her nature as an autonomous agent.[217]

216. William M. Thackerey, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin Classics, 2013 (1848). Edited with an introduction and notes by John Carey.

217. Connie Rosati, "Personal Good," in *Metaethics after Moore*, eds. Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 107-131.

I follow Connie Rosati in maintaining that the 'good for' property is to be characterized by the *relation of fit* that obtains between the agent and an activity, a pursuit of sorts or an individual with whom she has a special relation.[218] That is, things are intrinsically good *for* a person only if they fit or suit that person. Activities, pursuits, people, or whatnot that fit us, are but very rarely ready-made to be so. It is a mistake to think that all one needs in order to have a good life is to *discover* things or people that are good for her. Instead, many of our pursuits and relationships become good for us through our own efforts. When starting a new project, taking up a new hobby, or entering into a relationship with another person, we take risks. It is only if it is a story of success (if the relation of fit obtains) that we can say that having this project, hobby, or relationship is good for us.[219] In short, there is an important sense in which we *make* something our good.[220]

When something is good for a person, that is, when the relation of fit obtains between an activity and an agent, there seems to be a rapport between the agent and that activity. It is not only that an agent enjoys being engaged in the activity, but also, and most importantly, the engagement in that activity supports her sense of her own value and constitutes a part of her conception of the self. The experience of things that are good for us is enlivening and self-motivating, as opposed to being enervating or depressing.[221]

If this understanding of the personal good is roughly on target, then it follows that living a good life is a special kind of a challenge. It is a challenge in virtue of the combination of several

218. Rosati, "Personal Good," 107-131.

219. The difference between Rosati's and Williams's point is that the former focuses on creating or inventing one's own good by one's efforts, while Williams is focusing on luck. See Rosati, "Personal Good," 117, fn. 27.

220. Rosati, "Personal Good," 109-111, 116-117.

221. Rosati, "Personal Good," 119-120.

factors. On the one hand, we are all born into a certain set of conditions. We cannot change the family we are born into, the social status, the country, and whether we are born into a racist, misogynistic society, or into one which is conducive to the development of the stable sense of self-respect. Nor do we have any influence on our genetic make-up, including on whether we have any natural talent or beauty. On the other hand, we are made to exercise our autonomy in a condition of severe time constraint. This constraint of time is multilayered. It does not merely amount to our lifespan but also to the fact that as we age certain options consistently close up for us.[222]

If our good is indeed to some degree up to us, then meeting this challenge does not just involve a rationally optimal choice. It also involves being courageous and taking risks, striving to gain self-knowledge and, once the choices are made, making a steady effort to work oneself into the relation of fit between the activity or a person and oneself. I thus propose that an agent who is passive with regard to her personal good, who drifts through her life without regard to its direction, fails to meet this challenge. Since a person's well-being and autonomy are so intricately interrelated, this failure consists both in failing to respond to the reason to promote one's own well-being and in failing to respect oneself as an autonomous agent.

In the scenario mentioned above, Joe's moral failure towards himself consists in such a failure. *Amelia*, on the other hand, allows herself to be emotionally blackmailed by her mother into giving her son into the care of her father-in-law. By doing so, she fails to accord her own well-being equal consideration. She fails to respect herself by thinking that her own well-being is less important than the well-being of her parents and that of her son.

222. Connie S. Rosati, "Morality, Agency and Regret," in *Moral Psychology* (Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, vol. 94), ed. Sergio Tenenbaum. (Amsterdam/New York, NY: Rodopi, 2007), 231-260.

Thus, given the nature of our well-being as persons, it is partly up to us to improve it. Others are limited in what they can do to improve our well-being. This is because the major part of what makes our lives go best for us consists in the success in the freely adopted goals and projects. We can help others to achieve their goals or try and convince them to adopt goals that are better for them or to abandon destructive goals. However, apart from this, most of what we can do to improve the well-being of others consists in attending to their biological needs.[223]

As opposed to others, we are better positioned to improve our well-being for the following two reasons. First, we have intimate acquaintance with our goals and projects as well as a special vulnerability to our own autonomy. Second, success in our projects is good for us partly but necessarily because of our leading role in their execution. Achievement is a constitutive element of our well-being. We thus have special reasons to improve our well-being that we do not have with regard to well-being of others.

Now, the well-being of an agent gives her agent-relative reasons. However, since well-being is morally significant, it also gives her and anyone else agent-neutral reasons.[224] Our ordinary moral beliefs suggest that we have a duty to improve well-being. Well-being matters and matter impartially. Therefore, we have a duty to ourselves to improve our own well-being, not only that of others.

223. See, for example, Raz, *Morality of Freedom*, 291-292.

224. Cf. Connie Rosati, "Objectivism and Relational Good," *Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation* 25, no.1 (January 2008): 325, fn. 33.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, just as we have a duty to improve the well-being of others, we also have a duty to improve our own well-being, since morality is fundamentally impartial. I defended this claim against the challenge that stems from the conjecture that, from the moral point of view, one's self-interest, well-being, or happiness do not matter, as opposed to the self-interest, well-being, or happiness of others, which do (*the self-other asymmetry*). I argued that, apart from being poorly motivated, the asymmetry rests on the unexpressed presupposition that, in sacrificing one's well-being or self-interest, the agent implicitly consents to their sacrifice. Thus, the moral permissibility of self-sacrifice is to be explained by the moral significance of consent. From this I have concluded that the self-other asymmetry is not a fundamental feature of morality, and should not be captured by the substantive ideal of moral impartiality.

I have further argued firstly, that the moral justification of self-regarding actions depends partly on whether these actions are done autonomously and whether they are consistent with the maintenance of a meaningfully autonomous life; secondly, that from the first-person standpoint, the decisiveness of a person's self-regarding will depends upon it being consistent with protecting and promoting her overall well-being.

Although I have claimed that we have standing duties to respect ourselves and to improve our well-being, I focused mainly on the duty of well-being. Given the nature of our well-being as autonomous agents, it is partly up to us to realize it. This is because in order for a project, a person, or an activity to be good for us, we need to work ourselves into a relation of fit with that project, or that activity, or that person. Importantly, when the relation of fit obtains between us and, for example, an activity, the engagement in this activity fosters our sense of self-worth and self-trust.

I have presented two scenarios – *Joe* and *Amelia* – which demonstrate some instances of failure with regard to the duty of well-being. At the end of the day, I contend that the duty of well-being requires us to strive to create our personal good, to *risk* by undertaking new activities which may become good for us, to risk entering new relationships, and to be courageous enough to change things which we find to be regrettable in our lives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this dissertation, I have developed my defense of the claim that we have moral duties to ourselves. My proposal essentially amounts to the claim that the intrinsic value of persons, autonomy and the capacity for well-being ground not only the duties to respect and to care for the well-being of others but also the duty to respect oneself, as well as the duty to improve and realize one's own well-being. This argument could in principle appeal to Kantians, but is crucially independent from a Kantian theoretical framework.

I have set out my line of argumentation in three progressive steps: (1) by providing a negative argument to the effect that the main objections against the possibility of duties to oneself fail, (2) by a detailed examination of two existing accounts that shows these accounts to be insufficient for an adequate defense of duties to oneself, and (3) by formulating my positive argument for duties to oneself on the basis of the intrinsic value of persons, autonomy and well-being.

(1) I have I offered a negative argument for duties to oneself, i.e. an argument to the effect that standard objections against the possibility of such duties fail to convince. I have examined and rejected two main objections: the objection that the notion of a duty to oneself is internally incoherent, because if one had such a duty one would be able to release oneself from it at one's discretion (chapter 1) and the objection that stems from the presupposition that morality is

essentially social, hence the notion of a duty owed to oneself is fraudulent (chapter 2). I have given due consideration to two partially successful responses to the former objection only to find that, although they make important progress in the debate, they nevertheless miss the crux of the matter. In my view, one should pay attention not to the fact that we can release ourselves from purported duties to oneself, but rather to the fact that we can do so by simply opting out of them without offering justification for doing so. Furthermore, I went on to provide a more fundamental argument which, while compatible with the existing solutions, addresses the crux of the objection. I have argued that to the extent that we can release others from their duties to us without having to justify our decision, the explanation of why that is so lends no support to the claim that we can release ourselves from duties to oneself in a similar way. The moral justification for releasing oneself from a duty to oneself derives from the value and significance the agent's autonomy.

As for the second objection, I have claimed that any characterization of morality that blocks the possibility of duties to oneself must constitute an attempt to find its defining feature. I further identified two popular ideas concerning the modern conception of morality which fit its characterization as social and which appear to rule out the possibility of duties to oneself: (i) its exclusive other-regardingness and (ii) the connection to appropriate reactive attitudes. I have shown that neither can be established as the distinctive feature of morality with a high degree of certainty, prior to substantive first-order moral inquiry. Additionally, the connection between morality and blame-constituting attitudes on its own does not warrant skepticism about duties to oneself. I have contended, first, that blame can and often is dispassionate and inner, and second, that the importance of personal growth, self-understanding, and self-trust render the expression of a third party's blame inappropriate.

(2) After concluding my negative argument, I have proceeded to examine two existing approaches to defend duties to oneself: the argument for duties to oneself in the moral theory of Immanuel Kant (chapter 3) and the argument offered by Paul Schofield that relies on Darwall's second-personal moral framework (chapter 4). I have shown that Kant's view on the value of persons, which is crucial for his argument for duties to oneself, is implausibly thin. It excludes vitally important psychological facts about our nature as persons, such as the capacity to feel pain and to love, as well as the need for the sympathy and love of others. I have suggested that, in exercising our rationality, we deploy various sets of capabilities, including the capacity to form strong emotional ties and the capacity to set and pursue meaningful goals, capacities which are critically interrelated and which together help us to define what is important about persons.

As for Schofield's view, according to which duties to oneself arise as a result of a hypothetical second-personal relation that obtains between temporally divided perspectives within a person's life, I have argued that this view is problematic in its own right. First, it faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, if the validity of a claim is at least partially sensitive to the psychological identity of a perspective from which it is addressed, then Schofield's account is vulnerable to the non-identity problem. One cannot be culpably responsible for failing to comply with legitimate expectations issued from a perspective if at the time of acting, there was no perspective to which the compliance of those expectations was owed. On the other hand, if the validity of a claim is not sensitive to the psychological identity of perspectives, and the ends and interests held at any perspective are fixed in virtue of some moral principle which is not sensitive to the identity of perspectives, then the fact of second-personal address of a claim is superfluous in explaining what duties to ourselves we have. Second, I have shown that the view cannot

accommodate our intuition that it would be rational to undertake some great burden at a specific time in order to achieve an even greater benefit overall.

(3) Finally, I have proposed that we have duties to ourselves based on our intrinsic value, our autonomy and our capacity for well-being. In formulating this account, I have assumed that persons are intrinsically valuable, and relied on the view that, in order to delineate what is important about persons, we should consider various complex and partially overlapping capabilities. These include, among others, the capability to form strong emotional ties and to set up and pursue meaningful goals. Since persons matter and matter impartially, I went on to claim that we have the duty to respect ourselves and the duty to improve and realize our own well-being just as we have the duty to respect and to improve the well-being of others.

To defend this proposal, I have examined and rejected the challenge deriving from the common-sense tenet of self-other asymmetry. I have claimed, firstly, that it is poorly motivated, since it conflicts with permissible partiality. Secondly, and more importantly, I have argued that the asymmetry is best explained by an unexpressed presupposition that whenever an agent sacrifices her self-interests and well-being, she implicitly consents to this sacrifice. From this it follows that the asymmetry is not a deep feature of morality and that it is not necessarily captured by the substantive ideal of moral impartiality.

Having accomplished this, I have complemented my previous argument concerning the value and significance of autonomy by suggesting that, from the first-person deliberative standpoint, the decisiveness of a person's self-regarding will depends upon it being consistent with the protection and promotion of her overall well-being. I have shown that the duty of care for the well-being of others is importantly different from the duty of well-being that we owe to ourselves. This is because the nature of persons' well-being is such that it is partly up to the agent herself to

realize it. I have concluded that we have a duty to strive to realize and improve our well-being and that those who fail at it, fail morally.

This, I believe, is an important result that sheds new light on what one might require of a successful moral theory aiming at a complete description of the moral domain. If my analysis holds water, it opens the door to further inquiry concerning somewhat vague but settled divide between "narrow" and "wide" morality.

ABBREVIATIONS

References to Kant's works are to the volume and page numbers from the Prussian Academy edition. I use the following translations:

LE – *Lectures on Ethics*, translated by Louis Infield. Foreword to the Torchbook edition by Lewis White Beck. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

MS – *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Introduction, translation, and notes by Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

G – *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mary Gregor with an introduction by Christine M. Korsgaard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

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