

The Ethics of Expectations

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She was folding laundry when I told her I was gay. I'll never forget the look of sadness mixed with betrayal that fell across her face. I had seen my mother cry before, but never quite like that. I had hurt her in a way that I still struggle to make sense of, and she had hurt me too in a way that I still struggle to articulate. So, I wrote this paper instead of going to therapy. Although that last sentence is meant in jest, it serves to highlight a mismatch between the central significance of parental expectations in our lives and the little philosophical analysis such expectations have received. At least with regard to my mother's beliefs, I can pinpoint where she goes wrong because we have an ethics of belief. That is, we know what belief aims at, we know the norms governing belief formation, and perhaps we even know when beliefs can wrong. Expectation, however, is trickier to get a handle on.

The first part of the paper will be devoted to getting a rough handle on the target phenomenon, i.e., the nature of expectations. To get a broad account of the attitude of expectation on the table I begin by comparing expectation to more familiar attitudes that, when taken together, encompass the multiple roles that expectations seem to play. These attitudes include belief, including credences and normative beliefs and second-order beliefs about what other people believe, desire, aspiration, and interpersonal hope. Taking such a wide view will enable us to account for not only the different things we do when we expect, but also the multiple ways what we expect can be inappropriate or wrong. That is, once we get clear on the nature of expectations, or at least, unravel its multiple threads, we can turn to the second part of this paper: the wrongs of expectations.

In the second part of this paper, I argue that given the multiple roles played by expectations there will be multiple norms governing different kinds of expectations. In turn, there will be multiple ways that expectations can not only go wrong, but also wrong. Of particular interest to me, given the opening example, are the ways that expectations can wrong the subjects of the expectations. Although not all of us know what it's like to come out to our parents, we do each know what it's like to let them down and the hurt and disappointment that follow. Worse still, some expectations can be deeply alienating and the hurt that accompanies such expectations cuts us in deeper ways. I must however warn the reader expecting a full accounting of precisely how and when expectations wrong, that such an account is not forthcoming. The sheer range of types of expectations and the different functions expectations play in our lives leaves me skeptical there is a truly general account that can be offered. My goal in the second part of this paper is thus humbler, my goal is simply to canvas the available options for capturing the wrongs of expectations and leave it to future work to see if a unifying story can be told. Any unifying account must be able to capture not only the variety of expectations, but also the variety found in ways that expectations can wrong.

1. The Nature of Expectations

As little consensus as there is with regard to the nature of belief, expectations are trickier still. Whatever it means to say that beliefs aim at the truth, most agree that something has gone right when beliefs are true and something has gone wrong when they're false. To say the same for expectations, i.e., when they go right and when they go wrong, we need to get clear on the functional role that the attitude of expectation plays. That is, what are we doing when we expect? Sometimes expectations have a functional profile that is belief-like, i.e., like a theoretical attitude, but sometimes expectations act in different ways altogether, i.e., more like practical or evaluative attitudes. To see this, let us start by considering the following expectations.

- (1) I expect that it'll rain tomorrow.
- (2) I expect the meeting will end by noon.
- (3) I expect we'll run into each other at the party.
- (4) I expect you to do the reading before class.
- (5) I expect you to succeed at everything you set your mind to.
- (6) I expect you to be on your best behavior.

On a first glance, there is something (1)-(6) have in common, they each contain a predictive element about what the world will be like. It might be tempting to suggest that the rationality of expectations is akin to the rationality of beliefs. That is, the rationality of expectations is dependent on whether you have sufficient evidence to make the prediction. For example, it'd be inappropriate to expect that it'll rain tomorrow if there's only a 5% chance of rain. It would be inappropriate to expect that the meeting will end by noon unless you have good reason to think so. If you're not going to the party it'd be odd to tell someone you expect to run into them there. So, let us start by considering this connection between expectation and belief in more detail.

1.1 Expectations as predictions

Perhaps expectations are simply future-directed beliefs, that is, expectations are our predictions about what we think will happen. If this is right, expectations would also be weaker than belief because although expectations aim at getting things right, there's an inbuilt threshold of forgiveness for getting things wrong given uncertainty about the future. For example, if the meeting runs past noon because of an unforeseen urgent agenda item or because someone was uncharacteristically late, you weren't wrong to have expected the meeting to end by noon and to have planned your day accordingly. We might then expect expectations to be more akin to a report of our credences than a report of our outright beliefs. There are, however, two reasons to doubt this initial analysis. First, expectations are not necessarily future-directed.¹ Rather, some expectations can be about the past. Second, expectations do not merely express our estimations or best guesses.² Rather, sometimes expectations express our wishes or desires for what we hope the world will be like and in performing this second function, expectations more closely resemble desires than beliefs.

¹ Thanks to Gabrielle Johnson for pushing me to say more on this point.

² For an account of thinking (and in turn, believing) in terms of guesses, see Holguín (forthcoming).

On the first point consider the following past-directed expectations:

- (7) I expect the dog didn't eat her breakfast.
- (8) I expect it rained last night.

Although these expectations are past-directed, they still seem akin to the *best guess* gloss on expectations we began with. That is, the rationality of (7) and (8) seems to depend on whether you have good evidence for what you expect to find out was the case. This can be accommodated under a prediction gloss on expectations by noting that these expectations are aiming at discovering something about the world. That is, these expectations are still predictions. Further, they involve some element of discovery, of something not yet known or anticipation of figuring something out. For example, when we think about when someone would utter (7) or (8), it is because there is something in need of explaining, e.g., that the dog keeps begging for food or that the driveway is wet. Thus, although not future-directed, the expectations are still operating like predictions. These expectations are guesses about what the world must have been like in order to explain what the world is like.

However, not all expectations are predictions. Consider the expectation that your students will do the reading before class, i.e., (4). It's felicitous to say that you expect your students to do the reading but that you believe otherwise and will be lesson planning accordingly. Similarly, you can make plans with your perpetually tardy friend and expect to see them at 9am but fully believe that they'll be late or simply not show because they slept in. That you have strong evidence on the contrary does not make it any less appropriate to have some of the expectations listed above. It does, however, sound odd to say that you expect that it will rain tomorrow but you don't believe that it will. That is, we can contrast the following:

- (9) I expect students to do the reading, but I don't believe they will.
- (10) #I expect it will rain tomorrow, but I don't believe it will.

Expectation is functioning differently in (9) than in (10). Expectation is playing a predictive role in (10) and that results in the Moore-paradoxical character of that sentence. You cannot predict that p, but also predict that not-p. The fact that (9) does not have the same Moore-paradoxical character suggests that 'expect' is playing a different role. Thus, sometimes expectation has a different functional profile than belief.

To explore this difference in functional profile I turn now to two possible explanations of why expectation behaves differently in (9). First, in §1.2 I explore whether expectations are normative beliefs, beliefs about what *should* happen. That is, students *should* do the reading, but I don't believe they will. This normative use of expect contrasts with the epistemic or predictive use of expect in (10). Alternatively, in §1.3 I explore whether expectation is better glossed as a kind of aspiration, some hope you've invested in your students. That is, I *hope* students will do the reading, but I don't believe they will. This would similarly give us a normative use of expect where expectations express proleptic reasons. Despite these different roles, in §1.4 I argue that these different roles of expectation can be brought together under a unifying account of what expectations do for us by deploying a familiar metaphor more common to discussions

of the nature of belief: expectations provide us with maps. The nature of expectations is to give different types of guidance.

1.2 Expectation as prescription

Perhaps expectations are simply normative beliefs about what we think should happen or would like to happen. That is, perhaps expectations have a direction of fit more like desires than belief.

Standardly, discussions of direction of fit begin with Anscombe's grocery shopping case and the contrast between two kinds of lists: one compiled by a shopper and one compiled by a detective following the shopper around the grocery store. The list compiled by the shopper is an expression of their desires. If what the shopper has in their cart doesn't match the list, then there's no mistake in the list but rather a mistake in the shopper's performance. However, if what is in the shopper's cart doesn't match the list compiled by the detective, then there is a mistake in the detective's list. The detective's list is subject to revision when there's a mismatch between the contents of the shopper's cart and the detective's list, whereas the shopper's list is not similarly subject to revision. The lists relate to the world in different ways, just as desire and belief relate to the world in different ways.

With this in mind, consider again the expectation that students will do the reading but believing that they won't. Is it a mistake to expect that students will do the reading but not believe that they will? No, not if the expectation is expressing a desire. Beliefs function to track the world, desires express our wishes for what we'd like the world to be like. Expectations, however, are not merely desires. As we've seen, they also contain an element of prediction which complicates the story. The expectation that students will do the reading is not the same as the expectation that you'll get milk at the store. When you expect to get milk at the store but fail to put the milk in your cart that's a failure of execution, a failure in your performance. When your students fail to do the reading, what kind of failure is that? It can't be simply that your expectation communicates your desire for students to do the reading because they have no reason to care about your desires or whether your desires eventuate. As frustrating as it is to say the following vaguery: the expectations that go beyond mere predictions seem to be doing *something more* than just adding a prescription to the picture. It is this *something more* that we need to get a handle on before we can make progress on outlining how expectations can wrong.

An account that could help us get clearer on this additional function of expectation is Cristina Bicchieri's (2016) account of expectations according to which expectations are a certain class of beliefs, beliefs about what *is* going to happen or what *should* happen. However, as I noted earlier, expectations can also be beliefs about what has happened. Nonetheless, this account can capture the two roles that we've seen expectations play: a predictive role (what has or is going to happen) and a prescriptive role (what should happen or should have happened). The expectation that your students will do the reading is a belief about what should happen not how things will in fact play out. This is why there's no contradiction, nothing Moore-paradoxical, in expecting students to do the reading but believing they won't. Furthermore, the expectation contains an implicit prescription in the form of evaluating such a future state of affairs as a good state of

affairs. That is, the students should do the reading because it would be good for them and that is why they should want to.

Further, consider the following two expectations:

- (5) I expect you to succeed at everything you set your mind to.
- (6) I expect you to be on your best behavior.

Both of these expectations involve predictive and prescriptive elements and *something more*. What it means ‘to succeed’ is normatively-laden. For example, my parents and I disagree about what’s essential to success. Similarly, we have disagreements about ‘best behavior’. These expectations go beyond mere predictions or prescriptions in that these expectations are *heavier*. We often talk metaphorically of the weight of expectations or of expectations being a burden, and that metaphor of weight shouldn’t be dismissed as mere loose talk. This way of talking about expectations directs us to look for what *more* these expectations seem to include that makes them feel so weighty.

Returning to Bicchieri (2016), perhaps what’s going on here is that these expectations are not only communicating our own predictions and prescriptions, but also beliefs about other people’s personal normative beliefs. Namely, that expectations express second-order beliefs, beliefs about what other people believe. For example, returning to Anscombe’s grocery store, if we were to try to explain the behavior of the shopper and why they move through the store as they do, queue where they do, pay what they do, etc., it would be useful to explain all of that in terms of the shopper’s beliefs and their beliefs about what other shoppers believe and what the store workers believe. Group action is a coordination problem and it’s helpful to know what an agent believes and what they believe others they’re attempting to coordinate with believe. Although this example does not feel as *weighty* as the expectations in (5) and (6), some normative social expectations might simply serve to ease and enable this kind of social coordination. Expectations help structure these interactions so they go more smoothly.³

However, not all of the cases of expectations are on the same level with respect to their weightiness. That is, some of these expectations perform a function that goes beyond the easing or enabling of social coordination. That is, some expectations also engage in the practice of *shaping* or of *influence*. Consider again my mother’s expectations of me. We can make some progress on understanding the case by analyzing it in terms of my mother’s belief “that other people believe (and will continue to believe) that certain behaviors are praiseworthy and should be carried out, while others should be avoided” (Bicchieri 2016, p. 12). When my mother told me she never wanted life to be difficult for me, she was expressing her belief that other people believe that the life I had “chosen” for myself was not a praiseworthy one, that I ought not to have chosen such a path and made life hard for myself. However, the *depth* of her disappointment can’t be captured by beliefs about what the Chatterjees, Dasguptas, or Goswamis would think or even the prescription that I should act in accordance with prevailing social or cultural norms of what’s expected of a good Indian daughter. What is missing from the

³ For another example, see Breakey’s (2022) discussion of expectations and how expectations give rise to obligations. In common with Bicchieri, for Breakey focusing on expectations as predictions helps to explain why expectations give rise to obligations, i.e., such expectations help us navigate the world by making it more predictable.

explanation of the *weightiness* of some expectations is whatever mechanism is responsible for the obligation-generating nature of such expectations.

Some expectations are not just predictive or prescriptive or second-order beliefs about what other people believe. Some expectations also express relationships of dependence and reliance. We depend on people, rely on people, and feel let down by one another when we can no longer depend or rely on those same people. I feel let down when my mother doesn't accept me in a way that's different from when other people don't. My mother's expectations—more generally, the kinds of expectations our parents, teachers, coaches, advisors, lovers, and other attachment figures have of us—expresses this kind of dependence and reliance. She was depending on me and now she can't depend on me anymore. I upended the stable conditions under which she could think of me, and in doing so, she became unmoored. However, I too was depending on her, I needed her, and in her rejection of me, I too become unmoored. To make sense of this kind of unmooring what we need to add to our account of expectations is a story about how some normative expectations play a role in *shaping* who we are.

1.3 Expectations as aspirations

To understand so-called *weighty expectations* we can start by noticing that there is a class of expectations that have an aspirational character in addition to a predictive or prescriptive character. That is, some expectations function in the same way as *proleptic reasons*. Proleptic reasons are reasons that are not yet our own but we expect will be ours in the future. For example, although your child may not currently show any interest or aptitude in mathematics it may nonetheless be appropriate to *proleptically engage* with them as though they will come to be interested in the subject. As Agnes Callard (2018, p. 43) explains, “proleptic reasons are provisional in a way that reflects the provisionality of the agent's own knowledge and development: her inchoate, anticipatory and indirect grasp of some good she is trying to know better.” As Mark Schroeder (2020, p. 11) explains, proleptic reasons are reasons that “get a little bit ahead of themselves.”

Proleptic reasons are central to the kinds of relationships we have with our parents and other guardian figures like teachers, coaches, advisors, and mentors; relationships that are characterized by *attachment*. As Monique Wonderly (2017, p. 242) explains, attachment involves:

a set of evolutionarily adaptive behaviors that serve to provide the infant with a sense of security. The attached infant attempts to remain in close proximity to her primary caregiver, treats her as a “secure base” from which to safely explore unfamiliar surroundings, seeks her out for protection as a “safe haven” when threatened or hurt, and protests separation from her—for example, via clinging, crying, and other displays of distress.

In her work, Wonderly argues that the promise of an attachment account of love is that it can make sense of central features of love that are hard to capture on other accounts. Our interest is not in accounting for love, but in accounting for weighty expectations, though the two may be intertwined. For our specific purposes here this account of

attachment can help explain how expectations function in the context of loving relationships.⁴

Consider, for example, love's *depth*. When we lose what we love "we tend to feel as though we are 'less together,' on unstable ground, no longer 'all of a piece,' and so forth" (Wonderly 2017, 243). Compare this with the feeling of being unmoored that comes when weighty expectations are dashed. Our attachment figures provide a kind of stability and security. The functional role of their expectations is to provide that kind of stability and security in our lives. As we grow into the people we become, their expectations provide a kind of *affectively charged scaffolding*, their expectations shape us just as proleptic reasons anticipate who we will become.

If that metaphor of scaffolding strikes you as familiar, that is because it is how Victoria McGeer (2008) describes interpersonal hope. Another common metaphor for hope is that of investment (see Martin 2020). These metaphors are useful for several reasons. First, we recognize the metaphor of scaffolding in the kind of structure that exceptions impose. Expectations help us grow by giving us direction. Second, we recognize the metaphor of investment in the way that some expectations involve a creation of debts and how that gives rise to the obligation-generating feature of those expectations.⁵ Often these debts are forgiven. Sometimes investments are made with no expectations attached. Other times, however, they can be held over you and when held in that way they can feel like an unwelcome burden. Think again of my mother. She had made sacrifices and invested her hopes and dreams into me. Perhaps her anger and disappointment in my coming out can be explained by my renegeing on some implicit agreement that she thought we had. Renegeing on some of the expectations that come with her investment in me.⁶

Parents, and attachment figures more generally, are well-positioned to offer this kind of expectival scaffolding and investment, and this fits neatly with the proleptic role of expectation I've been trying to illuminate. If we think of these expectations in the same vein as interpersonal hope, then we are also in a position to recognize the following point from Martin (2020, p. 230): that "when we invest hope in people, we hope to create a certain intertwining of agencies. Put suggestively, the feeling that a person has let you down marks a hit on your agency." Similarly, as Wonderly (2017, p. 244-5) notes: it is through our attachments with others that "they have the power both to help shape our agency (e.g., we function better with them; they play stabilizing, balancing, and corrective roles in our lives) and to cripple us in deep and devastating ways." Weighty expectations shape who we are. The proleptic role of such expectations explains why they can feel *intrusive* and *unwelcome*. When we think of teenage angst it is directed at

⁴ Thanks to Adrienne Martin for this pointer.

⁵ cf. Breakey's (2022, 2801) discussion of expectations as hope-casts, that is, "[a] hope-cast is like a forecast, but where its holder also hopes for the predicted event." These hope-casts can also be morally loaded, which explains why we often feel disappointment when the world (and the people in it) doesn't match these expectations. As Breakey (2022, 2802) writes, "If X hope-casts that Y will A in S, then X will think Y ought to A in S. If his hope-cast is disappointed, the violation will be arousing and upsetting."

⁶ Although not my focus here, it can be illuminating for criticism to compare my discussion with Chenyang Li's (1997) discussion of filial duties and criticisms of accounts of filial obligation that ground the obligations in either the contribution that parents make to the self, prudent investor accounts, and more generally, accounts that are based on the special relationship between parents and children. Thanks to Kenneth Silver for this pointer.

these weighty expectations, we are upset at our attachment figures for becoming *too involved*.

1.4 Expectations as maps

So, what are expectations? We've seen that expectations play several multifaceted roles. Some expectations are predictive, like belief and credence, some are prescriptive, like desire and normative beliefs, some are proleptic, like aspiration and interpersonal hope, and some particularly weighty expectations emerge from our closest relationships because of how we depend upon, rely on, and influence one another. Some of the key features we've seen in expectations is that although they often play multiple roles, generally to expect is to anticipate.⁷ Even past-directed expectations involve anticipation. To capture this central feature of expectations it is illuminating to deploy a metaphor more common to discussion of the nature of belief: the metaphor of maps.

Frank Ramsey (1990, p. 146) once remarked that beliefs subserve the function of navigation, that is, beliefs are the "maps by which we steer." Expectations too provide maps by which we steer. Expectations are maps we draw of what we expect to find, sketches of what we think will be there, outlines of who we think we'll be when we get wherever we're going. But it does not follow from this metaphor that our expectations are simply our sketchy credences. Rather, the map metaphor can accommodate all the functional roles of expectation that we've outlined thus far. Maps, after all, can have many dimensions and overlays. Maps can tell you not just where things are located, but the relationships between them, and with respect to topological overlays, the shapes of the things themselves. We draw maps not only of things that are already there, but where things have been and where they will be. The metaphor of maps, thus, seems rich enough to capture the various roles that expectations play.⁸

The map provided by our attachment figures function like a blueprint for our lives. The blueprint guides how we move through the world, it gives us a restricted but safe space in which to explore. Parents, and our attachment figures more generally, play a role in fixing a map for our lives and these maps contain implicit prescriptions about what ought to be there, what they expect to see, what other people expect to see, and their best guesses of how the map will be filled in as we use it to navigate. That map is then handed to us for us to fill in.

Understanding expectations as maps can also help us to grasp another function that expectations play. Navigating via a map is an act of trust. We trust that the map portrays

⁷ A reader here has asked whether this gloss on expectations can be right because it doesn't sound right for prescriptive expectations. For example, one could expect their students to do the reading before class while at the same time anticipating that they won't. I wonder, however, to what degree one can expect their students to do the reading *without any anticipation at all* that they will. We generally don't expect things we don't also anticipate to at least some degree. Perhaps we simply anticipate more strongly that they won't have done the reading and thus lesson planned accordingly? It strikes me as infelicitous to in some sense say that you expect students to do the reading if *every* lesson plan is premised on no students having done the reading. Some degree of anticipation must be present.

⁸ What provides this metaphor with the depth needed to capture the various roles of expectations is how maps can overlay one another and provide different dimensions and different ways of looking at the same thing. This is how, as a reader asks, we can keep consistent the idea that the maps we operate with not only reflect what is there but also what normatively should be there.

things accurately. Trust isn't mere reliance; trust is marked by dependence. As we've seen with weighty expectations, they occur within relationships marked by dependence. When you are trusted, you are being counted upon. Karen Jones (1996) goes as far as to give an account of trust in terms of expectations. As Jones (1996, pp. 5-6) argues, to trust someone is "to have the confident expectation that, when the need arises, the one trusted will be directly and favorably moved by the thought that you are counting on her." Furthermore, in a manner similar to the way in which some particularly weighty expectations can feel coercive and intrusive, Jones notes that trust can feel the same. That is, sometimes we don't welcome trust, sometimes trust can feel coercive.⁹

We trust maps, we depend upon maps, we rely on maps, we represent the world through maps, we use maps to navigate, maps impose structure on the world. Expectations function similarly. As tricky as it is to get a rough handle on expectations, thinking of expectations in terms of maps gives us something to grasp.

A further upshot of the map metaphor is that thinking of expectations as maps can also help develop *an ethics of expectations*. After all, there are lots of ways a map can be wrong or used incorrectly. For example, to understand the disagreement between me and my mother the map metaphor can explain how we might be talking past each other. In coming out, in upending her expectations of me, she might think that I was tearing up the map that she had given me. The lack of a map to understand what was happening is why she feels unmoored, lost at sea. However, there is something else that could be happening. With the map metaphor we can make a familiar distinction between parents having expectations regarding ends versus expectations about the means to those ends. My mother's end for me is to be happy and secure, and she had given me a map to ensure such a life. A map that marked out a path of all the conventional things. In rejecting those conventional things I'm not necessarily rejecting the map. Rather, I could just be showing her that there is a different path to that same goal. What she couldn't yet see was that I could still end up where she wanted me to end up, i.e., living a happy life. My path would just be different.

This now brings us to the wrongs of expectations. That is, if expectations are maps we can ask about the right and wrong ways to draw and use maps. In some cases, the norms themselves map onto the functional role that the expectation is playing. However, when expectations play multiple roles things get trickier.

2. The Wrongs of Expectations

To start, it might be tempting to simply extend the work done on the wrongs of belief to develop an account of the wrongs of expectation. However, too narrow a focus on belief will obscure just how treacherous the waters are. Instead, the route I will take here is to explore how the different functional profiles of expectations give rise to different kinds of mistakes, and in some cases, different wrongs. Before we dive in let me first note that I will not aim to give a unifying account of these wrongs here. Perhaps there is a general story to tell, but that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Sometimes expectations wrong in virtue of being false, sometimes in virtue of being morally offensive, sometimes in virtue of being alienating, sometimes in virtue of all three and more. I

⁹ See also Darwall (2017) for discussion on trust and expectation.

leave it as a project for future work on expectations to see if there is some general unifying story that can be told about how expectations wrong, the goal here is just to show that they can wrong and canvas some plausible explanations for how they might do so.

2.1 A mistaken view of the evidence

The most obvious way that expectations can fail in performing their functional role is due to ignoring the evidence or an evidential mismatch between the expectation and the world. If we think back to the predictive function of some expectations, such expectations can suffer from a purely epistemic fault. That is, just as something goes wrong with belief when beliefs are insensitive to the evidence, something goes wrong with predictive expectations when they don't match the world in the right way. Although we should expect some expectations, in particular, the expectations that function more like prescriptions or proleptic reasons, to have some resistance to counter-evidence, expectations cannot be completely untethered from the world. Expectations that are unmoored from reality wouldn't serve the function of maps at all.

2.2 A mistaken view of morality

Sometimes expectations can also involve a mistaken view of morality. That is, just as the world places constraints on what kind of expectations are appropriate or inappropriate, so too might morality. For example, Dembroff and Saint-Croix (2019) argue that although there is a general duty to recognize and respect another person's identity, such a duty can be defeated when the identity in question is a *morally malicious identity*. As Dembroff and Saint-Croix (2019, p. 590) note, "agential identities are (in part) ways of being in the world. And we think that there are better and worse ways of being in the world." The externalization of identities that can cause undue harm, they argue, should be neither encouraged, recognized, nor respected.

Here we can use the phenomenon of *doxastic wronging* to make this point more forcefully. Doxastic wronging is the thesis that we can wrong others in virtue of what we believe about them (Basu and Schroeder 2019, Basu 2019 and 2021). Extending this thought to expectations, some expectations may be wrong in virtue of being morally problematic expectations *in and of themselves*. The argument for doxastic wronging begins with the recognition that beliefs are committal mental states. Notice that the same can be said for expectations because expectations also commit you to a particular representation. Any mental attitude that is a committal mental state is capable of wronging by relating the subject to the content of that attitude and thereby contributing to a morally harmful narrative. Notice that this applies equally to expectation as much as it does to belief.

2.3 A mistaken view of guidance

To understand when proleptically functioning expectations not only go wrong but also can wrong we need to first understand why our attachment figures feel let down when those expectations are thwarted. That is, understanding why they feel let down can help to pinpoint what went wrong in holding that expectation.

When we proleptically hold expectations of others we are doing two things. First, we are giving them directions of how to live their lives. Second, we are structuring our own lives with those same expectations. The expectations we have of others are part of our own maps, maps we use to help us make sense of the world and plan for the future. The weighty expectations that were the focus of §1.3 involve our attachment figures extending their agency through us in this way and being disappointed when that extension fails.

We can see the dissolution of this failure of extension in many stories of coming out. Our parents imagine various milestones we might meet based on societal expectations of success at those various stages, e.g., prom, graduation, marriage, children, etc. Our parents build plans around us, they rely on us to successfully execute those plans. When we disrupt that, the future no longer contains what our parents desired and this naturally leads to feelings of disappointment, of feeling let down. Many parents successfully reimagine a future for their children under new expectations, that is, they can redraw their maps. Many, however, fail. This kind of failure of reimagination or reconceptualization marks an expectation that is inappropriately held.

Some expectations are also potentially alienating.¹⁰ Some expectations risk cutting at the very core of who we are and telling us that we're unworthy. When expectations take this form, they can go wrong in a manner similar to how predictive expectations go wrong: these expectations are not, nor could they ever be, *connected in the right way to who you are*. The ends provided by these expectations could never be an end under which you could act. Potentially alienating expectations function similarly. The map not only fails to fit the world, but to make it fit we would have to change something fundamental about ourselves. It especially hurts when the expectations of our loved ones take this form because we depend on them as the first people through which we understand ourselves.

To make this point about being connected in the right way more precise we can draw on Hilde Lindemann's (2016) account of holding. What our attachment figures do is they *hold us in personhood* through the beliefs and expectations they have of us. As Lindemann argues, we become persons through our interactions with other persons. There are stories that get told about us that shape who we become. Our identities are, at least in part, narrative constructions made up of these beliefs and expectations others have of us. Holding, when it is done well, "supports an individual in the creation and maintenance of a personal identity that allows her to flourish personally and in her interactions with others" (Lindemann 2016, p. x). Our parents, and attachment figures more generally, engage in this practice of shaping and enabling our agency, they set

¹⁰ I use 'alienation' here on purpose to draw an analogy to alienation as it appears in Williams (1973)'s critique of consequentialism, i.e., that consequentialism requires a kind of alienation from ourselves, that is, if we were to understand ourselves in the way consequentialism requires, we risk losing our grip on ourselves. See also Railton (1984).

ends for us before we're capable of setting those ends ourselves.¹¹ When holding goes well we can flourish, when done poorly it can be destructive.¹²

So, what are some ways in which this setting of ends, this holding, can be destructive? One way is when they involve an insidious coopting of the mechanism of holding that undermines what is morally valuable about holding. We hold others in personhood to enable them to grow. When holding is done poorly it is restrictive and inhibiting. An example of insidious holding is when we instrumentalize others.¹³ As Quill Kukla (2020, p. 15) notes, there is a pernicious idea that the role of parents is to "create a specific type of person." This way of thinking treats children as products, as objects that can be crafted and according to which our own worth and success can be measured. This way of thinking encourages morally unacceptable behavior like coercion and surveillance. Under such a picture of parenthood a good parent would take any means necessary to craft the perfect child.

When we instrumentalize instead of providing scaffolding what is provided is more akin to internal fixation, i.e., a mechanical device made of metal plates, pins, rods, wires or screws that is designed to fix broken bones and fractures. When expectation functions more like internal fixation than scaffolding the expectations aim at *correction* not *guidance*. Such expectations impose a structure on the agency of another, a structure that simply does not fit unless you break things first. We are vulnerable to a lot of narratives about our lives, but we are especially vulnerable to the narratives our parents tell about our lives.

To end on a positive note, let me say something in the direction of how to avoid these wrongs by identifying a second way such expectations wrong: by not being justifiable to their subjects. To avoid these wrongs, we can employ a familiar Kantian distinction between treating someone as a means versus treating them merely as means. We are permitted to treat others as means, but not as mere means. The key difference turns on whether the other person can share in your ends, share in your goal, whether the other person could choose your end as her end. When we deceive and when we coerce, we treat people as mere means because we act under ends they could not agree to. My suggestion is that the good weighty expectations can be distinguished from the bad along similar grounds. That is, the appropriateness of interpersonal expectations rests on whether we can justify our expectations to one another. The ends need to be such that there's the possibility that they could become coauthored. That is, we are not wronged when we find ourselves in the following position with regard to those who hold us in personhood: if we can understand ourselves the way the other person understands us without risk of losing our grip on ourselves. I can't imagine myself how my mother imagines me, and she can't imagine me the way I imagine myself.

¹¹ Compare also to Ebels-Duggan's (2018) account of the liberal dilemma of childrearing.

¹² Compare this to what we saw in §1.3 with Wonderly's account of attachment. Namely, that it is through our attachments with others that those others have the power to shape our agency. Just as Wonderly's account of attachment begins with our earliest attachments, e.g., the infant-primary caregiver relationship, in Lindemann's account of holding our parents are the first to engage in this kind of holding. As I've noted, when holding goes well, we can flourish, and when done poorly, it can be destructive. Similarly, our attachment relationships can either play stabilizing and balancing roles in our lives, or they can "cripple us in deep and devastating ways" (Wonderly 2017, p. 245).

¹³ This is of course not to say that instrumentalizing is always and in every case wrong.

3. The Ethics of Expectations

The route I took in this paper was to cash out an ethics of expectation in terms of the different functional profiles of expectations. We've seen that expectations play several roles and involve a rich constellation of attitudes. Key to expectations is that they have an anticipatory function and I cashed this function out with a familiar metaphor common to belief: the metaphor of a map. The map metaphor helped us to not only get a better grasp on the phenomenon of expectations, but also to understand the various ways that expectations can not only go wrong, but also wrong in and of themselves. That is, we now hopefully have a clearer picture of both what expectations are and how they can lead us astray, but perhaps not what unifies all these uses of 'expectation' and the wrongs they're capable of.

But perhaps that's not surprising. Given the multiple roles that expectations play, we'll eventually find ourselves facing a dilemma. That is, sometimes the norms governing expectations will conflict. In this regard we find ourselves no worse off than we are in the case of the ethics of belief. It is commonly accepted that there are at least two competing norms governing belief—believe truth! shun error!—and we can't fulfill them both. Just as we make a choice with regard to belief to either err on the side of believing even if there's a chance of error or err on the side of not believing if the risk of error is too high, it seems we must do something similar with regard to expectation. For example, compare the requirement to avoid alienating a loved one through your expectations and the requirement to not hold a loved one in a morally malicious identity. What if it is really important to the person you love that they have this morally malicious identity, i.e., that they just are a bad person? In such a case, if you expect them to be otherwise, if you expect them to be better than they are, then you risk alienating them.¹⁴ We cannot simply stop expecting things of others because of the risks involved, and the task of figuring out not only if there's a unifying story of expectations but also how to balance the risks present in expecting is the task of an ethics of expectations.

Although I hope we are now in a better position to understand the nature of and the wrongs of expectations, what I've said in this paper barely scratches the surface of what there is to be said about the ethics of expectations. For example, there are other routes available for developing an ethics of expectation. So, in this final section I wish to end by gesturing at other directions for fruitful research into the topic.

First, how would our analysis change if we started by asking not what is the functional role of expectations, but instead what if we asked when is an expectation fitting? Second, the discussion of this paper has focused on interpersonal expectations, but we expect things not only of others, but also of ourselves. Succeeding or failing at the expectations we set for ourselves is at least in one important sense *up to us* and this is different from the position we find ourselves in with regard to interpersonal expectations. Thus, it's unclear to what extent what's said here will generalize to the intrapersonal case. One might also worry about the language of wronging itself. For example, some expectations may not rise to the level of wrongs, but instead may be, in the language offered from Julia Driver (1992), *suberogatory*. That is, perhaps some

¹⁴ See Yao (2020) for more cases that are like this.

expectations may be morally offensive but not themselves wrong. That is, some expectations may be rude, impolite, and violate other interpersonal norms without rising to the level of wrongdoing.¹⁵ Relatedly, one might also question whether expectation ought to be treated as a deontic category in and of itself. As Horgan and Timmons (2022) note, the Greek ‘deon’ from which ‘deontic’ and ‘deontological’ derive, simply means “that which is binding”. And expectations, as we have seen, are certainly binding. In their discussion of gratitude, Horgan and Timmons note that in gratitude we often feel the urge to return the favor. However, in such cases, there’s no real obligation that we must do so, one cannot demand that another return a favor, but often it is something that’s nonetheless *expected*, and it can have a binding force on our will. So, in gratitude there is anticipation of a future opportunity to, in some sense, pay back the kindness that one was shown. And in that *anticipation* there is something like a *moral expectation*.

And finally, when thinking about the nature of expectations the general notion of expectations can be multifaceted in more ways than outlined in this paper. For example, Rebecca Keller (manuscript) offers an account how expectations function in perception. Keller cashes out perceptual expectations in terms of the functional role they play in our visual system whereas here I have been focused on how expectations function within our interpersonal relationships. While tangential to the kinds of expectations under consideration in this paper, any full account of the general phenomena of expectations would need to consider not only how expectations function interpersonally and intrapersonally, but also in other aspects of our lives. All of these questions, and likely more, fall under the broad topic of the ethics of expectations.

But now you might begin to wonder why am I telling you about all the things I could have told you about, but didn’t. My reason is to demonstrate just how complicated the question we set out to answer is. Expectations operate in multifaceted ways and it is not always clear if some of the ways we talk about expectation are at all similar to other ways we talk of expectations. I hope to have made some progress in untangling part of the mess, but there is still much more to do.

In closing I should return to my mother. We’re doing better now. She complimented my rice and recently added me to the extended family WhatsApp group.¹⁶

¹⁵ See also Calhoun (2016) and Martin (2019, 2021).

¹⁶ My brother has been trying to get everyone to switch to Signal, but to no avail.

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