**THE PARTICIPANT ATTITUDE AND THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RESPONSIBILITY**

David Beglin, June 2024

**Abstract:** In “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson argued that our responsibility practices reflect a distinctive and natural way we’re oriented toward other people: the participant attitude. This idea has been influential. However, it is also widely acknowledged that Strawson’s account of the participant attitude is at best incomplete. In this paper, I argue that the lacuna in Strawson’s thought corresponds to a lacuna in the wider literature on the moral psychology of responsibility. This lacuna, I hold, limits our understanding of both our responsibility practices and what it means to be responsible. I then develop a more determinate account of the participant attitude, one that, I argue, promises to fill this lacuna and provide a unifying and illuminating framework for thinking about the moral psychology of responsibility.

**Key Words:** P.F. Strawson, Participant Attitude, Responsibility, Moral Psychology, Reactive Attitudes

**1. Introduction**

 In “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson set out to correct what he saw as a mistake common to moral theorizing. When we are engaged in philosophy, especially our “cool, contemporary style,” according to Strawson, it is easy to forget “what it is actually like to be involved in inter-personal relationships, ranging from the most intimate to the most casual” (Strawson 1962, 50). To correct for this, Strawson drew his audience’s attention to the emotions and feelings that characterize our ordinary social and moral lives, the so-called “reactive attitudes,” such as resentment, indignation, hurt feelings, gratitude, and forgiveness.

Our proneness to reactive attitudes, Strawson observed, reflects something foundational about how we’re generally oriented toward each other. What other people do, what attitudes they have, typically matters to us in some distinctive way. As a default, we adopt what Strawson called a “participant attitude” toward other people. That is, we’re generally oriented toward people as, in some sense, participants with us in social and moral life, and we’re thus vulnerable to be affected by them and to react in turn. So, for example, when we see someone litter or mistreat an animal, we don’t merely take note of their behavior or devise ways to change it; we don’t just see people as “objects of policy” or “treatment” (Strawson 1962, 52). Rather, we’re prone to feel resentful or indignant, to shoot them a disapproving look, to rebuke them. We feel engaged in some way by their behavior, and we’re apt to seek or want some kind of exchange with them. Likewise, when someone helps us or offers kind words, we don’t simply note it with relief or pleasure, as we might a good weather report. Rather, we’re apt to feel gratitude, to become effusive, thanking them, singing their praises.

Strawson’s thought, then, was that our responsibility practices, and particularly the reactive attitudes at their core, are the expression of a natural way we feel connected to other people, a way we feel involved with them. And this aspect of our sociality, he argued, is crucial for understanding the shape of our social and moral lives, undergirded as they are by responsibility practices and the reactive attitudes.

Strawson’s idea has been influential. However, it is also widely acknowledged that his discussion of the participant attitude is at best incomplete.[[1]](#footnote-1) Strawson may have identified an important concept with the participant attitude, but he didn’t offer much of an account of it. He describes the participant attitude, for example, as the attitude of “involvement or participation in a human relationship,” and he leans heavily on this language throughout his discussion. But talk of “involvement” or “participation” in a “human relationship” is simply too indeterminate to illuminate the relevant phenomenon without further elaboration. We can, after all, feel involved with people in different ways and participate with them in different kinds of relationships, not all of which seem connected to what Strawson intended to capture with the participant attitude. Parents, for example, surely feel involved in a human relationship with their infant children. But at this stage in the parent-child relationship, when the child is so young, parents typically occupy something more like what Strawson would call an “objective attitude” toward their children. They relate to their children as beings to be cared for, raised, and shaped; they’re oriented toward their children in a way characterized by forms of engagement that are distinct from the forms of engagement and reactivity characteristic of the participant attitude and our responsibility practices.[[2]](#footnote-2)

To be clear, the problem isn’t that Strawson didn’t recognize a distinction between the participant attitude and other ways of feeling involved with people. The problem, rather, is that Strawson didn’t specify the precise kind of involvement that distinguishes the participant attitude as a way of relating to others. More needs to be said about how we’re oriented toward people when we have the participant attitude. In what sense do we take them to participate with us in social and moral life? In what way do their actions and attitudes matter to us when we relate to them in this way? And how does this explain the distinctive ways we’re apt to feel engaged and affected by what they do? In particular, how does it explain our proneness to reactive attitudes?

Surprisingly, there has been little sustained discussion of precisely how we should understand the participant attitude in light of the shortcomings with Strawson’s articulation of it.[[3]](#footnote-3) Theorists have tended to focus on the emotions to which it leaves us prone and not on the participant attitude itself. As I’ll argue below, however, this leaves us with an incomplete picture of our moral psychology and an impoverished understanding of an important range of our relationships and practices.

My primary goal in this paper is thus to develop a theory of the participant attitude. I consider three potential accounts. The first—the Social Effect Account—is inspired by Pamela Hieronymi’s recent work on resentment, and the second—the Open Dialogue Account—is drawn from an early paper on “Freedom and Resentment,” by Lawrence Stern. Neither of these views, I argue, ultimately work. However, drawing on their insights, I develop a third view, the Normative Interlocution Account. On this view, the participant attitude is the attitude of involvement with others as normative interlocutors. When we’re oriented toward others like this, I suggest, the evaluative outlook expressed in their actions and attitudes takes on special significance. It can call into question the values and meanings at stake between us and can thus personally challenge or affirm us.[[4]](#footnote-4) This account, I argue, provides a plausible explanation for our proneness to the reactive attitudes. It also offers an illuminating framework for thinking about the moral psychology of our responsibility practices.

**2. A Lacuna in the Wider Literature**

Before developing an account of the participant attitude, it’s worth addressing how theorists have typically developed Strawson’s project in light of its shortcomings. The typical approach that theorists have taken, I believe, while offering important insights, leaves us with an incomplete picture of our moral psychology and responsibility practices.

That Strawson’s account of the participant attitude is incomplete is widely acknowledged. Rather than address this lacuna directly, however, theorists have tended to move away from the participant attitude itself and to focus, instead, on certain reactive attitudes to which it leaves us prone. This is most notable in the attempts that theorists have made to understand the nature of our responsibility practices and what it means to be responsible. R. Jay Wallace (1994), for example, influentially argued that in light of the problems with Strawson’s discussion of the participant attitude, we should understand responsibility in terms of a narrow subset of the reactive attitudes—resentment, indignation, and guilt—and particularly in terms of how those attitudes hold people to moral obligations. Other theorists, following Gary Watson (1987), have focused on the way that certain reactive attitudes communicate moral messages or demands and on the kinds of constraints that such communication puts on those attitudes’ intelligibility.[[5]](#footnote-5) And still others have focused on the way that certain reactive attitudes protest wrongdoing or respond to good or ill will.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 I have no doubt that understanding the reactive attitudes is crucial for understanding our responsibility practices and what it means to be responsible. Still, I don’t think that these attitudes can themselves give us a complete picture of things. Emotions and feelings, after all, don’t come out of nowhere. They reflect concerns that we have, ways we’re invested in our worlds (see Helm 2001; Roberts 2003). Just as my fearing and feeling happy for you are the expression of my concern for your welfare, my resentment and gratitude toward you reflect my being concerned, in some way, with how you exercise your agency. This, I take it, is what Strawson is getting at with the notion of the participant attitude. As he points out, it isn’t simply that we aren’t prone to respond with reactive attitudes to certain individuals, such as very young children or people suffering from certain forms of mental illness. It seems, rather, that we adopt an entirely different (“objective”) way of relating to those individuals. What they do and the attitudes that they have take on a different meaning for us. Likewise, when we’re prone to resent someone, when we’re prone to respond to what they do with gratitude or indignation, there seems to be some substantive orientation underlying our proneness to respond in these ways. What that person does, what attitudes they have, carries some kind of special significance for us. A complete picture of the moral psychology of responsibility seems to require an account of this way in which other people’s agency matters to us, this concern reflected in our reactive attitudes.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Of course, many theorists have acknowledged that our reactive attitudes reflect a concern with the good or ill will, the indifference or care, shown in people’s actions and attitudes. It might thus be tempting to think that theorists have addressed the lacuna I’m emphasizing, just not in the language of the “participant attitude.” These theorists, though, have tended to focus on *what* we care about when we’re prone to respond to someone with reactive attitudes, not on the *nature* of our concern. Thus, the debate has largely centered on how to understand the notions of good and ill will and on what capacities are required for someone to be capable of showing it.[[8]](#footnote-8) But as I’ve argued elsewhere, this is insufficient for understanding our responsibility practices and what it means to be responsible (Beglin 2020). The same lacuna takes on a new form. Say, for example, that the reactive attitudes reflect a concern about how people regard each other.[[9]](#footnote-9) Even if this is right, the problem is that we can care about this in different ways. Parents might care a great deal about how their young child regards other people. Indeed, they ought to care about this. But the sense of caring here might simply be the sort that is rooted in their caregiving role. Thus, when they learn that their child hurt one of her peers at daycare, the parents might not feel resentment or indignation. They might instead feel worried; they might fear for their child or fret over whether they’re raising her well.

To be clear, this isn’t to say that responsibility can play no role in the parent-child relationship. Nor is it to say that the parental role is incompatible with the participant attitude or the reactive attitudes. The point is simply that there is conceptual space for different ways of caring about the same thing. In this respect, theorists who try to understand responsibility and our responsibility practices in terms of what we care about when we’re prone to respond to someone with reactive attitudes are missing a crucial part of the picture. They’ve yet to give us a complete understanding of the nature of this concern; they’ve yet to spell out *how* people’s regard or quality of will or agency matters to us when we’re prone to respond to them with reactive attitudes. And this, again, leaves us with an incomplete understanding of our moral psychology.

This speaks to the need for an account of the participant attitude. The foregoing issue is the same one that Strawson originally faced. We need a more determinate articulation of how we feel connected to other people, of how we take ourselves to be involved with them, when we’re prone to respond to them with reactive attitudes, when we’re prone to engage with them as responsible agents. After all, if the sorts of responses that characterize our responsibility practices are the expression of a particular way of relating to people, then understanding this way of relating to people promises to shed light on the nature and unity of those different responses. It also promises to shed light on some of the presuppositions we make about people when we’re prone to respond to them in those ways, and this is relevant for thinking about the propriety of such responses.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**3. The Social Effect Account**

How, then, do we feel involved with people when we’re prone to respond to them with reactive attitudes, when we’re prone to engage with them as responsible agents? In what way do their actions and attitudes matter to us? In recent work, Pamela Hieronymi has likewise emphasized the need to answer these questions (Hieronymi 2019, 60). And although Hieronymi doesn’t develop an explicit answer to them, her work on resentment, in particular, suggests one. Let’s begin, then, by considering this work and the extent to which it can be extended to an account of the participant attitude.[[11]](#footnote-11)

 Hieronymi’s view of resentment begins with a distinction between two senses in which we can talk of someone’s “having” moral standing. First, there is the ideal sense, the sense in which to say that one has moral standing is to say that one ought to be treated as a moral equal. And second, there is the non-ideal sense, the sense attuned to one’s actual situation. In this second sense, we can honestly say of someone who is widely disregarded, who isn’t treated as a moral equal, that they don’t have moral standing. Resentment, according to Hieronymi, is a response to the way that a past wrong threatens one’s moral standing in this second sense. Wrongdoing, in other words, in failing to treat one as a moral equal, can threaten to erode the “here-and-now reality” of one’s moral standing. And resentment, Hieronymi holds, rises to meet this threat, protesting it.[[12]](#footnote-12)

 We can generalize Hieronymi’s idea in two ways. First, although Hieronymi focuses on the notion of moral standing, we can say something similar about any value. We might think that certain things (the environment, etiquette, specific traditions, etc.) should matter; however, if those things are widely disregarded in our society or community, then there remains a sense in which we can say that they don’t matter. In this way, people can threaten not only the here-and-now reality of our moral standing, but also the here-and-now reality of what matters more generally. And this is crucial for a more capacious understanding of our blaming reactive attitudes, which arguably rise to defend values beyond our moral standing.[[13]](#footnote-13) Still, it isn’t only that people can threaten what we think should matter. They can also help secure the status of those values. This is the second way that we can generalize Hieronymi’s idea. If Hieronymi is right, then someone’s treating something as mattering helps to make it the case that it does matter, at least in the “here-and-now” sense. And this might provide the grounds for an account of positive reactive attitudes, like gratitude and approbation. It might also provide insight into the social mechanisms at work in apology and forgiveness (Hieronymi 2001).

 The foregoing ideas provide the basis for an account of the participant attitude. To have the participant attitude toward someone, on this account, is to feel involved with that person in that their actions and attitudes bear on the reality of one’s evaluative situation. This person’s actions and attitudes matter, in other words, in that they can have larger social effects, strengthening or weakening the actual status or efficacy of certain values in one’s social context. Call this the “Social Effect Account” of the participant attitude.

 The Social Effect Account is suggestive. On it, responsibility is a deeply social phenomenon. For example, Hieronymi holds that whether someone is an apt object of resentment is tied up with their position within society. Children, for instance, she suggests, have been “marked” by society. They’re excluded from certain roles; they’re taken to occupy a dependent position vis-à-vis adults. And because they’re perceived differently, according to Hieronymi, their actions and attitudes cannot have the same effects—cannot threaten in the same way—as, say, an adult with psychopathy (Hieronymi 2019, 75). This kind of view, then, departs from the predominant way of thinking about responsibility, which sees one as a fitting object of our reactive attitudes just in case one has certain agential capacities. On a view like the Social Effect Account, one’s status within our responsibility practices depends upon how one is perceived and placed within one’s community. This is what determines the kind of social effects one’s actions and attitudes can have.[[14]](#footnote-14),[[15]](#footnote-15)

 There are certain features of the Social Effect Account that, I think, are crucial for understanding the participant attitude and responsibility. In particular, I think that this conception of the participant attitude is right to emphasize the way in which our responsibility practices are embedded within ongoing relationships and communities. Likewise, I think it is right to emphasize the fact that part of what’s at stake in those practices are the very values that define those relationships and communities. I’ll return to these insights below. Still, I think that the Social Effect Account misses something important by focusing so much on the potential effects of people’s agency, rather than on their agency itself.

To begin, it’s worth asking what differentiates a natural disaster from a typical adult, whom we’re prone to resent and feel gratitude toward. Say, for example, that a disease stands to kill the people from a group that treats me as a moral equal, leaving me to exist mostly with people who despise me. This would surely make the disease a threat to the here-and-now reality of my moral standing. But the disease wouldn’t therefore be an intelligible object of my resentment or indignation. But why not? The obvious answer is that the disease isn’t an agent. Diseases don’t form evaluations or judgments. They don’t act or choose. They have no normative outlook. Agency seems essential to the way we relate to people when we relate to them as participants with us in social and moral life; it’s at the center of our proneness to reactive attitudes. But this fact is obscured by the Social Effect Account, which, we’ve seen, de-emphasizes the relevance of agential capacities, shifting focus instead towards one’s position to have certain effects on the evaluative order.

 This speaks to the larger problem with the Social Effect Account. It suggests a picture in which we care about the status or efficacy of certain values, and other people become important in virtue of the way that they can affect these things. But this doesn’t capture the direct significance of people’s agency within the context of our ordinary social and moral relationships. That is, the way of relating to people that underlies our responsibility practices, that underlies our proneness to reactive attitudes, seems to be a way of relating to people directly in their agential capacity. The Social Effect Account, by making people’s agency relevant in virtue of its potential social effects, misses this.

 We can bring this out more sharply by considering cases in which someone remains an intelligible object of resentment or indignation, despite their actions not posing a threat to the here-and-now reality of what matters. Imagine, for instance, that a racist politician gives an inflammatory speech against immigration and immigrant communities. Say, though, that the speech backfires. It causes a backlash that brings about more support for immigrants than there was originally. In this case, the social effect of the politician’s speech is to secure the status of immigrants; it is to further realize their here-and-now standing. But this wouldn’t make resentment of the politician or indignation about what he said less intelligible or apt. And this, I believe, is because such emotions aren’t ultimately about the effects of people’s actions or attitudes. They reflect, rather, a way of relating to that person directly as an agent. What matters is the politician’s comportment towards immigrants itself. And this can matter even if it doesn’t present a threat to the here-and-now reality of anyone’s standing, even if it happens to further secure that standing.

**4. The Open Dialogue Account**

In the next section, I’ll return to the Social Effect Account, building on its insights while trying to avoid its issues. First, though, it will be helpful to consider another account of the participant attitude, developed by Lawrence Stern in an early paper on “Freedom and Resentment.” Stern was perhaps the first theorist to emphasize the lacuna in Strawson’s discussion of the participant attitude, and in his paper he sets out to develop a more determinate account of this way of relating to people. Ultimately, I doubt Stern’s proposal works. Still, his approach to the issue offers a helpful way forward.

Stern attempts to refine Strawson’s account of the participant attitude by focusing on a remark that Strawson makes. Strawson suggests that if one completely gives up the participant attitude towards someone, if one’s attitude towards them is “wholly objective,” then one cannot reason or quarrel with that individual, one can at most pretend to reason or quarrel with them (Strawson 1962, 52). The suggestion, then, is that the participant attitude is tied up with our reasoning and quarreling with others, and so Stern sets out to consider what goes into these activities. He arrives at the notion of “dialogue” (Stern 1974, 74-75).

When one reasons or quarrels, Stern argues, one recognizes “a certain equality between oneself and the other”:

There is, in general, no point in reasoning unless the other person is capable of seeing reason, getting the point. If he can do that, he can also correct *me* if I am mistaken. (Stern 1974, 75)

Stern applies the idea to moral argument in particular:

Moral argument presupposes that the other person is capable of responding to the argument. He is, at least potentially, a member of the moral community with myself. He shares my principles or can come to share them. *Or else he may win me over with his.* (Stern 1974, 75; my emphasis)

Quarrelling, according to Stern, involves the same sort of openness to the other person’s perspective. “When two people quarrel,” he explains, “they trade emotion, each submitting to the impact of the other’s feelings.” This contrasts with “shooting the other down the minute he opens his mouth.” Thus, Stern concludes, “What quarreling has in common with reasoning and moral argument is that all three involve giving the other the opportunity to change us” (Stern 1974, 75).

Stern, then, offers a way to understand the participant attitude. On his picture, it is the attitude of involvement in relations that are characterized by a kind of open dialogue. To have it is to see someone as a sort of interlocutor, someone whose evaluative perspective, including the perspective expressed through their emotions and feelings, bears on—can change—one’s own outlook. Call this the “Open Dialogue Account.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

 An advantage of the Open Dialogue Account is that it captures a direct way of relating to people in their agential capacities, as reasoners and evaluators. It thus avoids the issues of the Social Effect Account. Still, I think that Sterns’ proposal needs further refinement. Stern, for example, suggests that a benefit of “dialogue” is that it “allows us to learn from the other” (Stern 1974, 80). And as we’ve seen, he characterizes having the participant attitude toward someone as being open to that person “correcting” us. The suggestion seems to be that we ascribe some degree of credence to the other person’s perspective, or that we remain open to their perspective being the right one to have. More generally, Stern emphasizes the idea that we remain open to coming to adopt the other person’s perspective, either through argument or by taking up their feelings. This kind of openness, though—giving the other person the opportunity to change our outlook—doesn’t seem like the best way to conceive of the participant attitude.

The participant attitude, after all, is supposed to explain our proneness to reactive attitudes like resentment and indignation. We’re often quite sure, though, that the people whom we resent or feel indignant toward were wrong to have the attitudes that they had or to have done what they did. In fact, responses like resentment and indignation are often strengthened by just how wrong we think the other person was. In this respect, it is doubtful that engaging with someone as a responsible agent means remaining open to their being right or to their “winning us over with their principles.”

Likewise, it isn’t clear that reasoning or quarreling must involve the kind of openness that Stern identifies. It seems that I might try to persuade my friend that she shouldn’t lie to her partner about her infidelity without being open to the possibility that lying in this situation is right. Similarly, when I was younger and quarreled with my sister about whose turn it was to wash the dishes, I certainly felt the impact of my sister’s expressed emotions, but this hardly meant I was open to there being any merit to her perspective. If anything, as we quarreled, we became more closed off to each other. We may not have shot each other down the minute we opened our mouths, but both of us waited impatiently until we could say our piece, make our own cutting remark. It mattered that my sister thought I was wrong, but not because I thought she might be right.

This isn’t to say that Stern is completely off base to characterize the participant attitude in terms of dialogue. Having the participant attitude seems to involve some kind of openness to others. I doubt, though, that the participant attitude is characterized by the kind of openness that Stern emphasizes. Stern’s proposal seems to underestimate the way in which what people think, how they see things, and what they feel can matter to us, can affect us, despite our conviction that they’re wrong.

**5. The Normative Interlocution Account**

 The problem with Stern’s approach, I think, is that he begins by focusing on a kind of theoretical reasoning, one driven by an interest in figuring out what is true or right. Our participation with others in social and moral life, though, simply isn’t best characterized in terms of this kind of reasoning. As theorists like Margaret Urban Walker and Cheshire Calhoun have pointed out, the kinds of problems that are distinctive of social and moral contexts aren’t resolved simply by determining the “truth.” The problems that characterize such contexts, rather, are ultimately about what should matter, and they are resolved by arriving at a shared understanding of how to go on together (Walker 2006a; Calhoun 2016).

To see what I mean, imagine a couple, Fabiana and Matt, who are about to wed. Fabiana wants to keep her last name; Matt wants her to take his. Fabiana, we can imagine, explains to Matt that she finds this practice antiquated and sexist: she’s not his property. And let’s say that Matt finds this compelling. He comes to believe, with Fabiana, that the name-taking practice is sexist and should be abandoned. This might be enough to settle the matter. Matt might apologize; he might admit that he was wrong to suggest that she take his name. But things might also be more complicated. Matt might explain to Fabiana, for instance, that if she keeps her name, it will mar her relationship with his traditionalist parents, and it is important to him that this doesn’t happen. He might thus continue to ask her to take his name.

The issue between Fabiana and Matt here isn’t simply theoretical. Rather, it concerns how they’ll live together, what and how certain values will figure into their relations. When Matt brings up Fabiana’s relationship with his parents, he is suggesting that this consideration should matter within the context of their relationship. And when he suggests that Fabiana should take his name because of this consideration, he is suggesting that they should weigh this consideration more heavily than the sense of independence and identity tied up with Fabiana keeping her name. Of course, Fabiana, perhaps with resentment or indignation, might reject Matt’s suggestion. If she does, though, it wouldn’t simply be because she believes Matt is wrong in some abstract sense. Her objection would concern what’s acceptable in the context of their relationship. She’d be objecting to living with Matt on those terms, in a way that devalues her independence and identity.

What would be the ideal resolution for Fabiana in this context? It would involve Matt coming to share her understanding of things. Without this, the issue would persist. We can imagine, for example, that Matt accedes to Fabiana’s wishes because he has a headache and doesn’t want to keep talking about whether she’ll take his name. Perhaps Matt waves his hands and says, “Fine. Keep your name. I can’t think about this anymore.” In this case, Matt has agreed to what Fabiana wants. But Fabiana might still find Matt’s response unsatisfying. His concession doesn’t recognize the importance of her independence and identity, and his recognition of this might itself matter to Fabiana.

Fabiana and Matt, I believe, shed important light on the relational contexts in which the participant attitude is operative. They’re contexts in which we occupy a common social space, and in which other people’s evaluative outlooks—and our agreement or disagreement with them—thus become particularly salient. They’re contexts in which sharing an understanding of how to go on together, of what should matter, gains special significance for us. The key to understanding the participant attitude, I believe, is unpacking this.[[17]](#footnote-17)

How, then, should we understand the importance of agreement and disagreement in our social and moral lives? What is the significance of sharing an understanding of what should matter? Let’s dwell a bit longer on Fabiana and Matt, before broadening our discussion.

As the Social Effect Account observed, our responsibility practices exist against the background of ongoing relationships and communities, which are dynamic and mediated. This is surely central to unpacking Fabiana’s interest in sharing an understanding with Matt. I doubt, though, that Fabiana relates to Matt primarily in terms of the effects that he can have on the reality of what matters. Rather, Fabiana is invested in living *with* Mattin a meaningful way, one that honors her values. This is why pressing a button that changes Matt’s outlook, while perhaps securing the values that she finds important, wouldn’t ultimately address Fabiana’s issue. Keeping her name in this way, through mind control, wouldn’t mean the same thing as keeping it because Matt himself comes to recognize the importance of her independence and identity. Likewise, when Matt accedes to Fabiana’s wishes simply because he’s tired of talking about it, this creates a predicament for Fabiana. If she accepts this, then keeping her name still doesn’t mean what she’d like it to mean; it still doesn’t affirm the importance of her independence and identity. This is why Matt’s mere acquiescence might be unacceptable.

This helps us get at the significance for Fabiana of sharing an understanding with Matt. Matt’s disagreement calls into question the very values and meanings at stake *between them*. Is Fabiana’s changing her name out of bounds because of the importance of her independence and identity? Will Fabiana’s keeping her name affirm this and the importance of those values? Matt’s evaluative orientation calls these things into question. It can thus challenge Fabiana in a distinctive way. To abide disagreement in this context, to go along with Matt, would be to compromise herself. It would mean living with Matt in a way that fails to honor her values, her sense of what’s important. And so Fabiana might feel called to respond, to mobilize her values in the form of further engagement, through objection or criticism. Still, such a response will only get Fabiana so far. If Matt doesn’t come around, things remain unsettled, and this might naturally be unsatisfying for Fabiana. They still haven’t arrived at a shared understanding of what and how certain things should matter.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Borrowing Stern’s language, we might say that Fabiana relates to Matt as a normative interlocutor. Through normative exchanges—reason-giving, criticism, affirmation, emotional engagement, and so on—she’s mediating with him the values that are operative within their relationship and that determine the meaning of what happens between them. It’s not, then, that Fabiana simply sees Matt as a potential cause of or threat to the realization of certain values that she prizes. Rather, what’s crucial is how Fabiana sees herself in relation to Matt. She’s part of a process of exchange and mediation with him; this is an essential part of their relationship. This is why Matt’s outlook, in calling certain values into question, can leave Fabiana feeling challenged. To fail to respond would undermine the place of those values in her relations with Matt, and she’d be party to this. As a matter of integrity, then, of living the kind of life with Matt to which she’s committed, existing in relations that stand for what she thinks should matter, Fabiana might feel called to respond. Crucially, though, demanding recognition of the relevant values isn’t merely a means of fending off a threat to them. It is a way of standing for those values in its own right.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The way of relating to people that I’m getting at here might seem to fit naturally within an intimate relationship, like Fabiana and Matt’s. Still, one might be doubtful that this view fits social and moral life more generally. Do we really relate to strangers and casual acquaintances as normative interlocutors?

I think there’s reason to think we do. As numerous theorists have observed, our responsibility practices have a dialogical character.[[20]](#footnote-20) When we blame or morally criticize, we typically communicate, or at least want to communicate, our disapproval, and we typically seek or desire some sort of uptake from the other person, an acknowledgement that they made a mistake, perhaps an apology or explanation. Likewise, we generally communicate, or feel like we should communicate, our praise, inviting the other person to value their action with us.[[21]](#footnote-21) This communicative impulse fits well with the idea that we generally relate to each other as normative interlocuters. The kind of exchanges that we seek in our responsibility practices can be understood as part of the process through which we mediate the particular values and meanings at stake between us. This, I propose, is why communication and uptake can feel so urgent.[[22]](#footnote-22)

For example, when someone cuts us off in traffic or we see someone litter, even if this person is a stranger, we often feel motivated to communicate our disapproval, to honk at them or shoot them a look. When we’re motivated to respond like this, I believe, it is because we feel challenged by the other person’s evaluative orientation. Their action implies that such behavior is appropriate and that certain things (our safety, the environment) matter less than certain other things (their time, their convenience). But it isn’t just that this person has their point of view. To simply abide this person’s behavior and what it suggests would be to tacitly endorse their evaluative orientation; it would be to undermine the place of certain values in our relations with them and, thus, in our lives. In this respect, their action challenges us by calling into question our conception of what matters and of the meaning of what they did. Given our commitments, we might thus feel called to communicate our disapproval, to assert our own evaluative scheme. We would thereby stand for certain values and interpretations, putting them to work within the context of our relations with the other person.

Still, just as Fabiana can’t completely settle things on her own, without Matt’s taking up her perspective, our communication can’t itself resolve the situation. Indeed, we often don’t get the resolution we desire with such communication. But this doesn’t mean that resolution, arriving at a shared understanding, isn’t important to us.[[23]](#footnote-23) As David Shoemaker points out, it can be deeply unsatisfying and frustrating, even infuriating, if someone like the litterer or reckless driver leaves the scene without having taken up our communication, or, worse, if they rebuff it (Shoemaker 2015, 104). And this, I propose, is because they leave the meaning of what happened importantly unsettled; they leave our conception of what happened and what should matter within the context of our relations with them called into question. We can contrast this with the feeling of satisfaction or vindication, even gratitude, that attends a show of contrition or apology from the other person.

It may seem surprising that we’d relate to other people in this way. But it is important not to underestimate how thoroughly relational human life is. Many of our most important identities mark relations that we share, often with people whom we aren’t particularly close or whom we don’t know at all. We’re neighbors, colleagues, and citizens; we’re members of churches and schools and extended families; we participate in communities organized around shared activities and backgrounds; and, perhaps most broadly, we often feel part of a moral or human community. Like Fabiana and Matt, in other words, we exist with each other, even with strangers, in ongoing forms of life, and we’re generally invested in these forms of life taking a certain shape. We have ideas about what should matter to the people with whom we share them; we have commitments and values that are tied up with our various senses of self and place. Moreover, this isn’t something abstract. Our lives play out with particular people in particular situations. And so I don’t think it should be surprising that to live in a meaningful way, one that honors our values, would depend upon our interactions with and responses to the people with whom we find ourselves, even if we don’t antecedently know them and even if our interactions with them are transient.

The thought, then, is that our social and moral lives are characterized by relations that are marked by the mediation of value and meaning. And the participant attitude, I believe, is the attitude of involvement or participation in such relations. To have it is to relate to someone as a normative interlocutor; it is to relate to them as someone with whom we mediate the values that are operative in our relations, the values that determine the meaning of what happens between us. In this respect, we can feel specially implicated by their actions and attitudes. The evaluative orientation reflected in their actions and attitudes can call into question or affirm the place of certain values in our relations with them. And when we’re committed to certain values figuring into our relations in ways that are called into question, we can thus feel alienated and personally challenged. The sense of challenge here, though, isn’t the sense that Stern had in mind. It’s not that we’re made to doubt ourselves or think the other person might be right about the values they call into question. Likewise, it isn’t, as the Social Effect Account suggests, simply that we feel the need to defend the values that are threatened. Rather, we feel challenged in that we cannot abide the other person’s evaluative orientation without compromising ourselves. We thus feel called to respond as a matter of integrity, of living up to our commitments.

**6. Normative Interlocution and the Reactive Attitudes**

We have, then, a determinate account of the participant attitude on the table. A successful account of the participant attitude, though, must also shed light on the reactive attitudes. Here, of course, I can’t exhaustively address this issue. The class of reactive attitudes is simply too expansive and intricate to completely capture in this paper. Still, I believe that the Normative Interlocution Account provides a promising framework for understanding these attitudes and our proneness to them. Let’s turn to this issue now.

 The reactive attitudes are widely recognized to be responses to the quality of people’s will. They reflect a concern about how people comport themselves as agents, about whether their actions and attitudes show regard or disregard for certain important values. As I explained above, though, the nature of the concern underlying our reactive attitudes remains largely uninvestigated. Our reactive attitudes, in other words, are responses to regard or disregard that matters to us in some distinctive way. And unpacking this distinctive way in which other people’s regard or disregard matters to us is crucial for understanding both the reactive attitudes and our proneness to them. This is where the notion of normative interlocution can do some work.

When we adopt the participant attitude toward someone, I’ve proposed, how that person regards things takes on special significance. We relate to them as a normative interlocutor, as someone with whom we mediate the values and meanings at stake between us. How they regard things can thus call into question or vindicate the place of certain values and meanings in our relations with them. And depending on our commitments, the kind of life we want to live, this might leave us feeling alienated, challenged, or affirmed. The reactive attitudes, I believe, are best understood as responses to these ways in which other people can affect us. They are ways of emotionally engaging with someone as a normative interlocutor.

This picture fits well with a prominent view of resentment and indignation. A number of theorists have suggested that these “blaming” emotions are best understood as forms of protest, standing up against the offensive evaluative outlook implicit in wrongful action (Hieronymi 2001, Talbert 2012, Smith 2013). Hieronymi, as we saw earlier, conceives of resentment as protesting the threat posed by someone’s action. The notion of normative interlocution, as I understand it, provides another way of filling in this protest picture. Resentment and indignation can be understood as meeting the challenge posed by other people’s outlooks.

Return, for example, to Fabiana and Matt. When Matt suggests that Fabiana should take his name to avoid damaging her relationship with his parents, he is suggesting that her relationship with his parents should be privileged over the sense of independence that is tied up with her keeping her last name. And Fabiana might find this offensive. She might feel indignant or resentful at the suggestion; their discussion might turn into a quarrel. On the view I’m proposing, this is because of the way Fabiana feels implicated by Matt’s outlook. His outlook calls into question her conception of what matters, and she cannot abide this. If she did, it would compromise herself and their relationship. She would fail to stand for what she thinks should be represented in her relations with Matt. Fabiana might thus feel challenged, called to respond and assert her own conception of how her independence should figure into their relations, her own conception of the meaning of keeping her last name. Fabiana’s resentment and indignation can be understood as the emotional expression of feeling challenged in this way.

We can tell a similar story about the racist politician whose speech backfires, inspiring support for the immigrant communities that he disrespects. Even if this politician’s speech is no threat to the here-and-now reality of those immigrants’ standing, it still suggests that contempt for immigrants is appropriate. And this outlook might not be something that concerned citizens feel that they can countenance. To abide such an outlook would be to fail to stand for the right things. It would be to compromise themselves and their citizen-relations. Their resentment and indignation, like Fabiana’s, can thus be understood as the emotional expression of feeling challenged in this way.

Let’s turn now to the “positive” reactive attitudes. The idea of normative interlocution can illuminate things here, too. For example, the protest view of the blaming reactive attitudes corresponds to a complementary view of forgiveness. On this view, forgiveness is the natural outcome of a process through which we together, as normative interlocutors, address the meaning of what happened, arriving at an understanding of that event that affirms the right values and no longer calls for a protest response.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The idea of normative interlocution can also make sense of praising reactive attitudes, like gratitude and approbation. Rather than being responses to the way other people can leave us feeling challenged, these reactive attitudes can be understood as responses to the distinctive way others can affirm us. Say, for instance, that someone goes out of their way to help me. This behavior suggests an outlook that values me and other people more than mere convenience or self-interest. Such an outlook might resonate with my own, affirming me and my values. I might thus feel called to assent, to express my appreciation of what the other person did, to affirm its meaning within our shared social context. Gratitude and approbation can be understood as the emotional face of these feelings of resonance and affirmation.

Finally, the Normative Interlocution Account can also plausibly shed light on how we see our own actions and attitudes and, therefore, on our proneness to emotions like guilt and shame. The participant attitude, on the view I’m proposing, is about how one sees oneself in relation to other people. It is to relate to other people as normative interlocutors with us.Crucially, though, this means we also relate to ourselves as normative interlocutors. To have the participant attitude, on my view, thus imbues one’s own actions and attitudes with the same interpersonal significance with which it imbues other people’s actions and attitudes. The values and meanings at stake in our relations exist *between* *us.* This is part of why we can feel challenged by other people’s actions and attitudes in the first place, why their evaluative outlooks can call for a response. It is a matter of integrity, a matter of what’s at stake in our relations and interactions and what we can personally countenance. A response is called for as a way to give expression to certain values that we think should be represented in our relations. A failure to respond is to compromise our relations and ourselves. And just as we might feel guilt or shame about a failure to respond to other people’s inappropriate behavior, we might feel bad about our other failures to instantiate what should matter through our actions and attitudes. These failures, too, compromise what we and our relations stand for and thus call for redress and repudiation. Our self-directed reactive attitudes can be understood as our emotional responses to this situation.

Here, I’ve had to paint in broad strokes. The picture that has emerged, though, while not exhaustive, is, I believe, nevertheless promising. On this account, the reactive attitudes are responses to the way people’s evaluative orientations (including our own) can call into question or vindicate the values and meanings at stake between us; they’re reflections of our felt need to live with each other (and ourselves) in ways that honor our evaluative commitments.

**7. Conclusion**

We have, then, an account of the participant attitude on the table. On the view that I’ve developed, the participant attitude is the attitude of involvement with others as normative interlocutors. To have this attitude toward someone is to see ourselves as living *with* that person in a substantive way, one that implicates us because it is characterized by normative exchanges through which we mediate the meanings and values at stake between us and that person. This way of relating to people, I’ve argued, lies behind a number of interrelated tendencies associated with our responsibility practices: our proneness to the reactive emotions and feelings; the urge to press people on their reasons and to try to get them to take up our perspective; and the felt need to address conflicts in our understanding of what should matter and to share ways of going on together.

My focus has been understanding the participant attitude as it pertains to the moral psychology of our responsibility practices. As I hinted at in section 2, though, an account of the participant attitude is also relevant for thinking about certain ethical issues pertaining to responsibility. Let me end, then, by briefly gesturing at two ethical issues the Normative Interlocution Account might help us think about.

First, it is often suggested that it is morally meaningful to engage with other people as responsible agents, to morally criticize them, respond to them with reactive attitudes, and so on. This is, in some sense, supposed to be a form of respect, realizing some value. The picture that I’ve proposed can shed light on this idea. On its face, relating to another person as a normative interlocutor seems to imply one kind (but only one kind) of equality: we *together* determine the meanings and values at stake between us, even if I think you’re wrong and I resent you for it. In other words, to see someone as a normative interlocutor with us is to give them space to stand for their values within the context of our relations with them. It is thus one way of respecting their agency, treating them as an individual with their own (perhaps detestable) values and commitments.[[25]](#footnote-25)

 The second ethical issue concerns responsibility. On the view that I’ve proposed, our responsibility practices, and particularly the reactive attitudes at their core, are understood as expressions of our relating to other people as normative interlocutors. This, I’ve held, helps illuminate the responses that characterize our responsibility practices. It also, though, provides a framework for thinking about when these responses are appropriate (see Beglin 2020).[[26]](#footnote-26) If our proneness to respond to people in these ways is a reflection of our relating to them as normative interlocutors, then it is inappropriate to be prone to respond to someone in these ways if it is inappropriate to relate to that person as a normative interlocutor. Thus, we can ask: what kind of considerations bear on the propriety of relating to someone as a normative interlocutor? Minimally, relating to someone as a normative interlocutor seems to presuppose that they’re capable of reasoning and valuing things. Less minimally, it might also presuppose that they’re capable of reasoning *with us* and perhaps of having a stable evaluative outlook, one that reflects a degree of evaluative self-scrutiny.[[27]](#footnote-27)

 Of course, working out a view of the ethical implications of the Normative Interlocution Account is a task for another day. But I hope that what I’m gesturing at reinforces two points. First, I hope it reinforces the importance of having an account of the participant attitude in the first place. And second, more ambitiously, I hope it reinforces the promise of the Normative Interlocution Account in particular.[[28]](#footnote-28)

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1. See Stern 1974; Bennett 1980; Watson 1987; and Wallace 1994, 2014. Here, I draw on Bennett’s formulation of the worry (see Bennett 1980, 34-36). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I don’t mean to suggest that the participant attitude does not factor into the parent-child relationship, even very early on. There are big differences, however, between a parental relationship with a three-month old, a three-year old, a sixteen-year old, and a thirty-year old. That the relationship changes, that it gradually becomes less about caring for and shaping the child and begins to resemble a “typical” reciprocal, adult relationship is enough to make the point. It is worth adding that this paper will not dwell on the complicated ways in which the participant attitude can co-exist with the objective attitude, on the layered nature of many relationships, such as our relationship with children. While a complete account of the moral psychology of responsibility would include an account of these complications, this paper aims to take a first step, unpacking the participant attitude in more paradigmatic contexts. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Many theorists have had insightful things to say about the participant attitude. See, e.g., Wolf 1981; Darwall 2006; Macnamara 2011; Shabo 2012a, 2012b; Watson 2014; Tognazzini 2015; Coates 2018; and Hutchinson 2018. My point, then, isn’t that theorists have ignored the participant attitude wholesale, nor is it to suggest that theorists haven’t had important things to say about it. My point is only that there is a lack of systematic accounts of just what it is, particularly in light of the ways in which Strawson’s account of the attitude fails. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I previously gestured at this idea in Beglin 2020 and 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, e.g., Watson 2011; Darwall 2006; Shoemaker 2007; Macnamara 2015a, 2015b. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For protest views, see Hieronymi 2001, Talbert 2012, Smith 2013; for views that focus on the reactive attitudes as responses to good or ill will, see, e.g., Scanlon 2008; McKenna 2012; and Shoemaker 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The ideas in this paragraph grow out of Beglin 2018, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, e.g., Scanlon 1998, 2008; Smith 2005, 2012; Shoemaker 2011, 2015; McKenna 2012; Talbert 2012; and Nelkin 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This seems to be Strawson’s view (Strawson 1962, 48-50; Watson 2014). See also McKenna 2012 and Shoemaker 2015, Ch. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For a more detailed articulation of these points, see Beglin 2018 and, especially, Beglin 2020. In this work, I emphasize the importance of accounting for the “basic concern” that gives rise to the reactive attitudes. Here, I’m interested in the participant attitude. I take these notions to be, if not identical, at least deeply—inseparably—connected. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. To be clear, my goal here isn’t interpretive. I’m unsure Hieronymi would ultimately endorse the account I elaborate. I simply mean to draw on some of Hieronymi’s ideas to proffer one way of thinking about the participant attitude, one that has prima facie plausibility, connects to certain threads in the literature, and is useful to consider. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Hieronymi 2001, 2019, and 2020. Hieronymi develops the distinction between the ideal and non-ideal senses in which one can have moral standing in Hieronymi 2020, 91, and she explicitly uses it to clarify her (2001) account of resentment in Hieronymi 2020, footnote 31. Other theorists also emphasize the way resentment protests wrongdoing, but not all adopt the notion of threat at work in Hieronymi’s view (Talbert 2012; Smith 2013). For theorists with views that are similar to Hieronymi’s, or at least have elements that are similar, see Murphy and Hampton 1988, Walker 2006b, and Helm 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Jean Hampton on indignation (Murphy and Hampton 1988, 58-60). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. It’s worth noting that Hieronymi’s views on the relevance of agential capacities are complicated. In other work, for example, she ties responsibility to relations of mutual regard and argues that to be responsible requires having the capacities needed to stand in such relations, including the capacity to recognize other people as rightly making claims on one and the capacity to reflect upon the aptness of standards of regard (Hieronymi 2014, 39-40). I’m uncertain how this aspect of Hieronymi’s picture interacts with the aspect under discussion in this section. The two can come apart, though. For instance, Gary Watson (2011, 2013) has argued that many adults with psychopathy lack the agential capacities that Hieronymi cites; however, this doesn’t seem to bear on Hieronymi’s point about the way adults with psychopathy are positioned within our society. (One might wonder whether the participant attitude should be conceptualized as the attitude of involvement in relations of mutual regard. I have doubts. Bigots of all stripes have been prone to respond to the people they’re bigoted against with reactive attitudes, despite, even because, they don’t see the other person as being entitled to make claims on them.) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For a similar, non-capacitarian account of responsibility, which focuses on people’s position to affect the status of the norms that constitute our communities, see Helm 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A similar idea appears to underpin Jean Hampton’s account of resentment (see Hampton and Murphy 1988, 57). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This isn’t to suggest that sharing such an understanding is all that matters (or all that should matter) in social and moral life. Sometimes securing certain outcomes is important enough that we become less concerned about how we secure those outcomes. This is common in political life. Perhaps out of fear or expediency, it might seem less important to us that people share our understanding of what should matter than that they simply behave in certain ways or agree to certain outcomes, regardless of the reason. But this observation doesn’t undermine my larger point. The situations in which we come to singularly care about securing certain outcomes, at the expense of arriving at a shared understanding with the other person, are precisely the situations in which we’re most tempted to abandon reasoning and persuasion. These are the situations in which we’re inclined to negotiate and barter, as opposed to reason; they’re the situations in which we’re more likely to resort to manipulation or force, to see the other person more like an obstacle. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I don’t mean to suggest that we can’t live with disagreement. It’s possible to come to terms with or accept disagreement. When this is done in a healthy way, I suspect it represents a higher-order shared understanding with the other person. However, we can also live with disagreement in ways that are more fraught. We sometimes simply live with nagging quarrels and resentments. The important point for my purposes is only that sharing an understanding matters. This doesn’t mean we always arrived at such an understanding or that arriving at one is all that matters. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Here, in invoking the idea of integrity, I’m inspired by Calhoun 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See, e.g., Watson 1987; Darwall 2006; Walker 2006; Shoemaker 2007, 2015; Smith 2013; McKenna 2012; McGeer 2012; Macnamara 2015a; Fricker 2016; Telech 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For discussion of praise’s communicative nature, see Shoemaker 2015, Macnamara 2015a, and especially Telech 2021, whose account I draw on here. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. An alternative interpretation of our communicative impulse is that we’re interested in regulating other people’s behavior, seeking to affect the other person’s outlook so that they won’t disregard things in the same way again. I doubt, though, that this captures our motivations. For instance, we could again imagine that we have a button that will change other people’s minds, making their outlook align with ours. I doubt that pushing this button would be satisfying, at least in the same way as someone’s responding to our complaint with a recognition that they were wrong. Like Fabiana, we’re interested in living *with* other people, not merely parallel to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Something similar can be said about the desire to communicate in the first place. We often aren’t in a position to communicate disapproval, and this can be frustrating, infuriating, and humiliating. This, too, is a mark of the relevance of normative interlocution. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Hieronymi 2001 for an important articulation of how the protest conception of blame makes sense of forgiveness. And see Beglin 2021 for a discussion of forgiveness that connects it to the idea of normative interlocution. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. I explore this idea in more detail in Beglin 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In this paragraph, and throughout the paper, I have focused on the participant attitude and our responsibility practices in the context of ordinary interpersonal relationships. Notably, though, there is also a potential connection between the normative interlocution account of the participant attitude and certain theories of criminal responsibility and punishment. Joel Feinberg (1965), for instance, famously suggested that punishment can be thought of as an expressive act; and that retributivism can be unpacked in terms of this expressive function. The normative interlocution account of the participant attitude provides an explanation for our desire to communicate our resentment or condemnation of a person’s action, tying this desire to a felt need to stand for and against certain evaluations implicit in wrongdoing, to address the social meaning of the wrongdoing. There is thus an important connection between the idea of normative interlocution and contemporary discussions of Feinberg’s original idea (see, e.g., McKenna 2021 and Fischer 2023). On the other hand, it is worth noting that the relationship between moral and criminal responsibility is complicated (see, e.g., Watson 2024 for a helpful discussion in the context of analyzing the responsibility of people with psychopathy). Still, all of this points to the potential of the normative interlocution account to contribute to this literature. Thanks to John Martin Fischer for suggesting that I explore this connection. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Gary Watson (2013) suggests that a lack of evaluative self-scrutiny—“a controlling sense of the importance of how one’s life goes”—is at the heart of psychopathy. On the other hand, Watson (2024) also suggests that people with psychopathy might be capable of serving as respondents in social life, even if they are amoral. In these respects, it is unclear whether people with psychopathy should be viewed as responsible agents if we accept the Normative Interlocution Account. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This paper grew out of a chapter of my dissertation and was first developed around 2015. Since that time, it has undergone a number of transformations. I thus have many people to thank. I’d like to begin my acknowledgements, though, by thanking John Martin Fischer. John has read every iteration of this paper, and it has benefited from his feedback at each step. But more significantly, this paper—and my philosophical work in general—has benefited greatly from John’s spirit: from his humanity, his precision and attention to detail, and his honesty and humility in the face of philosophy’s difficult questions. While this paper may not succeed on all of these fronts, I hope it nevertheless honors the example John has set throughout his career and throughout our friendship. In addition to John, special thanks are owed to Agnieszka Jaworska, Coleen Macnamara, and Monique Wonderly, who offered many long and helpful conversations regarding the issues in this paper. I have also benefited greatly from feedback from Zac Bachman, Justin Coates, Taylor Cyr, Pamela Hieronymi, Andrew Law, Meredith McFadden, Jonah Nagashima, Dana Nelkin, Garrett Pendergraft, Andrews Reath, Seana Shiffrin, Dan Speak, Philip Swenson, Neal Tognazzini and to the participants in UCLA’s Ethics Writing Workshop and Legal Theory Workshop. Finally, thanks to Yuval Avnur for the honor of participating in this special issue of Midwest Studies in Philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)