Responsibility: Expected, Taken, Recognized

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1. Calhoun on Responsible Persons

Plausibly, to be responsible is to satisfy all general preconditions for being fittingly held responsible. Philosophers of responsibility have thus paid avid attention to the nature and preconditions of the most conspicuous practices of holding one another responsible: of blame for violations of moral expectations.

In her Descartes Lectures, Cheshire Calhoun asks us to widen our gaze.[1] To understand responsibility, we should also take into account our basic trust that others will fulfil at least the most basic normative expectations, and our predictive expectation that people will do good things that they are not required to do. Likewise, we should take into account our positive reactions of appreciation and gratitude towards those who do, reactions that Calhoun takes to be importantly different from negative reactive attitudes. And we should take into account our negative reactions to *not* being held accountable, expected to do the right thing, or asked to contribute what isn't normatively expected of us.

Together, Calhoun argues, these practices, reactions, and attitudes reveal that we operate with a default assumption that people are *responsible persons*. A responsible person, on her proposal, is someone who is (i) *accountable*—able to live up to normative expectations[2]—(ii) *compliance responsible*—

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[1]   Others have similarly argued for a more diverse diet of examples. See in particular Shoemaker forthcoming.

[2]   The ability need not be the ability to directly grasp or live up to normative expectations: sometimes we need assistance from the surrounding community, in line with Victoria McGeer's (2019) "scaffolding account" of the reactive attitudes and corresponding account of responsibility.

in fact living up to basic normative expectations, making them also predictive expectations[3]—and (iii) a *responsibility taker*—at least sometimes disposed to take the initiative to do good things that are not normatively expectable. Furthermore, being a responsible person is understood as valuable, as is being recognized as one.

Considering a wider range of related phenomena is often revealing, not only because the new phenomena are themselves interesting, but also because they make us see old phenomena with fresh eyes. In this case, the widened gaze helps us to think of responsibility and our responsibility practices in finer detail. It is in that spirit that I consider Calhoun's positive account, asking further questions about the notion of a responsible person. Specifically, I will ask whether she is right that we operate with the default assumption that people are responsibility takers in her sense. Contrary to Calhoun's proposal, I will suggest that, once we take into account the full range of standard normative expectations, it is doubtful that our predictive default expectations of what we naturally describe as responsibility taking outstrips what is normatively expected. In addition, I propose a way of nevertheless making good on Calhoun's suggestion that accountability, compliance responsibility, and contributions to the common good that merit gratitude are all aspects of responsibility. Finally, I suggest that what positive reactive attitudes reveal about their targets is not that they are responsibility takers, but that they are weight-givers subject to "balancing norms," which call on us to care about giving people and certain other values a certain comparative weight over time.

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[3]   *Basic* normative expectations include constitutive norms of practices and norms that are socially understood as matters of common decency rather than more elevated normative expectations (32). Exactly how to draw the distinction between the latter two categories is left open (34, n. 30), but one possible test, inspired by sociologist Harold Garfunkel's (1964) "breaching experiments," is in terms of "how difficult it would be for an average social participant to bring themselves to violate the rule. 'Don't negatively comment on other's purchases' might be among those. Other examples of norms of common decency would include not only prohibitions on intentionally and severely harming others, but also the expectation that a 'hello' greeting will be returned rather than ignored and, in the U.S., the expectation that guests will not smoke in one's house unless given permission." (34)

2. Do We Assume, by Default, that People Are Responsibility Takers?

Calhoun is clearly right that "our social practices are pervasively structured on the presumption that social participants have the capacity and disposition to elect to promote the good that underwrites those practices in non-required ways" (68–69). As she points out, a great many organizations, including charitable organizations, churches, clubs, professional organizations, and political advocacy groups rely, to various extents, on people voluntarily contributing money or labor, and workplaces frequently rely on people voluntarily taking on tasks. In our own profession, the voluntary refereeing of journal submissions, project funding, tenure, and promotions plays a crucial role. Calhoun is also clearly right that such voluntary contributions call for—and standardly receive—gratitude and appreciation. Based on these observations, she concludes that:

> the default presumption is that social participants are sufficiently capable of appreciating the goods served by norm-structured practices, have sufficient motivation to adopt some of those goods as personal ends, and have sufficient cognitive capacity to see how those goods might be promoted in non-required ways for it to make sense to organize social life so that only some promotion of the good is normatively expected and much left normatively optional. (69)

Differently put, she concludes that our notion of a responsible person includes that of being a *responsibility taker*, where taking responsibility is electing "to do things that are not normatively expectable" (59).[4]

This conclusion, I think, should be rejected. I will suggest that, to the extent that we presume by default that social participants are motivated to adopt and promote some social ends, this is already implicit in the assumption that people are accountable, or able to live up to normative

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[4]   She also notes that we would often find it insulting not to be included in requests for help, when this would suggest that we are unable or unwilling to contribute: it is understood as valuable to be seen as willing and able to contribute.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

expectations, and the assumption that they actually live up to normative expectations.[5] The suggestion builds on the idea that normative expectations go beyond expectations of certain kinds of fairly well-defined actions, such as expectations to return greetings, not to take what is not one's own, or to keep promises. Crucially, they also include expectations to care about certain ends, expectations revealed by negative reactive attitudes when agents fail:

> NORMATIVE EXPECTATION: People are normatively expected to be willing to contribute to the common good and to help others to some extent, giving the ends of others and shared practices some weight. In particular, people are normatively expected to help when asked to help, unless the requests are illegitimate or they have sufficient reason not to help.

Based on normative expectation, I will further claim that:

> PREDICTIVE EXPECTATION: Individuals are not in general predictively expected, by default, to do more for the common good or others than what is normatively expected.

Though predictive expectation is an empirical claim, I will just rely on the reader's assessment of its plausibility, based on personal experience. My focus will be on supporting and explaining normative expectation.

To understand my target here, it is important to distinguish two claims:

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[5]   The latter condition goes beyond the assumption of what Calhoun calls *compliance responsibility*, which only involves living up to *basic* normative expectations. Exactly how to delimit basic expectations is a little unclear (see n. 3), leaving me uncertain about whether the normative expectations that I appeal to are basic or not. However, this does not matter for my purposes, as I am concerned with whether people are expected to contribute beyond what is generally normatively expectable, not just beyond basic expectations.

NON-DISTRIBUTIVE PREDICTION: We predictively expect, by default, that in a sufficiently large social group, some individuals will do more for the common good, or for others, than what is normatively expected.

DISTRIBUTIVE PREDICTION: We predictively expect, by default, of each individual that they will do more for the common good or others than what is normatively expected.

Given natural variation in people's dispositions to contribute beyond what is normatively expected, non-distributive prediction is no doubt correct for large enough groups of participants. (For the same reason, we might presume, by default, that in a sufficiently large group there will be occasional failures to live up to normative expectations). What Calhoun alleges, and what I remain unconvinced about, is distributive prediction. It is not clear to me that we predictively expect of individuals, by default, that they will contribute beyond what we normatively expect them to do.[6]

It is also important to distinguish normative expectation from the claim that we are normatively expected to contribute to the common good or help others *in specific ways*. Calhoun's examples make

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[6]   Similarly, what Calhoun alleges is not merely that, as a matter of statistics, we can, by default, expect everyone to at some point contribute beyond what is normatively expected of them, just as we can expect everyone, by default, to at some point fall short of expectations. The responsibility-taking that she thinks that we expect of others, by default, is supposed to be, in aggregate, a very significant part of social life, not mere random deviations from the norm.

A complication in understanding Calhoun's argument concerns the notion of a *default assumption*, an assumption that holds pending evidence to the contrary. Obviously, our normative as well as predictive expectations on children and adults differ, and various stereotypes might lead people to expect more from some than from others: more empathetic attention from women than from men say, and more pro-sociality from white compatriots than from immigrants of color. On the face of it, these are differences in default assumptions. Alternatively, signs that someone belongs to a certain category (child, adult, child, woman, man, white, person of color) might perhaps be seen as modifiers of a basic set of universal default assumptions. I set these issues aside, as my main arguments are independent of how they are resolved.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

the solid point that many of the specific ways in which people contribute to the common good and help others are not normatively expected: I'm not normatively expected to take on *this* refereeing task, or contribute to *this* charity. But such specific contributions are also not predictively expected. Moreover, the examples are compatible with the existence of a general normative expectation that people contribute *in some way or other* to these goods, beyond the specific ways that are normatively expected.[7] Part of what I suggest is that we are under such general normative expectations to contribute. If we are, then our normative expectations might line up with our predictive expectations.

The notion of a normative expectation is obviously critical for the interpretation and plausibility of normative expectation. Calhoun ties the notion to that of an obligation, or to what one may "properly demand of others within a shared normative community" (53). But what is it to *demand* something of others, in the relevant sense? In light of the role that normative expectations play in Calhoun's understanding of accountability, I take relevant demands to include those implicit in the negative reactive attitudes of indignation and resentment. Exactly how to understand such demands might not matter, but I will assume that they involve a disposition to treat their targets less favorably until they have taken suitable and sufficient steps to amend the situation, by apology and efforts to repair or compensate for the harm their culpable wrongdoing might have inflicted. On this understanding of normative expectations, normative expectation says that if people are not to some extent willing to help others, contribute to the common good, and respond positively to requests for such actions, they would be subject to indignation and resentment, which involves some tendency to treat them less favorably.

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[7]   Many normative expectations leave open how they are satisfied: obviously, expectations not to lie, steal, or kill standardly leave open a great variety of ways in which one may avoid lying, stealing, or killing, while expectations to do specific positive actions leave open how exactly these actions are performed. I take Calhoun's repeated claim that we predictively expect people to contribute in ways that are normatively optional to go beyond this triviality: what she suggests is that we expect people to contribute *to an extent* that isn't normatively expected.

3. Requiring Reasons, Evaluative Autonomy, Balancing Norms

Understood along the lines just suggested, normative expectation strikes me as plausible. Calhoun is right that it is often consistent with normative expectations not to act on requests for aid or to promote social ends, instead pursuing one's private projects. But I take it that we do react with (perhaps mild) indignation to someone who never contributes in spite of ample opportunity to do so at low cost to themselves, and that we are prone to hold this against them, taking ourselves to be (*pro tanto*) justified in showing them somewhat less goodwill than we would to those contributing to a normal extent.

In addition, I suggest, normative expectations on our readiness to help others are extensive. Suppose that someone carrying grocery bags is struggling to open a door and risks dropping the bags. Suppose further that I don't help in spite of noticing their predicament, not because I'm occupied or think that I have something better to do, but because I just don't care. Then guilt on my part would be fitting. And should you learn about what I did, and why, you could fittingly be at least mildly indignant with me, and retract some amount of goodwill until I at least expressed some regret or showed, in other ways, that I care enough about the plight of strangers enough to give them a hand when good opportunities arise.[8] Or suppose that a stranger asks you for directions but you shake your head and move on, not because you thought you had something more important to do, but because you just attributed no significance to their request. Then negative reactive attitudes would again be fitting. Perhaps these attitudes should be relatively mild, as you weren't under a particularly stringent duty to help; if you had been somewhat short of time, or about to make a phone call, or even just deep in thought, turning down the request would have been fine. But the point is that another person's reasons, in particular reasons they invoke in asking you for help, often seem to be *your* reasons for action, to be set aside only if there are sufficiently strong countervailing

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[8]   Would I also be violating a *basic* normative expectation? On the proposal reproduced in n. 3, this strikes me as plausible.

or undermining reasons.[9] Such requiring reasons, and resulting (perhaps weak) *pro tanto* obligations, straightforwardly account for a phenomenon that Calhoun discusses but struggles somewhat to explain: when we decline requests, we feel the need to offer what looks like excuses or justifications.[10]

Importantly, the fact that the interests and requests of others provide us with *pro tanto* obligations is compatible with extensive moral freedom. Not all interests and requests have the same, or indeed any, authority: there is less or no force to malevolent interests, or to requests obviously interrupting sufficiently important ongoing activities that require continuous focus. Furthermore, the strength of the reasons provided plausibly depends on whether one is uniquely well placed to promote them or provide the assistance needed, whether one is the source of the problem that needs solving or has benefited from it, whether one has agreed to attend to the sort of problem at hand, and what social ties one has to whoever needs assistance and makes the request.[11]

To this I want to add something that I suspect is crucial in understanding moral freedom: to a significant extent, the relative normative importance of an agent's various interests and concerns is *up to them*. At a first pass, something like the following seems plausible:

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[9]   In the words of Christine Korsgaard (1996, 140): "If I call out your name, I make you stop in your tracks. … Now you cannot proceed as you did before. Oh, you can proceed, all right, but not just as you did before. … By calling out your name, I have obligated you. I have given you a reason to stop."

[10]   See pages 67–68. Calhoun suggests that the offering of excuses and justifications "sends the message 'I understand the good at stake, and my declining shouldn't be taken as evidence that I'm not a responsibility taking kind of being who is unable to appreciate the good and elect to promote it.' … It's not one's virtue that needs defending, but one's default status as a responsible person" (68). I agree that it is not virtue that needs defending. But it is also not one's default status as a responsible person. Rather, it is the validity of the request and the standing of the person making the request as a reason-giver that needs to be acknowledged. Not acknowledging that standing would reveal one as not just lacking in virtue (understood as excellence), but as falling short of normative expectations.

[11]   For an overview of sources of special obligations and responsibilities, see Björnsson and Brülde 2017.

EVALUATIVE AUTONOMY: If you think that an activity which competes with the common good or the ends of others is quite important, then it *is* quite important and can outweigh fairly weighty competing reasons. Conversely, if you think that it doesn't matter much in comparison, then it doesn't.[12]

This principle presumably requires qualification: if nothing else, assessments of importance might lack legitimacy to the extent that they reflect ill will or moral indifference.[13] Still, as long as it is basically on the right track, it ensures considerable moral freedom, even given the normative importance of the common good and the ends of others, and the normative expectations on us to respond to this importance. Yes, it is important to help, but so are the personal projects and activities that we take to be important.

Earlier, I insisted that we are under extensive normative expectations to help. I have now claimed that we can non-culpably avoid helping if we judge that whatever we would have to give up to help is sufficiently important to us. Have I then taken away with one hand what I gave with the other? Not so. We still violate normative expectations when we fail to help when helping wouldn't sacrifice anything of sufficient importance. Moreover, as I have already briefly suggested, there are limits to the extent to which we can prioritize our own activities and projects: *we are normatively expected to provide some help over time, given suitable opportunities*.

Let me now add some structure to the latter suggestion.

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[12]   Though I cannot discuss this here, one might also think that individuals also have some authority over the comparative importance of shared ends. The idea that personal projects have importance that competes with what is impersonally important is familiar from Williams 1981.

[13]   If our reasons are relative to what we take to be important, cases where our view of what is important changes over time might pose difficult questions. For a helpful recent discussion of corresponding issues for attitude-sensitive accounts of wellbeing, see Bykvist 2022.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons*.*

The basic idea is this: It is morally important not only to behave or avoid behaving in certain specific ways (to do as one promised, to conform to specific norms of politeness; to not lie, steal, harm, kill). On top of these familiar deontic concerns,

COMPARATIVE WEIGHT: It is morally important to give persons a certain comparative weight over time.

Giving weight to someone, in the sense that I'm after here, is *investing resources*—cognition, time, energy, property—*in promoting their interests or acting on their point of view*. The amount of weight given to someone is a matter of both the extent to which their interests are furthered, and their point of view acted on, and the amount of resources actually invested in this.[14]

For illustration, consider a group of friends deciding what to do together. Intuitively, everyone should be given *an equal say*. As not everyone can speak at the same time, one person might justifiably talk over the others if they then proceed to listen: what is important is that everyone has an equal say *over the span of the deliberation*. Likewise, everyone's equally strong preferences should ideally be given equal weight by the group in their decisions. Nevertheless, as preferences diverge the group might justifiably act on the preferences of some of their members. If they do so, however, and especially if the same members repeatedly draw the long straw, it becomes increasingly more important that the group also acts on the preferences of other members. Intuitively, the equal importance of the members calls for the group's actions to give them equal weight over some relevant period of time.

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[14]   COMPARATIVE WEIGHT and related principles introduced below should be seen as simplified models. To mention just one complication: not all weight-giving matters, or matters equally. Resources invested in acting on an adult's interest but against their will might not count; nor might resources invested in acting in normatively expected ways that others rely on as a matter of course: in respecting their property or bodily integrity, or keeping a promise to them, say, when the costs of doing so are clearly not prohibitive. The latter constraint might involve expectations involved in what Calhoun talks about as *default* or *basic* trust.

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In these cases, it is important that the *group* gives *equal* weight to its members over time. It can also be important that *individuals* give equal weight to individuals over time, or *unequal* weight, as the case may be. For example, it might be important that a parent gives roughly equal weight to their two children over time, more weight to their own children than to the neighbor's, and not too much weight to themselves compared to what they give to their children.

I now suggest that the pattern of these examples further extends to the weight given overall to others and to shared ends:

COMPARATIVE WEIGHT (EXTENDED): It is important that we give others and the common good a certain weight over time, compared to the weight we give to ourselves.

The importance of balanced weight-giving over time, I further suggest, is reflected in normative expectations:

CARING ABOUT COMPARATIVE WEIGHT: We are normatively expected to care about others and the common good in a way that involves caring about giving them a certain comparative weight over time.

To *care about something* in the sense that I have in mind here is to be disposed to notice what promotes or prevents it, and to be motivated to act on such information. If we fail to give others and the common good the right comparative weight in spite of having been given opportunities to do so, this normally means that we don't care about them as is normatively expected of us. This, I suggest, is what underpins indignation and resentment towards those who again and again prioritize their own interests in spite of opportunities to contribute to something of shared importance. It also makes straightforward sense of Calhoun's observation of a kind of reply naturally offered in response to requests for help: "I already gave" (67). Having already contributed enough to ends of the relevant nature, one violates no normative expectation on comparative weight-giving over time in preserving one's resources for other ends.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

The resulting picture has three main components. First, the common good and interests and preferences of others make demands on us. Second, these demands leave us with considerable normative autonomy, as we are not normatively expected to act on them if that would require sacrificing other values of sufficient importance, and as the importance of our personal projects and activities is partly determined by our own judgments. Third, this normative autonomy is restricted by what we might call "balancing norms," norms requiring that we care about giving a certain comparative weight to others and to the common good over time.

This three-part picture provides additional background to the premises behind the central contention of Section 2, repeated here:

> NORMATIVE EXPECTATION: People are normatively expected to be willing to contribute to the common good and help others to some extent, giving the ends of others and shared practices some weight. In particular, people are normatively expected to help when asked to help, unless the requests are illegitimate or they have sufficient reason not to help.

> PREDICTIVE EXPECTATION: Individuals are not in general predictively expected to do more for the common good or others than what is normatively expected.

Again, as far as I can tell, we do not predictively expect, by default, that individuals contribute more than is normatively expected of them, taking into account normative expectations of the sorts that I have sketched here. In Calhoun's terms, we do not generally predictively expect others to be *responsibility takers* in addition to complying with normative expectations.[15]

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[15]   The structure also accounts for phenomena that are often explained with reference to "imperfect duties". Such duties are said to involve latitude—we can decide not to act on them on particular occasions (see e.g. Hill 1971)—or understood as requirements to adopt certain ends rather than performing a specific action (see e.g. Stohr 2011), or as requirements that we do enough over time (see e.g. Pummer 2023, ch. 6).

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One might worry that caring about comparative weight and the overall picture that I have painted of our duties towards one another portrays our ethical lives as implausibly calculating. I will address three versions of this worry.

First, one might worry that the picture gives undue weight to balancing ideals and balancing norms, as opposed to the people involved and their interests. What matters when someone needs help, or when a parent has focused their attention on one of their children at the expense of the other, is that the person in need gets help and that the interests and point of view of the other child are given weight, not that some impersonal value of balance is achieved. Worrying about the balance, it might seem, is having one thought too many, or focusing on the wrong thing.

To see why this worry is misplaced, notice that caring about comparative weight doesn't understand caring about the balance of weight-giving as separate from caring about the people involved. It is because a good parent cares about each of their two children that they care about each being given the right comparative weight over time, not because the parent cares about some independent value of equality. Similarly, it is because a good person cares both about the common good, and about their own projects, that they care about giving them a certain comparative weight over time.

Second, one might worry that, on the proposed picture, we do not have to care about others now if we have already helped or know that we will attend to them later. This, though, is not an implication of the view. If it is important that two values are given a certain comparative weight, it does not follow that if one has been given weight at the expense of the other, it now lacks importance. What follows is that if the two values call for conflicting actions, it becomes comparatively more important to give weight to the latter. "I already gave" can explain why I am justified in prioritizing personal projects rather than giving more, without implying that the cause at hand no longer matters to me.

Third, one might worry that the view implausibly implies that there are precise balancing calculations to be had, somehow backed up by moral reality, as opposed to a messy social context

where norms and the weight of needs are under constant negotiation. But such metaphysical assumptions are not part of the picture. What I have said is compatible with balancing norms being indeterminate to various degrees, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that they are. Though we might have a sense of the amount of weight given to someone, the measurement is necessarily messy. Giving someone weight, I've said, is investing resources such as cognition, time, energy, or money into promoting their interests or acting on their point of view. It seems wildly implausible that the use of different resources, promoting very different interests—often subject to evaluative autonomy—or acting in different ways on various aspects of someone's point of view can be summed up with any precision. Given the messiness of what should be balanced over time, it is also hard to believe that balancing norms will come with much precision. Moreover, for all I have said, the norms in question might be to a significant extent socially constructed in some sense or other. What matters for the picture I have presented is that there are norms with the content needed to explain the phenomena that we are interested in; their metaphysical status is of unclear relevance.

4. Responsible Behavior, Responsible Persons, and Default Assumptions

On Calhoun's picture, predictively expecting people to be *responsible persons* in the relevant sense is taking them to be (i) accountable, (ii) compliance responsible, and (iii) responsibility takers. In effect, I have questioned whether the last of these components adds to the second.[16] What we are predictively expecting of people with respect to helping others, responding to requests, and promoting the common good corresponds to what we are normatively expecting of them.

Still, I agree with Calhoun that we operate with a notion of a *responsible person* that includes as an element a disposition to what she understands as responsibility taking. Even if I find it doubtful

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[16]   Or to a somewhat strengthened version of the second, where compliance responsibility is understood in terms not just of *basic* normative expectations, however those are understood, but of normative expectations more broadly.

that we predictively expect, by default, that individuals do good beyond what is normatively expected, we naturally think of those who do so as responsible persons. In thinking this, we are not necessarily thinking of them as paragons of virtue, or as satisfying *very* high standards: going beyond what is normatively expected is fairly common, if not predictively expected by default. Rather, we take such people to display more of what we see in people who satisfy normative expectations: responsibility takers display *more responsibility* than the compliance responsible, who merely satisfy normative expectations with reasonable reliability.

To accommodate this, I suggest that we think of *responsibility* as it figures in these thoughts as a property or dimension, of which one can instantiate more or less. At a first pass we can think of the relevant property as that of being responsive to what is important, or to normative reasons. The compliance responsible person is indeed responsible, and the person who goes beyond compliance more so. But attributions of responsibility, understood in this way, do not just target persons or agents. They also target behavior: we say that people and institutional agents behave responsibly, or in a responsible manner, and this is naturally understood as saying that they behave in a matter responsive to what is important.

If this is correct, it is natural to think of "responsible" and "responsibly," as they figure in these contexts, as a gradable adjective and adverb, respectively, or as "gradables," for short. Gradables signify a property or dimension of which there can be more or less. "Tall," "wealthy," "quickly," and "sensibly" are all examples, as objects can be more or less tall or wealthy and things done more or less quickly or sensibly, instantiating more or less of the relevant dimension. Likewise, someone or something can be more or less responsible and/or behave more or less responsibly, instantiating more or less responsibility.

Gradables are often used non-comparatively, as when we say that someone is tall, wealthy, or responsible, rather than saying that they are *more*, or *equally*, or *less* tall, wealthy, or responsible than someone else. What degree of tallness, wealth, or responsibility do we attribute on such occasions?

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

That depends on what the relevant standard is in that particular context:[17] to say or deny that Jill is tall attributes a different degree of tallness when her kindergarten friends provide the salient comparison class than when we are looking for someone to get a bowl from the top shelf. To say that someone is wealthy might similarly attribute different degrees of wealth when discussing who might be able to afford a good-sized apartment in central London than when discussing global economic disparities. Analogously, I suggest, to say that someone, or some behavior, is responsible is to attribute different amounts of responsibility depending on context.

What standards for degrees of responsibility might be relevant in different contexts? In some context, normative and predictive expectations might set the standard, as can what is required for sharing social practices. In declaring that I will assume that John is a responsible person until shown otherwise, I might plausibly convey that I will assume that he conforms to normative expectations as well as can generally be predictively expected of people: not perfectly, but well enough for whatever social practices we share.[18] By contrast, in saying that, unlike most of us, Jill handles crises responsibly, and further commending her for being a responsible person, I instead plausibly convey that she instantiates an amount of responsibility that goes beyond what is normally predictively expected, or is expected during a crisis. Underlying this variation, though, is a shared dimension of responsiveness to what is important, which the compliance responsible person and the responsibility taker instantiate to different degrees.

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[17]   The sort of contextualist analysis of gradable adjectives offered here is not uncontroversial, but it is fairly standard and similar points can be made in other semantic frameworks.

[18]   In this, I would be tracking the interest that Calhoun takes to hold the notion of a responsible person in place: that of sharing social practices with others (72–73).

5.   What Can We Learn from Positive Reactive Attitudes?

Calhoun argues that positive reactive attitudes are revelatory of the responsibility-taking aspect of the default status "responsible person." I have suggested that, while the default status involves no such aspect, responsibility taking (in Calhoun's sense) does indeed exemplify a person's responsibility. Calhoun is also clearly right that responsibility taking is the target of attitudes such as gratitude and appreciation, and I take her to be right that they are significantly different from the negative reactive attitudes. In particular, where resentment and indignation have clear communicative tendencies, prompting demands of recognition of wrongdoing on the part of their targets, attitudes of gratitude or appreciation seem quite different.

Still, I disagree with some of what she says about these attitudes, and about what they can teach us about responsibility. First, it seems clear that gratitude and appreciation are fitting in many cases that do not involve responsibility taking in Calhoun's sense. Gratitude is fittingly directed at the person who jumped into the ice-cold water and saved you from drowning, even if saving you was their duty and not saving you would have been terribly wrong. Moreover, what is fitting is not just gratitude *that* you were saved, but gratitude directed towards your benefactor. What seem to ground gratitude here are the agential resources invested in benefiting you, rather than any supererogatory element.[19] I take this lesson to extend to numerous, much less dramatic cases of helping that Calhoun describes as instances of responsibility taking, but which I take to be instances of responding to requiring reasons and the importance of certain kinds of comparative weight-giving. Here, too, what grounds the fittingness of gratitude and appreciation is not that these actions go

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[19]   For discussion, see Massoud 2016.

beyond what is normatively expectable, but that they involve investing resources, or taking on costs to help others or contribute to the common good.[20]

My second reservation concerns what positive attitudes reveal about responsibility. The negative reactive attitudes have a *structure* that seems to tell us something about what is presupposed by their targets: on Calhoun's appealing and broadly Strawsonian picture, they incipiently communicate demands that targets live up to normative expectations and that they respond appropriately to their failure to do so, both in action and in self-directed attitudes like guilt. Given that demands make sense only when their targets have the capacity to live up to them, the negative reactive attitudes seem to presuppose a range of capacities, both of self-control and of moral cognition and emotion. Given the natural thought that to be responsible is to be fittingly held responsible, and the Strawsonian idea that being targeted by reactive attitudes is the paradigmatic form of being held responsible, the negative reactive attitudes provide a guide to responsibility.[21]

Not all attitudes are structured in rich enough ways to provide such guidance, though. Consider desires. We might standardly desire that people behave responsibly and desire to be treated as responsible persons, but because *promotion of its content* is the only general action tendency of desire, such desires tell us nothing about responsible behavior, or about being treated as a responsible person beyond the idea that these might be things *to be promoted*. There is nothing here that corresponds to the rich interpersonal action tendencies of resentment and indignation. (If we fully understand what it is to desire that people behave responsibly, then we might plausibly understand what it is to behave responsibly. But this is because understanding the *content* of the desire already involves this understanding; the *attitude of desire* towards that content tells us little in addition.)

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[20]   I speculate that Calhoun's assumption that gratitude requires going beyond what is normatively expected is part of why she thinks that we predictively expect others to go beyond what is normatively expected. After all, we do predictively expect others to sometimes do things for which it is appropriate to feel gratitude.

[21]   In Michael McKenna's (2012) development of this sort of account, practices of holding responsible are akin to conversations, and the relevant capacities involve capacities to understand the "agent meaning" of actions.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

I now suggest that, taken in their full generality, positive attitudes such as praise, admiration, appreciation, and gratitude are like desire in this regard. While we can appreciate and praise someone for their responsibility taking, and be grateful for it, the general action tendencies of these attitudes are not particularly informative. I can praise the weather in Arizona, admire someone's beautiful face, appreciate a fine wine, and be grateful for having been born during times of peace without this involving any recognition of responsibility. At most, certain *forms* of these attitudes might be responsibility recognizing not only in sometimes taking responsible behavior or persons as their content, but in coming with action tendencies that reveal something about their targets.

What forms of positive reactive attitudes are informative? One form in particular seems to provide guidance: the sort of gratitude or appreciation that involves dispositions towards increased goodwill towards their targets. For simplicity, I will now use "gratitude" for this form, and will include goodwill directed towards someone in virtue of their sacrifice not only for the sake of the person displaying the goodwill, but also for the sake of third parties.[22] Now, the assumption that something is the fitting target of goodwill does not tell us much about the target, beyond the fact that it has interests. What is revelatory, though, are the conditions to which this goodwill is sensitive. As I previously suggested, we are subject to a variety of balancing norms, telling individuals and groups to give a certain comparative weight to persons and other values over time. I now further suggest that the *goodwill of gratitude* is shaped by such norms, and the importance of a certain balance in weight-giving. The basic underlying explanation of increased goodwill is that (i) the target has given others or the common good weight, and (ii) balance requires that the target is now given more weight than would otherwise have been the case: acting in their interest or on their preferences has now become more important.[23]

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[22]   Eskens forthcoming argues extensively for the recognition of this sort of impersonal gratitude.

[23]   In saying that the basic underlying explanation of goodwill is prior weight-giving, I am not assuming that all weight-giving matters for the relevant balance. Even if we can deserve gratitude for saving someone's life when it

Here I can only briefly sketch the kinds of balancing norms that I take to be at work. In the simplest case, where one person gives weight to the interests of another and the benefactor is grateful, a central balancing norm is that of reciprocity, which in the case of two equals says that, taken together, the two of them should give each other the same weight over time: if A gives B more weight (compared to A) than B gives to A (compared to B), it becomes increasingly important that they give B more weight compared to A. In ordinary reciprocal relationships, a rough balance is preserved, but in paradigmatic illustrations of strong gratitude, one has done considerably more for the other than vice versa. In cases involving third-party gratitude, I take the relevant balancing norm to be one governing the weight-giving of a group. Society, or even the moral community, might be required to give a certain comparative weight to its members. When one member has sacrificed themselves for another or for the common good, the group has thereby, other things being equal, given less weight to the benefactor than to the individual or collective beneficiary, and it becomes important for the group to give the benefactor more comparative weight. Other members of the group can individually or jointly ensure that they do.

If this is correct, as a rough outline, the kind of goodwill involved in gratitude is structured in a way that tracks the target's role as a weight-giver, as someone subject to weight-giving norms, and as someone who has actually responded to what is important. As this requires that the target is responsive to what is important, it involves recognizing them as a responsible person. For this specific form of gratitude, then, I agree with Calhoun that it is interestingly responsibility recognizing. Importantly, it is responsibility recognizing in a way that mirrors the responsibility-recognizing character of resentment and indignation. Those attitudes, in their responsibility-recognizing forms, characteristically involve withheld goodwill, on the grounds that their targets have given more comparative weight to their own interests or judgments than morality allows, and

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is our duty to do so, we do not in general deserve gratitude for weight given to someone against their will or in doing what we are normatively expected do and that others rely on as a matter of course. See n. 14.

have given too little weight to individual victims or the common good. However, to correct the resulting imbalance, fitting targets of resentment and indignation will have to give their own interests and point of view less comparative weight, as characteristic of the humbling stance of sincere apology for culpable wrongdoing and accompanying actions to repair what has been harmed.[24] The need for these responses on the part of perpetrators explains why the negative reactive attitudes involve significant action tendences directed at specific uptake from their targets in a way that gratitude does not.[25]

6. Concluding Remarks

We do well to follow Calhoun in considering a wider range of responsibility-related phenomena, and to consider the often-neglected positive aspects of responsibility. In this commentary, I have followed her example, and followed her to some of her conclusions. We do indeed predictively expect people to help others and promote the common good in ways that merit gratitude, and when people satisfy these expectations, they are indeed acting responsibly, and being responsible persons. Moreover, the demands of morality leave us with significant freedom in deciding when and how to contribute to the common good. But I have parted ways with her in suggesting that the good behavior predictively expected of others, by default, is also normatively expected, and explained how that is compatible with our sense that we are often free not to help or contribute to the common good, but merit gratitude when we do. In addition, I have argued that what the positive reactive attitudes reveal about their targets is not primarily that they are responsibility takers, but that they

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[24]   For discussion, see Björnsson 2022.

[25]   I take it that there is no corresponding requirement on targets of gratitude to give more weight to themselves compared to their beneficiaries in the future. We may sacrifice our own interests in a way that we may not sacrifice the interests of others.

Forthcoming in Calhoun et al, A Social Practice Account of Responsible Persons.

are weight-givers, subject to balancing norms. In this regard, they mirror the negative reactive attitudes.

I take this departure from some of Calhoun's conclusions to be based on the broadly Strawsonian methodology that she is following, using attention to our practices of holding responsible as a guide to what it is to be responsible. Importantly, these practices are not free-floating, but in turn responsive to the structure of our normative expectations. Appealing broadly to expectations of proper regard that are central to interpersonal life, Strawson (1962) explained why resentment and indignation would be undermined by standard excuses and exemptions. Here I have appealed to a more detailed characterization of expectations at work, as revealed by reactions to failures to help on particular occasions and failures to contribute sufficiently to the common good over time. What I have suggested is that such reactions cast a different light than the one offered by Calhoun on our expectations that people will contribute to the common good and our reactions of gratitude when they do. Gratitude can be fitting even for what was normatively expected, and what we are predictively expected to do—to give sufficient weight to the common good over time—is also normatively expected, as balancing norms are a pervasive part of the normative landscape.

Acknowledgments

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