

# Wronging by Requesting<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

Consider a case:

*Bar* Stefan and Eva are old friends of means at their local bar, planning to tie one on as they usually do. Stefan happens to catch the attention of the bartender before Eva, so he orders the first round of drinks. Stefan then says to Eva, “I bought the first round – please buy the next one”.

Because Stefan bought the first round, it seems in some sense okay for Stefan to request of Eva that she buy the next. But at the same time, Stefan’s request doesn’t seem okay; Eva was just on the receiving end of an act of generosity from an old friend – *of course* she’s got the next round. There’s something normatively “off” about Stefan making the request anyway.

Consider another case:

*Wedding* Aoife is Bill’s mother. The two of them are very close. Bill is engaged to Cara. The couple does well for themselves financially but they’ll still need to borrow a substantial sum of money to organize a wedding that accommodates all of their family and friends. Cara’s family can’t afford to help at all, so Aoife offers. As planning for the wedding commences, Aoife recalls fondly the traditional Irish music (trad) that played during her own wedding. Aoife and Bill are close enough for Aoife to know that Bill (and Cara) aren’t fans of trad music. Still, after writing a few checks for the wedding, Aoife says to the couple things like “I really love trad music. Would you put some on the reception playlist?”.

Because Aoife gave Bill and Cara money for their wedding, it seems in some sense okay for her to request of the couple that trad songs are played at the reception. At the same time, however, Bill and Cara aren’t fans of trad music. It’s also *their* big day. Moreover, Bill is close enough to Aoife to

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know what kind of wedding arrangements will make her proud of him and happy. Consequently, it doesn't seem okay for Aiofe to make her request of the couple.<sup>2</sup>

Our primary aim is to explain why Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are not okay.<sup>3</sup> In Section 2, we argue that several explanations of the negative normative profile of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests fail, before developing our own explanation in Section 3. In brief, we argue that morality requires us to trust our near and dear to reciprocate acts of generosity on their own and that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests for reciprocity violate this requirement. Over the course of accomplishing our primary aim, we also defend a minority view of the metaphysics and normativity of requests themselves. We then close out by developing some observations about the notion of "standing" to explain away the appearance that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are okay.

## 2 Four Attempts to Explain Why Stefan's and Aiofe's Requests are Not Okay

Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are not okay, in the sense that they are morally impermissible or morally wrong. We don't defend the *moral* bit of that claim.<sup>4</sup> But we do defend the claim that *deontic* moral concepts of impermissibility and wrongness make best sense of **Bar** and **Wedding**, by arguing against several non-deontic approaches in subsections 2.1-2. We then object to several deontic approaches in Subsections 2.3-4 on the way toward developing our own deontic view of the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests in subsection 2.5.

### 2.1 Oughts and Obligations

Think about an adolescent child ripping leaves off bushes absentmindedly on their walk home from school.<sup>5</sup> One might think that it's not okay for the child to rip the leaves but that it would be misguided to construe the sense in which it's 'not okay' in terms of wrongness – as a violation of a moral obligation.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, while one might think that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are normatively mistaken in *some* sense, it's misguided to construe the mistake in terms of wrongness.

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<sup>2</sup> **Bar** and **Wedding** are culled with modifications from one of our own lives. The intuitive reactions to these cases are actual reactions to closely related versions of actual events. Also, in discussing these cases informally, we've observed that those for whom music isn't an especially important part of their lives don't always share our reaction that Aiofe's request is wrong. If that's you, imagine instead that (say) Aiofe requests particular floral arrangements or colorways for the wedding alter. We claim that such requests would also be wrong.

<sup>3</sup> Our use of 'okay' and 'not okay' is a deliberate attempt characterize neutrally the specific normative profile of these cases at the outset.

<sup>4</sup> Candidates for the flavor of normativity at issue include *sui generis*, *aesthetic*, *prudential*, *epistemic*, *rational*, or *moral*. Because the latter strikes as most plausibly relevant, and because each chapter in this volume has an upper word limit, we assume without direct argument that the relevant normativity at issue is moral.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Bradford Cokelet and Matthew Caulfield for inviting us to consider the ideas of this subsection.

<sup>6</sup> We assume that violations of moral obligations are morally wrong even if there isn't any particular person wronged by such violations.

There are various ways of specifying the point. We think that those attracted to this line of thought might profit from enlisting Feinberg's (1961) influential distinction between "oughts" and "obligations".<sup>7</sup>

Memorably, Feinberg imagines a case in which a stranger at a street corner asks him politely for a match to light their cigarette. Most would agree, Feinberg says, that he *ought* to give the stranger a match but that he's *not obligated* to do it. Accordingly, if he didn't, Feinberg wouldn't be violating a moral obligation – he wouldn't be doing anything wrong.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the sense in which Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are normatively mistaken isn't that they're violations of a moral obligation; rather, it's that they *ought not* make them.

One way to tell whether it's *oughts* or *obligations* at issue in a given case, Feinberg suggests, is semantic.<sup>9</sup> His idea is that felicitous uses of 'ought' pick out a logically weak kind of normativity, not unlike the weak kind of normativity picked out by felicitous uses of the word 'should'.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Feinberg suggests, felicitous uses of the word 'obligation' pick out a stronger kind of normativity than both. Consider the following sentences:

- 1a 'Stefan should not request a round from Eva.'
- 1b 'Stefan ought not request a round from Eva.'
- 1c 'Stefan's obligated not to request a round from Eva.'

Feinberg would say that 1a-b sound more felicitous than 1c, which is evidence that the relevant kinds of normativity at issue in **Bar** and **Wedding** is not of the stronger variety – there's nothing like an *obligation* being violated in these cases.

But now consider the following sentences:

- 2a. 'Elsa's friends should attend her wedding. Elsa's family are obligated to attend.'

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<sup>7</sup> He makes the distinction in the context of explicating the notion of supererogation. See also Horgan and Timmons (2010).

<sup>8</sup> According to Feinberg, *obligations* attach to agents when and because either they've been "imposed" by a "authoritative injunction" (Ibid: 277), they've made a contract (e.g. a promise), or they occupy some kind of professional role (e.g. a doctor's obligation to do no harm). It seems that oughts, on Feinberg's view, depend for their existence on not being the case of an obligation but also on something that an "honorable" or "ideal" or "virtuous" person would do. Because moral philosophers don't fully appreciate this distinction, according to Feinberg, they see actions that agents are obligated to perform everywhere where there's only actions that agents ought to perform.

<sup>9</sup> "The word "ought" has several jobs, but at least one of them is not performed equally well by "duty" and "obligation"." (Ibid: 278)

<sup>10</sup> See, inter alia, Kratzer (1991) on the distinction.

#2b. 'Elsa's friends ought to attend her wedding. Elsa's family are obligated to attend.'

If Feinberg's suggestion that felicitous uses of 'ought' are evidence of the weak kind of normativity for which felicitous uses of 'should' are evidence, then 2a-b would sound equally felicitous. But 2a is *more* felicitous than 2b – there's a contrast between the pair of sentences in 2a that isn't captured equally by the pair of sentences in 2b.<sup>11</sup> Thus, there isn't strong semantic evidence against the idea that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests violate a moral obligation.

## 2.2 Suberogation

Consider a situation in which a couple are boarding a nearly full train right behind another person traveling alone.<sup>12</sup> There's two seating options remaining, only one of which is such that the couple can sit together. Because that option is slightly more convenient for the person traveling alone, the person takes it, thereby leaving the couple with no options for sitting together. According to Driver (1992), who introduced the case, it seems like the person traveling alone does something morally *bad* but not something that violates a moral *obligation* and hence not something that's wrong.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps something similar is true of **Bar** and **Wedding**. Stefan's request for another round from Eva is morally *bad*. Aiofe's request for trad music from Bill and Cara is morally *bad*. But neither request violates a moral *obligation*, so neither request is morally wrong.

Put yourself in the shoes of the couple, however. We suspect that you'll find it apt to *resent* the solo passenger for their action. But the aptness of such attitudes is some evidence that the norms in play are deontic.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the mere availability of using evaluative concepts like those of badness to think about **Bar** and **Wedding** doesn't force us to give up thinking about these cases in deontic terms.

Assuming that it's not wrongheaded to analyze **Bar** and **Wedding** in terms of wrongness, one might now wonder exactly what kind of moral obligation is violated when Stefan and Aiofe make their requests. We argue against answers to that question in the following two subsections.

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<sup>11</sup> We're not claiming that there's no distinction between oughts and obligations. Our claim is just that Feinberg's semantic considerations don't strongly support the claim that oughts rather than obligations are operating in our cases.

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Julia Driver for inviting us to think about the cases in such a way.

<sup>13</sup> Driver calls actions that are bad but not forbidden *suberogatory* actions. They're the flipside of the more familiar category of *supererogatory* actions that are good but not obligatory.

<sup>14</sup> There's tremendous controversy over how to distinguish the evaluative from the deontic. But one not terribly controversial test for the deontic is whether reactive attitudes are apt. See Smith (2005).

### 2.3 Imperfect Duties

Consider Kant's familiar distinction between *perfect* and *imperfect duties* to others.<sup>15</sup> On one way of understanding it, it's a distinction concerning the ways in which we're obligated to pursue ends. An agent has a perfect duty when there is an end that they ought to pursue and a specific means by which they're obligated to pursue it. An agent has an imperfect duty when there is an end that they ought to pursue and a variety of permissible means by which to do so. Uncontroversial examples illustrating the distinction are few and far between. One common example of a perfect duty is *the duty to tell the truth*. The idea would be that we're obligated to pursue the goal of truth telling and the only means by which it's permissible to do so is by telling the truth. A common example of an imperfect duty is *the duty to help others*. We're obligated to pursue the goal of helping others, Kant might say. But he'd add that there are many permissible ways of doing so, e.g. giving to charity, doing favors for friends, or whatever.

One might appeal to Kant's distinction to explain the negative normative features of **Bar** and **Wedding**. Partly in virtue of Stefan's and Aiofe's generosity toward Eva and Bill and Cara, respectively, Eva and Bill and Cara incur imperfect *duties of gratitude* toward the former. This is to say that Eva is obligated to pursue the end of expressing gratitude toward Stefan, but that it's permissible for Eva to express it in a variety of different ways. Likewise, Bill and Cara are obligated to express gratitude toward Aiofe but can do so in various ways permissibly.

Because a variety of means of expressing gratitude are permissible, on this line of thought, Eva and Bill and Cara are under no obligation to express it in any *specific* way. But one might think that's exactly what Stefan is requesting, by requesting of Eva that she pick up the next round. Similarly, one might think that's exactly what Aiofe is requesting, by requesting of Bill and Cara that they play trad music. Thus, Stefan's and Aiofe's normative mistake is that they act wrongly in treating Eva's and Bill's and Cara's imperfect moral obligation to show gratitude as a perfect one.

However, imagine that Stefan doesn't make the *specific* request of Eva that she buy the next round. Instead, Stefan makes a *less specific* request by uttering, "I bought the first round - would you mind doing *something* in return?". Imagine, too, that Aiofe doesn't request, *specifically*, that trad music is played at the reception. Rather, Aiofe makes a *less specific* request by uttering, "I'd really like the two of you to find *some* way of arranging this wedding that'll please me". These requests are less specific, so they do not treat Eva's and Bill's and Cara's imperfect duties as perfect duties to express gratitude in a particular way. Yet they still seem to violate a moral obligation. Indeed, they somehow seem to violate an even more significant moral obligation! Thus, Stefan's and Aiofe's normative mistake isn't best explained in terms of the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties.

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Nathan Robert Howard for the suggestion.

## 2.4 Gifts

Consider a case in which Stacy buys a \$20 music gift card for her friend Ryan.<sup>16</sup> Stacy really likes the legendary Irish rock and roll band, Thin Lizzy. As Stacy gives the gift card to Ryan, she requests that he use it to purchase their classic LP, *Jailbreak*. Intuitively, Stacy's request is wrong. Moreover, it might be a norm of gift giving that gift givers do not request that their gifts are used in any particular way. Stacy's request is at odds with the norm and perhaps wrong as a result of it. Similarly, in **Bar** and **Wedding**, it could be that the drinks Stefan purchases and the checks that Aiofe writes are gifts. Consequently, it could be that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong because they violate the relevant gift-giving norms.

Deeper explanations from gifts are available that turn on answers to why there's a norm forbidding givers to make requests in the first place.<sup>17</sup> Consider a variation on **Bar** in which Stefan is buying the first round as a gift, but he does so with the intention of leveraging the good will engendered by his gift to receive a round from Eva. It would be deceptive and manipulative to give a gift but treat it like a kind of exchange.<sup>18</sup> Such deception and manipulation is clearly wrong.<sup>19</sup>

We agree that there are norms of gift giving that could be wrong to violate. But the question is whether such norms are being violated not in variations of **Bar** and **Wedding**, as described immediately above, but in **Bar** and **Wedding** themselves. While it's true that **Wedding** has the look of a case of gift giving, **Bar** certainly doesn't. To be sure, Stefan's done something nice in buying the first round. But the case is such that there is an expectation of reciprocity between Stefan and Eva – the two of them are old friends in a long routine of trading rounds together at their local bar. Of course, the expectations among them aren't codified by contract. If they happen to call it a night after one drink, neither of them will think twice about it. But there's surely an understanding that, should they remain at the bar, the next round is on Eva. To our ears, it sounds odd to call Stefan's purchase a gift. The explanation from gifts isn't general enough to cover the phenomena of interest in this chapter.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Erik Encarnacion for pressing us to consider gifts more seriously.

<sup>17</sup> But remember the card from your aunt with \$20 and a note that said, "Please use it to buy yourself something nice". That request seems entirely acceptable. She might have gone further and simply written, "Buy yourself something nice!" So, while it's not obvious that there are norms forbidding requests in the contexts of gift giving, we take on the idea for the sake of argument.

<sup>18</sup> Plausibly, such exchanges involve distinct sets of norms. See Baviera *et. al.* (2016).

<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, it could be that the wrongness of making requests in contexts of gift giving is a manifestation of the wrong mentioned in the previous section of treating imperfect duties as perfect duties. Expressions of gratitude are often owed in response to giving gifts. But while certain kinds of responses might be licensed when gratitude is insufficiently expressed – perhaps resentment (Darwall 2012) or remonstrance (Manela 2015) – it's impermissible for gift givers to request particular expressions of gratitude.

<sup>20</sup> Thanks to Holly Smith for inviting us to think more about these kinds of cases.

Perhaps, however, it's a mistake to think that **Bar** and **Wedding** are sufficiently similar to look for a common explanation of them, as we do. Still, we don't see how the norms of gift giving illuminate the negative normative phenomena of interest in either **Bar** or **Wedding**. Recall, one of our main tasks is to *explain* why Stefan's and Aiofe's requests have the negative normative profile that they do. Merely pointing out that such requests violate norms of gift giving looks like a *name* for what's to be explained rather than an explanation of it. After all, we might equally well wonder how to explain the moral significance of the norms surrounding gifts.

### 3 The Wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's Requests, Explained

We've argued against several views that purport to capture the negative normative profile of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests. Some of these views (e.g. views inspired by Feinberg and Driver) reject the idea of using deontic concepts to explain the negative normative profile of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests. Other views accept the idea of using such concepts (e.g. Kantian imperfect duties and norms of gift giving) but they use them in ways that incur various problems or fail to rule out alternative views. In this section, we turn from criticizing different ways of understanding the negative normative profile of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests in **Bar** and **Wedding** to developing our own view about why their requests are morally wrong.

#### 3.1 Stefan's and Aiofe's Requests are Disrespectful

Focus on **Bar**. Recall that Stefan and Eva trade rounds at their local bar regularly – it's a staple feature of their old friendship. Consequently, after Stefan buys the first round on this occasion, Eva knows that the balance of (normative) reasons for her to pick up the second is decisive. Relatedly, Stefan also knows that Eva knows it. Against the background of such knowledge, Stefan's request expresses doubt that Eva is responsive to the reasons she knows she has to buy the second round. But to express such doubt is to fail to trust Eva to respond accordingly to the reasons she knows she has to buy the second round. Failing to trust someone with whom one has a close relationship to respond appropriately to their reasons is disrespectful. Thus, Stefan disrespects Eva. Because we have a moral obligation not to disrespect anyone generally, and especially those with whom we are in close interpersonal relationships, Stefan's request is morally wrong.

Turn now to **Wedding**. Recall that Aiofe is close to her son Bill – close enough to give him and Cara a substantial amount of money to cover their wedding costs. Accordingly, Bill knows that Aiofe wants to help him and Cara throw a phenomenal wedding that will make them and everyone else happy. Correspondingly, Aiofe also knows that Bill wants to throw a wedding that will please her and everyone else attending the wedding. Consequently, Bill knows that there is decisive reason to arrange the wedding in a way that will please Aiofe and she knows that he knows it. Thus, Aiofe's request expresses doubt that Bill is correctly responsive to his known reasons, which also

suggests that she doesn't trust him to respond to such reasons correctly. Because lacking such trust is disrespectful and hence morally wrong, Aiofe's request is morally wrong.<sup>21</sup>

More colloquially, when Stefan buys a round and Aiofe donates money, they create opportunities for Eva and Bill and Cara to reciprocate these acts of generosity. But when Stefan and Aiofe make their requests, it implies that they don't think that Eva and Bill and Cara are likely to reciprocate without prompting. Thinking of others in such a way is insulting, generally. But it's especially insulting in these particular cases. Stefan is Eva's old friend and Aiofe is Bill's mother and Cara's soon-to-be mother-in-law. We have a moral obligation to trust those with whom we are in close interpersonal relationships to have the moral character to do the (objectively) right thing on their own. By making their requests, Stefan and Aiofe fail to do what morality requires of them.

Having explained why Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong, we'll now clarify the explanation by responding to several objections. The first objection starts with our claims about **Bar**. We claim that by making his request, Stefan indicates that he doesn't trust Eva to respond accordingly to the reasons she knows she has to buy the second round. Consequently, we claim, Stefan acts disrespectfully and hence wrongfully. But we describe Stefan as Eva's old friend. Plausibly, one might think that old friends lack trust in one another only if there is very strong evidence for doing so – that's just part of what it even is to be a friend, especially an old friend. So, one might think, we must have under described the case; Stefan must have strong evidence for lacking trust in Eva. Moreover, one might also think that there's nothing disrespectful and hence wrong with not trusting a friend when there's strong evidence suggesting that they're not trustworthy. Thus, it also must be that Stefan isn't doing anything wrong.

We reject the claim that there's nothing disrespectful and hence wrong about not trusting a friend when there's strong evidence suggesting that they're not trustworthy. On the imagined objection above, we are told it must be the case that Stefan has strong evidence not to trust Eva. So be it; imagine that while Stefan and Eva have spent dozens of Saturday mornings doubling down on their hangovers at their local bar together, Eva has failed consistently to purchase the next round without being prompted. Stefan's evidence each Saturday that Eva will not buy the next round unless they're nudged is overwhelming. Still, each Saturday, Stefan morally ought to give Eva the chance to do

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<sup>21</sup> To make a presupposition of our discussion that's related to our core argument but not crucial to it more explicit: We're inclined to think that Eva and Bill are obligated to in some way reciprocate Stefan's and Aiofe's favors. Borrowing from Horgan's and Timmons' (forthcoming) recent and interesting discussion of gratitude, we lean toward *preservationism* over *eliminativism* about duties of gratitude. However, it's worth noting that the label might not be a perfect fit, as we suspect that such duties trace ultimately to features of Stefan's and Eva's and Aiofe's and Bill's interpersonal relationships rather than the favors performed.



the right thing on her own.<sup>22</sup> Our cases provide support for the idea, broadly put, that morality requires us to expect better of those with whom we stand in close interpersonal relations.<sup>23</sup>

Another objection to our view can be found by turning one's attention to **Wedding**. We claim that Aiofe's request for trad music indicates that she doesn't trust Bill (and Cara, but we'll just talk about Bill here for ease of exposition) to respond accordingly to his known reasons to arrange the wedding in a way that she will find pleasing. Consequently, we claim, Aiofe acts disrespectfully and hence wrongfully. But while Bill and Aiofe are close, it's not until Aiofe requests trad songs that Bill gains knowledge of how *precisely* to arrange his wedding such that it will please his mom completely. Thus, it's not until Aiofe makes her request that Bill knows how to arrange the wedding in the way that will please Aiofe. Thus, Aiofe's request does not indicate that she doesn't trust Bill to respond to his known reasons accordingly because at least one of those reasons isn't known. Thus, Aiofe's request isn't disrespectful and hence it isn't wrong.

Grant that it isn't until Aiofe requests trad music that Bill comes to know all of his reasons to arrange the wedding in the specific way that will please Aiofe. Grant, too, that a wedding arrangement in which trad songs are on the reception playlist is the *only* specific arrangement that will please Aiofe fully. While it isn't *until* Aiofe's request that Bill comes to know all of his reasons, it's not *because of the request* that he does so. Rather, Bill comes to know all of his reasons because of the *utterance* by which Aiofe's request is performed. Consequently, Aiofe had the option of communicating her love of trad music to Bill without also requesting that it be played at the wedding.<sup>24</sup> By merely communicating her love of trad music, Aiofe would have given Bill the opportunity to reciprocate her act of generosity on his own without prompting. It's compatible with the requirements of morality that Aiofe communicate her wants to Bill, not that she directs him to fulfill them.

### 3.2 Clarifying Further: An Objection from the Nature of Requests

In the previous subsection, we introduced our view of why Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong. We also clarified it, by responding to several objections. Still, we think it's worth responding to another line of objection to clarify the commitments of our view further. Focusing again on **Bar**, we claim that it's suggested by Stefan's request that he believes that Eva isn't responsive to the decisive reasons she knows she has to buy the second round. We also claim that for Stefan to have such a belief is for him to fail to trust Eva to respond to her reasons. But this seems to presuppose that Eva has decisive reasons to buy the next round *prior* to Stefan's request. In particular, it seems

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<sup>22</sup> We take no stand on just how long and how many chances Stefan ought to provide Eva, but we're inclined to claim that the answer is vague.

<sup>23</sup> See, *inter alia*, Keller (2004), Stroud (2006), Frost-Arnold (2014), Marušić (2015), Paul and Morton (2015), and Basu (2019).

<sup>24</sup> In the language of Austin (1962), Aiofe's illocutionary act (her request) was not necessary, since her locutionary act (the utterance) sufficed to communicate the relevant information.

to presuppose that the request itself doesn't alter the balance of reasons because *the request itself is not a reason*. Unfortunately for us, orthodoxy with respect to the metaphysics and normativity of requests has it that *requests are reasons*.<sup>25</sup> On the assumption that requests are reasons, it could be that it isn't until Stefan makes his request that Eva has decisive reason to buy the second round. Accordingly, it could be that Stefan is of the opinion that he needs to request of Eva that she buy the next round for her to have decisive reason to do so. From this perspective, it's not plausible that Stefan's request suggests that he doesn't trust Eva to respond to her decisive reasons to buy the second round. Thus, contrary to our view, it's not plausible that Stefan acts disrespectfully and hence wrongfully.

However, we doubt that for all that we have said so far, our view of the wrongness of Stefan's request presupposes, strictly speaking, that requests aren't reasons. We have claimed that when Stefan makes his request, he expresses his belief that Eva is unresponsive to the decisive reasons she has to buy the second round. But that's compatible with maintaining that requests are reasons and that Stefan believes that Eva needs an *extra* reason in the form of his request to do what she already has *pre-existing* decisive reason to do.<sup>26</sup> This way of reading our view preserves its spirit, as Stefan would still exhibit a disrespectful and hence wrongful lack of trust in Eva to respond on her own to her pre-existing decisive reasons. But while our view of the wrongness of Stefan's requests is compatible with the orthodox claim that requests are reasons, it's interesting to wonder whether our view is more ecumenical or whether it would be doomed if it were paired with a version of the heterodox claim that *requests aren't reasons*.

It's very natural to maintain that requests are reasons, both for theoretical and intuitive reasons.<sup>27</sup> The intuitive case is often made with cases. Imagine a PhD student in philosophy, Gabriella, who would benefit significantly from receiving feedback that she wants on a new paper draft from one of her friends, Esmerelda. Intuitively, the fact that Gabriella would benefit significantly from receiving feedback is a reason for Esmerelda to provide feedback – perhaps one that's weighty enough for it to be wrong of Esmerelda not to provide feedback. Still, it seems that Esmerelda gains an additional reason to provide feedback when Gabriella requests it – the request appears to alter the normative situation. The view that requests are reasons captures these intuitions easily.

But this way of reacting to the case is not the only reasonable way of reacting to it. Suppose that, as suggested above, the fact that Gabriella would benefit significantly from receiving feedback is a decisive reason for Esmerelda to provide feedback. Given this assumption, one might think that all the normative “work”, as it were, surrounding requests is taken care of by the surrounding benefit-

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<sup>25</sup> See, *inter alia*, Raz (2009), Enoch (2011), Owens (2012), Herstein (2017), and Lewis (2018).

<sup>26</sup> Thanks to Thomas Hurka for helping us appreciate this response.

<sup>27</sup> It has been suggested that one theoretical advantage of the view is that it can capture the sense in which requests are “discretionary” reasons, in the sense that one can without committing any kind of normative error, dismiss them. See especially Lewis (2018).

involving or value-involving facts. A natural thought would then be that Gabriella's request isn't a reason, because requests aren't reasons. To be sure, it does appear that Gabriella's request is a reason for Esmerelda to provide feedback – it does appear as though Gabriella's request alters the normative situation. But it could be that it *merely* appears that way. To account for such an appearance, one might add to the negative claim above that requests aren't reasons, the positive claim that requests are instead *evidence of existing reasons*. The thought is that when Gabriella requests help from Esmerelda, the request seems like a reason in virtue of “pointing”, as it were, to the actual reason that Gabriella would benefit from the feedback. Call this pair of negative and positive claims about the metaphysics and normativity of requests the *Epistemic-Evidential* view of requests.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond illustrating that the Epistemic-Evidential view of requests also has intuitive support, considerations of aim and space prevent us from saying much more about the view. However, one more item of discussion that we will add is that the view stands up to the one explicit and detailed objection to this kind of view of which we're aware. It comes from Lewis (2018) and it's based on the following case:

“Consider two friends, Sioned and Ffion. Sioned is mounting an election campaign and she wants Ffion to help as her campaign manager. Committing to the campaign would constitute a substantial sacrifice for Ffion as it will be stressful, and for the course of the campaign it will take a lot of time away from her own work, her family and her other engagements. Suppose that Ffion *knows* perfectly well that Sioned wants her help: indeed, everybody *knows* it. But because of the extent of the sacrifice that it would entail, Ffion has not voluntarily offered her help to her friend. For some time, Ffion *knows* that Sioned desires her help and Sioned knows that Ffion *knows* this too, but, somehow, she cannot bring herself to ask for help: partly out of pride, partly out of reluctance to burden her friend, partly in the hope that an offer will be forthcoming from Ffion anyway. But it is not, so the time comes and Sioned confronts the awkwardness that has arisen between them with a request: she explicitly asks Ffion whether she would commit to helping Sioned's election bid in the role of her campaign manager. This, I suggest, is a request which presents a non-obligatory reason for action. But moreover, the request itself has altered the normative situation. I suggest that it has done so by creating a reason that was not present before.” (Lewis 2018: 5, emphasis ours)

This case is similar to the case of Gabriella and Esmerelda above. Our reactions are similar, too. Contra Lewis, we claim that Sioned's request does not alter the normative situation, because it

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<sup>28</sup> Cupit (1994) and Gläser (2019) also defend related views on which requests aren't reasons.

doesn't add a reason that wasn't present before.<sup>29</sup> Lewis sets up the case such that, prior to Sioned's request, the balance of reasons is such that Ffion has strong and perhaps decisive reason not to help. Why not think, as we do, that the balance of reasons is the same after the request – that Sioned's request doesn't make a normative difference? Lewis has an answer:

“Since in the example it is stipulated that prior to the request being made, Ffion already *knows full well* of Sioned's desire for her help, it seems that the normative difference that the speech act of the request makes cannot be an *epistemic matter*.”  
(Lewis 2018: 6, emphasis ours)

Lewis's thought seems to be that because it's built into the case that Ffion knows that Sioned needs and wants help, it can't be that whatever normative difference Sioned's request makes is attributable to the request playing an epistemic role. Suppose, however, that we know that Bob Seger isn't touring anymore because we ran into him on the street and he told us as much, providing us conclusive evidence. Suppose, too, that we then read that he isn't touring anymore from his website, providing us with less conclusive but still more evidence. The information on his website is evidence that Seger isn't touring anymore that we gain, even though we already know that he isn't touring. That one knows  $p$  doesn't preclude receiving new evidence for  $p$ , generally. In particular, then, a proponent of the Epistemic-Evidential view of requests could say that Ffion is receiving new evidence in the form of Sioned request of something Ffion already knows. Moreover, such a proponent could then explain away the appearance of Sioned's request making a normative difference in a similar way as above in the Gabriella case, namely, by claiming that the request is evidence that causes one to attend to the known existing decisive reason that Ffion has to help Sioned with the campaign.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Either by “creating” a reason, as Lewis would say, or constituting a reason.

<sup>30</sup> We take our response to undercut a similar criticism to the one that Lewis advances from Enoch (2011: 4), in which all the relevant reasons are known. Our response exploits the fact that we can have knowledge of our reasons without at all times attending to our known reasons. Of course, one might then imagine a related version of the case above, perhaps one in which Sioned goes on about how much they are in need of help in front of Ffion, such that Ffion knows and attends to the reasons to help. After listing them, imagine that Sioned then asks Ffion for help – “I would greatly benefit. Please help!”. If one has the impression that Ffion has another reason to help, Lewis and Enoch might say that's some indication that the Epistemic-Evidential view that we're floating is false.

Unsurprisingly, we don't have the impression that Sioned's request adds another reason Ffion to help. Not only is it plausible to think that attention comes in degrees, we can also attend to things repeatedly. When Sioned requests Ffion's help by exclaiming “Please help!” after listing all the ways in which they would benefit from receiving it, Sioned's request causes Ffion to attend more closely or again to existing value-involving reasons to help. Again, a proponent of the Epistemic-Evidential view of requests can explain why it seems like requests make a normative difference.

Having argued that the Epistemic-Evidential view of requests enjoys both intuitive and theoretical support, we claim that it can be packaged with our disrespect-based view of the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests without hesitation. That it can be so packaged doesn't imply that it need be, as we also argued above. One can hold both our view of the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests and the orthodox view that requests are reasons. Our view of the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests is an ecumenical one with respect to the metaphysics and normativity of requests.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4 But Then Why Do Stefan's and Aiofe's Requests Seem Okay?

In the previous section, we argued that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong in virtue of being disrespectful. Our argument for why their requests are disrespectful is relatively straightforward: Morality requires us to expect those of whom we are in close interpersonal relations to be the kind of person that motivates themselves to reciprocate kind acts. When Stefan buys a round of drinks for him and Eva, as her old friend, he's morally obligated to trust that Eva will be motivated of her own accord to buy the next round. By directing Eva to buy another round in the form of requesting one, Stefan violates this obligation. When Aiofe gives Bill money for his wedding, as his mom, she's morally obligated to trust that Bill will be motivated of his own accord to arrange the wedding in such a way that she'll find fulfilling. By directing Bill to play trad music during the reception in the form of requesting it, Aiofe violates this obligation.

Admittedly, however, it's hard to shake an impression that we acknowledged at the outset of this paper – that while Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong, it also seems like they are in a sense in which they're okay. After all, Stefan bought a drink for Eva and Aiofe gave Bill a lot of money. Such acts of kindness seem to make their requests in some sense okay. This impression can perhaps be felt more keenly by comparing related versions of the cases in which Stefan doesn't buy the first round and Aiofe doesn't give Bill any money, but where Stefan requests a drink from Eva anyway and Aiofe still requests trad music. Such requests seem more normatively “off”, which suggests that Stefan's and Aiofe's acts of kindness could be playing some kind of role in making their requests in some sense okay. Since we're committed to the claim that the requests are not okay in the sense that they're wrong, ultimately, it's incumbent upon us to explain away the impression that they're not. That's our task in this section.

##### 4.1 Interpersonal Relationships, Shared Ends, and Standing

Think about the following features of **Bar**. Stefan and Eva are old friends, tying one on at the local bar as they usually do. It's not a stretch to presume that Stefan and Eva have entered into this

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<sup>31</sup> Like many others, we understand *requests* to belong to the genus of *directive*, a genus that also includes *commands* as a species. From this perspective, it's natural to wonder what a proponent of the Epistemic-Evidential view of requests might say about commands. One way to perhaps extend the view would be to say that requests are *evidence of existing pro tanto reasons* while commands are *evidence of existing conclusive reasons*. Thanks to Antti Kauppinen for inviting us to think about what an expanded view like this might look like.

drinking routine because they enjoy it. Their aim or end in getting together on this occasion is the same end it's always been, namely, to have a good time together. On this day, when Stefan buys the first round, he commits publicly to furthering their shared end. Eva accepts publicly that Bill is so committed by not turning away the round. Plausibly, in virtue of the publicity of his commitment and her acceptance, Eva knows that Stefan is committed to furthering their shared end and Stefan knows that Eva knows it.

**Wedding** has similar features. One of Bill's ends in organizing his wedding is to arrange it in a way that not only he and Cara will enjoy, but also Aiofe and the rest of their guests. Because Aiofe cares about her son deeply, she shares his end of organizing such a wedding. When Aiofe gives Bill money to organize the wedding, she then commits publicly to furthering this shared end. Bill then accepts publicly Aiofe's commitment by not turning away the money. Plausibly, in virtue of the publicity of her commitment and his acceptance, Bill knows that Aiofe is committed to furthering their shared end and Aiofe knows that Bill knows it.<sup>32</sup>

Against this backdrop, Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are, plausibly, interventions in Eva's and Bill's practical deliberations that are intended to help guide them.<sup>33</sup> Since Eva and Bill know that Stefan and Aiofe are committed to furthering their shared ends, it seems like Eva and Bill would be irrational to ignore such interventions. Moreover, because Stefan and Aiofe are in close interpersonal relationships with Eva and Bill, it seems morally permissible for Stefan and Aiofe to facilitate Eva's and Bill's practical deliberations in these ways. In other words, Stefan and Aiofe appear to exhibit many of the features that moral philosophers take to constitute a kind of *standing*, or socially-grounded, relational moral permission to guide Eva's and Bill's practical deliberation in ways that can't rationally be ignored.<sup>34</sup>

Moral philosophers appeal to the notion of standing to illuminate how it is possible for one's social identity to influence the normative status of their thoughts and actions.<sup>35</sup> Consider a scenario involving a graduate advisor and advisee who have been working together for several years. On

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<sup>32</sup> Our arguments in this section don't depend on knowledge serving as the backdrop or common ground *per se*, as we suspect they would work equally well under the assumption that the agents merely have justified belief or sufficiently high credence.

<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, Stefan and Eva and Aiofe and Bill can be understood as engaged in a kind of collaborative effort to carry out their shared ends. It's in part for this reason that we're not sold completely on an interesting suggestion put to us by Rima Basu that on a different way of thinking about the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests, the requests are wrong because they're attempts at *managing* Eva and Bill objectionably.

<sup>34</sup> This way of understanding standing is inspired by Herstein's (2017) interesting view of it. He focuses primarily on when agents lack standing, so our remarks above are best thought of as characterizing what Herstein says about standing in relief.

<sup>35</sup> The literature has become vast. See, *inter alia*, Wallace (2010), McKiernan (2016), Rossi (2018), Fritz & Miller (2018), Dover (2019), Edwards (2019), Todd (2019), and King (forthcoming).

Tuesday, the two are set to meet at their usual time and place but the advisee is detained by some other obligation. So, the advisee emails their advisor to reschedule the meeting. Emailing with this request seems okay; it is in line with the expectations of the advisor and advisee. The particular relationship between the advisor and advisee seems to make it okay for the advisee to make requests involving their meetings.

Contrast this with a case in which a complete stranger has been following the advisor and advisee, motivated by curiosity in their philosophical research. Suppose that the stranger realizes that the advisee is likely to be late to the meeting with their adviser. Without permission, the stranger then emails the advisor on behalf of the advisee to request that the meeting be rescheduled. That would be a very bizarre thing to do. One way to explain its bizarreness would be to claim that the stranger doesn't have the right relationship to the advisor and advisee to intervene in this way – they lack standing.

Standing is useful in moral philosophy, generally. With **Bar** and **Wedding** in particular, it helps illuminate the sense in which Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are not wrong – just not in the way that one might expect. So far, we've suggested that it looks like Stefan and Aiofe have standing, in the sense that they are morally permitted to make their requests when they're intended to facilitate Eva and Bill's guidance. If, however, they really do have such standing, then the core claim of our paper that we have gone on length to explain – that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are wrong (impermissible) – can't be true. We claim Stefan and Aiofe do not in fact have such standing, but it appears as though that they do, and that this appearance is why it seems like Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are not wrong.

The reason that Stefan and Aiofe don't in fact have standing to make their requests is that the notion of standing contains a *ceteris paribus* clause. It's in virtue of their interpersonal relationships and shared ends with Eva and Bill that Stefan and Aiofe are morally permitted, *all else equal*, to facilitate their practical deliberation in the form of directives like requests. But it's also in virtue of their interpersonal relationships that Stefan and Aiofe are morally required to trust Eva and Bill to reciprocate without being requested to do so. Since making such requests would be disrespectful, all else is not equal, and so Stefan and Aiofe lack standing to make them. And the reason it appears as though that Stefan and Aiofe have standing to make requests, and hence the reason it appears as though that their requests are not wrong, is that it's easy to miss that standing has such a *ceteris paribus* clause built into it.

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we've explained why it's wrong to make requests in a range of underappreciated cases represented by **Bar** and **Wedding**. Our explanation can be thought of as having two parts. In the first, we argued against rival views of the normative profile of these cases. In particular, we argued that the requesters in **Bar** and **Wedding**, Stefan and Aiofe, respectively, aren't best thought of as merely performing actions that they ought not to do (contra Feinberg) or actions that are merely bad to do (contra Driver). We also argued against the Kantian view that cashed out the

wrongness of these requests in terms of violations of imperfect duties and against the view that says their actions are violate gift-giving norms. In the second part, we defended the idea that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are disrespectful and hence wrong, because morality requires us to expect our near and dear to do as morality requires, namely, motivate ourselves to reciprocate generosity appropriately. It's suggested by their requests that Stefan and Aiofe presume that Eva and Bill do not care and know them well enough to be motivated to respond to their acts of kindness in kind. Even Darth Vader would find Stefan's and Aiofe's lack of faith disturbing.

In offering our explanation, we were also led to explore various claims about the metaphysical and normativity of requests and the nature of standing. We argued that our explanation of the wrongness of Stefan's and Aiofe's requests is compatible with the claim that requests are reasons. More intriguingly, however, we also argued that our view is compatible with the less widely held Epistemic-Evidential view according to which requests are evidence of existing reasons rather than reasons themselves. Finally, we explained away the appearance that Stefan's and Aiofe's requests are okay, by arguing that they would have standing to make them were it not for the neglected fact that standing has a *ceteris paribus* clause.

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