

Being-With, Respect, and Adoration

Abstract

According to Stephen Darwall, being with others involves an implicit, second-personal respect for them. I argue that this is correct as far as it goes. Calling on Jean-Luc Nancy's more ontological account of being-with, though, I also argue that Darwall's account overlooks something morally very important: right at the heart of the being-with that gives us to ourselves as answerable to others on the basis of determinate, contractualist moral principles, we encounter an irreducible excess of sense that renders those principles questionable. Following Nancy, I characterize this exposure to excess as adoration and develop some of its moral implications.

Keywords: respect; adoration; being-with; ethics; Jean-Luc Nancy; Stephen Darwall

In the second volume of his *Deconstruction of Christianity*, Jean-Luc Nancy proposes a radical rethinking of the familiar concept of adoration. Although he never provides a single authoritative definition of the term, and although he claims that it is “neither possible nor desirable to discuss adoration in an organized, coherent way,” we can isolate four common and closely related themes that run through his various descriptions of the phenomenon.¹ First, as the etymology of the term suggests, adoration is a kind of address. It is not primarily a way of thinking *about* something—predicating adorableness of it—but rather a way of relating *to* it.² Second, what is communicated in this form of address is little more than the address itself. Adoration, in other words, functions phatically: as with expressions like “hi!” or “how are you doing?”, the point is not primarily to convey a message or to request a piece of information, but rather to establish a kind of contact.³ Third, what we relate to in adoration is a “sense outside of sense,” and thus a “value without equivalent.”⁴ I do not adore another person, for example, *qua* good em-

ployee or good citizen, since the values of persons occupying these roles are determined with reference to more or less determinate criteria and are therefore capable of being equivalent. Instead, I relate to the person as possessing a singular value or dignity, understood in a broadly Kantian sense.⁵ Finally, the “sense outside of sense” that calls for adoration is not to be understood as any kind of higher, more exalted sense, but rather as the very opening of sense.⁶ This opening happens nowhere else than at the level of our ordinary being with others, in an exposure to the world that is prior to the identity of the I.

Nancy insists that adoration, understood in this way, is not primarily an ethical concept.⁷ And this is certainly correct, at least in one sense: it cannot serve as a starting point from which to deduce a system of rationally binding norms of conduct. It cannot be understood, for example, as analogous to the fact of reason in Kantian ethics or to self-interest in early modern egoist moral philosophy. Nonetheless, as Nancy’s references to a broadly Kantian conception of dignity strongly suggest, the idea of adoration does have important implications for our thinking about normative ethics, and about ethical experience more generally. My goal in this paper will be to develop some of those implications. I will attempt to do so by bringing Nancy’s thought into dialogue with the moral philosophy that Stephen Darwall articulates in *The Second-Person Standpoint* and in later papers that develop and expand its thesis. Despite being situated within different philosophical traditions and responding to different bodies of literature, Nancy’s and Darwall’s basic theoretical commitments are remarkably similar in at least two important respects. First, both can be understood as beginning from close descriptions of the condition of being-with. And second, both present the practical subject as irreducibly exposed, as open and

indeed vulnerable to a kind of moral sense that arises only in our relations with others. According to Darwall, genuine being-with entails relations of mutual respect, and this respect gives rise to determinate, rationally binding obligations whose content is specified by something like the contractualism that T.M. Scanlon describes in *What We Owe to Each Other*. What I aim to show in this paper is that adoration names a phenomenon that arises right at the level of mutually respectful relations, but that also exceeds the practical significance of those relations. It gives rise to an experience of being obligated, but without our being able to determine precisely the content of that obligation.

I. Respect and the Second-Person Standpoint

In order to help bring Nancy's and Darwall's work into productive dialogue, I would like to begin with the idea of being-with, which plays an important role in both thinkers' accounts of moral experience. Calling on work in analytic philosophy of mind, but also to some extent on the work of Martin Heidegger and Martin Buber, Darwall argues that we miss the full psychological and ethical import of being-with if we understand it simply in terms of spatial co-location. In many cases, one of the most salient features of our being physically proximate to other persons is precisely our not being *with* them in any robust sense of the term. This is the sort of thing that happens, for example, in airports or shopping malls, where people participate only minimally in the projects and experiences of others. It seems, then, that being-with in a more robust sense requires at least some kind of sharing of experience. Spectators at the opera, for example, are surely with each other in a stronger sense than shoppers at the mall: not only do they all share in the same experience, but they are also aware of each other *as* sharing that experience. The

fact that others applauded after the same arias or teared up at the same death scene is not a matter of indifference to the individual spectators; it plays an important part in making the experience what it was for each of them. But this kind of mutual awareness, Darwall thinks, still falls short of the full sense of being-with. What is lacking in the example of the opera, and what is necessary for genuine being-with, can be expressed by a pair of contrasting prepositions. At the opera, the spectators are cognizant *of* each other and of the fact that they are sharing the same experience, but they do not relate *to* each other for the most part, at least while the opera is being performed. What is constitutive of genuine being-with, as Darwall understands it, is some kind of relating-to.⁸

But how precisely are we to understand the meaning of this relating-to? This is an important question, as there are clearly many kinds of behavior that we could plausibly characterize as modes of relating-to but that are not examples of being-with as Darwall conceives it. As a pedestrian about to enter the crosswalk, for example, I relate to the driver of an oncoming car by making eye contact with him, encouraging him to stop and to allow me to cross. And as a disgruntled constituent, I might relate to my Congressperson at a town hall by hurling invective at him. In both of these cases, I am *with* the other person only in a very weak sense. This weakness consists in the fact that my relation to the other is one sided, taking place largely on my own terms: in both cases, I address the other party without leaving myself open to being addressed in turn. And this suggests an answer to the question concerning the meaning of the relating-to that is essential to being-with: we are genuinely with others only when we recognize their authority to address claims and demands to us and when we recognize ourselves as answerable to them.⁹

To make oneself answerable to others in the way required for genuine being-with is to engage with them on the basis of what Darwall calls the second-person standpoint. What is unique to second-personal relations, and what distinguishes them from third-personal relations, is that the authority we grant others to address claims and demands is not to be understood as epistemic. It is not like the authority, for example, that I grant my piano teacher when I willingly practice the melodic minor scales that she has directed me to learn. In that case, I accept her authority because I believe she has a knowledge of the usefulness of melodic minor scales that I lack and that I will benefit by practicing them in the manner she has suggested. If I did not believe she possessed the relevant knowledge, then I would not grant her the same kind of authority. To engage with someone second-personally, on the other hand, is to treat her as a “self-originating source of valid claims:”¹⁰ I take the claims and demands she addresses to me seriously simply in virtue of her being a fellow member of the moral community.

The specifically ethical difference between the second- and third-person standpoints is brought out nicely by an example that Darwall gives in *The Second-Person Standpoint*. Suppose that someone has stepped on my foot and that I want him to put his foot down somewhere else. One way to bring that about would be to give the person some kind of agent-neutral, state-of-the-world-regarding reason. This would be to engage with him third-personally. If I know the person is a utilitarian, for example, I might point out to him that the world in which he steps on my foot contains less total happiness than the world in which he does not step on my foot. In doing so, I give him a kind of reason that he already accepts, completely independently of the fact that it was I who had ad-

dressed it to him. If he takes my reasons seriously, it is because he grants me an epistemic authority: he believes that I have good insight into how much happiness the world would contain if he continued stepping on my foot and how much happiness it would contain if he moved his foot. But the fact that it was I in particular who addressed the reasons to him would be of no importance; anyone else with similar insight into the states of the two worlds would have been granted exactly the same authority. If the person ultimately decides to move his foot off from mine, then, it will be because he judged that doing so was what he had the best reasons to do, all things considered. Importantly, it will not be because he thought he owed it *to me*. The second way that I could get the person to move his foot would be to address a demand to him. This would be to engage with him second personally. In doing so, I call on him to recognize my standing as a self-originating source of valid claims and to recognize himself as answerable to me in particular. In this case, I intend the very fact that I address the demand to count as an agent-relative reason for the person to move his foot. I am not, in other words, providing reasons in favor of people's doing what is necessary in general to decrease the total amount of pain in the world; I am giving this particular person a reason to move his particular foot. This, of course, is not to say that I believe my demands should always count for others as overriding every other reason they might have; some demands, after all, are obviously unreasonable. It is to say, though, that others owe it to me to take my demands on board and that they ought to give me some kind of justification for not complying. And conversely, I recognize that I owe it to others to take their demands seriously and to justify my behavior to them.¹¹

Second-personal interaction of this kind has two closely related presuppositions that will prove to be very important for our understanding of the ethical import of adoration. The first of these is that second-personal reason giving presupposes relations of mutual respect. When we address second-personal reasons to others, we attempt to direct them not by coercion or manipulation, but rather by calling on them to determine their own wills freely.¹² Darwall traces this insight back to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who gave expression to it in the “principle of right” from his *Foundations of Natural Right*: “I must in all cases recognize the free being outside me as a free being, i.e., I must limit my freedom through the concept of the possibility of his freedom.”¹³ To engage with people in this way is to respect them as free and rational beings. The second presupposition of the second-person standpoint is that the persons to whom we address our claims and demands are capable of taking up the second-person standpoint in relation to themselves, addressing others’ legitimate demands to themselves and acting accordingly.¹⁴ Darwall calls this “Pufendorf’s Point,” tracing it back to the early modern natural law theorist Samuel Pufendorf, who argued in *De Jure Naturae et Gentium* that it makes no sense to hold others responsible if we do not believe that they are capable of holding themselves responsible. Pufendorf’s primary concern in developing this point was to show how God’s commands could be the sources of genuine obligations, as opposed to functioning merely as coercions. But the same point clearly applies to second-personal relations more generally.

Another presupposition can be seen to follow from these two. This third presupposition may seem so obvious as to go without saying, but it will turn out to be very im-

portant for what follows. When we engage with others respectfully, attempting to direct their wills by addressing demands that we believe they are capable of addressing to themselves in turn, it must be the case that the content of our demands is something determinate and intelligible. The reason for this is simple: if the demands we address to others have no determinate content, then it will be impossible for them to address those demands to themselves. And if they cannot address the demands to themselves, then it makes no sense to regard them as answerable to us for complying with them. To engage with others on the basis of mutual respect, then, is to engage with them primarily as addressors and addressees of determinate claims. As a result, our obligations to others are always contentful.¹⁵

The content of the obligations that arise within the second-person standpoint is specified by the contractualist principle that T.M. Scanlon develops in *What We Owe to Each Other*: “an act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement.”¹⁶ This follows straightforwardly from the idea of mutual respect: to engage with another person as someone whose moral standing is equal to my own, I must hold her accountable for complying only with demands that she would be willing to address to herself as a free and rational person. If I were to try to direct her behavior otherwise, by getting her to act on principles that she could reasonably refuse to address to herself, then I would be attempting to coerce or manipulate her. In Kantian terms, I would treat her as a means, using her

rationality in a merely instrumental way. And this, of course, is incompatible with treating her respectfully.¹⁷

II. Nancy and the Ontology of Being-With

I believe that Darwall's account of being-with and its ethical implications is largely correct. The second-person standpoint that arises within genuine being-with does presuppose relations of mutual respect, and these relations do entail obligations whose content is spelled out by something like Scanlon's contractualism. But I also believe that this account misses an important dimension of ethical experience. For Darwall, as we have seen, to engage with others on the basis of mutual respect is to engage with them primarily as addressors and addressees of determinate claims and demands. Calling on the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, and in particular on his account of adoration, I would like to argue that being-with names a relation in which we are present to each other as something more than addressors and addressees of claims and demands, and that this something more has an ethical significance that cannot be captured in the language of respect, at least as this is understood within the contractualist tradition.¹⁸

To show how this is the case, it will be necessary to undertake a close examination of Nancy's account of being-with, emphasizing the ways in which it differs from Darwall's. The difference that will prove to be most important for the argument that follows is that for Nancy, being-with is understood as a determination of being itself, and not primarily as a psychological phenomenon. In order to bring out the ethical implications of Nancy's account of being-with, then, it will be helpful to begin by describing it from a specifically ontological point of view. The most basic insight upon which Nancy's

ontology of being-with is built is expressed especially clearly in his book *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*: “the given,” he suggests, “always gives itself as something other than simply given.”¹⁹ What Nancy means by this is that there is no brute givenness of being; whenever being is given, rather, it is given *as*. The implement that I am using to write these words, for example, is given *as* a pen. When I look at my pen, I do not have two distinct experiences: first, the experience of unqualified, brute givenness and second, an experience of “pen.” Instead, the pen is given right from the outset as a pen. Likewise, I am given to myself as someone who is engaging in the act of writing. And at the most general level, being is given as being. This “‘as’ does not happen to Being; it does not add itself to Being; it does not intensify Being; it is Being, constitutively.”²⁰ To think of the given as something distinct from its “as,” then, is to think an abstraction that has no place whatever in our experience.

To say that being is always given *as* is to say that it cannot be thought independently of its sense. But this should not be taken to mean merely that being always *has* some sense or other. According to Nancy, rather, “Being itself, the phenomenon of Being, is sense....”²¹ We can take a further step toward understanding Nancy’s ontology, then, by looking into the question of how sense itself is given. Nancy offers a perspicuous answer to this question in a passage from *Being Singular Plural*:

Sense begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [*se disjoint*] in order to be itself *as* such. This “as” presupposes the distancing, spacing, and division of presence.... Pure unshared presence—presence to nothing, of nothing, for nothing—is neither present nor absent. It is the simple

implosion of a being that could never have *been*—an implosion without any trace.²²

Being, in other words, *is* only in negating its unshared immediacy, only in being exposed to an outside. Pure, undivided presence—presence *simpliciter*, without a *to*—would be unexperienceable and unthinkable. The *to* of being literally makes sense: it is the ordinary spacing or *différance* without which being could not be. And with this we arrive at Nancy's conception of being-with as a determination of being itself: if sense begins only where presence comes apart—where it becomes presence-to—then being can be given only as the being-with of beings. Importantly, “it is not the case that the ‘with’ is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being.”²³ Beings are what they are, in other words, only as being-with, as exposed to each other in the space of divided presence.

To say that being is irreducibly being-with, separated from itself by the spacing that constitutes presence, is to say that being is finite. Being cannot appropriate its sense—it cannot *have* a sense—precisely because “all sense resides in the nonappropriation of ‘being.’”²⁴ All sense happens in the exposure of beings—necessarily plural—to each other. Once again, being that is not exposed, not separated from itself, cannot be. And from this it follows that we must not understand sense as something that would be fully present in the interior of beings; we must understand it, rather, as arising right at their limits. Limit is understood here as “the end, the extremity beyond which there is nothing more—nothing more, at least, of the thing or the being of which one reaches the limit.... It is immediately and conjointly the strict contour of an ‘inside’ and the design or

outline of an ‘outside.’”²⁵ Limit, in other words, gives a kind of propriety, an interiority that would be the being’s own, but a propriety that is necessarily exposed to an exteriority that ceaselessly interrupts it. Sense happens nowhere else than at this limit that spaces out the plurality of beings. The sense that arises at the limit is not sense as signification, as fixed, determinate meaning. What arises is rather the very origin of sense, the birth to presence that is not yet a determinate presence, a present something.

This idea of sense as arising most originally in the *to* of exposition is exemplified nicely in the case of people who are meeting each other for the first time: “When you introduce yourself [*te présentes*], when you name yourself, this has no signification; it is not a concept joined to an intuition; there is neither distance nor immediacy; it is not a representation, nor is it sheer indetermination, since you stand out from both the world and significations.”²⁶ Our presentation to each other takes place as an exposition that is never reducible to the significant context within which the presentation happens or to the significant meaning that results from it.²⁷ These kinds of signification are appropriable. When I introduce myself to someone interested in renting my property, for example, I do so as a landlord, as someone with fairly well defined expectations about how our tenant-landlord relationship would proceed. The signification “landlord” is mine; I identify myself with it and orient my conduct with reference to it. What I cannot appropriate, though, is the *to* of my exposure. This exposure happens neither inside me nor outside me, but rather right at the limit at which I am open to others. As an experience of the limit, this exposure is best described as a kind of touching, a contact that both presupposes and preserves separation. To touch is necessarily to touch at the limit, such that the touched re-

sists appropriation. Sense happens most originally as a touch, as a relation not between signifier, signified, and referent, but rather between us.²⁸ For Nancy, then, “we” names “the sense of sense, the very opening of sense, and sense as opening.”²⁹

This ontology of being-with helps to explain how it is possible for us to engage with others not merely as particulars—as instances of general significations like “landlord” or “fellow shopper at the mall”—but also as singular beings who are incommensurable, and thus irreducibly strange. The other *qua* singular, according to Nancy, is “incomparable or inassimilable, not because it is simply ‘other’ but because it is an origin and touch of sense. Or rather, the alterity of the other is its originary contiguity with the ‘proper’ origin. You are absolutely strange because the world begins its turn with you.”³⁰ To encounter another as singular, in other words, is to find oneself exposed to the very origin of sense, which happens nowhere else than at the limit where beings touch.

III. Adoration

Adoration is the name that Nancy gives to our responsiveness and attentiveness to this opening up of sense. The term, of course, is not a neologism; it plays an important role in Christian thought, where it has a meaning that is importantly different in certain respects from what Nancy intends. Within the Christian tradition, adoration is understood as a special kind of reverence or respect owed exclusively to God in virtue of his supreme dignity.³¹ Immanuel Kant gives expression to this traditional understanding when he writes that adoration is called for by “consideration of the profound wisdom of divine creation in the smallest things and of its majesty in the great whole” and by God’s status as “the legislator of virtue.”³² In this conception, adoration is a very explicitly hierarchi-

cal relationship. Thomas Aquinas expresses this idea in the *Summa Theologica*, where he argues that adoration is not only an act of the spirit, but also an act of the body: adoration consists, at least in part, in bodily gestures that signify both “our weakness in comparison with God” and the fact that “we are nothing of ourselves.”³³ The higher status of the one proper object of adoration consists in the fact that he is not one being in the world among others, but rather the ground of the world, the “first principle of all things.”³⁴

This idea that the world has some kind of ground or first principle is precisely what Nancy means to deny with his ontology of being-with. Repurposing a familiar Christian theological theme, Nancy insists that the creation of the world is creation *ex nihilo*. Traditionally, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* means that God brought the world into existence from absolutely nothing, without the help of any pre-existing materials. Nancy’s account eliminates God, or any other agent for that matter, as the author of this creation.³⁵ The creation of the world is understood rather on the model of continuous creation, where the *nihil* is not a nothing that would be somehow prior to the world, but rather the very spacing or dis-position in which being most originarily comes to presence.³⁶ Adoration, for Nancy, has as its object precisely this *nihil*.³⁷

As a worldly orientation to others that is stripped of all reference to a transcendent ground, adoration is similar in many ways to the more familiar relationship of mutual respect. In what follows, I will examine three of these similarities. The first is that both are second personal in the sense that they are not primarily attitudes *about* others, but rather relations *to* them. This has important implications for our thinking about ethics: if we take second-personal relationships as our beginning point, then we are led to specifically

second-personal conceptions of obligation, responsibility, and other central moral ideas. To get a sense for what a second-personal conception of these moral concepts amounts to, it will be helpful to contrast it with the strongly non-second-personal conceptions we find in various forms of ethical rationalism. For the rationalist moral philosophers of the early modern period—the most important and influential of whom were Nicolas Malebranche, Ralph Cudworth, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Samuel Clarke, and Christian Wolff—obligation was understood as having its source in our own rational nature, and more precisely in the fact that we cannot help but assent to what we perceive clearly and distinctly. It is this “cannot help but” that accounts for the necessitation that is essential to obligation. Some of these ideas that we perceive clearly and distinctly are specifically moral. To take an example from Malebranche, we can perceive clearly and distinctly that a coachman is more estimable than a horse, and this gives rise to the obligation to treat the coachman better.³⁸ By grounding this obligation in our own rational nature, the rationalists suggest that we have an obligation *pertaining to* the coachman.³⁹ On a second-personal account, on the other hand, obligations are understood first and foremost as obligations *to*.

A second similarity between adoration and respect is closely related to the first: both presuppose a practical subject who is open and responsive to a moral sense that is not already her own. For Darwall, being-with necessarily involves what Martin Buber characterized as an I-Thou relation that “breach[es] the barriers of the self.”⁴⁰ The barriers of our selves are breached, according to Darwall, in our vulnerability to the claims and demands of others, which we experience as singling us out and as providing us with a

special, second-personal kind of reason that would be unavailable to us as practical subjects reasoning about the world from a detached, third-person point of view. This is the idea we saw exemplified in the case of the person stepping on my foot, where I made the offender accountable to me not by invoking a moral principle that I knew he was already committed to, but rather by getting him to take me seriously as a self-originating source of valid claims. This general idea that being-with involves an exposure to an inappropriate outside is also present in Nancy's thought, of course, where it developed in considerably more detail.

Finally, a third similarity is that both respect and adoration orient us toward others as possessing an equal dignity. To respect another person, on Darwall's broadly Fichtean account, is to limit my own freedom in my dealings with him. It is to engage with him as a rational being, refraining from coercing or manipulating him, and thus from treating him simply as means to my own ends. But it involves something more than this as well. I do not limit my freedom by the concept of the possibility of another's freedom because I have benevolent feelings toward him or because I calculate that doing so will be conducive to my long-term advantage. I treat him with respect, rather, because I experience myself as the addressee of a legitimate demand that I do so. Or in explicitly Kantian terms, I experience the other as possessing a "dignity (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world."⁴¹ The experience of the other's dignity is inseparable from the experience of him as exacting respect. As we have seen, I show the respect his dignity exacts from me by treating him in accordance with something like Scanlon's principle of contractualism.

But with this we arrive at the first of two important differences between the moral orientation toward others that is given in the experience of second-personal respect and the one suggested by adoration. For Darwall, the essential link between respect, dignity, and contractualism is Pufendorf's Point: within the second-person standpoint, we are open to others *qua* addressors of demands that we are capable of addressing to ourselves. We respect others' dignity when we hold ourselves responsible for complying with demands that could not reasonably be rejected as a basis for informed, unforced agreement. For Darwall, then, the moral sense of our second-personal engagements with others is exhausted by the content of these not-reasonably-rejectable demands. This is exactly what Nancy denies. In adoration, we relate to others not as addressors of determinate demands but rather as origins of sense. As we have seen, sense for Nancy is not merely a synonym for signification.⁴² As the example of meeting another person for the first time was meant to show, what sense names rather is the very opening of signification, which is always in excess of determinate, appropriable meanings. What we respond to in an encounter like this is an address that is not primarily semantic, but rather phatic.⁴³ In adoration, then, we find ourselves obligated *to* others as singular, incommensurable origins of sense, and thus as possessors of dignity, but without being able to know with certainty the content of that obligation. Or more precisely, our obligation is simply to render justice to "each existing singular," which requires us "to challenge the validity of an established or prevailing 'just measure' in the name of the incommensurable."⁴⁴ Precisely because the singular is an incommensurable origin of sense, there can be no rule that specifies how we are to do justice in any particular case.

The idea that we could be obligated to others without being able to consult rules that would specify the content of our obligations points to a second important difference between respect and adoration. For Darwall, the core concepts of second-personal morality—respect, dignity, demand, and obligation—are inseparable from the ideas of accountability and blameworthiness. In this he follows John Stuart Mill, who argued that “we do not call anything wrong, unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it; if not by law then by the opinion of his fellow-creatures.”⁴⁵ On this account, relations between moral subjects are understood primarily on a juridical model: what we are obligated to do just is what others can appropriately hold us accountable for doing and what they can find us blameworthy for failing to do. This, as we saw earlier, is why Darwall believes that the content of obligation must be articulated in principles. His argument for this point can be represented as a *modus tollens*: if the content of our obligations is not specified by principles, then relations between moral subjects are not primarily juridical. Since relations between moral agents are primarily juridical, it must be the case that the content of obligation is specified by principles. I believe that the first premise is true: it makes no sense to regard others as blameworthy for failing to do what they could not have known they were obligated to do. But one person’s *modus tollens* is another person’s *modus ponens*. The conclusion that we ought to draw, I believe, is that we should not understand relations between moral subjects exclusively in terms of juridical categories like blame, guilt, and accountability. As moral subjects, rather, we treat each other with dignity when we relate to each other as co-creators of the sense of the world. As beings who are given over always already to the

withdrawal of any given, fully established sense, we are enjoined to make the sense that we lack. And because sense originates only at the level of our exposure to each other, we are enjoined to make sense, in the most literal sense of the idiom, together. This requires precisely that we not relate to each other exclusively in terms of the kinds of already established principles that we could hold each other accountable for complying with.

IV. Conclusion

If Nancy's account of adoration and my own account of its ethical implications are correct, where do things stand with the ethics of second-personal respect? Is it superseded as a normative theory by Nancy's account in something like the way the Ptolemaic system was superseded by Copernican heliocentrism? I do not believe so. This is because the relation to the "sense outside of sense" that Nancy calls adoration always happens within contexts that are structured by determinate meanings. Adoration does not reduce these meanings to nothing in the way that the moral law in Kant reduces the claims of the inclinations to nothing. Nancy's own example of meeting a person for the first time demonstrates the point. If it is true that there is a *to* whose sense we cannot appropriate in our encounters with other persons, it is just as true that we orient ourselves with reference to meanings that we continue to appropriate all the same: the other person engages with me *qua* potential landlord and I engage with him *qua* potential tenant. And more importantly, we *ought* to orient ourselves with reference to these meanings. I would surely violate the dignity of the other person if I insisted on treating him as nothing but an absolutely incommensurable singularity, refusing to respect his standing *qua* potential tenant to address determinate demands to me *qua* potential landlord. More generally, as second-

personally competent addressors and addressees of meaningful demands, we do owe it to each other not to violate rules that no one could reasonably reject as the basis for informed, unforced general agreement. The idea of adoration does not nullify any of this. Instead, it complicates it. We ought generally to treat people with respect, engaging with them as self-originating sources of valid claims, but we ought also to be sensitive to the ways in which doing so is incompatible with engaging with them as singular, incommensurable origins and touches of sense. In the midst of our meaningful, rule-governed relations with others, we should take care to resist the closure of moral sense, remaining attuned to its irreducible open-endedness and questionability. But how can we know which of these ethical orientations is called for in any particular case? How can we know whether to engage with another person primarily as an addressor of determinate demands and when to give more emphasis to her incommensurable singularity? Nancy's account simply cannot provide definitive answers to these kinds of questions. But if the argument of this paper is right, it is beyond the competence of any moral theory to provide such answers.

- ¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 13. Hereafter *Adoration*.
- ² *Ibid.*, 2.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 18; 53.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 15; 80.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.
- ⁸ Stephen Darwall, “Being With,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49, no. s1 (2001): 5–7.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.
- ¹⁰ John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 543.
- ¹¹ Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 5–8. Hereafter SPS.
- ¹² Darwall, SPS, 20–21.
- ¹³ J.G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49. Italics omitted. Quoted in Darwall, SPS, 22.
- ¹⁴ Darwall, SPS, 22–25.
- ¹⁵ Stephen Darwall, “Morality and Principle” in David Bakhurst, Brad Hooker, and Margaret Olivia Little, eds., *Thinking About Reasons: Themes from the Philosophy of Jonathan Dancy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 182–189.
- ¹⁶ T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 153.
- ¹⁷ Darwall, SPS, 304–306.

¹⁸ Nancy proposes a strongly non-contractualist account of respect in a number of essays. See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Abandoned Being” in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 36-47; Jean-Luc Nancy, “The *Katagorein* of Excess” in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 133-151. Hereafter, *A Finite Thinking* will be abbreviated as FT.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 52. Italics omitted.

²⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 94. Hereafter BSP.

²¹ Ibid., 2. Translation modified.

²² Ibid. Translation modified.

²³ Ibid., 30.

²⁴ Nancy, FT, 9.

²⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Limits, Borders, and Shores of Singularity” in *Encounters with Alphonso Lingis*, ed. Alexander E. Hooke and Wolfgang W. Fuchs (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003), 103, 104.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1997), 56. Hereafter GT.

²⁷ Ibid., 57.

²⁸ Ibid. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63. “In a sense—but what sense—sense *is* touching.”

²⁹ Nancy, GT, 61. Translation modified.

³⁰ Nancy, BSP, 6. Translation modified. Italics omitted.

³¹ Alexander Halesius, *Summa Theologica Halensis: De Legibus et Praeceptis*, ed. Michael Basse (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 484; 485.

- ³² Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason in Religion and Rational Theology*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212; 201 [6:197; 6:183]. Page numbers in brackets refer to those of the Akademie Edition.
- ³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Volume III-Part II, Second Edition*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 1547 [II-II, q. 84, a.2].
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1523 [II-II, q. 81, a. 1].
- ³⁵ Nancy, *Adoration*, 17; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 51. Hereafter CW.
- ³⁶ Nancy, BSP, 16.
- ³⁷ Nancy, *Adoration*, 15.
- ³⁸ Nicolas Malebranche, *Treatise on Ethics*, trans. Craig Walton (Dordrecht: Springer, 1993), 47–48.
- ³⁹ More contemporary versions of rationalist ethics, including the kinds proposed in Thomas Nagel’s *The Possibility of Altruism* and Christine M. Korsgaard’s *Sources of Normativity*, also tend to treat obligation in this way.
- ⁴⁰ Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith, with an introduction by Maurice Friedman (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 206. Quoted in Darwall, “Being With,” 7.
- ⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* in Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and ed., Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 557 [6:434]. Page numbers in brackets refer to those of the Akademie Edition. Italics omitted.
- ⁴² Nancy, GT, 57–61.
- ⁴³ Nancy, FT, 195.
- ⁴⁴ Nancy, BSP, 186; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 75. Cf. Nancy, CW, 61–62.
- ⁴⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 51 [Ch. 5, ¶14].