

Reactivity and Refuge

Michelle Mason

When what we do is met with resentment, we are indirectly paid something of a compliment.¹

—Herbert Morris

INTRODUCTION²

For many of the past fifty years, discussion of P. F. Strawson's argument for the indispensability of the reactive attitudes has tended to frame the alternative in terms of their universal rejection; that is, in terms of the universal adoption of what Strawson calls the objective attitude.³ This focus on the universal adoption of the objective attitude as an alternative to current practice is to be expected in the context of the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists, where what is at issue is whether or not necessary conditions for the justification of the entire framework of reactive attitudes—that is, necessary conditions for “real moral responsibility”—are universally

¹ Morris 1968: 487.

² I thank my students for discussion and probing questions about Strawson's seminal article. For discussion of Strawson's account of the objective attitude as refuge, I am particularly grateful to Abigail Ault. For comments on previous versions of this essay, I thank the participants in the joint Carleton/Saint Olaf philosophy departments colloquium, the University of Minnesota workshop in Moral, Political, Legal, and Social Philosophy (especially commentator Zachary Hoskins), and two anonymous reviewers for Oxford University Press.

³ This is true both of those who agree with Strawson and those who oppose him. For the former see, e.g., Wolf 1981: esp. 390–1. For the latter, see more recently Sommers 2007. Some opponents identify the alternative in terms of universal adoption of a framework of *nonreactive* attitudes (see, e.g., Pereboom 2001). As I note later, Strawson allows that the objective attitude can be “emotionally toned”; the nonreactive sadness and disappointment that such opponents would substitute for reactive attitudes such as resentment are, I suggest, just such emotionally toned species of the objective attitude.

lacking. In this all-or-nothing framing of the debate, opposing sides direct themselves to arguing that the universal adoption of the objective attitude (perhaps per impossible) would be either a loss of significant magnitude or no lamentable loss at all. Everyone recognizes, of course, that Strawson himself takes the objective attitude to be fitting in a limited range of cases (namely, those that satisfy certain excusing or exempting conditions—the truth of determinism notably absent among them). The question is taken to be one of whether we can universally adopt the objective attitude without lamentable loss in cases where it is, on Strawson's view, unfitting.

In addressing this question, commentators at best note in passing one particular type of unfitting employment of the objective attitude that Strawson himself acknowledges to be an option for us.⁴ I refer to what Strawson calls a “curious” addition to his main discussion of the objective attitude: his acknowledgement that we may strategically employ the objective attitude in cases where it is not fitting—such as, in response to mature, competent adults with whom we stand in direct interpersonal relationships but with respect to whom the “strains of involvement” prove too difficult to bear (Strawson 1982: 67). The relative neglect of Strawson's curious addition (as I shall call it) is unfortunate because its examination promises insight into what Strawson took to be the costs of a moral psychological scheme devoid of the reactive attitudes for creatures like us.

To be sure, the objective attitude in its strategic employment provides those who adopt it with a refuge from the strains of interpersonal involvement. As such, it has a prudential payoff. Nonetheless, if Strawson is correct, that payoff is short-lived. It is so, in his view, because the strategic employment of the objective attitude in a relationship forebodes the relationship's demise. Why should that be? My aim in what follows is to submit Strawson's curious addition to greater scrutiny in taking up this question. If the strategic employment of the objective attitude in interpersonal relationships is an option for us—one, moreover, with a prudential payoff—why suppose that it forebodes an intimate relationship's demise? *Why* can't we maintain an intimate relationship while employing the objective attitude in this way?

To anticipate, Strawson is in my view correct (and characteristically perceptive) concerning the costs of prolonged strategic employment of the objective attitude for a relationship. In pursuing his suggestion, my main aim is to contribute to recent attempts to articulate just *what* is lost when competent adults forgo the participant, reactive attitudes that typically shape our intimate relationships in favor of adopting the objective

⁴ One notable exception to this neglect is to be found in Downie 1966. Sommers notes Strawson's recognition of the strategic employment of the objective attitude, but proceeds to ignore it (Sommers 2007: 323).

attitude—and to do so in a way that attempts to explain why that loss is lamentable even after we note that the alternative renders the parties susceptible to both strain and forms of reproach.⁵ On the account I shall defend, what one forfeits in adopting the objective attitude is relating to another's will as having what I call *authorial power*, a power to infuse his or her behavior with a significant range of meaning. My suggestion, in short, is that intimate relationships between competent adults—such as romantic love between spouses—cannot be maintained when the refusal of this power deprives parties to the relationship the relevant range of meaning.

As I make clear, refusing another this power is compatible both with granting his or her will weight and with affording him or her a distinct status. If this is right, then to adopt the objective attitude toward a person is not to relate to him or her as if to a thing. Although falling within the purview of the objective attitude does not thereby reduce one to the status of a mere thing, however, the weight and status one retains in the eyes of one's intimates does not suffice for the maintenance of intimate relationships whose normative ideal legitimately aspires to more robust forms of engagement.

Although interesting in its own right, I take the answer to my guiding question—*Why* can't we maintain an intimate relationship while strategically adopting the objective attitude in a prolonged employment?—to have broader significance. Only once we appreciate what is lost when adopting the objective attitude locally—that is, in the context of a direct, interpersonal relationship—can we presume to make claims about the consequences of adopting the objective attitude globally, or universally. By too quickly setting our sights on the objective attitude's universal employment, in short, we risk neglecting “what it is actually like to be involved in ordinary interpersonal relationships” (Strawson 1982: 64). Remedying that neglect, we are in a stronger position to resist those who urge enthusiasm about universal adoption of the objective attitude.

My pursuit of an answer to my question takes the following course. In Section 1, I offer a basic characterization of the objective attitude and set out the conditions under which adopting it toward a person is fitting. Section 2

⁵ Recently, Seth Shabo has focused attention on the implications of adopting the objective attitude in the context of intimate relationships. Shabo's defense of the indispensability of the reactive attitudes, however, does not attend to the strategic deployment of the objective attitude in such relationships (see Shabo 2012a). Instead, Shabo focuses on the *intrapersonal* consequences of adopting the objective attitude (whatever one's reasons for doing so) in such relationships (see Shabo 2012b). Thus, although we share the conclusion that one cannot maintain intimate relationships with those with respect to whom one adopts the objective attitude, Shabo and I arrive at that conclusion by different routes.

examines an example in which one party to a relationship adopts the objective attitude as a refuge from the strains of involvement in the relationship. After examining the reasons a person might have for this strategic employment of the objective attitude, I consider in Section 3 its significance for the parties to the relationship. In this way, I highlight both the costs of maintaining the participant reactive attitudes and the costs of their forfeiture in a particular case. In concluding, I bring my account of these latter costs to bear on the prospects for universal adoption of the objective attitude.

1. THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE AND ITS FITTING EMPLOYMENT

On Strawson's view, our natural propensity to the reactive attitudes—attitudes such as resentment, indignation, gratitude, love, and moral praise and blame—is responsive to considerations that warrant their modification or withdrawal. Among the considerations Strawson highlights are, in one category, those that alter our view of the relevant behavior of an agent (e.g., behavior resulting in some injury or benefit to us) without thereby altering our view of the agent. In his example of someone who steps on your hand accidentally, the person has caused you an injury. But where the circumstances of the injury are such that the person's behavior manifests no disregard of expectations, demands, and rights the regulation in accordance with which is necessary for aspiring to moral community with us, the circumstances enjoin us to view the injury as an inappropriate basis for resentment. Perhaps, for example, the person did not notice the position of your hand (and couldn't reasonably have been expected to notice). The person properly remains within the scope of the reactive attitudes but this particular injury does not signal the kind of disregard necessary for resentment to be fitting in the circumstances.⁶ As Strawson puts it, such circumstances do not "invite us to view the *agent* as other than a fully responsible agent. They invite us to see the *injury* as one for which he was not fully, or at all, responsible" (Strawson 1982: 72). In addition to (nonculpable) ignorance, Strawson includes in this first class of excusing conditions force, among others.

A second class of conditions alters our view not of the behavior but of the agent—either temporarily or indefinitely so. In the class of cases involving temporary suspension of the reactive attitudes, Strawson includes cases where a person has acted out of character or under great stress. Such

⁶ The sense of fittingness at issue is that which corresponds to evidential propriety. See, on this point, D'Arms and Jacobson 2000.

circumstances appropriately prompt a temporary suspension of the reactive attitudes, during which we appropriately view the agent as incapacitated in a way that breaks the typical link between her behavior and the quality of will she expresses thereby. In the class of cases involving indefinite suspension of the reactive attitudes, Strawson includes cases of psychological compulsion and pathology; that is, cases where the typical link between the person's behavior and the quality of will she expresses thereby is severed for as long as the compulsory or pathological condition persists. Finally, the status of being a child provides an interesting intermediary case, with children warranting varying degrees of suspension of our typical expectations or demands for goodwill.

Although Strawson's taxonomy risks appearing *ad hoc*, the cases have this in common: circumstances external or internal to the agent either block the inference from the agent's behavior to underlying judgments, commitments, or attitudes associated with goodwill, ill will, or indifference to the legitimate expectations, claims, or demands that properly shape our moral relations *or* inhibit or eliminate the grounds that render the expectations and demands legitimate in the first place.⁷ In such circumstances, the exempting conditions warrant us in modifying our reactive attitudes or withdrawing them in favor of what Strawson calls the objective attitude toward the person—either temporarily or indefinitely. I take myself to follow Strawson in understanding the wholly objective attitude, at its most basic, simply to be a stance of no longer regarding its target as properly subject to the normative expectations that determine necessary fittingness conditions of the reactive attitudes. The wholly objective attitude is fitting just in case a person is *incapable* of responding to the expectations, claims, or demands that properly shape our moral relations. Lacking this capacity, a person ceases to be—as we might put the general point—reactive attitude-worthy. More specifically, her behavior ceases to be resentment-worthy, gratitude-worthy, and so on for each of the reactive attitudes. In its most basic characterization, then, the objective attitude is defined negatively: the objective attitude toward a person is an attitude from the perspective of which another is not subject to the normative expectations and demands that typically shape our relationships with our fellows—expectations and demands whose flouting would otherwise render negative reactive attitudes, such as resentment, legitimate responses toward the other's ill will.⁸

⁷ For elaboration of the nature of these expectations and demands, see Wallace 1994 and 2007, as well as Darwall 2006.

⁸ Stephen Darwall understands the normative expectations at issue in terms of compliance with what he calls "second-personal" reasons. These are reasons whose recognition each practically competent person has standing to demand of other practically

This initial gloss risks equating the objective attitude to an affectless stance toward another, a form of emotional indifference such as that we might take toward things of no concern to us. This would be a mistake. For one, in cases where the objective attitude is thus fitting, its targets are properly exempt not only from the reactive attitudes but from certain other ways of relating to them; the change in attitude is not exhausted by changes in affect. As Strawson describes the situation: “If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel or to reason with him” (Strawson 1982: 66).

Second, those toward whom the objective attitude is a fitting response do not thereby become improper objects of emotional engagement. Strawson allows that the objective attitude can itself be “emotionally toned” and, moreover, that it can be so in some positive ways—including emotionally toned by certain kinds of love. Yet, and this is the point I wish to emphasize: In adopting the objective attitude (however fitting) toward another, one thereby forfeits a broad nexus of relations to its target, a nexus of relations necessary to certain other forms of engagement, among them forms of engagement constitutive of a significant type of love. In what follows, I shall refer to these as various ways of relating to the person’s *will*. In adopting the objective attitude toward another, in sum, we forfeit particular ways of relating to the will of the other. How so? Clearly, a Strawsonian cannot answer that we thereby relate to the other’s will as lacking contra-causal freedom. What power of the will, then, do we deny—if only implicitly—when adopting the objective attitude toward another?

For a start, consider Strawson’s contrasts between quarreling versus fighting with a person and between reasoning versus talking or negotiating with a person. Some commentators object that Strawson offers no argument that we cannot quarrel or reason with those toward whom we direct the objective attitude.⁹ In response, I suggest we understand Strawson as maintaining that quarreling with someone, in the sense he intends, involves more

competent persons (e.g., a reason for you not to gratuitously step on my foot); the reactive attitudes (perhaps implicitly) address these demands to their targets, on Darwall’s view (2006). Although Darwall has relatively little to say about the objective attitude, as I note later, the corresponding view would have its adoption involve refraining from addressing second-personal demands. I find this to be too sophisticated an account to serve as a basic characterization of the objective attitude. My analysis of the objective attitude nonetheless owes an obvious debt to Darwall’s account of the reactive attitudes as reactions to others’ responses to second-personal reasons.

⁹ E.g., Sommers 2007: 324.

than simply expressing our anger toward a person (and, perhaps, attempting to provoke the other's anger), as we might do in fighting him or her. Quarreling likewise differs from merely attempting to draw another's attention to a particular fact, as we might do in talking to him or her. Finally, quarreling involves something distinct from providing the other with incentives to behave as we like, as we might do in negotiating with him or her. Instead, in quarreling with another we press upon the other claims or entitlements of ours that we thereby demand the other recognize merely in virtue of a status that guarantees us the authority to make them—demands to which they may respond either by complying or by attempting to refute them in the course of a mutual exchange of reasons.¹⁰ Quarreling is, if you like, reasoning in a contentious mode. Why suppose that we cannot quarrel with fitting objects of the objective attitude?

In being a fitting target of the objective attitude, our would-be co-quarreler has already revealed herself to be incapable of governing herself in light of the expectations, demands, and/or claims whose recognition is necessary for moral community with us. Strawson appears to assume that the incapacity ramifies beyond other-regarding considerations. He suggests, that is, that attempting to quarrel with such a person is futile because she is incapable of acknowledging the imperative force of claims or entitlements *tout court*. Unable to rely on the supposed imperative force of whatever claims we might otherwise make in quarreling with her (including, e.g., claims we press on her own behalf), we condescend to her.¹¹ If need be, we instead resort to offering incentives directed at influencing her behavior or, at worst, to employing the causal force of our brute might.

Strawson's contrast here is related to the distinction that Stephen Darwall has articulated in terms of what he dubs "second-personal" versus non second-personal reasons (Darwall 2006). On Darwall's account, it appears, adopting the objective attitude toward a person would amount to responding to his or her will in a way that refrains from addressing second-personal reasons to him or her. As Darwall explains, "Claiming or demanding is not just calling some claim or demand to someone's attention. It is *addressing* a distinctively second-personal kind of reason to another person that aims to direct his will, but in a way that recognizes his authority and independent

¹⁰ As Darwall notes, Strawson seems to rely here on the juridical roots of the term "quarrel", which derives from the French *quereler* and emphasizes a claim to property or something else to which one is recognized to have a right (2013: 11). Quarreling with another is one way of addressing a reason to another literally (i.e., not metaphorically, as I take to be Darwall's sense in which the reactive attitudes address demands).

¹¹ That is, we literally "come down" from, or cease to press, claims and rights. See here the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

practical reasoning” (Darwall 2006: 76 (my emphasis)).¹² Second-personal reasons are distinctive in that, among other things, another’s accepting them presupposes your authority to issue the relevant claims or demands and to hold the other accountable for compliance (Darwall 2006: 8).

In contrast, consider a case where I appeal to either some incentive or to sympathy in order to get you to remove your foot from my hand.¹³ If, instead of demanding that you take your foot off my hand, I offer to pay you to do so, I thereby provide you with a reason to remove your foot that has nothing at all to do with any authoritative demand, claim, or right that I have that you do so. Likewise, if I appeal to your sympathy by way of a vivid account of the pain you are causing, thereby causing *you* pain, I’ve now provided you with a reason to ameliorate a situation that pains us both (namely, that it will make you feel better); however, I do not thereby succeed in getting you to recognize a legitimate demand, claim, or right I have that you lift your foot. Finally, upset at my lack of success in directing you to direct your foot elsewhere, I may bypass your agency altogether and simply remove your foot by my own brute force.

In the first two cases, although I succeed in providing you with a reason to act, that reason is completely divorced from any considerations concerning my authority or status. (In the third case I bypass your will altogether.) Second-personal reasons, in contrast, presuppose that I have the authority to issue such demands and that you have a competence that makes possible their uptake as normative reasons for you to govern yourself in certain ways in response.

In short, Strawson’s contrast between quarreling and fighting (and Darwall’s distinction between addressing second-personal versus addressing non second-personal reasons) throws into relief distinct modes of relating to another being, among them distinctly personal modes of relating that arguably are forfeited with adoption of the objective attitude.

Now, before turning to the significance of forfeiting these ways of relating to another in the case of competent adults, I want to note two things in order to avoid confusion.

First, taking the objective attitude toward another is consistent with relating to his or her will in a way that affords it a certain *weight* in our deliberations concerning how to respond to him or her. We are not, then, reduced to relating to those with respect to whom we adopt the objective attitude as if relating to a thing or force of nature. After all, a person who is incompetent

¹² Cf. Gary Watson’s discussion of the connection between the reactive attitudes and moral address (Watson 1993).

¹³ On the appeal to sympathy and how it fails to engage another second-personally, see Darwall 2006: 5–7.

with respect to second-personal reasons may nonetheless have preferences about the treatment that she and others receive. In taking the objective attitude toward a person, we in no way commit ourselves to ignoring this fact. Thus, the fact that a fitting target of the objective attitude opposes or desires a certain mode of treatment should continue to weigh with us in determining how to behave toward him or her. Indeed, taking the objective attitude toward a person is consistent with affording his or her will *decisive* weight in certain matters (e.g., in matters concerning his or her welfare).¹⁴

Second, adopting the objective attitude toward another is consistent with affording the other one kind of authority or status. Now, Darwall takes *mutual* authority and accountability relations to be among the normative felicity conditions for second-personal reasons. In addressing a second-personal reason to another, on his view, you presuppose both your own authority to issue claims and demands and the same authority of your addressee. Likewise, in holding another accountable to you for compliance with the demand, you must presuppose the addressee's competence to govern her- or himself by holding her- or himself accountable for compliance, as well as your own such competence (Darwall 2006).

It may thus appear that, on Darwall's view, fitting targets of the objective attitude—insofar as they are second-personally incompetent—stand outside the circle of second-personal concepts altogether. To be sure, in the case where a person is incompetent with respect to second-personal reasons (because *incapable* of recognizing claims or demands addressed to them), it would be surprising to find them *knowingly* addressing to another a demand or claim *as* a demand or claim. It does not follow, however, that such a person therefore lacks a status sufficient for generating demands on us. A competent person might do wrong, after all, to someone who is mentally ill (where doing wrong is something other than merely injuring or harming the person). In doing wrong with respect to a mentally ill person, moreover, I thereby render myself a fitting target of the accountability-seeking indignation and guilt that mark the fact that I have violated a second-personal reason to act otherwise. This is so even if the mentally ill person is herself incompetent with respect to second-personal reasons (and, hence, not herself a fitting object of *my* resentment when *she* does things that would warrant resenting a competent adult) and her moral psychological repertoire lacks resentment. As I see it, nothing vitiates the rights of such a person, even if the demands associated with those rights can in fact be pressed only by some delegate and their flouting registered only by some third person's indignation.

¹⁴ For a distinction between affording another's will *decisive weight* (i.e., treating it as "substantially decisive") and treating it as "structurally decisive", see Daniel Groll 2012.

If this is correct, then the fact that one is a fitting target of the objective attitude because one lacks the competence to respond to second-personal reasons does not entail that one lacks an authority or status that generates second-personal reasons for others. If we grant that second-personal competence is not necessary for this status, then what one forfeits when one is the fitting target of the objective attitude (namely, being related to as one who has second-personal competence) is less extensive than were we to view targets of the objective attitude as altogether outside the circle of second-personal concepts and, thus, their status as insufficient to generate second-personal reasons for others.

2. A STRATEGIC EMPLOYMENT OF THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE AS REFUGE: BEING REGARDED AS “BENEATH CONTEMPT”

In taking up the objective attitude toward a person, we thereby forfeit what I suggested are distinctively personal ways of relating to him or her. In the cases where the objective attitude is fitting, we do so perforce. Although something is forfeited in these cases, one has no attractive alternative. What possibly could be gained by attempting to foster and maintain reactive attitudes toward such persons? Given the nature of their presumed incompetence, the difference could hardly matter to *them*. Likewise, given the absence of justification, the alternative would appear at best a pointless and at worst a delusional fiction to *us*.

Strawson's curious addition, in contrast, presents the objective attitude in a very different, *strategic* employment.¹⁵ He writes:

The objective attitude is not only something we naturally tend to fall into in cases like these, where participant attitudes are partially or wholly inhibited by abnormalities or by immaturity. It is also something which is available as

¹⁵ To be clear, although talk of a strategic employment of an attitude makes it sound as if the attitude must be voluntarily adopted, on my view it need not be. In the standard cases, Strawson suggests that we may adopt or naturally fall into the objective attitude; so, too, we may adopt or naturally fall into the objective attitude as refuge. For the latter case, we can imagine someone whose intimate relationship causes him great psychic pain but who cannot bring himself to voluntarily sever the relationship. He begins spending longer hours at the office, devoting weekends to hunting with the guys, and letting his personal appearance slip. Such behavior fits the profile of the unconsciously emotionally unavailable; in the case I imagine, this is not a pathological response to childhood abuse but an unconscious defense mechanism against a perceived current threat. In what follows, I leave such cases aside to focus on the attempt to voluntarily adopt the objective attitude as a strategy for avoiding such threats.

a resource in other cases too. We look with an objective eye on the compulsive behaviour of the neurotic or the tiresome behaviour of a very young child, thinking in terms of treatment or training. But we can sometimes look with something like the same eye on the behaviour of the normal and the mature. We have this resource and can sometimes use it; as a refuge, say, from the strains of involvement; or as an aid to policy; or simply out of intellectual curiosity. Being human, we cannot, in the normal case, do this for long, or altogether. If the strains of involvement, say, continue to be too great, then we have to do something else—like severing a relationship. But what is above all interesting is the tension there is, in us, between the participant attitude and the objective attitude (Strawson 1982: 80).¹⁶

In order to illuminate this tension, and so bring to the fore what is lost by the prolonged strategic employment of the objective attitude, I want to return to an example I've discussed elsewhere, this time with a shift in focus (Mason 2003).¹⁷

Camille has come to regard her husband, Paul, with contempt upon coming to believe that he has tried to barter her sexual favors for his professional advancement. Camille's contempt manifests itself in her shunning Paul's advances and refusing to explain herself in response to his initial queries about her behavior. Indeed, it is important to Camille that any recognition of his failing come about through Paul's own appreciation of his opportunistic exploitation of her. If, alternatively, he reveals himself blind to his failing, this too is something she appears eager to know, presumably because her judgment of him will subsequently be correspondingly worse.

In my previous defense of Camille's contempt, I suggest that hers is an accountability-seeking response directed at Paul in virtue of his violation of her legitimate expectation of his goodwill. This response, I argued, earns a place in the Strawsonian pantheon of participant reactive attitudes (see Mason 2003: 245). I now want to suggest that this response is an especially apt one to investigate in this context precisely because of the way in which one kind of contempt—that which I shall call *reactive contempt*—can give rise to a different kind of contempt—that which I shall call *nonreactive contempt*. Moreover, I now want to suggest, we can understand nonreactive contempt to be but one “emotionally toned” species of objective attitude,

¹⁶ Compare: “For reasons of policy or self-protection we may have occasion, perhaps temporary, to adopt a fundamentally similar attitude to a ‘normal’ human being; to concentrate, that is, on understanding ‘how he works’, with a view to determining our policy accordingly or to finding in that very understanding a relief from the strains of involvement” (Strawson 1982: 69).

¹⁷ The example derives from Moravia 1954. The novel is the source for Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 *Le Mépris*.

in this case exhibited in its strategic employment as refuge.¹⁸ More specifically, we can understand Camille's nonreactive contempt to be a form of strategically employed objective attitude emotionally toned by aversion and recoil.¹⁹

Some philosophers seem inclined from the start to understand contempt as such to be incompatible with holding another accountable. Thomas Hill, for example, describes a "cold, silent contempt" that "is a deep dismissal, a denial of the prospect of reconciliation, a signal that conversation is over" (Hill 2000: 60). Contrasting a "furious argument and accusation" that leaves room for the possible resumption of communication to this cold, silent contempt, Hill maintains that the former demands to be heard, while the latter "walks away in disgust" (2000: 60). Disgust, notably, is a non-reactive response to a person consistent with the objective attitude. I am happy, however, to concede Hill's talk of contempt here: Hill is speaking of nonreactive contempt.

Nonetheless, if what I have previously argued is correct, a certain form of contempt *does* demand to be heard. Regarding another with contempt need not exempt the other from a demand, or legitimate expectation, of goodwill; on the contrary, certain forms of contempt are a properly focused response to the violation of such demands and expectations. On my account, it is only against the background context of such legitimate demands and expectations that reactive contempt qualifies as properly focused on its target. The point is one that Strawson himself takes to hold for all the so-called negative of the reactive attitudes:

Indignation, disapprobation, like resentment, tend to inhibit or at least to limit our goodwill towards the object of these attitudes, tend to promote an at least partial and

¹⁸ Nonreactive contempt is not always an attitude that is strategically employed as a means of avoiding emotional strain. For one, nonreactive contempt might be an attitude cultivated with other ends in view (hence, the nonreactive contempt of a misogynist or racist, which functions to dehumanize its target, not to emotionally protect the contemptor). Second, nonreactive contempt may, as in the case of the reactive attitudes, be something we naturally fall into given certain facilitating (or debilitating) conditions; again, racism is an apt example.

¹⁹ To my knowledge, commentators on Strawson's essay have failed to consider that the term "objective attitude" is properly understood to refer to a class of different type attitudes, just as "reactive attitude" is thus properly understood. If this is correct, among the interesting questions raised is: What are the positive emotionally toned types of objective attitude? One candidate, it seems to me, is nonreactive—because unconditional—love. Although it is compatible with the view I defend here that universal adoption of the objective attitude as emotionally toned by unconditional love would be preferable to universal adoption of it as emotionally toned by aversion and recoil, being the recipient of unconditional love is no less a denial of authorial power than that which I discuss here—both for the same reasons and (although I cannot argue this here) with the same undesirable consequences.

temporary withdrawal of goodwill; they do so in proportion as they are strong; and their strength is in general proportioned to what is felt to be the magnitude of the injury and to the degree to which the agent's will is identified with, or indifferent to, it. (These, of course, are not contingent connections.) But these attitudes of disapprobation and indignation are precisely the correlates of the moral demand in the case where the demand is felt to be disregarded. The making of the demand is the proneness to such attitudes. The holding of them does not, as the holding of objective attitudes does, involve as a part of itself viewing their object other than as a member of the moral community. The partial withdrawal of goodwill which these attitudes entail, the modification they entail of the general demand that another should, if possible, be spared suffering, is, rather, the consequence of continuing to view him as a member of the moral community; only as one who has offended against its demands (Strawson 1982: 77).²⁰

I see no reason to suppose that the demands in question need be addressed, in any other than a metaphorical sense, to the violator.

Now, of course those exempted from the relevant demands or expectations are outside reactive contempt's purview. But there is another way one might find oneself outside the scope of another's reactive contempt. There are persons who, despite their competence, are so corrupt and with regard to whom continued reactive engagement is so fraught that we naturally describe them as being "beneath contempt". To say that someone is beneath contempt often just is to say that one can no longer be bothered to reactively engage with him or her—the costs are too high and the benefits too few to continue to invest one's dwindling energy in maintaining such engagement. Such circumstances are ripe for strategic deployment of the objective attitude.

How, then, might Camille's contempt change from one of reactive contempt to the kind of nonreactive contempt consistent with a strategic employment of the objective attitude toward Paul? To aid in imagination, suppose that rather than responding to Camille's contempt with attempts to understand it, Paul is in fact much more knowingly callous than Moravia portrays him. Let's also imagine him being defensive and inclined to lash out with petty cruelties whenever others question his motives. In such circumstances, it might quickly become unbearable for Camille to maintain the kind of affective sensitivity and vulnerability that typically characterize healthy relationships between intimates.²¹ Unable or unwilling to

²⁰ Although I cannot argue this here, I believe it is a mistake to understand the so-called negative reactive attitudes to be retributive in any pejorative sense.

²¹ Note that the circumstances in which it becomes unbearable to maintain the kind of affective sensitivity and vulnerability that typically characterize healthy relationships between intimates need not be those in which the unbearable person acts malevolently. One can be prompted to avoid strains of involvement in response to behavior that would otherwise warrant so-called positive reactive attitudes (e.g., gratitude) no less than the

immediately sever the relationship, she attempts for prudential reasons to forgo her reactive contempt in favor of strategic employment of the objective attitude toward Paul. Her reason for adopting the objective attitude, that is, has nothing to do with considerations that speak to its fittingness (as described in Section 1); we are not supposing that Camille has come to view Paul as exempt because incompetent with respect to the demands of goodwill that one spouse legitimately expects of another. Rather, Camille can no longer withstand the strains of continued reactive engagement with Paul. What would the telling marks of this particular strategic employment of the objective attitude be? And what would being the target of Camille's strategic employment of this particular type of objective attitude—as opposed to the target of her reactive contempt—amount to for Paul?

3. CONSEQUENCES OF THE OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE AS REFUGE

Let us consider, first, Camille's perspective. As I understand the scenario, what she is resolving to do in the face of Paul's cruelty is, simply, to cease to care in a particular way about his violations of her legitimate expectation for better treatment. What marks the difference between her reactive contempt and the nonreactive contempt that results if her strategy is successful? From Camille's perspective, the distinguishing marks are just those that I suggested characterize the objective attitude in its fitting instances.

First, we will find her detached from any emotional involvement predicated on compliance with or violation of second-personal reasons. Indeed, we will find her denying that Paul can wrong her any longer, since his behavior can no longer have the requisite meaning from the perspective of Camille's objective stance. At best (or worst?) Paul's behavior can disappoint her or make her sad.

Second, Camille forgoes not only certain emotional but also other forms of rational engagement that likewise implicate second-personal reasons. She cannot quarrel with him from the position of someone with authority to address second-personal reasons to act in certain ways and avoid others; she

negative. Imagine, e.g., the case of a friend who is an overly enthusiastic do-gooder. Here, feelings of gratitude may legitimately shade over into feelings of indebtedness and—eventually—motivate a similar search for refuge. Lacking a good example for such a case, I invite the reader to imagine an alternate course for another failing marriage: that of Nick Hornby's protagonist Katie Carr and her loathsome-turned-sanctimonious husband, David (Hornby 2001).

can at best hope to appeal to external incentives that might influence his behavior.

Finally, although in adopting the objective stance Camille does not thereby take herself to be licensed to treat Paul however she pleases (it is still incumbent upon her to afford his will weight and himself a status or authority sufficient to distinguish her morally impermissible from permissible treatment of him), she has ceased to relate to Paul in a way that acknowledges a distinct power of will: that of conferring personally directed meaning on his attitudes and behavior. Call this power the will's *authorial power*. The meaning of a judgment-sensitive attitude or action is the significance that a person has reason to assign the attitude or action in light of the reasons for which its author adopted or performed it (see here Scanlon 2008). Of course, Camille *does* have reason to assign Paul's behavior the significance of having wronged her. These are, moreover, reasons of the right kind to warrant her resentment or (reactive) contempt.²² In adopting the objective attitude as refuge, however, Camille signals her unilateral exit from a mutual accountability relation with Paul. Her participant status in such a relation is one she is willing to forgo because she finds the strains of retaining that participant status too great. Subsequently, on my view, Paul can no longer wrong Camille.

To be clear, because Paul is in fact capable of responding to the normative expectations and demands that shape interpersonal relations between intimates, he is in fact capable of doing wrong or wronging others. Moreover, absent some excuse, he is blameworthy for so doing. However, I regard the fact that Paul does things to Camille that it is wrong to do to her as insufficient for wronging her. A necessary condition for wronging her is standing in the mutual accountability relation from which Camille has made her exit.²³

Now, there is a sense in which Paul in fact retains authorial power despite Camille's refusing him such power. Obviously, he can wrong others with respect to whom he stands in mutual accountability relations. However, the sense in which any of us has authorial power with respect to a particular person is akin to the sense in which we have a power to convince that person. Authorial power is a capacity I understand on analogy with capacities associated with so-called success verbs; that is, verbs that describe actions that require a particular outcome in order to be completed (e.g., "convince"). Exercises of authorial power, like exercises in convincing another,

²² That she has reasons of the right kind to react with contempt is a more controversial claim than that she has reasons of the right kind to respond with resentment. For defense of the latter claim, see Mason 2003.

²³ I thank an anonymous reader for urging me to clarify this point.

require uptake by the relevant others in order to succeed in achieving what they attempt. In refusing to interpret Paul's actions as expressions of will, Camille refuses that uptake. This is the sense in which Camille's adoption of the objective attitude constitutes a refusal of authorial power to Paul.

Consider this refusal next from Paul's perspective. If the consequence of being in this way the target of Camille's objective attitude is that Paul thereby escapes her reactive contempt, why suppose he is any *worse* off for the loss?

Recall that Paul is, however malevolent, nonetheless second-personally competent. He understands that Camille has the authority to legitimately expect, indeed demand, better of him. He also recognizes that intimates are prone to certain attitudinal responses in holding them to account for the violation of such demands. And yet, in adopting the objective stance, Camille has immured herself from this particular range of attitudes. Because these attitudes are precisely those that otherwise respond to the significance of an intimate's attitudes and behavior for her personally, their eschewal necessarily exerts a distancing effect on him. It does so relative to the vulnerability characteristic of lovers within the scope of each other's reactive attitudes. Were it not for such a distancing effect, the strategy of adopting the objective attitude couldn't serve as a refuge of any sort. Additionally, in cases such as this, where we imagine Camille thereby treats Paul differently from other intimates, we can understand the relevant notion of distance relative to her other relationships, as well. The intimates Camille holds closest, the ones about whom she cares the most, presumably are those toward whom she continues to regard it as worth her while to reactively respond. She has excluded Paul from this circle of intimates.

The significance of Paul's behavior, moreover, is one that we cannot adequately register by nonreactive analogues such as sadness or regret.²⁴ Allow me to illustrate why by appeal to a different example.²⁵ Rejecting an account of blame on which it necessarily involves feelings of resentment or other negative moral emotions, T. M. Scanlon reports that in judging his friend to be blameworthy for telling cruel jokes about him, he "might just feel sad" (Scanlon 2008: 136).²⁶ Note, however, that whereas resentment reproaches Joe as a violator of Tim's legitimate relationship-grounded demands, sadness focuses on an undesirable outcome Joe produces (as would regret and state-focused disappointment). Supposing that sadness is the right kind

²⁴ Cf. here Pereboom 2001: ch. 7.

²⁵ I discuss the example in Mason 2011.

²⁶ Here Scanlon appears sympathetic to certain concerns that motivate Pereboom's rejection of the reactive attitudes, among them a concern that they harbor retributive impulses.

of feeling to be warranted by evidence of a person's wronging you ignores the way in which wronging constitutes a violation of relational, essentially person-focused, demands.²⁷ It is just this possibility of person-to-person engagement (among other things) that Paul forfeits in becoming the target of Camille's objective stance. This is so whether her strategic employment of the objective attitude is emotionally toned by nonreactive contempt (and, so, aversion and recoil) or simply sadness (with its attendant inaction or withdrawal).²⁸ In either case, the distancing that results is, in short, in tension with the intimacy required to sustain romantic love.²⁹

Second, Paul is barred from a certain mode of reasoning with Camille. Paul will no longer find himself a recipient of Camille's trust that he is someone legitimately expected to respect her authority to provide him direct and conclusive normative reasons to act in certain ways versus others. At best, he will be offered incentives strategically designed to influence his behavior, appeals to the pain he might sympathetically share in injuring her, or the pleasure he might sympathetically take in benefitting her. Although, if effective, these modes of interacting suffice to place Camille in a specific causal connection to Paul's will, we rightfully take these modes to be

²⁷ The proponent of nonreactive analogues for the reactive attitudes might at this point appeal to a form of disappointment that is not state-directed: disappointment *in* a person. Consider, however, that it suffices for such warranted disappointment that the other has frustrated some desire of yours that he or she is in a position to satisfy—there need not be any connection between that desire and what the other is morally obligated to do (and so with desires whose frustration would count as wronging you). This alone marks an important contrast between such disappointment and resentment.

For further discussion of the relational feature of the demands implicit in reactive attitudes such as resentment, see Wallace 2007: 303.

²⁸ On withdrawal as a typical action tendency of sadness, see Nichols 2007: esp. 420.

²⁹ What if, however, a couple correctly decides that continued vulnerability to the reactive attitudes is detrimental to their relationship because, say, the resulting strains are too great? They vow to replace resentment with sadness or disappointment. (Again, I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing the example.) The first thing to note is that the primary detriment to this relationship, it seems to me, results from their so wronging each other that the negative reactive attitudes pose a psychic burden. That said, the suggestion is that substituting sadness and disappointment for the reactive attitudes would benefit the relationship without any significant loss. As I previously noted, if the parties to this relationship thereby treat each other differently from their other intimates, then we can understand the "distancing" I claim is involved relative to the kind of emotional engagement they reserve for those others.

Waiving that point, there is the additional consideration, again previously noted, that neither sadness nor disappointment have a necessary conceptual connection with wronging—and so this couple thus ceases to afford any special significance to those normative expectations whose violation marks moral injury in particular. That one would cease to thus distinguish such injuries from other kinds in the case of our beloved, I suggest, marks a failure to care sufficiently about the normative expectations whose violation we have most reason to protest.

appropriate, if at all, to children and the incapacitated. Taken up toward the competent, in contrast, they take on a perniciously patronizing cast. Such a stance, again, is in tension with the reciprocity essential to the normative ideal of mature romantic love.

Finally, although in adopting the objective stance Camille does not thereby take herself to be licensed to treat Paul however she pleases (it is still incumbent upon her to afford his will weight and himself a status sufficient to distinguish morally permissible treatment from that allowed only toward a mere thing), she has ceased to relate to Paul in a way that affords his will a distinct power: what I have called the authorial power of conferring personally addressed meaning on his attitudes and behavior. Such authorial power is necessary if one's behavior is to count as expressive in ways that we must take to matter—not only because, as Strawson writes, “it matters to us, whether the actions of other people—and particularly of some other people—reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other” (Strawson 1982: 76). It matters to us whether *others* take *our* actions to reflect such qualities. In assigning to Paul's attitudes and actions only those meanings that her objective stance can countenance, Camille deprives Paul of a power for which he has reason to demand recognition (however ill a use to which it has previously been put).

Consider here, again, another example. Consider the case of an adult daughter whose wrongdoing is, to her mind, much too quickly forgiven by a parent. Whereas the benevolent parent is motivated to do so by a concern for her child's happiness, the result is that the daughter is in fact angered. Why? Why is that an intelligible response? My suggestion is that the daughter regards it to be important—and important to her relationship with her parent—that her attitudes and actions be recognized as having the meaning she takes the fact of her violation to give them. The too-quick forgiveness resembles adoption of the objective stance in suggesting that the parent doesn't appreciate their meaning or simply doesn't care sufficiently about it in the context of the relationship to mount a protest.³⁰ In a similar vein,

³⁰ Thus, a forgiveness that avoids objectivity of attitude cannot deny the meaning of the forgiven behavior.

A perhaps more poignant example of the loss I articulate is found in Rufus Johnson, a character in Flannery O'Connor's “The Lame Shall Enter First” (O'Connor 1971: 445–82). An unrepentant juvenile delinquent, Johnson has little patience with his would-be benefactor Sheppard's efforts at explaining and excusing Johnson's deviousness by appeal to his disadvantaged upbringing and deformed foot. Sheppard interprets Johnson's actions as attempts to somehow compensate for the sense of weakness that his disfigurement provokes. Johnson will have none of this. I take Johnson's impatience to register

in taking up the objective stance, one usurps a meaning-giving, authorial power for which the competent correctly demand recognition and whose exercise they have reason to value.

CONCLUSION

Those who oppose Strawson in order to counsel universal adoption of the objective attitude—such as the self-described objective attitude enthusiasts³¹—focus our attention on the consequences of a person's adoption of the objective attitude toward all. They justify such indiscriminate, or universal, application by appeal to facts that, correspondingly, apply universally: for example, the purported fact that we generally lack the preconditions for “real moral responsibility”, or that consequentialist calculations or theological doctrine speak overwhelmingly in the objective attitude's favor. Such a focus on the “big picture” encourages one to overlook important aspects of how adoption of the objective attitude would play out in specific intimate relationships. In that context, far from being an impossibility for us, Strawson recognized the employment of the objective stance as a resource. Why then balk at the universal adoption of an admitted resource?

I hope to have gone some way toward explaining, where Strawson did not, why that resource is one we must ultimately find wanting. In immuring one to certain kinds of emotional engagement and rational relations with another—and deafening one to the meaning one has reason to assign another's behavior—the objective attitude erodes forms of regard necessary for sustaining intimate relationships among creatures like us. If the objective attitude enthusiasts were correct, universal employment of the objective attitude would usher in a reign of universal refuge characterized by relationships without strain. If what I have argued here is correct, in contrast, far from enabling us to take refuge *in* relationships, the objective attitude employed as refuge signals that we are, instead, on our way out.

his frustrated demand for a form of recognition that Sheppard refuses him, the recognition that he is capable of evil. On a less Manichean view, Johnson's is a demand for the recognition that he is capable of wronging others. “I lie and steal because I'm good at it” he insists. “My foot don't have a thing to do with it!” The novel ends with Johnson having enticed Sheppard's only child to commit suicide. Thanks to Anthony Rudd for recommending O'Connor's story.

³¹ Sommers embraces the term (2007: 325).

References

- D'Arms, Justin and Daniel Jacobson. (2000). "The Moralistic Fallacy: On The 'Appropriateness' of Emotions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61: 65–90.
- Darwall, Stephen. (2006). *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Darwall, Stephen. (2013). "Morality's Distinctiveness," in Stephen Darwall, *Morality, Authority, & Law: Essays in Second-Personal Ethics I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), chapter 1.
- Downie, R. S. (1966). "Objective and Reactive Attitudes." *Analysis* 27: 33–9.
- Groll, Daniel. (2012). "Paternalism, Respect, and the Will." *Ethics* 122: 692–720.
- Hill, Thomas. (2000). "Must Respect be Earned," in Thomas Hill, *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press), chapter 4.
- Hornby, Nick. (2001). *How to be Good* (New York: Riverhead Books).
- Mason, Michelle. (2003). "Contempt as a Moral Attitude." *Ethics* 113: 234–72.
- Mason, Michelle. (2011). "Blame: Taking it Seriously." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. LXXXIII: 473–81.
- Moravia, Alberto. (1954). *Il Disprezzo*. (Milan: Bompiani); in English translation, see *Contempt*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: NYBR Classics, 2004).
- Morris, Herbert. (1968). "Persons and Punishment." *The Monist* 52: 475–501.
- Nichols, Shaun. (2007). "After Incompatibilism: A Naturalistic Defense of the Reactive Attitudes." *Philosophical Perspectives* 21: 405–28.
- O'Connor, Flannery. (1971). "The Lame Shall Enter First," in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), 445–82.
- Pereboom, Derk. (2001). *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Scanlon, T. M. (2008). *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Shabo, Seth. (2012a). "Incompatibilism and Personal Relationships: Another Look at Strawson's Objective Attitude." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90: 131–47.
- Shabo, Seth. (2012b). "Where Love and Resentment Meet: Strawson's Intrapersonal Defense of Compatibilism." *Philosophical Review* 121: 95–124.
- Sommers, Tamler. (2007). "The Objective Attitude." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57: 321–41.
- Strawson, P. F. (1982). "Freedom and Resentment," in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press), 59–80.
- Wallace, R. Jay. (1994) *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Wallace, R. Jay. (2007). "The Argument from Resentment." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* CVII: 295–318.
- Watson, Gary. (1993). "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in John Fischer and Mark Ravizza, eds, *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 119–48.
- Wolf, Susan. (1981). "The Importance of Free Will." *Mind* 90: 386–405.