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INCOMPATIBILISM AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: ANOTHER LOOK AT STRAWSON'S OBJECTIVE ATTITUDE

Seth Shabo

In the context of his highly influential defence of compatibilism, P. F. Strawson [1962] introduced the terms 'reactive attitude' and 'objective attitude' to the free-will lexicon. He argued, in effect, that relinquishing such reactive attitudes as resentment and moral indignation isn't a real possibility for us, since doing so would commit us to exclusive objectivity, a stance incompatible with ordinary interpersonal relationships. While most commentators have challenged Strawson's link between personal relationships and the reactive attitudes, Tamler Sommers [2007] has taken up Strawson's claim that exclusive objectivity would preclude meaningful relationships. Here I set out a defence of this claim by identifying a kind of interpersonal caring that is plausibly both required for such relationships and excluded by the objective attitude. I then argue that this defence helps to support Strawson's more controversial claim about personal relationships and the reactive attitudes.

1. Introduction

Compatibilists believe that the truth of causal determinism is compatible with the existence of moral responsibility. P. F. Strawson [1962] offered a strikingly original defence of this view. Unlike previous theorists, Strawson did not challenge the incompatibilist's claim that causally determined actions are *unavoidable*. Nor did he appeal to the *expediency* of blaming and punishing individuals whose actions meet the relevant standard of avoidability. Instead, he maintained that questions about the justification of these practices are misplaced.¹ Such questions appear beside the point, he believed, once we recognize that blaming and punishing are expressions of *sentiment*, especially such sentiments as resentment and moral indignation. At root, these 'reactive attitudes and feelings' are manifestations of our natural concern with the quality of others' wills—with their indifference, hostility, ingratitude, contempt, disloyalty, and so on. In so far as these reactions are integral to our characteristically human form of life and 'a condition of our humanity' [Strawson 1985: 33], suspending them isn't a real

¹That is, while *instances* of blaming and punishing may be inappropriate in various ways, he denied that these practices *in general* can come up for review in the way incompatibilists believe they can [Strawson 1962: 55, 1985: 41].

possibility for us, whatever the theoretical merits of incompatibilism might be (or seem to be). Though not strictly impossible, Strawson concluded, the wholesale renunciation of these reactions is ‘practically inconceivable’, given our actual psychological makeup [1962: 54].

But why accept the Practical Inconceivability Claim? Notwithstanding the attention it has received, this claim and Strawson’s basis for it have remained somewhat elusive. At least part of his rationale can be reconstructed as follows:²

- (1) We cannot adequately understand the point of blaming and punishing without recognizing the extent to which these practices are expressions of sentiment, especially such ‘reactive attitudes and feelings’ as resentment, moral indignation, and guilt.³
- (2) To the extent to which we suspend these attitudes and feelings towards someone, we adopt ‘the objective stance’ towards him, viewing him as a ‘natural object’ *rather than* a potential co-participant in a personal relationship.
- (3) We cannot form or maintain personal relationships with individuals towards whom we *regularly* (or exclusively) adopt the objective stance.

If these three claims are correct, then, given our unshakeable commitment to personal relationships, our practice of holding people morally responsible is here to stay. Just as forgoing personal relationships is practically inconceivable for us, so is normalizing the objective attitude, a state of affairs that would preclude involvement in such relationships.⁴

To many commentators, the weak link in this argument has seemed clear. Regarding (2), Strawson did not say enough about *why* relinquishing our susceptibility to resentment, indignation, and guilt, in particular, would consign us to the objective stance [Bennett 1980: 40; Wallace 1994: ch. 2; Pereboom 2001: ch. 7]. (For convenience, I shall reserve the term ‘reactive attitude’ for these three sentiments.) Why not think that *other*, non-reactive attitudes and feelings could sustain the crucial sort of emotional involvement, the sort that is arguably both required for personal relationships and excluded by thoroughgoing objectivity [Pereboom 2001: ch. 7]?

Recently, Tamler Sommers [2007] has challenged (3), a claim that has largely escaped critical scrutiny. Sommers is surely right that this claim, too, requires a more thorough explanation and defence than Strawson provided for it. Why think that exclusive objectivity in our interpersonal dealings would preclude such emotional involvement? Without an answer to this question, the possibility remains that, although wholly renouncing the

²See Strawson [1962: 54] for his official statement of this argument.

³To some readers, talk of the *point* of these practices may suggest a consequentialist approach to blaming and punishing, an approach Strawson rejected. As Gary Watson [1987: 127–8] has argued, however, there is another, more Strawsonian way to describe the point of these practices. In so far as resentment and indignation are analogous to ‘incipient forms of moral address’, we can view their expressions as forms of moral communication whose purpose goes beyond influencing the target’s behaviour. I discuss this view further in Shabo [forthcoming].

⁴As noted, Strawson [1962: 55, 1985: 41] went on to argue that general questions about the justification of our responsibility-related attitudes and practices are misguided. This further contention won’t be addressed here. I believe the Practical Inconceivability Claim is of considerable interest in its own right.

reactive attitudes would entail exclusive objectivity (as [2] implies), this could be achieved without compromising personal relationships. If so, our commitment to personal relationships is not the bulwark against relinquishing our responsibility-related practices that Strawson thought it was.

Clearly, much turns on how we are to understand the objective stance, and how, in particular, *exclusively* adopting this stance is supposed to rule out participation in personal relationships. In what follows, I propose an answer on Strawson's behalf. While this answer is in the spirit of Strawson's remarks, it is not fully or explicitly developed in his writings; nor has it made its way into discussions of his work or the themes raised therein.

Put simply, the proposal is this. To be involved in a personal relationship with someone, we must care in a particular way about that person's attitudes towards us, especially in so far as those attitudes are manifested in that person's treatment of us. And, the thought continues, to the extent to which we adopt the objective attitude towards someone, we make it the case that we do not care in the required way about that person's attitudes towards us. Thus, someone who managed to achieve *exclusive* objectivity of attitude (assuming for discussion's sake that this is possible) would be excluded from involvement in personal relationships.

Now in one respect, (3), as it will be understood here, is weaker than Strawson's position. Whereas Strawson held that the distinctly personal element in *all* human interactions would be compromised by exclusive objectivity [1962: 49], I focus here on two particularly important kinds of personal relationship: mature friendship and reciprocal love.⁵ For simplicity, I shall reserve the expression 'personal relationship' for relationships of these two kinds. If we can neither forgo such relationships nor combine them with exclusive objectivity, it follows that we cannot normalize the objective attitude in a centrally important area of our emotional lives, let alone *tout court*.⁶

Granted, even if this defence of (3) and the Practical Inconceivability Claim succeeds, it does not rule out the possibility that we *can and should* strive to eliminate the reactive attitudes *outside* personal relationships. Be this as it may, this defence yields a significant result: it shows that, contrary to what Strawson's opponents have maintained, our inability to eliminate these attitudes—whether by adopting exclusive objectivity [Sommers 2007], or by suspending these attitudes without moving to exclusive objectivity [Pereboom 2001: ch. 7]—*is* rooted in our commitment to personal relationships.

To support (3), I describe a kind of caring that is both plausibly required for personal relationships, and plausibly excluded by Strawson's characterization of the objective attitude. It might be asked how this defence of (3), if successful, bears on the status of the more controversial

⁵I am supposing that we can distinguish—at least in favourable cases—relationships of mature friendship and reciprocal love from associations based chiefly on mutual convenience or attraction, shared personal or professional interests, general collegiality or amiability, and so on.

⁶Putting this a bit differently, showing that our commitment to personal relationships (i.e. mature friendships and reciprocal loves) precludes a globally objective stance is enough to support Strawson's claim that such a stance isn't a real possibility for us. Furthermore, the reasons for denying the possibility of exclusive objectivity seem strongest and most evident in connection with such relationships.

(2). While this defence will not by itself vindicate (2) or Strawson's conclusion that relinquishing resentment *et al.* isn't a real possibility for us, it will help to bring out more clearly what denying these claims would commit us to.

Five decades on, interest in Strawson's essay remains strong. Among its signal innovations was its linking the emotional basis of human relationships with the emotional basis of holding people responsible. By setting out a Strawsonian argument for (3), I hope to further illuminate this important link, while drawing together the arguments for (2) and (3) in a way that reinforces both. If I am right, Strawson's case for the Practical Inconceivability Claim is stronger than has been realized, and contemporary theorists have still more to gain from his remarkably fruitful approach.

In §2 below, I locate the substantive issue between Sommers and Strawson concerning personal relationships and the objective attitude. In §3, I defend Strawson's position that such relationships are incompatible with exclusive objectivity. In §4, I show how this defence can be extended to Strawson's more controversial claim that we cannot relinquish the reactive attitudes towards co-participants in such relationships.

2. What is the Objective Stance?

Strawson used the term 'objective stance' (and 'objective attitude') to mark a contrast between how we respond to the behaviour of adults in ordinary circumstances, and how we respond to individuals we see as incapacitated (or, in the case of small children, not yet ready) for involvement in ordinary adult relationships. Such incapacities can be more or less enduring, and more or less pronounced.⁷ And they can vary in a great many other ways besides. When we realize, for example, that a relative is going through a particularly trying period at work, we may find it easy to temper our susceptibility to anger and resentment in response to behaviour that would normally elicit these reactions. In doing so, we relax—if only in some ways, and to some extent—our standard interpersonal demand for goodwill, a demand whose violation typically triggers resentment and indignation. In other cases, as when we come to see someone's behaviour as the product of serious mental illness, we cease to see that person as an appropriate target of this demand [Strawson 1962: 52]. At the limit, Strawson writes [loc. cit.],

To adopt the objective attitude towards another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided.

⁷Strawson [1962: 54]. He also notes that we sometimes adopt this stance temporarily, as a 'refuge from the strains of involvement' that arise in ordinary personal relationships [ibid.: 52].

He continues [loc. cit.]:

The objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways: it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity or even love, though not all kinds of love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other.

There is little question that personal relationships require a broader emotional repertoire than this. As noted, commentators have often questioned Strawson's claim that such relationships require a susceptibility to resentment, indignation, and guilt in particular—the trio Strawson took to be constitutive of holding morally responsible (and for which I am reserving the term 'reactive attitude'). Why think that we must choose between retaining these attitudes and adopting a stance that is inhospitable to mature friendship and reciprocal love?

A further question, however, is why the objective stance should be seen as inhospitable to such relationships in the first place. According to Strawson, when we adopt this stance, we view someone as a natural object—something to be studied, controlled, avoided, and so on—*rather than* a potential co-participant in such a relationship. But why must these two perspectives conflict?⁸ Even if adopting this view precludes experiencing resentment and indignation (along with *some* other characteristic features of emotional involvement), perhaps it can be 'emotionally toned' in a greater variety of ways than Strawson allows. If so, it is fair to ask whether the two stances are really as 'profoundly opposed' as he believes [ibid.].

It is here that Sommers believes previous commentators have given Strawson a free pass. Susan Wolf eloquently presents what Sommers takes to be the prevailing view of the matter. Following Sommers, I quote her summation in full [Wolf 1981: 110, quoted in Sommers 2007: 326]:

The most gruesome difference between this world and ours would be reflected in our closest human relationships—in the relationships between siblings, parents and children, and especially spouses and companions. We would still be able to form some sorts of association that could be described as relationships of friendship and love. One person could find another amusing or useful. One could notice that the presence of a certain person was, like the sound of a favourite song, particularly soothing or invigorating. We could choose friends as we now choose clothing or home furnishings or hobbies, according to whether they offer, to a sufficient degree, the proper combination of pleasure and practicality. Attachments of considerable strength can develop on such limited bases. People do, after all, form strong attachments to their cars, their pianos, not to mention their pets. Nonetheless, I hope it is obvious why the words 'friendship' and 'love' applied to relationships in which

⁸On the related question of how the objective stance conflicts with the reactive attitudes in particular, see Bennett [1980: 40] and Benson [1990: 13–15].

admiration, respect, and gratitude have no part, might be said to take on a hollow ring. A world in which human relationships are restricted to those that can be formed and supported in the absence of the reactive attitudes is a world of human isolation so cold and dreary that any but the most cynical must shudder at the idea of it.

It is easy to see why Wolf believes that ‘love’ and ‘friendship’ would take on a hollow ring when applied to relationships formed on such a limited emotional basis. But would consistently adopting the objective attitude really impose such severe emotional limits? And if so, why?

Part of Wolf’s answer is that ‘admiration, respect, and gratitude’ would have no place in such a world. Let us grant that this is correct, and that relinquishing such attitudes would impoverish human relationships *to that extent*. Even so, more is needed to support Wolf’s ‘gruesome’ portrayal of the objective-attitude world. How would the loss of these attitudes lead to (or constitute) the loss of emotionally significant relationships?

Instead of challenging the suggestion that relinquishing these attitudes (along with resentment, indignation, and guilt) would commit us to the objective attitude, Sommers takes a more upbeat view of the objective attitude [2007: 341, italics original]:

When you take the objective attitude towards other human beings, you do nothing more than see them as natural things. But a human being is still a human being—the most exciting, infuriating, unpredictable, lovable, loathsome natural thing in the world. So when we adopt the objective attitude, we would not merely find people useful or amusing. We would not choose our friends as we would choose home furnishings, hobbies, songs, pianos or pets. (One needs to be suspicious about analogies that are used to trivialize certain features of the objective attitude without providing a basis for the trivialization.) We choose friends as we choose human friends—that is all. Nothing in the objective attitude prevents us from recognizing, appreciating, *cherishing* the rich and wonderful qualities of another person. It remains the choice that brings the greatest rewards and the deepest disappointments in all of human existence.

This is certainly a far cry from the ‘tragic world of human isolation’, ‘so much bleaker and more barren than our present world’, that Wolf (and Strawson) portrays [Wolf 1981: 106]. As Sommers remarks, we have not been given a compelling reason to believe that exclusively adopting the objective attitude would ‘endanger ... the most tragic, passionate, romantic, blissful kinds of love that exist’ [2007: 332].

How are we to account for such divergent assessments? To begin, it is important to see that the issue between Sommers and Wolf is not merely terminological, as it would be if (say) Wolf *stipulated* that ‘the objective attitude’ denotes a stance that precludes certain kinds of emotional involvement. If I am right, locating the substantive issue (something I believe Sommers hasn’t fully done) will help to illuminate an important and insufficiently appreciated strand in Strawson’s thinking, one with implica-

tions for the Practical Inconceivability Claim and the moral psychology of holding people responsible.

As a first step towards locating this issue, let us suppose that, as a matter of psychological fact, we do sometimes view people as natural objects (or systems) in a way that inhibits our susceptibility to the reactive attitudes towards them. What Wolf accepts and Sommers denies, I take it, is that suspending these attitudes by consistently viewing others in this way would compromise our ability to form and maintain meaningful personal relationships. It is this disagreement that calls for further examination.

To be sure, there may be *some* extent to which the disagreement is attributable to different conceptions of what makes a relationship emotionally significant. However, this cannot be the whole story. As the above quotations make clear, at least part of the issue concerns the psychological implications of adopting a certain perspective on other people. Presumably, Sommers would allow that *some* of the features Strawson associates with the objective stance *would* preclude meaningful relationships, on any plausible conception of such relationships. For example, Strawson [1962: 52] holds that, 'If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then ... though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to reason with him'. I take Sommers's position to be that a (or the) *core* feature of the objective attitude—viewing someone as a natural system in a way that inhibits the reactive attitudes—need not always (or even typically) be accompanied by these relationship-compromising features. If this is right, it is not evident that *consistently* viewing people in this way would have the dire impact on personal relationships that many believe it would.

We can now make out the substantive issue between Sommers, on the one hand, and Wolf and Strawson, on the other. When we adopt the objective attitude towards someone, Strawson suggests, we take a broadly *reductive* view of him, seeing him as a locus of various processes and changes, and nothing more [1985: 32]. In so far as we thereby assimilate him to *impersonal* features of our environments (such as storm systems, silt accretions, spider webs, and so on), it is perhaps easy to understand why Strawson and others might have thought it *obvious* that this perspective doesn't allow for a crucial sort of emotional engagement with others. Much as we may fear an avalanche or regret a cold spell, these occurrences do not personally *offend* us. And much as we may find bioluminescence fascinating or welcome indications that a hurricane will miss the coastline, we do not feel personally *indebted* to these things; nor do we feel an *emotional bond* with them. In assimilating our view of persons to our stance towards other natural systems, I take Strawson's thought to be, we narrow our emotional repertoire to the point where such distinctively interpersonal forms of emotional involvement are excluded.⁹ Because such forms of involvement are plausibly seen as essential to mature friendship and reciprocal love, we

⁹As noted, Strawson doesn't wish to deny that the objective attitude excludes all sorts of love (e.g. parental love for a small child), or feelings of pity or distress at the suffering of another sentient being.

can understand why he and others have supposed that exclusively adopting the objective attitude would preclude such relationships.

To resist this conclusion, Sommers observes that even when we regard people as natural things, they remain a *special kind* of natural thing, and our (non-reactive) attitudes and feelings towards them can continue to reflect this. That is, we can have distinctive kinds of attitudes and feelings towards them because, considered as natural objects, they remain different in important ways from other kinds of natural object. Even without such notions as dignity and moral responsibility, how we appreciate a lively conversationalist (say) is rather different from how we appreciate a wine's dryness or an amplifier's warm tone. We can, for example, appreciate someone's wry perspective and sense of humour, her insight into people's motivations, and her ability to understand, value, and reciprocate our emotional states. And, the thought continues, such qualities enable us to share in one another's struggles, joys, and sorrows in ways that we cannot engage with non-persons. Because the core objective attitude (as I am calling it) does not seem to preclude these varieties of interpersonal involvement and appreciation, it is not evident that it must compromise the emotional basis of meaningful relationships [Sommers 2007: 331–3]. Though reductive in *some* ways, this attitude need not be reductive in *all* the ways that Strawson and others have supposed. At any rate, this seems to be a reasonable interpretation of Sommers's challenge.

If adopting this stance need not involve assimilating ordinary adults to *mere* natural systems (systems of the wrong *sort* to understand and reciprocate our attitudes and feelings), we need not suppose that *exclusively* adopting it would preclude a variety of emotional engagement sufficient to sustain meaningful personal relationships. To show otherwise, Strawson would need to argue that the core objective attitude does exclude such involvement, *or* that we cannot sustain personal relationships on the basis of such involvement (not without further elements that *are* excluded by the core objective attitude). I shall now argue that such involvement is indeed insufficient for meaningful personal relationships.

3. Personal Relationships and Taking Things Personally

Recall Wolf's claim that 'love' and 'friendship' would take on a hollow ring when applied to relationships in the objective-attitude world. I believe that she is right about this, but that she has not identified the most important reason for it. Towards identifying this reason, let us begin with an extreme case of the objective stance: the studied, clinical detachment of a psychiatrist towards a patient she regards as seriously mentally ill. Sommers would no doubt agree that we cannot become emotionally close to someone while consistently maintaining such clinical detachment. What he would deny, I take it, is that such detachment is essential to viewing someone as a natural object in the way required for suspending the reactive attitudes. That is, he would deny that such detachment is essential to adopting what I am calling the core objective attitude.

Perhaps he would be right to deny this. Still, the case of the psychiatrist draws attention to something that *is* plausibly constitutive of viewing someone as a natural object in the relevant way. In treating a patient she regards as severely disturbed, the psychiatrist may take a keen interest in what the patient says and does, but not in the same way that she takes an interest in the words and actions of someone whose opinions *really matter to her*. With the patient, she will be on guard precisely against taking his behaviour *personally*. If, for example, he makes remarks that would cause her grave offence if made by a colleague, she will see it as part of her job to attribute it to his illness and not hold it against him.

While it is not easy to say what it *is* to take something personally, indications that someone *has* taken something personally (or has ‘taken offence’) are often easy to recognize. For example, someone who takes a slight personally may continue to think about it long after there is any practical point in doing so. She may become emotionally withdrawn, feel angry, hurt, or shocked, seek opportunities to retaliate, demand an explanation, and so on. Importantly, it may matter a great deal to her *why* the slight occurred, where this is precisely a question about what the offending behaviour reveals about the other’s attitude towards her. I shall say that someone who exhibits such concern with another’s attitudes towards her *cares in an essentially personal way* about the other’s treatment of her. To care about someone’s behaviour in this way is to care about it *independently* of what it presages about his future conduct, or how that conduct might affect one’s (or a third party’s) interests [cf. Strawson 1962: 49–50]. In taking offence at a slight, we take someone’s treatment of us personally on some occasion. And in taking that treatment personally then, we manifest a disposition to take that person’s behaviour personally, a disposition that is partly constitutive of caring in this essentially personal way about that person’s behaviour towards us.

In this connection, we should also consider our reactions to expressions of goodwill. When someone shows particular or unexpected awareness of our situation and acts to benefit us, or makes a special effort on our behalf, this often matters to us in ways that go beyond merely welcoming the benefit or valuing the personal qualities that led to it. In such cases, we may look for ways to express our gratitude, not towards influencing the person’s future behaviour, but because we want him to understand that we appreciate his goodwill and assistance. Such reactions, no less than our reactions to slights and wrongs, manifest our essentially personal way of caring about how others treat us.

I submit, then, that in regarding someone as a natural object, where this involves suspending our susceptibility to resentment and indignation (as well as gratitude) towards him, we bring it about that we do *not* take his treatment of us personally. To be sure, we sometimes avoid taking someone’s behaviour personally without regarding him as a natural object. For example, we may attribute someone’s hostile behaviour to the adversarial nature of the situation, thereby forestalling resentment towards him, even as we remain susceptible to resentment and indignation in response to *some* possible actions of his. In viewing someone as a natural

object, we bring about a much more extensive suspension of these attitudes, viewing him as though he were a kind of thing whose states it doesn't *make sense* to take personally.¹⁰

We now have a straightforward (if rudimentary) account of how regarding someone as a natural object tempers our susceptibility to the reactive attitudes: this susceptibility is tempered because, in so regarding her, we are less prone to taking her treatment of us personally.¹¹ It is telling in this connection that Strawson writes [1962: 48]:

The central commonplace that I want to insist on is the very great importance that we attach to the attitudes and intentions towards of us other human beings, and the great extent to which our personal feelings depend upon, or involve, our beliefs about these attitudes and intentions.

However, he doesn't tell us exactly why he believes that exclusive objectivity is incompatible with personal relationships (or with the characteristically personal element of human associations more generally). Using the notions of taking things personally and caring in an essentially personal way, I now propose an answer:

- (A) To the extent to which we adopt the objective stance towards someone, we make it the case that we do not take his treatment of us personally.
- (B) If we are not disposed to taking *anything* someone says or does personally (or if we subdue this disposition to the greatest psychologically possible degree at all times), we cannot be said to care in an essentially personal way about that person's actions and attitudes towards us.
- (C) Relationships between individuals who do not care in this way about one another's actions and attitudes are emotionally impoverished, and do not qualify as mature friendships or relations of reciprocal love.

To what extent can we share in the struggles, joys, and sorrows of someone about whose thoughts and feelings towards us we don't care about in this way? I am not sure. But whatever the answer to this question, I find (C) highly plausible. If (A)–(C) are true, someone who maintained the objective stance at all times, utterly minimizing her susceptibility to take personally serious maltreatment from those around her, would be missing a crucial dimension of emotional involvement.¹² In a world where such exclusive

¹⁰Analogously, in so far as we understand that a volcanic eruption is a wholly impersonal process, and not an expression of a deity's displeasure (say), we regard the volcano's states as the wrong kinds of things to take personally. If viewing someone as a natural object involves viewing him as the locus of various processes and changes, not fundamentally different from other natural systems (like volcanoes), this will involve viewing him as though he were the kind of thing whose states are the wrong sort to take personally.

¹¹If this was indeed Strawson's thought, we have a plausible explanation of why he saw the objective stance as 'profoundly opposed' to the kind of emotional involvement characteristic of personal relationships [1962: 52], for we do tend to associate such emotional involvement with a fairly robust susceptibility to taking maltreatment in such relationships personally.

¹²It should be stressed that nothing in my argument implies that personal relationships depend on there actually *being* instances of maltreatment. My claim is that the *susceptibility* to taking such treatment personally is required, independently of occasions for its manifestation.

objectivity was the norm, the words ‘love’ and ‘friendship’ would indeed lose much of their current significance.

Let us begin with (C). Suppose that one party in a romantic relationship discovers that he truly no longer cares what the other thinks of him or feels towards him. Whether she loves or loathes him, views him with admiration, contempt, or indifference, sees him as a well-intentioned fool or someone who really tried to make a difference (or a bit of both)—it really matters little to him. Assuming that this isn’t an aberration, something important is missing. In the light of this absence, we would not count his remaining feelings towards her as feelings of love (in the sense of reciprocal, romantic love). Even if he continues to care a great deal about her well being, and to admire many of her personal qualities, he does not care about her actions and attitudes towards him in the essentially personal way that love requires.

If this is right, the crucial sort of emotional involvement depends on caring in an essentially personal way about more than just others’ overt *treatment* of us (and the attitudes expressed therein). It involves a far-reaching concern with the esteem in which they hold us, something that is revealed in their interactions with us, in the concern they show for our interests, and in a variety of other ways (e.g. in what they say about us in confidence to third parties). Importantly, while we care about the various behavioural manifestations of this esteem (or its absence), we do not care *only* about these manifestations. To some extent, these manifestations matter as evidence of an attitude (or set of attitudes) that is important in its own right. Consider, for example, someone who really doesn’t care whether her partner in a romantic relationship is ‘just using her’, and who would be content to continue the relationship as long as he remains a ‘perfect actor’ and keeps his deep-seated contempt for her fastidiously hidden. While she may well have a strong passionate attachment to him, her emotional investment is of the wrong sort to qualify as reciprocal love.

I submit, then, that caring in this personal way about the other’s thoughts and feelings towards one—broadly speaking, about the esteem in which the other holds one—is required for reciprocal love and mature friendship. And I contend that such caring is incompatible with genuine indifference to the other’s *treatment* of one. In particular, someone who did not care in an essentially personal way about the other’s manifestations of neglect, hostility, or disrespect towards him (someone to whom it would not matter, for example, which of several explanations for an apparent betrayal was correct) could not be said to care in the required way about the other’s thoughts and feelings towards him more generally. The point is not that such manifestations matter only because (and in so far as) they are manifestations of the other’s broader esteem towards one. The point is, rather, that someone who cares about this esteem in the way required for the crucial sort of emotional involvement must *also* care about the qualities of will expressed in the other’s treatment of him.

As noted, an important theme in Strawson’s essay is that our natural concern with the qualities of others’ wills, as exhibited in their treatment of us, is a hallmark of our characteristically human form of life. This concern is by no means confined to co-participants in personal relationships. It is,

however, illuminating to consider it in the context of such relationships. By viewing it in this context, we can see it as intimately related to our broader concern with the other's esteem for us. Just as this broader concern is inseparable from the kind of emotional involvement required for personal relationships, so caring in an essentially personal way about the other's treatment of us is inseparable from this broader concern. Focusing on this broader concern thus helps to underscore the plausibility of (C).¹³

Now I take it that Sommers can allow that something important would be missing from a relationship in which one party was indifferent to the esteem in which the other held her, especially where this indifference was evident in the other's treatment of her. Indeed, Sommers might well allow that such indifference would disqualify the relationship as one of mature friendship or reciprocal love. It is less clear, however, that he can allow that the requisite concern about the other's esteem entails a disposition to take maltreatment from the other personally.

This brings us to (B). Suppose that nothing one's partner in a romantic relationship might do—no matter how unexpectedly rude, demeaning, spiteful, disloyal, and so on—would cause one to feel hurt or aggrieved, or to need to understand *why* she acted as she did. This would be strong evidence that one doesn't care about her behaviour in the essentially personal way I have described. If one genuinely cares in this way about her actions and attitudes towards one, there must be some possible behaviour (or significant range of behaviours) on her part that would trigger one's disposition to take that behaviour personally. It is hard to see how someone who is wholly and lastingly immune to taking another person's behaviour personally can be said to care about her actions and attitudes towards him in the relevant way. If this is right, and if, as (A) implies, *exclusively* adopting the objective attitude towards a particular other minimizes one's susceptibility to taking the other's treatment personally, then *globally* adopting this attitude ensures that one doesn't care about *anyone's* behaviour in the manner required for personal relationships.

Notice that someone who has stopped caring in an essentially personal way about the behaviour of a romantic partner might still *appreciate* the good qualities that drew her to him in the first place, in much the same way that she might appreciate them in someone whose admirable deeds she has learned about in the news. For this reason, such appreciation seems too thin a reed on which to hang personal relationships, even if how we appreciate the good qualities of *persons* differs from how we appreciate valuable, impersonal features of our environment [cf. Sommers 2007: 341]. From the fact (if it is a fact) that the objective attitude permits such distinctively personal appreciation, then, we cannot conclude that it permits the crucial sort of emotional involvement.

Be this as it may, Sommers maintains that the objective stance permits a good deal *more* than such appreciation. The question I now want to ask is whether he believes that someone who globally adopted the objective

¹³Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to distinguish more clearly the broader from the narrower kind of interpersonal concern and their respective roles in my argument.

stance—seeing everyone else as a special kind of natural object, while suspending her susceptibility to the reactive attitudes—would still be disposed to take others’ treatment of her *personally*. For example, would it sometimes remain important to her to know (for reasons neither practical nor purely intellectual) which of two very different explanations for someone’s behaviour was correct? Would she likely be hurt upon learning that someone whose joys and sorrows she had shared (or believed she had shared) had grievously abused her trust?

If Sommers answers ‘yes’, a question arises about whether he is really engaging Strawson’s position. After all, we can plausibly and naturally explain why regarding someone as a natural object inhibits the reactive attitudes by supposing that this stance inhibits our disposition to take their treatment of us personally. And it is not readily apparent how *else* we might account for this. For this reason, we can plausibly understand premise (3) from §1—that regularly adopting the objective attitude towards someone precludes having a personal relationship with him—as implying that we cannot form and maintain personal relationships with people whose behaviour we are regularly immune to taking personally. If the core objective attitude is plausibly understood in this way, and if Sommers understands ‘the objective attitude’ in a way that *doesn’t* exclude taking others’ behaviour personally, it isn’t clear that he genuinely disagrees with (3), a claim that seems sufficient for Strawson’s purposes.

If, on the other hand, Sommers answers ‘no’, a different worry arises. I have argued that someone who is immune to taking others’ treatment of her personally cannot be said to care about their attitudes towards her in an essentially personal way, and that the quality of our emotional involvement with others would be greatly impoverished without such caring. If exclusive objectivity precludes such caring, then, it affords an insufficient emotional basis for mature friendship and reciprocal love. Thus neither answer appears promising.

4. Resentment and Personal Relationships

Now look back at the three premises of the reconstructed argument with which we began (§1, par. 2). Assuming that we cannot relinquish personal relationships, it follows from (1)–(3) that suspending our practice of holding people responsible isn’t a real possibility.

As noted, I have restricted this conclusion to relationships of mature friendship and reciprocal love (having restricted the phrase ‘personal relationships’ to relationships of these two kinds). Even this restricted conclusion, if true, is enough to show that our practice of holding people responsible is here to stay, whatever the theoretical merits (or apparent merits) of incompatibilism. If we cannot overcome our susceptibility to the reactive attitudes in the context of personal relationships, we cannot overcome it *tout court*.¹⁴

¹⁴It is perhaps worth stressing that what is being denied here is the possibility that we might suspend this

If (3) is false, suspending our practice of holding people responsible may be a genuine possibility for us, even if doing so would commit us to exclusive objectivity of attitude. We could suspend this practice without endangering personal relationships, the idea is, because such objectivity need not conflict with the crucial sort of emotional involvement. I have argued, however, that (3) is highly plausible. This is because our involvement in such relationships plausibly depends on our susceptibility to taking the other's treatment of us personally, and because exclusively adopting the core objective attitude involves suspending this susceptibility. Just as we cannot have personal relationships without the essentially personal sort of caring described in the previous section, so, it was argued, we cannot care in the required way about people whose treatment of us we are immune to taking personally.

So far, I have not argued that such caring depends on the reactive attitudes in particular. (I have argued, rather, that relinquishing one's susceptibility to the reactive attitudes by consistently viewing the other in a certain way—a way that involves assimilating him to impersonal features of one's environment, and thereby making it the case that one isn't disposed to take his behaviour personally—is incompatible with regarding him as a co-participant in a personal relationship.) Indeed, for all that has been said, the possibility remains that we could renounce the reactive attitudes without relinquishing our susceptibility to taking others' treatment of us personally or ceasing to care in the crucial way about their actions and attitudes towards us. A defence of (2) must address this possibility.

Some incompatibilists believe that the reactive attitudes and their expressions are *morally inappropriate*, and that we should therefore abolish (or drastically reform) our practice of holding people responsible.¹⁵ In so far as these philosophers maintain that we could pursue this agenda without jeopardizing personal relationships, their interest in challenging (2) is clear, especially if they accept (1) and (3), as most appear to do [cf. Pereboom 2001: 199–200].

I won't take up the question of justification here. Rather, I want to suggest a way to extend the argument for (3) to (2). If successful, this strategy will cast doubt on the feasibility of the incompatibilist's reform agenda. For simplicity, I shall focus on resentment, leaving indignation and guilt to one side. To repeat, in so far as someone adopts the core objective attitude towards another person, she suspends her susceptibility to resentment towards him by making it the case that she isn't disposed to take his treatment of her personally. To support (2), a further premise is needed: that it is *only* by overcoming our disposition to take maltreatment from someone personally that we can reliably forestall resentment in response to maltreatment from him. Why accept this further premise?

This premise receives support from the following two claims:

susceptibility, not just on some occasions, but on most or all occasions, even as we remain involved in personal relationships.

¹⁵Here I am thinking mainly of Pereboom [2001: 98, 200], who believes that we should strive to curtail the reactive attitudes because these attitudes presuppose that their targets are morally responsible in the basic-desert-entailing sense, a condition he denies anyone meets *whether or not* determinism is true.

- (D) The relevant sort of resentment—the sort that is occasioned by the ill will and disregard of others, and that is plausibly seen as constitutive of moral blame—is a *way* of taking someone’s maltreatment of us personally.
- (E) In the context of personal relationships, we cannot reliably prevent our susceptibility to take things personally from being manifested *as* resentment, any more than we can suspend that susceptibility.

I shall assume without argument that (D) is true. As to (E), someone who endorses this claim need not deny that we have *some* control over whether our susceptibility to take maltreatment personally is manifested as resentment. For example, there may be situations in which we can tell ourselves that something simply isn’t worth getting upset about, or in which we can avoid resentment by trying harder to understand why the other’s behaviour might have seemed reasonable to her at the time. (These strategies for avoiding or minimizing resentment do *not* involve overcoming our *general* susceptibility to taking the other’s treatment of us personally.) What (E) implies is that our control in this area is limited—too limited to allow us to reliably avoid resentment on occasions when we *do* take maltreatment personally.

Opponents of (E) might contend that we could cultivate much greater control in this area than most of us currently possess. However, there is good reason to be sceptical of this contention. One way to see this is by considering *another* manifestation of our susceptibility to take maltreatment personally: hurt feelings. Such feelings often powerfully reinforce feelings of resentment, especially when they are caused by unjustified behaviour that occurs in a personal relationship. And it is hard to deny that we have limited control over whether we are hurt by behaviour that is spiteful, inconsiderate, disloyal, and so on. The point is not, of course, that resentment *always* involves hurt feelings. The point is, rather, that it *not infrequently* involves such feelings, and that when it does, these feelings greatly add to the difficulty of avoiding or quickly letting go of resentment (a task that is often difficult enough already).

We can now see how the defence of (2) will go. If we are to suspend our susceptibility to resentment in personal relationships, we must do one of two things. Either we must overcome our susceptibility to take maltreatment in such relationships personally, or we must learn to reliably prevent this susceptibility from being manifested as resentment. And, the argument continues, given how prone we are to resentment—a proneness that is reinforced, *inter alia*, by our susceptibility to hurt feelings—it seems doubtful that we could overcome our susceptibility to resentment in such relationships without overcoming our susceptibility to taking maltreatment personally. (That is, it seems likely that *only* by overcoming our disposition to taking maltreatment from someone personally could we suspend our susceptibility to resentment towards her.) Finally, since suspending our susceptibility to resentment towards someone by suspending our susceptibility to taking her behaviour personally *is* to adopt the core objective

attitude towards her, we have reason to believe that someone who wholly suspended her susceptibility to resentment towards *everyone* in this way would be adopting a globally objective attitude.

If opponents of (2) wish to maintain that renouncing resentment without embracing thoroughgoing objectivity is a real practical possibility, it is fair to ask how they expect us to go about it. Is the idea that we should try to overcome our susceptibility to resentment without overcoming our susceptibility to hurt feelings? Or is it, rather, that we should try to overcome our susceptibility to resentment in part *by* inuring ourselves against hurt feelings, even as we remain disposed to take maltreatment personally in other ways? What the above argument brings out is that someone who rejects (2) must maintain that one of these avenues is a serious possibility, a path we could actually walk. Ultimately, this is an empirical matter, and I won't try to settle it here. Since these possibilities have not been ruled out, the case for (2) remains inconclusive.¹⁶ Be this as it may, we can see that this claim, which until now has gone undefended, receives support from many of the same considerations as (3). While I cannot show here that (2)'s opponents are mistaken, I am happy to be betting against them.¹⁷

5. Conclusion

By focusing here on a particular sort of caring, I have sought to draw together two important strands in Strawson's essay. On the one hand, it is by preventing us from caring in this way that adopting the objective attitude inoculates us against resentment. On the other hand (the suggestion continues), it is because someone who globally adopted the objective attitude would cease to care in this way that she would be unable to regard others as co-participants in personal relationships. Putting these points together, it is because global objectivity precludes such caring that it would involve *both* a suspension of the reactive attitudes *and* the demise of personal relationships. As noted, this line of thought is not sufficient to establish (2). What is needed is the further claim that *only* by exclusively adopting the objective attitude towards someone—thereby making it the case that we do not take her treatment of us personally—could we become immune to resentment in our dealings with her. Be this as it may, we can see more clearly the psychological obstacles we would face in trying to achieve this immunity *without* ceasing to take maltreatment personally.

Even if the above argument for the Practical Inconceivability Claim is sound, this doesn't settle every important issue between Strawson and his opponents. In particular, the possibility remains that these attitudes (and their expressions), though inexorable, are morally *unjustified*, all things

¹⁶An anonymous referee notes that the case for (2) could be strengthened by maintaining that taking maltreatment personally just *is* feeling hurt or resentful. I'm not sure, however, that these *are* the only manifestations of this disposition. Perhaps someone who cares deeply about what the other's behaviour 'means', but without feeling hurt or resentful, might still count as taking it personally. Even without this claim, I believe that there is a credible case for (2), one that merits further consideration.

¹⁷I say more about these issues in unpublished work.

considered.¹⁸ If so, the upshot would be that we are, in effect, trapped in a pattern of morally unsatisfactory emotional responses—a troubling implication, but one that cannot be dismissed [cf. Wallace 1994: 99]. Nor does the above argument show that we couldn't eliminate these attitudes *outside* personal relationships if we came to regard them as morally unjustified. Even so, it delivers a significant result. Whatever else, the incompatibilist who believes that our commitment to personal relationships poses no special obstacle to vanquishing these attitudes has cause now to reconsider.¹⁹

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¹⁸See note 15.

¹⁹Thanks are owed to Derk Pereboom and two anonymous referees for the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* for apt and detailed comments that led to several improvements in the manuscript.