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Address and Response: The Normativity of Requesting,  
Begging, & Commanding

By

Daniel A. Khokhar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Niko Kolodny, Co-Chair

Professor R. Jay Wallace, Co-Chair

Professor Christopher Kutz

Summer 2022

Address and Response: The Normativity of Requesting,  
Begging, & Commanding

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Daniel A. Khokhar

## Abstract

### Address and Response: The Normativity of Requesting, Begging, & Commanding

by

Daniel A. Khokhar

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Niko Kolodny, Co-Chair

Professor R. Jay Wallace, Co-Chair

There are many ways of getting a person to do something without using or threatening physical force. A sergeant can command a private to clean the latrine; a parent can ask her teenage son to babysit his little brother; and a homeless person on the street can beg you for change. My aim in this dissertation is explain the normativity of these various forms of address and identify the similarities (along with the differences) amongst them. The guiding thought that structures my proposed accounts is that the values of these different forms of address depend on how they contribute to (or detract from) the values inherent in our interpersonal relationships.

Chapter One poses three questions about the normativity of requesting: (1) What kind of speech-act is performed in making a request?, (2) How demanding are our reasons to grant requests?, and (3) What explains why we ever have reasons to grant requests? In response to (1), I claim that requesting involves an attempted exercise of a normative power, which is an ability to intentionally effect a normative change by communicating the intention to do so. In response to (2), I argue that requests generate “weakish” obligations that implicate the requester and the requestee in relations of interpersonal accountability while still affording the requestee significant discretion about whether to comply. Request-based reasons are thereby distinguished from command-based ones which afford their targets very little deliberative discretion. In response to (3), I argue that we possess the power to request because of the valuable role it plays in conducting our interpersonal relationships (e.g. friendship) on terms that realize important interests we have in autonomy, equality, and recognition, interests that are constitutively linked to the value of such relationships.

Chapter Two takes up the question of whether requests can ever be wrongful. Now many requests don’t raise any normative concerns even if granting them would be burdensome (e.g. your shy friend asking you to go to a boring party so she’ll have someone to talk to). But things seem different in other cases. If a man asks his female subordinate for a backrub in the workplace, something seems normatively problematic regardless of whether he truthfully notes that she’s free to decline. I argue that some requests, like this one, wrong their requestees even though they do not harm them. The proposed explanation is that, in making such a request, the requester expresses a lack of due consideration or regard for the significant interests of the requestee. The request itself, *qua* communicative act, thereby constitutes a form of disrespectful treatment that the requestee has reason to object to and which implicates them in a regrettable relationship of inferiority.

Chapter Three turns to the phenomenon of begging and poses two questions about this social practice: (1) What is it about begging that makes it inherently demeaning, as it seems to be?, and (2) How can begging motivate the person it addresses? In response to (1), I argue that begging constitutively involves relating to another person as an inferior, rather than equal, as a means of motivation. This gives the act a kind of expressive badness that the beggar has reason to regret even if they have all-things-considered reason to beg for aid (say because that's the only way of addressing their terrible condition). Several different cases of begging are considered in provided a normative explanation of the practice that reflects the fact that it is unified in some ways and protean in others. In response to (2), I propose four different but mutually consistent ways in which begging can motivate its target: (i) via benevolence, (ii) via flattery, (iii) via vicarious embarrassment, and (iv) via emotional manipulation.

Chapter Four takes up the classic problem of political obligation ("PPO") which we may provisionally characterize as the philosophical challenge of explaining whether there's a moral duty to obey the law as such. In the first part of the chapter, I introduce two forms of skepticism that question PPO's philosophical significance. The first form denies that the existence of political obligations would make a significant practical difference for what agents have reason to do while the second form denies that political obligations are important for addressing potential complaints that individuals have against the state's activities. In the second part of the chapter, I propose an associative account of political obligations that purports to justify PPO's significance in the face of both forms of skepticism. On this view, respect for the law constitutes a valuable form of recognition, and the individual members of a polity, construed as free and equal moral persons, owe this form of recognition to one another. But having respect for the law, which ultimately amounts to having respect for one's fellow citizens, is nothing more or less than having political obligations. PPO is then significant not because it helps explain whether we have reasons to do what the law dictates or whether a complaint against the state can be met, but rather because political obligation represents a rather demanding political ideal which is a core element of a fully robust form of justice.

The dissertation concludes with a brief appendix on the normative grounds of parental authority. I consider two different "child-based" models and argue that they entail either (1) that the relation between being a parent and having parental authority is implausibly weak and accidental, or (2) implausible conclusions about the kinds of accountability relations that are associated with successful exercises of parental authority. I suggest that a "relationship-based model" can avoid these two worries by basing parental authority in two importantly related sets of interests: (i) those that parents have in shaping and nurturing their own child's development in ways that reflect their own reasonable conceptions of what's valuable in life, and (ii) those that children have in their relationship being shaped in this way by their parents. These two sets of interests jointly constitute a core element of what makes the parent-child relationship deeply valuable in the first place and what makes parenting, as it seems to many, one of the most valuable things one can do in life.

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## *Acknowledgments*

I've always liked reading acknowledgments. They remind us that even the most abstract philosophical works are produced, not by disembodied intellects, but by actual people with their own deeply personal attachments. But their primary purpose is to express gratitude to those who mattered so much along the way. And yet gratitude is a funny thing. Sometimes its proper expression requires only that a card be sent or a hat briefly tipped. Other times, much more may be needed. So what does gratitude call for when it comes to the help I received (and so desperately needed) while writing this dissertation? I suspect that discursive acknowledgment might not go quite far enough, and not only because my debts are too many in number and too deep in significance to be properly recognized in three pages. So for everybody mentioned below, I hope that someday I'll be able to repay your kindness and support with something more than words. But this will have to do for now.

My first and foremost thanks go to my co-supervisors Niko Kolodny and R. Jay Wallace. They are truly exceptional philosophers, as anyone who's interacted with them professionally would know. But I'm extraordinarily lucky to have also experienced how wonderful they are as mentors. They were incredibly supportive of my project (no matter how vague and disconnected it was at times). And they let me structure our relationship in whatever ways worked for me. They were always available but never overbearing, and they left me to my own devices for long periods when I needed to work through my own confusions. Niko, more than anyone, taught me how to identify a philosophical problem and articulate its importance. He provided copious illuminating comments within twenty-four hours on every paper I sent him. Jay was very much the same – always there whenever I needed him for anything. He worked tirelessly to improve my positive proposals and helped combat my tendency to focus on unnecessary details. Tackling the job market would have been impossible, in many senses, without his continued guidance. The only thing “regrettable” about working with the two of them is that I sometimes felt left out of party conversations because I never had a single thing to complain about. I'll remain forever proud to think of myself as their student, regardless of whatever professional station I attain. I hope only that they'd be happy to call me the same.

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whatever philosophical topic interested me and by asking me to comment on his own work. I doubt that he needed my help in any respect, but the fact that he was willing to reach out and engage with me in this way really meant a lot. I don't know how I would have navigated the grad school application process without his guidance, and I'm quite sure that I wouldn't have gotten into a place like Berkeley without him. And last, but certainly not least, he hired me for my first job as Faculty Fellow at the Center for Bioethics. Returning as a faculty member to the institution where I received my M. A. is, quite simply, a dream come true, and I look forward to learning more from him during the next three years.

While an undergraduate at Indiana University, I had the privilege of studying under Joan Weiner and Paul Vincent Spade who were the two most important teachers of my college years. It was from Joan that I first learned the virtue of philosophical rigor, both in thought and in writing. She seemed impossible to impress regardless of how I tried; at most, she would sometimes come off as mildly pleased. One day I was in her office giving a lengthy diatribe on some topic in logic. I made a mistake along the way (something about sets) but passed over it without comment. She remained quiet until I finished and asked, "What's the one thing you said that I didn't like?" I corrected the mistake at which point she simply smiled and remarked, "Now I like everything you said." I still think of that as one of my proudest philosophical moments. Eventually it dawned on me that her demandingness reflected a deep concern and respect for her students. Of course, one can be both demanding and indifferent (or even cruel), but Joan was nothing like that. She helped me see that setting high standards for one's students is crucially important for supporting their development and maintaining an appropriately egalitarian relationship. Because of that, she remains my first and most important model of philosophical pedagogy, one that I'll always try, however imperfectly, to imitate.

While I haven't worked very much in the history of philosophy, Paul's classes on existentialism, Kierkegaard, and medieval philosophy mattered deeply to me. It was impossible not to be inspired and challenged by his unfettered enthusiasm. Late in life, Rawls wrote the following about his own teaching of some great historical figures: "When lecturing, say, on Locke, Rousseau, Kant, or J. S. Mill, I always tried to do two things especially. One was to pose their problems as they themselves saw them, given their understanding of these problems in their own time...The second thing I tried to do was to present each writer's thought in what I took to be its strongest form. I didn't say, not intentionally anyways, what I myself thought a writer should have said, but rather what the writer did say, supported by what I viewed as the most reasonable interpretation of the text. The text had to be known and respected, and its doctrine presented in its best form. Leaving aside the text seemed offensive, a kind of pretending...Lecturing that way, I believed, made a writer's views stronger and more convincing, and a more worthy object of study." It was only upon reading these remarks that I fully grasped what had been so wonderful about studying with Paul. Apart from that, he was uniquely kind and encouraging. Despite the fact that I couldn't read a word of Latin, I devoted a good deal of one of my term papers to criticizing his translation of Boethius. Thinking back on this always fills me with a sense of abject horror. But when we discussed my paper, he showed no signs of irritation but instead charitably engaged with each of my points. I am not sure I would have been able to show such restraint and grace in his position. And I'll always remember when we ran into each other on campus during my first week of law school. Seeing the unhappiness that was etched into my face, he kindly lifted my spirits by treating me to drinks and a bite to eat at a local pub. That really meant a lot.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents to whom I owe everything. Nothing I might say in one paragraph or even one thousand pages could come close to capturing what they mean to me. They gave me everything they could in life and made sure I wanted for nothing. My mother taught me what it means to be moral and courageous simply by living her life as she did. Her infinite patience and love have sustained me through all my years. My father passed away during my second of graduate school, and I miss him dearly each day. He, more than anyone I've met in my life, demonstrated the virtues of dedication and curiosity in everything he did. I think often of just how much I would give up to have one more day quietly enjoying his company in a coffee shop or watching Fawlty Towers together. He supported me in every choice I ever made, even the ones he might have disagreed with. And it would have been impossible to leave my legal practice behind and pursue philosophy without him.

For V. D. L., my mother

and

Dr. A. M. K., my father.

## *Introduction*

“What ways are there of getting human beings to do things? You can make a man fall over by pushing him; you cannot usefully make his hand write a letter or mix concrete by pushing; for in general if you have to push his hand in the right way, you might as well not use him at all...Now getting one another to do things without the application of physical force is a necessity for human life, and that far beyond what could be secured by those other means.” — G.E.M. Anscombe (1981)

This dissertation is a collection of essays about some varieties of normative address, namely requesting, begging, and commanding. These actions are importantly similar in that each aims to motivate another to act in some way that’s specified in its associated utterance (e.g. “*Will you do X?*” or “*Please, I’m begging you to Y*”). So they seem to be members of a single genus and thereby differ from other forms of address like blame and forgiveness which have other kinds of practical consequences. And yet each species is importantly different from the others. This shouldn’t be surprising. A cobra is like a garter snake in many ways but very different in some others. Begging seems to be addressed from “below” and acknowledges a relation of inferiority while commanding seems to be addressed from “above” as befitting a position of superiority. Requesting, in virtue of its discretionary character, seems somehow more egalitarian than either. And ordinary language acknowledges that these species are interestingly opposed to one another for we can imagine a parent saying to their child, “*Set the dinner table in an hour, and I ain’t asking*” or, as Peggy Olson said to Don Draper in an episode of *Mad Men*, “*Beg me? You didn’t even ask me.*”

Understanding each of these forms of address requires answering two sets of questions. First, there are questions about the practical significance of its performance: What normative effects does it have? Does it generate reasons for the target to act, think, or feel in certain ways? Do these effects depend upon any “success” conditions being met? Can it ever be wrongful to address another in this way? If so, how? Second, there are questions about its importance: What values or ideals does its use or availability make possible? Would our lives be lacking in some significant way if we didn’t have the address in our repertoire? Alternatively, might it be concerning or bad in some way? Would our lives be better if we refrained from using it?

Chapter One poses three questions about the normativity of requesting: (1) What kind of speech-act is performed in making a request?, (2) How demanding are our reasons to grant requests?, and (3) What explains why we ever have reasons to grant requests? In response to (1), I claim that requesting involves an attempted exercise of a normative power, which is an ability to intentionally effect a normative change by communicating the intention to do so. In response to (2), I argue that requests generate “weakish” obligations that implicate the requester and the requestee in relations of interpersonal accountability while still affording the requestee significant discretion about whether to comply. Request-based reasons are thereby distinguished from command-based ones which afford their targets very little deliberative discretion. In response to (3), I argue that we possess the power to request because of the valuable role it plays in conducting our interpersonal relationships (e.g. friendship) on terms that realize important interests we have in autonomy, equality, and recognition, interests that are constitutively linked to the value of such relationships.

Chapter Two takes up the question of whether requests can ever be wrongful. Now many requests don't raise any normative concerns even if granting them would be burdensome (e.g. your shy friend asking you to go to a boring party so she'll have someone to talk to). But things seem different in other cases. If a man asks his female subordinate for a backrub in the workplace, something seems normatively problematic regardless of whether he truthfully notes that she's free to decline. I argue that some requests, like this one, wrong their requestees even though they do not harm them. The proposed explanation is that, in making such a request, the requester expresses a lack of due consideration or regard for the significant interests of the requestee. The request itself, *qua* communicative act, thereby constitutes a form of disrespectful treatment that the requestee has reason to object to and which implicates them in a regrettable relationship of inferiority.

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The dissertation concludes with a brief appendix on the normative grounds of parental authority. I consider two different "child-based" models and argue that they entail either (1) that the relation between being a parent and having parental authority is implausibly weak and accidental, or (2) implausible conclusions about the kinds of accountability relations that are associated with successful exercises of parental authority. I suggest that a "relationship-based model" can avoid these two worries by basing parental authority in two importantly related sets of interests: (i) those that parents have in shaping and nurturing their own child's development in ways that reflect their own reasonable conceptions of what's valuable in life, and (ii) those that children have in their relationship being shaped in this way by their parents. These two sets of interests jointly constitute a core element

of what makes the parent-child relationship deeply valuable in the first place and what makes parenting, as it seems to many, one of the most valuable things one can do in life.

I close this introduction with some brief remarks about the work's overarching structure. I've always shared the sentiment expressed by the late John Gardner who said, "These days everybody wants to be a philosophical architect. But I have made a perfectly good living as a philosophical plumber." This dissertation is more a work of philosophical plumbing. The topics addressed are independent of one another, and each chapter can be treated as a standalone piece. But there are two ways in which some architecture is erected herein. In the first place, a central task of practical philosophy involves mapping the normative landscape. While this landscape, considered as a whole, has a topography more akin to Swiss cheese than anything else, our goal as practical philosophers is to isolate and chart discrete regions, identifying as much continuity as possible and acknowledging the discontinuities where they exist. As mentioned before, the discussed varieties of address seem to constitute a single genus, and my hope is that the shape of a general region of interest emerges from these chapters when taken together as a whole. Second, if there's any idea that unifies the central claims of this dissertation, it's that the normativity of these various forms of address (their goodness/badness and the ways they function) is explained by how they contribute to (or detract from) the values inherent in our interpersonal relationships. So the kind of unity that emerges in the solutions to the problems I take up places this dissertation squarely within the ethics of interpersonal relationships.

## Chapter 1: Requests & Relationships

There are many ways you can get me to do something. You can explain why doing it would further my own interests; you can threaten me; and you can order me. But you can also ask me to do it. Now perhaps I shouldn't comply (e.g. if you ask me to help you bilk a contractor); but quite often, I should do what you ask. Suppose we're close friends and you ask me to help fix your computer the night before an important deadline. Even if I'd rather watch a film at home, I should aid you. But what kind of reason do I have and what accounts for its existence? Note that we're not looking for just any reason I might have, however contrived. If I have a sycophantic desire to please you, I might have reason to grant your insulting request that I entertain your party guests by dancing embarrassingly. But I might have that reason even if you didn't ask me to dance. Perhaps I just know that you'll be pleased if I liven the party with a terrible jig. But in the computer case, my reason seems to have a different kind of normative status. I have a reason to grant your request *as such* or, put another way, *because* you asked me to. As I see it, understanding the normativity of requests requires addressing three questions which structure this chapter:

- (1) the *Linguistic Question*: What kind of speech-act is performed in making a request?
- (2) the *Stringency Question*: How demanding are our reasons to grant requests?
- (3) the *Explanatory Question*: What explains why we ever have reasons to grant requests?

The chapter divides into four sections. §1 criticizes a natural approach – *Epistemicism* – that construes requests as attempts to communicate that requestees (for lack of a better word) have independent reasons to grant them. §2 addresses the *Linguistic Question* by arguing that requesting involves an attempted exercise of a normative power, which is an ability to intentionally effect a normative change by communicating the intention to do so. Requesting is then one species in a genus that includes the powers to promise and consent. §3 deals with the *Stringency Question* by arguing that request-based reasons have a “low stakes” deontic character that affords the requestee significant deliberative discretion about whether to comply. This feature distinguishes requests from commands which afford their targets significantly less deliberative discretion. §4 addresses the *Explanatory Question* by defending the *Relational View*: we possess the power to request because of the valuable role it plays in conducting our interpersonal relationships on terms that realize important interests in autonomy, equality, and recognition.

### I

It seems that the point of making a request, as well as granting it, is somehow for the sake of the requester. The *Epistemicist* accommodates that basic idea by proposing the following two claims as answers to the *Linguistic* and *Explanatory* questions respectively.

*Desire*: In making a request, one intends (primarily) to motivate the requestee to  $\phi$  by informing them, via the utterance, that you want them to  $\phi$ .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Searle (1969) proposes such a view although he incorporates additional elements that needn't concern us here.

*Independence.* If  $X$  has a reason  $R$  to grant  $Y$ 's request as such, then  $R$  is identical to  $X$ 's independently obtaining reason to satisfy some desire of  $Y$ 's that's salient given the particular request.

From there, the *Epistemicist* answers the *Stringency Question* by claiming that a reason to grant a request is as demanding as is one's reason to satisfy the desire that informs the request. The basic thrust of *Epistemicism* then is that requests play a kind of mediating role by communicating that requestees have independent reasons to grant them. Such a view is attractive for a couple reasons. First, it's intuitively plausible and theoretically simple (in the sense that it reduces our puzzles about requests to familiar issues concerning when we have reasons to satisfy others' desires). Second, it explains why we lack reason to grant silly, pernicious, and insulting requests as such. Suppose you ask me to help you bilk a contractor; this request is normatively impotent, much like a military order to violate the Geneva Conventions would be. It's not just that my reason to comply is outweighed by other relevant reasons; rather I lack any reason to comply with it whatsoever. *Epistemicism* explains this by locating the normative force of a request in the reason-giving status of an independently obtaining desire. When the desire that informs a request is morally reprehensible, there's no reason to do what's asked.

Despite these appealing features, a puzzle arises when considering how requests rationally explain actions. An agent might cite the fact that she was asked to  $\phi$  as a rational explanation of her  $\phi$ -ing. Requests-related reasons thereby seem similar to promissory obligations in that the normative significance of a promise cannot be explained solely by appeal to reasons, independent of the promissory act, that count in favor of performance. Rather, the fact that the promise was made must be cited in a complete account of the promisor's reason for acting. But the epistemicist has a hard time accounting for this feature of requests. Now they might respond by claiming that the expression "*I did it because I was asked*" is just a roundabout way of saying "*I did it because she wanted me to and this was made apparent through her request.*" But that doesn't really do justice to the idea that the fact that someone asked you to do something can itself serve as your reason for doing it.<sup>2</sup> Requests seem to play a direct rather than mediating role in normative explanations. Moreover, there are cases in which the normative significance of a request cannot be accounted for solely by appeal to requesters' desires. Consider first the following case in which the desire that informs the request is common knowledge between the parties.<sup>3</sup>

*Dissertation Defense.* Alice is nervous about her upcoming dissertation defense and will be calmer with some friendly faces in the audience. Her friend David knows about her anxieties and has gone to a number of her past talks to ease her mind. He plans to attend her defense but has some personal difficulties that day. The babysitter cancels and he has to spend the morning taking care of his son. Because of that, he doesn't grade some exams that he hoped to return the next day. As he's walking to the cafe, he runs into Alice and says "*I was planning to come today but some things have come up and I need to grade some exams so I'm not up all night.*" Alice responds, "*Oh, but would you please come? I know it's a burden but it'd mean a lot to me if you were there.*"

If I were in Alice's position, I'd intend that David treat the request as providing a reason over and above any other independently existing ones that he has. After all, I know that he knows about

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<sup>2</sup> Raz (1986, 36) also points out that  $X$  might tell  $Y$  that she'd like him to  $\phi$  but doesn't want a request to be needed for him to do so. But how does the epistemicist explain the intelligibility of this communication?

<sup>3</sup> Enoch (2011, 4) and Lewis (2018, 5) discuss cases of this type.

my anxieties and takes them seriously as providing reasons for action. And I could have left things alone by saying “*Oh that’s too bad but I understand.*” Given that, what purpose would I have in asking him to come if not that he treat the request as itself providing a reason for action? Importantly, I wouldn’t intend for my request to lead to some kind of false consciousness on his part. That is, I wouldn’t think (i) that the request provides no additional reason, and yet (ii) intend for it to lead him to deliberate incorrectly as if it did. That would involve some kind of objectionable manipulation that seems inapplicable to the case at hand. So if I intend that David take my request as providing a rational basis for action when it’s common knowledge between us that I want him to attend, then it looks like *Desire* is false; not all requests function primarily by communicating desires. This isn’t to deny that David’s reason to grant Alice’s request has something to do with her desires. Of course that’s correct, but the claim that should be rejected is that Alice intends, through her request, to motivate David simply by getting him to see the *independent* reason-giving force of her desire that he attend.

Shifting to David’s position, if I were he, I’d revisit my previous deliberation about how to spend my evening and treat Alice’s request as a new reason for action that I didn’t previously have. After all, I’d recognize that she could have left things alone, but she didn’t and that would matter to me. I might even conclude that her request shifts the balance of reasons such that I now have most reason to attend. But even if I thought that I still had most reason to stay home grading, that doesn’t preclude her request from making a normative difference that can’t be accounted for solely by her antecedent desire that I attend. And I also wouldn’t consider it irrational to revisit my deliberation in light of her request. So it seems that *Independence* is false. Not all reasons to grant requests as such are identical to independently obtaining reasons to satisfy a requester’s desire.

Consider next a case in which it’s difficult to maintain that a sufficient reason-giving desire exists independently of the request:

*Ailing Father.* Devoted Deborah has spent the past few months traveling back and forth across the country to tend to her dying father Finn who doesn’t have much time left. The travel has put a great deal of stress on her familial and professional life. Finn, knowing about these troubles, says “*I love having you here to comfort me, but would you please come less and spend more time looking after your own life?*” If Deborah does as he asks, she’ll still be able to visit him, but she won’t be able to provide care for him in the way she has over the past months.

Finn’s request seems to make a normative difference to Deborah’s reasons. This isn’t to say she now has conclusive reason to grant the request; there still may be a genuine question for her to resolve about what she’ll do. But the request itself is deliberately relevant for her. And here’s the crucial point: is there really something that Finn most wants, independently of his request? What would we expect him to say if we asked him what he wanted most? Does he most want his daughter to continue as his caretaker or tend to her own life? I expect that if we asked this of an actual person, we’d get a conflicted father torn between two impulses. It seems that the point of Finn’s request is not merely to inform Deborah of what he most wants. But the fact that he asked her to not spend as much time caring for him appears relevant for her deliberations. So again, we have reason to reject both *Desire* and *Independence*.

Another problem for *Epistemicism* concerns the fact that a person can have a reason to grant a request even when the requester doesn’t want them to grant it. Suppose that Mother asks Child to set the dinner table while (i) knowing that he won’t do it, and (ii) wanting him to not do it so she can



make a point about the importance of shared responsibilities within the family. I think that Child has a reason to do what she asks but that cannot be explained by appealing to the normative significance of her desire that he do so because, by stipulation, she has no such desire. So again, it looks like *Desire* and *Independence* are false.

A final difficulty for *Epistemicism* concerns the fact that the normative force of a request might not exactly match the normative significance of its content.<sup>4</sup> You can make a tentative request for something that's very important to you and not particularly burdensome for the requestee. One of my students once asked me to comment on their writing sample while giving an extreme qualification along the lines of "I know you probably don't have time for this and it's probably burdensome so I won't be put out if you decline. But I'd really appreciate it if you have any time." And you can make an emphatic request for something that's quite trivial. My shy friend might put a lot of "normative force" behind her request that I accompany her to a party even if she'll probably have a good time on her own. But how can *Epistemicism* explain this kind of variation if reasons to grant requests are identical to independently obtaining reasons to satisfy desires? Taken collectively, these arguments provide enough reason to look beyond *Epistemicism* in answering our guiding questions.

## II

An important takeaway from the previous section is that *Epistemicism* mischaracterizes the choice involved in making a request and thereby mischaracterizes its normative significance. But then what kind of speech-act do requests involve? Note that there are many ways our choices can make normative differences. Quite often, it's unreasonable to expect people to act in particular ways if their choice situations take certain forms (e.g. you're intoxicated and the bank robber threatens you with death unless you drive their getaway car). But there's a special kind of choice-dependent normative change that depends essentially on an agent intending to bring about such a change. Let's say that a *normative power* is an ability of an agent *X* to intentionally effect a normative change by (i) communicating this intention to some agent *Y*, and (ii) intending that the relevant change depend on *Y*'s recognition of *X*'s intention to effect such a change.<sup>5</sup> There are many different changes that one might bring about in this way as reflected in the variety of commonly recognized normative powers (e.g. promising and consenting).

Importantly, normative powers are individuated partly by an agent's intention to have the normative change depend on the target's recognition of the intention. This distinguishes normative powers from other ways in which we can intentionally create reasons for others.<sup>6</sup> I can threaten you by saying "Your money or your life" and thereby intend to create a reason for you that I communicate through the speech-act. But in issuing the threat, I don't intend that the existence of your reason depend on your recognizing my intention to create it. Nor does your reason depend on any such intention; it just depends on you wanting to preserve your life. Also, suppose I move my foot from here to there while shouting "Hey, my foot's now there so don't step on that spot." I might be communicating an intention to create a reason for you. But again, I don't seem to intend that the existence of that reason depend on your recognition of any intention to create it. And your reason not to step there

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<sup>4</sup> Owens (2008, 47) makes a similar point about promising.

<sup>5</sup> See Enoch (2011) for a similar characterization. Lewis (2018) also defends a view of requesting as the attempted exercise of a normative power.

<sup>6</sup> See Enoch (2011) for these points.

has nothing to do with my intention, for you would have had exactly the same reason if I'd moved my foot while keeping quiet.

I propose that requesting should be interpreted as an attempt to exercise a normative power. To make a request is to attempt to create a “requesty” reason for one’s target by communicating one’s intention to do so (via the request-utterance) and intending that the existence of this reason depends on the target’s recognition of your intention to create it.<sup>7</sup> This view does well in explaining the choices involved in the cases discussed so far. In *Dissertation Defense*, Alice intends that her request make a normative difference even when David knows about her desire that he attend. This can be explained by interpreting her as intending to create a reason for David to come to the defense and intending for that reason’s existence to depend on his recognizing her intention. In *Ailing Father*, Finn doesn’t merely aim to motivate Deborah by communicating his desire that she spend less time caring for him. Rather, he intends to create a new reason for her to do what he asks. Finally, in the Mother/Child case, Mother intends to create a reason for Child to set the table, and she succeeds in creating such a reason even without actually desiring that Child do so. Similar points apply to more common cases as well. In saying things like “*Will you come to the party with me tonight?*”, requesters intend to create reasons for requestees that don’t exist independently of the requests themselves. And this helps account for the idea that your reason to comply with a request as such is *that you were asked to do something*.

Moreover, it seems that a requester also intends that the normative significance of her request depends on the target’s recognition of her intention to effect such a change. To borrow a case from Enoch (2011, 14-15), I might say to you, my fellow graduate student, “*Will you comment on my draft?*” knowing that you don’t care much about me but that you do care about keeping our graduate advisor happy. And in saying this to you, I might intend to create a reason for you to read my draft by way of your desire to keep our advisor happy. But I don’t seem to be making a sincere request, partly because I know you don’t care about me very much or what I’m doing in making the request. Sincere requests that aim to motivate a target in the appropriate way involve intending that the normative difference of the request depend on the target’s recognition of your intention to effect such a change and their treating the act itself as deliberately relevant. Now of course you can request something even if you fail to make a difference to normative reality. Pernicious requests, like when my friend asks me to help her bilk a contractor, still count as *attempts* to make a difference to normative reality; they’re just unsuccessful in that my friend fails to create a reason to do what she asks. The question now is: What kind of difference does a request make to normative reality? It seems to create a new kind of reason for the requestee, but what kind of reason exactly? Addressing this question will be the task of the next section.

### III

We intuitively grasp some distinction between requests and commands and attach a great deal of significance to whether we’re being asked or told to do something. The latter can breed resentment and raise questions like “*Who made YOU boss?*” And yet asking someone to do something doesn’t typically generate the same kind of concern even if it’s off-putting.<sup>8</sup> The heart of the request/command distinction seems to have something to do with the former’s discretionary character

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<sup>7</sup> “Requesty” is a place-holder term and its sense will be given by my answer to the *Stringency Question*.

<sup>8</sup> One might appropriately respond to a request by “*You have no right to ask me that!*” My point here is just that we seem to have a distinctive concern with illegitimate commands that is not quite captured by this kind of response.

as reflected in the thought that it's somehow up to us whether we'll grant a given request or not. But how should this be fleshed out?

James Lewis (2018) answers in a natural way by arguing that legitimate commands generate obligations while legitimate requests generate non-obligatory reasons. Suppose my friend asks me to go to a party with her so she'll have someone to talk to, but I've had a long day and so I decline. This seems permissible; I don't wrong her in declining and it would be inappropriate for her to resent me. But things are different with commands. If a soldier is ordered to clean the latrine, it's not up to her so to speak, to decline because she'd like to have a nice nap; she's acted impermissibly. Despite the intuitive plausibility of this approach, problems arise when considering cases in which the benefit of granting the request is fairly significant relative to the cost. Consider the following from Micha Gläser (2019):

*Movie Night*: Rick and Erica are friends. They live across town from each other. Erica is really good with computers. Rick is not. Rick has a critical deadline coming up the next day. He's having trouble with his laptop and has already tried fixing the problem himself, to no avail. He's reaching out to Erica to come over tonight and help him. She tells him that, while she feels for him, she'd rather stay in and watch a film.

Gläser argues that Rick may appropriately resent Erica for declining the request. And if resentment is the appropriate response to being wronged, then Erica's declining the request wrongs Rick.<sup>9</sup> She's violated an obligation she owes to him. So it seems that Lewis's approach can't be correct as some requests do generate obligations.

Does Lewis have any kind of response here? Three possibilities come to mind. First, he might claim that Rick is not really making a request but is instead making some kind of disguised command; but that's implausible, as *Movie Night* seems to involve paradigmatic request between friends. Reclassifying the case would make it difficult to hold onto the request/command distinction in a way that reflects our commonsense judgments.<sup>10</sup> Second, Lewis might claim that it's permissible for Rick to decline the request but that he's blameworthy for deliberating in a certain way. Gläser (2019, 34) might even be read in this way as he says that Rick has something to complain about "perhaps precisely in virtue of how Erica considered his request." Now blame can be appropriate when a person performs a permissible (and maybe required) action for the wrong kind of reason. Suppose that, to use an example from Thomson (1991), Alfred's wife is dying and he wishes to hasten her death. He might purchase some stuff that he thinks is poison when in fact it's the only cure for her illness. Thomson says that it's surely permissible, and even required, for him to give her the medicine as she needs it to live. But if Alfred gives it with the intention to kill her, then he's blameworthy. But this line of thought doesn't seem applicable to *Movie Night*. The problem with that case isn't about how Erica *deliberates* in light of the request but instead concerns whether sufficient reasons obtain for denying it. The natural thing to say about *Movie Night* is that it would be quite easy for Erica to help

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<sup>9</sup> The claim that there is a conceptual connection of this kind between justified resentment and wronging another (qua violating an obligation owed to them) is common within the literature. See e.g. Wallace (2019b).

<sup>10</sup> Lewis informs me in conversation that he'd opt for something in the vein of this response. He claims that while the word 'request' may felicitously apply to **Movie Night**, we should not be interested in the ordinary English sense of the term. Rather, we should focus on the distinctive normative function that's at the heart of the ordinary notion, namely the robust creation of non-obligatory (i.e. discretionary) reasons. Taking a cue from him, I might then say that I am interested in the distinctive normative function of the form of address that appears in **Movie Night**, namely an address that creates obligatory reasons for one's target.

Rick. Doing so wouldn't involve ignoring other obligations nor would it involve any significant personal sacrifice. That seems enough to conclude that she owes him help. The problem is that she declined his request without an adequate excuse, not that she permissibly declined it for the wrong kind of reason.

A final response that Lewis might offer involves appealing to something like Harman's (2016) concept of a *morally permissible moral mistake* which she characterizes as "something an agent should not do, all things considered, such that the considerations that tell against doing it – that make it something she should not do – are moral considerations." Harman's motivating example for the possibility of such mistakes involves a philosophy professor Amanda whose student Joe sends her a third draft of a paper at 11 pm the night before it's due. Amanda has already commented on two of Joe's drafts but he's struggling in the class and is seemingly on the verge of a breakthrough. It would take a bit of time to read the comments, but Amanda is tired and has to wake up early to care for her daughter. Harman argues (i) that Amanda isn't morally obligated to give Joe comments, and (ii) that Amanda should, all things considered, give him the comments where the reasons that support that claim are moral ones (e.g. that Joe would benefit from them). Lewis might draw from this and claim that *Movie Night* is a case in which (a) Erica wouldn't wrong Rick by declining his request, and (b) she should, all things considered, aid him where the reasons that support that claim are grounded in his interests. But I doubt that this approach will succeed. The plausibility of Harman's claim that Amanda isn't morally obligated to give Joe comments depends on the intuition that she wouldn't be blameworthy for failing to do so. But Erica *does* seem blameworthy for declining Rick's request, which supports the judgment that it generates some kind of obligation. Given the intuitive plausibility of Gläser's thoughts about *Movie Night*, as well as the inadequacy of these three proposed responses, we should reject Lewis's way of drawing the request/command distinction.

Gläser's approach to the request/command distinction is tied to enforceability. Using some Kantian language, he argues that requests impose duties of virtue which are "by their very nature unenforceable" while commands impose duties of right which are "analytically connected with an authorization to coerce" and are "*in principle* susceptible to enforcement, even if not every *particular* duty of right is enforceable in a straightforward fashion." Gläser doesn't tell us what he means by "coercion" but presumably it must involve either the imposition or threat of some kind of harm that goes beyond the unpleasant effects of being blamed, since an agent may be blameworthy for violating a duty of virtue. In light of these considerations, Gläser's proposal looks quite attractive; it draws a principled distinction between requests and commands while explaining why we tend to put so much stock in whether we're being asked or told to do something.

There are, however, a number of worries with Gläser's view, not all of which can be dealt with adequately here. In general, I'm suspicious of the idea that there is some close connection between commands and coercion. While many commands are coercively enforceable (e.g. in military contexts), I think that the considerations needed to justify the power to command are quite different (and less demanding) than the considerations needed to justify imposing a harm on another. While the former may have some relevance for the latter, I don't think that the fact that an agent has the power to command itself serves as a justificatory ground for coercive enforcement. Moreover, it's not clear that every command is in-principle enforceable. Suppose I promise my spouse that we'll do whatever she likes on her birthday. Doesn't my promise give her some limited authority over me, such that I should take utterances like "*Let's go see that new horror film.*" as operating more like commands rather than requests or suggestions? Even though she might not use the typical language of commands, it seems that she can, through such utterances, determine my will, much like a sergeant can for a soldier.

But it's impermissible, in principle, for her to coerce me into going to the cinema even though I might be blameworthy for refusing. Any use of coercion would be at odds with the value of our romantic partnership.

A final problem with Gläser's approach goes a bit deeper.<sup>11</sup> His talk of "analytic connection" and "in-principle enforcement" suggests that part of the *concept* of a legitimate command is that there is some set of conditions under which it may justifiably be enforced. But that leads to difficulties in characterizing the motivation of a conscientious subject. We should expect a characterization of the concept of a command to shed some light on its deliberative significance for an agent who recognizes it as such. If, as Gläser suggests, commands are analytically connected with permissible coercion, a conscientious subject's motivation to comply with a command should incorporate either (i) a belief that justified coercion is likely to occur in the event she doesn't comply, or (ii) a belief that such coercion is justified whether or not it's likely to occur. But (i) seems to mischaracterize the deliberative stance of a conscientious subject. A properly motivated soldier doesn't deliberate about whether to obey a command by considering the harms she'll suffer for disobedience. This kind of deliberation doesn't involve the kind of respect a soldier has for her sergeant's authority; a form of respect that involves seeing commands as rationally determining one's will independently of any fears of coercion. Similar points apply to the conscientious citizen who, as Owens (2008, fn. 6) notes, would feel obligated to pay taxes even if she alone could evade sanction. And turning to (ii), it's hard to see how beliefs of that kind could motivate an agent to do anything. How could you be motivated to  $\phi$  just by the belief that it would be justified to harm you for not- $\phi$ -ing when you lack any other belief about the likelihood of being harmed? To put the basic worry simply, complying with a command because of concerns about coercion (whether justified or merely likely) involves acting for the wrong kind of reason. So we should reject Gläser's way of drawing the request/command distinction in terms of in-principle enforceability.

Notice that Lewis draws the request/command distinction in terms of a non-deontic/deontic difference. And the difficulties with that approach centered around the fact that requests have a deontic character. Gläser responds by drawing a *deontic difference* between commands and requests. But enforceability is not the only way in which two deontic phenomena may differ. I propose that we understand the request/command distinction in terms of another type of deontic difference, a difference in the strengths of the obligations that they impose. Obligations operate with a kind of practical necessity that differentiates them from ordinary counting-in-favor of reasons that may be weighed against one another in deliberation. This doesn't mean that obligations are absolute, that you must fulfill them come what may: it would be perfectly permissible to break my promise to pick you up at the airport if an unexpected emergency arises. Rather, obligations provide presumptive constraints on an agent's behavior. As Wallace (2019b, 27) puts the thought, "their deliberative role is to determine certain options for action to be either on or off the table from the start, fixing assumptions within and around which the rest of our planning agency will operate, as it proceeds."<sup>12</sup> When one is obligated to  $\phi$ , certain considerations against  $\phi$ -ing, which may provide reasons in other contexts, lose their justificatory force for the agent's practical deliberation. If I promise to pick you up at the airport, then my desire to spend the evening at the cinema is normatively irrelevant for

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<sup>11</sup> Here I draw heavily from Owens (2008, 406-8) who applies this argument to the concept of obligation.

<sup>12</sup> See also Scheffler (1997) for the idea of a presumptively decisive reason as well as the concept of an exclusionary reason discussed by Raz (1986). Raz's concept is slightly different from the one I articulate here since he thinks that exclusionary reasons are reasons not to act for other reasons but that they don't thereby negate the normative significance of those other reasons.

deciding what to do.<sup>13</sup> The promise doesn't provide a weighty reason that dominates my reason to go to the cinema. Rather, it negates the normative force of that consideration. This partly captures the idea that it's not fully up to me whether I'll act as promised; my discretion about whether or not to perform is fairly limited.

With this concept of a presumptive constraint in place, we can distinguish different obligations along at least one important dimension of strength: Obligation *A* is stronger than Obligation *B* if *A* renders more considerations deliberatively irrelevant, if *A* "takes more options off the table" so to speak, such that it would be inappropriate to weigh them in deliberation. At one end of the spectrum, some obligations might be absolute, in that no consideration is deliberatively relevant for whether or not you'll fulfill it (e.g. our obligations to not torture and to not commit rape). But other obligations (e.g. the one incurred by your promise to attend a friend's birthday party) are weaker insofar as they take fewer deliberative options off the table.

In these terms, I propose that requests and commands both generate obligations, but that request-based obligations are weaker than those that originate in commands in that the former exclude fewer considerations concerning the target's personal interests and convenience. Now of course some requests are made in circumstances where you ought to comply with them; that was the lesson of **Movie Night**. But slight modifications to the case show that a request-generated obligation may be fairly weak. Suppose that Rick is again having problems with his computer, but would like to use it to play video games rather than prepare for an important deadline. It seems permissible for Erica to decline the request simply because she's had a hard day and would like some rest. If, as in the original case, Rick needs help fixing his computer before an urgent deadline, the obligation resulting from the request will be somewhat stronger, but it will still leave many competing options on the table. Thus, even if Rick has an important deadline, it would seem permissible for Erica to decline his request if she needs to help her child with a school project. Now it might be acceptable, and perhaps even rational, for Erica to help Rick in these modified examples. The point is just that it seems permissible for her to decline, which suggests that the obligations generated by these requests are fairly weak; she has discretionary leeway to decline in a fairly wide range of circumstances.<sup>14</sup> So requests generate weak obligations and the strength of a given request will be a function of (i) the importance of the action, (ii) the burden of compliance, and (iii) the requester's intentions concerning the strength of the resulting obligation (i.e. how emphatically she makes the request).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> My desire might still be normatively significant in other ways, say by providing me a reason to be disappointed in not going to the cinema. The important point is that, in the context of the promise, it doesn't provide me a deliberatively relevant reason *to go to the cinema*.

<sup>14</sup> Contra my view, David Enoch argues, in conversation, that Rick's request robustly gives Erica a reason to help him but doesn't robustly give her a duty. Instead, the duty is merely triggered in predictable way. But it seems to me that, on Enoch's account of robust reason-giving (2011), this could be correct only if, in making a request, one intends to give a non-obligatory reason to do what's asked. But this seems to me to be inconsistent with the phenomenology of making a request. When I ask my friend to come help fix my computer, I think of myself as intending to give them a weak obligation; it's not just that I can predict that we'll end up in a situation in which they'll be obligated to grant it.

<sup>15</sup> It would be a problem for my view if some requests were so weak that *any* excuse for refusing would be acceptable (even something as simple as "I don't want to"), as that would mean that some requests don't generate an obligation (even an extremely weak one). But are there any such requests? A possible example might involve a close friend who asks me to go to a party because she wants me there even though she'll have a good time on her own. My discretionary leeway to decline is probably extremely wide, but I don't think it's unlimited. Saying something along the lines of "Oh, I don't think so, I'm a bit tired" or "That sounds fun but I really want to catch up on that new Netflix series" would probably be acceptable excuses. But if I'm not tired and I have nothing else to do, then it seems like I should go to the party. And if I just said "Oh no, I'm not going" because I'm in a bit of a sullen mood (where this counts as the specification of my reason for not going), then it seems like she has something to complain about, so long as she's sincerely asking me to come.

Commands, by contrast, operate in a “higher stakes” normative gear. Commands generate obligations that render most of one’s personal interests that might speak in favor of non-compliance deliberately irrelevant as well as one’s judgments about whether complying with the command is all-things-considered best. When a soldier is ordered to clean the latrine, she may not appeal to her interest in having a nap to justify disobedience; nor is she supposed to think about whether the latrine really does need to be cleaned. Similar points apply to a child who’s told to complete her homework; her interests in watching a bit of television or having a chat with her friends are supposed to be deliberately irrelevant. This doesn’t mean that all commands are absolute, that the target ought to comply regardless of context. If the soldier’s commanding officer is clearly intoxicated or has gotten obviously faulty intel, then the soldier may not be obligated to follow the order to storm the city. But that’s an exceptional circumstance where the soldier’s excuse has nothing to do with a personal interest that would be advanced by disobedience. Even requests on the stronger end of the spectrum still leave some room for a requestee to consider the significance of at least some her own interests and consult her own judgments about whether granting the request is all-things-considered best. So my account explains the stock we put in whether we’re being told to do something or asked to do it by appealing to the wider deliberative discretion that concerns requests in virtue of the weaker obligations they impose.

Note that we are left with a vague distinction between requests and commands for there is no sharp boundary line (drawn say in terms of the number of considerations excluded) separating the two. But I don’t find that particularly concerning. There are many cases where it’s difficult to come to a firm intuitive judgment about whether a command or request is being made. Suppose Parent is having a hard day and is frustrated with Teenager who’s been watching television for hours. If Parent says, in a strained voice, “*Will you PLEASE set the table for dinner?*”, is she thereby issuing a command or making a request? We should accept that the normative landscape is complex and that our language doesn’t perfectly map onto it in fully unambiguous way. So with the request/command distinction in hand, we must answer the *Explanatory Question* to complete our story.

## IV

Hume (1975, 524) famously says that the imposition of an obligation by promising is “one of the most mysterious and incomprehensible operations that can possibly be imagined, and may even be compared to *transubstantiation* or *holy orders*, where a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object, and even of a human creature.” Now Hume’s specific worry is tied to his moral sentimentalism, but a more general concern lurks here. Why exactly should my intending to make a difference to normative reality have any such effect? After all, I might intend to create a reason for you to do a silly or harmful action. For a normative power to effect a change, it seems that something must justify that change apart from the bare fact that an agent intended to make it.<sup>16</sup>

But the solution is fairly simple, at least in form, when the puzzle is put that way. Explaining why we have a given normative power just requires explaining why it’s important for human life. We must ask: What human interests are served by our being able to ask things of one another? Why is it valuable for us to be able to weakly obligate others, in the characteristic fashion of requests, given the

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<sup>16</sup> Watson (2009).

kind of creatures we are?<sup>17</sup> It's important to acknowledge here that requests between members of some ongoing interpersonal relationship (e.g. friendship) are far more common than ones between strangers. We should first answer the *Explanatory Question* as it applies to requests between relatives and then see whether our conclusions can be extended to requests between strangers. Otherwise, we risk misunderstanding the special role that requests might play in their natural habitat.<sup>18</sup> According to the *Relational View* that I defend in the remainder of this paper, requests are an important tool for conducting our interpersonal relationships in ways that realize certain valuable forms of autonomy, equality, and recognition.

Let's focus first on intimate relationships like friendship and romantic partnership. I begin with the claim that standing in an intimate relationship with someone entails being bound to them by various obligations. Indeed, it's hard to imagine two people counting as friends if they didn't see themselves as owing some things to one another, regardless of whatever other affections they might feel. Moreover, such obligations are part of the value of friendship; they partially define the terms under which two people will enjoy a valuable joint life together and the interwoven set of expectations they'll have of one another. Of course, we don't always explicitly keep our obligations at the forefront by, for example, constantly reminding our friends what they owe to us. We do that mainly when things are already going awry in some way. But that's consistent with seeing the value of intimate relationships as bound up with the obligations that relatives owe to one another and with understanding their conduct within the relationship as usually being guided, at least implicitly, by thoughts about such obligations.<sup>19</sup>

But what exactly do I owe you as my friend? A full answer would go far beyond the scope of this paper, but it suffices for present purposes to note that members of intimate relationships must have considerable leeway to determine the obligations they owe to one another if such relationships are to incorporate a reasonable conception of individual autonomy.<sup>20</sup> While some romantic partners opt to be bound to one another by obligations of sexual fidelity, many others opt for non-monogamous sexual relationships. And those in the latter group are not making any kind of mistake about what a valuable romantic partnership involves. The natural thought then is that requests function as a tool for determining the obligations we owe to one another, as friends, in a way that acknowledges this autonomy interest. Requests allow us to choose how and which of our interests will be relevant for the obligations that structure our interpersonal lives. Additionally, the power to request serves an important interest in recognition that relatives have. One form of recognition involves giving appropriate consideration to some feature of a thing in one's practical deliberation.<sup>21</sup> Now when you do something for me *because I ask you to*, you implicitly recognize the significance of my autonomy interest in determining the obligations you owe to me as a friend. One can be moved by a pet's need for food, but that's quite different from being moved by your friend asking for help. The latter involves being seen as someone who can autonomously contribute to the structure of the relationship, and that form of recognition is itself something we have reason to care about.

The preceding considerations explain why it's valuable for a requester to be able to impose obligations on a requestee within the context of an intimate relationship. But why are request-based

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<sup>17</sup> Raz (1986) is the apparent father of this approach and his ideas have influenced a number of philosophers including Owens (2012), Perry (2013), and Watson (2009).

<sup>18</sup> Similar thoughts about promising are expressed by Raz (1982, 931) and Shiffrin (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Owens (2012, 112-113).

<sup>20</sup> Wallace (2012; 182, 189).

<sup>21</sup> Darwall (1977, 38)



obligations fairly weak in the sense characterized earlier?<sup>2</sup> Here, I believe that we should appeal to the egalitarian character of such relationships. It's commonly thought that a valuable friendship is a relationship between equals. Now this basic idea might be fleshed out in numerous ways, but an attractive form of it is articulated by Scheffler (2015, 25) who argues that an interpersonal relationship is conducted on a valuable footing of equality if "each person accepts that the other person's equally important interests...should play an equally significant role in influencing decisions made within the context of the relationship...[and] each person has a normatively effective disposition to treat the other's interests accordingly." When this constraint is satisfied, the parties, as Scheffler says, "make manifest their view of one another as equals and the equal seriousness with which they treat one another's interests."

So if you and I are friends, I have an autonomy interest, grounded in the value of the relationship, in being able to impose certain obligations on you. But you also have an autonomy interest in not having your own life be completely subject to my control. If I could impose obligations on you, of whatever strength and at any time, those obligations would potentially dominate your life. You would have to drop a great many important things to help me out with fairly minor conveniences. So my power to impose on you via a request must be fairly constrained in order to satisfy the egalitarian deliberative constraint. To put the point another way, the kind of equal consideration specified by the egalitarian deliberative constraint requires that both of our autonomy interests be given appropriate weight in determining the normative effects of the requests we make of one another. And this explains why request-based obligations must be fairly weak and afford people significant deliberative discretion about whether to comply. If requests didn't afford this kind of deliberative discretion, my autonomy interest would be inappropriately privileged over yours in a way that violates the egalitarian deliberative constraint. Of course, this discretion is limited; that was the lesson of *Movie Night*. Given that Erica is Rick's friend, he can reasonably expect her to help him out when doing so involves taking on a minor burden. We cannot excuse ourselves from complying with most ordinary requests simply because we don't feel like it. To recap then, the power to request plays a valuable role within intimate relationships because it provides a way of determining the obligations relatives owe to one another in a way that accommodates important interests they have in autonomy, recognition, and equality.

What should be said though about requests between people who don't share an intimate relationship like friendship or romantic partnership? It's important to note here that many requests occur in the context of a "purposive relationship" (i.e. one that's partly constituted by the pursuit of distinct and independently evaluable aims).<sup>22</sup> I submit that, in all such cases, requests play an instrumentally valuable role in achieving the purpose of the relationship. Take a case in which you, my fellow graduate student, ask me to help explain a logic problem to your own students. The fellow-graduate-student relationship is purposive in that part of the point of being fellow graduate students is helping one another develop skills in doing and teaching philosophy. As it's often said, most of what one learns is graduate school comes from engaging with other graduate students. Within the context of such a relationship, you have an interest in determining the obligations I owe you, *qua* fellow graduate student, insofar as those obligations are rationally related to the independently evaluable aims of the relationship. And this interest in imposing obligations is constrained by Scheffler's egalitarian deliberative constraint and my own autonomy interest. So you can, through your request, weakly obligate me to help explain the logic problem.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, such purposive

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<sup>22</sup> Kolodny (2003b, 106).

<sup>23</sup> Another virtue of the *Relational Approach* is that it explains why we can ask some things of certain people but not of others. Some requests are perfectly natural when addressed to one's romantic partner (e.g. a request for a massage) but

relationships are often finally valuable for the participants; they make our lives go well in non-instrumental ways. People deeply value their membership in academic relationships, activist groups, and professional associations. When purposive relationships are finally valuable for their participants, the non-instrumental value of being an autonomous contributor to the normative structure of the relationship also partly grounds the power to request things of one another.

An important objection looms large at this point. One might argue that the values I've appealed to explain why relatives *possess the power* to request things of one another, but they can't explain why an agent has a reason to *grant* any particular request.<sup>24</sup> Addressing this worry requires more space than I have here, but I think that the values I've appealed to can in fact do double duty in explaining both why we have the power to request and also why requestees should act as requested. Suppose I make a request of you that you intuitively have reason to grant. There is in fact something valuable about you actually performing the action (by treating the fact that I asked as relevant for your deliberation) for in responding to me in that way you further promote my autonomy interest and also provide me with the aforementioned form of recognition that I have reason to care about. The value of the power to request concerns the value of my having the opportunity to impose on you at various times and in various ways. When I exercise that power, my choice to exercise it has a normative significance for you that provides a reason to actually act as requested.

But what should be said about requests involving people who have no substantial historical relationship and will likely never see each other again? I confess I'm of two minds about this question. On the one hand, I'm tempted to think that the view defended here can be extended to account for such cases. So, we might accept that we have an autonomy interest in determining the moral obligations that strangers owe to us simply as fellow persons. And we also might generalize Scheffler's egalitarian deliberative constraint to apply outside of the context of close interpersonal relationships.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on this generalized strategy, the normative significance of requests between strangers like "*I'm late for my flight, may I cut in line?*" might be explained along lines that are quite similar to those articulated thus far.

On the other hand, I'm also tempted to take a less concessive line and claim that the power to request plays a distinctive role within interpersonal relationships (and intimate ones in particular). In part, I'm far less certain that the autonomy interest I have in determining the obligations my friends owe to me has a parallel in the case of strangers. Additionally, I'm not so sure that strangers have an interest in being recognized (as autonomous contributors) in the way that relatives do. Suppose I ask you for directions to the Louvre because I'm hopelessly lost in Paris. If you tell me how to get there simply to impress your date with your cultural knowledge, I don't think I'd be that bothered. But if my close friend only grants my sincere requests because of "deviant" reasons like this, I think that would bother me *as their friend*. I would not get something that I have reason to want, namely to have the exercise of my will recognized as important for the obligations that structure our friendship. Perhaps *Epistemicism* can account for the normativity of requests between strangers. But given that the view faces the problems discussed in §1, it shouldn't be accepted as a complete account of requests. So ultimately, I think we should acknowledge that our practice of requesting is quite complex and

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are potentially bizarre and objectionable when addressed to one's professional colleague. But that's just because the value of such a relationship doesn't provide you with the power to weakly obligate your colleague via a request for a massage. Within the context of that kind of relationship, the request is perverse.

<sup>24</sup> Thanks to Niko Kolodny for pressing this objection. Raz (2014) addresses the worry as it applies to his theory of promising.

<sup>25</sup> See Wallace (2019b, 117) for this suggestion.

likely evolved to serve a number of different interests. We would be oversimplifying things by failing to acknowledge that requests between intimates function in importantly different ways from requests between strangers. We need requests to get along well with our intimates, in ways that incorporate important ideals of autonomy recognition, and equality. Requests provide one way of being, in Raz's (1986, 86) words, "the authors of our moral world."

## Chapter 2: Wrongful Requests

We ask things of one another all the time. Most of these requests don't raise any normative concerns even if granting them would be burdensome (e.g. your shy friend asking you go to a boring party just so she'll have someone to talk to). But things seem different in other cases. If a man asks his female subordinate for a backrub in the workplace, something seems normatively problematic regardless of whether he truthfully notes that she's free to decline. But what exactly is concerning about this type of request? The main contention of this chapter is that some requests, like this one, wrong their requestees even though they are harmless. In wronging a requestee, the requester violates a directed obligation owed to them that provides a privileged basis for complaint.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In §1, I explore and ultimately reject the initially plausible claim that requests cannot be wrongful because they are harmless. In §2, I propose an expression-based explanation of several harmless, but nevertheless wrongful, requests. On this view, making such a request expresses a lack of due consideration or regard for significant interests of the requestee. This expression amounts to a kind of disrespect that individuals have reason to object to and which implicates them in a regrettable relationship of inferiority. §3 addresses two further questions concerning wrongful requests, namely (1) Is it possible to wrong oneself in asking (or failing to ask) certain things of others?, and (2) Is it possible to wrong others in failing to ask certain things of them?

### I

It might seem implausible that a request can ever be wrongful. One way to justify this begins with the ordinary thought that there's no harm in asking. A request cannot change a requestee's life for the worse or negatively impact their well-being. And this seems correct because of another common thought: requests are, in an important sense, discretionary; you're free to decline. If a person asks another to *A*, then even if *A*-ing would impose some harm or burden on the requestee, they can decline and incur no additional harm other than what they would otherwise have incurred had the request not been made. But if a request cannot harm the requestee, how could it wrong them? It might seem precious to get upset about the mere fact that someone uttered some words while admitting that the act was not harmful and could easily be ignored.

The idea that declining a request yields no harm partly distinguishes requests from other forms of address. Consider classic threats like "your money or your life." One consequence of such a threat is that it worsens a person's option set since keeping the money now has an additional cost; "*Your money or your life*" is importantly different in this respect from "*Will you give me your money? If not, I'll do nothing.*" And it's often the threat of imposing some additional harm for not doing such-and-such that warrants one in saying "I ain't asking."

But some cases suggest that requests can be wrongful. Still though, some caution is needed. We are not interested simply in whether a person can wrong another *by making a particular request* but rather in whether a person can wrong another *in virtue of* asking something of them. Put another way, are there wrongs that are internal to the act of request itself such that the fact that a particular request was made plays an essential role in the explanation of why a wronging occurred? In some cases, a person can make a request and thereby wrong another but where the act is not wrong *qua* request. Here's an example of such a case:

*Fridge Bomb:* Victim and Villain are watching television on the couch. Villain rigs Victim's refrigerator with a bomb that will detonate when the fridge door opens. Villain asks, "Could you grab us a couple drinks out of the fridge?" Victim opens the fridge and is killed by the explosion.

In this case, Villain asks Victim to do something and wrongs her, but he doesn't wrong her *qua* request. To see this, notice that Villain would have committed the same kind of wrong if he had instead dialed up the thermostat so that Victim would get thirsty and go to the fridge. The explanation of both the original and modified case is that it's morally wrong for Villain to deliberately manipulate Victim in a way that exposes her to the harm of the bomb. The fact that the manipulation occurred via a request in the original case is neither here nor there when it comes to the explanation of the wronging. The relevant explanatory concepts are *manipulation* and *harm*.

But other cases of intuitively wrongful requests cannot be explained in this fashion. In such cases, the wrongdoing is internal to the act of request and no harm or deceptive manipulation occurs. I consider three such cases.

*Murder:* Villain and Ex-Con know each other from prison. After being released, Ex-Con devotes himself to God and pledges never to commit a crime again. However, Ex-Con often finds himself tempted to reoffend and doubts whether he can live up to his commitment. Villain, by contrast, has no desire to be reformed and plots to murder Rival. Villain asks Ex-con to help commit the crime and dispose of the body. Neither Villain nor Ex-Con's involvement will ever be discovered; people will assume that Rival went to live off the grid. Ex-Con declines Villain's request and is furthermore relieved to discover that he isn't tempted to grant it. This discovery fills him with renewed confidence that he'll be able to maintain his commitment.

*Workplace:* Employee and Colleague work in the mailroom of an office building. Employee is unusual in that he gets extreme sexual gratification when a woman he finds attractive simply grazes his knee. He asks Colleague if she'll graze his knee just once as he's been having a tough day. He truthfully tells Colleague (and she believes him) that she's free to decline in the sense discussed above and that he'll be completely discreet about whether she grants the request or not. Colleague won't experience any shame or regret regardless of whether she grants the request. She's inclined to view Employee as somewhat pathetic.

*Hijab:* Religious is a Muslim woman who proudly wears a hijab in public. She knows that this makes some people in her community uncomfortable, but she doesn't care so long as nobody interferes with her person. She's inclined to see peoples' prejudices as based in irrational beliefs. While at a Fourth of July parade in her town, a woman taps Religious on her shoulder and discretely asks, "I'm sorry, but would you mind taking off your hijab during the parade? It makes my elderly father uncomfortable." Religious scoffs and declines. She doesn't feel humiliated by the request or threatened. Rather, she's inclined to view the

woman as a bigot who can be ignored. The woman says “*Okay, no problem,*” and goes back to where she was standing.

In each of these cases, it seems that the requester wrongs the requestee in virtue of the request, but it’s difficult to construe the requests as causing any harm. Declining each request carries no penalty or burden that makes the requestee’s life go worse than it otherwise would have.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the requestees’ choice situations are not worsened by the requests. Now a choice situation may be worsened, although not necessarily so, if the set of possible options one may take is quantitatively reduced. But there are many other ways for a choice situation to be worsened by some action. I canvass a few such possibilities here.<sup>2</sup> First, an action can have a *cost effect* on a choice situation if some bad effect is added to one or more of the options (e.g. the way the threat of “*your money or your life*” adds a cost to keeping the money). But no cost is added to the requestees’ options in any of our cases. Second, an action can have a negative *influence effect* on a choice situation if that action makes it more likely that the agent will choose an option that’s worse for them than they otherwise would have chosen. But as the cases are constructed, the requestees aren’t open to this kind of influence; they’re not worryingly obsequious but rather are antecedently committed to not granting the requests. Perhaps these requests would be wrongful if they made it more likely that the requestees would choose an option that’s bad for them, but that wouldn’t involve a wronging *qua* request in the sense specified earlier. Furthermore, it’s not clear that these requests would influence the requestees in a way that could explain their intuitive wrongfulness. Given that the requests are discretionary in the sense specified earlier, they present a particular deliberative task for the agent which might be characterized as “*Shall I act in a way that furthers the requester’s interest (because they asked me to) even though doing so would set one of my interests back, given that I won’t suffer in any way if I decline?*” Even if a person is more likely to act in a way that is bad for them when presented with a deliberative question of this form, it’s far from clear that merely proposing this deliberative question (or making it salient) could wrong them. Many ways of proposing favorable *quid pro quo* exchanges or engaging in competition seem morally permissible even if they have negative influence effects. Influencing someone to do something that’s bad for them seems most concerning when the motivational mechanism bypasses or problematically affects the exercise of their rational agency. But that worry doesn’t apply to our cases.

Third, an action can have a negative *capacity effect* on a choice situation if it worsens one’s ability to evaluate and select among the options one has. But nothing of that sort occurs in our cases given the descriptions of the agents’ psychologies. Fourth, an action can worsen a choice situation when it causes the agent to feel regret or remorse (or gives them reason to feel such regret/remorse) for making a particular choice when they would not have otherwise. Again though, nothing of this sort occurs in our cases. None of the requestees feel regret or like they’re letting down the requester for declining, nor do they have reason to feel that way.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps they shouldn’t for additional reasons, tell their respective requestees to shove off, but that’s compatible with lacking reasons to feel regret or remorse for declining the request. Fifth and finally, an action can worsen a person’s choice situation by making it humiliating or servile for them to make a particular choice (or perhaps regardless of which choice they make). But even if it would be humiliating for the requestees to grant their respective requests, we would still need to explain why the requests are wrongful *qua* humiliating

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<sup>1</sup> For *Murder*, one might even say that the requestee is better off than he was before the request because of his renewed confidence in maintaining his commitment.

<sup>2</sup> See Kolodny (2017).

<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with them regretting that the request was made. Thanks to Jay Wallace for this point.

action. How do the requests change the relationship between requester and requestee such that doing something because one was asked is humiliating?

Some people might not share the intuition that a wronging occurs in each case. Others might be pulled towards that judgment but feel their conviction wane once it's suggested that the requests cause no harm. For those in the first group, I give two additional arguments that each request wrongs its respective requestee. For those in the second group, I discuss the possibility of harmless wrongings. The first argument turns on the connection between warranted blame and wronging. In each of these cases, it seems that the requestee would be warranted in feeling (and expressing) angry resentment in response to the request regardless of whether they grant it. Such resentment would seem to be experienced on their own behalf and differs from what would be experienced by a third-party overhearing the request. Given the conceptual connection between resentment and directed wronging, it's reasonable to suppose that each requestee is wronged. But if they are wronged, there must be some interest of their that anchors their claim to be treated differently. As argued above, it cannot be any interest in avoiding harm. Moreover, none of the cases involve the kind of manipulation that occurs in *Fridge Bomb*. So explaining the directed wrongings in these cases requires essential reference to the requests themselves.

Some might be suspicious of this blame-based argument. They could reject the intuition that the requestees have a privileged standing to experience warranted resentment and argue instead that the warranted response is irritation or some other feeling that's irrelevant for conclusions about wronging. They could also deny that the presence of warranted resentment entails that the requests are wrongful *qua* acts of request. Perhaps one thinks that warranted resentment targets problematic aspects of a person's character rather than wrongful actions.<sup>4</sup> So here's another argument for the claim that the requests constitute wrongings *qua* acts of request. It seems that the requestees would be warranted in expressing a complaint at having these requests directed at them. It wouldn't be jarring or odd for them to respond with something like "*You have no right to ask me that*" or perhaps "*Who do you think you are?*" But what do these expressions mean exactly? Having a right to perform an action entails lacking a duty to not perform it. So lacking a right to perform an action entails having a duty to not perform it. These expressions thereby seem to register something in the range of a complaint concerning the requesters' duty-violations. Furthermore, it seems that such complaints have an agent-relative character such that they could not be levied by just anyone. This is clearest in *Workplace* since Employee's wife couldn't complain about the request being directed at her if she knows about his desires and routinely grazes his knee as part of their sexual activities. In *Murder* and *Hijab*, a bystander might complain about the requests, but such complaints seem to be levied on behalf of the requestees. Given the agent-relative character of the complaints, the requests violate duties owed to the requestees which supports the claim that the requests wrong their requestees specifically.

At this point one might still resist the idea that these requests constitute wrongings by endorsing the principle that an action cannot wrong a person unless it harms them. Perhaps one thinks that this principle's intuitive plausibility outweighs any previously offered arguments that these three cases involve wrongings. But while the principle has some intuitive appeal, cases in other areas of moral philosophy raise serious worries about it. I consider two here. First, consider Philippa Foot's discussion of the anthropologist Mikluko-Maklay who travels to the Malayan archipelago to study its

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<sup>4</sup> Consider Thomson's (1991, 293) Albert who wishes to hasten his wife's death and gives her the only existing cure for her illness while mistakenly thinking it a poison. Thomson says it's surely permissible for him to give her the cure regardless of his intentions although he may be blameworthy.

indigenous people.<sup>5</sup> One of the Malayan people agrees to act as Maklay's servant on the condition that Maklay not photograph him where the promise is extracted because the servant believes that photographing him would harm his soul. It seems that photographing the servant while he sleeps, in a way that he could never find out about, would wrong the servant even though it wouldn't harm him, at least insofar as photography doesn't cause damage to souls. Consider also Gardner and Shute's discussion of what they call a case of "pure rape" entirely stripped of "distracting epiphenomena."<sup>6</sup> Imagine that a woman is drugged into an unconscious state before being sexually penetrated by a man. Further suppose (i) that the penetration causes no physical damage (those who object that this is impossible neglect that a person can be sexually aroused in a physical sense even while in a drugged state with no conscious experience of what's happening), and (ii) the woman cannot come to know about the act so she experiences no psychological trauma. Gardner & Shute argue that this is a case of harmless rape that is nevertheless seriously morally wrong. The example is of course atypical in that rape is usually extremely harmful, both in a physical and a psychological sense. But the Maklay case is also atypical in that, in many ordinary cases, a promise induces reliance, and the breaking of a promise is experienced by the promisee as distressing. Yet it still seems that Maklay's promissory breach and the pure rape are seriously morally wrong. So our three guiding cases might then be classified as instances of "pure wrongful requests" that are entirely stripped of distracting epiphenomena. While some requests might be wrongful if they cause harm, we should not rule out the possibility that harmless requests can also constitute wrongings.

Now one might hold onto the principle connecting harming and wrongdoing by expanding the concept of harm so that some form of it can be identified in these cases. Perhaps one thinks that (i) to be harmed is just to have some interest set back, and (ii) a person cannot be wronged by an action unless it sets back one of their interests. If we accept (i) and (ii), we believe that all wrongings are harmful even though some harmful actions might not wrong the person they harm. An oddly expansive notion of harm might be problematic for other reasons but perhaps one finds the principle too appealing to give up. I'm not drawn to this option but let me offer the following concessive line for those who are. I will continue to assume that the requests in our three cases constitute harmless wrongings but if one wishes to maintain, for example, that the requestees are harmed simply by the fact that some interest of theirs is set back by the requests, I have no quarrel. My real interest is in explaining these curious cases of pure-request-based wrongings, not in defending the claim that they are harmless wrongings. One can accept the heart of the explanation I give in the next section without committing oneself to the view that these requests are harmless. Furthermore, if one is unconvinced that the requests do wrong the requestees, I think it extremely hard to deny that there is something normatively concerning about them. It's not just that granting them would be burdensome; many ordinary requests that don't raise our hackles are like that. If we accept only the quite weak claim that there's something bad about these requests that's significant for the requestees, that's still something that requires explanation.

## II

In the previous section, I accepted that things like influence and capacity effects can explain why some requests wrong their targets, but I argued that these features cannot explain the sense in which the requests in our guiding cases are wrongful *qua* acts of request. If these requests are not wrongful because of their harmful effects, it seems that their wrongfulness must depend on the nature

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<sup>5</sup> Foot (2001, 47).

<sup>6</sup> Gardner & Shute (2000).



of the acts or perhaps the requesters' psychologies. Let's consider the latter possibility. Perhaps one thinks that an agent's motivation for performing an act can make that act wrongful regardless of what it brings about. Shooting a gun at someone with the intention to cause bodily harm might seem wrongful even if the shooter doesn't realize that he's holding a toy.<sup>7</sup> Requests, by their nature, seem to be speech-acts that aim to motivate one's target to act as requested.<sup>8</sup> So one might argue that the request in *Murder* wrongs Ex-Con because Villain aims to motivate him to act in a way that's bad for him. Similar thoughts would apply to *Workplace* and *Hijab*.

But this proposal faces a few worries. First, not every action that aims to motivate someone to act in a way that happens to be bad for them wrongs that person. As mentioned previously, there are morally permissible ways of motivating someone to engage in competition and of proposing *quid pro quo* exchanges that are unfavorable for the other party. Second, even if it's sometimes wrong to aim at motivating someone to act in a way that's bad for them, our assessment of wrongfulness seems to turn on the kind of motivation one aims at. As mentioned previously, the requests in our guiding cases present a particular deliberative task for the agent about whether they will forgo their own interests for the sake of furthering those of the requester. It's somewhat strange to suppose that I could wrong you simply by proposing this deliberative option. In many cases, it's permissible to freely sacrifice one's own important interests in order to advance another's. But if (i) the request doesn't interfere with one's rational assessment of the available options, and (ii) the request aims to motivate by presenting the agent with the opportunity to make a permissible decision without fearing any negative repercussions, how could the request be wrong because of what one aims at in making it?

Third, granting most requests involves taking on a burden and yet many of them don't seem wrongful. It's perfectly ordinary and not wrongful in the slightest for me to ask my close friend to help fix my computer the night before an urgent deadline even if he'll have to forgo a few hours of sleep to do so. Even quite demanding requests, such as asking your friend to help you move when she has important work plans for the weekend, don't seem wrongful. Consider also a somewhat tragic variant of *Hijab* in which the woman at the parade says, "*I'm sorry to ask but my husband gets enraged when she sees Muslims wearing Hijabs and I'm sure that later, when he's drunk, he'll take his anger out on me. Would you mind, just for my sake, taking off your hijab?*" Here, granting the request would involve Religious making the same kind of sacrifice as she does in the original case, but this request doesn't seem to wrong her.

Perhaps the problem with *Hijab* is not simply that the woman aims to motivate Religious to act in a way that's bad for her but that it aims at Religious sacrificing her own interests without advancing a comparably important interest of the woman's. Some cases giving rise to what we might call "equal consideration complaints" have this structure. Suppose that Mother comes home with some extra cake from a dinner party after her two children, Son and Daughter, have had a full dinner with dessert. It seems that Mother doesn't owe it to either child to give up some of the cake; neither would have a complaint if Mother kept it for herself. But if Mother gives some to Daughter and none to Son, then Son has a complaint against Mother that Daughter's interest was advanced but his comparably important one was not. We might even refine the idea by pointing out that a distinct but related complaint can be levied when a person aims to set back some other person's interest as a

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<sup>7</sup> Although my criminal law professor once humorously pointed out that if you shoot a mannequin thinking it your sworn enemy then you will be guilty only of stupidity and not, at least as a legal matter, attempted murder.

<sup>8</sup> Even this is controversial since one can make a sincere request while hoping that the requestee doesn't grant it.

means of furthering their own comparably interest (or one belonging to a third-party). This kind of complaint explains what's objectionable about Cab Driver charging Unattractive a higher rate so that he can offer lower rates to his attractive riders.

So we might say that the requestees in our guiding cases have a comparative equal consideration complaint that that explains why the requests are wrongful. And this kind of equal consideration complaint wouldn't apply to the modified version of *Hijab* since it's plausible that the woman's interest in avoiding abuse later in the evening is significantly more important than Religious's interest in wearing her hijab during the parade. But while this equality-based explanation is more promising in one regard, the other problems with the original motivation-based explanation apply to it just as well. The equal consideration explanation, in either of its forms, cannot obviously distinguish wrongful requests from ones that are quite burdensome to grant but intuitively permissible. This explanation would also, at least in its current form, condemn intuitively permissible *quid pro quo* exchange proposals and engaging in intuitively permissible competition. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it doesn't seem wrong to aim to motivate someone to sacrifice their interests in order to further your own when their doing so would involve making a morally permissible decision on the basis of their own rational assessment of the situation.

At this point it seems to me helpful to recall that requesting involves intending to create a reason for one's target to act as requested by communicating that intention to them. Not all requests are successful in the sense that they create reasons in this way. Importantly, it seems like none of the requests in our guiding cases are successful. In *Murder*, Villain's request that Ex-Con help him commit murder doesn't provide a weak reason for Ex-Con to help; rather, the request provides no reason whatsoever. The explanation of this is that Ex-Con's personal interests in living up to his religious commitment and avoiding moral wrongdoing are sufficiently important to trump Villain's interest in being able to create a reason, via the request, for Ex-Con to help commit the murder.<sup>9</sup> In *Workplace*, Colleague's interest in not being seen or treated as a sexual object in the workplace is sufficiently important that Employee cannot create a reason for her to give him sexual gratification in that context via the request. Similar thoughts apply to *Hijab*. If these requests were able to create reasons, that would mean that the members of each requester/requestee pair stand in a kind of perverse and egalitarian relationship in which the important interests of the requestees are subjugated to those of the requesters.

Now notice that if the requesters in our guiding cases intend to create reasons via their requests, they must expect (or at least think it's possible that) their attempts will succeed. But if they occupy this kind of epistemic position, then the requests, in virtue of their linguistic meaning as forms of attempted reason creation, express a lack of due consideration or regard for the requestees' personal interests and the significance of their deliberative perspective. When Villain asks Ex-Con to help him commit murder, the act expresses that he does not take Ex-Con's religious commitment seriously as something that Ex-Con is deeply committed to and which gives his life a sense of meaning. Similar points apply to *Workplace* and *Hijab*. Expressing this kind of disregard via a request is a form of treatment that it's plausible to think an individual has reason to object to regardless of whether they end up setting back their own interests by granting the request. This expression-based explanation of

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<sup>9</sup> Further details could be added here about precisely which interests ground the power to request (see previous chapter) and how those compare to the Ex-Con's interests. But it's plausible that the request is unsuccessful given the significant of Ex-Con's interests as compared to Villain's. Also, in claiming that Ex-Con has an interest in avoiding moral wrongdoing, I am not thereby claiming that his moral obligation is grounded solely in considerations of self-interest.

the wrongfulness shouldn't come as a surprise. If the requests in our guiding cases are not wrongful because they cause harm, then it must be something about the nature of the act themselves that troubles us. But requests are, by their nature, speech-acts that don't have any necessary non-normative causal consequences. If we accept that harmless requests can be wrongful, it's natural to explain that in terms of the communicative nature of the acts, specifically, as acts that express a lack of due consideration or regard for deeply significant interests of the requestee. Showing this kind of lack of consideration makes it the case that requester and requestee stand in regrettable relationship of inferiority, one that is constituted by the lack of consideration given to their interests.

It's important to point out that our proposed explanation is consistent with the possibility of two requests with the same "content" differing in their wrongfulness properties. Consider a variant of *Hijab* where the request is made by the woman's five-year-old son who doesn't really grasp the significance of the religious commitment to wear a hijab or the problematic nature of bigotry. The son might express his request using the same language as his mother and so it has the same content (at least in one sense), but the son's request doesn't seem to wrong Religious while the mother's does. But even if we think that the son's request expresses the same kind of disregard as the mother's (and I'm not sure we should even accept that), the difference in wrongfulness can be explained by the fact that it's not reasonable to expect a young child to understand the importance of the religious commitment and how his request expresses an objectionable endorsement of an inferiority relation. We might think that a young child doesn't act wrongfully (or is at least not blameworthy) when they act in a way that exposes others to risks of harm even though it would be wrong for an adult to expose others to those same risks. Similarly, the child's request doesn't seem to be wrongful because either (i) it doesn't actually express disregard for Religious because of what it's reasonable for us to expect of the child, or (ii) it does express disregard but it's not reasonable for us to expect the child to recognize this fact.

Consider next the possibility of "pressing" one's request in a way that makes it wrongful. Here's a case to illustrate what I have in mind.

*Karaoke:* Shy Guy regularly goes to a karaoke bar but never sings himself. He sees how much fun his friends are having and really wants to give it a go, but he's nervous about embarrassing himself. He asks his friend Falsetto if she'll sing "Blister in the Sun" with him. Falsetto knows about Shy Guy's feelings and wants him to have a good time, join them in the shared activity, and get over his insecurities. She doesn't care much for the song but knows the words and grants the request even though doing so means that she can't sing her own preferred song that night (there's a one-song-per-patron limit). Shy Guy has an amazing time. At the next week's karaoke, Shy Guy again asks Falsetto if she'll sing "Blister in the Sun" with him. She grants the request knowing that he needs some more encouragement and confidence before he can go up by himself. Shy Guy has a blast again. The next week, Shy Guy makes the same request, but this time Falsetto says, "*I want to sing my own song tonight and, in any case, don't you think it's time you went solo?*"

Controversially perhaps, I think that the third request wrongs Falsetto, albeit in a rather minor way, while the first two do not. What's interesting here is that all three requests have the same content; each is a request that Falsetto sing "Blister in the Sun" with Shy Guy. The issue with the third one is that it expresses disregard for Falsetto's interests in both (i) not singing a song that she doesn't

particularly enjoy, and (ii) having the opportunity to sing her own song, which are together sufficient to make it so that Shy Guy cannot create a reason for her to sing with him via the request. Also, it's reasonable to expect Shy Guy to understand the significance of those interests compared to his and thereby to expect him to not make the request.

Importantly, our proposed explanation does not entail that all burdensome requests are wrongful. We ask big favors of one another all the time. Suppose that I ask you, my close friend, if you'll help me move this weekend when I know that you were planning to get some rest after an incredibly hectic week of work. This request isn't wrongful because it doesn't express inappropriate disregard for the requestee's interests or deliberative perspective; one can therefore make the request without standing in the kind of problematic inferiority relationship mentioned earlier. There are a couple reasons for this. First, it's an ordinary part of friendship to sometimes take on burdens, even quite significant ones, for one another. We might even go so far to say that this is part of what makes friendship valuable. But the requester and requestee in each of our guiding cases don't have that kind of antecedent relationship with one another. Second, there's an important difference between a burdensome request that's part and parcel of ordinary forms of friendship and wrongful requests which express disregard for deeply important personal interests of others. In *Murder* and *Hijab*, the requestees' interests in adhering to their religious commitments are a significant aspect of what gives their lives meaning from their own points of view. Granted, it's not clear exactly where the dividing line between the merely burdensome and the wrongful lies. But that's not particularly concerning. Our assessment of whether a particular request is wrongful depends on first-order normative thinking, and it's doubtful that we can articulate a fully determinate decision procedure for the assessment.<sup>10</sup> But we can confidently agree that our guiding cases fall on the wrongful side of the spectrum because of the comparative significance of the interests in play and what the possibility of creating reasons to grant those requests would signify for the relationship between the parties. This leaves open the possibility that some requests, even amongst close friends or romantic partners, can be wrongful despite the fact that intimates routinely make significant sacrifices for one another. For example, suppose that Wife comes from a traditional Italian family and Husband is a devoted Muslim who won't eat pork. I think it would be wrongful, for reasons articulated thus far, for Wife to ask Husband to eat some porchetta during Sunday dinner at her parents' house just so that he can "fit in."

One final objection to our explanatory story begins by noting that each of the requests in our guiding cases still leaves it up to the requestee to determine whether they will sacrifice their own important interests to further those of the requester. But if that's correct, then each request can be interpreted as acknowledging the requestee's equal standing as autonomous agents capable of making decisions through their own assessment of the relevant considerations. So, the objection continues, it's mistaken to think that the requests are problematic because they fail to acknowledge the deliberative perspectives of their targets or express a lack of appropriate consideration for their interests. But this objection misses the mark because of the role that the power to request plays in our explanatory story. I grant that there is no interesting sense in which a request forces its requestee to comply. And because you are not forcing a requestee to comply, you are leaving deliberative space for them to make their own decision. So a request doesn't express that the decision isn't up to them (in the way "your money or your life" would) and, because of that, it still respects an interest they have in a certain form of autonomy. But that still leaves room for the request to express something else that is objectionable, something along the lines discussed so far. If you ask a devoted parent if they'll

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<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, an acceptable theory of promising need not provide us with a procedure of this kind of determining which promises bind and what conditions excuse non-performance.

let you use their children as slaves for a week, it's no defense to simply follow up with "*Oh and by the way, it really is up to you, so I'm acknowledging the importance to you of being able to make autonomous decisions.*" That way of covering one's bases is utterly bizarre and fails to acknowledge that, as a loving parent, acceding to the request would be unthinkable.

### III

The previous section dealt with the question of whether a request can wrong the requestee. In this section, we turn our attention to two further questions: (i) Can a person ever wrong herself in making (or failing to make) a request? and (ii) Can a person ever wrong another in failing to make a request? On the first question, some obligations are self-regarding in that they are obligations to promote one's own interests. Some self-regarding obligations are owed to other people (e.g. the duty to look after one's health in order to fulfill obligations owed to one's children). But ordinary moral thought seems to acknowledge the possibility of there being obligations that are owed to oneself -- self-directed obligations -- such as the obligation to develop one's talents or make financial provisions for old age. To be fair, there are important worries about whether such obligations are possible. One major concern is the *Paradox of Self-Release* which is based on the following two claims: (i) *A*'s owing an obligation to *B* entails that *B* can release *A* from the obligation, and (ii) an agent cannot release herself from an obligation.<sup>11</sup> Claim (i) is plausible because owing a duty to another entails them having a right against you while having a right against an individual seemingly entails the possibility of releasing them from the duty.<sup>12</sup> But when *A* and *B* are the same person, the claims are inconsistent.

Another worry focuses on the possibility of making sense of being accountable to oneself for violating a self-directed obligation. In order for an obligation to be owed to somebody, that person must have the privileged standing to complain when the obligation is violated.<sup>13</sup> So a significant distinction between claimholder and wrongdoer is built into the concept of an obligation. There is no issue with making sense of this distinction when the claimholder and wrongdoer are different persons. But the *Puzzle of Bifurcation* asks: How can this distinction be specified in the case of a self-directed obligation? Is there some aspect of *yourself* that has the privileged standing to complain about *you* acting in some way? Can we draw a robust and intelligible distinction between the acting self and the accounting self?

One might think that the Kantian has a natural way of responding to the *Puzzle of Bifurcation* given their conception of rational agency and of the person. On this conception, the Kantian can distinguish between "shallower" and "deeper" aspects of agency where the latter are more authoritative in the domain of practical reason. The bifurcation might be characterized in terms of the difference between being guided by a naturally given incentive and acting as a free agent on the basis of a maxim that doesn't run afoul of the Categorical Imperative. It might also be characterized, in a Korsgaardian style, by pointing to one's collection of practical identities and identifying a hierarchical structure with one's practical identity as a rational agent sitting at the foundation.<sup>14</sup> But

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<sup>11</sup> Singer (1958).

<sup>12</sup> Admittedly, some rights seem to be inalienable in that the right-holder cannot release others from the obligations corresponding to the right. Perhaps, as Herman (2012) suggests, some obligations of gratitude are like this. This means that the *Paradox of Self-Release* can be resolved by maintaining that all self-directed obligations correspond to inalienable rights, but I won't dwell on that possibility here.

<sup>13</sup> Recall my earlier argument that employed the conceptual connection between complaint and wrongdoing.

<sup>14</sup> Korsgaard (1996).

one problem with this strategy is that it might commit us to the implausible claim that every morally wrong action violates a self-directed obligation. Suppose that you murder your rival to advance your own business interests. The action clearly wrongs your rival, but it doesn't, at least not in any obvious way, wrong you. But if we are Korsgaardians, we think that the irrationality of the action is accounted for by the fact that it conflicts with our practical commitment to properly value the rational agency of others, a commitment that is grounded in one's own practical identity as a rational agent. If the accounting self is to be identified with the perspective of pure rational agency, don't we then have to say that it makes sense to think of the murder as violating a self-directed obligation? The heart of the problem, I suspect, is that abstract perspective of a rational agent isn't well-suited to characterize the needed conception of the accounting self; it doesn't give us an acceptable division between an acting agent and an accounting self with their own interests.

Another strategy for addressing the *Puzzle of Bifurcation* points to the fact that different temporal stages of a single person's life can be thought of as involving different perspectives.<sup>15</sup> You might, in your youth, enjoy nights filled with heavy smoking and drinking with the result that you suffer greatly in later years. It is, as Wallace notes, intelligible that you might look back on your earlier activities with a sense of resentment about how you acted. The accounting self is not to be identified with the youthful perspective from which the actions were performed; rather it's identified with a perspective that takes into account the overall arc of one's life and the interests that are intelligible from that point of view. This strategy also attractively solves the *Paradox of Self-Release* for in drawing an acceptable division between the acting and the accounting self, we can see why the agent cannot release herself from a self-directed obligation. Your perspective when you smoke and drink heavily through the early stages of your life is not the same perspective as the one in which accountability is based; so you cannot release yourself from the obligation simply through your own voluntary actions.<sup>16</sup>

The temporal account of self-directed obligations can be used to explain why some requests wrong the requester. If it is intelligible for a person to look back on their earlier actions with justified resentment for how those actions impact one's interests as a creature whose life unfolds through time, then presumably one could look back upon their own practices of asking "too much" or "too little" of others in a way that negatively impacts those same kinds of interests. So, to take one example, suppose that you have suffered privately for many years with a debilitating drug addiction knowing that you could have reached out for help on many different occasions, but you didn't, either because you were too proud to or didn't think there was a significant problem. At a certain point, irrevocable damage might be done to your life, and you could look back, angry at your past self, and think "*If only I had asked for help when I had the chance.*" The wrongness of your failures to ask for help is explained by appeal to distinct self-directed obligations to take care of one's future interests. And, importantly, this kind of self-directed wrongdoing is based on the effects of your actions or omissions on the broader trajectory of your life.

But can we characterize an expression-based self-directed wrongdoing similar to the kind considered in the last section, a wrongdoing that doesn't depend on the effects of asking or failing to ask? Consider the following. Suppose that you are an undergraduate keen on going to the best

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<sup>15</sup> See Schofield (2015) and Wallace (2019b, 156).

<sup>16</sup> I have discussed the *Paradox of Self-Release* and the *Puzzle of Bifurcation* as if they were wholly separate issues, but they might actually be two sides of a single coin. An interesting feature of Wallace's (2019b, 155-56) discussion is that he phrases a worry about self-directed obligations in terms of waiveability. But in answering that worry, he proposes a solution to the *Puzzle of Bifurcation*. It seems that making sense of being accountable to oneself requires identifying a bifurcation in the self which then allows us to explain why voluntary actions do not themselves qualify as waivers of claims.

graduate school in philosophy. You are quite close with a professor who happens to be one of the most well-regarded living philosophers. Each week you send them a draft of your writing sample hoping that they will provide copious comments. Your goal is to, as we might put it, get them to write the paper for you by providing enough detailed suggestions that you produce something that reflects their considered take on some philosophical question rather than your own. As it turns out, the professor accedes to some of your requests but doesn't offer much in the way of substantive positive proposals. You end up having to do most of the work but produce something original that gets you into an excellent program. Here, your pattern of requests (or omissions) hasn't negatively impacted your interests. But it seems intelligible for you to look back on your past actions with a sense of resentment. For here and now, as a thriving graduate student in an excellent program, you might be proud of what you've accomplished and confident that you deserve your place. You might conceive of your past requests as expressing a kind of disregard for the importance of these features of your current situation and be angry that you made them even if they weren't granted, at least not in the way you had initially hoped for. Note that here, we are not characterizing the wronging in terms of the request qua attempted act of reason creation for your request aimed to create a reason for a different person. That marks a crucial difference between the wrongfulness of the requests in our guiding cases and the requests addressed to the professor. But still, there seems to be room to articulate an expression-based explanation of self-directed wrongings involving requests you make of others.

I turn now to the final question of this chapter, namely whether it is possible to wrong others in failing to ask things of them. It's quite natural to deny such a possibility. Shouldn't it be completely up to me whether I seek help via a request? Why should I ever owe it to someone to seek their help, especially if helping me would impose some cost on them? Admittedly there's something attractive in the suspicions that underlie these questions. If the justification of our having positive duties, owed to others, to ask certain things of them wasn't sensitive to the importance of our own desires about whether to make requests, then such duties would seem overdemanding and implicate us in potentially regrettable relationships of dependency with others. But we shouldn't move from that plausible thought to the denial of any positive duties of request that are owed to others. In many contexts, including those involving intimate relationships like friendship and romantic partnership, it seems perfectly intelligible to think that we have such duties even though we still have a significant amount of freedom concerning what we will ask of others. Being part of a finally valuable intimate relationship like friendship constitutively involves having reasons to do things on behalf of one's relatives that you have no comparable reason to do for others.<sup>17</sup> Exactly which interests give rise to such reasons (and which contexts make such interests normatively salient) depends on the nature of the shared relationship. Moreover, it's plausible that intimates have relationship-based interests in providing various forms of aid to one another, at least some of the time. So, for example, if Husband never opens himself up emotionally to Wife and seeks some form of help when addressing the complexities of his life, that would seem to be at odds with the kind of valuable partnership that Wife has reason to want. She would be denied the kind of valuable "joint" or "shared" life which seems an attractive ideal within the context of such partnerships. And it seems that it's reasonable for her to expect Husband to open himself up to her, at least some of the time, and seek help. So if requests are a tool for seeking such help, then it's plausible that individuals have duties, owed to their intimates, to, at least some of the time, ask things of them.

One might object that the relevant values can be realized even if no requests are ever made. That might be correct as a logical matter but it seems unlikely to occur in practice. Admittedly,

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<sup>17</sup> Scheffler (2010).

spending a lot of time with one person often gives us the ability to know, even without them telling us, when they're having a rough time. But our epistemic abilities are limited and requests can partly play the role of revealing one's vulnerabilities to the other party. Moreover, requests can play additional normative roles that we have reason to care about. So, for example, even if you already owe it to me to *X*, my asking you to *X* can still have the normative effect of giving you reason to take on in your deliberation a greater proportion of my perspective on the significance of your *X*-ing, how exactly that duty is to be discharged, and how to assess whether your interests in not *X*-ing are sufficient to exonerate you.<sup>18</sup> And when we make requests, we express our recognition of the significance of allowing others into our lives. That itself is something that intimates have reason to care about that can be appealed to in explaining why there is a duty to make at least some requests of one another in the context of an intimate relationship.

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<sup>18</sup> Shiffrin (2011, 169) makes these points about the normative significance of perfectly redundant promises (i.e. promises to *X* made when one already has a perfect duty to *X*).



## Chapter 3: The Badness of Begging

Much recent philosophical work has focused on the normativity of both imperatival and non-imperatival forms of address that aim to move others to action.<sup>1</sup> But surprisingly little attention has been paid to one such form of address: begging. There seems something concerning about the act of begging itself, something about it that strikes us as demeaning. The central question of this paper, which I call the *Puzzle of Address*, just asks: What is it about begging that makes it inherently demeaning? After all, not every way of reaching out for help is demeaning. I might need emotional support after a recent breakup and ask my friend to chat about it. That's a perfectly ordinary request within a friendship, and it doesn't demean me. Additionally, different things are demeaning for different reasons. Perhaps you can demean yourself by failing to develop your talents or shirking your responsibilities. And you can, less controversially, be demeaned when someone denies you a job because of your race. Why, in particular, is begging demeaning?

A second puzzle about begging, which I call the *Puzzle of Motivation*, just asks: How can begging motivate the person it addresses? One answer might appear so obvious so as to make the question not worth asking: via benevolence.<sup>2</sup> But the obvious answer doesn't seem to tell the whole story. It's not clear that the motivational mechanism triggered by begging is always the same as that which occurs in other cases of benevolent aid (e.g. saving the proverbial drowning child). Moreover, begging is often used as a last resort when other attempts to elicit aid have proven ineffective. Why would people resort to begging unless they believed it had some special motivational power? What, then, is it about begging that produces this distinct and powerful kind of motivation? And might this motivational power have something to do with the demeaning nature of begging?

The structure of the chapter is as follows. §1 considers and rejects a reductionist answer to the *Puzzle of Address* which states that begging, as an action, is not inherently demeaning. §2 takes up the *Puzzle of Address* and argues that begging is both a unified and protean phenomenon. It's unified in that the activity is inherently demeaning because it constitutively involves relating to another as an inferior, rather than equal, as a means of motivation. This gives the act a kind of expressive badness that the beggar has reason to regret. But it's protean in that there are several importantly different ways of relating to another as an inferior as captured in different paradigmatic cases. §3 solves the *Puzzle of Motivation* by proposing four different but mutually consistent ways in which begging can motivate its target: (i) via benevolence, (ii) via flattery, (iii) via embarrassment on the beggar's behalf, and (iv) via emotional manipulation that involves seeing the act of begging as a kind of self-harm.

### I

Consider the following reductionist answer to the *Puzzle of Address*: there's something bad, and perhaps even demeaning, about *being in the kinds of situations* that typically lead people to beg but there's nothing demeaning about *engaging in the act itself*. On this kind of view, begging is merely a sophisticated version of an infant's cry in that it marks an underlying problem but isn't bad in itself. One major problem for such a view is that it seems rational (just in the minimal sense that there exists a genuine normative reason) for people who are very poorly off to prefer meeting their basic needs

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<sup>1</sup> On demands, see Darwall (2006) and Wallace (2019b). On commands see Enoch (2014). On requests, see Enoch (2011) and Lewis (2018)

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith (1776) seems to have thought as much in noting that “[n]obody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow citizens.”

through means other than begging. Suppose some society contains two groups of people with each member having the same level of welfare (except to whatever extent individual welfare depends on the distributive mechanisms through which one receives goods). Persons in the first group achieve their welfare level by receiving aid from charitable institutions funded by the well-off while those in the second group achieve the same welfare level by begging for aid on the street. Given this, it seems rational for one to prefer being in the first group rather than the second, and that seems explained by the fact that begging is itself a demeaning activity.<sup>3</sup> Consider also the following: a homeless man in my university town would refuse assistance from anybody who didn't laugh at a joke that he told. He clearly had a preference for receiving money as part of a *quid pro quo* exchange rather than by begging, and I doubt that he should be indifferent as to how he'd receive aid. Rather, his choice seems a rational response to the demeaning nature of begging.<sup>4</sup> So the reductionist seems to reject a distinction we intuitively draw in ordinary language between begging and other attempts at motivation.<sup>5</sup>

A second problem for the reductionist arises when we look beyond instances of so-called "street begging." Consider the following two cases:

*Car Ride:* Reckless and Passenger are driving together on an icy winter night. Reckless is joyfully speeding and swerving to the point where the car almost slides off the road. Passenger says that Reckless should really slow down. Reckless ignores the advice and Passenger continues "I'm begging you, please slow down or you'll get us killed!"

*Breakup:* Husband and Wife have had significant problems in their marriage for some time. They've tried addressing their issues in multiple ways including a great deal of marriage counseling. The problems persist and Wife eventually says to Husband, "I tried so hard but I can't do it anymore. I'm leaving you." Husband kneels in response and says "Please don't leave, I'm begging you."

Both *Car Ride* and *Breakup* have a demeaning element that the reductionist has a difficult time explaining. While Reckless clearly wrongs Passenger by unjustifiably exposing her to a risk of significant harm, it doesn't seem that he thereby demeans her. In order to support that claim, one would need to think that any morally wrong action demeans the victim. But that threatens to rob the idea of a demeaning action of much of its distinctive moral force.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in *Breakup*, it seems demeaning for Husband to beg Wife not to leave him, and while admittedly there are some demeaning ways of breaking up with a person (e.g. telling them that you cannot date someone of their race),

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<sup>3</sup> There may well be moral reasons to prefer a system of legitimate taxation over one of charitable donation, however efficient the latter might be. See Munoz-Dardé & Martin (2018, 124-44). I'm suggesting only that begging introduces an additional source of moral concern when compared to a relevantly similar situation in which needs are met through charity.

<sup>4</sup> Later on I'll identify the normative features of *quid pro quo* exchange that explain this rational preference.

<sup>5</sup> Consider also an exchange between Don Draper and Peggy Olsen in season 3 episode 13 of the television series *Mad Men*. Don is starting a new advertising agency and tells Peggy to pack up her things to come work for him. When she resists he says, "I'm not going to beg you," to which she responds, "Beg me? You didn't even ask me."

<sup>6</sup> If you aren't convinced by *Car Ride*, then consider *Mugging*: Late one evening Pedestrian is walking home. As they near the doorstep of their apartment building, two armed assailants approach them and attempt to steal their backpack. This creates a struggle in the midst of which Pedestrian cries out "Please I'm begging you, leave me alone." Mugging someone in this way is gravely morally wrong but it's not clear that it demeans the victim. The case is a slightly modified version of one discussed by Etinson (381, 360).

nothing of that sort occurs in *Breakup*. The relationship has simply run its course and Wife has exercised her prerogative to end it.

A final problem for the reductionist focuses on the beggee's (for lack of a better word) perspective. I take it that many of us feel some regret when we aid beggars but not when we help those who reach out in other ways (e.g. granting a friend's request to chat about their breakup). Something seems tainted by the begging transaction itself. But given that aiding the beggar is often what we have most reason to do, how can the reductionist explain that sense of regret? If we instead accept that begging is itself a demeaning action, then we can say, even without first solving the *Puzzle of Address*, that providing aid is a way of participating in that demeaning activity (it involves "doing one's part") and this provides a basis for reasonable regret.

As one final comment before moving on, nothing said so far entails that the demeaning character of begging is wholly independent of the beggar's underlying situation. I can put on shabby clothes and sit on a street corner holding up a sign reading "*Homeless and hungry, please help,*" but that won't make my action demeaning. In a certain sense I'm not even begging at all but instead doing something better described as play acting. And that's because my background circumstances are importantly different from the typical ones of the beggar. So, at the very least, our answer to the *Puzzle of Address* must explain how the background circumstances of the beggar function as an enabling condition without thereby completely explaining why the action's demeaning.

## II

How then should the *Puzzle of Address* be approached? One option is to first provide a definition of begging (*qua* speech act) that would distinguish it from other speech-acts that aim to motivate (e.g. requests, commands, and invitations) and then go on to answer the normative questions about begging.<sup>7</sup> But it's far from clear that we gain anything in taking a definition-first approach. Our motivating question is a normative one and our understanding of how begging compares with other speech-acts might be best informed by giving a prior answer to the question of what makes begging demeaning.<sup>8</sup> We can proceed then by identifying the demeaning elements in paradigmatic cases of begging. But we should proceed with some caution. First, some interactions might loosely be described as cases of begging even if they don't raise our normative questions. Suppose that Traveler misses their flight and desperately wants to return home that evening because they've got tickets for an NBA game. I doubt that Traveler could be accused of misusing language if they said "*Please, is there anything you can do to get me on another flight? I'm begging you!*" to the ticketing agent. But I struggle to think of this as demeaning in the sense that raises the *Puzzle of Address*. And this might make us doubt whether there's any philosophically interesting sense in which this counts as begging. Second, and even more importantly, begging is extremely varied with respect to (i) the kinds of goods that are begged for, (ii) the background circumstances of the beggar, and (iii) the antecedently existing relationships (or lack thereof) between beggar and beggee. Given that kind of multidimensional variation, a variety of cases should be considered with the aim of giving as unified of an answer as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> A definitional approach to coercion which informs distinctions between, for example, threats/offers and threats/warnings is given by Nozick (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Similar thoughts are expressed by Pallikkathayil (2011, 2) and Kolodny (2017, 89).

Let's begin then with cases like *Car Ride* and *Mugging* in which the beggar begs for something to which they have a right.<sup>9</sup> I argue that the demeaning character of begging in such cases is explained by the way in which the beggar refrains from claiming what they have a right to, in a way that expresses that they don't have a right to it. A number of philosophers have thought that there's an intimate connection between being a rights-holder and a particular performative sense of "claiming." In this sense, to claim that one has rights is, as Joel Feinberg puts it, "to make an assertion that one has them, and to make it in a such a manner as to demand or insist that they be recognized."<sup>10</sup> The point of such an assertion is to *make sure* that people listen and act accordingly, rather than simply communicating your belief in some proposition. Claiming something in this way requires taking oneself to have the normative standing to express demands that have practical import for the addressee. And failing to claim what's yours by right can be seen as a way of lacking self-respect, at least when doing so involves representing yourself as lacking that right.<sup>11</sup>

To take this point one step further, an idea of equal status can be cashed out in terms of the equal standing people have to make claims of one another. So, as Elizabeth Anderson notes, "to stand as an equal before others means [among other things] ...that no one need to bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as an inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard."<sup>12</sup> In some circumstances, failing to claim something of another is a way of disregarding this equal standing and thereby treating oneself as an inferior. Furthermore, claiming seems to go hand in hand with paradigmatic expressions of blame like resentment since judging that you have the standing to make a claim of another person necessarily involves a disposition to respond with something in the register of resentment if they fail to satisfy the claim. When we blame others for violating our rights, we manifest, in virtue of blame's dimension of emotional vulnerability and anger, a concern for our equal standing with others. In crude terms, expressing blame when someone wrongs you is a way of saying "*I count just as much as you and your conduct didn't acknowledge that fact.*" Claiming and expressing resentment are then two mutually reinforcing aspects of a practical orientation to one's equal standing with others where the former action is forward-looking and the latter is backwards-looking.<sup>13</sup>

Now begging looks to be, in a certain way, opposed to both claiming and expressing resentment. Beggars don't use the typical assertive language of performative claiming (e.g. "*That's not acceptable!*" or "*That's mine, give it to me.*") nor do they exhibit the kind of anger that gives blame its significance and value.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, begging also seems to constitutively involve expressing that you lack a right to the thing that's begged for. In *Car Ride*, it would be jarring and odd if, when Reckless doesn't slow down after Passenger begs him to, she then responded with something in the register of claiming or with angry resentment. Reacting this way would suggest that she wasn't really begging to begin with and, if that's the case, there's a way in which her begging expresses that she lacks the right to have Reckless slow down.<sup>15</sup> So if we have reasons to claim what's ours by right and blame others

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<sup>9</sup> The discussion is restricted to moral rights, but I believe the analysis can be extended to account for other kinds (e.g. non-moral legal rights and ones within intimate relationships).

<sup>10</sup> Feinberg (1970, 251).

<sup>11</sup> Darwall (1977, 22).

<sup>12</sup> Anderson (1999, 313). See also Satz (2010, 99): "For two people to have equal status they need to see each other as legitimate sources of independent claims and they need to each have the capacity to press their claims without needing the other's permission to do so."

<sup>13</sup> Blame is often expressed partly to deter a person from future wrongdoing, but I doubt that this is the sole (or even primary) point of blame. See Wallace (1994, 54-59).

<sup>14</sup> The role that harsh anger plays in accounting for the normative significance of blame is explored in Wallace (2011) and Wolff (2011).

<sup>15</sup> "*I hereby beg for you to x and demand that you respect my right to your x-ing,*" sounds a bit comical.

who violate those rights, we have the same reasons to choose claiming/blaming rather than begging as a way of motivating others to action. Given that such reasons are egalitarian in the sense discussed previously, it makes sense to think of begging as a demeaning activity by reference to *what you're forgoing* by opting for begging rather than claiming/blaming. Begging for what's yours by right involves relating to another as an inferior rather than an equal. Importantly, this doesn't mean that one actually loses the standing to claim/blame when one opts for begging. Our egalitarian moral status with others, that partly gives rights their normative significance, is not as fragile as that. Moreover, one need not believe that one lacks this standing. But accepting these points doesn't threaten our analysis of the demeaning character of begging for what you have a right to.

Unfortunately, this analysis doesn't cover all relevant cases since, as *Breakup* shows, it can be demeaning to beg for something one doesn't have a right to. Still, the demeaning character of begging your spouse to stay with you can, as before, be understood by reference to what one forgoes in opting for it. In order to see this, consider some alternative ways for Husband to respond to Wife's announcing her intention to end the relationship. He might have tried convincing her to continue the relationship by saying something along the lines of "I know marriage counseling isn't going well but I think we're making progress and we should stick with it," or "I know that my smoking is making it difficult to stay together so I'm quitting tomorrow." He might also have accepted her decision and said something like "I want to stay together but I understand that won't work for you." In saying such things, Husband is engaging in what Philip Pettit calls "discursive interaction" which occurs "when people attempt to resolve a common, discursive, problem – come to a common mind – by reference to what all parties regard as inferentially relevant considerations or reasons."<sup>16</sup> Discursive interaction can take many different forms including (i) providing reasons favoring a course of action under consideration, (ii) weighing in on the significance of proposed reasons for a course of action under consideration, (iii) proposing new courses of action, (iv) accepting another's proposal on the basis of acceptable reasons, and (v) proposing fair strategies for determining which course of action to take (e.g. "Let's flip a coin"). Within the context of an interpersonal relationship like romantic partnership, the structure of discursive interactions (including the options canvassed and the reasons appealed to in proposing and assessing them) must take into account the equally important interests of each member if those interactions are to satisfy an important egalitarian ideal.<sup>17</sup> To be willing and able to engage in discursive interaction of this kind with one's partner about decisions made within the context of a relationship is to have the finally valuable status of a co-contributor and co-reasoner, and if each partner is so able and willing (and sees the other person in that light), they stand to one another as equals, in one sense, rather than inferiors.

Realizing this egalitarian value doesn't require that every decision made within the context of a relationship must arise from discursive interaction. Some decisions may be minor enough that there are practical reasons for one party to unilaterally make them, and in some cases the appropriate solution may already be determined by past interactions or agreements. But realizing the egalitarian ideal does require that each party think of both themselves and the other as willing and able to engage in discursive interaction in making decisions within the context of the relationship (at least major ones concerning its character and structuring norms). Additionally, the value of discursive interaction doesn't require either that a consensus be reached or that the decision be one that could antecedently

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<sup>16</sup> Pettit (2001, 67).

<sup>17</sup> This kind of "egalitarian deliberative constraint" is articulated by Scheffler (2015, 21-44). Interestingly, claiming is a kind of discursive interaction but one that functions as "conversation stopper" given its connection to rights.

be described as “best.” The egalitarian value of being co-contributors is more “procedure-based” than “outcome-based.”

When Husband begs Wife to stay with him, it seems that he is forgoing the kind of egalitarian discursive interaction that is crucially important when addressing such a serious decision within the relationship (i.e. whether to continue the relationship at all). His attempts to motivate her seem to both (i) bypass reasons concerning her own equally important interests, and (ii) exploit an underlying asymmetry of need/vulnerability as a way of motivating her to continue the relationship. As to (i), it seems like Wife has come to the point where she can’t get anything more out of the relationship even if it’s painful to end it. But Husband, via begging, attempts to continue the relationship in a way that doesn’t further any of Wife’s interests; there’s simply nothing in it for her anymore. Someone with a healthy amount of self-respect would be inclined to end a relationship if they came to believe that the other person wasn’t getting anything out of it and was continuing it only out of pity. It’s unlikely in fact that Husband would have begged Wife to stay with him without having already deployed a host of other discursive moves which attempt to show what she has to gain by staying in the relationship. Begging, for him, seems to come into play when the normal way of appreciating various considerations has proven ineffective for getting what he wants. Of course, he might call attention to his intense desire to continue the relationship *as part of* an egalitarian discursive interaction. But he doesn’t seem to be doing that.

As to (ii), the fact that Husband and Wife have opposing desires as to whether to continue the relationship means that there’s an underlying asymmetry in how vulnerable each one of them is to the other. Husband’s begging aims to exploit this underlying asymmetry as a motivational mechanism in a way that amounts to relating to Wife as her inferior. Now quite often romantic relationships end even if one of the parties wants it to continue. In that case there is an underlying asymmetry between the parties’ desires. But if they part ways while both acknowledging their different needs and interests and respecting one another’s entitlement to decide for themselves whether to continue, the kind of motivation that attempts to bypasses egalitarian discursive interaction by exploiting an underlying asymmetry of need/vulnerability doesn’t occur. Because of the way this exploitative mechanism is at odds with egalitarian discursive interaction, Husband relates to Wife as her inferior through his address, and that’s why it’s demeaning. This might seem a bit puzzling for one might think that if Husband is trying to get Wife to ignore her own interests by staying with him, then he relates to her as her *superior* rather than her inferior; he’s trying to make himself more important rather than less important. While there’s a way in which that’s correct, the crucially important thing is that Husband forgoes his egalitarian status by opting for begging rather than an acceptable form of discursive interaction. To give up one’s egalitarian status (even symbolically) through the act of begging is to relate to another as their inferior. So there’s a curious way in which Husband’s begging involves relating to Wife as both an inferior and a superior.

We turn finally to cases of street begging that first motivated the *Puzzle of Address*. Here again, we cannot simply appeal to the contrast between begging and claiming. While we all have moral obligations of beneficence to address significant problems of poverty and need, that doesn’t obviously translate into a right on the part of each street beggar I may encounter to receive aid from me. Given that there are so many suffering people in the world such that it’d be impossible for a single individual to meet the needs of more than a few, it’s plausible that our imperfect obligations of beneficence just require that each of us donate our fair share to meeting the needs of those who suffer so greatly.<sup>18</sup> It

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<sup>18</sup> See Munoz-Dardé & Martin (2018, 129-30) and Wallace (2019a).

goes without saying, of course, that we might have to donate very significant sums in order to satisfy these obligations. But the relevant point concerns the structure of our obligations of beneficence rather than their demandingness.

In cases of street begging, I argue that the beggar draws attention to their inferiority relative to the beggee as a basis of motivation.<sup>19</sup> This gives the attempted transaction a certain kind of meaning that the beggar has reason to find demeaning. There are at least two kinds of inferiority to which the beggar may draw attention: status inferiority and dependence. Consider first inferiorities in status which obtain when some people are subject to a widely held view (and also perhaps treated in accordance with that view) that they're less entitled to important goods, opportunities, and favorable forms of treatment, and less suitable for participating in valued personal relationships.<sup>20</sup> Significant economic inequality can produce such differences in status when facts about the poor are treated as making them ineligible for various goods and social roles. Abjectly poor street beggars often wear their conditions on their sleeves so to speak. They appear in public with shabby clothes, disheveled hair, and features that mark their bad health. Some traits (e.g. being homeless or uneducated) may be relevant simply because it's common knowledge that people who beg on the street typically have them; they need not be acutely displayed. And it's fairly obvious what goods poor beggars lack when compared to the better-off. The abjectly poor don't have home addresses, cellular phones, or reliable means of transportation which often translates into a lack of employment opportunities. They are far less likely to receive help in addressing their substance addictions and mental illnesses than the better-off. They are far less likely to form personal relationships with people, at least ones who aren't already mired in the same kind of social situation. And finally, the abjectly poor who live on the street are typically not seen as individuals in a certain sense. They can be seen just as tokens of a particular social identity rather than autonomous agents with their own conception of the good and their own particular characteristics and virtues. There is a deeply unfortunate way in which the better-off often see the abjectly poor as mere furniture in their social worlds or simply as vectors of need that impinge on their lives in a way that's similar to how one might view an injured animal in the woods. The better-off often see them just as a surface to which a certain label is attached, and that's morally concerning regardless of whether the poor see themselves in that light.<sup>21</sup> Given that it's demeaning to be a status inferior in the ways just discussed, street begging is demeaning because it brings those inferiorities to bear on one's interaction with another as a way of motivating them to action. Highlighting such status inferiorities through the address gives the attempted transaction a certain meaning that the beggar has reason to find demeaning.

Consider next the kind of inferiority that obtains when people are regrettably dependent on others. As Munoz-Dardé & Martin note, "in order to entreat someone [in the way characteristic of begging] one has to indicate one's lack of power and resource relative to them... For the beggar to be effective, their needs must be suitably displayed so that the donor both has a keen feeling of lack on the part of the beggar and a sense of their own ability to act so as to make good the lack in a way that no one else is saliently placed to do."<sup>22</sup> I submit that such asymmetries in power make the beggar

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<sup>19</sup> I restrict my attention to the street begging that occurs in many modern Western cities. Begging has obviously been a practice for much of human history and I don't want to suggest that its demeaning features are exactly the same in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as they were in Ancient Greece.

<sup>20</sup> See Scanlon (2018, Ch. 3). See also the discussion of "asymmetries of consideration" in Niko Kolodny (2022, 202).

<sup>21</sup> See Kolodny (2022, 204-07) on treating a person as an individual as well as Williams (1973, 236) on regarding someone from the "human point of view."

<sup>22</sup> Munoz-Dardé & Martin (2018, 134).

dependent on the beggee in a way that the beggar has reason to regret, and furthermore, that it's demeaning to bring this dependency into play as a motivational mechanism.<sup>23</sup>

Now one might think that a person always has a reason to regret being dependent on another for any type of good. But such a view seems to fetishize the value of self-reliance and ignore the fact that dependency is ubiquitous in social life. A more plausible view is that the presence (or absence) of various factors can either (i) make a dependency relation pro tanto regrettable or (ii) transform the relation into something that isn't even a bad to begin with.<sup>24</sup> I canvas only a few such factors here. First, dependency isn't a bad thing when it's a constitutive part of a finally valuable interpersonal relationship. Friends depend on one another for emotional care and children depend on their parents for many different goods. These dependencies are not unfortunate necessities given our human weaknesses such that we'd prefer, other things being equal, to live as self-sufficient Robinson Crusoes. Rather, part of what it is to be a close friend involves being emotionally dependent on, and vulnerable to, one another. Moreover, within such valuable personal relationships, dependencies are often reciprocal, at least in broad terms which can render them not bad.<sup>25</sup> This is certainly true of friendships but even the parent/child relationship, considered over its entirety, involves many mutual and interlocking dependencies that form and persist as the relationship develops. Two romantic partners might also opt to have one person be the breadwinner and the other the childcare provider. Abstracting from concerns about problematic gender roles, this kind of mutual dependency might not be a bad thing at all but rather just a rational response to the parties' complex needs that gives each of them an acceptable contributory role within the relationship. On the flip side then, dependency can be pro tanto bad when it's inconsistent with the values of an interpersonal relationship.

Second, being dependent on another person can be pro tanto bad when being so dependent carries with it a certain kind of meaning that the dependent party has reason to regret. So, to modify an example from Scanlon, if a person depends on their parents to choose a martial partner for them, in a society where arranged marriages are not the norm, that person has reason to regret their situation because being dependent in this way suggests that they are not a competent and independent adult.<sup>26</sup> Finally, dependencies can be less regrettable (and perhaps not at all regrettable) if they are easily escapable. If Husband doesn't work and depends on his wife for financial support, his dependency is far less concerning if he has the skills to easily acquire a lucrative job.

Street beggars are dependent on others in ways that are pro tanto bad for all of the previously canvassed reasons. They lack the power to secure the goods needed to meet their basic needs and live as respected members of the community while others possess such powers and can aid the beggars if they so choose. In the first place, beggars typically cannot escape these dependency relations given their inadequate access to economic opportunities, education/training, and healthcare provision. Additionally, many modern cities simply do not have the infrastructure needed to help beggars rise out of their plight. Second, lacking the ability to meet one's basic needs and depending on others for aid in that regard suggests, within most modern societies, that one is not a competent adult capable of

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<sup>23</sup> In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant describes begging as a form of parasitism. I believe there's some truth in this although I don't care for his way of making the point insofar as it conjures ideas of something loathsome and morally criticizable. While begging is a demeaning action, I very much doubt that this legitimates any kind of disgust or moral disapprobation on the part of others.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kolodny (2022, 178-181) on factors that temper relations of inferiority.

<sup>25</sup> Thanks to Jay Wallace for helpful discussion about the importance of various kinds of reciprocity for assessing the badness of dependency.

<sup>26</sup> Scanlon (1998, 253).



determining the course of one's own life and participating in valuable relationships with others. Third, street beggars, in contrast to the better-off citizens, are unable to play a valuable co-contributory role within their society and are thereby unable to stand in a valuable reciprocal political relationship with their fellow citizens. It's plausible that there's something distinctively and finally valuable in being a contributing member of a complex cooperative social network which sustains a common framework of life among persons who aren't intimately related to one another (e.g. through friendship), a framework that allows individuals to develop and pursue their own conceptions of the good consistent with the abilities of others to do so as well.<sup>27</sup> Valuable social cooperation need not be restricted to participation in market transactions which aim at the mutual benefit of the parties (my spade for your trowel) or other forms of economic labor. Instead, valuable cooperation covers a broad range of activities which contribute to the intellectual, social, and emotional climate of one's community.<sup>28</sup> The capacity to contribute in these ways partially defines one sense of being an equal amongst others and provides the basis for an intrinsically valuable form of self-respect.<sup>29</sup> One need not make some incredibly significant contribution (e.g. develop a vaccine or compose the world's greatest violin concerto) in order to realize this form of value. Rather, all that one needs to do (although this is no insignificant task) is something that matters and that involves them doing their part given whatever talents and temperaments they have.<sup>30</sup> Just as some form of reciprocity is important for friends and romantic partners, another kind of reciprocity is important for a valuable political relationship.

Consider the following case to see how playing even a minimal contributory role can severely lessen the demeaning character of something that looks superficially like begging:

*Heterochromia.* Heavenly is a theocratic society in which 0.1 percent of the population is born with complete heterochromia, a condition in which a person's irises are two different colors. It's widely believed that these "heterochromes" are able to see the natural world through one eye, as everyone else does, but also deep into the spiritual world through the other. Because of this, they are revered as closer to God than any other living creature. Citizens of Heavenly don't hire heterochromes for any type of work as that's thought of as beneath them in virtue of their religious status. Instead, the heterochromes spend their non-leisure time sitting in temples in front of large bowls that their fellow citizens fill with donations. The other citizens donate huge sums to the heterochromes who end up living far better than the majority of the population in some ways.

Now whatever moral criticisms one wants to make of Heavenly, it seems that it isn't demeaning (or is at least only mildly demeaning) for the heterochromes to collect alms in the temples even though they're doing something that looks superficially quite similar to street begging. The heterochromes depend on their fellow citizens in order to meet their basic needs, but that dependency seems far less concerning (and perhaps not concerning at all) given that citizens of Heavenly see the heterochromes as playing a valuable role within their religious culture.

So street beggars are dependent on others in a way that's demeaning and they highlight this through their address as a way of moving others to aid them. They thereby relate to other people as

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<sup>27</sup> Scheffler (2018, 15).

<sup>28</sup> Shiffrin (2004, 1664).

<sup>29</sup> Shiffrin (2004, 1668). Stark (2012) argues that Rawls relies upon a notion of intrinsically valuable self-respect as a secure belief that one's contribution to the scheme of social cooperation matters.

<sup>30</sup> Stark (2012, 244-55).

inferiors rather than equals in forgoing other ways of meeting their basic needs and instead opting for a demeaning form of address.<sup>31</sup> Because of this, there's a clear parallel between street begging and cases like *Break Up*. In that case, part of what made Husband's begging demeaning had to do with the fact that he was emotional dependent on her in a way that wasn't reciprocated and his begging highlighted this fact as a way of motivating her to stay with him. And we can now see why, in the earlier example of the joke-telling homeless man, he has a reason to opt for *quid pro quo* exchange rather than begging. In transacting a joke for money, he is trying to show, at least to some degree, that he has something to offer in a market transaction and thereby secure his status as a competent and somewhat self-reliant person. Furthermore, he is also trying to get people to laugh at his jokes, to take enjoyment from them, and thereby play, albeit in a quite minimal and imperfect way, a valuable contributory role within his town.<sup>32</sup>

We now have an answer to the *Puzzle of Address* that characterizes begging as both a unified and protean phenomenon. In the cases discussed so far, the demeaning nature of the address is explained by the way in which it involves foregoing other ways of motivating a person to action and instead relating to them as an inferior as the basis of an attempted transaction. But begging is also a protean phenomenon insofar as there are many ways of relating to another person as an inferior as reflected in the diverse explanations of our cases. I don't find this result problematic but rather of a piece with much recent philosophical work examining, to give just a few examples, the diversity of objections we have to various forms of inequality and social inferiority<sup>33</sup> as well as our complex social practices of blame and forgiveness.<sup>34</sup> The argument I have presented is obviously abductive and its strength depends upon both (i) the plausibility of the individual explanations of the considered cases, and (ii) whether a "suitably broad" set of cases has been examined. While we could endlessly go on looking at cases that can felicitously be described as instances of begging and analyzing what, if anything, makes them demeaning, a sufficiently diverse set has been discussed to warrant significant confidence in the account I have sketched. The cases differ greatly with respect to the significance of the good begged for and also with respect to the interpersonal relationships that are in play, ones ranging from the most intimate (the marital relationship in *Breakup*) to the less intimate but still special (the relationship between fellow members of a society in cases of street begging) to the abstract (the egalitarian moral relationship between persons in *Car Ride* and *Mugging*).

### III

I turn now to the *Puzzle of Motivation* which asks: How can begging motivate its target? Given that begging is inherently demeaning and yet people often resort to it, it's worth considering the possibility that it gives rise to distinct and especially powerful motivations. Here I'll describe four

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<sup>31</sup> The reasons that beggars have to want to not relate to others as inferiors also give rise to derivative reasons that beggars have to want to not relate to beggars as their superiors. Such derivative reasons explain the rational regret we feel when we aid beggars. Given that begging is an inherently demeaning activity because it involves relating to another person as their inferior as a means of motivation, the action has a constitutive aim, namely the provision of aid. That fact explains the sense in which, as I mentioned earlier, aiding the beggar involves being complicit in their demeaning activity. Of course, the fact that the beggar has reason to regret aiding the beggar doesn't entail that the beggar has reason, all things considered, to refuse aid.

<sup>32</sup> Lewinsohn (2020) argues that two performances constitute a *quid pro quo* exchange only if, following the sequence of performances, the parties will emerge with no outstanding obligations on account of the other's performance. If that's correct, then the joke-telling homeless man could have an additional rational preference for *quid pro quo* exchange rather than begging if he desires to be free of any obligations of gratitude that might arise from the beggar's aid.

<sup>33</sup> See Scanlon (2018)

<sup>34</sup> See Coates and Tognazzini (2013).

mutually consistent ways in which it can motivate. First, it seems that begging can, as Adam Smith notes, trigger benevolent impulses. Benevolence can be thought of an emotion that (i) responds to a threat to another’s well-being, and (ii) involves a concern for that person for their own sake.<sup>35</sup> When a person begs for  $x$ , they are saying that  $x$  will address (perhaps only in a very minimal way) some threat to their well-being. The effectiveness of begging might then be explained if we accept, in a broadly Humean spirit, that the force of our benevolent tendencies is partly determined by how “close” we are to their objects.<sup>36</sup> It is one thing to know that people in your community suffer; it is quite another thing for the beggar to highlight their need right in front of you since the latter can stir our emotional responses to a much greater degree.<sup>37</sup> But this view looks a bit questionable when taken as a complete answer to the *Puzzle of Motivation* for it doesn’t allow the fact that someone begged something of another to figure in the motivational state. If we respond to begging only out of benevolence, then the act is the *mere occasion* for emotionally responding to the badness of the beggar’s underlying situation. And for all that’s been said, the exact same kind of motivation could be triggered by seeing a poor person sleeping in the alley or witnessing a small child drowning in a pond. Yet I think we have the sense that *the fact that someone is begging something of us* is itself motivating. Moreover, I noted earlier that begging is often used as a last resort when other appeals – which make clear the opportunity for a benevolent action – have failed. That suggests that begging has a distinctive potency which a purely benevolence-based view has a difficult time accounting for.

A different answer to the puzzle – and one that assigns a central explanatory role to the act of begging – can be drawn from some of Kant’s brief remarks about begging in *The Metaphysics of Morals* where he says that flattery and begging differ only in degree.<sup>38</sup> Now flattery may come in different forms but one kind that’s relevant here involves highlighting some feature of a person that they take pleasure in as a way of furthering one’s own interests. As argued earlier, many of us feel what I take to be a morally virtuous sense of regret when we aid beggars for we recognize that, even if aiding is what we have most reason to do, we are being complicit in a demeaning activity. But the beggar’s demeaning action can also create morally problematic feeling of superiority in a less virtuous beggee. And when the beggee then provides the begged-for object, the problematic belief that they’re superior can be reinforced.

The final two answers to be considered draw on the intuition that begging can produce painful feelings and be somewhat emotionally manipulative. As Munoz-Dardé & Martin note, “One aims to gain resources from someone else in begging by calling on their human feeling, their recognition of need, in such a way that the motivational force of feelings of sympathy and benevolence will lead the donor to a sufficient state of emotional distress that giving alms is the only way of relieving this distress, and returning them to equilibrium...[E]ffective begging requires that the donor be manipulated in their emotional responses: moved into a position of feeling distress or guilt such that the act of giving will lessen the distress felt.”<sup>39</sup> But what exactly is distressful about begging such that

<sup>35</sup> See the account of sympathy defended in Darwall (1998).

<sup>36</sup> Hume(1974; book iii, sect. i, para. 14). Closeness convers a number of things like physical proximity as well as kinship (e.g. friend vs. stranger).

<sup>37</sup> Think here of the effectiveness of Oxfam commercials which show emaciated children. Also relevantly, Veronique Munoz-Dardé tells me in conversation that beggars in some European cities go so far as to prominently display open sores on their bodies.

<sup>38</sup> Book I, Chapter II, Section 12 of *Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue*. Consider also Book II of the *Rhetoric* [1383b13-1384a22] where Aristotle says that “we feel shame at such bad things as we think are disgraceful to ourselves or to those we care for. These evils are, in the first place, those due to badness [and include such things as] praising a man in order that it may seem like begging.”

<sup>39</sup> Munoz-Dardé & Martin (2018, 134-35).

it can feel emotionally manipulative in this way? It cannot simply be that the beggar needs something that they can't provide for themselves. That happens in many other cases that don't involve begging and that don't seem emotionally manipulative.

One way that begging can be emotionally manipulative is by causing the beggee to feel embarrassed on the beggar's behalf in a way that moves the beggee to provide aid. Cases involving this type of second-personal embarrassment abound in ordinary life. If I'm at a post-colloquium reception and witness a drunk colleague behaving embarrassingly, I might pull them aside to let them know how they're being perceived or even quietly suggest that they excuse themselves. My colleague might not actually feel embarrassed; they might think that they're being quite charming. But if their behavior is embarrassing, they would have reasons for feeling first-personal embarrassment on their own behalf. And my awareness of such reasons can trigger a kind of second-personal embarrassment that can motivate me to help put an end to the shameful scene. If begging is an inherently demeaning activity, then engaging in the act provides the beggar with reasons to feel first-personal embarrassment. Even if the beggar doesn't feel embarrassed themselves, the beggee's awareness of such reasons can produce second-personal embarrassment which can in turn prompt the provision of aid. One might object that this answer cannot explain why second-personal embarrassment would motivate the beggee to provide aid rather than simply turning away from the scene. In the party case, you can assuage your embarrassment by helping your drunk colleague or by (albeit in perhaps a less complete way) finding another conversation so you don't have to witness what they're doing. But we need not identify a motivational mechanism that unfailingly leads people to give money to beggars. It's enough for our purposes that second-personal embarrassment on the beggar's behalf regularly leads the beggee to provide aid. It can, of course, produce other common responses such as scurrying away while looking at the ground and mumbling *"Sorry, I don't have any change."*

Furthermore, it seems emotionally manipulative for the beggar act in a way that tends to produce this kind of vicarious sentiment. Admittedly, it's unlikely that most beggars are very explicit in their own minds about what they're doing. And an objector might push back at this point by claiming that a person cannot do something emotionally manipulative unless they understand what they're doing as trying to incite an uncomfortable feeling in another. But people can behave manipulatively even if they're not very articulate themselves about what they're doing and even if they'd deny that description of the action. People are often manipulative in intimate or family contexts even if they'd generally deny that they were acting that way. What matters for characterizing the agent's behavior are the considerations that explain or make sense of it, and these reasons often diverge from the ones they'd offer discursively if they were asked to justify themselves or give an account of what they were doing.

A final answer to the puzzle that highlights the emotionally manipulative character of begging involves characterizing the act as a kind of self-harm. Consider the following story recently told to me by a colleague who was traveling in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While walking on the beach, he saw a number of extremely poor people engaging in various acts of self-harm to solicit money (e.g. walking across hot coals). The point, as he relayed it to me, was not to demonstrate some skill at being able to painlessly perform an action that an untrained person couldn't endure. Rather, the point was to move people to donate by entertaining them with the spectacle of self-harm. And my colleague ended up donating money because, as he put it, *"I wanted to do what I could so they wouldn't have to do that to themselves anymore."* His response suggests that he was motivated not simply by the underlying needs of the "performers" but specifically by their acts of self-harm.

Questions about the metaphysics of harm and what it takes to be harmed are extraordinarily difficult. But one attractive family of views holds that being harmed involves being caused to be in a state that's intrinsically bad for that person.<sup>40</sup> Given that begging is a demeaning action that involves relating to another particular person as their inferior, it's plausible that the beggar's action causes her to be in an intrinsically bad state, one that she has reason to regret, which means that begging can be thought of as a kind of self-harm. The beggar lowers herself through the act and that lowering is itself harmful in a way that goes beyond the bad features of her underlying situation. This can produce emotional distress in the beggee similar to the kind my colleague experienced in his walk on the beaches of Kinshasa. Confronted with this painful experience, it's natural for the beggee to respond by providing aid because this puts an end to the beggar's act of self-harm.<sup>41</sup> To put the main idea quite glibly, through the act of begging, the beggar twists their own arm in order to twist the beggee's arm. If we accept that begging involves a kind of self-harm, we can explain why it seems to give rise to an especially powerful form of motivation that often is emotionally manipulative.

In discussing the manipulative character of begging and classifying it as a kind of self-harm, one might think that I'm suggesting that *all* beggars are morally criticizable and/or blameworthy for their behavior. But I believe that this claim is false.<sup>42</sup> Not every instance of emotional manipulation is wrongful and, while begging is a problematic way of relating to others that provides all parties to it with reasons of regret, that doesn't mean that every instance of begging involves blameworthy behavior. People who beg on the street have typically gotten to a point of desperation where it's not reasonable to expect them to refrain from begging given how few options they have for meeting their very significant needs. But in other cases, like *Breakup*, we might be tempted to think that there is no excuse for Husband to beg Wife to stay with him insofar as that involves an attempted manipulation that doesn't properly take account of her interests. In any case, the question of which instances of begging involve wrongful behavior turn on difficult issues concerning our accountability practices, questions which cannot be fully addressed here.

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<sup>40</sup> Shiffrin (1999, 123-4) says that "to be harmed primarily involves the imposition of conditions from which the person undergoing them is reasonably alienated or which are strongly at odds with the conditions she would rationally will." See also Harman (2009).

<sup>41</sup> It's important to note that a single act of aid will often not be enough to prevent future acts of begging. But if the beggee acquiesces, they end this particular act of self-harm and thereby put an end to their own painful experience. The beggee's recognition of these facts seems sufficient to generate a motivational effect.

<sup>42</sup> See also Munoz-Dardé & Martin (2018, 135).

## *Chapter 4: Political Obligation & Political Recognition*

My topic in this chapter is the classic problem of political obligation (“PPO”) which we may preliminarily characterize as the philosophical challenge of explaining whether there’s a moral duty to obey the law as such. Given that characterization, ‘political obligation’ may seem a somewhat unhappy term, for many obligations that can plausibly be classified as “political” have nothing to do with obeying the law (e.g. obligations to promote the culture of one’s polity or to engage in civil disobedience). But such terminological observations shouldn’t trouble us much as long as our problem is clearly specified. Understood this way, PPO is often thought of as the most central problem for political philosophy. If there are no political obligations, so the natural thought goes, there must be something fundamentally wrong with the state and the way it relates to its citizens. Perhaps this would open the door to justified disobedience or even violent protest. But, as it turns out, it is extraordinarily difficult to explain clearly why PPO is important for political philosophy.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In §I, I provide a minimal conception of political obligation that both (i) develops a familiar and intuitively important idea from ordinary moral experience, and (ii) incorporates some of the most central features from extant discussions of the concept. In §II, I discuss two forms of skepticism that question PPO’s philosophical significance. The first form denies that the existence of political obligations would make a significant practical difference for what agents have reason to do while the second form denies that political obligations are important for addressing potential complaints that individuals have against the state’s activities (e.g. coercively enforcing compliance with the law). In §III, I propose an associative account of political obligations that purports to justify PPO’s significance even while accepting both forms of skepticism. On this view, respect for the law constitutes a valuable form of recognition, and the individual members of a polity, construed as free and equal moral persons, owe this form of recognition to one another. But being required to have respect for the law, which amounts to having respect for one’s fellow citizens, is nothing more or less than having political obligations. Ultimately then, PPO is significant not because it helps explain whether we have reasons to obey the law or whether a complaint against the state can be met, but rather because political obligations represent a rather demanding political ideal which is a core element of a fully robust form of justice.

### I

Even though it’s difficult to find a single clear conception of political obligation within the contemporary literature, there’s enough general agreement to propose a fairly minimal characterization incorporating many intuitively important features and ignoring some of the more controversial ones. The concept that emerges should be one that’s familiar from ordinary political life.<sup>1</sup> In developing an initial formulation of PPO, namely the challenge of explaining whether there’s a moral duty to obey the law, I consider the following five issues: (i) the applicable sense of ‘moral’, (ii) the nature of duties of “obedience”, (iii) the status of law as commands, (iv) the particularized nature of political obligations, and (v) the correlativity of political obligations and rights to be obeyed.

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<sup>1</sup> Even if the articulated concept does not strike you as familiar and important, the fact that it has such a significant place in contemporary political philosophy means that it’s worthwhile to pin it down, as much as possible, and raise questions about its importance.

First, political obligations are moral in the sense that they are not justified solely by narrowly prudential considerations concerning the duty-bearer's own individual interests. But not much more than that should be built into the applicable sense of 'moral' lest we risk unduly restricting our inquiry. In particular, political obligations shouldn't, at least at the outset, be thought of as grounded in the interests of others considered simply as fellow persons whose interests count equally.<sup>2</sup> The second issue concerns the significance of 'obey' in the initial formulation, which should be understood in terms of the kinds of reasons that political obligations provide. Consider the deliberative significance of promising. If I promise to pick you up at the airport, then my reason to do so is the fact that I promised to, rather than other considerations that independently count in favor of performance. Promises provide content-independent reasons for actions.<sup>3</sup> Obedience, as an attitude, partly consists in recognizing directives as providing content-independent reasons for action. To obey one's platoon leader is to take the fact that they've ordered you to clean the latrine as a reason for doing it. This doesn't mean that obedience should be understood in "blind" terms that would involve seeing commands as conclusive determinations of what one should all-things-considered do. Given these thoughts, the significance of 'obey' in our formulation should be understood as indicating that political obligations provide content-independent reasons for action.<sup>4</sup> This reflects a natural understanding of one normative dimension of law. The law, like a promise, is binding on those it applies to because it is law, not solely because of the specific content of the individual statutes that make it up in its totality.

The issue just discussed reflects the fact that a philosophical interest in PPO revolves around one normatively significant dimension of law, namely its status as a set of commands. But, and here is the third issue, one might object to this partial characterization of our problem for a number of reasons. First, one could argue that, as matter of syntax or semantics, law doesn't take the form of commands. Perhaps one thinks that laws are norms that aren't best construed as commands. But that point isn't concerning so long as we accept that the law contains obligation-imposing norms that are to be interpreted as providing content-independent reasons for action. And we can accept that point even for laws that do not employ words like 'obligation' and 'duty' in their content (e.g. "*Anyone who does X is guilty of the offense of O codified at...*"). So the idea of a duty to obey still makes sense even if we aren't inclined, strictly speaking, to interpret the law as involving commands. A second way to develop the objection is to argue that laws should be understood as coercive threats or, to use some language that isn't so normatively loaded, announcements of what will happen to you if you act in certain ways. But while states almost universally claim that they will punish lawbreakers, and often follow through on those threats, that doesn't entail that the syntactic or semantic form of laws precludes many of them from being understood as commands. And it simply doesn't seem plausible to me to construe the law as involving mere threats or conditional announcements.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it isn't conceptually necessary that the law provide for sanctions in order to count as law or have the

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<sup>2</sup> See Wallace (2019b, 2021) for the claim that a basic postulate of equality underlies our modern conception of morality.

<sup>3</sup> See Raz (1986, 35-37) for a discussion of content-independent reasons as a necessary feature of authoritative utterances. Admittedly, it's difficult to pin down exactly what Raz has in mind when he introduces the concept for he says that "a reason is content-independent if there is no direct connection between the reason and the action for which it is a reason." If there is no such connection, the reason will be some "extraneous fact." Raz cannot mean to say that a reason is content-independent only if the reason can be specified without reference to the action that the reason is for. Your reason to pick me up at the airport is the fact that you promised *to pick me up at the airport*. Without a clearer idea of "direct" and "extraneous" the concept of content-independence remains elusive, but that is not terribly concerning in the present context.

<sup>4</sup> See also Green (1988).

<sup>5</sup> Scheffler (2018, 18).

normative features that interest us.<sup>6</sup> Of course, this still leaves open the possibility that, as a substantive matter, the ultimate philosophical interest of PPO turns on the question of whether the state's use of coercion is morally permissible. But that substantive issue about PPO, as opposed to this conceptual issue about the nature of political obligations, is taken up in the next section on skepticism.

Now it's a well-known point that many laws cannot be interpreted as obligation-imposing norms, such as those concerning contracts, wills, and marriages.<sup>7</sup> Laws in these domains confer legal powers on people to alter rights and duties either by specifying qualifications needed to exercise those powers (e.g. being over eighteen to marry) or by specifying what procedures must be followed to effect the relevant normative alteration. The fact that we cannot successfully exercise these legal powers when we fail to abide by certain norms doesn't mean that the laws themselves specify requirements on how people are to act. I will continue to think of political obligations primarily in terms of duties to obey obligation-imposing norms, but it is useful to slightly extend the concept so that it bears on legal powers as well. It's natural to think that a person who views the legal system solely as something to game for their personal benefit fails to grasp a significant dimension of its normativity. The criminal law says "*Don't murder*" and someone who takes that as "*Don't murder unless you can get away with it*" has missed something important, namely that the criminal law is a source of political obligations. But a similar kind of gaming or abuse can occur within the laws of contract, wills, and marriage. Suppose that *A* represents himself as having entered into a legally binding contract with *B* while knowing that there is no such contract due to lack of consideration. Even though *A* hasn't disobeyed any law, for the simple fact that there is no law with the structure necessary to make the idea of disobedience intelligible, their "abuse" of the law is objectionable in, I believe, a similar way to disobedience of the criminal law. Insofar as people seek to attain the benefits of power-conferring laws, they should exercise due care in following the specified norms and not unjustly enrich themselves at the expense of others. This yields another duty that we might incorporate into the concept of political obligation without stretching it too thin.<sup>8</sup>

The fourth issue concerns Simmons's *particularity requirement*, which dictates that an acceptable account of political obligation must explain why political obligations are owed specially to one particular political society (i.e. "one's own") rather than to all societies that one interacts with in some sense.<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of this restriction may appear unwarranted for the simple fact that it seemingly rules out, right from the beginning, some seemingly plausible answers to the question of why anyone should do what the law says.<sup>10</sup> But the particularity requirements ties the duty of obedience, in an intuitively attractive way, to a concept of citizenship. We should not understand this concept in terms of the rather narrow and descriptive legal notion. Instead, the concept of citizenship invoked in justifying the particularity requirement represents a kind of normative ideal. On the one hand, a

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<sup>6</sup> See my arguments in chapter 1 concerning the relation between commands and justified coercion. See also Raz (1990, 157-61).

<sup>7</sup> Hart (1994, ch.3).

<sup>8</sup> It is no objection that this duty cannot be construed as a "legal obligation" or "obligation in the law." Properly understood, political obligations are not legal obligations; they are moral/political in nature. Given that, there is no conceptual barrier to including, among our political obligations, a duty governing the proper attempted exercise of one's legal powers.

<sup>9</sup> Simmons (1979, ch.2; 2007). Simmons (2007, 19), to my mind, correctly points out that while few have accepted his negative claim that almost every extant account of political obligations should be rejected, many have adopted his important framing assumptions for PPO including, above all, the particularity requirement.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Simmons's (1979) arguments against natural duty theories of political obligation.



normative ideal of citizenship, one that we use to guide the design of laws, is that a citizen, first and foremost, is entitled to various protections of one state but not others. Similarly, I think we employ, in ordinary political thought, an idea of citizenship that's intimately bound up with political obligation understood in particularized terms.<sup>11</sup> Law is, in the first place, a normative institution for guiding the conduct of those who are members of a particular society. To the extent that we are interested in whether a particular body of law can be a source of obligations to obey, it's natural to construe these obligations as belonging only (or at least in the logical first place) to members of the society governed by that body of law. Now of course, one could maintain that the inclusion of the particularity requirement means, ultimately, that PPO isn't philosophically all that important. But again, addressing that issue is the task of the next section. My goal here is only to provide a characterization that both (i) does justice to the modern discussion of the issue, and (ii) is at least *prima facie* a plausible reflection of our shared moral experience.

The fifth and final issue concerns the *correlativity-of-right requirement*, which dictates that an individual has political obligations if and only if that individual's society has a claim-right that the law be obeyed.<sup>12</sup> The *prima facie* motivation for incorporating this requirement turns again, as was the case with the particularity requirement, on its being a component of an important concept from ordinary political life. In the first place, the normative ideal of citizenship alluded to earlier seems to involve a special relationship between a citizen and their society, one that engages both parties at a deep moral level through the mediating force of law.<sup>13</sup> If political obligations are duties to obey the law that are to be understood primarily in terms of this special relationship, they're naturally understood as corresponding to a claim-right.<sup>14</sup>

We are left then with what I take to be a fairly minimal characterization of political obligation that nevertheless accurately captures much of what's important in contemporary discussions. And yet one may still feel some discomfort with where we've wound up. Have we, they may ask, really gotten at the heart of what worries people when they reflect on "political authority"? If one thinks that there's a single concept of political authority, then our characterization obviously includes both too much and too little. It includes too little because it doesn't incorporate anything about coercion, territorial rights, or the powers of a state to enter into treaties with other states. It includes too much because surely there are interesting concepts of authority that have nothing to do with the particularity requirement. But the assumption of singularity should be rejected as there are many different things that plausibly answer to the title of political authority and there's not much use in wondering what the single "correct" conceptual account of authority is.<sup>15</sup> The articulated conception of political obligation

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<sup>11</sup> Simmons (2001(a), 67-68) says that political obligations are felt to be owed to one particular government or community (or own) above all others and so rejecting the particularity requirement involve a *prima facie* objectionable discounting of our shared moral experience. Consider also Wolff (1970, 18-19): "When I take a vacation in Great Britain, I obey its laws, both because of prudential self-interest and because of the obvious moral considerations concerning the value of the order, the general good consequences of preserving a system of property, and so forth. On my return to the United States, I have a sense of reentering *my* country, and if I think about the matter at all, I imagine myself to stand in a different and more intimate relation to American laws. They have been promulgated by *my* government, and I therefore have a special obligation to obey them."

<sup>12</sup> Simmons (1979) and Christiano (2009) discuss a similar feature.

<sup>13</sup> See Christiano (2009, 241-42) for discussion along these lines.

<sup>14</sup> This leaves open exactly how the obligor should be specified. Some views may take political obligations to be owed to other individual members of one's society. Alternative views may construe political obligations as being owed to the state itself, understood in a way that cannot be reduced simply to the collective polity.

<sup>15</sup> Christiano (2009, 241).

is meant to capture only one potentially interesting form of authority that has a place in ordinary political thought.

## II

It's natural to think that PPO must have some deep philosophical significance. Wouldn't far-reaching implications flow from the facts that citizens lack political obligations to obey the law and their society lacks the right to be obeyed? Wouldn't that render all governments "bad" in a distinctively important way? Tempting as these thoughts are, it's surprisingly difficult to clearly articulate why PPO is important, at least in any way that would justify the volumes that have been written about it.

One form of skepticism questions whether the absence of political obligations would make a significant practical difference for individuals purportedly bound by them.<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, the existence of political obligations wouldn't determine how we ought to act, all-things-considered, when it comes to political matters since other considerations will often be relevant.<sup>17</sup> But that wouldn't justify any skepticism about PPO simply because obligations provide quite significant reasons for action. But the following skeptical claim is seemingly much more concerning – *No Practical Difference* ("NPD") *Skepticism*. For most possible circumstances in which an individual has a political obligation to *X*, that individual would have a reason to *X* (of the same normative weight) even if they were not politically obligated to *X*.<sup>18</sup>

A number of philosophers, even ones who have written extensively on PPO, find NPD skepticism plausible. So, for example, Simmons suggests that several different moral considerations can provide strong reasons for obeying the law even in the absence of political obligations.<sup>19</sup> First, we might have natural moral duties to support and further just governments, at least when doing so involves no great cost to ourselves. Second, the existence of a legal order can produce expectations in people about how others will act, and we might have natural duties not to frustrate these expectations (albeit perhaps only when we've acted in a way so as to induce some kind of reliance). Third, a body of law might be substantively just in a way that natural duties prohibiting harm can ground obligations to comply with many legal norms contained in that body of law. But what's important is that none of these natural moral duties can account for political obligations because of the particularity and correlativity of right requirements. Any random passerby in a territory might be subject to these various requirements without being bound specially to the particular state associated with that territory.

But one could object to NPD skepticism by arguing that there's a significant gap between what the law directs individuals to do and what our natural duties require. Political obligations would then be philosophically significant in virtue of bridging this "Directive/Duty Gap" thereby providing

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<sup>16</sup> I will be concerned only with 2<sup>nd</sup>-order forms of skepticism that raise doubts about the philosophical significance of PPO. 1<sup>st</sup>-order forms of skepticism about PPO (which are usually classified as varieties of "philosophical anarchism") simply deny that there are political obligations. Strong philosophical anarchists, like Wolff (1970), claim that political obligations are impossible, say because they fundamentally conflict with individual autonomy. Weak philosophical anarchists claim that political obligations are possible but that almost no modern states (if any) satisfy the conditions necessary for them to obtain. From here on, 'skepticism' should be understood in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-order sense.

<sup>17</sup> Simmons (1979, 29-30); Scheffler (2018, 3).

<sup>18</sup> A stronger version of this claim that covered all possible circumstances might be defensible, but we need not rest our skepticism on it.

<sup>19</sup> Simmons (1979, 193).

law with the kind of authority it seemingly claims for itself. Kolodny (2022, 93-95) discusses a few examples illustrating the purported gap. A Swede might satisfy his natural duty of justice by paying taxes to either Sweden or Denmark while his political obligation would require that he pay Sweden.<sup>20</sup> But there's some room to doubt whether there really is a gap here that would warrant significant interest in PPO. Our question is whether the Swede will have a reason of the same normative weight to pay taxes to Sweden with his natural duties in play but not political obligations. And a number of additional considerations suggest that he would. First, even if the natural duty, strictly speaking, generates an obligation to give a certain portion of money to either Denmark or Sweden, individual epistemological limitations might justify the Swede (and others in relevantly similar circumstances) in simply deferring to the laws of his own government rather than trying to decide between Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and so on. Second, the Swede might be justified in deferring to Swedish law if there aren't institutional structures available that would make it efficient (or even possible) for him to satisfy his natural duty by paying money to some other state. How exactly, after all, is the Swede supposed to pay Danish taxes?

Third, the Swedish people might collectively do better in satisfying their natural duties simply by deferring to Swedish laws rather than by exercising their own judgments without any additional coordination amongst themselves. And if they do better collectively in this way, that can translate into a sufficient individual reason on each Swede's part to pay taxes to Sweden even if no individual is a "difference maker" (i.e. no single person's failing to pay Swedish taxes entails that the just Swedish government ends up with less money than it ought to have). Now one might object to this point about the significance of collective action by drawing an analogy with our obligations to help those who are in serious distress (i.e. our duties of mutual aid). When it comes to thinking about how to satisfy such duties, the first step is to think about what total level of contribution by the better-off is needed to address the needs of the worst-off and then determine our individual fair shares on the assumption that everyone is doing their part. From there, individuals have discretion to determine which eligible (in the sense of being genuinely well-positioned to address the needs of the worst-off) aid organization they will donate their fair share to.<sup>21</sup> But if both our natural duties of justice and our duties of mutual aid importantly revolve around a collective action problem, and if we still have some discretion about how to discharge the duties of mutual aid, shouldn't the same thing be said about our natural duties of justice? Shouldn't it be up to individuals whether they will satisfy their natural duty of justice by contributing to the just government of Sweden or of Denmark?

But notice two points here. First, our discretion about how to satisfy our duties of mutual aid is still limited. It's doubtful that one would satisfy the duty by going to a foreign country filled with people in desperate need and throwing money on the street. Rather, they should donate the money to an aid organization. Second, given our current institutional structures, there is no better way to satisfy our duties of mutual aid other than by exercising discretion about which aid organization to donate to. It would perhaps be better if there were some "global" aid organization that we could donate to which would then efficiently funnel the collective pool of money to subsidiary organizations like the Against Malaria Foundation. Now admittedly, there is no "global" organization available to properly disperse a collective fund to all and only the just states in the right proportions. But there still may be room for claiming that our best solution to the collective action problem of supporting

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<sup>20</sup> Strictly speaking, Kolodny is concerned with natural duties to promote the public interest which might be importantly distinct from natural duties to support and comply with just institutions. But the difference shouldn't matter much for the points made here.

<sup>21</sup> See Wallace (2019a).

just states involves each person paying their taxes to the one they're a citizen of. This also helps circumvent the worry that a natural duty of justice can be satisfied equally well, in principle, either by paying taxes to a just government or supporting private charitable institutions. With these additional considerations in tow, the purported Directive/Duty Gap might be significantly shrunk or even closed. Importantly though, this does not mean that the Swede's natural duty is particularized in the way that political obligations require; these additional considerations do not establish the kind of moral relationship characterized by political obligations.

Other examples of the purported Directive/Duty Gap invoke sentiments most naturally associated with instrumentalism about political authority. Take Raz's (1986) normal justification thesis according to which "the normal way to justify that a person has authority over another involves showing that the alleged subject is likely better to comply with the reasons which apply to him (other than the alleged directives) if he accepts the directives of the alleged authority as authoritatively binding and tries to follow them, rather than by trying to follow the reasons that apply to him directly." The normal justification thesis, by itself, gives rise only to a partial and qualified obligation to obey the law that varies among individuals depending on their personal characteristics and circumstances (e.g. how knowledgeable they are about certain matters). But instrumentalism, by itself, cannot justify particularized political obligations.<sup>22</sup> It cannot establish any special normative relationship between citizen and state that's mediated by law because it focuses exclusively on the relationship between the purported authority and the individual subject. Citizenship, as far as the normal justification thesis is concerned, is nothing special; if it is relevant to the independent reasons that apply to an agent, it is just one consideration among many.

Because of this individualistic focus, the instrumentalist seemingly allows for other instances of the Directive/Duty Gap. So Kolodny points out that an individual (i) might be in a position such that disobeying a directive will not fail to promote the public interest because enough others will coordinate to promote it, or (ii) might have enough knowledge/skill that they can promote the public interest without obeying directives while others cannot (e.g. an experienced auto mechanic might do better at complying with independent reasons by relying on his own judgments about whether his car is fit for the road than by deferring to the state's directives on the matter). But while such cases (and many others having the same structure) are in principle possible, it might be that this inherent variability doesn't amount to much at the end of the day, for there are so very many considerations that might be invoked in justifying the state's authority over some particular individual with respect to a wide range of issues.<sup>23</sup> In fact, part of what makes the instrumentalist view so powerful is that one can appeal to *any* independent reason that applies to the agent in justifying their obligation to do what a given directive (or class of directives) dictates. So while there may be a Directive/Duty Gap, it's far from clear how wide this gap actually is in practice. And so, it's far from clear that PPO's significance can be justified by appeal to such a gap.<sup>24</sup>

The second type of skepticism that concerns us revolves around the possibility of a complaint that individuals have against some of the state's activities, a complaint that can be addressed only if there are political obligations. *Complaint skepticism* denies that there is any such complaint and thereby

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<sup>22</sup> There is a slight complication here. The normal justification thesis can be used, I think, to establish particularized political obligations if you feed "the right kind of independent reasons" into the thesis, namely ones that reference the relevant notion of particularity. But nothing inherent in instrumentalism commits us to that further step.

<sup>23</sup> See Raz (1986, 75, 100) for some of these considerations.

<sup>24</sup> Raz recognizes that his theory leaves room for a Directive/Duty Gap and accepts that the normal justification thesis cannot establish that the law has the authority it claims for itself. But he simply doesn't seem to find this all that troubling.

claims that political obligations will not be significant if we are concerned with this kind of agent-relative evaluation of the state. It's important to stress that a complaint skeptic can allow, as a substantive matter, that both (i) some complaint against the state is met if some condition *C* obtains, and (ii) *C* entails that individuals have political obligations. The skeptic can allow this because the condition may do different kinds of justificatory work in the two cases even though there's no interesting relation between political obligations and the complaint. What the complaint skeptic doubts is whether it can be shown, in a way that's independent of one's particular answer to PPO, that political obligations are necessary for addressing a complaint that individuals have against the state.

So what are some candidate complaints against the state? The most natural activity to start with is the state's coercive enforcement of its directives, where coercion can be understood as either (i) threatening to impose a harm on someone for violating a directive, (ii) imposing a harm as a means to ensuring (or rendering more likely) someone's compliance with a directive, or (iii) intentionally imposing a harm for failing to comply with a directive in order to pursue a separate greater good. The fact that discussions of political obligation are so often bound up with points about coercive enforcement strongly suggests that any interest in PPO must revolve around this activity. So for example, Dworkin (1986, 191) says that "no general policy of upholding the law with steel could be justified if the law were not, in general, a source of genuine obligations." And Simmons (2001, 130) says that "[a] state's (or government's) legitimacy is the complex moral right it possesses to be the exclusive imposer of binding duties on its subjects, to have its subjects comply with these duties, and to use coercion to enforce these duties."<sup>25</sup> Now obviously, we cannot justify the philosophical significance of *A* simply by noting that *A+B* is philosophically significant for *B* might be the only interesting element of the pair. Someone who wants to know where the treasure is buried may be keen to find out the truth of the conjunction [*There are infinitely many twin primes* and *The treasure is buried in Jones's garden*] without having any interest in mathematics. Similarly, the fact that political legitimacy, understood as the state's having the right to coerce AND create political obligations, is philosophically significant doesn't tell us anything about whether political obligations are philosophically significant unless some relation between the two can be established.

We'll focus on coercion simply as the imposition of harm for failing to act in a certain way. Now the sought-after connection between political obligation and justified coercion might be conceptual or substantial. The possibility of establishing a conceptual connection has already been discussed and rejected, but it will be useful to recap some of the worries. First, the concept of enforcement (either put in descriptive terms or in terms of in-principle justifiability) does not need to be appealed to in order to characterize the concept of a command. The concept of a command can be understood in terms of its deliberative significance for a subject where that is in turn understood in terms of its content-independent and exclusionary character.<sup>26</sup> We mischaracterize the deliberative stance of a conscientious subject if it's understood in terms of enforcement. Second, one can imagine various institutions justifiably commanding individuals to do various things without using (or claiming the right to use) any kind of coercion. A small hippie commune or Raz's (1990, 159) society of angels

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<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Huemer (2013) says that political authority has two aspects, one being political obligation and the other being political legitimacy which is "the right, on the part of the government, to make certain sorts of laws and enforce them by coercion against the members of its society."

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 1 of this dissertation. See also Green (151-52) for arguments that threats and authoritative reasons have important different normative features.

might need some institution to issue commands in order to solve coordination problems without thereby having a need for those commands to be coercively enforced.

What then of the possibility of a substantive normative connection between political obligations and coercive enforcement? Perhaps we accept the following general principle similar to one Kolodny considers -- *Coercion Requires Duty* ("CRD"): It is morally impermissible to intentionally impose a harm on *X* for their not-*A*-ing as a means to achieving a good unless *X* has a duty to *A*. One problem with basing PPO's significance on CRD is that other duties besides political obligations may be used to justify state coercion. Of course, if there is any kind of Directive/Duty Gap, then PPO would be significant for the absence of political obligations would mean that the state will be punishing some individuals impermissibly. But why should we accept CRD? It seems intuitively plausible, but there are counterexamples.<sup>27</sup> Suppose that Rescuer is rushing to save Climber from a fall that will result in a broken neck. Bystander is blocking the way, and Rescuer won't be able to save Climber if Bystander stays in place. Rescuer can effortlessly knock Bystander out of the way, but Bystander will then break his finger. Bystander can easily move aside without suffering any bodily harm, and Rescuer announces, "*You're in the way, I'll have to knock you over and harm you if you don't move.*" It seems permissible to harm Bystander by knocking him out of the way as a means to achieving the greater good of preventing Climber's leg from being broken. But if Bystander's presence makes no difference to the probability of Rescuer's success (for he can be effortlessly knocked out of the way), then it's not clear that he has a duty to step aside.

But beyond serving as a mere counterexample, this case illuminates a confusion that might be overlooked in assessing CRD's plausibility, a confusion that involves neglecting the fact that the considerations needed to justify imposing a harm on someone for not *X*-ing may not be sufficient to justify that person's having a duty to *X*. In assessing whether it's permissible to harm an individual in order to pursue a greater good, we are to consider objections the individual can raise on their own behalf against suffering the harm and compare them to, among other things, the moral significance of the greater good to be achieved. In assessing whether an individual has a moral duty to *X*, we are to consider the personal interests the agent has in not-*X*-ing and compare them to other relevant moral considerations (including the interests of other persons which would be hindered by the agent's not-*X*-ing). An agent may have significant enough personal interests in not-*X*-ing that they lack a duty to *X* *without it being the case* that they have significant enough personal interests in avoiding the harm to make imposing that harm impermissible. So Bystander might object, in a stylized fashion, to a principle requiring him to step aside by saying "*Look, while I acknowledge the importance of saving Climber from a broken foot, my presence makes no difference to whether Rescuer will succeed. And if my presence makes no difference, then I can reject a principle requiring me to move simply because I don't feel like it. It's acceptable if I prefer not to actively contribute to the end of saving Rescuer and instead accept that harm.*" But Bystander cannot appeal to those interests in reasonably rejecting a principle permitting harming him in order to save Climber given the morally significant difference between a broken neck and a broken finger.

One might respond here that state coercion doesn't usually take the form that occurs in the Climber case because it is applied *ex post facto* in the sense that it is not intended to prevent a harm that would occur from the agent's acting in a particular way. Imposing a harm on *A* for the purpose of general deterrence is meant to lower the chances that other individuals will, in the future, act in the way *A* did. But it's still far from clear that we need anything like CRD to justify that kind of coercion in principle. It may be morally permissible to punish someone in order to deter others from engaging

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<sup>27</sup> The following is a slightly modified version of one given by Kolodny (2022, 102).

in a collective risky activity even if that individual has no individual duty to refrain from the activity. That could be the case if the individual's interest in engaging in the activity is significantly outweighed by harms that would likely result from enough other individuals engaging in the activity and the harm imposed as a deterrent is not that significant. One might still try to justify *CRD* by invoking a substantive theory of what justifies punishment. Perhaps, as one example, we accept pure retributivism according to which: (1) it is intrinsically valuable that wrongdoers suffer in proportion to the gravity of their wrongdoing, and (2) the state's punishing an individual is permissible only if it ensures that this valuable state of affairs is realized.<sup>28</sup> This view would explain *CRD* in terms of the value of deserved suffering. But I doubt that we should rest PPO's significance on substantive views about what justifies punishment, especially views that are as strong and controversial as pure retributivism.

Shifting focus now, perhaps our sought-after enforcement-based concern with PPO has less to do with the all-things-considered permissibility of coercive enforcement and more to do with the question of whether the state, in particular, has a special permission to punish lawbreakers that other individuals/institutions lack. The sought-after complaint then is not "I may not be harmed for violating a directive without having a duty to follow it" – a complaint which could in principle be directed at any agent attempting to inflict the harm – but rather "*You* (the state) may not punish me for violating your directive without my owing *you* a duty to follow it." Such a concern seems implicit in some discussions of PPO. So, for example, Huemer (2013) considers a story in which you, an ordinary person in a small village, tackle the unaddressed crime problem by imprisoning criminals in your basement. After a while, you begin going to your neighbors and demanding payment from them to aid the fight against crime. Should they refuse, then they too will be branded as criminals and confined in your basement. In asking what in our ordinary moral thinking differentiates your actions from those of an ordinary government, Huemer suggests that there is an important difference between the two agents. You are not the government; you do not have what he calls "political authority." In a similar vein, Senor (1987, 263-64), when objecting to Simmons's claim that political obligations may be superfluous with natural duties in tow, argues that a government that demands taxes and imprisons people for refusing to pay is unjust if it lacks the right to do so. And it is no defense, he argues, to point out that the government is punishing in a way that fits the crime for "in order to punish wrongdoing appropriately, the punisher must...be in a position of authority over the one being punished."

Can this kind of positional complaint be made sense of in a way that would justify PPO's significance? Admittedly, some actions with harmful effects or a quasi-punitive character depend, for their intelligibility and value, on only certain individuals having the normative standing to perform them. So suppose that you, my close friend, violate an obligation you owe to me. I am in a privileged position to blame you such that it simply doesn't make sense of the practice for me to "offload" my blame to another person because I want to save some time and effort. This is explained by the valuable roles blame plays in our lives. First, blame, given its affective dimension, is a way of responding to another person's wronging you that manifests an appropriate concern with one's own interests. It is therefore important for maintaining a valuable form of self-respect. Second, blame can play an important role in an evolutionary process that aims at repairing one's relationship with the wrongdoer. But both of these values seemingly presuppose that blame is essentially positional and that it cannot, at least not usually, be outsourced in a way that maintains the possibility of realizing its values.

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<sup>28</sup> See Tadros (2011, 26-27) for a similar formulation of the view. One could of course build in either consequentialist or non-consequentialist restrictions on the pursuit of this value.

To consider a case more relevant for thinking about the state, suppose that we accept that parents may permissibly punish their children in some ways for failing to obey their directives. So it may be permissible for Father to take away Teenager's car for a week (say just by hiding the keys) when Teenager doesn't follow some legitimate parental command while it would be impermissible for Bystander who simply witnessed Teenager's dereliction of duty to impose the same punishment. What then grounds Father's privileged standing to punish? First, he might have an interest in deterring Teenager from future wrongdoings of the same kind insofar as those negatively impact Father's interests whereas Bystander has no comparable interest. Second, the punishment might play a kind of educational or communicative function that cannot be realized if the punishment is imposed by a third party. Can similar justifications, when applied to state punishment, be used to justify PPO's significance? It's difficult to see how a broadly deterrence-based view of state punishment could be appealed to since it's unclear why the state itself should have an interest in deterrence-based punishment. Alternatively, one could hold a retributivist view according to which a wrongdoer's suffering is intrinsically valuable when and only when that suffering is imposed by the wronged party or their representative. This view is even stronger than pure retributivism and, to the extent that I do not share many of the retributivist's axiological intuitions, I find it unattractive. Finally, the strongest case for thinking that there is a positional complaint against state punishment might depend on accepting a broadly communicative view of punishment according to which the permissibility of enforcing legal directives depends on the value (or perhaps obligation) of condemning the actions of wrongdoers. Achieving this communicative value might require that condemnation be expressed by the state in virtue of the fact that it "speaks for" the aggrieved party or the collective society. Political obligations, in virtue of their structure, establish the kind of moral relationship necessary to achieve the communicative value of punishment.

But there are some problems with this route. First, as previously mentioned, it's not appealing to base PPO's significance on substantive and controversial philosophical positions. Second, a view on which the value of some form of communication is the only thing that justifies punishment seems to ignore the intuitively most natural function of punishment, namely protecting people from harms and providing restitution.<sup>29</sup> And it's unclear why some kind of privileged standing to punish is important for this kind of justification on the assumption that the state is not being enriched unjustly through punishing. Third, we might reject the seemingly implicit assumption that the state's punishment is necessary to communicate the relevant message. If these thoughts are on the right track, we might still wonder what exactly raises our hackles in considering Huemer's thought experiment involving private punishment. It's difficult to pin down exactly what the concern is, but it may have less to do with the fact that you lack some kind of normative standing to punish and more to do with the fact that you do not occupy a role in a broader institutional structure with mechanisms designed to lower the chances that punishment will be meted out unjustly. To put the point another way, the worry might be more along the lines of "*Can this person really be relied on to punish fairly and justly?*" rather than "*Who does this person think they are?*"

If the sought-after complaint doesn't revolve around coercive enforcement, what other potentially objectionable state activities remain? One might argue that the state acts objectionably in ordering us to act in various ways when it lacks the normative power to generate obligations via such orders. Imagine that you pass someone on the street, and they suddenly shout, "*I order you to give me your wallet.*" You pause and ask, "*What will happen if I don't?*" to which they respond, "*Nothing of course. Nevertheless, I order you as is my right!*" If the account of wrongful requests defended in chapter two is

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<sup>29</sup> Tadros (2011, 89).



accepted, one could propose a similar view of wrongful commands on which they objectionably express a lack of due consideration. The plausibility of such an objection depends on the state claiming (or more generally representing itself as having) the right to generate political obligations via enacting law.<sup>30</sup> But even if this complaint can be made sense of, it doesn't seem all that significant. Does our interest in political obligation really revolve around the idea that sometimes it might be objectionable to be told what to do?

Let us suppose that a reasonable, albeit non-dispositive, case has been made for accepting both forms of skepticism. At the very least, the waters are still quite murky since some of the most interesting challenges to our skeptical claims rest on substantive and controversial philosophical views. So how to proceed from here? Perhaps one thinks that PPO can still be philosophically significant simply because it's important that we categorize the normative truths of our world. But I doubt that mere categorization, in this sense, should be a goal of political philosophy. And I also suspect that endorsing both kinds of skepticism pushes (if not requires) us to do away with the often-expressed idea that PPO is the fundamental question of political philosophy. But our skeptical conclusions do not rule out the possibility that PPO is philosophically significant. In order to see this, let us reflect on something that's already been mentioned. In asking whether individuals have political obligations owed particularly to their own society that correlate with a right to be obeyed, we are asking whether a certain kind of special moral relationship obtains, a relationship mediated by law itself. In asking about the normative grounds of political obligations, we seek to understand one dimension of the citizen-society relationship. And our understanding of that relationship can provide insights into the underlying normative significance of reasons that citizens have to do what the law says.<sup>31</sup>

Let me illustrate with a comparison to the obligations we owe to those we share an intimate relationship with, like friendship. Reductionists think that these obligations are accounted for by general moral principles that potentially apply even in the absence of any intimate relationship (e.g. ones governing how we ought to treat those who are vulnerable to us). Non-reductionists claim that obligations of friendship are *sui generis* and hold in virtue of standing in a particular intimate relationship with someone.<sup>32</sup> I take it that the philosophical interest of the reductionist/non-reductionist debate does not depend on (i) an interest in the mere categorization of our duties, (ii) the practical question of whether we have particular duties to our friends since the reductionist and the non-reductionist will probably agree on that issue, or (iii) the question of whether there is some complaint we have against our friends that is met only if we have duties of friendship. Rather, a philosophical interest in the reductionist/non-reductionist debate flows from our desire to understand the normative nature of some of the most important relationships of our lives and the role that duties play in realizing the values of such relationships. And if non-reductionism is correct, that would mean that satisfying our obligations has a particular significance for the parties, because doing something on behalf of your friend involves responding to a distinctive value which affects the meaning of your action. The account of political obligation defended in the next section aims to accomplish something

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<sup>30</sup> Raz (1994) thinks that this is a constitutive feature of legal systems although Kolodny (2022, 158) raises plausible doubts. It should be noted that Kolodny raises a slightly different possibility about whether there's a complaint against the state falsely asserting that we have political obligations. The complaint we are discussing here is not quite a complaint against lies or misrepresentations.

<sup>31</sup> Kolodny (2022, 156) wonders, in a similar vein, what the positive point of complying with political obligations might be if, assuming a significant Directive/Duty Gap, one can often serve the public interest at least as well without complying with political obligations.

<sup>32</sup> See Wallace (2012) for the distinction.

similar. It seeks to show that the normative grounds of political obligations reveal that they are a constitutive part of a finally valuable relationship that we stand in with our fellow citizens.

### III

In this section, I present an associative account of political obligations that purports to justify their philosophical significance in a way that avoids the skeptical worries canvassed in §II. Associative theories construe political obligations as special requirements that apply to individuals in virtue of being members of a political community. And such views have historically been attractive, especially because they can easily satisfy the particularity requirement.<sup>33</sup> The view defended here is similar to other such theories but it's distinctive in that it (i) situates our political obligations within a general Rawlsian framework, and (ii) explains such obligations by appeal to a distinctively valuable form of recognition.<sup>34</sup> That the account is both associative and Rawlsian may be surprising for a couple reasons. First, Rawls explicitly says that there are “no political obligation[s], strictly speaking, for citizens generally.”<sup>35</sup> But this is seemingly because he understands obligations, as a matter of definition, to arise only from voluntary acts (e.g. promising) whereas duties apply to us without regard to such acts.<sup>36</sup> Second, to the extent that Rawls is relevant for our contemporary understanding of PPO, he is often interpreted as giving an archetypal natural duty account. But Rawlsian theory has, as it turns out, a much broader set of resources for solving PPO in a way that reveals the distinctive contribution that political obligations make to our lives.

Here is the basic argument to be developed:

- P1: Members of a political community have important interests in being recognized by the fellow members of their polity as free and equal moral persons.
- P2: Having a standing disposition to treat the law as a source of content-independent obligations (and acting on that disposition when appropriate) is a crucial way of affording other members of one's polity this kind of recognition.
- P3: Members of a polity may reasonably have normative expectations of their fellow citizens that they will be afforded this form of recognition.
- C: Therefore, members of a political community have political obligations that are principally owed to one another.

In unpacking this argument, let's begin with some of the basic ideas concerning the specification of the Original Position and their role in justifying the two principles. Rawls argues that his two principles would be chosen by representative free and equal moral persons under fair and impartial conditions. In choosing between competing principles, the parties are motivated to secure the conditions needed to realize their higher-order interests in the two moral powers: (1) a capacity to adopt, revise, and pursue a determinate conception of the good that involves exercising one's natural

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<sup>33</sup> See Simmons (2001a, 66-69).

<sup>34</sup> See in particular Scheffler's (2018) membership-based account of political obligations.

<sup>35</sup> Rawls (1999, 98).

<sup>36</sup> Rawls (1999, 97-98).

and developed skills, and (2) a capacity and willingness to abide by the principles of justice, insofar as they apply to individuals indirectly, and to live with others under fair terms of cooperation. This translates into an interest all persons have in acquiring an adequate and fair share of the primary social goods. Furthermore, the constraints imposed by the veil of ignorance ensure that the parties are considered solely as free and equal moral persons. The principles of justice are thereby connected with a conception of the person that's fundamentally important for political justifiability.<sup>37</sup> Our self-conceptions as particular persons are of course informed by distinctive individual features such as the projects we take on and the intimate associations we develop. And these self-conceptions are often relevant for determining many of our conclusive reasons for action. But it is the Rawlsian conception of the person that specifies what matters fundamentally in assessing the acceptability of the principles governing the basic structure which will have a profound impact on whether we live in the conditions necessary to realize our higher-order interests. The Rawlsian conception thereby specifies a key element of what it is to be fellow citizens of a cooperative venture governed by various political institutions.

Apart from the fact that the basic structure should be regulated in a way that provides us with an adequate and fair share of the primary goods, it is additionally important that our status as free and equal moral persons be reflected in the design of the institutions that regulate our social lives and also acknowledged in the public conduct of other participants in the cooperative venture. It is generally not enough that we happen to receive a fair share of the material resources that are owed to us in virtue of this status. That could occur simply because the law provides a coercive mechanism that motivates "bad actors" to begrudgingly refrain from interfering with us.<sup>38</sup> Beyond receipt of such material resources, acknowledgment of our status as free and equal moral persons is valuable for a variety of reasons. First, it's instrumentally valuable because it supports the kind of moral motivation necessary for people to act in ways that further everyone's interests as free and equal moral persons. It thereby has an important role to play in ensuring the stability of society. Second, acknowledgement of this status provides a basis for individual self-respect which allows one, among other things, to have the confidence and desire to pursue one's own conception of the good on fair terms with others. Without this kind of acknowledgment, people will be more inclined to either protest and take violent action against the institutions that make up their social world or, alternatively, grow cynical and withdraw from political society, thereby making it less likely that they can fully endorse and pursue their own conception of what's valuable in life.<sup>39</sup> Finally, being acknowledged as a free and equal person by one's fellow citizens is a form of treatment that is intuitively finally valuable. Caring about being acknowledged as having certain kinds of valuable statuses, rather than simply caring about acquiring the particular goods that are owed to us in virtue of having them, is a familiar feature of ordinary life. In some of the most quotidian cases (e.g. discrimination in employment contexts), we care that we have not properly been recognized as equals via our treatment by others even if such failures advance other interests we take to be important. The fact that we care about being so recognized doesn't just reflect a psychological vulnerability that we'd be happy to purge from our

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<sup>37</sup> This idea comes out most clearly in Rawls (1980). I set aside, on account of its irrelevance to our main arguments, the difficult question of whether Rawls's specification of personhood is best understood as a core component of our nature as practical agents or, alternatively, as the conception of ourselves that's most relevant for deciding on principles of justice for a liberal society inhabited by people with many different reasonable conceptions of the good.

<sup>38</sup> Shiffrin (2021, 150).

<sup>39</sup> See Rawls's (2001, 128-29) arguments in favor of the Difference Principle as opposed to one that simply guarantees a social minimum that secures basic human needs essential for a decent life.

emotional repertoire. Rather, it represents a justified and morally sensitive response to our circumstances.<sup>40</sup>

We turn now to the question of how to understand the role or function of a legal system within a just Rawlsian society. Consider first a utilitarian conception according to which a justifiable legal system aims at maximizing aggregate welfare while counting the good of each individual equally. But utilitarian principles, both in general and as applied to the legal system specifically, do not acknowledge or promote the interests of individuals construed as free and equal moral persons who interact with each other on a basis of reciprocity. Given that Rawls's principles apply directly to the basic structure understood as the arrangement of the major social, political, and economic institutions into one system of cooperation designed to advance the good of its members, a just Rawlsian legal system should be conceived of as an essential part of a structure whose elements together express a conception of citizens who have an interest in and are able to relate to one another as free and equal moral persons.

While it's important to remember that the principles holistically regulate the whole structure, there are reasons for thinking that the legal system has a special role to play in furthering the ideals embodied by the principles. First, the legal system specifies private norms of individual conduct and provides people with legal powers whose successful exercise alters the normative landscape. This provides a public normative basis for individuals to further their own and others' interests as free and equal moral persons. Whether a norm of private conduct (or the availability of a legal power) is justifiable depends, in part, on whether general compliance with the norm (or the availability of the legal power) properly furthers the fundamental interests of those apt to be affected by it. And it's plausible that without the law, it would be significantly less likely, and perhaps impossible in many cases, for such interests to be adequately satisfied. This is partly due to the fact that many rights are not fully determinate in the state of nature. Second, the legal system plays a crucial role in regulating the other institutions that constitute the basic structure including the political and economic systems. Third, and perhaps somewhat implicit in the other two points, the legal system has a greater range of applicability than most other elements of the basic structure. It regulates, in some way, almost every aspect of each person's life outside of their intimate associations.

Importantly, I am not suggesting that the value of furthering peoples' interests as free and equal moral persons provides the only justification for (or constraint on) a legal system. There may well be acceptable reasons for promulgating laws having nothing to do with this value (e.g. ones prohibiting the destruction of beautiful parts of the natural world where the justification for such laws is simply that it is finally good that such things exist). All that is needed for the argument here is the idea that the justifiability of a legal system requires that it properly and fairly furthers the fundamental interests of all free and equal moral persons. These points might lead one to conclude that political obligations are associated with only a small subset of the laws constituting a legal system, such as ones pertaining to fundamental rights like freedom of speech and of association. But this thought mischaracterizes the role that many ordinary laws play in protecting our interests as free and equal moral persons.<sup>41</sup> For example, laws concerning parking in major cities are intended to solve a coordination problem and thereby enable people to make efficient use of public and private spaces and pursue their adopted ends in a way that's fair to all.

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<sup>40</sup> Shiffrin (2021, 150-51).

<sup>41</sup> See Shiffrin (2021, 167-68).

The next move in the argument connects the norms of the legal system with our status as free and equal moral persons. While there are many different conceptions of acknowledgment or recognition, Wallace (2020, 4) characterizes “interpersonal recognition” as consisting in treating moral requirements as presumptive constraints on behavior. Because Wallace thinks of moral requirements as constitutively connected to claims held by other individuals, acknowledging moral requirements in this way involves acknowledging other persons as sources of moral claims, a form of acknowledgment which is itself finally valuable. So given this connection, interpersonal recognition thereby amounts to a kind of respect for persons. Using Wallace’s basic ideas, we can characterize a similar form of “political recognition” or “respect for the law”. If (and only if) the legal system’s content and its relation to the other elements of the basic structure are consistent with the Rawlsian principles, then that system properly expresses and is constitutively connected to a conception of persons united by it as free and equal. This means that having a standing disposition to treat the law as providing content-independent presumptive constraints on action (which is nothing more than treating the law as a source of political obligations) amounts to a form of political recognition that involves acknowledging other members of one’s polity as free and equal moral persons. It is necessary for valuable relations of recognition to treat the law as having this kind of normative significance for one’s practical deliberation.

It is important to note that having respect for the law does not require that one blindly follow it on all possible occasions. We have already rejected the implausible assumption that political obligations have this kind of significance for practical deliberation. If you are driving late at night and the traffic light has remained red for an unusually long period of time, it’s morally acceptable to look carefully in all directions and drive through the intersection. You haven’t violated any obligation or failed to afford your fellow citizens the kind of recognition that is valuable. But if you lack the standing disposition to take tort and criminal law as providing content-independent obligations or if you routinely try to game the system of property by purporting to exercise various legal powers in a way that unjustly enriches you, then you have failed to afford people the kind of recognition they have reason to care about as fellow free and equal members of society. It is also important to note that treating the law as providing content-independent obligations on action affords recognition, in the first place, to those who stand to be affected by your actions but also, perhaps indirectly, to other members of your polity. This is because a Rawlsian legal system expresses and acknowledges the status of *all* persons united by it as free and equal. This generality in expression and acknowledgment carries over to political recognition.

To further illustrate the underlying idea of the argument, it will be helpful to consider one of Rawls’s discussions of the duty of mutual aid. In considering the standard Kantian argument for this duty (i.e. we will ourselves encounter situations in which we need the help of others...and so on), he says “[t]he primary value of the principle is not measured by the help we actually receive but rather by the sense of confidence and trust in other men’s good intentions and the knowledge that they are there if we need them...Once we try to picture the life of a society in which no one had the slightest desire to act on these duties, we see that it would express an indifference if not disdain for human beings that would make a sense of our own worth impossible.”<sup>42</sup> Rawls’s remarks are striking in that he normatively grounds our duties of mutual aid, at least partially, in what’s valuable about generally acknowledging and complying with the duty, which is something that goes beyond the value of whatever is secured by given acts of aid. Similarly, I claim we have political obligations because the form of political recognition that consists in treating the law as providing such obligations is itself

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<sup>42</sup> Rawls (1999, 298).

valuable, both instrumentally and finally. It is constitutive of acknowledging relations of mutual freedom and equality that we treat the law as political obligations dictate.

It is essential to note that political obligations cannot exist unless some publicity conditions are met. The legal system (again understood as including its relations to other elements of the basic structure) must satisfy the Rawlsian principles and there must also be a public basis for people with ordinary cognitive faculties to know that it does so.<sup>43</sup> If this publicity condition is not satisfied, then people won't be able to see the law as reflecting their status as free and equal persons and they will not be in a position to have the secure knowledge (or to expect) that others are affording them the kind of valuable recognition that consists in other people treating the law as a source of content-independent obligations. Admittedly, it is not immediately obvious what precisely is required to satisfy such a publicity condition. It might be necessary to provide forms of public education that allow people with ordinary cognitive faculties to understand, at some level, the justification of the principles regulating the basic structure.<sup>44</sup> It might also be necessary for many government officials to publicly express how the design and operation of the legal system is consistent with the ideals embodied in the Rawlsian principles, regardless of whether those officials played an essential role in that design/operation (e.g. a sitting President issuing a press statement supporting a Supreme Court decision concerning free speech).

It is also important to note that the offered theory of political obligations satisfies both the particularity and correlativity-of-right requirements. Members of a polity have an interest, in the first place, in being shown political recognition by the other members of their society. This is because our status as free and equal moral persons is a crucial component of our relationship to one another as participants in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage in which we all have an equal right to have the principles governing that venture be justifiable to us. The particularity of political obligations is thereby built into the values that justify them. As for the correlativity-of-right requirement, it's reasonable to think that insofar as people have a deeply important interest in being afforded political recognition, they have reasons to form normative expectations that others will recognize them in this way and to complain when such expectations are not met. As Scheffler (2010, 110) puts it, the reasons to afford people political recognition and the reasons to form normative expectations are "two sides of the same coin" insofar as they are constitutively linked and generated by the value of the relationship of being free and equal moral persons in a cooperative venture for mutual advantage that is conducted on fair terms. It should also be apparent at this point that the relevant notion of "membership" (and the associated sense in which the account is associative) is broader than simple legal citizenship. Some legal citizens of a state may not participate in the cooperative venture or be subject to its governing institutions. Perhaps they've emigrated without renouncing their legal citizenship or perhaps they were simply never a part of the collectivity to begin with. On the other hand, non-citizens may have political obligations owed to other members of a society insofar as they robustly participate in the cooperative venture and live out their lives within a particular basic structure.

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<sup>43</sup> In articulating a different publicity principle of justice, Christiano (2004, 270) helpfully draws a distinction between an unnecessarily demanding requirement that each person actually see that they are being treated justly and a more plausible requirement that each person be capable of seeing that they are being treated justly given a reasonable effort on their part to exercise ordinary cognitive faculties.

<sup>44</sup> This of course doesn't mean that *A Theory of Justice* must be included on all summer reading lists for third graders, but perhaps it's important that there be some secondary educational classes teaching young persons about basic moral ideals and how the legal system is to be designed in light of them.

Now to address some significant worries about the offered account. The first objection accepts that we have strong reasons to acknowledge one another as free and equal moral persons but denies that treating the law as a source of content-independent obligations is necessary for this type of recognition.<sup>45</sup> My response is partly concessive for I admit that having respect for the law is not the only way of recognizing others as free and equal persons. We do this when, for example, we protest laws that unjustly regulate fundamental rights and when we contribute to domestic charitable organizations. But that doesn't entail that having respect for the law isn't constitutively important for maintaining co-equal relationships of personhood in a political community. It's difficult for me to really conceive of myself as being recognized as free and equal by other persons who don't exhibit any respect for the law. Insofar as we accept that Rawlsian law properly expresses the value of our status as free and equal moral persons, then someone who simply begrudgingly complies with the law to avoid punishment or social opprobrium at best sends mixed messages about their commitment to the importance of co-equal personhood in a political community. Granted, such a person may adequately satisfy some other duties of justice by acting in this way, but they haven't fully provided the recognition that their co-citizens have reason to want. And it doesn't seem like mere discursive affirmation of the value of such personhood (e.g. via some daily virtue signaling on Twitter) suffices for valuable recognition in the absence of some associated actions.<sup>46</sup> Having a robust standing disposition to treat the law as a source of content-independent reasons, and acting on that disposition when appropriate, does far more by way of acknowledgment than could be accomplished by many other means given that having such a disposition involves a self-imposed limitation on action. Additionally, our opportunities to afford valuable acknowledgment to many people in our community are fairly limited. Given the encompassing nature of law alluded to earlier and the way in which it normatively structures the interactions of people who participate in the cooperative venture without having any preexisting relationship, it's hard to see how one could afford these people a valuable kind of recognition without having respect for the law.

The second objection doubts that treating the law as a source of content-independent obligations really is sufficient for affording people valuable recognition. Recognition, if it is to be valuable in the ways suggested earlier, requires a clear communicative message. And, so the objection continues, treating the law as providing content-independent obligations cannot communicate this message given that we are not mind readers and publicly observable compliance with the law is consistent with a number of internal motivations. But the objection misses the mark for a few reasons. First, political recognition is a form of treatment that seems finally valuable even if people do not know they are being afforded it. Second, when the relevant publicity conditions are satisfied, there will be a public basis for both (i) reasonably believing that people have a standing disposition to treat the law as providing content-independent obligations, and (ii) interpreting that standing disposition as communicating a clear message about the importance of our status as co-equal free persons. Even if we sometimes make mistakes about people's motivations for complying with the law, the obtaining of (i) and (ii) means that we can have knowledge of people's affording one another political recognition when they do so. So the instrumental and final values of knowledge of political recognition can be realized even if we are not mind readers and are sometimes mistaken about people's motivations. That being said, I do not deny that full acknowledgement of the co-equal personhood of others requires more than having respect for the law, but it is nevertheless a core and indispensable component of it

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<sup>45</sup> Thanks to Jay Wallace for the worry.

<sup>46</sup> Shiffrin (2021, 153).

Third, one might object that the argument does not show that political obligations actually exist but rather that it's good for people to believe that they have them. But this objection misunderstands the structure of our main argument. In the first place, we have a valuable status as free and equal moral persons such that we have interests in being so recognized. This provides reasons to treat the law as a source of content-independent reasons insofar as both (i) the legal system is properly governed by the Rawlsian principles, and (ii) there is a suitable public basis for people with ordinary cognitive faculties to know that. We furthermore have reasons to form normative expectations that others will treat the law as providing such reasons. But that's all that we need to support the claim that there are political obligations. An analogy to other kinds of valuable relationships may be helpful here. Love can be thought of as a normative response to the value of an interpersonal relationship, but a valuable loving relationship also partly consists in having and expressing attitudes of love towards one another.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, I think that deep friendship constitutively involves owing some things to one's friend, and part of being a genuine friend involves recognizing that one has such obligations. In the case of political obligations, it is the value of our relationship to one another as free and equal moral persons, a relationship that's partly constituted by attitudes of acknowledgment, that does the real justificatory work in the argument and establishes that there are political obligations. We are not relying on the idea, as the objection assumes, that we have shown merely that it's good for people to believe they have political obligations. Of course that's good, but it's good *because* believing that involves properly appreciating the value of other members of one's polity and one's relationship to them.

These considerations also help circumvent a final worry about the role that the value of political recognition plays in the account. As noted before, Wallace claims that interpersonal recognition is a valuable way of relating to people as sources of moral claims. But for him, the value of recognition is explained fundamentally by the normative considerations connected with the moral claims we have on one another. It would be a mistake to change the order and explain the reason-giving force of moral requirements in terms of the value of interpersonal recognition. The character and significance of moral norms is given by an independent account, and this account illuminates what makes interpersonal recognition valuable to begin with. So have we made the mistake that Wallace seeks to avoid? Have we objectionably justified political obligations by the value of recognition when we should have explained the latter in terms of the former? I think not. The value of political recognition presupposes that the other members of one's polity are free and equal moral persons and that this valuable status is, in principle, capable of grounding practical requirements. But the articulated values of recognition given in terms of (i) support for the development of moral motivations, (ii) support for the development of one's capacity for a conception of the good, and (iii) the inherent value of relating to one another through the attitude, do not presuppose that we have specifically political obligations. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that political obligations are quite funny things, unlike many other practical requirements, in that having them dictates taking a particular attitude towards the law itself. Apart from the fact that the account does not presuppose political obligations to explain the value of recognition, it also seems to me that we must appeal to something in the vein of recognition if we are to explain why the law provides content-independent reasons for action. What underlies my account of political obligation is an independent account of the value of living as free and equal moral persons in a cooperative venture. The value of that relationship and our associated reasons to afford people political recognition is what fundamentally explains the existence of political obligations.

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<sup>47</sup> Kolodny (2003a).



Let me close by reconsidering how to understand PPO's significance and offering some related reflections. On the proposed account, political obligations represent a quite demanding political ideal whose existence illuminates the valuable nature of an underlying political relationship and the sense of ourselves that's relevant for understanding that relationship. Political obligations are part and parcel of a fully robust and ideal form of justice. We are not interested in PPO, as the NPD skeptic would have us think, simply because we wish to understand whether we have reasons to do what the law says. However, the fact that we have political obligations does, on the proposed account, reveal something about *what kinds of reasons* we have for obeying the law and the significance of acting on those reasons for those we share a common political life with. And we are also not interested in PPO, as the complaint skeptic would have us think, because there's some objection to the state's activities that cannot be met unless we have political obligations.

And now finally for something more in the realm of reflection than philosophical argument. I hope though that this will help bring out some of the underlying motivation for the offered view. There is, unfortunately, much to find distressing about the current political climate. It would be absurd to try comparing the "badness" of all the different ills, but one thing that has concerned me lately is the perception of law in contemporary society. There are many reasons for this, too many to list, and many ways in which the law seems to be failing us. But I think we also have an intuitive sense that there is a need for law, that law can be good, and under those conditions it is important to have respect for the law. Of course, the claim that one should have respect for the law is often bandied about carelessly and, even worse, in ways that criticize people for protesting their unjust treatment. But it is hard to deny that there is some notion of respect for the law that reflects something that's both valuable and part of common moral experience. This chapter, at its core, is simply an attempt to explain what respect for the law is and why it's valuable. Respect for the law is nothing more than respect for the other members of one's political community construed as free and equal moral persons with an interest in living amongst one another on fair terms.

## *Appendix: The Grounds of Parental Authority*

This project has focused on several varieties of normative address, specifically requesting, begging, and those commands that are associated with the law. In this brief postscript, I would like to consider another form of address, namely that involved in the exercise of parental authority. Now one might doubt the philosophical importance of this topic. In the first place, discussions of authority often focus on cases for which we harbor serious pre-theoretical doubts about whether authority obtains (e.g. state authority over individuals who have not consented to it). Second, even if we aren't suspicious about the legitimacy of some particular type of authority, we may be unsure about the limits of its successful exercise (e.g. What exactly can a platoon leader order during wartime?) as well as subjects' responsibilities with respect to that authority (e.g. What orders may permissibly be disobeyed?). But perhaps we don't have any serious doubts about whether parents possess some form of authority over their children or how this authority may be successfully exercised. If you are tempted by that thought, then what interest might this topic hold?

Here are some reasons for caring about the issue. First, a reasonable justificatory account of parental authority promises to shed light on the normative character of an especially important intimate relationship and the normativity of the actions/emotions typically associated with it. When it comes to our engagement with parental authority (either as parents, children, or third parties), we wish to understand not just what we should do but what reasons and values we're responding to when performing various intuitively rational actions (doing this or that because parental authority was successfully exercised). Second, to borrow a thought from Scheffler (2015, 24), authority is not a phenomenon that emerges for the first time at the political level. It appears in ordinary life within personal relationships, the workplace, and organized sports. The nature and significance of authority within the political realm will obviously be importantly different from that found in these other contexts. But we should expect to find some interesting relations between these various instances of authority. It might even be a strike against an account of political authority if it did not allow us to see any revealing commonalities. So it's fruitful to develop theories of authority in simpler cases as a basis for thinking about the political one.

Third, it's tempting to think that individuals have a pro-tanto objection to being subject to another's authority, an objection that can be defeated only if some legitimating condition is satisfied (e.g. consent). This is quite a natural thought since authority constitutively involves some kind of control and its exercise attempts to determine the will of another; authority therefore necessarily involves one party being "higher than" or "superior to" another. Given the attractiveness of many equality-based ideals, this thought, however vague it might be, can raise our hackles and prompt serious worries about autonomy or other related values. One might even be tempted, as Wolff (1970) is in the political case, to think that autonomy is necessarily inconsistent with authority and so, given the supremacy of autonomy's value, authority can never be normatively justified. But what exactly is this general objection and what kind of legitimating condition might address it? Now I suspect, and this is more in the realm of pre-theoretical sentiment than philosophical argument, that we have something to learn about the possibility of such an objection by considering the case of parental authority. After all, many peoples' first concerns with authority arise in their own childhood. We often, at least if you're of a particular stripe, resent our parents telling us what to do. At a young age, we might take their dictates as providing advice that is assessable as reasonable or unreasonable on

independent merits, similar to how one might view a tax accountant, but resist seeing what they're doing as genuine exercises of authority that can rationally determine our wills. If a reasonable justification of parental authority doesn't illuminate and justify such a concern, that might lend some support to the idea that there is no general objection that any individual has to any given instance of purported authority. Now of course, we should attempt, for any given type of authority, to explain how it operates and what justifies it. But that's a far cry from supposing that authority is inherently pro-tanto objectionable and that the offered justification must do something more to answer such a complaint.

Fourth and finally, a reasonable account of parental authority could have important consequences for legal decision-making. We may find that some legal verdicts unjustly interfere with legitimate exercises of parental authority. Alternatively, even when the legal verdicts are not themselves mistaken, their underlying rationales might be inconsistent with the kinds of values that parental authority properly serves.

Turning now to questions of substance, parental authority can be thought of, at the most general level, as a bundle of Hohfeldian incidents. We might include within this group things like a parent's claim that a stranger not offer their child candy without first seeking permission. But it would be best, lest we risk casting the net too widely, to focus on the presumptive powers parents have to modify various permissions and obligations.<sup>1</sup> Parents have such powers with respect to their own children; they can, for example, issue a command to clean the dinner table and permit their child to attend a school function. But parents also have such powers with respect to other persons whose actions stand to impact their children's interests in various ways (e.g. a daycare provider).

Now the most natural justification of such powers appeals to the interests of the child, but there are a few ways of developing such a view. According to the first and simplest version, parents have these powers just because their possessing such powers is in their children's best interests. But such a view faces a couple significant worries. First, as a descriptive matter, many parents are not the ones who are best positioned to look after their own children's best interests. This might be the case for a variety of reasons and yet it's intuitively plausible that even somewhat incompetent parents still retain some degree of parental authority over their children. Another related concern, but one that goes a bit deeper, is that this view proposes an implausibly weak and accidental relation between *being a parent* and *having parental authority*. Parental authority is something that parents have in virtue of being parents and not, as the simple view would have it, because they are, as a contingent matter, the ones who are best positioned to look after their children's best interests. The attractiveness of the view seems to rest on a confusion between the standards governing the proper exercise of parental authority and its normative justification. While we can accept that purported exercises of parental authority are illegitimate if they cannot reasonably be construed as aiming at the child's best interests (e.g. a parent ordering their young child to prostitute themselves to help pay rent generates no obligation on the child's part to obey), we shouldn't thereby conclude that the justification of parental authority is simply the fact that possessing such authority enables parents to look after their children's best interests.

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<sup>1</sup> I believe that the kind of view I gesture at in this postscript can be extended to cover parental rights in general, but given that defending this claim would require a concrete picture of what kinds of rights parents have, I leave that issue for another time.

A more plausible version of the child-based view claims that parents have parental authority because such powers are necessary for discharging the duties they owe their children, including, above all, duties to promote their childrens' welfare and development.<sup>2</sup> Given that such duties are grounded in childrens' interests, parental authority is then ultimately explained in terms of its capacity to promote such interests. Now it seems to me that an account of the sources of parental authority should have implications for what happens when it's successfully exercised. In particular, it should be capable of explaining the accountability relations that are intuitively generated by such exercises. A major worry with the duty-based model is that it renders puzzling why failures to respect parental authority wrong the parent, in the first place, and thereby make the wrongdoer accountable principally to them. I assume that in order for an action to wrong someone, that action must negatively impact one of their interests.<sup>3</sup> That in turn partly explains why the wronged party has a special and privileged standing to blame the wrongdoer. Suppose that Mother orders Son to set the dinner table and he disobeys. It's intuitive that Son owes it to Mother to obey and that his disobedience wrongs her and affords her the privileged standing to blame him. But if, as the duty-based view claims, Mother's normative power to issue the command is ultimately grounded in Son's interests, that would seemingly entail that Son's disobedience wrongs himself only and that he owes an apology only to himself. Similarly, suppose that Mother is a committed vegan and wants Son to have a similar diet until he's older. If Mother tells Daycare Provider that Son is not to be served hamburgers at lunch, then Daycare Provider wrongs Mother, in the first place, if he serves Son McDonald's. But again, if the duty-based model is correct, it would seem to follow that Daycare Provider is accountable, in the first place, to Son.<sup>4</sup>

Now one can object here on behalf of the duty-based model by claiming that Mother has an interest in fulfilling the duties she owes her children. If that's correct, then Daycare Provider's disobedience might be construed as wronging Mother because it sets that particular interest back. Such a thought is plausible in light of the intuition some might have that we have a general interest in fulfilling our moral duties. Suppose that Hero is trying to save Victim from drowning. Villain might intentionally interfere with Hero's effort by blocking their way, say just because they hate Victim. Now if Victim drowns, then Villain has clearly wronged them. But has Villain wronged Hero? We might say that, insofar as Hero has some rational or good end, Villain wrongs Hero by interfering with their pursuit of that end. But that explanation seemingly applies equally well to any rational end (e.g. Hero's attempt to go see their favorite film at the cinema). Is there then a way to fit the duty into the explanation such that Villain's interference wrongs Hero in his capacity as a duty-bearer? I think not. Perhaps we have an interest in striving to live up to the demand of morality because that allows us to live well with others, to realize a certain kind of valuable relationship. But that interest is satisfied in the rescue case. Hero isn't able to save Victim, but if they make a sincere effort and would have saved Victim but for Villain's interference, then Hero is on "good terms" with Victim. Hero has gotten what they have reason to want. Therefore, Villain doesn't wrong Hero because they don't have an interest in *satisfying* the duty of rescue even if they do have an interest in *making a sincere effort to satisfy*

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<sup>2</sup> Such a view is suggested in an unpublished paper that is not citable at this time.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace (2019b, ch.5).

<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that Mother's judgments about how daycare should be conducted are decisive in a way that normatively voids all of Daycare Provider's judgments. In many cases involving delegation of responsibilities, the delegate may (and even must) appeal to some of their own judgments about how to satisfy the duties they've taken on via the delegation. But, in the present case, it still seems that Daycare Provider wrongs Mother if he, without conferring with her, simply acts on the thought, "*Oh the old bat has no idea about childhood nutrition. I'm going to serve Son some McDonald's.*"

that duty. And similar things can be said about the case involving Mother and the Daycare Provider. Mother's interest is, strictly speaking, in making a sincere effort to fulfill her duties to the best of her abilities given facts about the situation that she may reasonably be expected to know. And, for all that's been said, it seems that this interest is satisfied.

So our conclusions about accountability suggest that a reasonable justification of parental authority must be based, at least partially, in some interests parents have. But we shouldn't, I think, do away with the idea that children's interests are relevant in this context as well. I suggest that the trick is to find a set of interests that's shared by parents and their children. Basing parental authority on such a set would likely both (i) establish the right kind of relation between being a parent and having parental authority, and (ii) entail the right conclusions about associated accountability relations. The most natural way to unify these two sets of interests is by basing both in the value of the parent-child relationship. It's plausible to assume that parents, or at least many of them, have significant interests in shaping and nurturing their children's development in ways that reflect their own reasonable conceptions of what's valuable and worth pursuing as a final end.<sup>5</sup> Accomplishing this is part of what makes parenting, as it seems to many, one of the most valuable things one can do in life. Moreover, such interests seem to constitute a core element of what makes the parent-child relationship a valuable one. And on the other side of the coin, it's plausible that children have relationship-based interests in their parents being able to shape their development in ways that align with their parents' desires and values. There are of course limits to this; it's important for parents to not be overly controlling and leave space for their children's development to be impacted by others. And it's also important that children, at least when they're older, come to their own conclusions about what matters in life. But that doesn't undermine the basic thought here, namely that parents and children share a common set of relationship-based interests. There is something good about being another's parent that is importantly related to what's good about being that person's child. If we accept that thought then there's a unified basis for the normative justification of parental authority; the grounds and limits of its successful exercise are based in the relationship-dependent values it serves. On this kind of view, parental authority serves the conjoined interests of both governor and governed. That at least is the sketch of the basic thought whose further specification will have to wait till another time.

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<sup>5</sup> See Liao (2015, 157) for a similar claim about one factor which, among others, jointly explains why specifically biological parenting is an activity that's important to human beings qua human beings' life as a whole.

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