Canadian Journal of Philosophy (2026), 56: e33, 1–15
doi:10.1017/can.2026.10074

SYMPOSIUM

The Relational Right and the Good

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Abstract
My aim in this paper is to offer some constructive suggestions about the deontological conception of moral value, taking the relational account as my example of a deontological approach. I identify two different kinds of moral values that might be elucidated by the relational approach, which I shall call compliance values and status values. I discuss the role that these moralized values play within the relational theory, tracing the contributions they make to the larger interpretative case for understanding interpersonal morality in relational terms.

Keywords: deontology; value; moral obligation; rights and claims; recognition; dignity; relational ethics

Deontological theories in ethics hold that the requirements of interpersonal morality place constraints on the individual pursuit of the good. There are certain things that one may not do to other people as one pursues the personal values at the heart of one's projects and relationships. The right is, in this way, prior to the good. At the same time, evaluative notions clearly have a role to play in the philosophical explication and defense of deontological theories of the moral right. But the precise contribution of these evaluative notions remains poorly understood and difficult to reconcile with the basic deontological idea that the right constrains the pursuit of the good.

My aim in this paper is to shed some light on these questions by looking closely at the evaluative ideals latent in a particular class of deontological accounts, namely, relational theories of the moral right. According to these theories, the domain of interpersonal morality is structured in terms of directed requirements that define what we owe to each other, simply insofar as we are each members of the community of moral persons whose interests matter equally.[1] Within a theory of this kind, directed moral obligations correspond to claims that individuals hold in their own person against agents to their compliance with the requirements that they owe to the claimholder. Furthermore, this nexus of directed obligations and claims has downstream implications when agents do things that violate the requirements of the moral right. Such conduct is not merely wrong, it specifically *wrongs* the individual claimholder to whom the requirement was owed. My ultimate objective in this contribution is to explain some of the values that are latent within this relational interpretation of the moral domain and to explore their significance for our understanding of relational morality.

[1]This expression unambiguously refers to directed requirements; it is also the title of Scanlon (1998), which is the canonical statement of contractualism as a theory of morality. It should be noted that Scanlon himself has increasingly distanced himself from the relational elements that were latent in his original statement of this theory and that were explicit in the title of his main book on the topic. For discussion, see Wallace (2019), sec. 5.4.

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The paper divides into three sections. In the first, I set the stage for my discussion by explaining the conception of deontology I will be operating with in the paper, comparing and contrasting it with different varieties of act consequentialism. Against this background, I then introduce the idea of a moralized value—a value that is understood in terms of a prior conception of the moral right. I go on to suggest that values of this kind are familiar within the deontological tradition in ethical theory, referencing Kant's conception of the good will as a prominent example.

The second section turns to the value of recognition; this is another moralized value, and it is one that has particular affinities with a relational interpretation of the moral domain. But the role of this value within deontological approaches remains poorly understood, a point I develop by interrogating T. M. Scanlon's appeal to recognition to explicate the reason-giving force of contractualist morality. The remainder of this section offers a fresh take on the moralized value of recognition. I show how a conception of recognition falls out of the relational interpretation of morality, characterizing it as a moralized compliance value. I argue that it is built into a proper understanding of this value that it cannot specify the primary reason for agents to comply with the requirements of the relational right, since the value is realized only when agents act for other reasons. Finally, I discuss the normative significance of this moralized value, both for agents and for the individuals who stand to be affected by their actions.

In the third section of the paper, I discuss some other moralized values that can be understood relationally, which I characterize as status rather than compliance values. These include desirable forms of moral status that are fully intelligible only on the basis of relational moral norms, including nonviolability and dignity or self-respect. I argue that these status values play a constructive role in the philosophical case for the relational conception of morality, which is an essentially interpretative enterprise. These forms of social status are ideals that we reasonably aspire to realize and to promote, and it is part of the appeal of the relational account that it makes sense of those values by articulating their normative presuppositions.

1. Moralized Values

I shall operate in this discussion with the conventional assumption that ethical theories offer us interpretations of the moral right. That is, they propose principles or criteria that define what it is permissible or obligatory to do and that aspire to have normative significance for individual agents. By this, I mean that the principles are meant to govern our deliberations, identifying considerations that we have compelling reason to honor and comply with in our decisions about what to do. Familiar examples of these kinds of normative principles in the modern tradition include Kant's categorical imperative, the principle of utility, and contractualist principles for the general regulation of behavior that nobody could reasonably reject.

I shall also operate with a familiar characterization of deontological theories in ethics, which is that the principles of the moral right that figure in them place constraints on the individual's pursuit of the good. Within a theory of this kind, for instance, it might be wrong to break a promise or to commit an infidelity or to cause someone physical harm, even if by doing these things one could bring about an outcome that is better on the whole. Indeed, it might be wrong to act in these ways in circumstances in which doing so would result in a lower overall number of actions of the problematic type: the fact that a villain will kill five people if you refuse to kill a sixth does not make it permissible for you to do so, nor would it be okay for you to break a promise if doing so would induce five others to keep similarly significant promises that they have made to other individuals.[2] Deontological moral principles in this way constrain the individual pursuit of the good, placing limiting conditions (as Kant put it) on what agents may do to advance their projects and goals, including projects that involve the promotion of impersonal values.

[2]This is sometimes referred to as the paradox of deontology; for discussion, see Scheffler (1982) and McMahon (1991).

The clearest contrast with deontology in this sense is a version of act consequentialism, the view that the right action in any given situation is the action that would maximize the overall good (compared with the other options that it is open to the agent to perform in the situation). These approaches start with an independent conception of intrinsic value and define right actions in terms of that conception, as actions that best promote the good. Thus, classical utilitarianism assumes a hedonistic theory of intrinsic value and identifies the right action as the one that produces the highest aggregate sum of pleasure over pain. It is characteristic of a consequentialist view of this kind, as Bernard Williams pointed out, that if an agent does the right thing, the state of affairs brought about by their action will be at least as good as the states of affairs that would have been produced by the alternatives (Williams, 1973). On a deontological conception, by contrast, inferences of this kind do not necessarily go through: doing the right thing might, depending on the circumstances, bring about an outcome that is not better than the alternatives available to the agent.[3] The right in this way constrains the pursuit of the good within deontological theories but not within act consequentialist accounts.

It is, of course, consistent with this feature of deontology that evaluative considerations have a role to play in the justification of the principles of the right that function to constrain the individual's pursuit of the good. Contractualist moral reasoning, for instance, involves comparative consideration of the objections that individuals would have on their own behalf to principles that permit or proscribe their acting in certain ways (Scanlon, 1998, chap. 5). Promisees, for instance, have personal objections to principles that permit promisors to defect from their agreements under ordinary circumstances, and these objections seem stronger that the different objections that promisors have to principles that require them to honor their promissory commitments. As a result, it is wrong for promisors to defect from their commitments, other things equal, because principles that permit them to do so could reasonably be rejected (by promisees). The personal objections that figure in this reasoning on both sides of the question can arguably be couched in terms of the beneficial or deleterious effects of general compliance with candidate principles on affected individuals. It is good for promisees to be able to rely on the commitments that promisors voluntarily undertake, and this explains the character and force of their objections to principles that permit promisors to defect from them. They have legitimate personal interests in reliance in these situations, and their own lives go better to the extent principles are in place that protect this interest by requiring promisors to live up to the commitments they have made.[4] It is consistent with this feature of contractualist justification, however, that the principle of promissory fidelity that results from it will function to constrain the agent's pursuit of the good. Promisors will arguably be required to keep their promises even when doing so inhibits them in their pursuit of their other goals, including the goal (if they have it) of encouraging promissory fidelity in the world at large. The fact that breaking a promise you have made would induce five other promisors to honor their commitments does not make it permissible for you to do that.

A different way that evaluative considerations might enter into the justification of deontological principles is illustrated by rule consequentialism (see Hooker, 2002). This approach holds that the principles that define what it is right or permissible to do are ones that would be best in the aggregate if they were universally accepted and complied with. For purposes of discussion in this paper, I shall assume that a theory of this type will include some deontological principles that function to constrain the individual pursuit of the good. Thus, it is very plausible that rule consequentialism of this kind will include a principle of promissory fidelity similar to the one that can be justified in the contractualist terms sketched above. It would arguably be better for people in the aggregate if

[3] As Williams points out, this might be because one judges the outcome produced by the right action to be worse overall than the state of affairs produced by doing the wrong thing, but it might also be because one does not know how to rank outcomes in respect of their overall value. On the latter possibility, see Thomson (1997).

[4] The vocabulary of "personal interests" to characterize the objections that individuals have on their own behalf to candidate principles for the general regulation of behavior is explained in Wallace (2019), chap. 5.

promisors accept and comply with principles that require them to honor their commitments under normal circumstances, compared with the scenario in which they accept and comply with principles that permit them to break their promises without special reason.

There is, of course, an important question about why moral justification might be thought to take this form and about whether the resulting normative theory is even stable. If what you ultimately care about is maximizing the good, it seems odd that your deliberations about what to do, here and now, should be hostage to hypothetical considerations about the good or bad effects of general compliance with principles for the regulation of behavior (see Scanlon, 1982, p. 103). If it would bring about a better state of affairs in your actual circumstances to break a promise you have made, that seems to be the thing you ought to do, which is, of course, the verdict delivered by the act consequentialist standard of right conduct. A possible response to this worry is that the deeper rationale for rule consequentialism is not a concern to maximize the good so much as to act on principles that would be acceptable to all. Principles that would be best in the aggregate if everyone accepted and complied with them are ones that anyone could rationally will, and it could be argued that this is what is important for purposes of moral justification (see Parfit, 2013, chap. 16).[5] Whatever we might say about this question, the main thing for present purposes is that the principles of right that rule consequentialism delivers will plausibly include deontological principles in my sense, which function to limit what individuals are permitted to do in pursuit of the good.

I said earlier that principles of the moral right are meant to have normative significance for agents within their deliberations about what to do; they are put forward as principles that we have compelling reason to comply with, where these reasons are ones that individual agents will be responsive to if they are deliberating well. This assumption is sometimes questioned in the consequentialist tradition, insofar as a distinction is drawn between a criterion or standard of right conduct and a motive or decision procedure (Sidgwick, 1981, p. 413). Those who follow Sidgwick in making this kind of distinction insist that it is conceivable that agents might better comply with the act consequentialist standard of right conduct if they never deploy it in their deliberations about what they ought to do so that the standard becomes effectively self-effacing.[6] According to this way of thinking, it is ultimately an empirical question whether it would be better, by the consequentialist's own lights, for agents never to operate with the consequentialist criterion in their own decision-making. Perhaps, there is a demon on the scene who will visit excruciating agony on the entire population of sentient beings if agents endeavor to comply with the act consequentialist principle of right conduct (cf. Railton, 1984, pp. 155–156).

Even here, however, it seems to me more plausible to think of the act consequentialist standard as having some kind of normative significance for agents, if only as a basis for the decision to take the magic pill that will banish consequentialism from their thinking in response to the demon's nefarious threats. This is also in line with Peter Railton's depiction of the sophisticated (act) consequentialist, who cultivates dispositions that will make it impossible to deliberate in consequentialist terms at least some of the time, but who still has access to that standard at other moments, and who appeals to it in order to justify their overall way of living (Railton, 1984, sec. 6). Whatever stand we take on this issue, however, it remains the case that the act consequentialist principle of right act is not a deontological principle in the sense I have been discussing. It defines the right action for individuals as the action that best promotes the independent good, and to the extent, this is the case it cannot be understood to place constraints in the individual agent's pursuit of the good.

[5]Similarly, contractualism is concerned, at bottom, with justifiability to each individual, which is the feature of it that seems congenial to the relational interpretation. Considerations of the personal good matter, within this framework, because they bear on the question of whether a principle can be justified to each of the individuals affected by the behavior it permits.

[6]For discussion of the possibility that consequentialism might be wholly or partially self-effacing in this way, see Parfit (1984, sec. 17). Parfit is responding, in part, to Williams's discussion of the possibility that utilitarianism might "usher itself from the scene" in Williams (1973, sec. 6).

I noted above that deontological theories will typically appeal to evaluative notions in the reasoning that goes to determine the principles of right that then operate as limiting conditions on the activities of agents. This is true, for instance, of both contractualist and rule consequentialist approaches to the justification of such principles. Once such principles are specified, however, there is a further role they might play in helping to constitute distinctively moralized values. My larger goal in this paper is to understand the nature and philosophical significance of moralized values of this kind within deontological approaches, taking the relational interpretation of morality as my paradigm.

The most prominent example of a moralized value in the modern tradition of deontological ethics is Kant's notion of the good will. This is at the very center of his most influential treatise in moral philosophy, the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, which is a sustained critical discussion of the good will (Kant, 2012). Kant begins by evoking some intuitive convictions about the good will, including the idea that it is good without limitation, that it is the condition for other values accessible through human efforts, and that it is supreme in relation to other good things. The rest of the treatise can be read as an attempt to explicate the normative and agential presuppositions of a will that is good in this distinctive way. Kant understands it as the will of a person who is striving with utmost sincerity to do the right thing for its own sake. But what is the principle that animates a will of this kind, and how should we think about the exertions of agency that it represents? Kant famously identifies that principle with the categorical imperative, giving different formulations of this supreme principle of morality. And he suggests that the valuable effort to comply with this principle involves an act of free self-determination in accordance with a law that agents lay down for themselves. The result is a more specific characterization of the modality of value that is realized by the good will, in terms of the attractive (if elusive) ideal of autonomy.

I offer this potted summary of the argument of the *Groundwork* to highlight the fact that moralized values are prominent in Kant's major statement of his ethical theory. The good will is a moralized value, insofar as it is understood essentially in terms of Kant's deontological principle of right action. It is the will of agents who are determining themselves to act in accordance with the categorical imperative, a moral principle that essentially functions, as I noted earlier, as a limiting condition on their freedom. Having called attention to the prominent role of these moralized conceptions of the good within Kant's deontological theory, however, I do not propose to discuss it further in this essay. Both the nature of the good will and the contribution it makes to the larger defense of Kant's theory in the *Groundwork* are difficult questions that are shrouded in scholarly controversy. Furthermore, the notion of the good will itself has some religious connotations that make it ill-suited to illuminate the role of moralized values within a contemporary philosophical defense of deontology. In the remainder of this contribution, I shall therefore shift gears, focusing on some of the other moralized values that are latent in the relational account of interpersonal morality that I have elsewhere defended.[7]

2. Recognition and the Relational Right

A moralized value that has figured prominently in post-Hegelian conceptions of morality is that of recognition or regard. Compliance with basic moral requirements, the thought goes, makes it possible for us to stand in relations of recognition to other moral persons, where this is understood to be a valuable way of relating to people. It is a value, moreover, that is plausibly interpreted in terms of a deontological conception of the right. Moral principles that place constraints on the

[7]My quarry in this paper is the relational theory as an example of deontology and the role that moralized values play within theories of this kind. But it is worth emphasizing that there are moralized values available in the classical consequentialist tradition, as well. Thus, there is an ideal of personal transcendence that is constituted by conscientious compliance with the act consequentialist standard of right conduct, and that contributes to the appeal of such theories. For discussion, see Wallace (2004).

individual pursuit of the good often connect to a conception of persons as having a special standing that limits what it is permissible to do specifically to them; we may not treat them merely as means, in the vocabulary of Kant's formula of humanity, even if doing so would help to bring about an outcome that is better in the aggregate. Acting in accordance with principles of this kind can be seen as a way of recognizing others as moral persons, realizing a value that is intelligible only in deontological terms.

But what work does this kind of moralized value do within a philosophical theory of the moral right? T. M. Scanlon supplies a possible answer to this question in *What We Owe to Each Other*, where he appeals to the value of mutual recognition to explain the reason-giving force of contractualist moral principles (Scanlon, 1998, chap. 4). In particular, Scanlon argues that mutual recognition can shed light on the priority of our reasons for complying with basic moral requirements, by comparison with other reasons for action with which they are sometimes in apparent tension. Contractualism understands interpersonal moral requirements to be specified by principles for the regulation of behavior that nobody could reasonably reject. If you comply with such principles, you will necessarily act in ways that are justifiable to other individuals, insofar as it would not be reasonable for them to reject the principles on which you have acted. Moral principles thus provide the basis for a notional community of individuals who are able to give an account of themselves to each other, and relating to people in this way strikes us as desirable. It amounts to a form of mutual recognition, whereby each of us acknowledges that the interests of other people matter to our agency and acts in ways that can be justified to them, taking fully into account the effects of our actions on their interests. Scanlon sees parallels between the value of mutual recognition and other valuable ways of relating to people, such as friendship, and he contends that this value can help us to understand why contractualist moral principles are able to constrain the personal projects with which morality is apt to come into conflict.

Scanlon's discussion of the issue of priority is interesting and complex, and I have discussed in detail some of the questions it raises in other papers (see Wallace, 2002, sec. 3; Wallace, 2021). To summarize some of the main points: It is misleading, first of all, to characterize the value at stake here as *mutual* recognition. This locution implies that the relevant value is realized only under conditions of reciprocity, when one agent's concern to act in ways justifiable to another is met by a similar concern on the part of the second individual. But the value of recognition, properly understood, does not presuppose this kind of reciprocity. The wrongs that are done to you by other parties may affect the content of the contractualist principles that apply to your treatment of those other parties; but it remains important that you should comply with such principles—you should still strive to act in ways that are justifiable to them. Recognition is better understood as a valuable way of relating to other people, rather than in analogy with a relationship, such as friendship, that is constituted by reciprocal concern.

A further point is that recognition, however we understand it, is ill-suited to account for the reason-giving force of moral principles in virtue of its status as a moralized value in the above sense. To think that it plays this role is to suggest that our primary reason for complying with moral requirements is that doing so realizes a valuable way of relating to others. But even if we grant that it is a good thing to be able to justify yourself to others, this does not seem to be the consideration that mainly counts in favor of acting in accordance with moral principles. It is a value that is instantiated in our own lives, whereas the principal reason to comply with moral principles should more directly connect to the interests of other people. This is connected to a distinct point, which is that the value of recognition seems transparent in the deliberations of the agent who realizes that value. It seems analogous in this respect to some of the virtue concepts, such as selflessness, which characterize traits that an agent can instantiate only if and when they do not think of themselves in terms of those very concepts. It might be a very good thing to be selfless in your interactions with other people. But the value of this trait cannot characterize the reason you are responding to when you realize it, since you would not really be selfless if you thought of yourself as acting in a way that would instantiate that particular virtue.

Talk of the priority of the moral right points to its distinctive normative character by comparison with reasons of other kinds. It is not merely that moral rightness is a source of especially weighty reasons, rather those reasons have features that set them apart qualitatively from other kinds of normative considerations. They have the character of obligations or practical requirements, which are not merely to be weighed in the balance against other reasons, but which function to settle on their own the question of what the agent is to do (cf. Wallace, 2019, chap. 2). This structural dimension of moral obligations is the specific feature of them that needs to be made sense of in the agential point of view, and it is very difficult to see how appeal to the value of recognition might help to illuminate it. Even if we grant that it is a good thing to stand in relations of recognition to other people, that merely seems to be one value like others that could be realized through our agency, and it is not clear why a value of this kind should structure practical deliberation in the way that is characteristic of obligations or practical requirements. Furthermore, the paradox of deontology threatens to return. Recognition might be a valuable way of relating to other people, and realizing that value might be a good reason for complying with moral principles. But if your flouting those same principles would enable five others to stand in equally valuable relations of recognition to other people, it is unclear why you should not defect from them. The very value that allegedly gives you reason to satisfy the deontological requirements of the moral right seems a reason to violate them in situations of this kind.

The lesson that I think we should draw from these considerations is that recognition is the wrong kind of consideration to capture the structure of the reasons to which agents are responding when they comply with the requirements of the moral right. It is what I earlier called a moralized value, and one that is specifically structured through deontic considerations. The version of deontology that seems to me best suited to illuminate the reason-giving force of moral considerations in the perspective of deliberation is the relational account that I have defended in *The Moral Nexus* (Wallace, 2019). This is an account of what it is for an action to be morally right. It holds that the property of being the right thing for an agent to do is the property of being an action that the agent owes it to another party to perform, just insofar as they are both persons whose interests matter equally. An action's being owed to another party in this way is equivalent, in turn, with its being the case that that party has a claim against the agent to their performing the action in question. The domain of the moral right, according to this approach, just is the domain of what we owe to each other, abstracting from the special obligations that we owe to people in virtue of standing in antecedently significant relationships to them (as friends, relatives, colleagues, and so forth).

This way of thinking about interpersonal morality admittedly has some peculiar features. For one thing, it might seem less illuminating than some philosophical accounts of the moral right, such as classical act utilitarianism, which have a more thoroughly reductionistic character. The relational property with which rightness is identified is not understood in naturalistic terms, but is characterized through concepts that themselves have a deontic character, including the concepts of being owed to another party and having a claim against an agent.[8] What the relational approach sacrifices in reductionistic ambition, however, it makes up for in explanatory plausibility. In particular, the deontic property in terms of which the relational approach understands moral rightness is peculiarly well-suited to illuminate the reason-giving character moral considerations. The fact that you owe it to someone to do X does not conceptually entail that you are under a practical requirement to do X. You can intelligibly wonder whether an action that is owed by you to another party is something you really have to do, where the question you are asking has an "open" feel to it. As a substantive matter, however, actions with this deontic property are ones that we plausibly understand to be required of us, treating this property as settling the question of what we are to do in

[8]It is thus to be contrasted with the popular contemporary project of deontic "buck-passing" about the moral right, which attempts to analyze moral obligations in terms of nondeontic reasons of various kinds. See, for instance, Bedke (2011), Kiesewetter (2026), and Skorupski (2010), chap. 14.

the perspective of deliberation.[9] They are also actions that we understand to function as a reasonable basis for relations of interpersonal accountability, which is an additional feature of moral rightness that we want a philosophical account to illuminate. In these ways, the relational approach offers a highly appealing account of the normative significance of the moral right, one that is based in a substantive theory of what it is for an action to be right in the first place.

It is a further advantage of this approach that it sheds light on the moralized value of recognition, as I shall explain in a moment. But it does not appeal directly to this value to make sense of the reason-giving character of moral considerations. The reason to which one is responding when one acts morally is not the value of recognition but the fact that one owes it to another party to do what one is doing. This is not, it should be emphasized, a consideration that threatens to render the structure of deontology paradoxical. The fact that you owe it to me to do X (because, say, you have promised me so to act) is generally sufficient to make it the case that you must do X, settling on its own the question of what you are to do. But the same consideration will not itself be a reason for you to break your promise to me in the situation in which your doing so would induce five other people to keep the promises they have made to other parties. Your obligations are determined by considerations about what you owe specifically to me, and the fact that five other individuals are under promissory obligations of the same generic kind is not in itself directly relevant to your deliberative situation. Your reason is given not by the impersonal value of someone's doing what they owe it to others to do but by the deontically structured fact that you, in particular, owe it to me to do X, and that is not in itself a reason to contribute to the maximal realization of promissory fidelity in the world at large.

It is also true, however, that we can illuminate the value of recognition in terms of these deontically structured reasons. To be responsive to these reasons is to take the fact that you owe it to someone to do X to settle the question of what you are going to do. Considerations of the moral right, on this interpretation of them, necessarily connect you to other individuals who have claims specifically against you to compliance with the requirements of the right. In taking these considerations to be dispositive, then, you are treating the claims of others as having direct significance for your agency. This is tantamount to the kind of interpersonal recognition that we intuitively take to be valuable. Your responsiveness to the requirements of the relational right shows that you regard other persons as individuals whose interests matter in the specific way that makes them bearers of significant claims against you. This is a way of recognizing their generic moral standing, as persons to whom consideration is owed. Furthermore, you render this generic form of regard concrete when you acknowledge the specific claims that others have against you as constraints on what you are permitted to do. Complying with the duties you owe to them is thus a matter of recognizing their particular claims. In this way, an account of interpersonal recognition falls out of the relational account of the reasons that agents are responsive to when they act on considerations of the moral right (cf. Wallace, 2021).

It is a consequence of this way of understanding recognition, however, that its value has to be transparent in the perspective of the agent who realizes it. To stand in a relation of recognition to others is, constitutively, to be moved by reasons distinct from the value of recognition itself; specifically, it is to be moved by considerations about what we owe to others and about the claims they hold against us to decent treatment and regard. Interpersonal recognition is in this way like the value of Kant's good will, which is achieved only when agents are directly responsive to their moral obligations, doing what they are doing for the sake of duty. We might call these evaluative ideals moralized compliance values, insofar as they constitutively involve compliance with deontological moral requirements—in Kant's case, with the moral law, in the case of the relational approach, with

[9]Thus, on my view, it will be true that if X is the right thing to do, the agent will be under a practical requirement so to act. But this is not a conceptual truth—one that obtains in virtue of the meaning of claims like "A owes it to B to do X"—but rests on our substantive understanding of the significance that facts about directed duties have for practical agency.

considerations about what we owe to other claimholders. The result, however, is that they are values that can be realized only by agents who do not have them specifically in view at the moment when they are achieved.

If recognition is a moralized compliance value of this kind, what role does it play within the relational conception of the moral right? What contribution does it make to our understanding of the morality of what we owe to each other? Values are often connected to reasons, so we should expect that interpersonal recognition would have normative significance for individuals if the relational account of interpersonal morality is correct. To work this out, however, it is important to distinguish between the position of agents who are subject to the requirements of the moral right and of claimholders to whom compliance with those requirements is specifically owed.

Interpersonal recognition is not, as we have seen, the primary moral consideration that agents are responsive to when they act in ways that instantiate this value. But that does not mean that the value is without normative significance in the agent's larger point of view. Realizing this value in your biography is one way in which your life can go well from your own point of view, and this is something that agents might reasonably attach importance to. Scanlon, as I noted above, compares mutual recognition to the value of friendship, and there is something deeply illuminating about this analogy, even if it is also potentially misleading. Friendship is a relation one stands in to other people only when one acts on reasons of other kinds. One does things for and with one's friend, for instance, because it is important to them, and one also sees oneself as having directed obligations which are owed to the other party in virtue of the relationship you stand in to each other (cf. Wallace, 2012). Friendship is thus not accessible to someone who is motivated solely by a concern to enjoy the goods of friendship. But that does not mean that friendship is not a valuable manner of relating to people, and its value has significance for us in other ways, just as the value of recognition has in the moral case. Appreciating these relational values can help to reassure us about the importance of our primary reasons of friendship and morality in the face of skeptical doubts, identifying dimensions in which our own lives are enriched through our responsiveness to reasons of other kinds (see Wallace, 2004). These same relational values give us secondary reasons, prospectively, to cultivate our tendencies toward morality and friendship, bolstering our confidence in their significance for our lives. And they are also significant in the retrospective point of view. Looking back on our lives, we have reason to take satisfaction in the fact that we maintained deep friendships with selected individuals and related to others on a basis of interpersonal recognition. These secondary reasons are provided by the relational values we realize when we act on the primary reasons operative in these domains, and they make an important contribution to the agent's larger conception of the role of friendship and morality in their lives.

But recognition has a different kind of normative significance within the perspective of the claimholders to whom directed moral requirements are owed. It is, indeed, the primary thing we care about from this point of view and the focus of our practices of interpersonal accountability. What is important to us, when we think about the relations of other person to us, are their attitudes of consideration and regard. This is something that P. F. Strawson called attention to years ago in "Freedom and Resentment," when he noted the significance that we attach to the "quality of will" that others display toward us in our interactions with them. As Strawson observed in support of this point: "If someone treads on my hand accidentally, while trying to help me, the pain may be no less acute than if he treads on it in contemptuous disregard of my existence or with a malevolent wish to injure me. But I shall generally feel in the second case a kind and degree of resentment that I shall not feel in the first" (Strawson 2003, p. 80). What matters to us from this point of view, Strawson seems to be saying, is that others realize the value of interpersonal recognition in their treatment of us, and the reactive attitudes are generically reactions to failures relative to this relational ideal (see Wallace, 2021, sec. 2).

It might seem puzzling that there should be this asymmetry between the first- and the second-personal perspective when it comes to the normative significance of recognition. But the puzzle dissolves on closer inspection. An initial point is that the explanation for why recognition is of

secondary significance for the agent does not carry over to the situation of other parties. As we saw above, agents can realize this value in what they do only if they are responsive to reasons of other kinds, in particular, the directed obligations and claims at the center of relational morality. But claimholders are free to care about whether agents relate to them in this valuable way without thereby undermining the value they are concerned about. The asymmetry concerning the significance of recognition in the first- and second-personal points of view reflects this fact about the special role of the agent's attitudes toward reasons in constituting the value that is at issue.

But there is a second and more interesting point to make in this connection. For all of us, the relational claims we have against other parties are based in what I referred to above as our personal interests, which are interests we have on our own behalf about how our lives go. These interests include concerns for independence, autonomy, assurance, control, and fair treatment, as well as more elemental concerns for freedom from pain and discomfort of the kind that are set back when one's hand is tread upon. It matters to us that these interests are protected, and our lives go worse in an important sense whenever they are damaged. This much is true regardless of whether the damage results from an act of nature or whether it can instead be traced to a deliberate attempt to inflict harm on the bearer of the interest.

When it comes to our attitudes toward other persons, however, our concerns assume a somewhat different character. We enter into social relations as bearers of personal interests that serve to ground relational claims against other parties. But what we demand of them is not that our interests should remain absolutely undamaged—something that might not even be in their power to bring about—but that they should show due regard for our interests and the relational claims that are grounded in them. Our attitudes toward those with whom we interact in social space are thus sensitive to facts about what it is reasonable to expect from them as centers of agency. In this context, what is important to us is that people should be conscientious about the potential effects of their agency on our interests, acknowledging the relational claims that are based in those interests, and making a sincere attempt to honor those claims. This is the attitude that is constitutive of interpersonal recognition. It is the thing we primarily care about in our social relations not because the interests that give rise to our relational claims do not matter in themselves, but because we cannot reasonably expect more from others than that they should recognize us as individuals whose interests are important and do their best to honor our claims against them.

3. Nonviolability, Dignity, Self-Respect

Recognition is what I earlier called a moralized compliance value. It is a value that is understood in essentially moral terms, and one that is realized when agents make a conscientious attempt to comply with the requirements of the relational right. But there are other moralized values that are associated with a relational conception of interpersonal morality, which we might refer to as moralized status values. I shall discuss two of them in this section.

Deontological theories, as we have seen, place constraints on an agent's pursuit of the good. The relational account is one of a family of views that trace these constraints to Hohfeld-style moral claim rights, which link claimholders with agents in a nexus of connected normative elements. According to this view, deontological constraints are defined by the principles that specify what we owe to each other as moral persons and by the corresponding claims we hold against each other. If you have a claim against me that I should do X on account of a promissory commitment I have made to you, that claim will place limits on what it is permissible for me to do, going forward, in pursuit of my projects and goals. Other views that incorporate Hohfeld-style claim rights deny that the principles that specify them define our moral obligations in the most basic sense. They allow that it might sometimes be permissible to do something that infringes another party's moral rights or (equivalently) to fail to comply with duties that are owed to the rightholder. But these views allow

that actions are often morally wrong because they would violate rights such as those that are invested in the promisee by a promissory commitment.

A normative scheme that incorporates Hohfeld-style rights or claims can be understood to confer on individuals a desirable status, which is sometimes referred to under the heading of inviolability (see, e.g., Kamm, 1996, chap. 10). Within this conception, the interests of individuals have a special kind of significance for the agency of others, grounding rights or claims that generally must be respected by those agents as they go about their business in the world. The assignment of rights and claims makes it the case that individuals are not available to be conscripted into serving the valuable ends of others. It is not merely that their interests need to be taken into account, for example, as potential sources of pleasure and pain that are entered into the hopper when agents calculate the aggregate benefits and harms of the courses of action it is open to them to perform. Rather, their interests give rise to claims that place limits on the options that are eligible for agents even to consider. An individual who bears rights and claims of this kind achieves some degree of normative protection from being inducted willy-nilly into the valuable projects of others, which is a status that we recognize to be valuable. It is related to other ideals, alluded to earlier, that are commonplaces of deontology, including the idea that agents should be able to justify themselves personally to the individuals affected by their actions, and the idea that those individuals are to be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means (see Kant, 2012; Nagel, 1972; Scanlon, 1998).

Talk of inviolability in connection with this normative status is potentially misleading, however. It suggests that moral rights or claims define deontological constraints that are absolutely binding, in the sense that it would be wrong to violate them whatever the consequences of so acting. There are some rights might plausibly be understood to be absolute in this sense, including perhaps rights against torture or sexual assault. But a moral structure that incorporates relational claims confers a valuable status on individuals even when their claims do not function to determine absolute constraints on agents' behavior. To return to the promising example, it seems permissible to fail to keep a promise to do X if, say, a personal emergency intrudes that raises the stakes dramatically in ways that could not have been anticipated when the promise was originally undertaken. Perhaps, someone in your household has a heart attack, for instance, and you are the only person on the scene who can drive them to the hospital. Even if promises ordinarily give rise to moral obligations, there are almost always circumstances that can be imagined in which it would not be strictly obligatory to do the thing you have promised to do.

The relational view I favor understands circumstances of this kind as ones in which the promisee no longer has a claim against the promisor to their X-ing, strictly speaking. Reasoning about whether it is permissible for the promisor not to do X is, on this conception, reasoning about the contours of the promisee's rights or claims. It is reasoning that helps to specify promissory rights and claims, which is at the same time reasoning about the content of the directed duties that determine what the promisor is morally permitted or obligated to do (see Wallace, Forthcoming; also Oberdieck, 2004, Zylberman, 2022). This contrasts with the alternative conception of Hohfeldian moral rights mentioned above, which interprets them as normative considerations that are inputs into deliberation about the moral right, and that may sometimes permissibly be infringed (see Thomson, 1986, 1990; also Wallace & Darwall, 2023). Proponents of the alternative conception would say that the promisee retains a right against the promisor in the emergency scenario sketched above, but that the promisor is not obligated to respect the promissory right, but is permitted to attend to the personal emergency rather than to keep their word to the promisee.

For present purposes, it is less important how these approaches differ from each other than what they have in common. Both of them allow that moral claims correlate with obligations that are not absolute, insofar as circumstances are conceivable in which those obligations would no longer obtain even though the claim-relevant interests of the claimholder persist. The promisee continues to have an interest in assurance, for instance, even when the promisor needs to attend to the unanticipated family emergency. Because relational claims are in this way not absolute, it is

potentially misleading to say that their assignment to an individual confers on them the status of inviolability.[10] Still, a moral structure that incorporates such relational entitlements provides a significant degree of protection against conscription into the valuable projects of others. Promissory obligations persist even if breaking a promise one has made would maximize the overall quantity of promissory fidelity in the world at large, and you should not kill an innocent person even if doing so would prevent a villain from killing five others. A moral structure of this kind, incorporating claims that generally function to constrain agents in their pursuit of valuable ends, renders intelligible widespread intuitions about the valuable status of moral persons. They are bearers of relational entitlements that make them, if not interpersonally inviolable, then at least nonviolable (as we might put it).

Nonviolability in this sense is a normative status. It consists in being a bearer of claims that ground firm limits on what agents are permitted to do in pursuit of the good, which is, of course, consistent with their being violated in practice by the wrongful mistreatment of agents who are willing to disregard the normative constraints that the claims of others impose on them. Agents who have been wronged in this way can attain a different status that we also recognize to be valuable, which may be referred to under the rubrics of dignity or self-respect. Unlike nonviolability, dignity and self-respect in the conception of them that I have in mind are performative statuses, in that they are realized only when the bearer of claims responds to their violation in recognizable ways. The kind of response at issue is one whereby the bearer of a claim that has been flouted or ignored stands up for themselves interpersonally, demanding that the claim should be recognized by the agent who wronged them. It involves the interpersonal assertion of a claim, a response whereby one insists on the importance of the claim by protesting against its violation on one's own behalf. By demanding in this way that others respect one's moral claims against them, one shows that one respects oneself, a performative status that can also be described as a form of interpersonal dignity.[11]

Dignity or self-respect in this performative sense is another moralized value, a social status that we recognize to be desirable and worthy of aspiration and esteem. But it is arguably not a status that is intelligible within all deontological conceptions of the moral right. It might be wrong for individuals to break their promises without special justification, not in the sense that they owe it to promisees to act in this way, but because it is simply wrong from the impartial point of view or because promisors owe it to god to keep their word in these circumstances. Deontological requirements that are understood in these terms might be ones that we could demand that agents comply with through reactive attitudes such as indignation, but these performances would have an impersonal character. We would be insisting that agents acknowledge the deontological constraints that they are subject to on behalf of the moral community (cf. Darwall, 2009; Darwall, 2013) or (perhaps) on behalf of God. The individuals who are adversely affected by wrongful conduct could, of course, also protest against it in this way. In doing so, however, they would not be reacting to wrongs on their own behalf, but protesting as representative members of the moral community or as spokespeople for God, which is a role that is in principle open to anyone to take up.

The relational account of interpersonal moral requirements makes space for a different performative response to wrongdoing, one that distinctively realizes the values of dignity and self-respect (cf. Feinberg, 1970). It does this by connecting those requirements constitutively with claims and rights that individuals hold against the agent, where disregard of the directed requirement is tantamount to a wrong that is done specifically to the claimholder. Requirements that are understood in these terms give claimholders a privileged basis for complaint about wrongful

[10]Thanks to Gopal Sreenivasan for pressing me to clarify this point.

[11]The term "dignity" is sometimes used to denote an elusive quality that allegedly grounds the basic equality of moral persons; on this idea, see Sangiovanni (2017). Performative dignity in the sense here at issue is something very different, a form of status that is not endemic to moral persons but is achieved by them in the way they respond to infractions against them. Important discussions of the performative status that I am calling dignity or self-respect include Hill (1995a, 1995b) and Bird (2010).

conduct that flouts their claims, and this opens space for a distinctive practice of performative claiming, one that involves the assertion of moral claims against agents in one's own name or on one's own behalf.[12]

Resentment and the behaviors to which it disposes a person are responses to wrongdoing that have an inherently positional aspect; they represent a way of standing up for oneself interpersonally, in ways that operationalize the valuable status of dignity and self-respect. The assignment of moral claims to individuals by relational principles of the moral right does not guarantee that individuals will achieve this valuable status. The claims that individuals hold need to be taken up and defended interpersonally by them, something they might not be willing or able to do for any number of reasons (including oppressive ideologies that deny the legitimacy of their anger at the injustices visited upon them). But their having claims that are disregarded through wrongful conduct makes available these performative ways of responding to such conduct in their own name; to that extent, it is a condition for the possibility of the valuable statuses that are at issue.

In this section, I have identified two moralized status values that are associated with a relational conception of morality: the normative status of inviolability and the performative status of dignity or self-respect. My next and final question is about the role of these status values within a philosophical theory of the right. What contribution might these values make to our understanding of interpersonal morality?

The status value of dignity or self-respect, being performative, is one that can be realized through exertions of claimholders' agency in response to acts that wrong them in particular. The value is thus at least potentially available to figure in the deliberations of agents, as a normative consideration that counts in favor of behaviors whereby they lodge a protest on their own behalf against actions that violate their entitlements. Nor is there anything in the nature of the performative value at issue that precludes it from playing this normative role. Granted, those of us who follow Strawson in emphasizing the role of the reactive attitudes in our practices of accountability will acknowledge an emotional element in the syndrome of responses to wrongdoing through which dignity and self-respect are realized. Our resentment at acts that inflict moral injuries on us is itself a way of asserting our claims interpersonally; we are already standing up for ourselves and demanding acknowledgment of our claims when we respond to their violation through resentment. Our reasons for these emotional responses, however, are given not by the values that they may help to realize but by the different considerations that make them fitting or warranted in the first place. It is the fact that you have been wronged that is your primary reason for resenting the agent who wronged you, and this fact is also what the emotion is about. Still, there is a question about agency in the vicinity of this reactive attitude, which is whether you are going to engage in the expressive and confrontational behaviors to which your resentment will dispose you. The value of dignity or self-respect could well have normative significance in this connection. If it would realize a valuable social status to express your resentment by standing up to the wrongdoer in protest and demanding acknowledgment of your claims, that is a perfectly good reason to engage in such behaviors.

The same cannot be said for the normative status value of nonviolability. This value is constituted by the assignment to individuals of moral claims and rights that function as hard constraints on what agents are permitted to do. Those claims have normative significance for agents, connected as they are with directed requirements that specify what we owe to each other. The moral structure within which nonviolability is realized is thus constituted through a set of interlocking duties and claims that function to set limits on the individual's pursuit of the good. We acknowledge that someone has this normative status by treating their claims against us as

[12]Other views that include Hohfeld-style claim rights can also arguably make sense of the performative value of dignity that is here at issue. These include the views discussed earlier in this section, which treat rights or claims as inputs into reasoning about what it is morally obligatory to do, rather than as considerations that define the contours of the moral right. This is the view of moral rights implicit in Joel Feinberg's influential discussion of the connections between rights, claiming, and dignity in Feinberg (1970).

constraints on our deliberations about what to do. But nonviolability itself is not something that is realized performatively, and so its value is not so much as available to function as a separate reason for action.

But there is a different kind of contribution that nonviolability can make to a philosophical story about morality, and it is a contribution that is shared with the other values I have identified and discussed, recognition and dignity or self-respect. All three of these are moralized values, insofar as we understand them essentially in terms of a prior conception of the requirements of the moral right. I have argued, furthermore, that they are fully intelligible only if we understand those requirements in relational terms, as defined by directed duties that are owed to individuals who have claims against agents to compliance with them. Thus, interpersonal recognition is a compliance value, realized when agents make a conscientious effort to live up to the obligations they owe to other individuals, which is the most plausible way of understanding what it is to recognize them as moral persons. Nonviolability is also best understood in relational terms. It is a normative status that is conferred on individuals by a moral structure that assigns them rights and claims against agents, which generally place firm limits on what it is permissible for those agents to do. Dignity or self-respect are moralized status values of a different kind. They have a performative dimension, insofar as they are realized only when individuals respond to moral infractions in a recognizable way, by standing up for themselves interpersonally. To make sense of these valuable performances, however, we need to understand the infractions to which they respond in relational terms, as actions that *wrong* the individual who protests. An individual claimholder who is wronged in this way has a privileged basis for complaint, and when they stand up to agents on account of such wrongs, they can be understood to be protesting wrongful conduct in their own name.

As I see things, philosophical ethics is an interpretative undertaking. It is an attempt to make sense of interpersonal morality, as a set of norms that have a special kind of normative significance for both agents and those who stand to be affected by their conduct, and that reflect in some way an ideal of basic equality. In *The Moral Nexus*, I offered an argument to the effect that the relational interpretation makes best sense of these aspects of modern morality, illuminating their significance as a ground of obligations in the perspective of agency and as a basis for social relations of interpersonal accountability (see Wallace, 2019, chaps. 1–3). But it is a further point in favor of the relational interpretation that it also helps us to understand the important moralized values that I have been discussing in this essay. We appreciate that it is valuable to stand in relations of interpersonal recognition with other people; we also appreciate the status values of nonviolability and dignity or self-respect. But these values become fully intelligible if morality has the normative structure that the relational interpretation ascribes to it. If, as I believe, it is a desideratum for a philosophical account of the moral right that it should help us to make sense of evaluative notions of these kinds, this is a strong additional reason for accepting the relational interpretation.[13]

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[13]For very helpful feedback on earlier versions of this material, I am grateful to audiences at the following institutions: the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Philosophie (25th Kongress), Indiana University, the Ohio State University, and the Workshop on Relational Ethics at the University of Toronto. I owe a special debt to Gopal Sreenivasan for his penetrating and forceful criticisms of the penultimate draft.

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Cite this article: Wallace, R. J. 2026. The Relational Right and the Good. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 56: e33, 1–15, doi:10.1017/can.2026.10074