

Darwall, Stephen, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. xii + 348, US\$49.95 (cloth).

In this ambitious and intricately-argued book, Darwall focuses on an aspect of our everyday moral practice, namely that we make claims and demands on one another. You might, for example, demand to someone stepping on your foot that he get off of it. In making this demand, you purport to give him a 'second-personal reason' for doing so, namely a normative reason that is 'grounded in (*de jure*) authority relations' [4] that you take to hold between you and him. Let us assume that, as he realizes, his getting off your foot would relieve pain and even result in a net decline of suffering in the world. He might as a result have a reason to do so. But in making your demand and, in Darwall's idiom, thereby addressing a second-personal reason to him [4, n.], you would not be appealing to that (agent-neutral) sort of reason for him to act. You would instead be appealing to your authority to demand that he do so.

From the seemingly modest starting point of this aspect of our moral practice, Darwall works toward some dramatic conclusions. The making of a claim or demand on another is subject to 'normative felicity conditions'. When we look carefully, and our vision has been enhanced by 'points' made by Fichte, Pufendorf, and Strawson among others, we see that no such claim or demand can be valid unless we presuppose a certain moral view, namely what Darwall calls 'morality as equal accountability'. According to it, 'moral norms regulate a community of equal, mutually accountable, free and rational agents as such'; these norms are "'laws" for

a “kingdom of ends,” which structure and define the equal dignity of persons as beings who may not be treated in some ways and must be treated in others and who have equal standing to demand this second-personally of one another’ [101]. If we take ourselves to make any valid second-personal claims or demands on one another, then we are, rationally speaking, committed to a Kantian view of morality. This is Darwall’s first main conclusion. Accepting it is consistent with embracing the possibility that we need never take ourselves to make ‘valid’ second-personal claims or the possibility that whenever we believe ourselves to have done so we are misguided. His second main conclusion, which he defends far more briefly and schematically than the first, is that we have good reasons for rejecting these possibilities. He tries to ‘vindicate the authority of moral obligation’ [x].

This latter project is necessary, argues Darwall, in light of Kant and contemporary Kantians’ failure to demonstrate the validity of the Categorical Imperative. Darwall claims that Kant’s attempt to do so in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section III, as well as Christine Korsgaard’s efforts to establish the Formula of Humanity with materials gleaned from *Groundwork* II, are doomed because they ‘aim to derive the moral law from presuppositions of a (first-person) deliberative standpoint alone’ [214]. It is only once we recognize the fundamentally second-personal nature of moral obligation that we are able to vindicate it.

It is not part of Darwall’s project to specify the particular normative implications of morality as equal accountability [300]. He does not try to pinpoint the ways persons must or must not be treated, according to this conception. But he does claim that his vision of morality is well-suited to serve as a foundation for contractualism, for example, for T. M. Scanlon’s account of what we owe to each other.

In his effort to establish the book’s main conclusions, Darwall appeals to a remarkable range of contemporary and historical work. He seems to be equally at home with Pufendorf or Fichte as he is with Gibbard or Rawls. His arguments are complex, and the dialectic is sometimes hard to navigate. (Referring to a conclusion he has just reached, Darwall writes: ‘This is Pufendorf’s Point from the addresser’s perspective projected through Fichte’s Analysis into the second-person framework in general’ [261].) So I am not sure I appreciate the full force of Darwall’s defence of his conclusions.

Part of the difficulty for me lies in discerning where historical interpretation (or reconstruction) ends and philosophical argument begins. For example, one of the claims Darwall affirms along the way to his first main conclusion is the following: if you take yourself to make any valid second-personal demand of another, you must hold that the other is capable of complying with the demand solely on the basis of its (in her view) being authoritative [76, 248]. Darwall invokes this claim in his attempt to show that addressing second-personal reasons always presupposes the dignity of persons [269–76], a key element in morality as equal accountability.

The truth of this claim is far from obvious. If you demand that someone get off your foot, you might (rationally speaking) presuppose that she can do so. But why would you presuppose that she has the ability to do so on the basis of your demand alone, instead, say, on the basis of it as well as her desires that you not be in pain and that she avoid an unpleasant altercation, or even on the basis of such desires alone? That in making your demand you are appealing to your authority does not obviously entail that in making it you must assume that your addressee can act solely on that

authority. Darwall suggests that the Cambridge Platonist Cudworth affirms the claim [77–78], and near the end of a ‘second-personal interpretation’ of Kant’s ‘fact of reason’ he contends that Kant is committed to it as well [241]. But I am left unsure why we, who do not necessarily share their elaborate philosophical frameworks, should join them.

A second important claim Darwall makes along the way to the conclusion that our believing that we make any valid second-personal demands commits us to a Kantian vision of morality is that act-consequentialist justifications of moral obligation are bound to fail. If I understand his argument for this claim, then it also seems questionable. The argument seems to unfold as follows. We cannot justify the notion that it would be wrong for an agent to do something unless we justify what is built into the very idea that it would be wrong. The idea that an agent is morally accountable for doing something is built into the idea that his doing it is wrong [92–4, 99]. But, as Strawson’s work on reactive attitudes has shown us, moral accountability necessarily involves second-personal demands, for example, ‘You owe me an apology’ [70–4]. So we cannot justify the notion that it would be wrong for an agent to do something unless we justify the (legitimate) second-personal claims against the person that necessarily go along with his action’s being wrong. But now suppose we hold the act-consequentialist view that the wrongness of an agent’s action is just a function of its failing to promote good states of affairs. This proposed justification for the wrongness of the agent’s action would fail to justify the (legitimate) second-personal claims someone (perhaps even the agent himself) would make against him. It offers a reason of the wrong kind for such claims [91, 103]. For example, an agent owes you an apology for stomping on your foot not on the grounds that doing so failed to maximize the good, but rather on (something like) the grounds that his doing so amounted to a failure to respect you. So, ends the argument, the act-consequentialist view cannot justify the notion that it would be wrong for an agent to do something.

To mention one possible criticism of this argument, it is unclear why we need to endorse the second premise, namely the view that moral accountability or responsibility is conceptually tied to moral wrongness. Darwall suggests that, upon reflection, we do not hold people responsible unless ‘they had it within them to act as they should, not just in the sense that . . . they weren’t physically prevented, but that there was a process of reasoning they could have engaged in by which they could have . . . determined themselves to act as they should’ [241]. Suppose we accept this condition. It does not seem to be self-contradictory or conceptually incoherent for us to claim that someone who fails to fulfill it has nevertheless acted wrongly. A 16th-century Aztec might not have had a deliberative route available to him that would have led to his treating captive enemy soldiers decently. But it does not seem to be conceptually confused to say that his torturing them was wrong.

In any case, Darwall’s book is interesting, sophisticated, and provocative. He has advanced the debate on the foundations of ethics by underscoring the importance of second-personal reasons. Philosophers will engage with the ideas he foregrounds for many years to come.

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