

Moral friends? The idea of the moral relationship

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Abstract

What role do human relationships play within the moral domain? There appears to be a lot of agreement that relationships play an important role in and for morality, but certainly not any foundational one. Yet, there has been a recent interest in seeking to explain the foundation of morality in relational terms. According to these relational proposals, the very foundation of impartial morality, and in particular the domain of “what we owe to each other” can be found in the same normative structures that are characteristic of interpersonal relationships and the partial reasons they give rise to. This suggestion has been met with serious criticism, according to which any seeming appeal to a so-called moral relationship does no work in grounding morality and the obligations that we owe to each other. The present paper intends to challenge this conclusion by arguing that the objections rendered are not decisive, as a result of which we can begin to make sense of the idea that we do share a reason-giving relationship with each other in the moral sphere. The moral relationship, the paper argues, is one we simply share with each other in virtue of our shared vulnerability to attitudinal injury as rational agents.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

What role do human relationships play within the moral domain? One might well want to grant that they play an important, albeit not any foundational, role. After all, the hallmark of morality is its impartiality, universality and an impersonal point of view, all of which stand in seemingly direct opposition to the partiality, particularity, and a deeply personal point of view that are characteristic of human relationships and other forms of “thick” involvements. Only by taking up the impartial and impersonal moral point of view and acting in accordance with the universal reasons derived from it, do we respect and treat each and every person as our *moral* equal, or so a standard story goes (Hare, 1981; Kant, 1785/2012; Mill, 1861/1998; Nagel, 1986; Parfit, 2011). At best, morality has to make room for “thick” involvements and personal relationships, at worst, however, these “thick” involvements and the partial reasons they give rise to threaten to undermine the impartial and universal nature of morality. In either case, the core assumption is that morality and relationships are fundamentally different sources of normative considerations: the latter giving rise to relationship-dependent and the former to *relationship-independent* reasons.

Yet, there has been a recent and to some extent renewed interest in seeking to explain the foundation of morality in relational terms. According to these relational proposals, the very foundation of the interpersonal sphere of morality can be located in the same normative structures that are characteristic of interpersonal relationships and the reasons of partiality it gives rise to.¹ Moral reasons, on this view, are constitutively linked with the valid claims of our fellow moral beings. In turn, any violations of the requirements flowing from these reasons are best understood as wrongings and impairments of a basic relationship, with blame best understood as a backward-looking attitude that captures these wrongings and impairments. Ultimately, what underlies these relational proposals is the anti-consequentialist spirit that what morality should be most fundamentally concerned with is not that we bring something about, but first and foremost how as persons we *relate to* one another (Darwall, 2006; Scanlon, 1998; Wallace, 2013, 2019).

Of these relational proposals, T.M. Scanlon's contractualism in particular seeks to understand morality as being grounded in a valuable human relationship (Scanlon, 1998). What is central to the morality of “what we owe to each other” is that we act only on reasons that cannot be reasonably rejected by another and thereby maintain a relation of mutual recognition, the latter of which reflects the value we place on “the importance for us of being ‘in unity with our fellow creatures’” (Scanlon, 1998, p. 154). Fundamental to these ideas is Scanlon's conviction that the morality of “what we owe to each other” is deeply interpersonal, insofar as our moral reasons correspond to the reasons of others “which have to do with the claims and status of individuals in certain positions” (Scanlon, 1998, p. 219). Eventually, Scanlon suggests that moral reasons are internal to a relationship and as such belong to the class of *relationship-dependent* reasons, a class of reasons typically associated with exclusive personal and partial relationships like friendship or other “thick” involvements:

The contractualist ideal of acting in accord with principles that others (similarly motivated) could not reasonably reject is meant to characterize the relation with others the value and appeal of which underlies our reasons to do what morality requires. This relation, much less personal than friendship, might be called a relation of mutual recognition. Standing in this relation to others is appealing in itself – worth seeking for its own sake. A moral person will refrain from lying to others, cheating, harming, or exploiting them, ‘because these things are wrong.’ But for such a person these requirements are not just formal imperatives; they are aspects of the positive value of a way of living with others (Scanlon, 1998, p. 162)

Among others, Samuel Scheffler (Scheffler, 2010) has prominently called into question the very prospect of such a relationship-dependent account of morality that aims to explain the normative content and the motivational force of moral reasons in terms of a certain kind of relationship that holds among persons in the moral sphere.

While Scheffler takes relational accounts of morality to be promising in explaining the normative source of certain moral reasons in terms of relational normative structures that appear analogous to the normative structures of human relationships, Scheffler questions whether we can explain the occurrence of these relational normative structures in the moral sphere by appeal to genuine human relationship. Whereas we can, for example, appeal to the valuable relationship of friendship in order to explain why John owes it to his friend Lou to visit her at the hospital, we cannot appeal to such a valuable relationship in order to explain why I owe it to you not to step on your foot. After all, we are not moral friends, let alone with just about everybody with whom we together traverse the moral universe.

The present paper intends to challenge this conclusion by arguing that none of the worries raised by Scheffler and other ultimately succeed in calling into question the idea of the moral relationship as a reason-giving relationship. In offering this defense of the idea of a moral relationship, the paper will critically assess the standard view of relationship-constitution. According to the standard view, reason-giving relationships among individuals are paradigmatically constituted by a certain degree of individuation and historical- and attitudinal robustness. Even where this is not the case, human relationships characteristically bear at least the relevant psychological salience that renders them significant and meaningful, and thus reason-giving.

Against the standard-view, the paper argues that we should make room for the idea that we can share a basic reason-giving relationship with each other in the moral sphere that simply holds in virtue of certain facts about persons as sources of valid claims and a shared vulnerability to attitudinal injury and, more specifically, recognitional harm. Thus, on the one hand the paper identifies as the constitutive feature of the moral relationship simply a fact that is shared by its participants, similar to the fact that being a citizen of a given nation state places us in a reason-giving relationship with our fellow citizens—the fact of being a rational being. This does away with the worry that only so-called robust relationships count as genuine reason-giving relationships. On the other hand, the paper identifies as the significance feature that provides the moral relationship with the relevant salience, a shared vulnerability to attitudinal injury and recognitional harm; a vulnerability that is characteristic of other reason-giving human relationships, like friendship, as well. That is to say, while constituted differently from friendship, the moral relationship shares with this robust relationship a salience feature that enables it to ultimately render the moral relationship a significant human relationship. This does away with the worry that the moral relationship is not a meaningful, and thus reason-giving, relationship.

Despite the arguments offered in the paper, it is nevertheless important to note that the ambition of the paper is modest: to do away with central worries that have so far stood in the way of making conceptual space for the idea of the moral relationship, thus laying the groundwork for a more complete account of that relationship. The hope is that this will spur further investigation into the idea that moral obligations, at least those that we can be said to owe to each other, are best understood to belong to the class of relationship-dependent obligations.

I begin by (Sections 2 and 3) outlining the main worries that beset the idea of a moral relationship by drawing in particular on the work of Samuel Scheffler. I will answer each of these worries (Sections 4 and 5) by drawing on some of Scanlon's later arguments from *Moral Dimensions* (Scanlon, 2008), in which he further elaborates on the idea of a basic moral relationship. I then consider (Section 6) yet another worry that appears to stand in the way of making good on the idea of the moral relationship. Eventually, I will (Section 7) propose an answer to this latest worry and in doing so delineate a positive proposal as to what the moral relationship might reasonably look like, thereby lending support to the thought that all rational beings share a basic, yet significant, moral relationship with each other that merits further exploration.

2 | RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ROBUSTNESS WORRY

Samuel Scheffler has, among others,² voiced his reservations about the possibility of locating moral reasons in the same structures of normativity that are characteristic of friendship or other valuable personal relationships. At the

heart of Scheffler's reservation stands the claim that appeal to any sort of normatively basic relationship turns out to be explanatorily inert with regard to our moral reasons, because we simply do not share such a relationship with each other in the moral sphere. Moral reasons, according to Scheffler, do not belong to the class of *relationship-dependent* reasons.

Let me briefly outline the two most fundamental worries that Scheffler has concerning the analogy between personal relationships like friendship and the relation of mutual recognition, both of which seem to support his core claim that morality is relationship-independent. There are, to begin with, many different kinds of relations people can stand in to one another. Among these relations is the relation of standing to another person in virtue of some shared property, as, for example, one's height, weight, or hair color. These property-relations are distinct from what we ordinarily call *relationships*. While the latter are reason-giving, the former are normatively inert. Hence, while I might have a very good reason to help Jane in virtue of sharing a friendship with her, the fact that I relate to John as being taller than him does not tell me anything as to how I ought to treat John.³ But what exactly does this difference between relations and *relationships* come down to?

Part and parcel of what it means to stand in a personal relationship with another person is that one knows of or is aware of the other and has a shared history of engagement with the other. Thus, we can identify the following elements as constitutive of personal relationships. First, a relationship always holds between two particular individuals and is consequently what we may call a face-to-face relationship. As Niko Kolodny puts it, personal “[r]elationships are individuated by the identities of their participants; they cannot survive substitution of their participants” (Kolodny, 2003, p. 148). Although property-relations can certainly satisfy the particularity condition, it is the second constitutive condition of genuine relationships that ultimately distinguishes the latter from the former; human relationships are characterized as “ongoing bonds between individuals who have a shared history that usually includes patterns of engagement and forms of mutual familiarity, attachment, and regard developed over time.” They are, as Scheffler puts it, “robust” (Scheffler, 2010, p. 115). It does hence not suffice for two people to momentarily obtain some relation without any “historical pattern of attitudes and actions between [them].” (Kolodny, 2003, p. 148). Only when the relevant conditions—persistence over time, individuation, a shared history, and patterns of engagement and interlocking attitudes—are met do people “have a relationship” with another person as opposed to merely “standing in some relation” to one another (Scheffler, 2010, p. 115). According to Scheffler, it is these relationships that are “among the most basic objects of human valuation,” and consequently reason-giving:

A valuable relationship [like friendship] transforms the needs and desires of the participants into reasons for each to act on behalf of the other in suitable contexts. At the same time, it gives each of them reasons to form certain normative expectations of the other, and to complain if these expectations are not met...These two sets of reasons – reasons for action on the one hand and reasons to form normative expectations of the other – are two sides of the same coin. They are constitutively linked and *jointly generated* by the relationship between its participants (Scheffler, 2010, p. 110).

Scheffler initially wonders how people can stand in a relation of mutual recognition “if they have never met or interacted, will never meet or interact, and do not even know of each other's existence” (Scheffler, 2010, p. 121) The worry is that it looks more and more like the relation of mutual recognition that Scanlon is referring to is merely one that holds in virtue of the property of being able to justify our actions to each other and thus denotes a property relation-to that is not reason-giving in the relevant sense. Thus, we can formulate Scheffler's first worry as follows:

Robustness Worry: Only so-called robust interpersonal relations – constituted by *ongoing bonds* between *particular individuals* with a *shared history of patterns of engagement* – give rise to a valuable human *relationship* and hence present themselves as sources of reasons to its participants. Relations of mutual recognition are not constituted in this way. Instead, relations of mutual recognition merely denote a property relation.

Accordingly, it is not at all clear that “there is enough substantively in common between the relation of mutual recognition and a robust personal relationship like friendship to support an analogy between the reason-giving characteristics of each.” (Scheffler, 2010, p. 122).⁴

3 | THE ACTUALITY WORRY

Implicit in the Robustness Worry is yet another worry that Scheffler is explicit in separating out (Scheffler, 2010, p. 121). According to this worry, only actual and ongoing relationships present the participants with a source of value that “transforms the needs and desires of its participants into reasons for each to act on behalf of the other in suitable contexts” and consequently into relationship-dependent reasons that correspond to the reasonable expectations of the other (Scheffler, 2010, p. 110). Although friendship clearly does present us with a case of an actual relationship and as a paradigm model of how the relevant normative structures giving rise to relationship-dependent reasons emerge, the relation of mutual recognition does not in fact refer to an actual relationship at all. Rather, the Scanlonian relation of mutual recognition is, according to Scheffler, merely an “ideal and prospective” relationship that we might be able to stand in with each other just in case we conform to the contractualist requirement of mutual justifiability (Scheffler, 2010, p. 123). Scanlon himself appears to confirm the ideal nature of the relation of mutual recognition when he states “[t]he contractualist ideal of acting in accord with principles that others (similarly motivated) could not reasonably reject is meant to characterize the relation with others *the value and appeal* of which underlies our reasons to do what morality requires.” We might have reason to be participants in the moral relationship, because we can discern its intrinsic value-appeal, and thus understand that acting in accordance with contractualist requirement of mutual justifiability enables us to do so. But having reasons *to be* a participant in the moral relationship is of course very different from saying that moral reasons are reasons of a moral relationship we already *are* participants of (Scheffler, 2010, p. 122). Accordingly, the worry is that moral reasons are merely *relationship-constituting* reasons, but never *relationship-dependent* reasons:

To be sure, contractualism as Scanlon presents it, with its emphasis on the justifiability of one's actions to others who are affected by them, coheres smoothly with an interpretation of the deontic character of morality that links it to structures of reciprocal or bipolar normativity, in which reasons for action are constitutively connected to grounds for privileged complaint. But in the case of valued personal relationships like friendship, the value of the relationship provides an explanation of how these structures of reciprocal normativity arise. The appeal to relations of mutual recognition does not play a comparably explanatory role, for the relations are not actual, ongoing human relationships at all (Scheffler, 2010, p. 123)

Let us help ourselves to what I shall call *the hope case* to fully grasp the force of Scheffler's worry here and the important distinction between relationship-constituting and relationship-dependent reasons. Suppose I just met Jane at a party the other night and have heard from Chris, a mutual friend, that she's been hospitalized. I might find myself sitting at home, gazing at the painting on the wall when it strikes me that I have a good reason to visit Jane. I had a great time with her at the party and both of us seemed keen on spending time together again in the near future. We might say that both of us *hope* to become friends or that doing so is our *ideal*, something that we each desire and strive for. But, of course, we are not yet friends. That is, we do not yet share a relevant relationship that “transforms our needs and desires of the participants into reasons for each to act on behalf of the other in suitable contexts,” as a result of which none of us has any expectations that are constitutively linked with the reasons of the other in the relevant sense. Accordingly, Jane might very well be disappointed if I do not show up, but she does not thereby have any reason to blame me for my no-show. For, were Jane to do so and in fact call me up, angrily complaining that I never came by, I might be somewhat thrown off and actually reconsider my desire to become friends with her.⁵

What would explain this reaction of mine not only as intuitively plausible but also as justified is the fact that Jane lacks the relevant standing to make such a demand of me and blame me in case I fail to comply with it in the first place. Appealing merely to her own desire to become friends with me as the reason for blaming me for my alleged failure to check on her simply amounts to a wrong kind of reason for holding me so accountable.⁶

That being said, we might both have reason to act in a way that accords concern to the other to reach this ideal. We might in fact act in accordance with principles that neither of us could reasonably reject and hence accord the other some kind of standing in our individual deliberation. I might think to myself, ‘maybe I should keep Jane some company. After all Jane might expect this of me if we were to become friends’. Similarly, Jane might think that ‘Jonas should keep me some company’. After all, we’ve just been spending the evening talking and I told him that ‘I hate being by myself’. But in doing so, we each do not yet thereby respond to relationship-dependent reasons that are constitutively linked with the expectations of the other. Quite to the contrary, we are at best responding to relationship-constituting reasons.⁷ As a result, we can state Scheffler’s second worry as follows:

Actuality Worry: For a reason to belong to the class of relationship-dependent reasons, it must stem from an *actual* and *ongoing* personal relationship that is of value to its participants, not from an ideal or prospective relationship that is yet to be realized. The relation of mutual recognition at best denotes an ideal or prospective relationship and is therefore not a source of genuinely relationship-dependent reasons.

4 | RESPONDING TO THE ACTUALITY WORRY—NORMATIVE IDEALS AND GROUND-RELATIONSHIPS

In the following, I address and respond to each of these two worries in order to ultimately vindicate and defend the claim that we do after all stand in a moral relationship with each other, the value of which we *respond* and not merely contribute to by acting morally. I will do so by arguing (a) that the moral relationship denotes an actual, rather than merely an ideal, relationship and (b) argue that this relationship bears significant resemblance to other valuable human relationships that ground structures of relational normativity, despite the fact that it holds among members of the moral community, including distant strangers.

I begin by addressing Scheffler’s second worry—the Actuality Worry. To I will here only begin to answer this worry by highlighting an important distinction, before completing the answer in Section 7 of the paper. Although Scheffler’s worry targets in particular Scanlon’s account of the relation of mutual recognition as presented in *What We Owe to Each Other*, it will be helpful to here consider Scanlon’s more mature conception of the moral relationship as presented in *Moral Dimensions* (Scanlon, 2008). Doing so will eventually help to allay Scheffler’s worry. According to Scanlon, the moral relationship “is fully realized when we are moved to act in a way that is justifiable to others and this concern is also reciprocated.”⁸ But more importantly for our purposes, he suggests that “good moral relations with others” involve exhibiting concern for the other and being “pleased when we hear of things going well for them;” Ultimately Scanlon concludes that it is “[t]hese attitudes and dispositions [that] define what I am calling the moral relationship: the kind of mutual concern that, ideally, we all have toward other rational beings” (Scanlon, 2008, p. 140). So understood, the moral relationship is seemingly constituted by a shared set of attitudes. But how far does this proposal get us? Once again, we might think that all Scanlon is doing here is to describe an ideal relationship that we should all try to bring about, but not one that we do already share with each other.⁹ After all, how plausible is it to believe that everyone always exhibits the relevant attitudes towards each other in the moral sphere? The Actuality Worry is set to reoccur.

I shall now argue that this conclusion is mistaken, insofar as it is built on the failure to observe an important distinction—that between a particular *ground-relationship* and its (higher order) *normative ideals* or standards, the latter of which specify the attitudes and expectations that individuals should have towards each other whenever they

share the relevant ground relationship with each other (Scanlon, 2008, p. 139).¹⁰ In describing the moral relationship as a relationship characterized by some shared set of attitudes, for example, exhibiting concern for the justifiability of reasons towards others, Scanlon simply describes the (higher order) normative ideal of the ground moral relationship. In other words, he describes the governing standards that apply to the relevant ground relationship and determine how its participants should behave toward each other.

Before I say more about the constitution of the ground-moral relationship in Section 7 of the paper, let me here elaborate a bit more on the notion of normative ideals. This constitutes part of the answer to the Actuality Worry, an answer that will only be completed in Section 7 later on when I attempt to provide a first articulation of the moral relationship as a ground relationship. To do so, let us consider friendship again: given that two particular individuals share a friendship with each other, certain normative ideals or standards apply. In the case of friendship, the relevant ideals or standards include something like ‘concern for the other,’ ‘interests in her projects,’ the ‘desire to help and support the other in her undertakings,’ ‘loyalty,’ ‘trust,’ and so on. Being a *good* friend to someone involves adhering to these ideals and to exhibit the appropriate attitudes. Failure to do so amounts to being a bad friend, as a result of which one’s friendship with another person can be impaired.

Analogously, we might think that however the moral relationship is constituted, a certain class of normative standards or ideals also applies to it. Some of these standards might include the following: its participants should act only in ways that are justifiable to the other and “be pleased when we hear things going well for another” (Scanlon, 2008, p. 140). Morality, so understood, is simply “a normative ideal, like a normative ideal of friendship that specifies attitudes and expectations that we should have whenever certain conditions are fulfilled” (Scanlon, 2008, p. 139). It is against the background of these normative ideals that the moral relationship can be better or worse, realized or impaired.

This, of course, tells us nothing yet about the kind of ground-relationship that we share with each other in the moral sphere. I will say more about the actual ground-relationship in Section 7 of the paper. What is important for our purposes right now, however, is that it does importantly *not rule out* the possibility of identifying the relevant ground-relationship to which this normative ideal applies and thus allay the Actuality Worry. Once we pay attention to the distinction between particular instances of relationships and their respective normative ideals and understand that in describing the normative ideal of a relationship we are not thereby describing the conditions in virtue of which the relationship holds, nothing is ruled out with regards to referring to the normative ideal of the moral relationship as that of an actual rather than a prospective or ideal relationship. What remains to be seen, of course, is to what sort of ground-relationship the higher order normative ideal of morality applies to. And it is here that the initial worry—the Robustness Worry—comes back into play. Can the moral relationship be conceived of as a genuine human relationship, such that it bears significant resemblance to ordinary personal relationships like friendship, to which certain normative ideals or standards apply?

5 | RESPONDING TO THE ROBUSTNESS WORRY—RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR CONSTITUTION

What then could the ground relationship look like to which the above-mentioned normative ideal of morality applies? Appeal to friendship, which is itself constituted by a shared set of interlocking attitudes will not be of help here. Quite to the contrary, it would further raise doubts about the supposed analogy between personal relationships and the moral relationship. But are all genuine relationships constituted in this attitude-dependent way? Here is Scanlon again:

Insofar as one assumes that any relationship must, like friendship, be constituted by the parties’ attitudes, this provides a...reason for thinking it inappropriate to say that morality defines a relationship that holds even between total strangers. But this assumption is mistaken. The conditions in virtue of

which relationships exist, and the relevant normative standards therefore apply, do not always involve the parties' attitudes toward one another (Scanlon, 2008, p. 149).

Scanlon himself appeals to the parent–child relationship as the paradigm example of such an *attitude-independent* relationship. In contrast to friendship, the parent–child relationship does not depend for its constitution on a set of shared or interlocked attitudes of its participants. Rather, it can hold independent of these attitudes and in virtue of certain facts about its participants. More so, whether or not a parent (or a child for that matter) displays the relevant attitudes towards the child (or the parent) is explanatorily insignificant with regards to the constitution of the relationship in question and the normative standards applying to it.¹¹

What seems to be normatively significant in the parent–child case is, at least partly, a certain degree of dependence on the parts of the children for the care of their parents and not any shared attitudes. There are possibly many other instances of such attitude-independent relationships. Just think about other familial relationships or the doctor-patient relationship, the student-teacher relationship, and various other forms of institutional relationships that clearly count as human relationships. All of these relationships are instances of so-called attitude-independent relationships. Despite the fact that they are attitude-independent, all of these relationships can well be of value to its participants and therefore give rise to special reasons that are determined by the relevant normative standard of the respective relationship. Hence, they all present us with instances of relationships that give rise to *relationship-dependent* reasons.

I now want to suggest that the moral relationship is an instance of such an attitude-independent relationship, which is simply constituted by certain general facts about each person: the fact that we are rational agents “that are capable of understanding and responding to reasons” (Scanlon, 2008, p. 139). This relationship “holds universally, of all rational agents.” Whereas the normative ideal or standard of the parent–child relationship gives rise to, among other things, the requirement to care for one's children and to support them in their endeavors, morality supplies the relevant normative ideal for the moral relationship and asks of its participants to develop attitudes such as “being pleased when we hear of things going well for them.”

The apparent analogy between the parent–child relationship and the moral relationship remains specious, however. Although both the parent–child relationship and the moral relationship are attitude-independent relationships, the parent–child relationship is, unlike the moral relationship, a robust human relationship. Thus, while the parent–child relationship is unlike friendship insofar as it does not depend on a shared set of interlocking attitudes for its constitution, it is nevertheless a robust relationship in that it is characterized by a shared history of engagement, and, most importantly, individuated by its participants, such that it cannot survive substitution of their participants.

The moral relationship, on the other hand, does not bear this kind of robustness, as a result of which it does appear that the moral relationship is no more than a thin property-relation that holds between persons in virtue of some shared characteristic. This brings us all the way back to the Robustness Worry.¹²

Let me now turn to answering the Robustness Worry. In doing so, I shall argue that robustness is neither sufficient nor necessary for the constitution of a genuine relationship. To see why it is not sufficient, let us consider the following case: every morning I'm standing next to the same person on the tube. Although I might not share a relationship with this person, I do seem to share a relation with the person that bears some historical dimension and is certainly one that is individuated by the two of us standing next to each other on the tube every morning. At the same time, we would clearly not count this ongoing relation-to of standing next to each other on the tube as an instance of a human relationship *with* someone. This is so, I believe, even if we grant some shared pattern of engagement, say, a mutual nod of the head. Hence, robustness does not appear to be sufficient for the constitution of a personal relationship.

Next, let us turn to the question of whether robustness is necessary for the constitution of a genuine human relationship. I shall argue that it is not. For there are, besides friendship and the parent–child relationship—both of which incorporate different degrees of robustness—other human relationships that lack this feature altogether, yet

count as substantive and valuable human relationships that provide its participants with a unique set of relationship-dependent reasons.

To begin with, let us shift our focus to the socio-political sphere. It is here that we can identify a relationship without robustness that we share with others and which grounds relational normative structures that in turn give rise to relationship-dependent reasons. More specifically, I have in mind the relationship that we share with our fellow citizens.¹³ As a fellow citizen I might have, among others, reason to vote, to recycle my trash, or to pay my taxes. These reasons present themselves in the form of an obligation to me insofar as they are constitutively linked to the reasonable expectations or valid claims of my fellow citizens by means of public institutional settings that govern the socio-political interactions between the citizens. That is, all of these reasons are grounded in relational structures of normativity that the citizen relationship provides a foundation for; they are a set of *relationship-dependent* reasons, or as Nicholas Southwood puts it, “reasons of democratic citizenship” (Southwood, 2010, p. 123). Similar to the other relationships previously considered, a particular set of normative ideals will apply to the relationship that we share with others as fellow citizens.¹⁴ And it is these normative ideals, in turn, which determine what is required of us to be “good citizens” and how failure to act exhibit the proper attitudes and act in accordance with these ideals amounts to an impairment of the citizen relationship.

Contrary to friendship or the parent–child relationship, the citizen relationship is clearly not characterized by its voluntariness, exclusive nature, or robustness, but instead by its involuntary inclusivity—the relationship simply includes the many citizens of a given nation-state. The citizen-relationship does not depend for its constitution on “ongoing” bonds, “shared history of patterns of engagement” or face-to-face interaction between its participants. In fact, participants of this relationship do not necessarily need to know (of) each other or have interacted in any direct way with each other at all in order to be participants of this relationship. While I'm sitting here in my office, writing this paper, I might well be aware of my fellow citizens in the rest of the country, but have hardly known or come across any of them. Instead, participation of this relationship is mediated through various socio-political institutional settings and its accompanying normative standards. More importantly for our purposes, however, is that the citizen relationship so understood simply holds in virtue of a certain fact about individuals, namely that fact that they are citizens in a given nation state.¹⁵

Another instance of an inclusive relationship is the cooperative or what I call shared-project relationship. Such a relationship might well hold among a large number of people; between certain groups of, say, the scientific community. As such, I take it, we can easily imagine researchers or research groups at various academic or other scientific institutions being engaged in a shared project or cooperative venture, say that of identifying a vaccine against a global pandemic. Although members of the different groups and laboratories might never actually come across each other and sometimes only read the relevant publications of the other groups, it strikes me as plausible to think that these groups do share a genuine relationship with their fellow researchers who are spread across the globe. They do so, because of their common pursuit of a shared project—finding a vaccine. As with all the other relationships, a certain set of normative standards applies to the project-relationship as well, which in turn provide the researchers with reasons to act accordingly and to form certain intentions towards and expectations of one another. These reasons possibly include, among many others, reasons to share relevant information with the fellow researchers, to involve everyone in important decisions regarding the next research phase, and not take advantage of the work of others for one's own benefit.¹⁶

Now, one might think that something like the shared-project relationship is in part constituted by a certain element of robustness. After all, we could contend that someone might only count as sharing a relationship with others of the relevant kind if and only if one is aware of others doing the same thing, and doing it jointly, and is affected by the others (and vice versa) in carrying out the project. All of this, then, seems to constitute ongoing bonds and a shared history of engagement, at least minimally; hence robustness must come in.

Let us note, however, that it would be a mistake to identify the bonds and histories of engagement characteristic of the shared project relationship with the robustness of, say, friendship that Scheffler has in mind. For one, any awareness of the other needs and often can only be *de dicto* in the case of the shared project relationship; one might

know *that* other researchers are engaged in the same project without knowing *of* anyone in particular. In the case of friendship, this awareness must always be *de re*, that is, awareness of another individual in particular. And it is in virtue of a relationship like friendship that Scheffler thinks of robustness. Accordingly, a robust relationship must always satisfy the particularity-condition, that is, hold between two particular individuals. It is not clear that in the case of the shared project relationship one even knows of all the particular individuals involved, rather than merely *that* there are other individuals involved. That is to say, one might know that there are other individuals at a different venue involved, but not who these individuals are. To make this point more explicit, just consider the following: researcher A from Lab X might come across researcher B from lab Y. Neither A nor B might be aware of the other sharing the project of finding a vaccine. Only after talking to each other might A and B become aware of the other being engaged in the same project, finding out that they do stand in a shared-project relationship. That is to say, we find neither an ongoing bond nor a shared history between A and B. At the same time, A and B can plausibly be said to *already* share a relationship with each other. Contrast this with friendship, in which case A and B need already be aware of the other as someone with whom one shares an ongoing bond and a history; both of the latter are in fact constitutive of friendship. As such, we can conclude that the shared-project relationship need not include robustness, certainly not at the constitutive level.¹⁷

With these considerations in mind, it looks as though Scheffler's conception of which relationships can be reason-giving is incomplete. The condition of robustness does not appear necessary for the constitution of various human relationships that can present us with distinct sources of reasons. As a result, Scheffler's initial worry seems to be unfounded, at least if understood as a general worry regarding the very notion of what gives rise to a reason-giving human relationship. All that we can infer from Scheffler's worries is simply the fact that we cannot model the moral relationship on an exclusive personal relationship like friendship. And that seems fair enough.

Now that we have seen how the robustness component ceases to be fundamental to a reason-giving human relationship, the conception of the moral relationship as a relationship that holds simply in virtue of certain facts about individuals seems that much more plausible. In fact, one might now hold that the analogy between a human relationship and the moral relationship is perfectly accurate, insofar as the moral relationship is just another instance of an inclusive reason-giving relationship that holds in virtue of certain facts about a set of individuals. Accordingly, the reasons we have to treat others in ways that reflect principles that others cannot reasonably reject might after all turn out to be relationship-dependent reasons that emerge from the moral relationship we share with others. That is to say, similar to civic duties corresponding in part to the reasonable expectations of fellow citizens, one's moral obligations correspond to the reasonable expectations and claims of what we might now call one's fellow *moral* citizens.

6 | THE SIGNIFICANCE WORRY

Reason for doubt, however, still lingers. For, as he makes clear in other work, Scheffler in fact agrees that the citizen—and possibly also the shared-project relationship present us with instances of genuine human relationships.¹⁸ But in contrast to the moral relationship, the citizen—and shared-project relationship both are “socially salient connection among people” and as such relationships (Scheffler, 1997, p. 198). This is just to say that these relationships are significant or meaningful for their participants. As participants of those relationships we are in some sense invested in a way that goes beyond just sharing a certain property with each other. But what exactly makes us so invested? In what sense are those relationships meaningful?

Very roughly, the idea behind this is that participants of friendship, the parent–child relationship, the citizen—or the shared-project relationship are in some socially or psychologically relevant sense *tied* or *bound* to each other. Let us consider the citizen relationship once again; as citizens, even if we do not know each other, we identify ourselves as a member of a nation state and as such with our fellow citizens, which in turn has a significant effect upon our self-conception. Consider also in this context R. Jay Wallace, who holds:

We understand ourselves as members of nations and variously local communities, and these kinds of self-understanding shape our identities in significant ways. They can influence, for instance, our passions and interests, our conceptions of what is good to eat and fun to do, our feelings of comfort and security, and so on. Nothing like this seems to be true of our shared identity as rational agents. We do not think of ourselves as having ‘ties’ to other people solely in virtue of our sharing with them the property of rationality; this is not an aspect of our self-conception, a description with the kind of social and psychological salience that can help to shape our sense of who we are. (Wallace, 2011, p. 361)

Against the background of these elaborations, we can put the latest worry that besets any attempt to articulate and vindicate the idea of the moral relationship as follows:

Significance Worry: Human relationships are only those interpersonal relations that are significant or meaningful, insofar as they bear some *social- or psychological salience*. The moral relationship does not bear any social- or psychological salience and is hence not reason a reason-giving relationship.¹⁹

7 | A FIRST ARTICULATION OF THE MORAL RELATIONSHIP

It is here that I wish to answer this latest worry and eventually propose an initial account of the moral relationship. To begin with, I want to suggest that human relationships receive their significance or social-and psychological salience from the fact that they are potential sources of disvalue and vulnerability: they can bring about attitudinal injury and, more specifically, recognitional harm. These sources of disvalue and its associated forms of attitudinal injury are particularly prevalent in, and constitutive of, intimate and personal relationships like friendship, where a lot depends on the attitudes of trust, care, and loving concern.²⁰ Having been let down by a friend or, on the other hand, having been cared for with loving concern in a difficult time bears the relevant salience, which can have a great impact on one's self-conception; one can feel disregarded or affirmed by the other as the other's friend. The same, I believe, is true of the parent-child relationship. As Sophie's and Peter's child, Ruby is dependent on her parents for their care and support, which in turn makes her vulnerable to not only physical harm, but, moreover and importantly, attitudinal injuries such as disregard, indifference, or negligence.

I shall now argue that we find these vulnerabilities and associated attitudinal injuries in the context of more abstract relationships, like the citizen relationship, as well. As citizens, and everything that being a citizen entails, our liberties and rights, our economic prospects, our sense of security, and our ability to pursue a meaningful life, depend not only on the possession or ascription of these rights and liberties qua being a citizen, but moreover on the recognition of ourselves by our fellow citizens as possessing these liberties and rights. It is one thing to formally possess rights and liberties, yet another thing entirely to be recognized by others as possessing them. The former depends simply on being a citizen, the latter on being recognized as such by one's fellow citizens. Since it is the latter that partly enables one to fully enjoy one's rights and liberties, being an equal citizen in the complete sense of the term depends very much on how others relate and are attuned to oneself, whether they do so by respecting each other's rights and liberties or not.²¹ I submit that as fellow citizens we stand in relations of recognitional dependence to each other who are vulnerable to the attitudes that others might or might not exhibit towards them.

Being recognized or acknowledged as a citizen “equally real” is of great and fundamental value to us, as it enables us to the things just mentioned and ultimately to pursue a meaningful life.²² At the same time, however, it also means that we are prone to attitudinal or *recognitional injuries* that take the form of humiliation, stigmatization, oppression, and exclusion by our fellow citizens. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of examples of such injuries (Appiah, 2010; Margalit, 1998). These attitudinal injuries can shape and negatively affect the citizens' self-conceptions in quite different but nevertheless significant ways. Conversely, however, the experience of the loyalty

or solidarity of one's fellow citizens in times of crisis, for example, can positively affect and reinforce one's self-conception as a fellow citizen “equally real.” It is this recognitional dependency that accounts for the significance or meaningfulness of the citizen-relationship. Thus, we might say that as citizens we are bound to others in virtue of being dependent on the recognition of others.

I now wish to bring all this to bear on the idea of the moral relationship. Let us recapitulate: what constitutes the moral relationship, according to Scanlon, is the fact that we are fellow rational beings. According to Scheffler, among others, this does not suffice to vindicate the idea that we stand in a significant or socially salient relationship with each other, such that our moral reasons can plausibly be said to belong to the class of relationship-dependent reasons. All that the so-called moral relationship seems to denote is merely a property relation-*to*, and no meaningful relationship-*with*. At best, moral requirements can be relationship-constituting, but never be relationship-dependent.

Against the previous elaborations on the social- and psychological significance of non-robust relationships, I now wish to contest this claim.²³ After all, what does it mean to be a rational agent? To begin with, it means to be “capable of understanding and responding to reasons” and eventually to formulate interests and valid claims that express these reasons. Understanding and responding to reasons, in turn, makes us sensitive to the reasons that others choose for their own actions and what these reasons tell us about their *attitudes* towards us. To be a moral agent is to be “endowed with powers that enable them to consider and evaluate how one has acted” (James, 2012, p. 25). In turn, we have an interest in being recognized accordingly and are prone to a “distinct kind of vulnerability, a vulnerability to what another's reasons, or reasoning, concerning how it is appropriate to relate to oneself, says about oneself” (Kumar, 2011, p. 107). This is to say that as moral or rational agents we are vulnerable to the attitudes of others that reflect their reasons for conduct in addition to being vulnerable to the effects of particular actions.²⁴ For what matters to us as moral beings is not only whether certain actions are right or wrong, but moreover whether or not we are recognized or acknowledged as individuals who have a claim on or can demand certain actions of others. We are as such concerned with “amour-propre in its natural form...the need we have to be recognized by others as having secure standing, or status, as an equal member of our social group.”²⁵

What explains the vulnerability in the moral sphere is hence, similar to the citizenship case, a fundamental and mutual recognitional dependence among moral agents regarding their respective moral standing; a dependence on the affirmation by others of one's equal moral standing, or, what Stephen Darwall calls, the second-personal “recognition respect” of others (Darwall, 1977, 2006) Given this mutual dependence, we can come to understand how moral agents are prone to the same recognitional injuries invoked in the previous section.

To illustrate, let us consider in the following three cases that should further buttress the idea of the moral relation being a significant human relationship. Consider first the act of stealing someone's wallet: Not only will the affected person have been wronged by the fact that her wallet was stolen, but this person will have been furthermore wronged in virtue of having been disregarded as an equal moral being to whom a certain degree of concern is owed and according to which her wallet should never be stolen from her in the first place. It is this recognitional harm, brought about by the second-order wrong of neglect for one's standing as an equal moral being to whom justification of reasons for action is owed, that reflects our recognitional vulnerability to others, the latter of which supports the idea that we stand in a significant relationship with each other in the moral sphere.

Next, let us look at the case of the moral asshole. The moral asshole, as invoked by Aaron James (James, 2012), persistently fails to recognize others as morally equal and hence “walls them off” by not considering them worthy of being owed justification for one's reasons and actions. As such, the moral asshole neglects the equal standing of others.²⁶ The reason for this is that the moral asshole has an entrenched sense of entitlement and as such immunizes himself against the complaints of others. The paradigmatic example of the moral asshole is someone who jumps the queue in the supermarket without any good reason. While others might do so after explaining that they are in an emergency, the moral asshole does so simply because of his sense of entitlement; he thinks that's what he owes himself (James, 2012, pp. 14–15). Thus, while the moral asshole might not even harm another in any physical sense, he harms the other in the attitudinal or recognitional sense described above by refusing to acknowledge the other as his moral fellow “equally real.” And it is this “deeper wrong” to which we are vulnerable as moral beings. In denying

someone the standing of being a person to whom justification of reasons is owed, the moral asshole disregards the other person as someone worthy of his moral concern and in doing so fails to grant the other the appropriate recognition respect. This, in turn, can very well have detrimental effects upon the self-conception of the person so disregarded. In constantly experiencing the disregard of the moral asshole might begin to question one's own moral beliefs, thereby ultimately undermining one's self-conception as a source of valid claims who ought to be acknowledged and treated as such.

Finally, and to lend support to the phenomenological aspects of the previous two cases, let us consider the case of an asylum seeker in Germany who asks a public health officer for a medical note for his injured leg that requires surgery (Tugendhat, 1993). Upon asking, the public health officer denies the request by giving the following explanation: the leg does not need to be treated and eventually heal, because the asylum seeker is not permitted to work in Germany anyways. What is so troubling about this case is not only the refusal of help itself, but the attitude of the public health official expressed in the explanation for this refusal (Tugendhat, 1993, p. 305). After all, the asylum seeker is a person “equally real,” a source of valid claims who has the standing to demand medical treatment for his injured leg. In virtue of having this standing, he is vulnerable as to how others respond to his valid claims. In experiencing the humiliating encounter with the public health official and in realizing that his valid claims do not receive the appropriate uptake, the asylum seeker might not only be upset and resent the official, he might, upon frequent encounters of that sort, fall into despair and refrain from seeking any more help from others around him; he might lose his self-respect. For, in being subject to the experience of the second-order evil of “floating freely and without control” in the moral universe, as someone who is merely at the mercy of others, an experience that manifests itself in the feeling of neglect, disrespect, and being morally walled out, the asylum seeker might lose his self-respect and with it his self-understanding as a person “equally real” who is entitled to the help of others.²⁷

Against the background of these considerations, then, I take Scheffler's and Wallace's latest worry to be misguided: To hold that “[we] do not think of ourselves as having ‘ties’ to other people solely in virtue of our sharing with them the property of rationality; this is not an aspect of our self-conception, a description with the kind of social or psychological salience that can help to shape our sense of who we are” seems to me to be mistaken. As I've tried to argue, quite the contrary seems to be the case. Although all of what I have so far suggested needs to be further spelled out, I believe that we are now in a position to begin to make sense of the idea that the moral relationship can plausibly be said to bear relevant social and psychological salience. Experiencing the constant neglect or disregard of one's fellow moral beings can shape one's identity significantly and undermine one's self-respect in such a way that one loses any sense of hope for being treated as a moral being that is owed concern and respect and ultimately to be able to live a meaningful life. On the flipside, standing in the moral relationship with others and realizing the normative ideal of morality can be of great value, since standing in this relationship contributes significantly to one's self-respect and the confidence that we are “equally real” and as such able to participate and engage in some of the projects we most fundamentally value—personal and social relationships, projects and, more generally, the pursuit of one's very own plan of life. Of course, this is not to say that the value of the moral relationship consists solely in that it furthers one's self-respect and confidence. This might make the value objectionably self-regarding. The value of the moral relationship, to put it more positively, consists in shared attitudes of empathy and concern for the others qua particular sources of valid claims. What gives the moral relationship salience, however, is that it bears these positive effect on the self-respect of individual members of the moral community.²⁸

Now, might one worry that the kind of vulnerability to recognitional injury that has been the focus here, and hence the relevant social and psychological salience, can simply be explained in terms of moral requirements that we are under, irrespective of whether or not we share a basic moral relationship with each other? That is, one might worry whether the salience in each of the cases described could in fact be explained by the fact that we take ourselves to have moral obligations to one another in the first place. If so, then it would be illegitimate to point to our vulnerability to recognitional injury as evidence of a socially and psychologically salient relationship which explains our having moral obligations; the existence of the moral obligations would, on the contrary, explain the social and psychological salience of the moral relationship. The worry is that we can describe the “kind of social or

psychological salience that can help to shape our sense of who we are” without appeal to any kind of relationship that we share with each other in the moral sphere.

Let us recall that Scheffler and Wallace agree that in order to describe this kind of social or psychological salience we need to show that, like friends, we are interlocked with each other not just logically, but attitudinally; that we are involved with each other. But can we do so by mere appeal to moral obligations that we are under irrespective of any relationship that we share with each other simply as fellow moral beings? If we cannot we have two options: either give up on the idea that attitudinal injuries and vulnerabilities are an important aspect of our moral lives, which risks giving us an explanatorily inaccurate account of interpersonal morality against the background of the phenomenology of the cases just described, or argue that moral obligations and the vulnerabilities associated with them must in fact presuppose a basic moral relationship. I have here argued for the latter option. And this strikes me as much more plausible than making sense of the “kind of social or psychological salience that can help to shape our sense of who we are” by mere appeal to moral *obligations*. Let me illustrate this as follows, by analogy to the citizen-relationship: suppose that as a citizen of a given country A, I owe it to my fellow citizens to respect their right to freedom of expression as a result of which they are vulnerable as to whether I and other citizens of country A do so. Although citizens of country B might also have the right to freedom of expression, they are not similarly vulnerable as to whether or not I and other citizens of country A do so. Why not? Well, they are not involved with each other in the relevant sense. That is to say, citizens of A and B, even though under the same obligations - obligations with the same structure and content - are not interlocked attitudinally.²⁹ They do not share the relevant relationship with each other, as a result of which they are not vulnerable to the attitudes of each other.³⁰

To be clear, I have not here argued that the moral relationship is itself constituted by our shared vulnerability or recognitional dependence and the attitudes associated with these notions. More modestly, and hopefully more plausibly, I have here instead mounted an argument to the effect that the moral relationship, which is constituted simply in virtue of a set of facts about our rational nature and capacity, can and should best be understood as belonging to the class of significant human relationships in virtue of which we can be presented with a set of relationship-dependent reasons that give rise to agent-relative requirements. More so, it is possible to conceive of this relationship as one that is individuated, holding between each and every single, and non-substitutable, individual member of the moral community. At least in that respect—namely that it can be individuated—the moral relationship bears a certain kind of resemblance to robust relationships like friendship.³¹ On the view proposed in the paper, then, moral reasons correspond to the reasonable expectations or valid claims that others possess.³² There is then even some sense in which the moral relationship is similar to friendship: When asked “Why are you helping John?,” one will reply “Well, he is *my* friend.” Similarly, one *may* answer when asked “Why are you helping this person who happened to be robbed” not by holding that this is simply what the moral law demands of us, but rather by responding “What? Because she is *my* moral fellow!”

8 | CONCLUSION

I began the paper by drawing on the seeming fundamental tension between partial relationship-dependent reasons and reasons of impartial morality. Nothing of what I have argued here suggests that the tension is set to disappear entirely. Quite to the contrary, it is a mark of the value that we associate with personal relationships like friendship, on the one hand, and stringency of the impartial demands of morality, on the other hand, that the tension between the demands of friendship and morality arises in the first place. But if we do grant the idea that we also stand in a significant relationship with each other in the moral sphere simply as fellow moral beings, we should begin to understand that the source of our moral reasons and those we have in virtue of our various ordinary relationships might very well be the same: a valuable interpersonal relationship that we share with each other. Accordingly, any reasons we have to do or refrain from doing certain actions are (agent-relative) reasons that we have in virtue of being

invested in relationships with other persons that matter to us; they all belong to the class of *relationship-dependent* reasons. The initial tension between the partial personal domain and the impartial moral domain, then, might in one central respect be overstated: it is not one between different classes of reasons—relationship-dependent and relationship-independent reasons. Instead, the tension is one that arises and needs to be resolved within the class of relationship-dependent reasons. This “implies that the very impartiality that we rightly see as a defining feature of morality has its roots in the same structures of normativity that give rise to legitimate reasons of partiality.”³³

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Importantly, this qualification leaves open as to whether all of morality might be best understood in relational terms. For the purpose of the paper, I shall accept this qualification. By the interpersonal sphere I mean that sphere of morality that has, generally speaking, to do with our obligations to other people, including such obligations as not to step on other people's feet, to keep our promises, to aid others, as well as prohibitions against killing, coercion and deception. Among the obligations that are excluded from the interpersonal sphere of morality are, for example, the obligation not to destroy natural artifacts or the obligation not to kill animals for trophy collection.
- ² See also Wallace, 2013, 2019, Kolodny, 2010, Sher, 2012.
- ³ This should not be confused with the broader claim that no property-relation can bear normative significance. We can think about a relation between A and B that might in fact be normatively significant, such as when A is stronger than B.
- ⁴ For a similar worry, see Sher (2012) on “The Problem of the Stranger.”
- ⁵ On the difference between being in a position to resent me or being hurt by my failure to show up on the part of Jane, see also Stephen Darwall's elaborations on love and hurt feelings (Darwall, 2006, p. 73).
- ⁶ This is essentially what Darwall dubs *Strawson's Point*: “Desirability is a reason of the wrong kind to warrant the attitudes and actions in which holding someone responsible consists in their own terms.” (Darwall, 2006, p. 15).
- ⁷ See also, Betzler (2009).
- ⁸ Scanlon (2008).
- ⁹ Accordingly, Scheffler holds that Scanlon's more mature conception of the moral relationship in Moral Dimension does not allay my doubts about the plausibility of construing moral reasons as relationship-dependent reasons in my sense (Scheffler, 2010, p. 124).
- ¹⁰ See also Brown (2017) for an insightful discussion of this important distinction.
- ¹¹ For further helpful discussion of attitude-dependent versus attitude-independent relationships (see Kolodny, 2003, pp. 148–149).
- ¹² For an objection along similar lines, see also Wallace (2011, p. 361). Wallace stresses in particular the “historical dimension” that is characteristic of attitude-independent relationships like the parent–child relationship, but not of the moral relationship.
- ¹³ I'm drawing here on Southwood (2010, p. 127). As Southwood puts it, “we enjoy a relation with one another qua fellow citizens that we plainly do not enjoy with those who are non-citizens.” Note, however, that the idea of such a relationship is not without its skeptics. Those with anarchist dispositions might not share this idea and instead believe that we do not share such a reason-giving relationship with our fellow citizens. Others might argue that these relevant reasons are ultimately rooted in moral obligations to all fellow creatures—obligations to uphold just or utility-promoting institutions or to refrain from free-riding, for instance—and are merely “triggered” by our happening to live in the territory of a particular state. In each of these cases, any appeal to a shared citizen relationship would remain normatively inert. I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out these possible sources of skepticism about the idea of the citizen relationship. For the sake of the argument of the paper, however, and in light of the fact that Samuel Scheffler himself endorses the idea of a shared citizen relationship which will become apparent further down in the paper, I simply adopt the assumption that we can plausibly be said to stand in such a relationship with our fellow citizens. Once this idea is adopted, it should become clear how it helps to make the case of the paper.

- ¹⁴ See for example, Rawls (1971/1999).
- ¹⁵ There are of course complicated questions with regards to those members of a state that are not yet or will never be citizens of that state. For simplicity's sake, I shall leave these issues aside here.
- ¹⁶ While both the project-relationship and the citizen-relationship denote inclusive relationships that do not depend for their constitution on ongoing bonds or a shared history, they also differ in significant respects from each other. The citizen-relationship can be viewed as the inclusive version of the exclusive attitude-independent personal relationship we saw illustrated in the case of the parent-child relationship. Both are non-voluntary and hold simply in virtue of certain facts about individuals and both receive their normative import from these facts. The shared-project relationship, on the other hand, resembles friendship, insofar as both relationships are voluntarily constituted by certain set of shared intentions and expectations—a shared set of interlocking attitudes. All that these observations are supposed to suggest is that reason-giving relationships, whether attitude-dependent or not, cannot only hold at the personal face-to-face level, but at a much broader and to a certain degree abstract level as well.
- ¹⁷ I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this important point.
- ¹⁸ Scheffler (1997, pp. 189–190).
- ¹⁹ One should be careful not to mistakenly infer from this that the relevant relationships are meaningful or significant simply because they are of value to their participants. While it might eventually be true for each and every relationship discussed in this paper that they add value to the lives of their participants, neither the parent-child relationship nor the citizen-relationship depend for their social- or psychological salience on the relevant interactions being necessarily valuable to their respective participants.
- ²⁰ See Wallace (2011, p. 355): “Friendships are constituted, in part, by patterns of emotional interdependence and vulnerability. To stand in a relationship of friendship with someone just is, *inter alia*, to be disposed to a range of characteristic emotional responses, depending on how things are going both with the friend and with the relationship you stand in to the friend.”
- ²¹ See also Daniels (1975), on the formal ascriptions of liberties and the unequal application-worth of these liberties.
- ²² See here, in particular, John Rawls' discussion of the importance of self-worth and self-respect. Without self-respect, Rawls argues, “nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism.” (Rawls, 1971/1999, p. 386).
- ²³ In the following I draw and in fact expand on work by Rahul Kumar, who suggests to understand the “basic moral relationship” that we stand in virtue of our shared vulnerability to recognitional injury. As Kumar puts it, “all capable of self-governance, at all times and at all places, stand in a relationship to one another. It is because a rationally self-governing being is naturally disposed to care about not just the implications for him of what others do, but what their reasons for their conduct say about their attitudes towards him, that such beings are vulnerable to one another in a way that is characteristic of many kinds of personal relationship that we value.” (Kumar, 2011, p. 136).
- ²⁴ We can distinguish here between first-order and second-order wrongs, the latter of which refer to the sort of recognitional disregard that I am concerned with here. Kumar captures this nicely, when he holds that “For though one may have not made the other worse-off, the way in which one has related to the other may still express a failure to have appropriately recognized and taken account of a person's value as capable of rational self-governance. A person can be wronged, then, simply in virtue of how she figures, or does not figure, in how one is rationally disposed to relate to her” (Kumar, 2003, p. 109). See also Philippa Foot (Foot, 2002, p. 168), who distinguishes between first-order and second-order evils.
- ²⁵ See Rawls (2007, p. 218).
- ²⁶ Even where the moral asshole sees the other as one to whom justification is owed, they deny the other equal moral standing insofar as the moral asshole thinks they can provide justification to the other by pointing out how special they are.
- ²⁷ The question might arise whether it is true that we should regard recognitional injury as a kind of wrong. After all, there seem to be cases where one can fail to give another recognition respect without wronging the other. I might realize that someone is fulfilling all of their moral obligations to me, not because they care about my well-being or my moral standing at all, but just because doing so happens to promote their own self-interest. In that case, we might think, the other would be depriving me of recognition without wronging me—they are acting rightly, but for the wrong reasons. But as I've tried to argue in the previous sections, not only is the other acting for the wrong reasons in such a case, but the other would in fact wrong me in the second-order sense just described, what some, like Scanlon (2008, pp. 99–100), capture in terms of the “meaning” of an action. That is to say, the other person is wronged not by the action itself, but by what the underlying reasons for one's action tell about the agent's attitudes towards another. This suggests that wronging, at least in this second-order sense, need not be understood in terms of the impermissibility of an action. Quite to the contrary, or so I

suggest, one can be wronged simply by the attitudes expressing the reasons underlying the action. To see this, consider Michael Stocker's famous hospital case (Stocker, 1976), where a friend visits only because he takes himself to be under a moral duty to do so. What is important to note here is the *twofold wronging* potentially involved; for one, the friend could wrong the other simply by not showing up, by failing to treat the other properly as the *target* of his obligation. But there is another level of wronging involved that is not captured by this. For, the friend would also wrong the other in disregarding her as the *source* of his obligation. After all, the other would not only blame or resent the friend in light of his failure to show up, but, more importantly, in light of the friend's failure to do so given *her* standing as his friend. Implicit in this thought is, importantly, that one can wrong another even in doing the right thing. How so? By acting on the wrong kind of reasons and thereby inflicting a distinct second-order wronging on the other—attitudinal or recognitional wronging. Similarly, one could refrain from stepping on someone else's foot, but do so simply because he lost interest in doing so or do so only because he cares about fulfilling my moral duty, or because someone else told him to do so, thereby failing to recognize the other person's status as a source of valid moral claims. Let us imagine the following case: John and Jane are both at a party. John steps on Jane's foot and thus prevents her from going to the bar to get another drink as a result of which Jane demands of John to take his foot off of hers. While John is talking enthusiastically to some of his friends over the Chicago Cubs finally ending their championship drought, Jane begins to get irritated and tries to gain John's attention by raising her voice slightly, telling him "Hey, excuse me, could you please take your foot off of mine." But John does not register Jane. It is only after one of his friends tells him to take his foot off of hers that John does so, but without acknowledging Jane in any particular way. Now, while John certainly did the right thing—taking his foot off of Jane's—John did so for the wrong reasons, or so I want to maintain. And in doing so, John *wronged* Jane. In order to work our way closer to this intuition, let us imagine that John runs into Jane at the bar again. After a short while Jane approaches John: "Hey, why did not take your foot off of mine, given that I've asked you so many times?" to which John replies: "I'm sorry, but c'mon, I did take my foot off of yours after all. Why does it matter to you why I did it?" This response will irritate Jane even more and she will reject John's explanation as insufficient: "What do you mean by 'c'mon'? That does not cut it. I asked you to take your foot off of mine, but you did not do it. I mean, do you not care about people around you and what they are asking of you?" What Jane is doing here is fighting to be recognized and in so doing pointing out to John that he has wronged her in denying Jane precisely this sort of recognition. Alternatively, one might say that Jane is pointing out to John that in failing to respond to *Jane's demand*, John has failed to respect *her*. Here is one way to understand Jane's complaint. What Jane is pointing out to John is that she is not just an "occasion" or the "raw material for wrongdoing," which we can stipulate John did recognize her as, but instead a "wrongable" being and the victim of John's doing, and that John ought to recognize her as such. After all, Jane is herself an autonomous reasoner and a "self-originating source of valid claims." In order to recognize and acknowledge her as such, it does not suffice for John to merely regard Jane as the *target* of his obligation—the occasion for "doing the right thing." Instead, John must, at the same time recognize and acknowledge Jane as the *source* of his obligation, that is, the reason for which John is under the relevant obligation in the first place. I'm grateful to two anonymous reviewers for pressing me to say more about the nature of the attitudinal and recognitional wronging appealed to in the paper.

²⁸ I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify the positive value of the moral relationship and its relation to the question of where this relationship receives its salience from.

²⁹ Note that although they are under the same obligation, the obligation in question does not even constitute a relationship.

³⁰ I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this worry and helping me to clarify my position.

³¹ I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

³² This, furthermore suggests that any plausible relational account of morality, which seeks to explain the morality of right and wrong in terms of directed obligations, will be able to provide a foundation for the normative structures that give rise to the claims and correlating directed obligations on the part of individuals.

³³ Scheffler (2010, p. 100).

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