

The Second-Person Standpoint and the Normative Question

Bachelor Thesis Philosophy

Student:

Willam van Weelden

3223337

Mentor:

Katrien Schaubroeck

Table of Contents

The Second-Person Standpoint and the Normative Question 3

 The second-person standpoint..... 4

 Authority to make claims 5

 Legitimate claims and demands 5

 Second-personal competence 6

 Equal accountability 7

 Answering the normative question 7

 The optional character of the second-person standpoint 9

 The second-person standpoint cannot answer the normative question 11

 From practical reason to the second-person standpoint..... 12

 Conclusion 15

Bibliography..... 16

The Second-Person Standpoint and the Normative Question

On July 22nd 2011, Anders Breivik detonated a car bomb in Oslo, killing eight. Later that day he shot and killed 69 people on the isle of Utøya. During his trial, Breivik admitted to killing all victims but he denied criminal responsibility. Breivik testified that he considered the victims legitimate targets. What is implicit in Breivik's testimony is that, all things considered, he had good and compelling reasons for slaughtering 77 people. This shows that Breivik does not deny that he is responsible for these deaths, but that his act is not morally reprehensible. The reasons he had for committing his act of terrorism overruled any moral claims his victims may have had or the moral reasons Breivik thinks applied to him did allow for killing these people.

The case of Anders Breivik issues a direct challenge to any ethical theory that claims that morality is normative: Why was Breivik's act wrong, regardless of the reasons he had for doing as he did? If we want to answer the question in a way that qualifies Breivik's acts as unethical or evil, we must assume that there were overriding reasons for him to not commit this act of terrorism. Reasons that made this act wrong, but that Breivik ignored none the less. And by saying that his act is wrong or evil, we mean that his action was an action that he *ought* not to have done. This *ought* is issued by a normative morality.

Reasons are the basis for any action. And an agent has a multitude of reasons. Some reasons are stronger than others or are more pressing and so the agent must deliberate on what to do. The agent must act on the reasons that she concludes are the most important.

Moral reasons constitute commands that cannot just be overruled by other reasons. Or, at least, that is what a normative account of morality claims. But why should we suppose that moral reasons override other reasons? This question echoes what Christine Korsgaard called 'the normative question': Why should I be moral? We are not looking for an explanation of moral practice but for a justification of the special nature of moral obligation. (Korsgaard 2011)

In his book *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* (2006) Stephen Darwall provides a metaethical account with which he wants to show that normative ethical reasons do exist and why those reasons are normative. If Darwall succeeds in answering the normative question, we will have an answer to Breivik. This answer will allow us to formulate why Breivik should have acted differently. If Breivik was morally obligated, he had sufficient reason for acting morally. (Smith and Strabbing 2010, 242) Even though Breivik might deceive himself by thinking that another morality applies to him.

In this paper I explore Darwall's view of the second-person standpoint. My research question is: Does Darwall's second-person standpoint provide an account of why agents should be moral? In order to answer this question I will first give an account of Darwall's theory and how Darwall tries to answer the normative question. Next I will show how Darwall's answer to the normative question fails and why his theory cannot but fail to answer the normative question. Lastly, I will argue for a revised form of Darwall's second-person standpoint that does provide an answer to the normative question.

The second-person standpoint

In this section I will provide a short introduction to Stephen Darwall's second-person standpoint. I will only focus on the basic idea in order to show how Darwall answers the normative question.

Darwall describes the second-person standpoint as “*the perspective you and I take up when we address (putatively valid) claims or demands to someone, whether explicitly, in speech, or implicitly, in thought, whether to others or to ourselves (as in self-addressed feelings of guilt).*” (Darwall 2010, 216) This second personal perspective is a special mode of first-person deliberation in which the agent regards herself in relation to someone else. It is not a mode of deliberation different from first-person deliberation. (Darwall, Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson 2007, 55) This second-person standpoint does not require a second person as you can also take a second personal standing towards yourself. This is what an agent does when she feels guilt or shame.

Making a claim or demand of someone is a second-personal address. A second-personal address gives the addressee normative reasons for acting. These normative reasons are second-personal reasons and can only be addressed and understood from within a second-personal perspective.

Second-personal reasons give rise to moral obligation for the addressee. These reasons are normative because the addresser has the authority to hold the addressee responsible¹ for compliance. When the addressee does not comply, the addresser may hold the addressee responsible. The addresser may direct blame and resentment towards the addressee and the addresser may sometimes even coerce the addressee into compliance. It is not necessary that claims are always voiced. For reactive attitudes, such as resentment, it is enough that these claims are only thought by the addresser. (Darwall 2010, 216)

This description of the second-person standpoint names two central ideas: address and validity. Address entails that the addressee can recognize these claims. These claims and demands must not only be addressed, but they also need to be legitimate². This legitimacy means that the addresser must have a right to address the claims and that the claims themselves are reasonable. This positions second-personal address within a circle of four interdependent concepts:

- a. The authority to make claims.
- b. Legitimate claims and demands.
- c. Second-personal competence.
- d. Equal accountability.

Darwall thinks each one of these concepts implies the other three. He also thinks that these concepts can only be understood and appreciated from within a second-personal view: “*A central claim of The Second Person Standpoint (SPS) is that there is no way into this conceptual circle from the outside.*”

¹ When I use the term *responsible* in this paper I always take it to mean responsible in a moral sense. There are other forms of responsibility, such as causal responsibility, but those kinds of responsibility are of no concern in this context.

² I use the terms *valid* and *legitimate* as synonyms in this paper.

(Darwall, *Precis: The Second-Person Standpoint* 2010, 218) I will now give a short overview over these four concepts and I will show how each of these concepts implies the others.

Authority to make claims

Humans make all kinds of demands of each other in daily life. However, not all of these demands are legitimate. For instance, when I walk up to a total stranger and demand that he does ten push ups, the result will most likely be that my demand is ignored and that I am scorned for making such a ridiculous demand in the first place. But in a different situation the demand that someone does ten push ups may be valid. Darwall frequently uses the example of a platoon sergeant: The sergeant can require her soldiers to do ten push ups.

What makes these situations different is the authority relation in which the subjects find themselves: To be able to make a valid claim you must be in a position in which you have the authority to make such a demand. And this authority must always be decided by both the addresser and addressee from a standpoint that they can share. (Darwall, *Precis: The Second-Person Standpoint* 2010, 224)

Authority to make second-personal demands is intimately linked with responsibility. The addressee to whom a claim is addressed is responsible for complying with this claim. This intimate link between these concepts raises the question when a person is responsible for complying with a claim: when is a claim legitimate?

Legitimate claims and demands

When we make a demand of someone, we need to suppose that our claims are legitimate. Otherwise we could not reasonably expect the addresser to comply with the claim. This brings us to what Darwall calls Strawson's point.

Strawson's point is that desirability of a certain outcome or state of affairs is a reason of the wrong kind for holding someone responsible for compliance. Darwall takes this point and formulates it with a broader scope: *"To be a reason of the right kind, a consideration must justify the relevant attitudes in its own terms. It must be a fact about or feature of some object, appropriate consideration of which could provide someone's reason for a warranted attitude of that kind toward it."* (Darwall 2006, 16)

A reason of the right kind for holding someone responsible for complying with a moral claim is a reason that is based solely on the authority of the addresser to hold the addressee responsible. (Darwall 2006, 253) This is made visible in reactive attitudes like resentment and blame. We blame someone if he did something he had no right to do: We blame an actor who did not appreciate the moral claims and thus violated the demands of morality.

Strawson's point also entails that the responsibility to adhere to a claim cannot be derived from the claim itself. There must to be a previously established accountability relation between addresser and addressee before agents can hold one another accountable. Both agents must already possess the authority to make demands of one another before they can hold one another accountable.

There is another presupposition in play here: a claim can only be valid when the addresser presumes to give reasons to the addressee that the addressee can use in her own self-determining choice. In

other words, the addressee must be able to regulate her own conduct freely by these reasons. When a claim violates this principle, the claim is simply goading the addressee into compliance. Although this may spur an agent into action, these claims do not have the normative force of second-personal reasons and therefore the agent is not obligated. (Darwall 2006, 51)

Any valid claim must therefore direct an agent through her own free will alone. This is what Darwall calls Fichte's point. This means that "*any second-personal claim or "summons" (Aufforderung) presupposes a common competence, authority and, therefore, responsibility as free and rational, a mutual second-personality that addresser and addressee share and that is appropriately recognized reciprocally.*" (Darwall 2006, 21)

Fichte's point actually consists of two points: first that both addresser and addressee share an authority to make claims of each other and secondly that they are both free to act on claims that are based on this shared authority.

An addresser cannot expect someone to comply when the addressee is not able to recognize or act on claims. A person who cannot recognize claims, for instance someone with a severe mental disability, is excused in a moral sense. You cannot be responsible (in a moral sense) for something you have no control over.³ (Darwall 2006, 241)

Second-personal competence

When an addresser expects an addressee to comply with a claim, the addresser holds the addressee accountable for complying. But holding someone responsible also entails that the addressee must be able to hold herself responsible. This is what Darwall calls Pufendorf's point: "*in holding people responsible, we are committed to the assumption that they can hold themselves responsible by self-addressed demands from a perspective that we and they can share.*" (Darwall 2006, 112)

According to Pufendorf's point, an addressee can only be obligated freely, in the sense of Fichte's point, when the addressee can freely determine herself by the authority of the addresser. And this is what it means to be second-personally competent: Having the capacity to accept the authority of the addresser and being able to freely act on reasons stemming from this authority.

The authority of the addresser is determined from the perspective that both addresser and addressee can share: the perspective as members of the moral community. When the addressee accepts the authority of the addresser, she thereby accepts the normativity of claims. Since the addressee accepted the authority of the addresser herself, she must acknowledge that she is therefore responsible for compliance. Because the addressee accepted this responsibility herself, she is responsible for compliance in her own eyes as well as in the eyes of the addresser. In other words: From the standpoint that both the addressee and the addresser share, the addressee demands compliance to the claim from herself.

³ This is not to say that someone cannot be held responsible in another way. For example, someone can still be held causally responsible. Darwall gives the example of a very young child. Although we will not hold the child morally responsible, we may still subject the child to treatment or management. (Darwall 2006, 69)

This is the version of Strawson's point that Darwall calls Cudworth's point: the accountability relation of the agents is established in the authority that both addresser and addressee share as members of the moral community. And this means that not only the addresser and addressee can hold the addressee responsible, but that all beings that can share this common perspective can hold the addressee responsible.

Equal accountability

It is the common perspective makes both the addresser and the addressee equally accountable to one another. This is what Darwall calls dignity: "*the second-personal standing of an equal. It is the status of an equal member of the moral community (the "realm of ends") to hold one another accountable for compliance with the mandatory norms that mediate relations between free and rational persons.*" (Darwall 2006, 243)

So the circle of authority, claim, second-personal competence and accountability is closed. Because of the circular nature of these concepts, accepting a single one of these, at least in the way Darwall uses them, commits us to accepting all of them. Moral obligation exists because these concepts give overriding reasons for acting because we have the authority to demand this of one another.

Answering the normative question

In the previous section I have provided as short overview over Darwall's theory of the second-person standpoint. In this section I will show how the four interdependent concepts authority, claim, second-personal competence and accountability provide Darwall with an answer to the normative question. I will then question this answer to see whether this answer will hold when confronted by a moral sceptic.

According to the second-person standpoint, we should be moral because we are accountable as members of the moral community – in both our own eyes as well as in the eyes of any other member. And the normativity of second-personal reasons lies in the authority of the addresser to make the demand. This however, can only be appreciated inside the second-person standpoint:

"If, however, the moral law is essentially tied to the dignity of persons, and if dignity includes an irreducible second-personal standing, then it should not be surprising that the second-person perspective is essential to appreciating the bindingness of the moral law. No authority to address second-personal reasons of any kind is reducible to propositions of value or normative principles of right that can adequately be appreciated either first- or third-personally, since nothing of this sort will itself include the irreducibility second-personal claim or demand." (Darwall 2006, 244-245)

What Darwall has shown this far is simply that the second-person standpoint gives rise to second-personal claims if and only if an agent takes up the second-person standpoint in deliberation. But what commits an agent to the second-person standpoint in the first place? What makes these second-personal reasons inescapable?

If Darwall wants to have an answer to someone like Anders Breivik, he needs to show how even Breivik is necessarily committed to the second-person standpoint. Or as Darwall formulates it: "*Even*

if taking up the second-person stance commits us to equal dignity and autonomy, that is consistent with that standpoint and its commitments being no more than rationally optional, or worse, illusory.” (Darwall 2006, 277)

To take up a second-personal stance, the addressee must first recognize the demand as being second-personal and even after recognizing the demand must conclude that the claim is legitimate. But the addressee is always free to “*step back from these [presuppositions of second-personal address] and ask whether, on reflection, we should still accept them. And nothing suggests that fundamental philosophical reflection on practical reason must be second-personal itself.*” (Darwall 2006, 278)

Darwall takes up this challenge by giving an account of how second-personal reasons function in practical reason. This account of practical reason is to show that the second-person standpoint is not optional.

Because of the possibility of stepping back from deliberating to deliberation about which reasons we should accept, Darwall needs to show that our reasons to accept second-personal reasons are as good as our reasons to accept any other kind of reasons for acting. For a good understanding of the argument, it is important to note that Darwall distinguishes between the formal and substantive aims of practical and theoretical reason. The formal aim of theoretical reason is to believe that for which there is reason to believe. The substantive aim of theoretical reason is to believe that which is true. The formal aim of action is to do that which there is reason to do. (Darwall 2006, 279) But what is the substantive aim of action?

The substantive aim of action cannot be to bring about valuable states of affairs, as a naïve practical reasoner may assume. For if actions’ substantive aim is to bring about valuable states, it would be impossible to have any other kind of reason for acting. But this is evidently untrue as an agent can have second-personal reasons to determine her actions. (Darwall 2006, 287) The second-personal address requires agents to assume that the motivation for acting on a second-personal reason is derived from the second-personal reason itself. Therefore the substantive aim of action cannot be found in the outcome of an action.

Since agents derive the motivation from the second-personal reason, we must assume the autonomy of the will. And from this autonomy of the will an agent is committed to the assumption that she can guide her conduct by second-personal reasons; regardless of any object-dependent desires she may hold. (Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* 2006, 290) Therefore, the substantive aim of practical reason is autonomy⁴ or practical reason has no substantive aim at all. (Darwall 2006, 296 n.30)

This shows that agents can coherently use second-personal reasons to regulate their conduct. And it also shows that practical reason’s substantive aim cannot be the bringing about of valuable states of affairs. But this still does not require that an agent actually accepts second-personal reasons as reasons for acting.

⁴ This autonomy cannot, however, be autonomy in the Kantian sense that Darwall discusses as Darwall explicitly denies this. (Darwall, *Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson* 2007, 59)

When taking a step back from second-personal deliberation, we still are deliberating, but on a different level. In fact, no matter what reasons we use in deliberation, we can always take a step back and ask whether we should accept the assumptions required by those reasons. But in order to deliberate at all, an agent must assume that there are normative reasons for acting. If an agent would not assume that, deliberation is useless as it cannot provide an outcome to the question of what an agent should do. And this, Darwall thinks, only requires that he shows that we have no less reason to accept second-personal reasons than that we have reason to accept other kinds of reasons. (Darwall 2006, 291)

Darwall shows that we have good reason to accept second-personal reasons by showing how second-personal reasons would function in both Kantian constructivism and recognitional theories. In Kantian constructivism the CI-procedure requires that an agent considers her position from the perspective as one among free and rational persons. And this is precisely what taking up the second-person standpoint is. (Darwall 2006, 297) For recognitional theories the reasons given by the second-personal perspective are no less valid than reasons stemming from desire. So therefore second-personal reasons are valid reasons in a recognitional theory. (Darwall 2006, 298)

By showing that second-personal reasons are perfectly valid reasons for acting in both Kantian constructivist theory as well as in recognitional theory, Darwall has shown that we have good reasons to accept second-personal reasons when we deliberate about what we should do.

On top of that, the second-person standpoint provides us with a rich account of our own agency that enables us to appreciate the difference between theoretical reason and practical reason. This improves our understanding of our reasons for acting and gives us a more comprehensive view of practical reason itself. (Darwall 2006, 277)

The optional character of the second-person standpoint

In the previous section I have shown how Darwall answers the normative question: The equal accountability of agents makes that agents owe it to one another and themselves to be moral. And when reflecting on second-personal reasons, an agent has good reason to accept second-personal reasons for acting. Therefore the second-person standpoint seems obligatory.

In this section I will argue why Darwall's answer to the normative question fails. I will examine Darwall's arguments and show why his arguments cannot convince a moral sceptic. I will then argue why Darwall's second-person standpoint is unable to give an answer to the normative question.

So far Darwall has only shown that we can take up second-personal reasons for acting, but that alone does not commit someone to the second-personal perspective. According to Darwall, we unavoidably take up the second-personal perspective whenever we respond to an address (*Fichtean Aufforderung*). Taking up the second-personal perspective is unavoidable, because as soon as we recognize an address as a demand, we have entered the circle of second-personal reasons. But it is exactly the question whether we must recognize, or accept to recognize, a claim.

Darwall's first argument for the inescapability of second-personal reasons is that it is psychologically difficult, almost impossible to avoid taking up the second-person standpoint. (Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* 2006, 277-278) But, as Darwall also notes,

this does not provide a normative reason for taking up the second-personal standpoint. It simply describes that humans frequently take up this standpoint as they go about their lives. But concluding that you ought to take up the second-person standpoint for psychological reasons would be a reason of the wrong kind for taking up the second-person standpoint.

When an agent rejects second-personal claims, can she still be part of a social community or must she leave human society as Darwall seems to suggest? (Darwall 2006, 263 n.26) This would mean that the second-person standpoint is inseparable from human interaction. But this is not the case. There are many more social acts than second-personal address alone. Yaffe even describes second-personal reasons as a proper subset of social acts. (Yaffe 2010, 251) Darwall accedes to this. (Darwall, Reply to Schapiro, Smith/Strabbing and Yaffe 2010, 263) So even when an agent rejects second-personal reasons, she can still function in human society.

Darwall's second argument is that the second-person standpoint gives us a more comprehensive understanding of our own agency. Someone who takes up the second-personal perspective can validate reasons as reasons for acting that someone who does not take up this perspective cannot. Although such a more comprehensive view would enable an agent to appreciate more reasons for acting, this account of agency presupposes the very view that is contested. Darwall does not argue that this more comprehensive agency is a reason to take up the second-personal perspective, but he does argue that failing to take up the second-person stance does deny the more comprehensive view. This however does not obligate agents to take up the second-person standpoint.

Darwall's third argument is that someone is still obligated even when the agent does not accept the second-personal reasons. Second-personal reasons exist even when the agent ignores them. (Darwall, Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson 2007, 60) It is necessary that the addressee could be reasonably expected to accept the authority of the addresser. The second-personal reasons exist none the less.

There is a catch to this argument as Darwall seems to suppose that second-personal authority and the acceptance of second-personal norms cannot be separated. Being second-personally competent is enough for an addresser to demand compliance. The addressee is not required to accept the authority before being morally obligated. (Darwall, Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson 2007, 59)

But how can having second-personal competence require that you take up the second-person standpoint? Holding that humans have the psychological capacity is a reason of the wrong kind for holding that one should take up the second-person standpoint. Holding that someone could reasonably accept the claim means that it is reasonable from the perspective of a member of the moral community.⁵ But when taking this perspective is optional, there is no ground for holding that someone can be reasonably expected to accept the authority unless the agent already accepted the presuppositions of the second-person standpoint. Therefore this inseparable connection between second-personal competence and the acceptance of second-personal reasons cannot be made.

⁵ Darwall thinks that the space of the reasonable, as Rawls sees it, is exactly the second-personal perspective. But as the reasonable cannot be derived from the rational, this seems to put an even greater burden on Darwall's theory.

The fourth argument for the inescapability moral obligation is the inescapability of the second-personal reasons themselves:

“The sense in which moral obligations are inescapable is that *the reasons* they provide are inescapable, that is, that these reasons hold and apply to us irrespective of our interests, aims, or other idiosyncratic features. What follows from a second-personal analysis is that moral obligations and the second-personal reasons for acting that flow from them are rooted in our second-personal competence. And these are features we cannot give up without removing our very moral agency itself. It is hard to see how moral obligations could be any more inescapable than that.” (Darwall 2010, 228)

This argument requires that you already need to presuppose the requirements of second-personal address to be able to acknowledge that denying second-personal reasons will require removing moral agency. But someone who does not take up the second-person standpoint can simply deny that giving up this standpoint is giving up moral agency itself. So this does not provide an answer to the agent who asks why she should be moral. It will only answer her question when she is already committed to the second-person standpoint in the first place.

The second-person standpoint cannot answer the normative question

In the previous section I have shown that the arguments Darwall gives for the inescapability of second-personal reasons, and thus for the inescapability of moral obligation, fail. In this section I will argue that the second-person standpoint as formulated by Darwall cannot provide an answer to the normative question.

Darwall cannot provide an answer to the normative question because an addressee must first decide, in first-person deliberation, whether she can be held responsible from the standpoint from a member of the moral community. And this is something that the addressee has to decide in first-person deliberation. (Pauer-Studer 2010, 299) So any second-personal address first requires an agent to step out of the second-person standpoint to evaluate the claim and her own position: The addressee takes a step back and asks whether she should consider the claim and authority relation from within the second-personal perspective; she can ask whether she should accept the second-person standpoint in the first place.

When the agent takes a step back, she thereby leaves the second-personal perspective – if she had already entered it. And since autonomy, claim, second-personal competence and equal accountability can only be appreciated from within the second-personal stance, the agent loses the idea of the bindingness of second-personal reasons.

The agent can still accept that the second-personal stance provides reasons for acting. Darwall did show that second-personal reasons are as good as any kind of reason for acting. But precisely because second-personal reasons are ‘as good as any’ when taking a step back, the second-person

standpoint must remain optional.⁶ Again: second-personal competence does not entail that an agent must automatically accept second-personal reasons.

Since Darwall explicitly denies that the substantive aim of action is autonomy in the Kantian sense to which Darwall is committed, it is reasonable to accept Darwall's other conclusion, namely that action does not have a substantive aim. And because there is no substantive aim of practical reason, any reason generated for acting is a valid reason when seen from a deliberative perspective. (Although these may not, of course, be moral reasons.)

If the agent is to appreciate that second-personal reasons are inescapable, she already needs to stand within the second-personal perspective. It is only within the circle of concepts that she can obligate herself as a member of the moral community. But there is nothing to indicate the special nature or priority of moral reasons after the agent has taken a step back in her reflection. So there is nothing in this deliberation that commits an agent to accepting the moral reasons. An agent can only be obligated when she herself chooses the second-person standpoint. And this makes that the obligation is ultimately founded in the authority of the addresser to be a law to herself. (Wallace 2007)

In short: Darwall fails to give a transcendental argument for the second-person standpoint. An agent can coherently deliberate about second-personal reasons without taking the second-person standpoint. Darwall cannot show that the second-person standpoint itself is obligatory and thus he cannot show that moral requirements are categorical. Darwall acknowledges this in his article *Precis: The Second-Person Standpoint* (2010):

“Now I concede that there may be no way to convince a consistent egoist, say, that second-personal reasons exist or that egoism is internally inconsistent or incoherent in some way.” (Darwall 2010, 228)

And because Darwall cannot convince a sceptic, Darwall cannot hold the sceptic morally responsible: It is the consequence of Pufendorf's point that we cannot hold people responsible who do not take up the second-person standpoint.⁷ Since we cannot reasonably expect them to endorse second-personal reasons, we cannot reasonably expect them to hold themselves responsible.⁸ As the second-person standpoint is an open deliberative alternative, it cannot answer the normative question.

From practical reason to the second-person standpoint

As I have shown in the previous section, the inability of Darwall's second-person standpoint to answer the normative question comes from the possibility that agents reject second-personal

⁶ When the agent does however accept second-personal reasons, she must also accept the special urgency of these reasons because she committed herself to the presuppositions of second-personal address.

⁷ Whether they deny second-personal reasons completely or when they hold that they have another morality which gives different reasons.

⁸ We could, of course, hold people accountable when they accept second-personal reasons but then consequently ignore them. But we can only say this because these agents are already committed to the second-person standpoint.

reasons from a deliberative standpoint about reasons. If Darwall wants to show that the second-person standpoint is obligatory, and therefore that moral reasons obligate, he needs to show how we are necessarily committed to the second-person standpoint when we deliberate at all.

In this section I will provide such an account, as outlined by Christine Korsgaard in her commentary *Autonomy and the Second Person Within: A Commentary on Stephen Darwall's The Second-Person Standpoint* (2007). Darwall does use this solution provided by Korsgaard. I will give the reasons Darwall has for not taking this route provided by Korsgaard. Then I will argue why these reasons are not valid and how, in Korsgaard's account, deliberation necessarily commits agents to the second-person standpoint.

Darwall has three objections to the solution provided by Korsgaard:

1. First-person deliberation alone does not acknowledge the special character of second-personal reasons. Unless agents are summoned second-personally from within deliberation, there is no way to appreciate second-personal reasons.
2. First-person deliberation alone cannot answer a naïve practical reasoner⁹. This is because Kant cannot establish autonomy of the will, because rational thinking does not presuppose the categorical imperative.
3. When standing in a relation to oneself by means of deliberation, it is unclear how you can be accountable to yourself.

The first objection can be refuted by an account of deliberation that can show how agents are committed to the second-person standpoint when they deliberate at all. Since that would mean that the second-personal perspective comes hand in hand with the first-personal perspective of deliberation. I will argue that deliberation commits an agent to the second-person standpoint after refuting Darwall's other two objections to Korsgaard.

Darwall argues at length for the second objection in chapter 9 of *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability*. Darwall argues that, from a Kantian perspective, a naïve practical reasoner can choose any rational norm as basis for deliberation but that does not commit the reasoner to suppose autonomy: "*For intelligent pursuit of an outcome I desire to involve my will, I must deliberate on the basis of some rational norm, one I take to apply validly to any possible rational agent. [...] But does this require me to presuppose autonomy? For this assumption to amount to autonomy, I would have to be required by the logic of my deliberative situation to presuppose that (at least some) reason-generating norms are valid independently of any properties of the objects that I am counselled by them to bring about. What in the deliberative context forces me to assume this?*" (Darwall 2006, 225-226)

Korsgaard argues that this does not do justice to Kant's account. (Korsgaard 2007) Kant derives the idea of the categorical imperative from the idea of a categorical imperative: "*But when I think of a categorical imperative I know at once what it contains. For, since the imperative contains, beyond the law, only the necessity that the maxim be in conformity with this law, while the law contains no*

⁹ "A naïve practical reasoner deliberates about what to do from the perspective of (critically revised) beliefs and desires." (Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability* 2006, 216-217)

condition to which it would be limited, nothing is left which the maxim of action is to conform but the universality of a law as such; and this conformity alone is what the imperative properly represents as necessary.” (GWS, 4:420)

This means that Darwall’s argument against Kant fails because any agent must presuppose that she must act on unconditional norms:

And in connection with the Fact of Reason argument, Darwall claims that a Rossian deontologist can accept the Fact of Reason argument without thinking that he is committed to the Categorical Imperative, or to the idea that something like the Categorical Imperative underlies the requirements he does accept. But if Kant is right in arguing that the Categorical Imperative can be derived from the very idea of an unconditional requirement, then both of these agents are committed to the Categorical Imperative. For they are both committed to thinking that the norms they act on are unconditional rational requirements. (Korsgaard 2007, 19)

The last objection is an objection Darwall offered to Korsgaard’s idea of a second person within: “*On Kant’s account as I understand it, by contrast, the second-person standpoint is unavoidable, because I do not have to discover, by making and responding to demands on others, that I am answerable to myself. The fact is made clear to me by the voice of the second person within.*” (Korsgaard 2007, 23) Darwall does not accede that this necessarily involves answerability or accountability. (Darwall, Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson 2007, 56)

But Darwall’s objection does not hold, as deliberation makes an agent accountable to herself. In the argument that follows this paragraph I will show that because an agent must accept reasons if she is to act, she must identify with herself and so she must be a law to herself. This makes the agent accountable to herself, thus placing the agent within the second-personal perspective. Meaning that if the agent is to deliberate at all, she unavoidable takes up the second-person standpoint.

Humans have a multitude of practical identities. These practical identities are contingent and may change or even disappear over time. (Korsgaard 2011, 120) But reflection must always be governed by a practical identity. And this practical identity is the identity springing from being a human being. (Korsgaard 2011, 121) This identity as a human being is a very basic identity and that means that every conception of practical identity is based in your humanity.

Now the reflective structure of human consciousness requires that an agent identifies herself with a principle to govern her choices and so be a law to herself. (Korsgaard 2011, 103-104) And this establishes a relation of the agent to herself: “*So the reflective structure of human consciousness establishes a relation here, a relation which we have to ourselves. And it is a relation not of mere power but rather of authority. And that is the authority that is the source of obligation.*” (Korsgaard 2011, 104)

In other words: an agent owes this to herself and therefore she is accountable to herself. And the idea of accountability brings the agent into the second-person standpoint. Since reasons are public, we are thereby forced to acknowledge the humanity and reasons of others. (Pauer-Studer 2010, 301) And this puts the agent firmly within the second-person standpoint.

When I accept any reason for acting, I immediately am responsible to myself for acting according to my reasons on pain of irrationality¹⁰. Therefore the deliberative stance requires me to enter the second-person standpoint when I deliberate at all.

We now have an answer to the normative question: If we are to deliberate at all, we necessarily take up the second-person standpoint. And the second-person standpoint gives rise to obligation because agents have the authority to make demands of one another as members of the moral community.

Conclusion

I started this paper by sketching the problem posed by the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik. I argued that this casus issues a challenge to any moral theory that claims that morality is normative. This challenge is what Korsgaard calls 'the normative question'. I then made an analysis of the second-person standpoint where I focused on four interrelated concepts: authority, claim, second-personal competence and accountability.

Authority is the authority of an addresser to make demand of an addressee. This authority is to be decided from a standpoint that both addresser and addressee can share: the perspective of members of the moral community.

A valid claim is a claim that derives its normativity purely from the authority of the addresser. And it is not necessary for the addresser to actually utter the claim. The claim is also valid when it stays unspoken. That a claim is only valid when its normativity derives from authority is the consequence of Strawson's point. And it follows that a claim is only valid when it gives reasons that the addressee can reasonably use to guide her own free conduct. This is what Darwall calls Fichte's point.

A consequence of Fichte's point is that any second-personal demand must presuppose the capacity of the addressee to freely guide herself. The addressee must be second-personal competent. And it is this competence that is the autonomy of the will.

The addressee is therefore also accountable, because she thinks of herself as accountable from the perspective as a member of the moral community. This is Pufendorf's point: We can only hold someone responsible when we can expect the other to hold herself responsible too.

After this analysis I argued how Darwall tries to answer the normative question. We should be moral because we are accountable to one another, but that is not the whole story. The question is whether an agent is required to accept second-personal reasons anyway. Darwall tried to dispel this problem by showing that, from a perspective about our reasons in deliberation, our reasons for accepting second-personal reasons are as good as any other reason to accept reasons of other kinds.

I then argued that there is nothing in the second-person standpoint that makes this standpoint obligatory. To appreciate the special nature of second-personal reasons, an agent must already be committed to the second-personal stance. And when deliberating about second-personal reasons, there is nothing to commit the agent to accepting these reasons. When the agent does accept

¹⁰ When I decide to do A because I determine that I have a compelling reasons to do A, I would be irrational if I would do B. (Unless I find another reasons to do B, but I must then deliberate again before deciding to do B.)

second-personal reasons, we can hold her morally responsible. But this does not answer the cynic who denies second-personal reasons.

After that I gave an account of Korsgaard's argument of the second-person within to show how any form of deliberation necessarily commits an agent to the second-person standpoint. Because an agent must value her practical identity as a human being, she is therefore accountable to herself. This roots the agent within the second-personal standpoint.

A slightly revised account of Stephen Darwall's second-person standpoint can give an answer to the normative question. We need to be moral because the second-person standpoint is required when I deliberate at all. And thus we are required to view ourselves from the standpoint of members of the moral community. A sceptic cannot deny moral obligation as he cannot deliberate about second-personal reasons without being rooted in the second-person standpoint. The same goes for the sceptic who holds that he has a different morality. By deliberating at all about what this morality would be, he is already firmly rooted in the second-person standpoint. This means that if Breivik is committed to holding that he acted from a different morality, he erred and acted immoral. If Breivik denies the obligation of second-personal reasons he placed himself outside the moral community as an a-rational being and then we should treat him accordingly.

Bibliography

- Barney, Rachel. *Callicles and Thrasymachus*. 27 10 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/callicles-thrasymachus/> (opened 06 04, 2012).
- Brewer, Talbot M. „Morality and the Second Person.” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 2009: 163-167.
- Darwall, Stephen. „Precis: The Second-Person Standpoint.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2010: 216-228.
- . „Reply to Korsgaard, Wallace and Watson.” *Ethics*, 2007: 52-69.
- . „Reply to Schapiro, Smith/Strabbing and Yaffe.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2010: 253-264.
- . *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Vertaler: Mary Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Korsgaard, Christine M. „Autonomy and the Second Person Within: A Commentary on Stephen Darwall's The Second-Person Standpoint.” *Ethics*, 2007: 8-23.
- . *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Pauer-Studer, Herlinde. „The Moral Standpoint: First of Second Personal?” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2010: 296-310.

- Sayre-McCord, Geoff. *Metaethics*. 26 01 2012. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaethics/> (opened 06 04, 2012).
- Schapiro, Tamar. „Desires as Demands: How the Second-Person Standpoint Might Be Internal to Reflective Agency.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2010: 229-236.
- Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter. *Moral Scepticism*. 05 09 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scepticism-moral/> (opened 06 04, 2012).
- Smith, Micheal, en Jada Twedt Strabbing. „Moral Obligation, Accountability, and Second-Personal Reasons.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2010: 237-245.
- Sussman, David. „Stephen Darwall, The Second-Person Standpoint.” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 2010: 414-416.
- Wallace, R. Jay. „Reasons, Relations and Commands: Reflections on Darwall.” *Ethics*, 2007: 24-36.
- Watson, Gary. „Morality as Equal Accountability: Comments on Stephen Darwall's The Second-Person Standpoint.” *Ethics*, 2007: 37-51.
- Yaffe, Gideon. „Comment on Stephen Darwall's The Second Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect and Accountability.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2010: 246-252.