



Separateness of Perspectives, Separateness of Persons, and Duties to the Self

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Recently, Paul Schofield has developed a highly original and sophisticated case for the existence of duties to the self. The core idea is that since each of us occupies multiple perspectives from which our interests conflict, we can be said to relate to ourselves on recognizably moral and political terms. In this article, I argue that Schofield's argument fails because it does not take seriously enough the key disanalogy between conflicting interpersonal perspectives and conflicting intrapersonal perspectives—namely, the fact of interpersonality itself. To show this, I first argue that interpersonality offers a simple explanation of the intuitive moral difference between otherwise similar actions, thus suggesting that interpersonality is morally relevant. I then consider and reject two responses: that there are alternative explanations of this moral difference and that there is no moral difference here in need of explanation. I conclude by suggesting that this argument provides independently interesting insights into the sometimes-obscure idea of the separateness of persons.



Separateness of Perspectives, Separateness of Persons, and Duties to the Self

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In everyday speech, we often refer to duties to the self. We might say that “she owes it to herself to revise for the exam” or that “he did not do himself justice in the interview.” Despite this, many contemporary philosophers are sceptical of the idea of moral duties to the self (and especially sceptical of the idea of politically enforceable duties to the self). Morality, they say, is fundamentally interpersonal and other-directed. Some even take this to be part of the very *definition* of morality. On this view, there cannot possibly be duties to the self because morality consists in the rules and principles regulating behavior that affects *others*. Talk of what we “owe to ourselves” or of “doing ourselves justice” is at best a *façon de parler* and at worst a conceptual confusion; in neither case does it tell us anything real about our moral rights and duties.

Such scepticism is understandable. Indeed, there is a seemingly devastating argument against the coherence of duties to the self.¹ This argument begins by noting that moral duties (or at least moral duties *owed to someone*) have two characteristic features. The first is that duties are *binding*. If X owes Y a duty, then X is bound to perform that duty. The second feature is that duties are *waivable*. If X owes Y a duty, then Y can waive this obligation. When a person owes a duty to another distinct person, there is no tension between these two features. For instance, if Alf owes Betty a sum of money, Alf cannot simply release himself at will from the duty to repay Betty (because duties are binding) but Betty can release Alf from the duty to repay her (because duties are waivable). But when a person owes a duty to herself—when X and Y are the same person—a tension arises. Suppose Clara owes herself a duty to revise for an exam. If duties are waivable, then she can release herself from this duty (as the party to whom the duty is owed). But in this case the duty is not binding. And if duties are binding, then she cannot simply release herself at will from this duty (as the party who owes the duty). But in this case the duty is not waivable. So, assuming duties are both binding

¹ For a classic statement of this argument, see Singer 1959. For recent arguments against the bindingness feature, see, e.g.: Oakley 2017; Muñoz 2020; Muñoz 2021; Schaab 2021; Kanygina 2022. And for an argument against the waivability feature, see, e.g., Hills 2003. As I explain in Section I, Schofield’s view also overcomes the paradox by denying the waivability feature.

and waivable, there can be no such thing as a duty owed to oneself—there are only duties owed to others.

Against this backdrop, Paul Schofield has recently developed a highly original, systematic and powerful case for the existence of moral and political duties to the self.² The argument has several steps. Schofield first sketches a broadly Darwallian account of morality according to which the distinctive feature of moral duty is its “second-personal” character.³ On this view, the mark of a moral duty is that it places individuals in relations of mutual accountability in which one person makes a claim or demand on another. Schofield then argues that since we occupy multiple perspectives from which our interests conflict, we can relate to ourselves in a recognizably second-personal manner. These conflicting perspectives, that is, enable us to hold ourselves accountable and make demands on ourselves in the same sort of morally inflected way in which we hold others accountable and make demands on them. Schofield goes on to argue that at least some of these moral duties are enforceable by political institutions. The basic idea is that just as certain laws are legitimated by the need to prevent one from relating to others in a dominating or unjust way, certain paternalistic laws are legitimated by the need to prevent one from relating to oneself in a dominating or unjust way.

In this article, after summarizing Schofield’s argument in greater detail (Section I), I argue that it fails because it does not take seriously enough the most central disanalogy between conflicting interpersonal perspectives and conflicting intrapersonal perspectives—namely, the fact of interpersonality itself. On this view, the reason why interpersonal interactions are regulated by moral norms whereas intrapersonal interactions are not is simply that the former involve interactions between metaphysically distinct persons whereas the latter do not. To show this, I first argue that interpersonality offers a promising explanation of the intuitive moral difference between certain otherwise similar actions, thus suggesting that interpersonality is morally relevant (Section II). I then consider and reject two responses available to Schofield: that there are alternative explanations of the moral difference between these actions (Section III) and that despite appearances to the contrary there is no moral difference here in need of explanation (Section IV). I conclude by suggesting that this argument provides independently interesting insights into the sometimes-obscure idea of the separateness of persons (Section V).

² See Schofield 2021. See also the earlier discussions in: Schofield 2015; Schofield 2018; Schofield 2019.

³ See Darwall 2006.

I. SCHOFIELD'S CASE FOR DUTIES TO THE SELF

Schofield begins his case for the existence of duties to the self by sketching out a broadly Darwallian account of morality as “second-personal.”⁴ Stephen Darwall characterizes the second-personal standpoint as “the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another’s conduct and will.”⁵ To shed light on this idea, consider Darwall’s recurrent example of a person who steps on another person’s foot. The stepper has a moral duty to remove her foot. One way to make sense of this is *third-personally*: the stepper would best promote overall happiness by removing her foot. But, thinks Darwall, this would miss the important sense in which the stepper owes it *to the other person* to remove her foot. The situation is thus better understood *second-personally*: the stepper is *accountable to* the victim, her reason to remove her foot is generated by the victim’s *legitimate claims or demands*, she *owes it to* the victim to remove her foot, if she fails to remove her foot she *wrongs* the victim, and so on. This sort of analysis can be generalized to other cases that involve moral duties. So, on the Darwallian view, the distinctive feature of morality is that it involves a “circle of irreducibly second-personal concepts”—concepts such as accountability, legitimate claims and demands, owing, wronging, and so on.⁶

Schofield then argues that a person can relate to herself in this sort of second-personal manner. To do so, he makes the intriguing and provocative suggestion that what allows two distinct persons (such as the foot-stepper and her victim) to relate second-personally is not their being metaphysically distinct persons per se but rather their occupying and deliberating from distinct perspectives with conflicting interests. Of course, distinct persons do in fact always have distinct perspectives, but it is the conflicting perspectives, rather than the metaphysical distinctness of persons, that is philosophically central to the second-personal standpoint—or so Schofield contends. In other words, it is possible to describe a recognizably second-personal interaction without making any reference at all to metaphysically distinct persons.⁷

This means that if one and the same person can occupy and deliberate from distinct perspectives with conflicting interests, she can properly be said to relate to herself second-personally in the way that is distinctive of morality on the Darwallian view. These conflicting perspectives would enable each of us to hold ourselves accountable

⁴ See Darwall 2006. For a helpful recent overview, see Schaab 2023.

⁵ Darwall 2006, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ Schofield 2021, p. 70. See also Schofield 2015, pp. 518–9.



and make demands on ourselves in the same sort of morally inflected way in which we hold others accountable and make demands on them. There would thus be an important analogy between interpersonal and intrapersonal moral address—between relating to others second-personally and relating to oneself second-personally.

There are two main ways, says Schofield, in which one and the same person can occupy and deliberate from distinct perspectives with conflicting interests. The first and most obvious way is that each of us can occupy and deliberate from distinct *temporal* perspectives. Consider a young person's decision about whether or not to smoke. From her perspective as a young person, she experiences smoking as pleasurable. Yet from her perspective as a sufferer of lung disease, she feels very differently about smoking. Here the interests that a person has from distinct temporal perspectives come into conflict in much the same way that the interests of metaphysically distinct persons do. And so it seems perfectly natural that when deliberating about whether or not to smoke, this person might adopt a second-personal standpoint towards herself. That is, qua occupant of the future perspective she might well confront herself qua occupant of the present perspective, holding herself accountable and demanding that she does not ruin her lungs. And, feeling the normative pressure of the demand emanating from this future perspective, she might well conclude that she ought not to smoke. In this way, she would be acting not for reasons of prudence and rational self-interest, nor even for third-personal moral reasons, but rather for distinctively second-personal moral reasons having to do with what she owes to her future self.

The second main way in which one and the same person can occupy and deliberate from distinct perspectives with conflicting interests involves our various *practical identities*. The interests and ends associated with our various practical identities can come into conflict, just as they do in cases involving metaphysically distinct persons and distinct temporal perspectives. For instance, one's interest qua parent in spending time with one's child might conflict with one's interest qua philosopher in traveling to conferences. This again makes it possible for a person to relate to herself in a recognizably second-personal way: at any given moment, she can issue demands *from* the perspective of one of her practical identities *to* the perspective of another of her practical identities. This sort of phenomenology is pervasive. We often talk about feeling "torn" between different aspects of ourselves. "Such talk," Schofield says, "amounts to an acknowledgement of the possibility of a divided self—a self susceptible to normative pressure applied in opposed directions from competing demands, issued from various perspectives that it occupies."⁸

⁸ Schofield 2021, p. 108.

Importantly, Schofield's account of duties to the self solves the paradox mentioned above. That paradox, recall, is that a person who owes a duty to herself would be able to waive that duty, in which case it would lack the binding force characteristic of moral duties. In the case of moral duties arising from the conflicts between distinct temporal perspectives, this objection is defused because any successful waiving of a duty would have to come from the perspective from which that duty was generated. But a person cannot waive a duty generated from a future perspective as she does not yet occupy that perspective. In the case of moral duties arising from the conflicts between the distinct perspectives of our various practical identities, matters are more complicated but the key point is that there are certain practical identities that simply *cannot* be relinquished or abandoned at will. One way in which Schofield explains this is by drawing on the work of Kantians such as Korsgaard who hold that "our identity as rational beings" is one that "is had by each of us necessarily."⁹ In both cases—those involving duties across time and those involving duties at a moment—the paradox is solved since duties to the self are binding and unwaivable.

Having defended in this way the idea of moral duties to oneself, Schofield argues that at least some of these duties are enforceable by political institutions. Here he draws on contemporary republican theorists such as Philip Pettit, who hold that state power must be aimed at ensuring that no citizen is dominated by any other.¹⁰ There are different specifications of non-domination, but the core idea is that no one should be subject to the will of another. For Schofield, this non-domination rationale for coercive enforceability applies intrapersonally as well as interpersonally. So just as certain laws are necessary and legitimate in order to prevent one from relating to others in a dominating or unjust way, certain laws are necessary and legitimate in order to prevent one from relating to oneself in a dominating or unjust way. Consider again the choice of a young person to smoke. "From her perspective later in life," Schofield explains, "such a person seems to be at the mercy of her earlier self—her purposiveness seems to be vulnerable to decisions she makes earlier on—in much the same way that an individual can come to be at the mercy of another person who is in a position to interfere with her body. This explains how an individual person, by virtue of her temporal extension, can relate to herself wrongfully."¹¹ A paternalistic law banning smoking might thus be justified on the grounds that it prevents this sort of wrongful bodily domination.

⁹ Ibid., p. 113; see also Korsgaard 1996.

¹⁰ See Pettit 1997.

¹¹ Schofield 2021, p. 169.

While Schofield's defence of paternalism may differ from other defences of paternalism in some of its practical conclusions about law and policy, the much more important difference is in the nature of the argument used to reach those conclusions. Two distinctive features of this argument are worth noting. The first is that it does not rely on balancing justice against well-being. Many paternalists argue that there are justice-based costs to paternalism but that these costs are *outweighed* by the benefits of promoting citizens' well-being. Many paternalists, that is, argue that citizens' interests take precedence over their independence in these cases. Richard Arneson, for instance, refers to this sort of "conflict within the soul of liberalism" and states that when "paternalism could improve a person's life dramatically, perhaps along many dimensions of assessment, but at the cost of a small loss of integrity," it is all-things-considered justified.¹² By contrast, Schofield's argument is that paternalism is not separate from, and competitive with, justice. Rather, paternalism is *constitutive* of justice: it is "necessary for putting a person on [just and] rightful terms with her own self."¹³ Put differently, it is necessary to ensure a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of "intrapersonal cooperation" between the distinct perspectives within a person's life.¹⁴ As such, paternalism does not even have pro tanto justice-based costs—paternalistic coercion is no more presumptively unjust than coercion aimed at, say, preventing people from harming others.

The second distinctive feature of Schofield's argument for paternalism concerns its lack of assumptions about citizens' rational capacities or dispositions. Many paternalists argue that paternalistic laws and policies are required in light of evidence from the fields of social psychology and behavioural economics that indicates that human beings are systematically and predictably subject to various sorts of cognitive biases and failures of rationality. Sarah Conly, for instance, says in this regard that "the truth is that we don't reason very well, and in many cases there is no justification for leaving us to struggle with our own inabilities and to suffer the consequences."¹⁵ This has, in turn, been critiqued by anti-paternalists such as Jonathan Quong who worry that paternalism "demean[s]" or "denigrate[s] citizens' moral status" insofar as it relies on "negative assumptions about citizens' abilities to know and rationally pursue their own good."¹⁶ By contrast, Schofield need not make any such assumptions. This is

¹² Arneson 2004, p. 87.

¹³ Schofield 2021, p. 161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁵ Conly 2013, p. 1.

¹⁶ Quong 2011, pp. 86, 101, 103. For a response, see Tahzib 2022, pp. 280–93.

because non-domination has a requirement of counterfactual robustness: it requires not just that no one *actually* subjects you to their will but also that no one *could* subject you to their will. So just as the creation of a society in which all enjoy non-domination requires the state to enact laws that prevent citizens from treating others unjustly even if citizens have no actual desire or tendency to treat others unjustly, it also requires the state to enact laws that prevent citizens from treating themselves unjustly even if citizens have no actual desire or tendency to treat themselves unjustly.

Such, in bare bones, is Schofield's account of moral and political duties to the self. Before developing an objection to this account, two clarifications are in order. The first is about form versus content. Schofield is at pains to stress that he is not seeking to defend any *particular* moral or political duties to the self.¹⁷ He does not try to adjudicate between various possible principles for the regulation of one's relationship with oneself, such as an intrapersonal difference principle (whereby any inequalities between perspectives must be to the greatest benefit of the worst-off perspective), an intrapersonal prioritarian principle (whereby benefitting a perspective matters more the worse-off the perspective is), an intrapersonal sufficientarian principle (whereby each perspective must have enough), and so on.¹⁸ Instead, he is seeking to defend a general framework for thinking about these matters in a fruitful and illuminating way. In this sense, his focus is on the *form* of intrapersonal morality and justice, rather than its *substance* and *content*. In this regard, Schofield explains that working out the substance of intrapersonal morality and justice—working out the substantive moral and political principles that regulate a person's relationship with herself—is a “prodigious undertaking” and one that is likely to be just as difficult as the task of working out the substance of interpersonal morality and justice.¹⁹ So what still needs to be identified—and what Schofield leaves deliberately open—is a scheme of plausible principles of intrapersonal morality and justice.

Second, it is worth clarifying what is at stake in this debate. After all, even critics of the idea of duties to the self readily accept that we have *prudential reasons* to promote our own well-being, to develop our own talents, and so on. They just deny that these prudential reasons amount to *moral reasons* and *moral duties*. So isn't this a merely verbal dispute—a dispute about how to use the terms “morality” and “moral duty”? Why does it matter whether we say that treating ourselves in certain ways is required by morality or by prudence, if everyone agrees about how we should treat ourselves?

¹⁷ Schofield 2021, pp. 18, 185–90.

¹⁸ For discussion of intrapersonal prioritarianism, see: Otsuka and Voorhoeve 2009; Porter 2012.

¹⁹ Schofield 2021, p. 187.

Schofield gives several reasons why it matters whether our treatment of ourselves falls under the rubric of morality as opposed to mere prudence, but the most important of these concerns the distinctive *strictness* of moral duties. Whereas norms of prudence and rationality “afford a degree of latitude to persons laboring under them,” norms of morality leave little or no discretion.²⁰ Morality “doesn’t simply urge, it commands.”²¹ Whether or not there are moral duties to the self can thus be expected to have far-reaching implications for practical deliberation.

II. INTERPERSONALITY AND ITS MORAL SIGNIFICANCE

Schofield’s argument for moral and political duties to the self relies on some quite heavy machinery, such as Darwall’s second-personal standpoint, Korsgaard’s idea of our inescapable practical identity as rational beings, and republican theories of freedom as non-domination. A perfectly reasonable response here would be to deny one of these theses—that is, to deny that morality is fundamentally second-personal, to deny that we have certain inescapable practical identities, or to deny the coherence or plausibility of republican freedom.²² But, to get to the most original and distinctive issues raised by Schofield’s argument, I shall be maximally concessive: I shall argue that, even if we grant the heavy machinery that Schofield relies on, his argument still fails because it does not take seriously enough the moral significance of interpersonal

For Schofield, the way in which we relate to others resembles the way in which we relate to ourselves. Just as we issue demands to others, hold others accountable, experience conflicts of interest with others, confer benefits on others, impose harms on others and dominate others, so too each of us occupies multiple perspectives (across time and at a moment) from which we can and do issue demands to ourselves, hold ourselves accountable, experience conflicts of interest within ourselves, confer benefits on ourselves, impose harms on ourselves and dominate ourselves. If the first set of interactions is regulated by moral and political norms, why shouldn’t the second set be regulated by moral and political norms too?

There is an obvious (perhaps *too* obvious, as I explain below) answer to this question: namely, that interpersonal

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²² For relevant critical discussions, see, respectively, e.g.: Zylberman 2017; Enoch 2006, esp. pp. 187–92; Simpson 2017.

why interpersonal interactions are regulated by moral and political norms whereas intrapersonal interactions are not is simply that the former involve interactions between metaphysically distinct persons whereas the latter do not—or, at least, something very close to this, such as the fact that interpersonal interactions involve interactions between the distinct *wills* of metaphysically distinct persons whereas intrapersonal interactions do not.

The point—to be clear—is not conceptual or definitional. It is not that “morality” by definition concerns the interactions between metaphysically distinct persons (or wills) and thus that the idea of intrapersonal morality involves a sort of conceptual confusion. That way of dismissing duties to the self would be deeply unsatisfying. After all, Schofield could easily respond by introducing some novel term (“schmorality”) that has all of the characteristics of morality (such as its strictness, its connection to certain reactive attitudes, and so on) except the characteristic of interpersonal. All of Schofield’s questions and arguments could then be coherently rephrased in terms of schmorality: we could coherently inquire into whether there are schmoral duties to the self, whether some of these schmoral duties are enforceable by political institutions, and so on. My argument against Schofield’s case for duties to the self is thus driven by normative rather than conceptual considerations: it is driven by considerations having to do with the moral significance of the metaphysical distinctness of persons.

In a footnote, Schofield does briefly consider the possibility that the intrapersonal case and the interpersonal case are “disanalogous precisely in that the latter case, but not the former, involves two distinct persons.”²³ But he dismisses this suggestion on the grounds that it “would be question-begging”—hence the worry above that interpersonal might be *too* obvious a disanalogy here.²⁴ As Schofield explains: “My purpose here is to determine whether a person can have self-directed second-personal reasons of the sort she has with respect to others. To reject my argument on grounds that cases I’m considering involve only one individual is simply to assume a negative answer to the very question I’m attempting to ask.”²⁵

However, this dismissal seems to me too quick. No doubt there are certain crude ways of running an interpersonal-based argument that would indeed beg the question against Schofield. But there are also, I think, more sophisticated ways of running such an argument that are not question-begging in any straightforward sense. In particular, I shall in this and the following sections seek to work up an independently

²³ Schofield 2021, p. 70 n. 8; see also Schofield 2018, pp. 73–4.

²⁴ Schofield 2021, p. 70 n. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

persuasive account of interpersonal and its moral significance—an account that is supported by robust intuitive judgements and thus that is capable of explaining in a non-question-begging way why moral and political norms apply between persons but not within persons.

Let us start with a simple pair of cases:

Alf: Alf commits suicide for no good reason and contrary to the objections and demands that would be issued from the perspective of his future self. Alf's life is going perfectly well, yet he decides anyway to kill himself.

Betty: Betty kills another person for no good reason and contrary to the objections and demands issued from the perspective of her victim. Betty's victim's life is going perfectly well, yet she decides anyway to kill this third party.²⁶

Different people are likely to have different intuitions about whether Alf acts wrongly. Some will deem Alf's act morally wrong, whereas others will deem it imprudent but not wrong. But surely everyone—even those who do think that Alf acts wrongly—will share the intuition that Betty's act is *more seriously wrong* than Alf's act. Whatever we think about the moral status of Alf's act, that is, it is difficult to believe that Alf's act and Betty's act are on a moral par.

This is not an isolated pair of cases. It is possible to construct many such pairs in which it seems more seriously wrong to impose a harm on someone else than to impose an otherwise similar harm on oneself. In doing so, however, we have to ensure that our pair of cases is “clean.” We have to ensure, that is, that the only relevant difference between the cases is the fact that one case is interpersonal whereas the other is intrapersonal. This is not entirely straightforward because our own consent is normally implicit in our treatment of ourselves, whereas others' consent is not

²⁶ For related cases in the context of the debate about the common-sense morality thesis of self-other asymmetry, see: Stocker 1976; Slote 1984; Muñoz and Baron-Schmitt forthcoming. Daniel Muñoz also invokes suicide in the context of a very different (indeed, entirely opposite) sort of objection to Schofield's view. Where I worry that Schofield's view is too condemnatory of suicide insofar as it cannot distinguish between gratuitous suicide and gratuitous murder, Muñoz worries that Schofield's view is not condemnatory enough of suicide insofar as if one ends one's life then one destroys one's future perspective and so there is no conflict of perspectives to ground a duty to oneself against suicide. I believe that one of the responsive strategies that Muñoz anticipates—grounding duties in the hypothetical claims emanating from the hypothetical perspectives of actual persons—can block this objection and is in keeping with the spirit of Schofield's view. See Muñoz 2023, pp. 453–4; Schofield 2021, p. 63.

similarly implicit in our treatment of others—and indeed in Section III.A., I consider the objection that the case of Alf and Betty is not equalized in terms of consent. As Muñoz and Baron-Schmitt put this point, in our treatment of ourselves we are normally “an active participant, not an unwilling victim.”²⁷ For instance, it is implicit in my ruffling of my hair that I consent to being touched in this way, whereas it is not implicit in my ruffling of someone else’s hair that he consents to being touched in this way. In constructing pairs of cases, then, we have to find situations in which a person does not or cannot validly consent to her treatment of herself. In addition to suicide versus murder, such cases might involve harming one’s own long-term health versus harming someone else’s long-term health, getting oneself into debt versus getting someone else into debt, accidentally or negligently giving oneself a painful electric shock versus accidentally or negligently giving someone else a painful electric shock, and so on.

What, then, explains this intuitive difference in wrongness between what Alf does and what Betty does? Given that the two actions seem otherwise equivalent—given, that is, that both involve killing someone for no good reason—a natural explanation for this intuitive difference is the fact of interpersonality itself: inflicting a harm on someone else is more seriously wrong than inflicting a harm of the same magnitude on oneself precisely because it is inflicted on a metaphysically distinct person. On this view, the reason Betty’s act is more seriously wrong than Alf’s act is nothing more mysterious than the fact that Betty acts upon a third party whereas Alf acts upon herself.

Importantly, this disanalogy seems to be morally relevant: the “separateness of persons” is not just an arbitrary difference between the cases (like the fact that Betty’s name is longer than Alf’s) and instead seems on reflection to possess a certain independent plausibility and thus to be of the right kind to explain why the interpersonal case is morally inflected whereas the intrapersonal case is not. It is telling in this regard to observe that when Darwall characterizes the second-personal standpoint, he typically makes explicit reference to the separateness of persons: the second-personal standpoint, he says, is “the perspective *you and I* take up when we make and acknowledge claims on *one another’s* conduct and will.”²⁸ Similarly, when Pettit characterizes republican non-domination, he too makes explicit reference to this feature: being dominated consists in “being subject to the potentially capricious will or the potentially idiosyncratic judgement *of another*.”²⁹ Of course, Schofield would contend that these references to the idea of interpersonality are mere

²⁷ Muñoz and Baron-Schmitt forthcoming, p. 8; see also Slote 1984, p. 190.

²⁸ Darwall 2006, p. 3 (emphases added).

²⁹ Pettit 1997, p. 5 (emphasis added).

expository artefacts. We can abstract from this idea without losing sight of anything very important. And, admittedly, Darwall and Pettit do elsewhere characterize their positions without explicit reference to the idea of interpersonality and thus in ways that leave open the possibility of moral and political self-relation. Pettit, for instance, elsewhere says that “to enjoy non-domination is to be in a position where *no one* [oneself included?—CT] has that power of arbitrary interference over me.”³⁰ Still, the separateness of persons does seem to mark a deep and important moral fact, and it is at least suggestive that the very theorists on whom Schofield relies in building his case for duties to self often appear to regard this fact as morally relevant.

Many others also make use of the idea of the separateness of persons. Robert Nozick, for instance, says that individual moral rights “reflect the fact that no moral balancing act can take place among us.”³¹ He continues: “there is no moral outweighing of one of our lives by others so as to lead to a greater overall social good. There is no justified sacrifice of some of us for others. This root idea, namely, that there are different individuals with separate lives and so no one may be sacrificed for others, underlies the existence of moral side constraints.”³² Similarly, Rawls famously criticizes classical utilitarianism on the grounds that it “adopt[s] for society as a whole the principle of rational choice for one man” and so “does not take seriously the distinction between persons.”³³ As these statements indicate, the separateness of persons is typically used to show that the interpersonal cannot be modelled on the intrapersonal (as utilitarians endeavour to do). But it can equally well be used to show that the intrapersonal cannot be modelled on the interpersonal (as Schofield endeavours to do). Attempts to analogize the interpersonal and the intrapersonal—whether in the service of utilitarianism or in the service of duties to the self—fail to take seriously the normative significance of the separateness of persons.

The separateness of persons is particularly important from the point of view of liberal political philosophy.³⁴ Indeed, for many liberal theorists interpersonality is part of the nature and point of politics. Liberal politics (even more than liberal morality) is fundamentally interpersonal: it is about creating a framework in which citizens are free to lead their own lives in their own way so long as they do not harm others,³⁵ or in

³⁰ Ibid., p. 69 (emphasis added); see also Darwall 2006, p. 23.

³¹ Nozick 1974, p. 33.

³² Ibid.

³³ Rawls 1971, pp. 26–7.

³⁴ See Schofield 2021, ch. 5.

³⁵ See Mill 1985; for a contemporary expression, see Feinberg 1984.

which citizens enjoy independence from the wills and choices of others,³⁶ or in which citizens despite their conflicting ends can cooperate with each other on fair terms as free and equal persons,³⁷ or something in this vicinity. Despite their differences, these liberal theories agree that politics is concerned with specifying the normative relations between persons—hence the popularity amongst liberal theorists of the metaphor of a *social* contract as opposed to a *Ulysses* contract. Liberal theory thus leaves little if any room for relating to oneself politically. Arthur Ripstein, for instance, says in this vein that “Kantian independence is not a feature of the individual person considered in isolation, but of relations between persons ... [It] can only be compromised by the deeds of others.”³⁸ Schofield’s denial of the relevance of interpersonal— and his corresponding receptiveness to enforceable duties to oneself to prevent certain forms of political self-relation such as intrapersonal harm, intrapersonal domination, intrapersonal inequality, intrapersonal injustice, and so on—thus constitutes a striking departure from the dominant liberal conception of the nature and point of politics.

In short, the fact of interpersonal offers a straightforward and independently plausible explanation of the intuitive moral difference between the wrongness of Alf’s action and Betty’s action (as well as other similar pairs of cases)—an explanation that is especially congenial to the liberal tradition. Insofar as the apparent moral difference between this pair of cases (i) cannot be better explained in some other way and (ii) is a genuine moral difference, the fact that interpersonal accounts for this difference constitutes evidence in favour of the moral relevance of interpersonal and thus against the attempt to analogize interpersonal address and intrapersonal address. In the following sections, I will defend in turn each of these suppositions against objections.

III. EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE WITHOUT APPEALING TO INTERPERSONALITY

I have suggested that the intuitive moral difference between what Alf does and what Betty does is explained by the fact of interpersonal itself. But that explanation, of course, is unavailable to Schofield, who does not attribute any intrinsic moral significance to interpersonal. So unless he wants to deny that Betty’s act is more seriously wrong than Alf’s act (an option discussed in the next section), he will need to provide some alternative explanation of this difference—one that does not make

³⁶ See Kant 1996; for a contemporary expression, see Ripstein 2009.

³⁷ See Rawls 2005.

³⁸ Ripstein 2009, p. 15; quoted in Schofield 2021, p. 154.

essential reference to the fact that Alf harms *himself* whereas Betty harms someone *else*. There are at least three ways in which Schofield might explain this difference without appealing to the fact of interpersonalit. I call these the “consent” strategy, the “different-principles” strategy and the “different-strictness” strategy. None, I shall argue, is successful.

A. Consent

The consent strategy maintains that we can explain the moral difference between what Alf does and what Betty does in terms of consent. After all, when Alf kills himself he consents to this, but when Betty kills a third party the third party does not consent to this. In this way, Alf’s victim (that is, Alf himself) is a willing victim; Betty’s victim is not. If we equalize these cases by supposing that Betty kills a willing other—by supposing, say, that Betty kills a third party who is *asking* to be killed—then the intuition that Betty’s act is more seriously wrong than Alf’s act seems to disappear.³⁹

However, if one takes the perspective-theoretic framework seriously, this is not a relevant disanalogy and is instead more of a technicality of the case. On the perspective-theoretic view, for consent to be morally transformative it must be issued from the *relevantly affected* perspective—and not merely from a perspective within the relevantly affected life. For instance, in a discussion of smoking, Schofield notes that the smoker might benefit *in the present* and might even benefit *on the whole*. “But what’s relevant, morally speaking,” Schofield continues, “is whether he could, *from the perspective from which he suffers*, legitimately demand that he not smoke earlier on in his life.”⁴⁰ And it is Alf’s hypothetical future perspectives, not his present perspective, that are relevantly affected by his suicide. So, within the perspective-theoretic framework, the consent of Alf’s present perspective to the infliction of harm on his future perspectives is no more morally transformative of that harm than is the consent of the smoker’s present perspective to the infliction of harm on his future perspectives. In short, then, although it is true that the cases of Alf and Betty are unequal insofar as there is a perspective that consents to Alf’s killing of himself but there is no perspective that consents to Betty killing of a third party, the cases are equal in the *morally significant* respects (or at least the respects that are morally significant

³⁹ I thank Robin Jeshion for discussion of this issue. For a sustained argument that many cases used to support the self-other asymmetry can be alternatively explained by appealing to differences in consent, see Muñoz and Baron-Schmitt forthcoming.

⁴⁰ Schofield 2021, p. 84 (emphasis added).

within the perspective–theoretic framework) since in both cases the *relevantly affected* perspectives—the perspectives from which harm is suffered—do not consent to the killing.

Still, although the consent of Alf’s present perspective is not a relevant disanalogy within the perspective–theoretic framework, it may admittedly exert an inadvertent influence on our intuitions about the pair of cases. So perhaps a better pair of cases would be one in which Alf’s present perspective (as opposed to merely his future perspectives) does not or cannot consent to his suicide due to, say, being extremely drunk or under the influence of drugs or in the grip of a form of multiple personality disorder severe enough to undermine consent but not so severe that it literally results in two metaphysically distinct persons inhabiting the same body. In this way, Alf’s victim (that is, Alf himself) is, like Betty’s victim, an unwilling victim:

*Alf**: In a moment of severe drunkenness, Alf* commits suicide for no good reason and contrary to the objections and demands that would be issued from his present and future perspectives.

*Betty**: In a moment of severe drunkenness, Betty* kills another person for no good reason and contrary to the objections and demands that would be issued from her victim’s present and future perspectives.

As before, different people are likely to have different intuitions about whether Alf* acts wrongly or merely imprudently. But, again, I suspect that very many people—even those who do think that Alf* acts wrongly—will share the intuition that Betty’s* act is more seriously wrong than Alf’s* act. It is difficult to believe that Alf’s* act and Betty’s* act are on a moral par. Appeal to consent or willingness, then, does not suffice to explain the intuitive moral difference between gratuitous (drunken) suicide and gratuitous (drunken) murder.

B. Different Principles

The different–principles strategy takes off from Schofield’s claim that the substance of intrapersonal morality may well turn out to differ in important ways from the substance of interpersonal morality. As he puts it, “the substance of interpersonal right cannot be mechanically and thoughtlessly mapped onto the intrapersonal case.”⁴¹ For instance, interpersonal morality contains a stringent prohibition against

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

altering another person's body without their consent. But intrapersonal morality does not plausibly contain an analogous prohibition as this would have very restrictive implications such as ruling out getting a haircut that one may come to regret from a future perspective. So intrapersonal principles regulating one's treatment of one's own body might prohibit altering one's own body in specific ways—say, in ways that are irreversible or that significantly reduce future well-being. In this vein, then, the different-principles strategy says that while interpersonal morality obviously contains a prohibition against killing for no good reason, intrapersonal morality does not contain a prohibition against killing (that is, suicide) for no good reason. This would explain why what Betty does is more seriously morally wrong than what Alf does, since Alf turns out not to violate any principle of intrapersonal morality at all.

However, the different-principles strategy faces two problems. The first is that this strategy does not seem to be theoretically well-motivated. Why think that the substance of intrapersonal morality differs from the substance of interpersonal morality? The most natural answer here is to appeal to the moral significance of the separateness of persons. But that, of course, is not something that Schofield can do. So is there a rationale from within Schofield's perspective-theoretic framework—a framework in which what ultimately matters is not conflicts between metaphysically distinct persons per se but rather conflicts between perspectives—for holding that the substance of intrapersonal morality differs from the substance of interpersonal morality? How can this difference in substance be vindicated without making any reference to the fact of interpersonality itself? So the worry is that, even if the different-principles strategy helps to achieve extensional adequacy, it is an ad hoc manoeuvre for fending off counterexamples, rather than something that is driven by, or at least consistent with, the underlying motivations and commitments of Schofield's project. This strategy looks like a way of inconsistently smuggling in the idea of the separateness of persons through the back door.⁴²

One might wonder whether Schofield could appeal to shared embodiment and the value of autonomy in order to explain why the substance of intrapersonal morality differs from the substance of interpersonal morality. Unlike the different perspectives of different people, the different perspectives of the same person have a *shared embodiment* and so cannot but act in such a way that they affect each other (at least in the relevant direction). My present self cannot avoid having my future self as one of the patients of its actions: my eating choices necessarily affect my future self, my career decisions necessarily affect the options open to my future self, my use of money

⁴² For a similar argument in a different context, see: Enoch 2005; Enoch manuscript.

necessarily affects the resources available to my future self, and so on. These mundane facts about human life and action strongly suggest that unless intrapersonal morality is different from, and in particular more permissive than, interpersonal morality, our sphere of autonomous agency will be unduly restricted by the competing claims of necessarily affected future perspectives.⁴³

However, it is not clear how this argument can be developed without relying on the separateness of persons somewhere down the line. The reason for this is that our rightful exercise of autonomy is always constrained by the moral and political duties that we are under. The value of autonomy does not permit me to kill others for no good reason because I owe others a duty not to kill them for no good reason. So, in order for the value of autonomy to permit me to kill myself for no good reason, it must be the case that I do not owe myself a duty not to kill myself for no good reason. But Schofield would then be faced with the task of explaining why I owe others a duty not to kill them for no good reason, but I do not owe myself a duty not to kill myself for no good reason, given that in both cases this is contrary to the objections and demands issued from the occupant of the relevantly affected perspective, without appealing to the fact of interpersonality. And this just is the moral difference we are trying to explain in this section. So it appears that a version of the different-principles strategy that is grounded on the value of autonomy cannot *explain* the moral difference between what Alf does and what Betty does because it already *presupposes* this difference.

Even if the different-principles strategy can be theoretically motivated, however, it faces a second problem: namely, that if there are *any* principles of intrapersonal morality, there is surely a prohibition on killing oneself for no good reason. This, of course, is not to say that intrapersonal morality must prohibit suicide under all circumstances. Intrapersonal morality may well permit or even require suicide under conditions of extreme pain or indignity. The point is just that it is hard to see how intrapersonal morality, if such a thing exists, would permit one to commit suicide for no good reason (that is, when one's life is going perfectly well, when one is happy and healthy, and so on). So even in the absence of a fully worked-out account of the substance of intrapersonal morality and justice, it seems plausible to suppose that any such account must recognize a prohibition against killing oneself for no good reason.⁴⁴

⁴³ I thank a reviewer for putting to me this objection in these terms.

⁴⁴ Daniel Groll briefly argues that Schofield's view cannot account explain the difference between a pair of interpersonal and intrapersonal actions (namely, tattooing oneself and tattooing someone else) that is similar to the pair of actions I give in Section II. See Groll 2022, pp. 674–5. But (assuming, again, that the different-principles strategy can be philosophically motivated) Schofield can, I think, plausibly respond to Groll's pair by saying that intraper-

C. Different Strictness

The different-strictness strategy says that while intrapersonal morality contains a prohibition against killing (that is, suicide) for no good reason, this prohibition is less strict than interpersonal morality's prohibition against killing for no good reason. As it stands, this strategy looks ad hoc, but it can be made less ad hoc by saying that it is a fully general and systematic feature of intrapersonal morality that its principles are less strict than the analogous principles of interpersonal morality, and not a feature of this specific principle of intrapersonal morality. While this is, I think, an interesting possibility worth exploring further (Schofield does not say anything about the relative strictness of interpersonal and intrapersonal morality), it is problematic for two reasons.

The first problem is that the claim that intrapersonal morality is generally less strict than interpersonal morality still seems *somewhat* ad hoc, even if it is less ad hoc than the claim that some specific principle of intrapersonal morality is less strict than the analogous principle of interpersonal morality. As with the different-principles strategy, the different-strictness strategy raises the following question: What is the rationale from within Schofield's perspective-theoretic framework for according greater strictness to interpersonal moral norms? How can this difference in strictness be explained without making reference somewhere down the line to the fact of interpersonality itself? Here again the worry is that treating interpersonal morality as less strict is merely an ad hoc stipulation to rescue a theory, rather than something that flows from, or at least coheres with, the basic motivations and commitments of Schofield's project.

The most promising attempt to provide a rationale for the different-strictness strategy that coheres with the perspective-theoretic framework is, I think, as follows.⁴⁵ Almost always, the different perspectives that a single person adopts are more integrated or connected than the different perspectives that separate persons adopt. Even when there are conflicts between the different perspectives that a person occupies, these are almost always internal, ultimately, to a single overarching perspective or will in a way that conflicting interpersonal perspectives are not. This difference in the degree of integration or connection between conflicting perspectives plausibly makes a difference to the moral seriousness of the conflicts between those perspectives. This suggests a way of vindicating the different-strictness strategy: assuming that (i) the separate perspectives of different persons are almost always more disintegrated or

sonal morality does not contain a prohibition against tattooing oneself, whereas this is not a plausible response to my pair for the reason I explain in the main text.

⁴⁵ I thank Jon Quong and a reviewer for suggesting this sort of argument.

disconnected than the separate perspectives of the same person, and assuming that (ii) if separate perspectives are more disintegrated or disconnected then the conflicts between them give rise to more stringent moral duties, then it follows that (iii) the conflicts between the separate perspectives of different persons almost always give rise to more stringent moral duties than the duties to which the conflicts between the separate perspectives of the same person give rise. Importantly, this argument promises to distinguish between the stringency of interpersonal morality and intrapersonal morality without any essential reference to the fact of interpersonality itself: it is the degree of integration or connection between separate perspectives, rather than issue of whether those perspectives attach to the same person or different persons, that does the work in determining the stringency of moral duties. Any moral significance accorded to the separateness of persons is purely contingent and derivative.

However, even if the degree of integration or connection between separate perspectives *somewhat* affects the stringency of the moral duties arising from conflicts between those perspectives, it does not seem to affect this stringency by *enough* to explain the size of the difference in wrongness between what Alf does and what Betty does. To see this, let us stipulate that when Alf kills himself his suicidal present perspective is as disconnected from his hypothetical future perspective as Betty's murderous perspective is from her victim's perspective. Although not straightforward, there are different ways to try to visualize this: for instance, perhaps Alf has a kind of multiple personality disorder or perhaps his future perspective would come to passionately oppose suicide on religious grounds. Regardless, we can use Alf** to refer to this highly disintegrated and disconnected version of Alf. On the current proposal, Alf** and Betty act equally wrongly. But, intuitively, Alf** and Betty's actions are *not* on a moral par. Betty's act is (much) more seriously wrong than Alf's** act. Perhaps the stipulated high degree of disconnection between Alf's** present and future perspectives makes his act *somewhat* more wrong than Alf's act, but it still does not seem as wrong as Betty's act. Even when the cases are equalized with respect to the degree of integration or connection between separate perspectives, then, an intuitive moral difference between murder and suicide remains. This difference, it appears, cannot be fully explained without making essential reference at some point to the moral relevance of interpersonality *per se*.

Even if the charge of being ad hoc can be overcome, however, the second problem with the different-strictness strategy is that it resurrects the worry about what is at stake in the debate over duties to self—whether this debate is merely semantic, whether it is worth caring about, and so on. Recall that, in response to the question of why it matters whether we say that treating ourselves in certain ways is required by morality or by prudence, Schofield explains that morality has certain distinctive

features, foremost among which is its strictness. Unlike prudential reasons (and even prudential duties), a moral duty “doesn’t simply urge, it commands.”⁴⁶ But if one says that intrapersonal morality is systematically less strict than interpersonal morality, it is more difficult to make this response.⁴⁷ It would no longer be clear that intrapersonal morality commands rather than urges. At the very least, then, the different-strictness strategy (even if it can be theoretically motivated) leaves us with a pressing worry: Does an intrapersonal morality that is less strict than interpersonal morality still possess (enough of) the characteristic features of morality that the distinction between intrapersonal moral oughts and prudential oughts is worth caring about?

IV. DENYING THE DIFFERENCE

Alternatively, Schofield might bite the bullet and deny that there is in fact any genuine moral difference between what Alf does and what Betty does. On this view, Alf’s act and Betty’s act are on a moral par insofar as both acts inflict a serious harm on an unwilling victim.

However, this bullet-biting strategy comes at a very significant cost. The intuition that gratuitous murder is more seriously wrong than gratuitous suicide is extremely robust. Indeed, the very fact that our language as well as a wide range of other languages has a special word for suicide—as opposed to assimilating suicide into the category of murder—is an indication of the depth of this distinction within common-sense morality.⁴⁸ And while it is true that some people do use the word “self-murder,” this usage is very rare: for most people, suicide is not murder. Moreover, if Schofield were to say that there is no moral difference between gratuitous murder and gratuitous suicide, he would probably also need to say—even more counterintuitively—that there is no *political* difference here, since duties not to kill or cause serious bodily harm are paradigmatic examples of politically enforceable duties. Yet the vast difference in punishment for the crime of attempted murder and the crime of attempted suicide—where indeed the latter is considered a criminal offence at all—across a wide range of jurisdictions suggests that murder and suicide are not normally thought to be on a

⁴⁶ Schofield 2021, p. 29.

⁴⁷ To be clear: the different-strictness strategy does not make it impossible to run Schofield’s response to the worry about what is at stake in this debate, since one could postulate three normative domains of descending stringency (namely, interpersonal morality, intrapersonal morality, and prudence), the first two of which command and the third of which merely urges. (I thank a reviewer for urging—but not commanding—me to clarify this point.) Still, the different-strictness strategy does put pressure on that response.

⁴⁸ This point is made in Slote 1984, pp. 183–4.

political par in this way. None of this, of course, is intended to trivialize suicide. The point is just that however wrong suicide is—and it may well be *very* seriously wrong—murder is widely thought to be *even more* seriously wrong.

It is not enough, then, to simply *assert* that what Alf does and what Betty does are on a moral par. For such a strategy to be persuasive, one would need to say much more in support of this assertion. In doing so, Schofield might again stress that what ultimately matters is not the separateness of persons but the separateness of perspectives. And since both Alf and Betty kill someone for no good reason and against the objections issued from the relevantly affected perspective, aren't their actions equally wrong? How could it make a deep moral difference—Schofield might ask—whether a conflict between distinct perspectives occurs within a person or between persons? Admittedly, we are used to thinking in terms of distinct persons rather than distinct perspectives. But why, on more abstract reflection, should that matter? In particular, Schofield might stress that “a person can confront her own will as foreign, just as she might confront the will of another, by virtue of the fact that it can knowingly undermine itself in much the way that distinct wills can.”⁴⁹ Given this possibility of inner conflict and alienation from one's own will, can the bare fact of interpersonality bear the moral weight placed upon it? Why should I care whether I am subject to someone else's will or subject to my own will, if in both cases I am subject to a will that I strongly oppose? Shouldn't comparable harms be equally wrong, regardless of whether they flow from the will of someone who is literally other or from the will of someone who is metaphorically other?

I agree that a person can confront her own will as foreign—or at least that a person can confront some aspect or portion of her will as foreign. But, still, there remains a phenomenologically important difference between the sort of foreignness that a person can feel in relation to her own will and the sort of foreignness that she can feel in relation to someone else's will. Even when a person confronts her own will as foreign or alien in certain respects, she confronts it as *less* foreign than the will of someone else. She still *identifies* with her will; she is *intimately associated* with it; she recognizes it as *hers* in some normatively weighty sense.⁵⁰

Of course, Schofield might say that this phenomenologically important difference between being harmed by *my* will and being harmed by someone *else's* will does not correspond to any morally important difference. But this cannot be right. When a person ignores her future well-being, or undermines herself, or wastes her resources, it is

⁴⁹ Schofield 2021, p. 168.

⁵⁰ For related points in the context of a puzzle within the philosophy of action, see Nefsky and Tenenbaum 2022.

appropriate for her to come to *regret* this, or feel *guilty* about this, or take *responsibility* for this.⁵¹ All of these attitudes and emotions suggest a sense of identification with one's past will that coexists alongside a sense of alienation from that will. They point towards the existence and significance of an enduring self—a first-personal identity to which a person's various conflicting perspectives and standpoints belong. By contrast, it does not make sense for a person to regret, or feel guilty about, or take responsibility for the harms that *other* persons impose on her. These attitudes and emotions are incoherent, or at least inappropriate, in relation to the decisions of third parties. These sorts of differences in the appropriate attitudinal and emotional responses to our own choices versus others' choices strongly suggest that the fact of interpersonality—the fact that I am harmed by *my own* will as opposed to *someone else's* will—has moral significance and not merely phenomenological significance.

In short, then, while a person can confront (aspects or portions of) her own will as foreign, she still confronts her own will as significantly *less* foreign than the will of someone else. Even when we oppose our own past and present choices, we appropriately identify with those choices in a way that we do not identify with others' choices. So appealing to the possibility of inner conflict and alienation from one's own will does not succeed in undermining the moral relevance of interpersonality or in showing that Alf's act and Betty's act are on a moral par.

V. SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE SEPARATENESS OF PERSONS

I have argued that Schofield's argument for the existence of moral and political duties to the self, despite its ingenuity and sophistication, does not adequately account for the most central disanalogy between interpersonal interactions and intrapersonal interactions—namely, the fact of interpersonality itself. He suggests that it would be question-begging to cite this disanalogy—for this would be to deny precisely what he asserts. But I have sought to develop an independently compelling (and thus non-question-begging) account of interpersonality and its moral significance—an account informed by self-standing intuitive judgements about pairs of cases. However, beyond posing a challenge to Schofield—who must now either explain away the intuitive difference between the wrongness of gratuitous suicide and the wrongness of gratuitous murder or else explain this intuitive difference without relying on the fact of interpersonality itself—this argument provides several independently interesting insights into the idea of the separateness of persons. Of these, I shall mention two: the first concerning the explanatory role of the separateness of persons, and the second concerning the first-order implications of this idea.

⁵¹ See Schofield 2018, p. 76.

First, then, the argument in the preceding sections helps us to sharpen our understanding of the explanatory role of the idea of the separateness of persons. Many moral and political philosophers appeal to the idea of the separateness of persons in order to support or criticize a given view. But these philosophers do not typically explain how this idea fits into the normative landscape. At what level of fundamentality is the idea of the separateness of persons most plausibly thought to operate? Is this idea explanatorily fundamental, or at least close to being explanatorily fundamental? Or is it instead downstream, in some sense, from various even deeper values, conceptions and commitments? And, if the latter, what are these more basic values, conceptions and commitments, and how do they relate to the idea of the separateness of persons?

Schofield takes the views of various theorists who appear to attribute importance to the idea of the separateness of persons—theorists such as Darwall and Pettit—and seeks to show that, when one follows through on these views, what turns out to be of fundamental importance is not the separateness of persons per se but instead the separateness of perspectives. This shift from the separateness of persons to the separateness of perspectives, I have contended, should be resisted—for, otherwise, we face the absurdity of treating Alf’s action and Betty’s action as morally equivalent. And the only way of resisting this shift, it turns out, is to treat the separateness of persons as even more fundamental than we might previously have imagined. In this way, reflecting on the idea of the separateness of persons in the light of Schofield’s project teaches us something independently interesting and important about this idea’s explanatory role and status within moral theory: it teaches us that the separateness of persons is something like a brute fact about morality. Ultimately, “the self is simply special.”⁵²

This is not to say that *nothing* can be said in support of the moral relevance of the separateness of persons. After all, unless we regard the separateness of persons as morally relevant, we cannot explain our intuitive judgements about the difference in wrongness between gratuitous suicide and gratuitous murder (as well as the difference in wrongness between other similar pairs such harming one’s own long-term health and harming someone else’s long-term health)—or so I argued in Section III. Within the methodology of reflective equilibrium, these sorts of considerations of coherence with intuitive judgements about cases do in themselves lend support to the moral relevance of the separateness of persons. The point is just that the moral relevance of the separateness of persons cannot be defended by reference to any more general or immediately intuitive idea from which it can be derived or under which it can be subsumed (such as the separateness of perspectives). It is a fact of irreducible moral

⁵² This phrase comes from Muñoz and Baron-Schmitt forthcoming, p. 9 n. 15.

significance—an axiom rather than a theorem. Given the obscurity that sometimes surrounds the idea of the separateness of persons, this sort of clarity about its explanatory role and status within moral theory is welcome.

Second, the argument in the previous sections sheds light on the first-order implications of the idea of the separateness of persons. In particular, the argument suggests that a morality that takes seriously the separateness of persons is fundamentally patient-relative. Moral philosophers have long been familiar with the idea of agent-relativity—the idea, that is, that the moral status of an action can depend on whether *I* do the action or whether *someone else* does the action.⁵³ This idea figures prominently in debates over consequentialism and deontology. As Nagel puts it, “deontological reasons have their full force against *your doing* something—not just against its *happening*.”⁵⁴ But the argument in the preceding sections points towards the much more unusual and unfamiliar idea of patient-relativity—the idea, that is, that the moral status of an action can depend on whether I do the action *to myself* or whether I do the action *to someone else*.

In a sense, of course, the idea of patient-relativity is not so unusual or unfamiliar: it is another name for the common thought shared by many moral and political philosophers that there are no (or almost no) duties to self, or at least that there is a significant difference between what we owe to others and what we owe to ourselves (that is, the “self-other asymmetry”). But this name helpfully draws attention to a deeply puzzling aspect of that common thought. For it is strange to think that I can free myself from general moral constraints against harming *just because I am me*. Isn’t that a kind of special pleading? How can morality allow me to make an exception for myself in this way? Isn’t this just as strange as thinking that I can make an exception for you because you are you? Surely morality shouldn’t allow differential treatment based on who the patient is?⁵⁵ If the preceding argument is sound, however, morality is indeed patient-relative in this way. Morality allows differential treatment based on who the patient is in the case of oneself and oneself alone: it allows me to make an exception for myself (from, say, general constraints against harming) because I am me, but does not allow me to make an exception for you because you are you, and there is no deeper explanation of why this is so, beyond the fact that I am me and you are you.

⁵³ See, e.g., Scheffler 1982; Nagel 1986, ch. 9.

⁵⁴ Nagel 1986, p. 177.

⁵⁵ I thank Paul Schofield and a reviewer for helping me to formulate these points.

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The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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