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THE DEONTIC STRUCTURE OF MORALITY

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Morality presents itself as a source of practical necessities. It is not merely a domain of normative reasons, in the familiar sense of considerations that count in favor of the ways of action morality happens to favor. It makes demands on us, ones that it is not open to us to neglect or ignore in deliberating about our options for action. What accounts for this dimension of moral thought? How can we make sense of the idea that morality is a source of rational requirements or demands?

In this paper I want to address one important aspect of this complex problem. To set the terms for the discussion to follow, it will help to begin by distinguishing between three potentially distinct things that might be meant when reference is made to the necessity of the demands that morality makes on action. First, it might be meant that moral considerations are normative reasons for all agents or persons, without reference to the contingencies of taste, preference, or interest that distinguish some individuals from others. Call this the dimension of inescapability. Second, moral reasons might be said to be especially weighty, insofar as they trump or override any competing normative considerations with which they might potentially come into conflict. Call this the dimension of importance or weight. Third, morality strikes us within deliberation as a source of normative requirements, in an elusive way that cannot be traced to the first two factors I have already identified. Moral reasons enter the deliberative

field, as it were, in the guise of considerations that we lack discretion to ignore, structuring our practical reflection in a distinctively peremptory style that contrasts with the contribution made by other kinds of normative consideration. Call this the dimension of deontic structure.

My aim will be to make sense of the idea that there is a distinctively deontic style of normativity that moral considerations in particular might be said to exhibit. To this end, I shall begin (in section 1) by discussing some non-moral examples that illustrate the intuitive difference between deontic and what I call aspirational normativity. I argue that there are serious problems with the philosophical accounts of this difference that have been offered in recent discussions. The difficulty is to make sense of the difference between deontic and aspirational normative force, while hanging onto the idea that considerations of both kinds are genuinely normative. In section 2 I propose my own account of the difference between deontic and aspirational reasons. My thesis will be that this difference turns on the distinctively relational normative contexts within which deontic reasons are embedded; those reasons are bound up in structures of bipolar normativity that give content to the fundamental idea that we lack discretion to ignore or to discount their claims in deliberation. In section 3 I apply this interpretation of the contrast to the moral case. In particular, I distinguish between two familiar ways of thinking about morality and its normative significance, the consequentialist and the relational, and argue that only the relational approach has the resources to make sense of the deontic structure of moral reasons. If this is correct, then whether morality in fact structures deliberation in the distinctively deontic style will depend

on larger issues about the nature of morality and the source of its normative significance. But this is anyway what we should expect.

1. Deontic structure: an elusive idea.

Let us begin by thinking about the following three deliberative situations:

Movie. Suppose that you are considering what to do after dinner tonight. It has been a long and trying week, and you are feeling in the mood for something that will be a change of pace, and take your mind off of the difficult issues you have been grappling with at work. To simplify matters let us assume that your options are basically twofold. You could stay home and finish the moderately entertaining but basically forgettable thriller you started the other day. Or you could drive down to the local arts cinema, which is showing on its large screen Rocco and his Brothers, a classic film that you have never seen before, and may never again have the opportunity to see under such favorable viewing conditions. Here it would seem plausible to say that you have conclusive reason to choose the film over the novel, taking everything into account. And yet we would probably be reluctant to conclude that this is something you are strictly required to do. You might be foolish or lazy or unwise to stay home and read your book, and you might even agree with these verdicts about the case yourself; but it is not clear that there is enough here to support the idea that the considerations that speak in favor of going to the movie have the shape or force of requirements. The reasons at issue have what we might refer to as an aspirational structure, insofar as they count in favor of the actions they recommend in a way that leaves the deliberating agent with some discretion to ignore or to discount their claims.

Small Loan. You have taken out a small loan from an electronics shop, with the help of which you have paid for a new television set. The loan agreement you signed upon purchasing the TV called for you to pay it off in a number of equal installments, each of which is due by the 5th of the month. Here it seems more natural than in the previous case to say that you are obligated to make the payments. You have obligated yourself precisely by taking out the loan, as we might say. Thus the fact that a new payment is due by the 5th of the month is not merely a consideration that recommends or speaks in favor of making the payment, in a way analogous to the attractions of seeing Rocco and his Brothers. Its claims on your deliberative attention seem more insistent, leaving you without the kind of discretion to reject them that appears to be in place in the scenario in which you are deliberating about what recreational activity to plump for this evening.

Distraught Friend. Consider next a situation that involves a valuable form of personal relationship. A good friend of yours calls up late at night, and you immediately notice from his tone of voice that he is distraught and in a bad way. He tells you that something horrible has come up at work that he does not know how to handle, and he asks if you could possibly get together with him for lunch the next day to talk about the situation and his options for dealing with it. You already have a lot on your plate for the next day, and had been planning as a result to work through lunch. But you feel that your friend really needs you, and this consideration strikes you as one that has a special kind of deliberative force. The fact that your friend is in a bad way is not merely something that speaks in favor of doing something to help him out. Rather it presents itself as a kind of requirement, one that

it would be an especially serious kind of mistake to ignore or to discount. Once again, it is natural to put the point in the language of discretion, saying that you do not have the same kind of liberty to reject the claims of friendship that you seemed to have in the case in which you are deliberating about whether to go to the Visconti film.

My presentation of these three cases suggests that there is a difference in normative force between the reasons involved in *Movie*, and those at issue in *Small Loan* and *Distraught Friend*. The former are aspirational, as I put it, whereas the latter seem more in the nature of requirements; they exhibit what I shall henceforth refer to as deontic structure. But what exactly does this difference in normative force involve?

In answer to this question, it might be maintained that deontic structure is present whenever normative considerations carry decisive importance or weight, with regard to the issue of what an agent ought to do. But this does not seem to be correct. In *Movie*, for instance, I suggested that the aspirational considerations that would recommend the Visconti film are conclusive reasons for action; what you have most reason to do, taking everything into account, is to see the film rather than to stay home to read your novel. And yet in this situation we are precisely not tempted to think of the reasons as in the nature of requirements. It follows that the distinction between aspirational and deontic reasons cannot be understood simply by looking to the output side of practical deliberation, and considering whether a given consideration is or is not conclusive in determining what the agent finally ought to do.

A different strategy would be to attend to the ways in which normative considerations structure deliberation in the practical

thought of those agents who are taking them correctly into account. Thus Joseph Raz has noted that some normative considerations amount to what he calls exclusionary reasons.¹ The distinctive feature of such reasons is that their obtaining functions to block the normative force of potentially competing considerations. Thus in *Small Loan*, the fact that your payment is due by the 5th of the month is not merely a consideration that is to be set over against the attractions of the other things you might do with the same sum of money. Rather it silences those considerations, even though they would be perfectly respectable reasons in contexts in which you had not thus committed yourself to making the payment. Similarly, John Broome has proposed that we can distinguish between reasons that do and do not enter into “weighing explanations” of normative facts (such as the fact that a given agent ought to do X), where a weighing explanation in turn involves the aggregation and combination of different kinds of consideration.² In this vein, we might say that the fact that payment is due on the loan determines the normative fact that you ought to arrange for timely transfer of funds to the creditor, without reliance on the kind of comparison, aggregation, or combination of considerations that would give the metaphor of “weighing” a point in this context.

I find promising the suggestion that the difference between the aspirational and deontic reasons has to do with the role of normative considerations in structuring deliberation. But it is not clear to me that deontic structure is correctly analyzed in terms of the notions of

¹ See Joseph Raz, Practical Reason and Norms (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

² John Broome, “Reasons”, in R. Jay Wallace, Philip Pettit, Samuel Scheffler, and Michael Smith, eds., Reason and Value. Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 28-55.

exclusion or weighing. For one thing, considerations can exhibit the kind of deontic structure I am trying to capture without necessarily being conclusive in relation to the output of deliberation. In *Small Loan*, for instance, we can imagine circumstances, such as a medical emergency, in which the claims of your creditor are trumped by competing considerations. If there are unanticipated medical needs, and limited financial resources available with which to address them, then it might well be best on the whole to forego the payment in the month in which the emergency occurs, and to accept the consequences. If this is right however then we cannot understand deontic structure simply by appeal to the notions of exclusion or weighing. There may be situations in which deontic reasons do not exclude or negate the normative force of considerations with which they might compete, and determining whether such circumstances obtain will require something like weighing, comparison, and combination of the different kinds of reasons on each side the issue.

Furthermore, even to the extent exclusion and absence of weighing may be characteristic of deontic reasons, it is not clear that these are the features that render those reasons distinctively deontic. We might, after all, treat just about any reason as an exclusionary consideration, taking it to determine directly what we ought to do without reliance on the kind of comparison of normative considerations involved in weighing different kinds of reason in a balance. With deontic reasons, by contrast, it is very tempting to think that there is something else about them that makes it the case that it is ordinarily correct to treat them in these distinctive ways within practical reflection. It is because the claims at issue in *Distraught Friend* are deontic rather than aspirational in nature, one wants to say, that it is fitting to structure one's deliberations so that the

reasons function to exclude other kinds of consideration from entering the deliberative field. It remains to say what this further feature of deontic normativity might consist in.

To make progress in understanding better what this feature might be, it will perhaps help to return to the original contrast I have drawn between the aspirational and the deontic. I have characterized aspirational normativity, to this point, in terms of the notion of deliberative discretion. In *Movie*, you seem to have a certain leeway to ignore or discount the considerations that speak in favor of seeing the *Visconti* film. With deontic reasons, by contrast, this kind of discretion seems lacking; the reasons at the center of *Small Loan* and *Distraught Friend* enter the deliberative field from the start in the modality of obligations, leaving you without discretion to ignore their demands. This is connected to the fact that they typically structure practical deliberation in the way of exclusionary reasons. If we can make sense of the lack of discretion that sets deontic reasons apart from aspirational ones, we might be closer to understanding what it is about them that renders it fitting that they should ordinarily structure our deliberations so as to silence other kinds of normative consideration, and to determine what we ought to do without reliance on procedures that weight competing reasons and values against one another.

A natural way to approach the notion of discretion at issue here would be to focus on the consequences that attend the failure to act on aspirational and deontic reasons. Thus it might be said that we open ourselves to strong rational criticism if we do not comply with our deontic reasons; we are irrational from our own point of view if we agree that a consideration of this kind obtains, but do not succeed in acting on it. In the aspirational cases, by contrast, no such

consequences may seem to follow from the failure to act on our reasons. Our discretion to ignore aspirational reasons might thus be traced to the fact that we can deliberately flout them without opening ourselves to criticism, as irrational.³

This suggestion cannot be accepted as it stands, however. For one thing, it is not obviously the case that we open ourselves to rational criticism whenever we fail to act on reasons that exhibit deontic structure. This possibility has already been illustrated by the earlier reflections on Small Loan. If a medical emergency arises, it might well be rational to miss a payment on the consumer loan, and yet the fact that the payment is due continues to have a residual (if admittedly elusive) deontic character. But the suggestion under consideration seems equally problematic with regard to the aspirational side of the contrast that I have been gesturing toward. Aspirational considerations, such as the attractions of the classic film in *Movie*, may well be considerations that we have a certain latitude to ignore. But this idea cannot plausibly be fleshed out in terms of the notion of rational criticism, for the simple reason that we often are irrational insofar as we fail to act on aspirational considerations of this kind. In *Movie*, for instance, the agent who acknowledges the force of the argument in favor of seeing Rocco and His Brothers may well be subject to a strong kind of regret if they fail to act in accordance with that argument. The natural expression of this regret will be the thought that they have done something stupid or at least very silly, and in the present context thoughts of this kind amount to acknowledgements of one's own irrationality. To deny that aspirational reasons ground rational criticism in this way, it seems to me, is in effect to deprive

³ For this suggestion, see Patricia Greenspan, "Reconceiving Practical Reasons", unpublished draft.

them of normative force. They become considerations that render options eligible for agents to pursue, but without really counting in favor of such pursuit in the perspective of practical deliberation. If we want to hold onto this dimension of aspirational considerations, and with it the idea that they are a species of reason for action, then we need to allow that a failure to comply with aspirational considerations can ground rational criticism of the agent.

Granting this point, however, one might still attempt to capture the contrast between the deontic and the aspirational by attending to the consequences that attend failure to act on reasons of the different kinds. Jonathan Dancy, for instance, has suggested that practical deliberation can be framed in terms of two different practical questions.⁴ There is, first of all, the question "What is the thing to do?", a question that is answered (in effect) by determining that X is something that one ought to do. But there is also a different question we can pose in deliberation, namely "What shall I do?", and this question invites us to consider our options for action in rather different terms. Dancy's strategy is to explain the contrast between something like deontic and aspirational normativity by situating the two kinds of reasons in relation to these different practical questions.

Thus, what I have been calling deontic reasons are to be understood in relation to conclusions about what an agent ought to do. They may not alone succeed in grounding a true claim of this kind, insofar as they are not always conclusive reasons for action. But ought-judgments are the kind of practical claims that deontic reasons tend to support, and their counting in favor of such claims is what is

⁴ Jonathan Dancy, "Enticing Reasons", in Wallace, Pettit, Scheffler, and Smith, eds., Reason and Value, pp. 91-118.

distinctive about their normative significance. Aspirational reasons (as I have called them), by contrast, take us to "bests" rather than "oughts"; they thus exhibit a different kind of normativity from the deontic, insofar as the practical conclusions they tend to support are claims about what it would be best to do. Dancy proposes that we can make sense of the idea that we have discretion to ignore or discount aspirational considerations against the background of this explanation of their distinctive normative significance. The ought-judgments that deontic reasons tend to support are to be understood in relation to the practical question, "What is the thing to do?" But the nature of this relation is such that a determination that one ought to do, say, X, is already a conclusive answer to the question "What is the thing to do?" Agents who judge that they ought to X, but who fail to act on that judgment, are therefore peculiarly at odds with themselves; they have posed a practical question, arrived at a conclusive answer to that question, and then ignored their own answer in deciding what to do. By contrast, agents who conclude that X would be the best thing to do have not already thereby answered the practical question from which they set out. The judgment that X-ing would be best, though relevant to the question "What shall I do?", is not itself a conclusive answer to that question. One can therefore fail to do what one judges it would be best to do without being at odds with oneself, insofar as the question from which one's deliberation began has not in this case already been given a conclusive answer through one's own practical judgment. It is in this sense, Dancy suggests, that we have a kind of latitude to go against aspirational reasons that is not present in cases of deontic normativity.

This strategy attempts to preserve the normativity of both aspirational and deontic considerations, while doing justice to the

intuition that there is a significant difference in the way in which the two kinds of reasons count in favor of the actions they support. But the device that is hit on for achieving this end—namely the distinction between two different practical questions to which normative reflection might be a response—strikes me as artificial. There are no doubt differences of nuance between the questions “What is the thing to do?” and “What shall I do?”, but it is doubtful that these differences provide a consistent principle for sorting normative reasons into two fundamentally different categories. Thus deontic considerations are at least sometimes relevant to reflection about what I shall do, while aspirational reasons can bear on reflection about what the thing to do might be. In *Movie*, for instance, I might conclude that heading out to the cinema is the thing to do, just because it is the option that would be best under the prevailing circumstances. If this is right, however, then we cannot understand the idea of discretion by appeal to the distinctive question to which aspirational reasons are presumptively relevant; reasons of this kind can equally be brought to bear in deliberation about what the thing to do would be, and in this context it would seem that we have no discretion of the kind Dancy has suggested to ignore their claims. By the same token, I might take into account considerations about what I ought to do in reflection that sets out from the question, “What shall I do?” But in this context, Dancy maintains, we precisely have scope for ignoring our own practical conclusions in practice without our judgment thereby being at odds with itself. If deontic considerations take us to “oughts”, as Dancy suggests, we would therefore seem to have discretion to ignore them in at least some deliberative situations.

In the end, I believe we should resist the fragmentation of practical reason that is implicit in Dancy’s approach. Deliberation

begins from a practical question about what to do, a question that can be variously formulated depending on the context that is to hand, but to which reasons of any kind are at least potentially relevant. The problem, then, is the following: to make sense of the different ways in which deontic and aspirational considerations count in favor of the actions they support without resorting to an artificial multiplication of practical perspectives.

2. Reciprocal normativity.

The approaches to deontic structure considered in the preceding section have one striking feature in common. They are all alike attempts to distinguish between different kinds of normative force by attending solely to the deliberative perspective of a single agent. I now want to suggest that this common feature of the canvassed accounts is also their common flaw. To make sense of the idea of deontic structure, we need to broaden our view, by considering the essentially social context within which the individual's deliberation takes place.

The contrast between the deontic and the aspirational, I have suggested, turns on the idea that agents have a kind of discretion to ignore or discount reasons of the latter kind that they do not have in relation to the reasons of the former variety. Whatever it is that accounts for this lack of discretion would also explain why it is fitting that deontic reasons should ordinarily structure deliberation in the manner of exclusionary considerations. The difficulty was to give a clear sense to the notion of discretion that is at issue in this contrast. It seemed promising in this connection to look to the consequences of a failure to act on reasons of the different kinds, but this suggestion cannot be worked out in a plausible way so long as we restrict our focus to the individual agent. Let us now consider the

interpersonal consequences of failure to act on reasons of the different kinds, to see whether that might give a more plausible sense to the central idea of discretion.

In *Small Loan*, there is a distinctive institutional context to the contractual agreement between the consumer and the creditor. If you fail to make a payment on the loan by the 5th of the month, then the contract itself, or the framework of consumer law within which it is embedded, will presumably specify that certain penalties are going to be imposed. You will incur special punitive fees, and perhaps become subject to a different and higher rate of interest on the balance of the loan; in addition your credit rating may suffer, in ways that will disadvantage you when you attempt to engage in other consumer transactions in the future. Nothing like this network of social sanctions is ordinarily present in a case such as *Movie*.

This suggests a social explanation of the difference between deontic and aspirational reasons. The comparative leeway we have to ignore or discount the considerations that speak in favor of seeing the *Visconti* film might be traced to the absence of clear social sanctions for doing so, of the sort that seem to be present in *Small Loan*. Furthermore, this difference in respect of discretion would seem to illuminate the distinctive role that deontic reasons typically play within practical deliberation. The fact that financial sanctions would attend a failure to make a payment on one's loan, for instance, makes it reasonable to structure one's deliberations so that other consumer pleasures that might be purchased with the same resources do not even enter into one's calculations, as considerations to be weighed against the advantages of making the payment. Lack of discretion, interpreted in this way, thus promises to explain the characteristic role of deontic reasons within practical deliberation.

At the same time, lack of discretion, on this account of it, is not simply identical with these structural features of practical reflection; the social account thus leaves room for the possibility that reasons might be deontic in nature even when they are not conclusive in relation to the output of deliberation. Consider, again, the variant of Small Loan that involves a medical emergency, in which it would be best on the whole to forego the monthly payment on your consumer loan. Insofar as the financial sanctions remain in place, we would not say that you had discretion to ignore or to discount the fact that the payment was due in deliberating about action. As long as the loan agreement remains in force, failure to make the specified payment by the 5th of the month will incur the sorts of penalties already mentioned, and this in turn gives a sense to the idea that you lack discretion to neglect the terms of the loan in deliberation. By contrast, in Movie we have a reason that is conclusive, on the output side, but that precisely leaves you with discretion to ignore its claims, insofar as no similar network of sanctioning responses is in place.

Attention to the social context of deliberation thus suggests a new account of the elusive normative distinction that has been our quarry in this paper. In particular, it yields an interpretation of the idea that there is discretion to ignore aspirational reasons that is not present in the case of the deontic considerations. The explanation offered so far, however, still seems to me inadequate in important respects. For one thing, it ties deontic force too closely to the literal application of sanctions. Thus, the credit institution in Small Loan might decide, in its mysterious wisdom, not to impose the prescribed financial penalties when you fail to make your monthly payment. Perhaps they send you a letter reminding you of your financial

obligation, but announcing that they will waive the penalty for this first infraction if payment is received in the next 5 days. In this situation it seems to me that their action does not retroactively nullify the obligation you were under to make a timely payment, or modify its original normative force. Yet if deontic structure were understood strictly in terms of the application of penalties and sanctions, this is what we would have to say. At the time you may have taken yourself to lack discretion to make your payment, but as it happens you were mistaken about the matter, since the anticipated penalties were not in fact imposed.

Furthermore, there are many cases of deontic normativity in which talk of penalties or sanctions would seem to be more fundamentally out of place. Thus in *Distraught Friend* it seems—more clearly even than in *Small Loan*—that you lack discretion to ignore the reasons that are at issue. Yet your failure to act on those reasons would not eventuate in the application of anything that would naturally be described as a penalty or a sanction. To be sure, your friend is apt to feel resentful or angry with you if you do not respond to their cry for help. But these emotional reactions, even if they are uncomfortable for the person who is their target, are not really in the way of penalties or sanctions; to characterize them in these terms would be to trivialize them, and to distort the nature of a relationship between two close friends (who will not see themselves as in the business of applying penalties to each other). Finally, aspirational reasons are not turned into deontic ones simply through the imposition of arbitrary sanctions or penalties in the event of noncompliance. In *Movie*, for instance, an acquaintance of yours might issue a credible threat to douse you with cold water if you fail to take advantage of the opportunity to see the *Visconti* film. This odd intervention into your deliberative space would

plausibly alter the normative situation in some way or other, adding (perhaps) a new reason to see the movie that you did not have before. But it would not transform your aspirational reason into a deontic one, making it the case that you now lack discretion to act on the reason to see the film. The idea of discretion that we are trying to pin down thus cannot be interpreted in terms of freedom from social sanctions or penalties.

To see how we might improve on the social account, let us return to the case of Small Loan. The initial suggestion is that you lack discretion to ignore the reason to repay your creditor, insofar as failure to make a payment will eventuate in certain sanctions or penalties. But what if the bank decides to waive the prescribed penalty in a given case? Even if it makes this decision, it remains true that the bank was entitled to impose a penalty on you for nonpayment. Your reason for payment is not a free-standing normative consideration, but part of a normative nexus linking you and your creditor. Your creditor has a claim against you for payment, and the fact that it has this claim is constitutively connected to the fact that you have a reason to make the payment; you would not have the same reason to pay the installment if the creditor were not also entitled to the payment. It is further characteristic of the reciprocal normative relations that are in play here that your obligation to pay is specifically an obligation to the creditor, who—as I have said—has a claim against you for payment. If you fail to act on your reason, you may be said to have injured or wronged the creditor, in a way you will not have injured or wronged an uninvolved third party. Your reason in this case is thus grounded in normative principles that structure your relationship with your creditor, specifying corresponding normative claims or entitlements to performance on the creditor's part.

It is the role of reasons in structuring normative relations of this kind, I now want to suggest, that is the key to understanding the phenomenon of deontic normativity. Reasons exhibit deontic structure when they are constitutively implicated in complexes of reciprocal (or "bipolar") normativity.⁵ Thus in *Small Loan* it is the fact that you have entered into a valid consumer contract that gives you reason to make the payment; but this very same fact gives your creditor a special claim against you that payment be made. This normative complex remains intact even if your creditor should decide, for whatever reason, to forego the penalty that would ordinarily be imposed in the event of failure to perform. A decision of this kind would amount to the renunciation by the credit institution of something that they were entitled to, as a matter of contract law, and it is this normative relation between you and the bank that gives content to the vague idea that you lack discretion to ignore your reason in this case. Even if that reason should be outweighed by competing normative considerations (as in the variant of *Small Loan* involving a medical emergency), it remains the case that payment is due to your creditor, and this is reflected in the fact that you will injure or wrong them through your failure to pay, leaving undischarged an obligation you owe specifically to them.

In *Movie*, by contrast, reciprocal normative structures of this kind are not in play. Your reason in this case is provided by the value of seeing *Rocco and His Brothers* on a big screen, where this is connected to the aesthetic pleasure of experiencing the film under excellent viewing conditions, and to the intellectual and emotional

⁵ On "bipolar" normativity, see Michael Thompson, "What is it to Wrong Someone? A Puzzle about Justice", in Wallace, Pettit, Scheffler, and Smith, eds., Reason and Value, pp.

interest of the various things that contribute to its cinematic quality (the cinematography, performances, atmosphere and mood, and so on). Values of these kinds make it the case that going to the film is the option you have most reason to choose under the circumstances, where it is a question of what would make for a rewarding break from your daily routine at the office. But these same considerations do not ground reciprocal claims on the part of other agents to performance of the valuable action. The cinematic qualities that make going to the film the best option under the circumstances do not also make it the case that others are entitled to have you choose that option, nor would a failure on your part to do so wrong or injure anyone else in particular. This remains the case even if an acquaintance of yours should happen to take a spectator's interest in your cinematic education, or bizarrely threaten to douse you with water if you fail to take advantage of your opportunity to see the movie under such favorable viewing conditions. Under these circumstances we would not say that your acquaintance is entitled to performance on your part, or vulnerable to being wronged specifically by you in case you decide not to see the film; your reason for seeing the film does not implicate you in a normative nexus with your acquaintance, however interested they may be in your exposure to classics of the genre. This in turn gives a content to the fundamental idea that have discretion to ignore the reason at issue in this case, of a kind you lack in *Small Loan*. Your discretion consists in the fact that failure to act on the reason will not itself injure or wrong another person, depriving them of something that is theirs as a matter of right or entitlement.

Now in the case of a legal agreement, such as that at the center of *Small Loan*, there is in fact room to question whether we are dealing with a genuinely normative nexus, describing reciprocal reasons and

claims. I have assumed that the consumer contract gives the debtor a reason to make the specified payment, in the standard normative sense, and that the creditor's special entitlements equally involve complexes of normative reasons in this sense (specifying, for instance, considerations that justify or speak in favor of the demand that a timely payment should be made). But legal obligations and rights are not always and automatically sources of normative reasons of this kind. If the framework conventions of contract law that prevail in one's society are fundamentally unjust or exploitative, then the fact that one is legally obligated to make a payment under those conventions might not itself count as a compelling reason so to act (though the different fact that one will confront penalties in the event of nonpayment might remain a consideration with some normative weight).

In these respects, *Distraught Friend* provides a better illustration of the phenomenon of deontic structure. Within the context of a genuine friendship, the fact that one's friend is in a bad way may be counted as a normative reason to help out if one can. It is constitutive of friendship, we might say, that friends have special reasons of this kind to attend to each other's needs and interests.⁶ To the extent this is the case, there is no room for the kind of distancing maneuver that seems at least intelligible in the case of legal obligations. That is, we cannot grant that someone has an obligation of friendship to provide assistance, but question whether that obligation counts as a genuine reason for action. It is built into the idea of friendship that friends have normative reasons to help each other out, so that the fact that my friend is in a bad way itself

⁶ Compare Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship", The Philosophical Review 112 (2003), pp. 135-89.

counts in favor of my doing what I can to relieve the friend's distress.

Reasons of this kind, however, are not merely free-standing normative considerations. Rather they are parts of reciprocal or bipolar normative structures, analogous to the legal-cum-normative complex linking creditor and debtor in *Small Loan*. It is not exactly that your friend has a right or entitlement to your assistance in a time of need; this legalistic language seems inappropriate to the intimate context that is constituted by a relationship between friends. But the friend does have a kind of claim on you to attend to their interests and needs, and a special vulnerability to being injured or wronged if you should fail to take these considerations into proper account in deliberating about what to do. The friendship that grounds your special reason to look out for the needs and interests of your friend equally grounds an expectation or demand on the part of the friend that you will be there for them, and be willing to put up with some inconvenience when you are in a privileged position to help them out of a jam.

I will take these features to be essential to structures of reciprocal normativity. We have a complex of this kind when the considerations that provide you with a reason themselves provide some other party with a claim against you that the reason be acted on, and a corresponding vulnerability to being wronged should you fail to do so. Reciprocal structures of this type in turn constitute a framework for relations of mutual accountability, of a kind that essentially implicates the distinctively reactive sentiments.⁷ Thus your failure to

⁷ On the reactive sentiments and their connection to moral accountability, see R. Jay Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

act on your reason to help your friend will not only wrong the friend specifically; in doing so, it will also give the friend a reason to adjust their attitudes toward you. Typical emotional reactions to such treatment range from feelings of mild disappointment to more serious emotions of anger, resentment, or a sense of betrayal (in cases of greater consequence to the friendship). These reactions are emotional manifestations of the role played by certain core values or principles in structuring your relationship with your friend. The same values that provide you with a reason to help your friend equally provide your friend with a reason to expect you to offer what help you can when they turn to you in a moment of crisis. These expectations in turn are connected to the kind of reactive sentiments involved in accountability.

I believe that reciprocal normative structures of this kind are the key to understanding the elusive idea of deontic structure. Agents in a case such as *Distraught Friend* lack discretion to ignore their reasons, insofar as those reasons are constitutively connected to an interpersonal context involving normative claims on the part of other agents, and a special vulnerability of those agents to being wronged, where these normative considerations provide a scaffolding for the reactive sentiments implicated in accountability. The fact that your reason in *Distraught Friend* is part of a reciprocal normative structure of this variety gives a content to the idea that you lack discretion to discount the reason in deliberation. Doing so will itself change your normative relation to another person, exposing you to reactive sentiments on the other person's part and to the forms of behavior that give expression to such sentiments. The implication of your reason in a structure of this kind gives it the character of an obligation, a character that is very different from the free-standing forms of

aspirational normativity at issue in a case such as Movie. This in turn makes it fitting that you should ordinarily structure your deliberations in such a way that the claims of your friend function as Razian exclusionary reasons. We have, in other words, an account of deontic normativity that explains the distinctive role that deontic reasons typically play within practical reflection.

Against this, it may be wondered whether the complexes in which deontic reasons are embedded really deserve to be called structures of reciprocal normativity. My failure to act on my reason in *Distraught Friend* may violate an expectation on the part of the friend, wronging them in a way that we might characterize as a form of moral injury. But in what sense are these consequences of my behavior "normative" in nature? Normative reasons, I have been assuming, are considerations that count for and against attitudes and actions in the deliberative perspective of agency, and it is not immediately obvious that my disappointing another person's expectations, in the way that constitutes a form of wrong or moral injury, is connected to normative reasons of this kind.

On closer inspection, however, reasons in the standard normative sense appear to be involved on both sides of the reciprocal structure that I have been concerned to explicate. Thus in a case of friendship the value of the relationship gives both of the parties to it reasons not only to attend to each other's interests, but also to expect that the other will be there for them when they are in a special position to provide assistance. The expectations or claims characteristic of friendship are thus grounded normatively in the value of the friendship itself, which renders those stances fitting or appropriate. Furthermore, when these expectations and claims are violated, the wrong that has been done to the friend also renders appropriate or fitting

the reactive stances of disappointment, resentment, and perhaps avoidance; it is thus a reason, in the standard normative sense, for adjusting one's attitudes to the friend, in ways that in turn have implications for the agent's future stance toward the whole relationship. These considerations make it sensible to characterize the complexes in which deontic reasons are implicated as structures of reciprocal normativity.

It is the essentially normative character of the reciprocal relations involved in *Distraught Friend* that distinguishes the reason at issue in that case from the reason involved in *Small Loan* (insofar as doubts may be raised about the normative status of the prevailing consumer laws, under certain social and historical conditions). I shall therefore take *Distraught Friend* to be the paradigm for understanding deontic normativity in the discussion to follow. The question will be, how can the account of deontic normativity I have proposed be brought to bear to illuminate the deontic structure of the moral realm?

3. Two conceptions of morality.

Moral philosophy in the English-language tradition has historically gravitated toward a consequentialist understanding of morality, treating moral rightness as the property of maximizing the impartial good. According to this approach, that action (or policy, institution, legislative determination, etc.) is morally right whose consequences would be best, by contrast with the consequences of the other actions (policies, institutions, legislative determinations, etc.) that are available in the situation. Consequences are here understood to include everything about the world that would be brought into existence if the actions under assessment were performed (including not only the distinct effects that the performance of the actions would cause to

occur, but also the fact that the actions themselves are performed). And the value of the consequences is to be assessed from a suitably impartial point of view, taking into account the interests of all persons (and other sentient creatures) who would be affected by the actions under assessment, and treating equally the satisfactions of each of those persons (and other sentient creatures).

The advantages of this general approach to morality are both powerful and familiar. It connects moral rightness to considerations that are undoubtedly of great moral importance, concerning the welfare and interests of humans and other sentient beings; it offers an interpretation of the important idea that morality treats individuals as equals; and it is broadly congenial to the modern naturalistic temperament, depicting moral rightness as the kind of property that could find a place in a world that is accessible to ordinary methods of empirical investigation. Some philosophers hold that moral rightness, on this interpretation of it, defines a standard for the assessment of actions, policies, institutions, laws, and so on, but that it is not necessarily a consideration that has normative significance for the agents whose actions, policies, and so on are assessed. Whether a given person has reason to care about the rightness or wrongness of what they do, on this view, is a further question, one that is not settled simply by determining whether their actions are morally right or wrong.⁸

For our immediate purposes, however, there is a different understanding of consequentialism that is potentially of greater interest. This takes it to be a central attraction of consequentialism that it helps us to understand the normative significance of morality. Thus we might suppose that normative reasons are in general grounded in

⁸ See, e.g., David Brink, Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

facts about value, in accordance with a basically teleological schema. Intrinsic value, on this way of thinking, inheres fundamentally in states of affairs, which may be ranked as better or worse in a way that reflects their overall comparative value, taking everything into account. Reasons may then be derived from values, insofar as various of the actions open to agents stand in a productive relation to the states of affairs that are bearers of intrinsic value. According to this teleological schema, what fundamentally recommends or speaks in favor of one's doing X is the fact that X-ing would bring about a valuable state of affairs. And one has most reason to do that action, from among the alternatives that are available, that would produce the best state of affairs overall, taking everything into account.⁹

If we assume that normativity has an essentially teleological structure of this kind, then the consequentialist approach to morality will not leave it an open question whether agents have reason to care about acting rightly. Actions will be morally right insofar as they produce the best consequences, from an impartial point of view, and according to the teleological conception of normativity this is already sufficient to establish that moral rightness is normatively significant. The consequentialist account of rightness thus aligns with the teleological conception of normativity, in a way that promises to make sense of the idea that morality is a distinctively normative domain. Moreover, a conception of normativity along these teleological lines seems independently attractive, defining a straightforward general framework for understanding reasons for action and their relation to values. Something like this framework seems implicit, for

⁹ We might refer to this teleological conception as the Moorean schema, after the view about what we ought to do presented in G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

instance, in the maximizing conception of practical rationality that has found broad acceptance in modern economics and the social sciences. The fact that consequentialism makes moral reasons intelligible in terms of this influential conception of normativity has thus contributed to its philosophical appeal.¹⁰

But there are at least two immediate difficulties that arise if we think about morality and its normative significance in this way. First, it starts to look as if moral reasons expand to occupy the whole of normative space, leaving no room for reasons that are distinct from and independent of morality. If right actions are those whose consequences are impartially best, taking everything into account, and what one in general has reason to do is just that which would produce the best overall state of affairs, then it seems there is no room for the idea that one could have compelling reason to act at variance with the requirements of morality. Every legitimately reason-giving consideration will be a value of the kind that would be taken into account in the course of the impartial reflection through which questions about moral rightness are properly resolved, with the result that there are no non-moral reasons for action, of the sort that could potentially conflict with the demands of the moral point of view. Now it may in fact turn out to be the case, at the end of the day, that moral reasons are important enough to prevail in any conflict that might arise with potentially competing normative considerations. But an account of normativity that secured this result by ruling out from the start the very possibility of competing reasons for action would seem

¹⁰ Compare Samuel Scheffler, "Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues", in Samuel Scheffler, ed., Consequentialism and its Critics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.

implausible, denying the diversity that we experience in reflection on the normative domain.

This result can be resisted, however, compatibly with the broadly teleological approach to normativity. The key is to leave room for distinct and independent perspectives for the evaluative assessment of states of affairs, or (what comes to the same thing) for distinct and independent value functions that may be applied in such evaluative assessment. Thus, the state of affairs that is best from the impartial standpoint of morality might not be the best state of affairs from my own personal point of view; impartial goodness need not be identical with goodness_{me}. By distinguishing in this way between the different standpoints from which the value of states of affairs might be assessed, philosophers such as Sidgwick, Nagel, and Sen have left room for normative considerations independent from those with which consequentialism identifies the property of moral rightness.¹¹

¹¹ See Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981); Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Amartya Sen, "Consequential Evaluation and Practical Reason," Journal of Philosophy 97 (2000), pp. 477-502. There are numerous questions raised by this general strategy, which I am not able to go into here. But I shall mention two immediate issues. First, it is not obvious that the distinction between impartial and personal standpoints of evaluative assessment will map exactly onto the distinction between moral and non-moral reasons. Some of the requirements and reasons familiar within common-sense morality can be articulated within the teleological framework only in terms of agent-relative value functions. (Nagel and Sen in fact exploit this, as a way of accommodating the complexity of the moral realm within the framework of a broadly teleological approach to normativity.) Second, once we distinguish in this way between standpoints of evaluative assessment, it becomes essentially unclear how we can arrive at rational judgments about what we have most reason to do overall, compatibly with the teleological approach to normativity; the fragmentation of value functions apparently leaves conceptual space for conflicts between different reasons, but at the cost of making those conflicts impossible rationally to resolve. Sidgwick's dualism of practical reason is an acknowledgement of this problem; for further discussion, see Michael Smith, "Neutral and Relative Value after Moore", Ethics 113 (2003), pp. 576-98.

There is a second potential difficulty, however, that is of more immediate relevance to my concerns in the present paper. This arises when we think about the distinctive character of moral reasons, as grounds of rational requirements on action. It has been an assumption of this paper that the landscape of normative reasons is multiply diverse. Not only are there normative considerations whose source is independent from that of morality. There is also a difference in the ways in which normative considerations impinge on deliberation, a difference that applies within both the moral and the non-moral domains, which I expressed as a contrast between aspirational and deontic normativity. The basic idea is that we have a certain latitude to ignore or discount aspirational reasons, of a kind we do not have when it comes to reasons that exhibit deontic structure. But this distinction seems to disappear on the teleological approach to normativity. If the fundamental normative relation is the productive relation that our potential actions stand in to valuable states of affairs, then it looks as if there is no room for differentiating between aspirational and deontic normativity. All reasons will derive from the value of states of affairs, via the role of our agency in bringing those states of affairs into existence. But this general schema seems fundamentally inimical to a distinction between different styles of normative relation.

The problem here is not that the teleological conception of normativity on which consequentialism relies cannot make sense of the idea of a requirement. We may say, if we wish, that morality represents a set of normative requirements, insofar as agents are rationally required to maximize the good. But the same could apparently be said about any action that we have most reason to perform, on the teleological approach. If action X would produce the best consequences,

taking everything into account, then X is the action the agent is required to perform, regardless of whether the value of the consequences is cashed out in moral or non-moral terms. Conversely, we may allow that agents can have reasons for performing actions whose consequences would not be optimal on the whole, insofar as those consequences are valuable along some dimension or other. But these reasons will not be in the way of normative considerations that the agent has discretion either to act on or to ignore. To the extent the action in question is non-optimal, it is something that the agent is rationally required not to perform. The result is that the distinction between aspirational and deontic normativity disappears from view.

In light of the discussion in the preceding sections this should not be a surprising result. We saw there that an adequate account of deontic normativity needs to situate deontic reasons within a distinctively social context. The challenge in this area is to do justice to the normativity of aspirational reasons, while making sense of the suggestion that we have discretion to ignore or discount them of a kind that is lacking with deontic reasons. This challenge can be met if we suppose that deontic reasons are constitutively bound up in reciprocal normative structures, while holding that aspirational reasons stand alone, apart from such structures. Seen in this light, the problem with the teleological conception upon which consequentialism draws is that it treats all reasons as free-standing normative considerations, deriving from the value of the states of affairs that would be brought about through the options for action that are open to a given agent at a given time.¹² If we want to make sense of

¹² To this it might be objected that reasons are not really "free-standing" considerations, on the teleological view. The very same value that gives me reason to promote a given state of affairs, after all,

the distinctively deontic character of the reasons morality provides, it seems that we will need a different way of thinking about the normative significance of moral considerations, one that construes moral reasons from the start as parts of reciprocal or bipolar normative structures.

Now as it happens there is a way of thinking about moral reasons for action along these lines. According to this relational conception, as we might call it, moral rightness is to be understood essentially by reference to a certain ideal of human relationship. There are different vocabularies available for talking about the kind of ideal that is suited to play this foundational role in morality; we might variously refer to it as the relationship of mutual regard, or mutual recognition, or mutual consideration and concern. The basic idea would be that morality fundamentally sets the terms for valuable relationships of this kind. Thus actions would be morally right if their performance is necessary for one to stand in relations of mutual recognition with all of one's fellow agents, and morally wrong if doing them would render one unable to enter into relationships of this kind with some other person. Actions might further be said to be morally permissible when their performance is neither right nor wrong in this

might equally be said to give any other agent who is appropriately situated reason to do what they can to bring the state of affairs into existence. (At least this will be true when the value in question is impersonal, or not agent-relative.) But that the value that grounds my reason also grounds reasons for other agents is just an accidental fact about it, as it were; there is nothing in the nature of the reason that essentially implicates other agents. Moreover, even when the value at issue grounds reasons for other agents, the result is not the kind of reciprocal normative structure identified in the preceding section, as the key to understanding deontic normativity. Reasons, on the teleological account, are not linked internally to claims and expectations on the part of others, of the sort that render them specially vulnerable to being wronged.

sense, but compatible with maintaining relationships of the relevant kind with all other agents.

Among modern moral theories it is contractualism, in the version developed by T. M. Scanlon, that most clearly illustrates the relational conception.¹³ Scanlon holds that the demands of morality are defined by principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject, as a common basis for social life. Actions are morally right if they are required by such principles, wrong if such principles prohibit them, and permissible if their performance is neither required nor ruled out by the principles. According to this conception, morality is the condition for the possibility of a certain kind of relationship with other persons, a relationship in which one is able to justify oneself specifically to each of the people potentially affected by what one does. It is plausible to suppose that this capacity to justify one's actions to those affected by them, on grounds that it would be unreasonable for the affected persons to reject, is the condition that is crucially involved in relationships of mutual recognition and regard, and Scanlon himself appeals to the value of such relationships as providing the key to understanding the reason-giving force of morality.¹⁴ We show proper regard for others precisely insofar as we strive to comply with principles that would enable us to justify our actions to them, and the value of relating in this way to our fellows helps to explain the normative significance of the moral realm.¹⁵

¹³ See T. M. Scanlon, What We owe to Each Other (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other, chap. 4.

¹⁵ This leaves open the possibility, of course, that the principles that enable us to justify ourselves to others have the content of consequentialism, enjoining us to maximize the impartial good. In that

To this it will be objected that the appeal to the value of relationships appears to presuppose the teleological conception of normativity, rather than representing an alternative to it. If our reasons for caring about moral rightness derive from the value of the forms of relationship that right action makes possible, then it seems that we are still thinking about the actions morality recommends as standing in a productive relationship to valuable states of affairs. Granted, the contractualist does not believe that we are required to contribute globally to the maximal realization of relationships of mutual recognition among all the people who exist, where this is a distinct state of affairs that is causally brought into existence by the things we do. Valuable relationships of the relevant kind are constituted by the sincere effort to comply with moral requirements, not mere causal consequences of the actions that result from such efforts. Moreover, contractualism gives each agent a proprietary interest in their own ability to enter into relationships of this kind with other people; moral agents are concerned primarily about the ways in which they themselves relate to others. But the teleological conception leaves room for these distinctive features of the contractualist approach. As we have seen, the valuable states of affairs that are produced by our actions may consist (in part) in the fact that the actions themselves are performed. Furthermore, the introduction of different standpoints for the evaluative assessment of states affairs would allow us to define a distinct value function for each agent, which ranks overall states of affairs depending on the

case, however, consequentialism would be a theorem of contractualism, not an independent account of the nature of moral reasons. What gives us reason to comply with the consequentialist principle, in other words, would not simply be the fact that doing so maximizes the good, but the different fact that doing so enable us to relate to other people on a basis of mutual respect and consideration.

degree to which that agent in particular is able to enter into relations of mutual regard with other persons. Viewed in this way, the relational conception of morality suggests a conception of moral reasons that conforms fully to the teleological paradigm of normativity.

This interpretation fails to do full justice, however, to the relational aspect of the contractualist view. The point is that the valuable relationships at the heart of morality do not merely ground reasons for the agent considered in isolation; they represent structures of reciprocal or bipolar normativity, which can be understood very much by analogy with the norms at the heart of friendship. As we saw in the preceding section, the value of friendship that gives us special reasons to attend to the needs and interests of our friends also gives our friends special reasons to expect that we will be there for them if we are in a position to help them out in a time of need. Our friends are vulnerable to being wronged by us if we fail to act on our own reasons of friendship, and they have a privileged basis for complaint in such cases. These expectations and vulnerabilities in turn provide the normative scaffolding for the reactive attitudes to which the parties involved in a friendship are characteristically subject (such as the disappointment and resentment our friends feel when we let them down). Similarly, on the contractualist view morality too defines a structure of reciprocal normative reasons and claims. The very considerations that give me reason to care about doing the right thing—namely the valuable forms of relationship that I am thereby able to enter into with other people—equally ground reciprocal claims and expectations on the part of those who are affected by what I do. What makes an action of mine morally wrong is the fact that it cannot be justified to someone affected by it on terms that that person would be

unreasonable to reject. In a situation in which I do something morally wrong, the person adversely affected will have been wronged by me, and have a privileged basis for moral complaint, resentment, and so on, precisely insofar as I have acted with indifference to the value of relating to them on a basis of mutual recognition and regard. The very principles that specify what I have moral reason to do, on this relational conception, equally serve to specify normative expectations and entitlements on the part of others. Those principles are thus implicated in a bipolar normative nexus very like the one that defines the reciprocal reasons and expectations constitutive of a relationship of friendship. This is a way of thinking about the normative significance of morality that is quite unlike the teleological conception upon which consequentialist approaches rely.¹⁶

With this relational conception of morality in place, however, we are in a position to make sense of the distinctively deontic structure of morality. In particular, we can explain why agents lack the kind of discretion to discount or to ignore their moral reasons that is present

¹⁶ We might put this by saying that valuable relationships of mutual regard are possible only if the agents involved in them do not view their reasons in standard teleological terms, but instead take themselves to be implicated in structures of reciprocal normativity. The consequentialist might reply that even if this is true, it is the value of states of affairs that include relationships of this kind that ultimately grounds the reasons in question. This would be an application of the familiar strategy whereby a consequentialist justification is provided for dispositions, practices, relationships, and so on that preclude agents from deliberating in consequentialist terms. Compare Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, "The Truth in Deontology", in Wallace, Pettit, Scheffler, and Smith, eds., Reason and Value, pp. I agree with Bernard Williams in finding these "self-effacing" forms of consequentialist justification problematic (cf. Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism", in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, Utilitarianism: For and Against (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973). On the contractualist approach, at any rate, the relational conception of moral reasons sketched in the text should be understood as the most fundamental account of the nature and source of moral reasons, an account that is not susceptible to a further "justification" in non-relational terms.

in cases of merely aspirational normativity. The sense in which this discretion is lacking is precisely given by the reciprocal normative complexes in which our moral reasons are constitutively involved, on the relational conception. If I discount or neglect my moral reason not to harm someone, for example, I will not merely have fallen short relative to a free-standing ideal of individual rationality. Rather, my neglect of my moral reason will itself give the agent who is harmed a special ground for complaint, and a corresponding normative basis for the reactive sentiment of resentment.¹⁷ I will not merely have acted wrongly, by the terms of a normative standard that applies to my own conduct, but wronged the person I have harmed, insofar as my action will not be justifiable to that person on grounds that it would be reasonable for the person to accept. Neglecting my moral reason, on this way of thinking about it, itself changes my normative relations to other people, in ways that in turn ground alterations in their attitudes toward me. Nothing like this same complex of normative relations is implicated when we neglect or discount merely aspirational reasons (such as those at issue in *Movie*). The relational conception of moral normativity thus helps us to make sense of the intuitive idea that moral reasons enter the deliberative field in a distinctive normative key, structuring our reflection the peremptory style of obligations or demands. It is fitting that they should structure our deliberations in this style, precisely insofar as a failure to act on them would change our normative relations with other people, in ways that would ground distinctively reactive sentiments on their part.

Of course deontic structure of this kind is not all that is involved in the common conception of moral standards as forms of

¹⁷ See, again, Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments.

practical necessity. In particular, I have not addressed two things that are thought to distinguish morality as a source of unusually stringent norms: the alleged inescapability of moral reasons, or their overriding importance or weight in comparison with other kinds of normative consideration. My leading idea in this paper has been that there is a third dimension of morality that is implicated in the apparent necessity of its requirements, something that I have characterized by contrasting the deontic structure of normative reasons with merely aspirational forms of normativity. Furthermore, I have suggested that we can make sense of this form of normativity if we situate it in the context of structures of reciprocal norms, and I have sketched a relational account of morality that would render the deontic character of moral reasons intelligible in these terms. Whether a relational approach of this kind is independently plausible is of course a further question, beyond the scope of my discussion in this paper.¹⁸ But it seems to me at least a potential advantage of the relational approach that it promises to shed light on an important feature of moral reasons that would otherwise appear completely mysterious.¹⁹

¹⁸ A further issue that needs to be considered is the following. Even if the relational conception is plausible, it might not provide a complete account of the entire moral domain. Some moral reasons might well be thought of in terms of relational normativity, while others resist treatment in these terms, exhibiting features that require to be understood within an essentially teleological framework. "Morality", as we commonly understand it, would in that event not be a unified normative domain, but rather a collection of radically diverse normative considerations. If my suggestions about deontic structure are correct, it would follow that only some parts of morality might turn out to exhibit this kind of structure.

¹⁹ I am grateful to an audience at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, for helpful discussion of an earlier version of this paper. Work on the paper was generously supported by a Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and by an Erskine Fellowship from the University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

