

## **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. 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 explore 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 thinking about some non-moral examples that illustrate the intuitive difference between deontic and what I call aspirational normativity. Discussion of these cases will reveal that there are different kinds of factor that can lend to normative reasons the character of requirements. Sometimes this character will be a reflection of the systematic importance of the reasons in question; but there is a distinct source of deontic structure that is seemingly independent from considerations about normative importance. In section 2 I propose an account of this elusive further source of deontic normativity. My thesis will be that a kind of deontic structure is implicit in cases in which reasons come embedded within essentially relational structures; reasons that are bound up in a nexus of bipolar normativity are ones that we lack discretion to ignore or to discount in deliberation, insofar as our failure to take them properly into account affects our normative relations to other people. In section 3 I connect this discussion of deontic structure 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 accommodate the thought that morality exhibits the elusive kind of deontic structure that it will be my aim in this paper to elucidate. If this is correct, then whether morality in fact structures deliberation

in the distinctively deontic style will depend in part 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 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, as you yourself would presumably agree; 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 exhibit what we might refer to as an aspirational character, 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 helping 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 we might provisionally refer to as deontic structure. But what exactly does this difference in normative force involve?

In answer to this question, it cannot 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. 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.<sup>1</sup> The distinctive feature of such reasons is that their obtaining functions to block the normative force of potential competitors. Thus in *Small Loan*, the fact that your payment is due by the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 reasons that 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 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 of 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 accommodate 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 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. 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 weigh 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.<sup>3</sup>

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* as I have described it, for instance, the agent who acknowledges the force of the argument in favor of seeing Rocco and His Brothers may well be subject to 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 squandered a rare opportunity, 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 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.<sup>4</sup>

Granting this point, however, it might be suggested that the considerations at issue in *Movie* do not exhibit deontic structure only

because they are not compelling enough. They are (by hypothesis) conclusive under the circumstances described, but as presented the case is something of a close call, with reasons on the other side that are also not negligible, and that would indeed render intelligible the decision to stay home and read the novel rather than go to the film. If we vary the case, however, then the same features that speak in favor of the movie option might appear to acquire the character that I have attributed to deontic reasons. Suppose, for instance, that there is virtually nothing to be said for the alternative of staying home instead of going out to Rocco and his Brothers: the novel you have been reading is both lousy and a bore, your neighbors are having a boisterous party with music that drives you crazy, and anyway you are strongly in the mood to get out of the house.<sup>5</sup> Under these altered circumstances, the attractions going out to see the Visconti film appear much more compelling. They dominate the other main option, to a degree that makes it natural to say that you lack discretion to ignore or to discount them in the situation at hand. (To fail to act on the reasons in favor of the movie option, under these circumstances, would be not merely irrational but virtually unintelligible, and if this is the cost of ignoring or discounting them then these strategies are ones we lack discretion to go in for.) If lack of discretion is in turn criterial for deontic structure, then we would appear to have normative reasons that exhibit this feature in the revised Movie case.

Of course, the considerations that speak in favor of seeing the Visconti movie are of a kind that do not routinely dominate competing reasons in this way. They are dominant under the revised circumstances just described, but in many other deliberative situations they would easily be outweighed by reasons on the other side. For instance, the admitted attractions of seeing the movie would hardly be conclusive—

never mind dominant—if it were showing on an evening when you have promised to attend your nephew's performance in the school play, or when there is work that needs to be done on a paper you are writing if you are to meet an imminent deadline. This feature of the reasons in question would make it inappropriate to structure your deliberations in such a way that they function as exclusionary considerations, regularly silencing potential competitors that would otherwise have significance for your deliberations about what to do. Perhaps this is what makes us reluctant to classify the attractions of the movie as deontic in character, despite the fact that we sometimes lack discretion to ignore or discount them in deliberation.

If this is the crux, however, then we can easily imagine other kinds of considerations that routinely function as the attractions of the Visconti film do in the revised Movie case, dominating the reasons on the other side with which they might potentially come into conflict. Consider, in this connection, the reasons that stem from our deepest personal projects and ambitions, or considerations related to our health and survival. As typically understood, these are reasons whose importance is such that they dominate potential competitors across a wide range and variety of deliberative contexts, determining decisively what we have most reason to do in those contexts. Insofar as this is the case, it might seem that the reasons in question are ones that we regularly lack discretion to ignore or to discount in deliberation; this in turn would make it fitting to allow them to function as exclusionary reasons, of the kind that are insulated from competition in reflection about what to do. Deontic structure, as I have been calling it, would on this account reduce to a kind of deliberative importance.

I am happy to concede that normative considerations that are important in this way have the character of requirements, ones that we lack discretion to ignore or discount in our deliberations about action. Furthermore, since friendship is among the things that have this kind of importance for most people, the account on offer might explain our sense that the reasons at issue in *Distraught Friend* have the character of requirements. The difference between this case and the original *Movie*, we could say, is the difference between considerations that routinely dominate the reasons with which they might potentially compete, and considerations that, in the case at hand, outweigh by a fairly close margin the reasons on the other side. Aspirational normativity turns into deontic structure, on this picture, once it crosses a threshold of sufficient systematic importance.

But what about *Small Loan*? This by hypothesis is not a case in which the normative factors at issue are presumptively important in relation to other kinds of normative consideration. And yet, I maintain, it seems to us that we lack discretion to ignore or discount the reasons in this case too, in a way that makes it natural to think of them as requirements. (Thus we speak of contractual commitments of this kind as obligations, referring e.g. to a person's "financial obligations".) This suggests that there can be different explanations for the phenomenon of lack of deliberative discretion, and correspondingly different senses in which normative considerations can be said to take on the character of requirements. I want to explore the question of what this further sense might amount to. Doing so, I conjecture, may eventually reveal something else that is going on in a case such as *Distraught Friend*, opening our eyes to a way in which considerations can be deontically significant that is potentially independent from questions about deliberative importance.

One reason in particular for pursuing this line of enquiry is the following. On the account currently on offer, normative reasons are considerations that we lack discretion to discount or ignore when they systematically dominate the other reasons with which they might potentially come into conflict. A reason could satisfy this condition, however, without being dominant in all conceivable conflict situations, and in fact the kinds of reasons that are routinely dominant in this way sometimes do not dominate their competitors. This can happen, for instance, when they end up conflicting with each other, as in a case in which the demands of a personal project interfere with the things that need to be done within an important personal relationship. A situation of this kind will have the character of a hard choice, precisely because it involves a clash of normative considerations that are in the nature of requirements. This conclusion will not be available to us, however, if we think of deontic normativity simply in terms of the notion of rational dominance, for it is precisely characteristic of a hard choice that neither of the alternatives at issue dominates the other. Something else must be at issue in cases of this kind, something that leads us to think of the normative considerations in conflict as requirements despite the fact that, under the circumstances, they are not rationally dominant in relation to the other factors that are at issue.

Practical conflict of this kind is a complicated phenomenon, and I cannot hope to provide a comprehensive treatment of it within the scope of this essay.<sup>6</sup> But some light might be shed on the phenomenon if we can get clear about the kind of deontic structure apparently at issue in *Small Loan*, in which there seem to be normative requirements whose standing as such is independent from questions of systematic rational dominance. One thing that is noteworthy about the kind of

normativity exhibited by this case is that the considerations at issue enter the deliberative field from the start, as it were, in the modality of requirements. Their having this standing does not depend on the relation they end up standing in to potential competitors in the situation at hand. Rather, even before considering what other reasons and values might be in play, they present themselves to us in an insistent voice, as considerations that we lack leeway to disregard. Their deontic standing seems not only independent from issues about importance, but also endemic and noncontextual. Why these reasons should have this character is something that we have not yet succeeded in explaining; but if their deontic appearance can be made sense of, we would thereby have identified a different way in which reasons might be said to qualify as requirements.

In what follows I shall adopt a more restrictive terminology, using the expression deontic structure to pick out the elusive kind of normativity that seems to be at issue in *Small Loan*. My suggestion will be that this distinctive kind of normativity, once we see what it involves, will also turn out to play a role in *Distraught Friend*, contributing something important to our sense that the reasons in that case are in the nature of requirements. This in turn will have ramifications for our understanding of the special character of the reasons at the center of morality.

## **2. Relational 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 focus on the agent in isolation may be obscuring our

view of an important potential source of normative requirements. To make sense of the kind of deontic structure that is distinct from the phenomenon of rational dominance, we need to consider the essentially interpersonal framework within which the individual's deliberation takes place.

Thus 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 contextual 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 context of deliberation thus suggests a new account of the elusive normative distinction that has been our quarry in this paper. The explanation offered so far, however, still seems inadequate in important respects. Most significantly, 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, 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 simply in terms of freedom from social sanctions or penalties.

To see how we might improve on the preceding 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 legally entitled to impose a penalty on you for

nonpayment. Your reason for payment is not a free-standing normative consideration, but part of a 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 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, there is a sense, fixed by the conventions of contract law, in which 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 legal principles that structure your relationship with your creditor, specifying corresponding claims or entitlements to performance on the creditor's part.

It is the role of reasons in structuring relations of this kind, I now want to suggest, that is the key to understanding the elusive dimension of deontic normativity that we are after. Reasons exhibit deontic structure when they are constitutively implicated in complexes of relational (or "bipolar") normativity.<sup>7</sup> 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 a legal obligation you owe specifically to them.

In *Movie*, by contrast, relational 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 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 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 in the variant of *Movie* in which the reasons in favor of seeing the Visconti film are postulated to dominate the deliberative field, insofar as there is nothing significant to be said on the other side. Nor is the situation altered by the supposition that an acquaintance of yours has taken a spectator's interest in your

cinematic education, or bizarrely threatened 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 distinctive content to the idea that you 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.

But what exactly is it for a nexus of this kind to obtain, such that certain actions that are open to you would count as things that wrong or injure another party? The intuitive idea would seem to be that the other party would be in a privileged position to complain or object if you choose the options in question. In the legal case we have been considering, the "complaint" would presumably take the form of the imposition of a financial penalty by the credit institution, and the idea that they are in a "privileged position" to react in this way is given content by the framework of consumer law, which authorizes or entitles the institution to impose the penalties at issue in the event of nonpayment. So we have the idea of a response that can be said to be expressive of a complaint, together with the idea that that response is one that the institution is entitled to adopt. These ideas alone, however, do not quite capture the suggestion that there is a nexus linking the creditor specifically to the consumer. In the United States, for instance, creditors may be "entitled" to impose punitive

interest rates on consumers who default even on loans taken out with other credit institutions, insofar as such actions affect the consumer's credit rating. And yet we would not think that the act of default itself constituted a wrong or an injury in any sense to the parties who are thus legally authorized to impose the penalties. The missing element, it would seem, is the further idea that the very considerations that give the consumer reason to pay the original loan should themselves give certain parties a privileged basis for complaint. In the case at issue, of course, this link is effected through the contract linking the consumer and the original creditor; it is the fact that you have signed such an agreement that "obligates" you (as we say) to keep its terms, and that same fact grounds the credit institution's entitlement to impose penalties in case of default.

The case of financial obligation, however, has certain artificial features, which make it of dubious value as a general paradigm for understanding deontic structure. For one thing, there are not many situations in which our sense that we have been wronged or injured by someone will connect with an entitlement to complain through the imposition of a financial penalty. For another, the entitlements and reasons that are at issue here are defined largely through legal institutions and arrangements, in ways that lack application to many ordinary interactions between individuals. If relational normativity is to be helpful in understanding the deontic character of ordinary reasons (both within and outside morality), then we will need a less artificial way of understanding the key elements that it involves.

At this point, I would suggest that we consider in more detail the structure of a case such as *Distraught Friend*. 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.<sup>8</sup> To the extent this is the case, 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 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 relational or bipolar normative structures, analogous to the contractual glue that links 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 crises, 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.

These connected reasons and claims in turn give a content to the idea that your friend has a special ground or basis for complaint in the event you neglect their needs. Thus your failure to act on your reason to help your friend will give the friend a reason to adjust

their attitudes toward you, of a kind that is not shared by uninvolved third parties. Only your friend is in a position to resent what you have done, or to experience feelings of personal disappointment or betrayal. This is because only a person who stands in a friendship relationship to you has the special claim to consideration and vulnerability to injury that is partly constitutive of friendship. The complaint that is at issue in this context will take the form of vulnerability to the kind of reactive sentiments that constitute relations of accountability. In general—or so I have elsewhere maintained<sup>9</sup>—we hold people accountable when we hold them to expectations or demands, in a way that is connected essentially to reactive sentiments. But within the class of reactive emotions it seems that resentment has a special role to play in contexts of relational normativity. The natural thought is that only those who have themselves been wronged or injured normatively are entitled to react with this particular sentiment; it is not merely a reactive sentiment, but an essentially relational one. Such relational sentiments might accordingly be understood as the form of complaint that those who stand in a nexus of interpersonal normativity are in a privileged position to lodge.

Distraught Friend thus provides an attractive general model for understanding the kind of relational normativity that is also at issue in the legal context of Small Loan, and that contributes to our sense that the reasons in that case are in the nature of requirements. The basis for the nexus of reasons and claims in Distraught Friend, and the analogue of the contractual agreement in the legal case, is the value of a relationship of the kind that here obtains. It is this value that grounds both your reason to respond to the crisis of your friend, and the friend's expectation or demand that you should be there to help

out. That expectation in turn involves a vulnerability to resentment on the part of the friend in the event that your reason to help should be neglected or ignored, giving content to the idea that the friend has a special claim against you to assistance.

If this is on the right lines, however, then the features I have identified may be part of what gives the reasons involved in *Distraught Friend* the character of requirements. We have in this case the kind of deontic structure that is implicit in situations of relational normativity, where a failure to acknowledge or act on your reasons will itself change your normative relation to someone else, and in that sense count as something that you lack discretion to do. We are inclined to suppose that people are subject to normative requirements to be loyal to their friends insofar as friendship is a source of especially important reasons, ones that weigh heavily across a wide range of deliberative contexts. There is no doubt something right in this idea, and it presumably contributes to our sense that these reasons are peculiarly insistent ones. But it does not by itself yield a complete account of the deontic character of the reasons at the core of friendship. A further and distinct contributing factor is the relational character of the normative considerations involved in a case such as *Distraught Friend*. The implication of your reason in a structure of this kind helps to give 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* (in any of its variants). It means that, quite independently from considerations of systematic importance, there is a definite sense in which you lack discretion to ignore or discount the reasons at the core of friendship. This 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. Those claims enter practical reflection from the start as considerations that you lack leeway to disregard, and this makes sense in light of their imbeddedness within structures of relational normativity.

The implications of this for morality are significant. In *Distraught Friend* we are already very close to having a set of deontically-structured reasons that are moral in nature. The resentment that your friend would feel if you let them down belongs to a class of sentiments that we commonly think of as moral; by the same token, the wrong you would do to a friend whose plea for help you deliberately neglected is at least very similar in character to the actions that incur moral criticism and censure. The question is, can the account of deontic structure that we have extracted from this case be extended to the whole domain of morality, to yield a comprehensive framework for thinking about the deontic nature of the reasons that morality provides? That is the issue to which I now turn.

### **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.<sup>10</sup>

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 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.<sup>11</sup>

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 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 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<sub>me</sub>. 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 traditionally identifies the property of moral rightness.<sup>13</sup>

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 any 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 we can perhaps qualify this dismissive verdict to a degree. We have seen that there are different lines of thought that can contribute to our sense that some normative considerations in particular are sources of requirements on action, giving content to the idea that we lack discretion to neglect or discount considerations of those kinds. One idea was that certain reasons might be systematically important, such as to dominate in a wide range of contexts the reasons with which they potentially conflict. It might appear that this idea can be affirmed and applied to the moral case within the framework of the teleological conception of normativity. Thus it is open to the teleologist to hold

that certain of the impersonal values that are relevant to the assessment of states of affairs are much more weighty than evaluative considerations of other kinds—candidates might include the well-being and freedom of human beings. This would entail that values in the privileged class are typically decisive in determining which of a range of options for action would be best, such that the alternative options are generally sub-optimal by a wide margin. Even if it is always a rational failing knowingly to choose an action that is sub-optimal, the failing might be especially glaring in cases in which impersonal values from the privileged class are in play. Though the issues are murky, this might bring us somewhat closer to the thought that moral considerations are distinguished as reasons of an especially insistent or compelling kind.<sup>14</sup>

The resulting picture would still leave out of account, however, the further aspect of deontic structure elucidated in section 2 above. We saw there that a complete account of deontic normativity needs to situate deontic reasons within a distinctively interpersonal context. The challenge in this area is to make sense of the idea that there is a lack of discretion to ignore reasons that is independent from considerations their systematic importance. This challenge can be met if we suppose that deontic reasons are constitutively bound up in relational normative structures. Seen in this light, the more significant 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.<sup>15</sup> If we want to make sense of 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 interpersonal 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 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 perhaps most clearly illustrates the relational conception.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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 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 relational or bipolar normativity, which can be understood very much by analogy with the norms at the heart 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 specifically relational 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 corresponding 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.<sup>19</sup>

With this relational conception of morality in place, however, we are in an improved 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 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.<sup>20</sup> 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 standing with other people, in ways that would ground relational reactive sentiments on their part.

This is, to be sure, only a first step toward understanding the deontic character of morality. I have so far merely situated one aspect of deontic normativity in the context of larger debates about the nature of morality; I have not yet done anything to defend the relational conception of morality that is well-suited to render this

phenomenon intelligible. But even if a relational conception could be defended, there would still be outstanding issues to address.<sup>21</sup> The relational account attributes to morality a source of deontic structure that is independent from questions about the systematic importance of moral reasons. I have maintained that we cannot arrive at a complete understanding of normative requirements if we think of them solely in terms of the notion of importance. Insofar as the source of deontic structure I have identified is indeed independent from questions of importance, however, the possibility arises that moral considerations might exhibit the kind of deontic structure I have identified without being of compelling weight or significance in comparison to other kinds of normative reason. If that were the case, then we would no doubt feel that our picture of morality as a domain of special normative requirements had not fully been vindicated.

Questions of importance will thus have to be addressed on their own terms to arrive at a complete account of the standing of morality as a set of normative requirements on action. If a relational approach to morality is to provide the framework for this kind of investigation, then presumably what will need to be established is that the moral values that ground an interpersonal normative nexus are also especially significant ones, such as to be capable of competing with the important values around which we otherwise orient our lives. The value of relationships of mutual recognition, in other words, will have to be shown to be important in something like the way the values are that structure our projects and personal relationships. This is a difficult and elusive undertaking, which is beyond the scope of the present paper.<sup>22</sup> But I hope to have paved the way for it by identifying and elucidating an independent source for the deontic character of the reasons at the heart of morality.<sup>23</sup>

### **Appendix: Dancy on Enticing Reasons**

Jonathan Dancy has suggested that practical deliberation can be framed in terms of two different practical questions.<sup>24</sup> 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 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 what they acknowledge to be 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> For this suggestion, see Patricia Greenspan, "Reconceiving Practical Reasons", unpublished draft. Greenspan sees connections between her approach and the satisficing conception of rationality.

<sup>4</sup> One might, I suppose, attempt to distinguish between two different kinds of normativity in this connection, holding that some reasons are such as to render options eligible for pursuit, while others count positively in favor of such pursuit by the agent. But this sounds forced to my ear: ordinarily options are rendered eligible for pursuit by the fact that there is something to be said in favor of such pursuit, perhaps because it would be valuable along some dimension or other. Furthermore, to distinguish in this way between two different kinds of normativity would threaten a problematic bifurcation of practical reason, of the kind I discuss in the appendix.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Sharon Street for suggesting this variation.

<sup>6</sup> One implication of the account I shall eventually offer is that the normative considerations involved in the most serious practical conflicts should be thought of as having a relational aspect (which might include, in the case of personal projects, something in the way of an obligation to one's future self to be true to the project undertaken). But I will not be able to develop this suggestion here.

<sup>7</sup> 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. 333-384. Also relevant is Stephen Darwall's forthcoming work on the second-person perspective. I have profited from both Thompson's and Darwall's writings on this general topic.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Niko Kolodny, "Love as Valuing a Relationship", The Philosophical Review 112 (2003), pp. 135-89.

<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., David Brink, Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> 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).

<sup>12</sup> Compare Samuel Scheffler, "Agent-Centered Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues", in Samuel Scheffler, ed., Consequentialism and its Critics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 243-60.

<sup>13</sup> See Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981); Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere (New

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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.

<sup>14</sup> The murkiness stems in part from the notion of a requirement within the teleological view. On one natural interpretation of this view, the only use it can make of this notion is in relation to the idea that we are required to choose the action whose consequences would be optimal. But if this is what it is for an action to be normatively required, there should be no essential difference between cases in which the second-best option is inferior by a very wide margin, and cases in which it is more in the way of a close call.

<sup>15</sup> 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, 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.

<sup>16</sup> See T. M. Scanlon, *What We owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, chap. 4.

<sup>18</sup> 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 case, however, consequentialism would be a theorem of contractualism,

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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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> See, again, Wallace, Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments.

<sup>21</sup> A further issue that would need 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.

<sup>22</sup> I offer some suggestions about how to approach this issue in "The Rightness of Acts and the Goodness of Lives, in Wallace, Pettit, Scheffler, and Smith, eds., Reason and Value, pp. 385-411.

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to audiences at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, at the Maryland conference on practical reason (held in April 2005), and at the University of Sheffield, for helpful discussion of earlier versions of this paper. I owe a special debt to Simon Clarke, Patricia Greenspan, Niko Kolodny, Konstantin Pollok, Andrew Reisner, and Sharon Street, all of whom took the trouble to write up their incisive questions and comments. 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.

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Dancy, "Enticing Reasons", in Wallace, Pettit, Scheffler, and Smith, eds., Reason and Value, pp. 91-118.