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The Discretionary Normativity of Requests

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Why should we ever accede to requests? Is there some common normative basis for the reasons that we act on when we do accede to requests, and if so, what is it? One motivation for trying to answer these questions is the desire to vindicate requesting as a *rational* form of interpersonal reason-giving. This is a necessary piece of the broader vindication of our deeds as those of rational agents. If there is no good answer that explains the normative foundations of requesting, then there is a sort of nihilism hovering in wait. That is, if there are no sound normative grounds for acceding to requests, then perhaps we only ever do so out of socially inculcated habits which themselves cannot be justified. Interestingly, scholars in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics have found evidence to support the view that our tendencies to use requesting as a form of reason-giving are culturally relative phenomena.[1] Perhaps this view itself supports the aforementioned nihilism about requesting: we only make and accede to requests out of culturally contingent habits, not on the basis of normatively grounded reasons. So there is philosophical worth in seeing what defence can be made against that nihilist perspective.

A second, further motivation for thinking about the normative basis of requests comes from its possibly fruitful connection to what some philosophers call the second-person relation.[2] If, in certain circumstances, we can create, at will, genuine reasons for others to act, then what does this say about the kind of relations that we always stand in to other people? One possible thing it might say is that just by virtue of being a person, one has the status in the eyes of others as a source of practical reasons. More than that: as one whose intentions for other people to act can themselves count as good reasons for those others to so act. If it is indeed *just* by virtue of being a person that one has the power to make a request of another, then it might look as though the normativity of requesting is a structural feature of the second-person

1. See for instance (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989), (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2010), (Huangfu, 2012).
2. I am thinking here in particular of Stephen Darwall (2006), though the interest in the second-person is now much broader, as illustrated by two recent special journal issues (Conant & Rödl, 2014), (Eilan, 2014).

relation. That, I take it, would be an interesting conclusion, and would also have interesting ramifications for moral philosophy. It is not exactly the conclusion that I will defend here, though the intrigue of this hypothesis is part of my motivation.

The thesis that I *am* going to defend is this: a request requires for its efficacy that the person addressed by the request (the addressee) places discretionary value in the person making the request (the addressor). My primary task is to present and stand up for that thought, so I will not have space, other than between the lines, to make conjectures about the consequences of this view for thinking about the second-person relation. This thesis is driven by a need to cover the following three *explananda*, which I believe set the bar for any attempted account of the normative quality of requests. (i) Requests can in principle be the source of *legitimate* reasons; (ii) requests create *new* reasons; and (iii) the reasons that they create are in some sense *discretionary*. To be sure, this triad is, at least at first glance, hard to reconcile.

However, that is the task at hand and it will be undertaken in the following manner. First I will discuss the definition of requesting, making clear how it is distinct from other kinds of interpersonal reason-giving. In the second section, I will set out the notion of a discretionary value, explaining the particular sense in which one could place discretionary value in a person. Third, I will lay out a theory by David Enoch (2011) of what he calls 'robust reason-giving', which is a class of reason-giving that includes requesting. I am sympathetic to Enoch's picture and I will try to illustrate its advantages, but I will also argue that it fails to account for the whole triad of *explananda* when it comes to requests. As such, in the fourth section, I will propose a solution — an adaptation of Enoch's theory to specifically explain the normative structure of requests. There is an apparently compelling objection to my proposal that I will address in the fifth section. If my thesis holds true then it provides a rebuttal of the nihilist suggestion that requests can never create well-founded reasons, and a vindication of requesting as a feature of interpersonal life.

1. Distinguishing requests

I shall define requests as follows:

> **Definition:** A request is an attempt by an addressor to create and communicate a non-obligatory reason for the addressee(s) to perform an action.

A successful request is thus one that succeeds in this attempt. Since my goal in this paper is to consider the reasons that we are presented with in requests and to identify their normative basis, defining what exactly requests *are* is a separate matter, though a crucial one. As such, for the purpose of my main argument, this definition is stipulative. Having said that, I do hope that the concept of requesting under inspection here rings true as a familiar device in the normative play of interpersonal relations. There are, perhaps, a few points in my definition that could be contested, so in this section I will briefly defend two of the most salient of those points. That is, I will defend the ideas that requests should be conceived as *creating* reasons, and that those reasons are *non-obligatory*.

One sceptical perspective from which one might criticise this definition is that of ordinary language. One might reasonably object that when we talk about requests, we are often talking about utterances that do not create reasons but merely state reasons that were already in play; or similarly, it may be that we use the term 'request' to refer to the exchanging of reasons that are obligatory, not non-obligatory. I do not contest that, as we commonly use the term, it does often include these features that are not captured by my definition. I am not providing a definition of the concept as it is used in ordinary language. Rather, the goal here is to define requests as a form of reason-giving with *distinctive normative force*. Specifically, that distinctiveness from other forms of reason-giving derives from thinking of requests as uniquely occupying a quadrant in the chart below (fig.1). Again, whilst this definition is stipulative, I also believe that it captures the heart of the concept of requesting. Thus, when in ordinary language we call

something a request though it does not meet these conditions, I suggest that we are thereby deviating from, and ever so slightly perverting, the true meaning of the term.

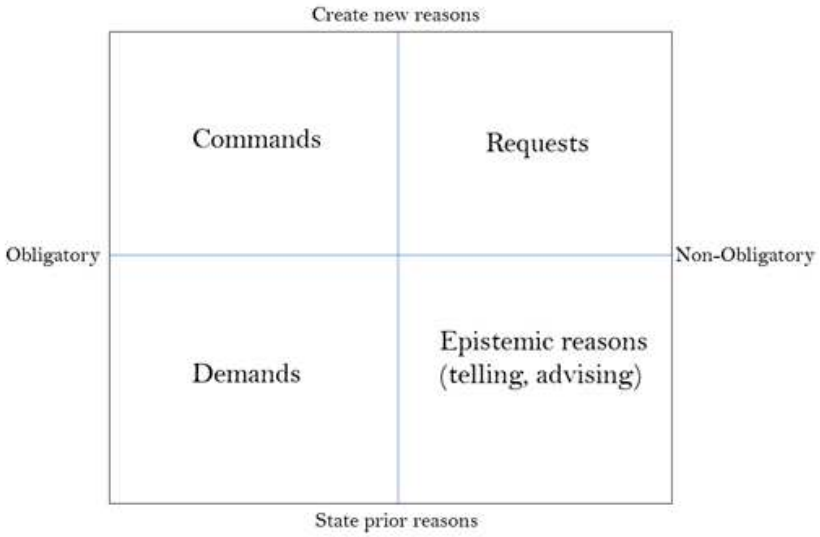

Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual terrain for interpersonal reasons — the kind of reasons that one person is able to give to another person, intentionally, in an act of address, thereby applying some rational force for or against any particular action.[3] The chart carves the terrain along two dimensions: whether the reason presented is thereby created, and whether it is obligatory. As such, the top-left quadrant represents interpersonally given reasons that are both created and obligatory, which I suggest might be the conceptual heart of the notion of a command.[4] Beneath that, in the bottom-left, are reasons that are also obligatory, but which are not newly created. In these instances, the addressor presses their addressee with an obligation that putatively befalls the addressee irrespective of this instance of it being addressed. Again, my suggestion is that this is the conceptual heart of the notion of demand.[5] In the bottom-right are reasons that are also not newly created, but which are not obligatory either. This is just a kind of purely epistemic reason-giving, as when one tells another some non-normative fact ('the bus is coming in 5 minutes') or a normative fact ('the item you have in your hands is very precious'). These are *pro tanto* reasons, considerations which exist, and pertain

3. Note that in categorising ways of giving reasons for action, this chart does not purport to categorise ways of giving reasons for belief.

4. More precisely, I mean two things: that the conceptual heart of 'commanding' is the act of intentionally creating an obligatory reason for another person; and also, broadly, that commanding is a paradigm representative of the class of acts which create obligations.

5. One might be suspicious of this demarcation in Figure 1, on the basis that the border between demands and commands is rather blurrier than I am suggesting: that sometimes demands create new reasons. Let me try to allay this concern through an example. Consider a group of employees in a factory that produces supermarket sandwiches, who, after a breakdown in official negotiations, down their aprons and march to the management corridor of their employer's head office, where a spokesperson for the workers issues a demand to the employers that they introduce a decent workplace pension scheme. One way to interpret this putative demand would be to understand it as stating an obligation that was already in play, and thereby holding the addressee to account, much like the rebuke one might give retrospectively by saying 'you should have provided a pension scheme for your workers'. Indeed, the spokesperson's utterance of the demand could at the same time be an instance of epistemic reason-giving, making the employers aware of this normative fact that they had hitherto overlooked. Alternatively, one could understand this 'demand' as being, in fact, a command in disguise. That is, the spokesperson may be creating an obligation simply by stating it, invoking their authority as representative of the people on whom the employers depend. Either way, it is apparent that the distinction between demands and commands is a clean, not a blurry one: either the obligation that the utterance purports to present was already there, or the utterance purports to create it. Little hangs on the terminological dispute over what we use the words 'demand' and 'command' to refer to. The point for my purposes is that these terms can be used to capture two *discrete* normative moves.

to the addressee, irrespective of this particular interpersonal address. Finally, then, in the top-right quadrant are non-obligatory reasons that are newly created in the act of being addressed to one person by another: requests.[6,7,8]

An example here may be helpful in illustrating the extent to which this stipulative definition is revisionary of the ordinary concept of requesting, but also the extent to which it nonetheless succeeds in capturing the core of that concept. Consider Bronwen, a bus mechanic who has recently taken on young Mair as an apprentice. Bronwen is kindly and warm-hearted towards Mair and I suspect that most people would ordinarily take her to be making a request when she asks Mair, 'Please would you change the oils of the Leyland National that came in yesterday?' But if Mair were to treat this reason that she has just been given as *discretionary* (a notion that will be elaborated upon shortly), then I fear that Mair would have misunderstood the situation quite badly. If she simply chooses not to change the oils of the Leyland National then she will have something to answer for, and Bronwen could legitimately express at least a little irritation towards her.

Similarly, suppose that a few hours later, Bronwen notices that Mair has not gone near the Leyland National, and so she reiterates her earlier utterance. Again, there is an ordinary sense in which the reiterated utterance would commonly be thought of as a request. But woe betide Mair were she to think of utterances like these as creating *new* reasons that were not in play prior to their being uttered. Whilst we may ordinarily refer to both Bronwen's first and second utterances as requests, on my stipulative schema, they are a command and a demand, respectively. The first created a reason for Mair to change the oils that she didn't have prior to having been asked, but a reason that is obligatory, rather than discretionary. The second did not create a reason at all, but merely reminded Mair of an obligation that she had been given, where the reminder itself was an act of holding Mair to account to that obligation.

Whilst being revisionary, though, there is nonetheless some purity to the notion of requesting that is advanced here. The claim that the given stipulative definition captures the conceptual heart of requesting rests on the further intuition that although we may ordinarily refer to Bronwen's speech acts as requests, we may at the same time acknowledge a sense in which they were not *really* requests. I make this sentiment explicit by claiming that speech acts are only *really* requests when they attempt to create non-obligatory reasons, and stipulate that hereafter in the present discussion, the term 'request' will be reserved for the real deal, so to speak. Thus, when appeal is made below to intuitions about requests, these appeals seek to draw on intuitions about only this central subset of what the term 'requests' often includes.

I have thus put aside the ordinary language objection on the basis that what is required here is a stipulative definition that captures the distinctive normative force of requesting. But that will not satisfy a detractor who maintains that not only does the word 'request' commonly refer to reasons in the other three quadrants of the chart here, but moreover, that the quadrant that I am designating to requests is either unnecessary or an impossibility: there can be no such things, and/or we need not think that there are such things, as speech acts that create non-obligatory reasons. In a way, the thesis that I want to defend in the later sections of this paper speaks to this challenge by explaining how

6. One of the few philosophy papers that expressly sets out to address the normativity of requests provocatively argues that requests *do* create obligations. That is Cupit (1994), who thinks that requests appeal to obligations that are grounded in the commitments of the agent. Despite appearances, this view is interestingly similar to the one that I will develop here, though I do ultimately disagree about the characterisation of the resulting reasons as obligations, rather than discretionary reasons. Also noteworthy is that Cupit (1994, p. 449) agrees with the other half of my definition: that requests "generate" new reasons.

7. Defining requests as giving non-obligatory reasons is concordant with Lance and Kukla (2013, p. 460): "The [normative] output of a successful imperative is an obligation on the part of the person ordered to do what the speaker ordered her to do. The output of a successful request is that the target now has a specific sort of reason to do what was requested, but it is essential to the notion of a request that this reason is not an obligation."

8. This definition of requests also conforms to Raz's understanding of requests as a kind of content-independent reason-giving (Raz, 1988, pp. 36–37), with which Owens (2012, p.86) also concurs.

there *could* be a normative basis for such reasons. But a more immediate response to this challenge can also be made.

The challenge in question, to be clear, rejects my stipulative definition of requests on the following basis: that the other three quadrants of the chart between them exhaustively explain the reason-giving that goes on in requesting; that no recourse is needed to the idea of a newly created non-obligatory reason. I think this is not true. The fact that the kinds of reason-giving categorised in those other three boxes are inadequate to explain at least some of what we conceive ourselves to be doing when we make and accede to requests, can be seen through an example.

Consider two friends, Sioned and Ffion. Sioned is mounting an election campaign and she wants Ffion to help as her campaign manager. Committing to the campaign would constitute a substantial sacrifice for Ffion as it will be stressful, and for the course of the campaign it will take a lot of time away from her own work, her family and her other engagements. Suppose that Ffion knows perfectly well that Sioned wants her help: indeed, everybody knows it. But because of the extent of the sacrifice that it would entail, Ffion has not voluntarily offered her help to her friend. For some time, Ffion knows that Sioned desires her help and Sioned knows that Ffion knows this too, but, somehow, she cannot bring herself to ask for help: partly out of pride, partly out of reluctance to burden her friend, partly in the hope that an offer will be forthcoming from Ffion anyway. But it is not, so the time comes and Sioned confronts the awkwardness that has arisen between them with a request: she explicitly asks Ffion whether she would commit to helping Sioned's election bid in the role of her campaign manager. This, I suggest, is a request which presents a non-obligatory reason for action. But moreover, the request itself has altered the normative situation. I suggest that it has done so by creating a reason that was not present before.

All I mean to appeal to here are two intuitions about this case (and therefore about others like it). The first intuition is that the reason presented by the request is not an obligatory one. Of course friendships are relationships that can sometimes generate obligations, including obligations to help one another.[9] But being someone's friend does not mean *always* being obliged to help them, regardless of what the help is needed for, or of the cost that helping would incur. Sioned's request is supposed to be an example of one of those deeds which Ffion is not obliged to do: Sioned is not at risk of being harmed and the costs of helping are substantial. As such, the kind of reason-giving that is going on in this instance cannot be anything on the left-hand side of the chart in figure 1, since the reason is non-obligatory.

On the other hand, the second intuition is that the making of the request is a normatively significant moment. Whatever the act of uttering the request does, it has some kind of impact on the balance of reasons for and against helping. That is to say, from Ffion's perspective it makes a difference that Sioned asks for her help. Since in the example it is stipulated that prior to the request being made, Ffion already knows full well of Sioned's desire for her help, it seems that the normative difference that the speech act of the request makes cannot be an epistemic matter. It cannot be the case that Sioned alters the normative situation through some epistemic reason-giving, telling Ffion about her desire for the latter's help, because Ffion already knows all about it.[10] As such, the normative role that the request is playing must be more than merely epistemic. Somehow or other, this utterance is creating a new reason for Ffion to commit to the campaign itself.[11]

9. For a discussion of how friendships and other particular relationships can generate special obligations, see (Jeske, 2008).

10. As I will discuss in section 5 below, some theorists — particularly in the domain of speech act theory — do think of requests as functioning by expressing desires. Searle (1969, p. 66) is the precedent for this.

11. One objection here to the claim that requests create new reasons, would be to point to cases where the addressee seemed to have more than sufficient reason to perform the action in question prior to being asked, where the addressor could legitimately say 'I should not really have to ask!' However, in such cases as this, it is at least *possible* that the request does indeed add a new reason to the existing pile. It is exactly the fact that the existing pile *without* a further reason had not already moved the addressee to action that has drawn the addressor's ire.

When added to those of which she was already aware, this utterance could conceivably be sufficient to tip the balance of reasons for Ffion in favour of making the commitment to her friend. This prompts the question that I will try to answer later on, of *how*, without any appeal to authority, it is possible for people to simply create reasons of this sort for others.

Despite having said earlier that the definition of requesting in this paper is not intended as a descriptive attempt to capture the ordinary language meaning of the term, I have nonetheless addressed the relation of my stipulative definition to the ordinary-language conception. Whilst in everyday speech we may commonly use the term to refer to other forms of reason-giving, I have argued — through the example of Sioned and Ffion — that the everyday notion must at least *include* the kind of reason-giving that is under inspection here. In the next section, I will elaborate on the idea of having reasons that are discretionary, and how other people could be the source of such discretionary reasons. This will lay the ground for my actual account of the normative basis of requesting, which I will present later.

2. The discretionary value of persons

What it is to value something is a troublesome question. But whatever else it is, valuing X is having a favourable attitude towards X such that X can be the source of reasons for certain actions. Thus, if you value this photograph of your grandmother, as well having an array of beliefs about, and emotional attitudes towards it, you will also be disposed to act in certain ways regarding the photograph. You may, for instance, be prone to lurch to catch it if you were to see it falling; or perhaps you would be inclined to act to ensure that it retains a prominent, visible position on the mantelpiece — whatever.[12] In this section I want to set out the sense in which valuing another person can make them the source of reasons in this sense (that is, in the internalist sense that they would not be such a source of reasons were it not for one's attitudes towards them). It will also be helpful here to clarify what bearing this kind of internalism about this class of reasons has on other important matters, namely, the (non-)obligatory quality of the reasons, and their relation to external reasons and to moral reasons.

A first important thing to note is that we are morally obliged to value others, to a certain extent. Typically, we might express this by saying that we are obliged to respect others, or some similar thought. It seems plausible to me (though nothing hangs on this here), that our obligation to respect all people does not simply pertain to performing the deeds of respecting their dignity. Rather, the obligation also pertains to the attitudes that we hold. We must actually *respect* others' dignity, which means, *inter alia*, believing that their dignity is worthy of respect and perhaps harbouring at least some minimal degree of emotional connection with their dignity — a disposition to regard threats to their dignity with concern, for instance. Holding the attitude of respect towards others is holding an obligatory interpersonal valuing-attitude.[13]

Indeed, respect might be an attitude that we are each obliged to hold towards everyone else, but there are other obligatory interpersonal valuing-attitudes, ones which are specific to one's particular relationships with others. Often, for instance, one is obliged to hold the attitudes of deference towards one's elders, of sympathy towards one's young children, of solidarity with one's friends and comrades. In entering into relationships with others, one accrues obligations to hold certain attitudes towards them. And the obligatoriness of such attitudes is not undermined by the fact that forming those relationships with those people was not, in the first place, something one was obliged to do.

But not all interpersonal valuing-attitudes are obligatory. Consider the affection you might have for your nieces, the admiration you

12. See (Scheffler, 2010, pp. 27–28).

13. I do not think that one is obliged to *always* hold this attitude towards *everyone* in the world. Whilst there may well be obligations that we all owe to absolutely everyone, the obligations to hold certain attitudes towards people only emerge when you are (or should be) aware of those people.

might have for a colleague, pity for an unfortunate stranger, endearment to a charming one, the lofty esteem that you might have for an able rival. These attitudes are all discretionary. No one is entitled to demand them, or to blame others for preferring not to hold them. In fact, for any valuing-attitude that can be legitimately expected, one can imagine the possibility of holding that attitude more intensely than is expected. The fact that one is obliged to hold a valuing-attitude to a certain extent implies that whether to hold it to a greater extent is a matter of discretion.

Significantly, there is a difference between valuing a quality, or set of qualities that someone has, on the one hand, and on the other, valuing *them*.[14] When discussing interpersonal valuing in requests — which I will get on to in the next sections below — the kind of valuing must necessarily be the latter kind, not the former. Various qualities may play a role in leading us to place value in others, or in vindicating in our own eyes the value that we already do place in others. But our interpersonal relationships are characterised by the way in which we value persons themselves, not merely certain aspects of them.

A consequence of the fact that it is people as individuals that are the objects of our interpersonal valuing-attitudes is that the reasons that arise from those attitudes are reasons to act *for others*. Thus, when my admiration of you manifests in giving me a reason for some kind of action — to help you in your endeavours, perhaps — I thereby have a reason to act *for you*. Doing someone a favour — which is a way of acting on an interpersonal valuing-attitude — entails doing something *for* that person herself. What this kind of inter*personal* valuing attitude contrasts with would be a kind of valuing attitude that pertains only to particular traits and qualities: fondness for Harriet's dry wit but not fondness for Harriet *per se*.[15] The point here is one that will be relevant later: that there is a species of discretionary valuing-attitudes that play a central role in our social lives, which have as their objects people, as such, rather than merely the valuable qualities that people sometimes bear.

At this point, it is worth noting the distinction between being obliged to do something, on the one hand, and having *reason* to do something all things considered.[16] That is, it might be said that one 'rationally ought' to do that which one has most reason to do, all things considered. But in distinguishing a set of attitudes that one must hold, from another which one may hold at one's discretion, I am not making any claim about what one rationally ought to do, or where rationality allows for some discretion.[17] Rather, the sense of obligation at play here is to do with what it is morally right and wrong for us to do.[18]

Moreover, the obligatoriness of a valuing-attitude finds expression in the obligatoriness of the actions that express that valuing-attitude. I have already mentioned the strong connection between valuing something and treating it as a source of practical reasons. This connection

14. The difference I want to capture matches Darwall's (1977) distinction between appraisal respect, and recognition respect, respectively. Having said that, I do not mean to endorse what Darwall thinks are the bounds of the recognition respect that persons can enjoy from one another, where "there can be no degrees of recognition respect for persons" (ibid., p.46). Unlike Darwall in that paper, I am concerned here with *non*-moral interpersonal valuing, within which sphere it is possible to value some people more than others, in a way that is not at all a matter of appraising their virtues.

15. The valuing I have in mind could be characterised as valuing someone *de re* and not *de dicto*. For a discussion of related matters see (Kraut, 1986, esp. p.423).

16. Thanks to Bob Stern for pressing this distinction.

17. As it happens, I do also in fact think that there is such a thing as rational discretion *and* that interpersonal valuing-attitudes that are discretionary in the deontic sense are also discretionary in the sense of there being no determinate all-things-considered set of attitudes that any given person rationally-must adopt. But for present purposes, the notion of rational obligation is not relevant.

18. What characterises obligations is a matter of some controversy. One influential account is Raz's view of obligations — or mandatory reasons — as involving a second-order 'exclusionary' component that instructs the disqualification of competing first-order considerations (Raz, 1999, pp. 73–76). Other theories of obligation define the concept in terms of the kind of accountability that it implies (Darwall, 2006, chpt.5). For my purposes, I need not endorse one account or another, so long as they are all compatible with a general thought that obligations "always give agents conclusive reasons for acting that outweigh or take priority over any potentially competing considerations" (Darwall, 2006, p. 26).

illustrates the divide between obligatory and discretionary interpersonal valuing-attitudes. Suppose that Charlene is obliged to hold an attitude of deference towards her professor, Dominique. If she fails to hold that attitude she will be doing something wrong. This failure may manifest itself in certain deeds — an insufficiently deep bow, a lacklustre display of courtesy, perhaps — and by extension, these deeds too are wrong. By contrast, there is nothing wrong about failing to feel heartfelt affection for someone, or genuine admiration, or real pity. It is intrinsic to the very notions of these attitudes that one cannot be obliged to feel them. The true sentiment of affection can only be an organic sentiment, one that arises naturally and not out of duty.[19] The same goes for the 'true sentiments' of other interpersonal valuing-attitudes.

The notion of a valuing-attitude being discretionary is important. An attitude is discretionary just when it is not obligatory. And on the picture of practical reasoning that I am assuming in this paper, an attitude is non-obligatory just when no one is entitled to react with anger to one's holding or failing to hold the attitude. When we are unconstrained by duties, in this sense, we must exercise discretion over our conduct: we take ownership over which values to invest ourselves in, and over how we weigh those values against one another. This thought too will be relevant later in the discussion of requests. Since requests do not create obligations, I will claim that they must make an appeal to their addressees as agents who have this kind of discretion.

In this section, I have been trying to express an idea that I think comes naturally when we think about the reasons that we have to act in the interests of others. That is, I have tried to establish — in line with common intuitions — that there are such things as discretionary reasons to act for another person that stem from discretionary attitudes of valuing that person. Before moving on, there are two noteworthy features of the general picture of practical reasoning to emphasise. The first is that, as mentioned above, the reasons that I have been chiefly concerned with are 'internal' reasons. That is to say, they are normative reasons that make essential reference to some aspect of the motivational set of the agent for whom they are reasons.[20] However, that does not mean that the theory that I am advancing represents a partisan position on the debate in meta-ethics between internalists and externalists about moral reasons; it doesn't. It is entirely compatible with the view that people have some reasons that depend on their own values, to also think that they may also have some other reasons — moral obligations, perhaps — that are external to their own set of values. I thus remain neutral on that question. Having said that — and this is the second noteworthy point — the kinds of discretionary other-regarding reasons that I have identified *could* have some moral significance. Specifically, when moral philosophers talk of something being the wrong or the right *kind of reason* for someone to do something, the discretionary interpersonal reasons discussed here might seem relevant. It seems plausible, *prima facie*, that acting out of a genuine, discretionary heartfelt desire is very much the *right* kind of reason to act, even if the action itself is something that one is morally obliged to perform. So this is just to note that whilst the picture that I am advancing is neutral between competing moral and meta-ethical theories, it may have some interesting consequences.[21]

3. Enoch's account

It is now possible to return to the goal of explaining what, if any, normative force there might be to the new, non-obligatory reasons that are presented in requests. David Enoch (2011) has devised a sophisticated account addressing this issue. Here I will offer a sketch of how Enoch proposes to explain the normative power that people have to give practical reasons 'robustly'. There is, though, a problem with this explanation when it is brought to bear on requests. I will try to

19. For a further defence of the view that there cannot be a duty to love, see (Driver, 2014). Not everyone holds this view, however, see (Liao, 2006).

20. For an elaboration on this kind of understanding of internalism, see (Markovits, 2014); for its classic source, see (Williams, 1981, p. 102).

21. Interesting though such consequences may be, discussing them properly must remain a matter for another time.

illuminate the difficulty that Enoch's view has in accounting for the discretionary quality of the normativity of requests. In the following section below (section 4), I will propose an amendment to the view that enables it to overcome this problem.

The primary concern driving Enoch's inquiry is the explanation of a phenomenon broader than merely requesting. The motivating question is rather, "if, as seems likely, 'reason must constrain and guide the will', how is it that we can create reasons at will" (Enoch, 2011, p. 1)?' The sphere of intentionally created reasons includes commands and promises, and to the entire domain he gives the label 'robust reason-giving'. But Enoch thinks that requests are the paradigm form of robust reason-giving by virtue of their simplicity relative to these other apparently more complex phenomena, where authority is involved. As will become apparent below, requests have complexities of their own. But the theory of robust reason-giving in its general form is still of use. According to that view, all practical reasons that one person can give to another can be categorised into two sets. On the one hand, they could be a kind of merely epistemic reason-giving (the sort of thing found in the bottom half of the chart in Figure 1 above). Alternatively, if they are doing something more than merely telling or advising the addressee about some prior existing reasons, then, Enoch thinks, they must be *triggering* a reason. As such, since these reasons by stipulation are more than merely epistemic reasons, they must be instances of triggering-reasons.

It may be helpful to elaborate on this point. A robustly-given reason — such as a command or a request — does its normative work not simply by trying to reveal to the addressee what reasons there are for them to act, but by in some way *changing* what such reasons are. But practical reasons are not the sorts of things that can be merely willed into existence wantonly. You cannot, for instance, make it the case that a stranger should arduously undertake to do your bidding, merely by deciding that they should. Rather, Enoch (2011, p. 9) infers, these reasons work by *realising the non-normative antecedents* of conditional reasons that hold true independently.

One example of this can be seen in the case of commands, which are a species of robust reason-giving. When the sergeant commands one of her officers to quick march to the barracks, she triggers a conditional reason, by realising its antecedent. That conditional reason must have the form: 'If commanded to do so by the sergeant, then the officer has (obligatory) reason to quick march to the barracks.' And the same story applies to requests. When Sioned requested Ffion to help her with the campaign, she triggered something like the following conditional reason: 'If requested to do so by Sioned, Ffion has (non-obligatory) reason to help with the campaign.' Such reasons can be made when the relevant conditional reasons are true; conversely, successful robust reason-giving implies the truth of the prior conditionals (Enoch, 2011, p. 10).[22]

This is not the whole of the account, however. So far, no space has been made for the difference between robust reason-giving, on the one hand, and, on the other, the variety of other ways in which non-normative circumstances can be manipulated so as to trigger conditional reasons. Enoch (2011, p. 4) gives the example of the neighbourhood grocer raising the price of milk. By doing so, we can suppose that she triggers (again, by realising the antecedent of) a prior conditional reason, one of the following sort: 'If the price of milk at this shop is above X amount, it is too expensive, so you should not buy milk here.' Here, the mechanism by which the grocer *inadvertently* gives you a reason not to buy her milk looks identical to the mechanism by which the sergeant creates a reason with her command, or that by which Sioned creates her request. This is inadequate since it certainly seems that the normative power of reasons like those presented in requests simply

22. Following a line of argument by Mark Schroeder (2014), Enoch (2011, p. 11) acknowledges the conceptual possibility of robust reason-giving that does not trigger a prior reason but really creates a wholly new reason. Thus, divine command theorists may believe that the obligatoriness of a command *consists* in God having commanded it. On such a view, God gives reasons that do not rely for their force on the truth of prior conditional reasons. But in the present paper I am concerned only with reasons exchanged between ordinary mortals, which, contrarily, *must* be grounded in prior, conditional reasons.

have more to them, so to speak, than such incidental reason-giving as the grocer's price change creates.

To address this, the account of robust reason-giving must incorporate the role played by the *intentions* of the parties to these exchanges. In requests and commands, the reason that one attempts to make with one's utterance depends on the addressee recognising one's intention for this utterance to give them a reason. Enoch's exact formulation of this thought summarises the account (Enoch, 2011, p. 15):

> One person A attempts to robustly give another person B a reason to Φ just in case (and because):
>
> (i) A intends to give B reason to Φ, and A communicates this intention to B;
>
> (ii) A intends B to recognize this intention;
>
> (iii) A intends B's given reason to Φ to depend in an appropriate way on B's recognition of A's communicated intention to give B a reason to Φ.

There are several considerations to be discussed in relation to this proposal that I shall leave aside here. For the purposes of my argument, I shall assume that the formulation of robust reason-giving set out here sufficiently explains the general manner in which intentions are relevant to the class of normative interpersonal interactions that are at issue — including commands and requests. In what follows, I will focus in on requests and inspect the status and normative quality of the conditional reasons — those that are required for a request to be successful, whose antecedents are made-true by the uttering of a request.

At this juncture, I would like to raise a problem, or rather, to raise again the problem with which I began. How does the theory of robust reason-giving fare at dealing with the three *explananda* of requesting? The first *explanandum* was that requests can in principle be the source of *legitimate* reasons. One worry in this regard might be that in acceding to requests we act out of socially inculcated habits, rather than on the basis of well-grounded reasons. Another concern is that requesting must always be some kind of coercion, since legitimate reasons cannot simply be willed into existence, out of thin air. The theory of robust reason-giving addresses these concerns. It does so by revealing the role of prior conditional reasons that are brought into play in requests. Those are reasons of the form, 'Person A should Φ, if requested to do so by person B.' These conditional reasons are not willed into existence; they are in some sense there already, before — or at least *at* — the moment of a request being made. By positing the existence of such conditional reasons, the theory can explain in principle how acceding to a request could be justified by reference to a legitimate reason. Acceding therefore need not be thought to be a response to a social convention or being bent coercively by the mere will of the requester.

The second *explanandum* was that requests create *new* reasons. This is the feature towards which the theory of robust reason-giving is primarily addressed. Enoch is motivated by a suspicion of the mysterious-sounding notion of reasons — which bind our wills — coming into existence at the mere whims of agents. But this mysteriousness is played off against the phenomenology of requests. As the example of Sioned's request illustrated earlier, it seems certain that it is possible for requests to make an impact on the normative terrain — to *do* something, that is — even when all the relevant normative and non-normative facts are known, so they cannot be *doing* anything epistemic. Robust reason-giving explains this *doing* as kind of a triggering. By making-true the antecedent of a prior, conditional reason, requests manipulate the non-normative circumstances in such a way that the addressee has a reason that they didn't have before. (That reason is just this: that a request has been made of them.)

The third of the triad of *explananda* was that the reasons that requests create are in some sense *discretionary*. How does the theory of robust reason-giving account for this discretionary quality? This is

where I think the problem arises: I do not think it can. For a request can be made only if there is a prior conditional reason available for it to trigger. In other words, I can only request you to Φ if it is the case that 'you have reason to Φ, if I request you to do so'. If such a prior conditional is not true, then the request will fail. It will fail not just to persuade the addressee conclusively to Φ, but even to alter the balance of reasons at all. But on the other hand, if the prior, conditional reason is true, and it is triggered, then the addressee simply has a reason to Φ, and it is not clear where the discretionary quality enters in.

This is quite a serious concern. It is a fundamental quality of requests that acceding to them is distinctively a matter of discretion. Asking someone to do something is an interesting, special form of reason-giving precisely because in so asking, one intends for the other to treat this request as a reason, but not for them to treat it as itself conclusively instructing them. We ask them to Φ, and thereby acknowledge that whilst our wishes are clear, the matter of whether to Φ or not is up to them. Despite the fact that Enoch thinks of requests as the paradigm of robust reason-giving, that theory lacks any conceptual resources to account for this defining discretionary quality.

It might be thought that Enoch's account as it stands can accommodate the discretionary quality of requests simply by distinguishing them from commands.[23] That is, the reasons presented by requests, rather than being obligatory, are merely *pro tanto*: they are 'first-order' considerations that favour certain actions, but they could just as well be outweighed by more pressing reasons that speak against those actions. Obligations should not be outweighed in this way. Obligations purport to provide conclusive reasons. Thus, the discretionary quality of requests might be thought to consist simply in the fact that they do not purport to provide conclusive reasons.

But this line of defence, though initially tempting, fails on two fronts. First, it simply begs the question. It is true that to be merely *pro tanto*, rather than obligatory, is part of what it is for a request to be discretionary. But merely claiming that requests trigger conditional reasons and those reasons are merely *pro tanto* is not enough. The question is *how* can one person issue another with a merely *pro tanto* reason to do as they ask? In the case of commands, the prior, conditional reasons ('if the sergeant commands, then the officer should Φ') are made-true by the authority that the addressor has and the reasons are grounded in the normative grounding of that authority. These normative powers are often taken for granted: the parents' authority over their teenage child plausibly stems from their parental responsibility; the employer's authority over her employee stems from an explicit contract; the restaurant customer's from an implicit one; and so on. To be sure, in any given case, it may be far from straightforward to determine whether the putative authority is in fact well grounded. What is straightforward, though, is that *when* reasons are robustly given in commands, they are *always* grounded in this kind of authority. In requests, though, there is no authority at play. So what, on Enoch's picture, could ever make it true that person A has a merely *pro tanto* reason to Φ if requested to do so by person B? This is the question that the theory is so far ill-equipped to answer.

The second front on which that tempting line of defence fails is its characterisation of the discretionary quality of requests. One of the distinctive things about requests is that, at some level, they appeal to addressees to *choose* what to do: to make a choice between competing values, rather than simply calculating what they have most reason to do. Or, put another way, when we do appeal to others to make a certain choice between competing values, it is possible for us to make such appeals by requesting. But insofar as requesting is understood merely as the simple triggering of a reason, this aspect of the phenomenon remains mysterious. The general theory that Enoch has articulated has no resources to explain how requests can appeal to their addressees to choose between such competing paths where only they, the addressees, have the authority — the discretion — to make that choice.

23. Thanks to Daniel Viehoff for pressing this point.

4. A proposal

In response to these difficulties, I have a sympathetic proposal to amend the account of robust reason-giving as it applies to requesting. My suggestion is that the prior reasons that are triggered by requests must always have not one but two conditions. Besides being conditional on a request being made, they must also depend on the addressee placing some discretionary value in the addressor. Accordingly, those prior, conditional reasons take the following general form:

> Person A has a reason to Φ *if* [condition (i)] requested to do so by Person B *and if* [condition (ii)] Person A places sufficient discretionary value in Person B.

On this view, then, the normativity of requests is keyed to interpersonal valuing-attitudes. Specifically, it is keyed to a set of valuing-attitudes which are a matter of an agent's discretion: these are attitudes that one is not obliged to hold. Specifying this point, therefore, introduces sufficient conceptual resources to explain the discretionary quality of the reasons presented in requests.[24]

My proposal bakes in the discretionary character of the reason at the level of the prior, conditional reason. A consequence of doing so is that if that discretionary valuing-attitude is not held by the addressee — if condition (ii) is not met — then the request fails entirely and does not create a reason at all. And this outcome is one that might seem problematic. That is, one might think that even when a request is made by a contemptuous fiend — a person towards whom one holds no discretionary valuing-attitude whatsoever — a reason might nonetheless be *created*.[25] The thought is that the reason might be created just as the fiend intends even though in the addressee's deliberations it has insignificant normative weight, or is dramatically outweighed by countervailing considerations against acting *for* the contemptuous addressor.

But this problem does not arise if one keeps in mind the structure of requesting as a distinctive normative operation — a structure that depends on appropriate mutual acknowledgement of the intention to create a reason. Recall that in the theory of robust reason-giving, to which my proposal is an amendment, requests create reasons only when the addressor intends the addressee's given reason to Φ to depend in an appropriate way on the addressee's recognition of the addressor's communicated intention (to give the addressee a reason to Φ). On my proposal, the addressor intends to trigger a reason which itself depends on the addressee's discretionary value-outlook. As such, the addressor intends the request as an appeal to an item in the addressee's own discretionary value-outlook. If there is no such item, if the addressee does not place any discretionary value in the person of the addressor, then the request fails to create a reason. Moreover, it fails to create a reason *even by the addressor's own lights*. Of course, the fiend may succeed in coercing the addressee, or the fiend may have the authority to command her, or it is even possible that the contemptuous fiend can reveal his desire (epistemically) for the addressee to do his bidding, and that mere desire may give the addressee a reason. The fiend may be successful in creating reasons in all these sorts of ways. But without the addressee holding discretionary value in their addressor, the latter cannot create a reason in the normatively distinct sense of requesting.

24. A question that might be raised to my view (and indeed has been, by Alfred Archer, to whom I am duly grateful), is whether the reasons that are thus created by requests are free-standing considerations that favour Φ-ing, or whether they can only ever play an accompanying role to other reasons that must also be at play. Specifically, does the reason that is created by the request (qua request) depend on there being a favouring reason that stems simply from the existence of the addressor's desire for the addressee to Φ? In the terms of Jonathan Dancy's work on the different sorts of practical reasons that there are, this is the question of whether requests create 'favourers' or 'intensifiers' (Dancy, 2004, pp. 38–43). My answer is that the reasons created by requests are stand-alone favourers. When we hold an interpersonal valuing-attitude in another we endow another with the power to create reasons by requesting. Conceptually speaking, I do not see why it should be impossible to endow someone with this power, whilst for whatever reason not treating their very desires as themselves the sources of practical reasons.

25. I am very grateful to Glenda Satne for pushing me on this point.

As a further illustration of the theoretical worth of the proposal being made here, consider the case of entreaties. I shall use the term 'entreaties' to refer to a subset of requests in which, prior to the request being made, condition (ii) is not met: the addressee does not yet place sufficient discretionary value in their addressor to grant them the standing to make the request.[26] In entreating, one attempts to trigger *both* conditionals of the prior reason. That is, the addressor appeals to their addressee to actively place discretionary value in them — in the person of the addressor — and simultaneously to request, on the basis of that discretionary valuing-attitude, that the addressee undertakes some action.

Suppose that Carrie and Anita are strangers to one another. Carrie is walking down the street on which Anita lives and she urgently wants somewhere to hide, but to tell anyone why she needs to hide would risk endangering her confidant. She knocks on the door of a house on the street and Anita answers. Carrie asks whether she can come in, without offering any explanation. We might imagine that she asks whilst looking directly into Anita's eyes. In the moment before this exchange, if Anita had been asked 'would you consider the request of a stranger to come into your house, without explanation', she would have said no. Anita would not have granted a stranger even the standing to make that request — not without some explanation. But in the moment of the entreaty, Carrie implicitly appeals to Anita to take up some kind of valuing-attitude towards her. This could be admiration, affection, pity, some kind of endearment. (As I mentioned in section 2 above, these particular feelings are only points in an indefinite range of favourable interpersonal attitudes that one can hold, or not, at one's discretion.[27]) It is a presupposition of Carrie's entreaty that the following conditional reason is true: Anita has reason to let Carrie into her house, if Carrie asks, and if Anita places sufficient discretionary value in Carrie.

A theoretical advantage of my proposal is that it equips the theory of robust reason-giving with the capacity to explain the normativity of exchanges like Carrie and Anita's, of entreaties in general. This advantage is pertinent because, as it seems to me, the boundary between entreaties and ordinary, run-of-the-mill requests is fluid and often difficult to identify. A run-of-the-mill request, let us say, is one in which condition (ii) is met already, prior to the request being made. All it takes is for the request to be uttered and a reason will have been created for the addressee, without any alteration in anybody's value-outlook also being required. For example, Gwen and her younger sister Cat are being looked after by their babysitter, Wynn. Gwen is extremely enamoured of Wynn — thinks the world of her — so when Wynn asks Gwen to go and read Cat a bedtime story, there really is no question of whether she places sufficient discretionary value in Wynn for the request to be reason-giving. This is a clear-cut case of a run-of-the-mill request. But I suggest that often, depending on the demandingness of the action that is being asked for, things are less clear. When we make requests, it seems that we often implicitly appeal to our addressees to value us — we seek to convey our worthiness of pity or esteem, or whatever, as a way of bolstering the reason that our request attempts to provide. On my view, these appeals may sometimes be requirements for the request to succeed in creating a reason at all. If the border between entreaties and run-of-the-mill requests is indeed as hazy as this, then any account of requests should be capable of explaining *at least* how there could be such a hazy border. Enoch's account cannot, since the interpersonal valuing attitudes that are appealed to in entreaties play no role in his theory of requests. But my proposal explains the possibility of the hazy border, as well as giving an account of the normativity of the terrain on both sides of that border: of both entreaties and run-of-the-mill requests.

26. In giving this specific meaning to the term entreaties, I am following Lance and Kukla (2013, p. 474): "[A]n entreaty is a meta-call: it calls someone to grant the caller an entitlement to make certain kinds of claims that the caller is not yet in a position to make."

27. Having said that, Cristina Roadevin has pointed out to me that some requests make their appeals to *particular* interpersonal valuing attitudes. For instance, the lover's request is appropriately granted out of love, affection, but not out of, say, pity.

In this section I have presented an amendment to the theory of robust reason-giving. The amendment helps to explain the sense in which the reasons presented in requests are discretionary reasons. I will now raise an objection to my proposal in the form of a competing explanation of the discretionary quality of requests, one that is popular in the way that speech act theories think about the matter. I will argue that this competing explanation fails to address the normative questions that my view sets out to confront.

5. The pragmatics of discretion[28]

A central merit of the account that I am proposing is its capacity to explain the sense in which the reasons presented in requests are discretionary. It does so by appealing to the normative role played by discretionary interpersonal valuing-attitudes in grounding those reasons. As such, one way to challenge this account would be to offer an explanation of that discretionary quality without recourse to such interpersonal valuing-attitudes. A rival explanation of exactly this sort is to be found in the approaches by speech act theorists to the phenomena of requesting.

Such approaches tend to follow John Searle (1969, p. 62) in thinking of requesting as expressing a desire of the addressor for the addressee to undertake an action. As such, these approaches concern themselves with what I earlier characterised as a form of epistemic reason-giving. They do not address what I argued in section 1 to be the distinctive normative role of requests as such, wherein a request does something more than merely convey information (either about the addressor's desires, or anything else). But what is more interesting for my purposes is the way in which such pragmaticists think about the discretionary quality of requests in terms of the *indirectness* of requests as speech acts (Searle, 1975). This analytical perspective distinguishes between degrees of (in)directness (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, pp. 23–25). Thus, while a straightforward imperative might be possible, an addressor has the option of deploying layers of indirectness. This could be achieved by phrasing the request as a question ('would you please…'), adding qualifications ('if you wouldn't mind…'), or even merely implying the request by making a related assertion (as when the assertion 'It's a little cold in here' implies the request to close the window). In some instances, an addressor may choose to make a request out of politeness to the addressee. In other instances, this indirectness may function to protect the addressor themselves against embarrassment in the event of the request being refused. Either way, the indirectness of the request is a mechanism by which the addressor communicates her acknowledgement that the reason that she is presenting is discretionary. This is the important point. By focusing on the mechanics of indirect speech acts, one can conceive of the discretionary quality as simply this: an acknowledgement by the addressor, concomitant with the request, that the request creates a reason that the addressee could heed or not, at their discretion.

To be sure, this perspective does look like a challenge to the proposal that I am advancing. The challenge holds that all there is to the discretionary quality of a request is explicable in terms of the communicated acknowledgement of the optional or discretionary force of the reason. This rival explanation threatens to make the idea of the discretionary value of persons superfluous to a theory of requests.

But I do not think that what we have here really is a rival explanation. I do not contest that requests can be made with varying degrees of indirectness. Nor do I contest that such indirectness can, to varying degrees, indicate the addressor's willingness or preparedness to accept the refusal of the request. But the question that I have been addressing in this paper is what normative force, if any, there could possibly be to the discretionary reasons that we create in requests. And to this, as far as I can see, the pragmatic analysis does not propose an answer. In fact, therefore, the pragmatic analysis of discretion begs precisely the question that motivates my proposal.

To see the point here, it may be helpful to attend to the contrast between the kind of reason one can intentionally give another by virtue

28. I am indebted to Basil Vassilicos for raising this challenge and helping me to think it through.

of being authoritative (a command), and the kind one can give without authority (a request). How could the former kind of reason be discretionary? It is difficult to see how a reason could at the same time derive its normative pull from the authority of the addressor, and be discretionary in the sense of decidedly *not obliging* the addressee. Reasons stemming from addressees' authority are — surprisingly enough — authoritative, they are commanding, they are non-obligatory. Having the authority to command someone to Φ does not necessarily entail having the power to give them reasons to Φ with watered-down, less than obligatory strength. As such, the pragmatic analysis, in illustrating the mechanisms through which people present discretionary reasons, thereby illustrates the existence of interpersonally given reasons that do not derive from the authority of the reason-giver. That is the phenomenon targeted by my suggestion for a theory of requests.

Conclusion

I began here by stipulatively defining a request as an attempt by an addressor to create and communicate a non-obligatory reason for the addressee(s) to perform an action. Beyond merely stipulating this definition, I have argued that it captures the conceptual heart of the notion of request, even though it is also fails to match up with the breadth that the term takes on in ordinary usage. On the basis of this definition, I have motivated a general philosophical question about this aspect of our practical lives: what could possibly be the normative grounds of such reasons as those created by requests? In light of the discussion of Enoch's theory of robust reason-giving, of my own proposal, and of related objections, I now have an answer to that question. The normative ground of a successful request, and the reason that the addressee has to accede, is the truth of a prior reason with two conditional elements. That prior conditional reason is of the general form: Person A has a reason to Φ if requested to do so by Person B and if Person A places sufficient discretionary value in Person B. As such, the reasons presented in requests make essential reference to the discretionary value outlooks of their addressees. In particular, they rely on the addressee holding a certain degree of interpersonal valuing-attitude in the person of the addressor. The normativity of requesting, therefore, is a product of a deeper normativity: that value that people have for one another, which can wax and wane in the course of interpersonal interaction.[29]

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