

“Screw you!” & “thank you”

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Published online: 26 July 2012
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Abstract If I do you a good turn, you may respond with gratitude and express that gratitude by saying “Thank you.” Similarly, if I insult you, you may react with resentment which you express by shouting, “Screw you!” or something of the sort. Broadly put, when confronted with another’s morally significant conduct, we are inclined to respond with a reactive attitude and to express that reactive attitude in speech. A number of familiar speech acts have a call-and-response structure. Questions, demands and hails are all call-types, and each seeks a defining response. Questions seek answers, demands seek compliance, and a hail, for example, “Hi Coleen” seeks a “Hi” in return. Many theorists claim that expressions of the reactive attitudes also have this structure. Yet, this insight raises a number of questions. There are, after all, many familiar call-types, not only questions, demands and hails, but also requests, invitations, recommendations and entreaties. Given this, it is natural to wonder whether the expressed reactive attitudes are a sui generis call-type or whether they can be properly assimilated to one of the better-known forms. Further, we might wonder about the response component. It is utterly familiar that the response suited to a demand is compliance, and that the response sought by a question is an answer, but what response do the expressed reactive attitudes seek? The answer to this question is not similarly ready to hand. In this paper, I provide a recognition-based theory of the call-and-response structure of the expressed reactive attitudes. On my account, both the positive and negative expressed reactive attitudes are modes of recognition that seek for their target to give expression to her recognition of having been appropriately recognized. In the negative case, the target does this by feeling and expressing guilt or remorse, and in the positive case, by feeling and expressing self-approbation.

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Keywords Reactive attitudes · Praise · Blame · Demands · Recognition · Gratitude · Resentment · Approval · Indignation · Guilt · Remorse · Self-approration

1 Introduction

If I do you a good turn, you may respond with gratitude and express that gratitude by saying “Thank you.” Similarly, if I insult you, you may react with resentment which you express by shouting, “Screw you!” or something of the sort. Broadly put, when confronted with another’s morally significant conduct, we are inclined to respond with a reactive attitude—resentment, indignation, gratitude or approval. Oftentimes, we express these emotions: our resentment or gratitude with “Screw you!” or “Thank you,” our indignation with “That was a horrible thing to do!” and our approval with “That was a lovely thing to do.”

Of course, the above locutions do not always serve to express the reactive attitudes, nor are they the only ways we express them. The negative locutions might instead express plain old anger or disgust. And the more refined and well-mannered of us will express our resentment in more polite ways. We express our reactive attitudes in different ways depending on character and context. The terms that form the title of this paper simply serve to make vivid the *kind* of speech act that takes center stage here, namely the kind that functions to express our reactive attitudes.

These speech acts are a core feature of the moral life. As forms of praise and blame, they are essential to our understanding ourselves as responsible agents who are responsible *to* fellow members of the moral community.¹ They are ways in which we voice, affirm and deepen our commitment to the moral norms that bind us (Wallace 1996; Walker 2006). They play a key role in the constitution and repair of the moral community.²

It is unsurprising, then, that moral philosophers frequently discuss the expressed reactive attitudes. Theorists have explored, *inter alia*, their warrant conditions (Wallace 2010; Watson 2008); their conceptual connections to demands (for example, Darwall 2006); and the role they play in our practices of holding others responsible (Smith 2007; Macnamara 2011). In this paper, I focus on yet another characteristic of the expressed reactive attitudes that has captured theorists’ attention: that they seek a reply. According to Margaret Urban Walker, the reactive attitudes have a “call-and-response” structure (Walker 2006, p. 135). In Stephen Darwall’s words they include an “implicit RSVP” (Darwall 2006, p. 159). Victoria McGeer explains that it is essential “that the recipients of such attitudes understand—or can be brought to understand—that their behavior has been subjected to normative review, a review that now calls on them to make a normatively ‘fitting’ response” (McGeer 2012, p. 303). Finally, according to Angela Smith, moral criticism “calls upon the agent to explain or justify her rational

¹ Darwall (2006) emphasizes the *responsible to* piece.

² Walker (2006) emphasizes this point.

activity in some area, and to acknowledge fault if such a justification cannot be provided” (Smith 2008, p.381; see also Kukla and Lance 2009).

While these theorists explicitly point to the expressed reactive attitudes’ call-and-response structure, many more implicitly endorse this picture in arguing that the reactive attitudes are forms of moral *address*. If we understand a form of address to be a call that seeks a reply from its target,³ then proponents of the claim that expressed reactive attitudes have a call-and-response structure also include Gary Watson (2008), Michael McKenna (2008) and David Shoemaker (2007).

But recognizing that the expressed reactive attitudes have a call-and-response structure brings to the fore a number of questions. In this paper I focus on two. The first has to do with the call component. There are, after all, many familiar call-types: questions, demands, hails, requests, invitations, recommendations, entreaties. Given this diversity, it is natural to wonder whether the expressed reactive attitudes are a *sui generis* call-type or whether they can be properly assimilated to one of the better-known forms. The second question focuses on the response component. It is utterly familiar that the response suited to a demand is compliance, and that the response sought by a question is an answer. But what response do the expressed reactive attitudes seek? The answer to this question is not similarly ready to hand.

Theorists do not take these questions head on, but a number do arguably speak to some of them in the course of pursuing broader philosophical aims. In particular, there is a compelling literature on the response sought by expressions of the negative reactive attitudes. Theorists such as Darwall, Shoemaker and Walker link expressions of resentment and indignation to the targeted recipients’ feeling guilt or remorse and expressing it via apology and amends.

In this paper I provide a theory of the call and response that mark the expressed reactive attitudes, one that builds on the above work even as it points to its limitations. In contrast to a dominant tendency in the literature to look at demands as the leading paradigm for understanding the reactive attitudes, I put forth a picture in which recognition is at the core of the call-and-response analysis. An expression of a reactive attitude, I propose, is a particular, and particularly interesting, form of *recognitive*. Understanding the nature of recognitives in general, and the recognitive structure of reactive attitudes in particular, can help redeem the literature’s view of the proper response to blame, and restore attention to the proper response to praise. On my account both the positive and negative expressed reactive attitudes are modes of recognition that seek that their target give expression to her recognition of having been appropriately recognized.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Sect. 2, I unpack the concept of a call-and-response structure. In Sect. 3, I explicate the literature’s characterization of the response sought by the expressed negative reactive attitudes in order to give us an anchor for the proper analysis of the call-type those expressions represent. In Sect. 4, I show that demand-based accounts of the call are seriously flawed. In Sect. 5, I highlight recognition’s many modes. And in Sect. 6, I put forth my recognition-based account of the call-and-response structure. I conclude by highlighting my recognitive account’s distinct advantages over a demand view.

³ See Kukla and Lance (2009) for an argument for this view of address.

2 Call and response

This paper starts from a widely held and deeply insightful claim about the expressed reactive attitudes: they have a call-and-response structure. In this section, my aim is to unpack this claim.

It is helpful to begin by reminding ourselves that some speech acts can be understood as the kind of thing they are *without* any reference to a response. Consider, for example, “Ouch!” and “Damn!” when used to express pain and frustration, respectively. One understands these speech acts merely by understanding that they have an expressive function—the point or purpose of “Ouch!” and “Damn!” is to express or make manifest the relevant underlying mental states. No mention of response is needed.

Of course, this is not to deny that there are intelligible responses to expressions of pain or frustration. “Are you okay?” or again “Serves you right!” might fit the bill. But while these responses are intelligible, it is, in a manner of speaking, neither here nor there whether such a response is received. “Ouch!” and “Damn!” do not *internally aim* at a response. They can be fully successful as the kind of speech acts they are—as expressions of pain or frustration—even if they are met with silence. The speaker might consider *herself* unsuccessful if her expression of pain or frustration is not met with a sympathetic response. But there is a difference between *speaker* aim and a *speech act’s* internal aim (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, p. 14). At times, these coincide: my aim in yelling “Ouch!” may be precisely to voice or vent my pain, in which case my aim coincides with the internal aim of the speech act. On the other hand, if I yell “Ouch!” hoping to catch someone’s sympathy, that is *my* aim, not the internal aim of the speech act.

In one obvious respect the expressed reactive attitudes are similar to “Ouch!” and “Damn!”, for they do function to express an underlying mental state. Crucially, though, to say that the expressed reactive attitudes have a call-and-response structure is to say that these speech acts are not *mere* expressives.⁴ The expressed reactive attitudes are speech acts that cannot be understood without reference to a response. In this respect they are like certain other familiar speech acts such as demands, questions and hails, to name a few. Like these, an expressed reactive attitude internally aims at a response from its target and thus is fully successful as the kind of thing it is only if it receives the response at which it aims.⁵ Full success

⁴ My use of the term ‘expressive’ follows Searle and Vanderveken. For Searle and Vanderveken not all speech acts that express an underlying mental state have as one of their defining functions to express that mental state. In other words, while it may be true that all speech acts express an underlying mental state, not all speech acts are expressives. This follows from their distinction between sincerity conditions and illocutionary point (pp. 1–60).

⁵ I am unpacking the claim that expressions of the reactive attitudes call for a response *from their target*. Though I am following the majority of theorists on this point, Walker is the exception. On her view, the expressed reactive attitudes call for a response not just from their target but also from the moral community at large. I am inclined to think she is mistaken. In saying this I do not mean to deny that the moral community has an obligation to speak up for those who have been wronged. They do. But it is one thing to claim that the moral community is obligated in this way and another to claim that the expressed reactive attitudes call on the moral community to meet this obligation. However, even if Walker is not mistaken, this would not negatively affect the arguments made in this paper. At worst it means that a full

is certainly not guaranteed. The expressed reactive attitudes can, like any other speech act, fail to achieve their aim. But the fact that something can fail to achieve its aim on a particular occasion does not speak against its having that aim as definitive to the kind of speech act it is.

While the expressed reactive attitudes seek a response from their target, not just any response—or even any intelligible response—will do. If I issue a demand and the target responds with “You’re not the boss of me!”, then the demand has certainly received a reply, and an intelligible one at that; but it has not received the specific kind of response at which demands internally aim. Demands internally aim not at defiance, but at compliance (Kukla and Lance 2009; Austin 1975; Raz 1999). A demand is fully successful as the kind of thing it is only if its target does as directed because she was so directed.

The full success conditions of expressed reactive attitudes are similarly sensitive to the nature of the reply received. Consider an expression of resentment that is met with “But I didn’t do anything wrong,” or again, a “Thank you” that receives the response “Oh, I didn’t do it, Mary did.” These replies, while clearly intelligible, are not the sort of response at which expressions of resentment and gratitude internally aim. We instead say that such expressions are *unwarranted* if directed at targets who did not do anything wrong or who did not do a kindness. These responses are what we might call *corrections*. They are challenges to the assumptions lying behind the speech acts rather than responses that constitute their full success. It simply does not make sense to think that expressions of resentment and gratitude seek responses that claim them to be unwarranted. After all, the sought response by definition renders the speech act fully successful, and it is at a minimum odd to say that a speech act is fully successful when met with a response that claims it to be unwarranted.

This is not to say that if an expressed reactive attitude does not achieve *full* success then it has failed. Consider demands again. A demand is fully successful when its target complies. What’s more, a demand met with a correction fails. But there is room between a response that renders the speech act fully successful and one that challenges its legitimacy. Often, for instance, demands are met with conformity rather than compliance: the target of the demand does as directed but not *because* it was directed. When a demand is met with conformity it is met with part of what is sought but not the whole of it. In this case it makes sense to say that the demand is partially successful. Similarly, in the case of the expressed reactive attitudes there is room between the response internally aimed at and a response that serves as a correction. Responses that approximate the response sought will render these speech acts partially successful.

At the end of the day, though, these details are only of limited importance. The crucial claim as we move forward is that inasmuch as the expressed reactive attitudes have a call-and-response structure, they have a defining response. That is, there is a response at which they internally aim and which thus renders them fully successful as the kind of thing they are.

Footnote 5 continued

account of the expressed reactive attitudes will have to include a characterization of the response sought from the moral community.

3 Guilt, remorse, apology and amends

What then is the response at which expressed reactive attitudes aim? A number of theorists have discussed the question in the context of resentment, indignation, and blame—the negative side of reactive attitudes. Such work can give us an important anchor for assessing proposals about how best to understand the expressed reactive attitudes and their call-and-response structure.

According to Angela Smith, moral criticism “calls upon the agent to explain or justify her rational activity in some area, and to acknowledge fault if such a justification cannot be provided” (Smith 2007, p. 381). Here, Smith seems to offer a disjunctive account of the response sought by expressions of resentment or indignation. Such expressions, Smith tells us, first and foremost call for justification—for an account that indicates that the action was in fact acceptable, or otherwise admits of excuses that obviate the appropriateness of the resentment or indignation.⁶ If the justification is absent, then acknowledgment of fault is called for.

Now in fact, I think that only the second of these two disjuncts is appropriately seen as the response sought. Once again, responding to expressed resentment by offering justification is certainly an intelligible response. When you express your resentment, you are blaming me—“calling me out,” as it were, for having wronged you. Thus it is perfectly intelligible for me to respond by offering you reasons that demonstrate my innocence or provide an excuse. In a case of unwarranted blame, we expect the target of the blame to set the record straight, and this is precisely what I am doing when I offer justification. But it is counterintuitive to identify this as the response sought by an expression of resentment or indignation. As we saw above, it does not make sense to think that expressions of resentment and indignation seek a response that claims them to be unwarranted. Instead, such responses should be understood as corrections.

The defining response is in fact the second one: an expression of resentment or indignation seeks that its target acknowledge her fault. In what does such acknowledgement consist? Though Smith does not explicitly make this point, it is intuitive to say that acknowledging fault, in its most robust sense, involves both an emotional and a behavioral component. We fully acknowledge our fault when we feel guilt or remorse and express it with apology, amends and the like. Both components are essential. Guilt and remorse amount to recognition of one’s fault; but acknowledgement of fault is not complete until this recognition is interpersonally expressed in apology, amends and the like. Just so, the interpersonal component, emptied of emotional recognition, is insufficient: an apology made in the absence of guilt or remorse is insincere or otherwise deficient (see, for example,

⁶ When Smith uses the term *explanation*, I take her to be referring to a specific species of explanation, namely justification. I read her in this way for two reasons. First, she begins the sentence by talking about explanation or justification and ends with simply justification. This suggests that she takes explanation and justification to be synonyms in this context. Second, I cannot make sense of how offering non-exculpatory justification could reasonably be construed as a way of acknowledging an expressed negative reactive attitude.

Bach and Harnish 1979; Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Gill 2000; Pettigrove 2003; Harvey 1995; Davis 2002).⁷

Walker and Shoemaker explicitly point to these two components of the response sought by the expressed negative reactive attitudes. In discussing the response sought by expressed resentment, Walker explains, “In the ideal case, the offender should reassure the victim and the judging community with responsibility-taking, remorse, or shame at the offense, and apology and offers of meaningful amends” (Walker 2006, p. 138; see also Walker 2006, p. 25, 135). According to Shoemaker, an expression of one’s negative reactive attitude is an “emotional address, urging the wrongdoer to feel what I feel as a result of his wrongdoing and then subsequently to feel the guilt or remorse (at having caused that feeling) which I expect to motivate him to cease his wrongdoing” (Shoemaker 2007, p. 91). He further states, “He may feel guilt or remorse and so may apologize or otherwise attempt to rectify what he has done” (Shoemaker 2007, p. 100).

Darwall also arguably endorses the view that expressions of the negative reactive attitudes seek guilt or remorse and expressions of these emotions via apology, amends and the like. For one thing, Darwall relates a story in which a woman’s expressed resentment is met by the target feeling guilt and apologizing, and he suggests that this is a case in which expressed resentment receives the response it seeks (Darwall 2006, p. 85, 86). Consider also the following passage:

[W]hat resentment seeks is not getting back, but the other’s acknowledgment of having wrongfully injured one and the other’s taking responsibility for what he has done, for example, through compensation and, perhaps, punitive damages (Darwall 2011, p. 331).

Apologizing is plausibly understood as a way of “taking responsibility,” and, for Darwall, feeling guilt amounts to “acknowledgment of having wrongfully injured another” (Darwall 2006, p. 71, 79, 112). Thus this passage is further evidence that Darwall joins Walker, Shoemaker, and arguably Smith in endorsing the idea that the response sought by the expressed negative reactive attitudes includes both emotional and behavioral recognition of wrongdoing, and—more specifically—the target feeling guilt or remorse and expressing it via apology, amends and the like.

It is not hard to see why this view—let’s call it the consensus view—has so many proponents. For one thing, it has intuitive appeal. There is, after all, nothing as satisfying as having one’s blame met with admission of wrongdoing, apology and reparation.⁸ Indeed, one’s intense feelings of resentment or indignation may well tend to dissipate when met with a sincere apology and an attempt to make amends.

Further, the view is theoretically elegant. Strawson’s class of reactive attitudes includes not only the *other-regarding* reactive attitudes of resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval, but also the *self-regarding* attitudes of guilt, remorse and self-approbation. According to the consensus view, expressions of the

⁷ Some theorists identify regret rather than guilt or remorse as the emotional component of apologies.

⁸ To be sure, the speaker’s aim and the speech act’s aim can come apart, but paradigmatically these aims coincide.

other-regarding negative reactive attitudes seek that their target feel and express a self-regarding negative reactive attitude. In other words, the consensus view seamlessly brings together different components of Strawson's picture.

Finally, the consensus view helps to explain why expressions of resentment and indignation are such crucial parts of the moral life. Wrongdoing creates rifts in relationships, straining and tearing the fabric of the moral community. If the community is going to stay together, these rifts need to be repaired. Repair happens when those who have done wrong take up and make good on their faults by feeling guilt or remorse and expressing it via apology and amends.⁹ The consensus view allows us to see that expressions of resentment and indignation catalyze the reparative work that is so essential to keeping the community together.

If the literature has served us well in identifying the response defining of expressions of the negative reactive attitudes, though, I want now to argue that it has struggled more when it comes to understanding the call-type of such expressions and yet more when it comes to understanding what expressions of reactive attitudes, in their full range, have at their core.

4 Demands

Even a cursory survey of the reactive attitudes literature would leave one struck by how frequently theorists discuss demands. Most often theorists emphasize the relationship between the reactive attitudes and demands understood as a model or metaphor for the standing requirements of morality. Strawson told us that the reactive attitudes “are associated with,” “involve,” “express,” and “rest on and reflect” demands (Strawson 2008, p. 29, 30, 34). Watson suggests that “the negative reactive attitudes come into play only when the basic demand has been flouted or rejected...” (Watson 2008, p. 125). According to Wallace, “there is an essential connection between the reactive attitudes and a distinct form of evaluation, or quasi-evaluation, that I refer to as holding a person to an expectation (or demand)” (Wallace 2008, p. 158).

Darwall, however, is arguably unique in claiming that the reactive attitudes are not just conceptually connected to demands understood as the standing requirements of morality, but also to demands understood as a distinct kind of speech act. According to Darwall,

What gives Strawson's discussion of reactive attitudes its special relevance to the issue of free will is that reactive attitudes invariably address demands, and, as Gary Watson notes, there are ‘constraints on moral address’ that must be presupposed as felicity conditions of addressing a demand ... the capacity to recognize and act on second-personal reasons is, I am claiming, a felicity condition of moral address's having its distinctive ‘illocutionary force’ (that is, making it the distinctive speech act it is) (Austin 1975) (Darwall 2007, p. 120).

⁹ See Walker (2006) for a thorough treatment of this idea.

On Darwall’s account, the reactive attitudes (in both their expressed and unexpressed forms), whatever else they might be, are implicit demands qua speech act. Darwall, in other words, puts forth an account of the call-type of the expressed reactive attitudes.

While there is strong evidence that Darwall regards the expressed reactive attitudes as implicit demands, his view on the propositional content of these demands is not similarly clear. It is not clear what Darwall thinks the negative reactive attitudes are demands *for*. Darwall never explicitly takes up questions about propositional content. This, I suspect, is because Darwall’s broader project of arguing for the second-personal nature of morality requires only that the reactive attitudes make demands—not that they make this or that particular demand. There are, however, a number of passages that suggest two views he might seriously entertain. The first is what I will call the “standing moral requirement” view (Darwall 2010b, p. 155; 2006, p. 76; 2010c, p. 21); the second, the “acknowledgment of fault” view (Darwall 2011, p. 331; 2006, p. 71, 79, 85, 86, 112). Neither of these views, I want to argue, succeeds.

Let’s start with the standing moral requirement view. This view piggybacks on the idea that the negative reactive attitudes are intimately connected to demands understood as standing moral requirements. Theorists claim that resentment and indignation are responses to, involve a construal of, and are warranted by the violation of a demand qua standing moral requirement (Strawson 2008; Watson 2008; Wallace 2008). The standing moral requirement view of content merely pushes the connection between a reactive attitude and the moral requirement with which it is correlated one step further: it claims that the negative reactive attitudes issue the demand that underwrites them. More precisely, on this view, the content of the demand constitutive of a negative reactive attitude mirrors the content of the standing moral requirement whose violation prompted it. Thus, if I intentionally stomp on your foot, and you feel resentment and express that resentment to me, your expression not only is a response to, involves a construal of, and is warranted by my violation of the demand “Do not intentionally stomp on other people’s feet” it also, crucially, *issues* this demand.

But this is not a tenable account of the call component of the expressed negative reactive attitudes. To see, recall the response sought by demands. Demands seek compliance; that is, they are successful when the target does as directed because she was directed. Applied as an account of resentment, this implies that your resentment seeks compliance: it will be successful if I respond by not stomping on your foot because you so demanded. But when you consider the fact that I have already stomped on your foot—this is after all what elicited your expression of resentment in the first place—my options for complying with your demand are rather limited. I cannot comply by refraining from the offending action, since it is already in the past: I cannot make it the case that I never stepped on your foot to begin with. Future compliance, of course, is possible—I can refrain from stepping on your foot in the future. But while we can agree that this would be a good thing, such forbearance is not satisfying as a complete account of the response your expression of resentment aims at. It is highly implausible that my *merely* not stomping on your foot in the future renders your expression of resentment fully successful.

If you take me to task for stepping on your foot and I respond simply by saying “Okay, I won’t step on your foot in the future,” my guess is that you would be taken aback. What about the fact that I have already stomped on your foot—that I have already shown you ill will and disregard? Expressions of resentment are responses to past wrongs, and whatever else we say about the response they seek, it needs to be at least in part about this past wrong. An account of the call-type that entails that the success-constituting response is as thoroughly forward-looking as “Okay, I won’t step on your foot in the future” is hard to swallow. The defining response of an expression of resentment must involve a backward-looking element.¹⁰

What the above points out is that the response implied by the standing moral requirement view is inconsistent with the consensus view. The consensus view *does* and the response implied by this account *does not* contain the backward-looking elements that are crucial to any plausible account of the response. The fact that this view fails to cohere with the consensus account is a serious strike against it.

Let’s turn then to the acknowledgement of fault view. On this view, a negative reactive attitude is a tacit demand that its target acknowledge her fault, where this includes both feeling guilt or remorse and expressing it via apology and amends. Can this account of the call-type stand up to scrutiny?

From one perspective it seems like it can. This view implies what we have argued is the correct view of the response component—the consensus view. But from another perspective it faces a serious problem. To say that expressions of resentment and indignation are demands to feel and express guilt or remorse is to say that these expressions are demands for a response with both an emotional and a behavioral component. However, the emotional component is simply not the sort of thing we can felicitously demand of another. To comply with a demand, one must do as directed because it was directed. Feeling guilt or remorse, though, is not something we can do because we were directed to. We can no more feel an emotion on command than we can digest our food on command. We can, as it were, go through the motions—feigning guilt or remorse is possible, of course, but *feigning* guilt or remorse is not what is demanded of us. We can also, of course, work to develop our capacity for and sensitivity to guilt or remorse—emotions are susceptible to this sort of “indirect” control. What we cannot do is will the genuine feeling of guilt or remorse as a response to another’s authority.¹¹

Demand-based accounts of the negative reactive attitudes fail, then, either because they imply an implausible picture of the response component or because they characterize expressions of resentment and indignation as infelicitous demands.¹²

Let me now point to a further reason to be skeptical of demand-based accounts.¹³ For Darwall, as for most theorists, the positive and negative reactive attitudes are

¹⁰ See Talbert (2012) for another objection to the standing moral requirement view of content.

¹¹ Some of what Darwall says suggests that he might hold a hybrid view of content (Darwall 2010a, p. 37; 2010c, p. 21). On this view, the expressed negative reactive attitudes are implicit demands to stop violating the demand *and* to acknowledge fault. If this is his view, it fails for the same reason that the acknowledgment of fault view fails.

¹² For additional objections to Darwall’s characterization of the reactive attitudes see Wallace (2007).

¹³ A number of the paragraphs in this section come from Macnamara (2013).

forms of praise and blame and thus, like praise and blame, two sides of the same coin. Given this, we should expect them to have the same fundamental nature. But a demand-based account precludes the possibility of such a unified picture: even if it were possible to respond to the concerns laid out above, and thus to salvage a demand-based account of the negative, it would be all but impossible to defend a demand-based account of the positive.

First, it is simply hard to make sense of the idea that “Thank you” and “That was a lovely thing to do” are demands—whatever the content of the demand. Demands, where legitimate, make it the case that their target *must* do as the demand directs. In other words, demands are exercises of authority, forms of normative subordination. It stretches matters to think that doing something nice for someone functions to make you subject to her authority.

Adding content to the demand does not improve the view’s prospects. The acknowledgement of fault view of content is a nonstarter for praise, and it is easy to see why the standing moral requirement view fails. Imagine that I do you a good turn and you feel and express your gratitude. Some will argue that your gratitude is fitting or apt because I have shown you an amount of good will that goes above and beyond what you have the authority to demand of me (Darwall 2006, p. 71; Smith 2008, p. 381). But on the view we are considering, your expression of gratitude is not only *fitting* because I have gone above and beyond the demand for a reasonable amount of good will and regard, but it also *addresses* the demand for a reasonable amount of good will and regard. When you express your gratitude by saying “Thank you,” you are implicitly demanding that I show you a reasonable amount of good will and regard. This is—to say the least—an odd view of what we are doing when we express gratitude. When I say “Thank you” to another for doing me a kindness, I don’t take myself to be implicitly demanding that she show me a reasonable amount of good will and regard. After all, she has just shown me more regard than I can demand!

To be clear, my point here is not to pin a demand view of the positive reactive attitudes on Darwall. There is some evidence that he might hold such a view, but it is far from clear that it is his considered view.¹⁴ Rather, my point is that the demand view of the *negative* reactive attitudes comes at a cost insofar as it precludes a unified account of the fundamental nature of the expressed reactive attitudes as a class.

At the end of the day I do not take myself to have offered a knock-down refutation of the demand view. Rather, my aim has been simply to highlight the view’s weaknesses so as to provide us with the impetus to look beyond demands.

¹⁴ Evidence that Darwall does not hold a demand view of the expressed positive reactive attitudes includes the fact that Darwall’s treatment of the positive reactive attitudes diverges from his treatment of the negative in a crucial way. Darwall is very explicit that the conceptual connections between demands and the negative reactive attitudes go beyond warrant conditions. He emphasizes not just that the negative reactive attitudes are not just warranted when someone violates a demand, but also that the negative reactive attitudes themselves address demands. He is not as explicit about the latter in the case of positive reactive attitudes. When talking about specific positive reactive attitudes—and gratitude in particular—he never explicitly says that they address demands. He only explicitly states that they are warranted when the actor acts in a way that goes above and beyond what can be demanded of her. Evidence that Darwall does hold a demand view of the expressed positive reactive attitudes includes the fact that in many places he claims that the *class* of reactive attitudes addresses demands, never qualifying this claim so as to indicate that *only* the negative reactive attitudes address demands.

5 Recognition

In the last section, I highlighted the frequency with which theorists point to various conceptual connections between demands and the reactive attitudes, as well as the limits of those connections in helping us to understand the nature of the speech acts that give voice to those attitudes. Fortunately, demands are not the only concept that the literature points to. When we look closely at the reactive attitudes literature, appeal is often made to the concept of *recognition*. For example, according to Walker: “Reactive feelings in their natural and learned forms of expression have been described as a form of ‘moral address’: they call on us to *recognize* the propriety or impropriety of what goes on between us and in our midst” (Walker 2006, p. 25, emphasis added). She further claims that when we express our resentment to others, we seek confirmation that we are “*recognized* by others” (Walker 2006, p. 26, emphasis added). Indeed, Darwall himself appeals to this concept. He says that the reactive attitudes seek “reciprocal *recognition*” of the equal dignity that they both claim and presuppose (Darwall 2006, p. 84, emphasis added). Earlier in the same work, he claims that “gratitude’s natural expression is also second-personal, a grateful addressing of the benefactor that reciprocally *recognizes* that he has benefitted us beyond what we had any claim to expect” (Darwall 2006, p. 73, emphasis added; see also Hieronymi 2004; Allais 2008).

To my mind, Walker and Darwall are exactly right in linking the reactive attitudes to the concept of recognition, and in the next section, I argue that this concept is key to understanding the expressed reactive attitudes’ call-and-response structure. But before I put forth my picture, we will do well to familiarize ourselves with the concept of recognition and its many modes.

First, there is recognition as *receptive encounter*: recognition that amounts to *taking up* or *taking in* some feature of the world. Emotions are a paradigmatic form of this kind of recognition. As theorists frequently point out, emotions are ways of recognizing the import or significance of an evaluatively construed object or situation (see for example, Helm 1994; Nussbaum 2001; Stocker 1987, 1983; Taylor 1985). When Amanda is grieving over the death of her mother, or, when John is afraid of the patch of ice he is approaching, they are recognizing features of the world in evaluative terms. Amanda recognizes her mother’s death *as a terrible loss*, and John the ice *as dangerous*.¹⁵ More than that, they are recognizing the import of the loss and the danger in a particularly rich way. When John fears the ice, the threat posed by the ice *resonates* with him. John’s fear is *a way of being in the world* that reflects the fact that the ice can do him harm. We can unpack these metaphors. Emotions are forms of comportment comprised of modification of one’s patterns of salience, tendencies of interpretation and orientations of the will (Bartky 1990; Solomon 2004; Calhoun 2003; de Sousa 1987; Roberts 1988; Rorty 1980; Jones 1996; Oakley 1992; Sherman 1997).¹⁶ Patterns of salience consist in having one’s surroundings or circumstances appear to one in a particular way, with certain features coming to the fore, and others fading into the background (Sherman 1997,

¹⁵ The fear of ice example is from Stocker (1983 and 1987).

¹⁶ This lovely characterization of forms of comportment is from Little (1998).

p. 39). For example, John’s fear of the ice is constituted in part by the fact that the ice, and not the beautiful mountain in the distance, rivets his attention, or again, by the fact that he is attuned to the subtle textural changes in the ice, and not his colleague walking towards him.

Emotions are not just constituted by patterns of salience—what we notice—but also by tendencies of interpretation—how we interpret the features of the world that we notice (de Sousa 2004; Little 1995, 1998). John’s fear, for example, is in part constituted by his proclivity to interpret the grass patch next to the ice as a traction-rich refuge and likewise, the particularly shiny part of the ice not as pretty, or as a mere textural change, but rather as a spot to avoid placing a foot.

Finally, and perhaps most familiarly, our emotions are constituted in part by motivational profiles. It is a familiar point that “we act *out of* compassion, *out of* friendliness, *out of* sympathy” (Sherman 1997, p. 49, emphasis added). Part of being in an emotional state is being moved to act or respond in certain characteristic ways. We can see this in the case of John’s fear. John will approach the ice with new caution and care. He will move slowly and deliberately. He will test to make sure his foot is secure before taking his stride.

In short, then, to say that emotions are *ways of being in the world*, or again, ways of *engaging with* the import of an evaluatively construed object or situation, is to point to the fact that emotional recognition is constituted by changes in comportment that reflect said import.¹⁷

While emotions are a mode of receptive recognition, they are not the only mode. I can, for example, receptively recognize the animal in the bush as a rabbit, myself as Coleen, or Marilyn Monroe in the pointillist painting, without even a tinge of emotion. We might then think of receptive recognition as a genus with many species.

Crucially, though, receptive recognition is not the only genus of recognition; there is also a form of discursive recognition, a “recognitive.” Recognitives are speech acts that recognize another person in a particular guise, and that seek acknowledgement by the target of that recognition. Acknowledgement is at its core a way of giving expression to one’s receptive recognition of having been appropriately recognized by the speech act.¹⁸

According to Kukla and Lance, our default greeting, namely the hail—“Hi Ernie”—is a recognitive. When I say “Hi Ernie” to my friend, I am performing the discursive act of recognizing my friend as Ernie (Kukla and Lance 2009, pp. 134–145). The hail also seeks acknowledgment. For example, my “Hi Ernie” calls on Ernie to give expression to his receptive recognition of having been appropriately recognized by me (Kukla and Lance 2009, pp. 138–152).

On my own view, Ernie receptively recognizes that I have appropriately discursively recognized him by *mirroring* my recognition of him, that is, by

¹⁷ A number of the above paragraphs explicating my view of the unexpressed reactive attitudes come from Hurley and Macnamara (2011).

¹⁸ I am borrowing the term “recognitive” from Kukla and Lance, but I am using it differently. That said, the idea that there is a kind of speech that recognizes another person in a particular guise, and that seeks acknowledgement by the target of that recognition comes from Kukla and Lance (2009). The existence of this kind of speech act follows directly from their analysis of hails.

receptively recognizing himself as I have discursively recognized him. When Ernie recognizes himself as I have recognized him he affirms or takes up as correct my recognition of him. Ernie then mirrors my discursive recognition of him by receptively encountering himself as Ernie. This sort of identity self-recognition is non-emotional receptive recognition, but it is receptive recognition nonetheless.

Of course, given that recognitives (and thus hails) aim at acknowledgement, it is not enough for full success that Ernie respond by seeing himself as Ernie. Acknowledgment is a *public* act, and thus my “Hi Ernie” seeks not just that Ernie receptively encounter himself as Ernie, but also that he give expression to this encounter. He does this with a returned “Hello,” a wave, or a nod of his head in my direction. It is these utterly familiar acts that serve to discursively register and thus make public the fact that Ernie sees himself as Ernie. In short, the hail seeks what we intuitively know it to seek—a returned “Hello,” wave, or a nod of the head—but what this analysis brings to light is that these familiar acts serve to acknowledge a hail only inasmuch as they are expressions of the target’s receptive recognition of herself as having been appropriately recognized.¹⁹

At the end of the day, not much rides on the details of this analysis of the hail. What is crucial is that there exists a class of speech acts—recognitives—that recognize another person in a particular guise and that seek acknowledgement from the target of that recognition. In the next section, I argue that the expressed reactive attitudes are, like hails, a species of recognitive.

6 Expressions of the reactive attitudes as recognitives

I want now to argue that it is attention to considerations about the *unexpressed* reactive attitudes that point us in the direction of a better theory of the speech act, or call-type, that functions to express a reactive attitude. I will start, then, with the unexpressed reactive attitudes.

Hurley and I (2011) argue that we can make substantial progress toward understanding the unexpressed reactive attitudes when we take them seriously *as* emotions. As we saw above, many theorists maintain that emotions are modes of recognizing certain features of the world under an evaluative guise. Applying this insight, Hurley and I argue that the reactive emotions are ways of recognizing

¹⁹ Kukla and Lance agree that “Hello,” a wave, or a nod of the head in the speaker’s direction can be a way of giving expression to one’s recognition of having been appropriately recognized by a hail. In other words, we agree that “Hello” and the like can function to acknowledge a hail. That said, my analysis diverges from Kukla and Lance’s because I take these familiar acts to function as acknowledgment insofar as they serve to discursively register Ernie’s receptive encounter of himself as Ernie. In contrast, Kukla and Lance hold that all speech acts impose deontic normative burdens on their target and thus that the target of a speech act gives expression to her recognition of having been appropriately recognized by the speech act by giving expression to her receptive recognition of the normative burden imposed by the speech act. Thus in the case of hails, Kukla and Lance take a returned “Hello” to function as acknowledgement insofar as it gives expression to one’s receptive recognition of the normative burden imposed by the hail.

I do not subscribe to the view that all speech acts impose normative burdens and thus I give an analysis of giving expression to one’s receptive recognition of having been appropriately recognized that does not involve the receptive recognition of normative burdens.

persons (the feature of the world) as having done something morally significant: something good, bad, right or wrong (the evaluative guise). My resentment of you for betraying my confidences receptively recognizes you as having injured or offended me. My gratitude toward you for giving me timely feedback on my draft receptively recognizes you as having done me a favor.

In addition, theorists emphasize that emotions are particularly rich forms of receptive recognition: emotional recognition consists in *taking in*, or again, *engaging with* the *import* of the evaluatively construed object or situation. When I resent you for betraying my confidences the import of your betrayal resonates with me. Or again, the gratitude I feel toward you for giving me timely feedback on my draft is a way of being in the world that reflects the import of your having done me a good turn.

Above, we unpacked these metaphors in terms of comportment. The reactive attitudes take in or engage with import in the sense that they are in part constituted by forms of comportment that reflect the import of another having performed a good, bad, right or wrong action.

Consider, for example, the resentment that Beth feels toward her spouse, George, for not doing his share of the household chores. Her resentment is in part constituted by what she notices. George’s bad qualities capture her attention: she is quick to notice his clothes on the floor, his dirty coffee cup left on the table, and his mess of papers strewn all over the couch. Her resentment is further constituted by a tendency to interpret things he does as further insults—as signs of disrespect or of failure to value *her* contributions to the household. She takes his suggestion to spend Saturday frolicking in the park together as another instance of him thinking that the house cleans itself, or that the groceries magically appear in the refrigerator. Finally, Beth’s resentment is constituted by her motivational profile. She is more likely to lay into him for perceived infractions: seeing his clothes on the floor, or his dirty coffee cup on the table, is more likely to set her off.

On a more pleasant note, imagine you witness your friend Max doing a kindness for someone and you feel approval. Your approval receptively recognizes him as having done a good deed, and is constituted in part by changes in your comportment towards him. Max’s good qualities capture your attention and his bad ones fade into the background; you are ready to interpret other deeds of his, even those that don’t end up helping anyone, as well-meaning. And finally, you may be more inclined to do good deeds yourself.²⁰

In short, when Beth resents George she receptively recognizes him as having wronged her, and when you approve of Max you receptively recognize him as having done a good turn. In each case the receptive recognition is a form of comportment that reflects the import of the actor’s morally significant conduct.²¹

But if the emotions of resentment, gratitude, indignation and approval are modes of receptively recognizing another, it makes sense to think that the speech acts that *give voice to* or *make public* these emotions are themselves modes of recognition.

²⁰ For psychological research on moral approval, see Algoe and Haidt (2009).

²¹ A number of the above paragraphs explicating my view of the unexpressed reactive attitudes come from Hurley and Macnamara (2011).

To be sure, these speech acts are not modes of *receptive* recognition, but as we have emphasized not all recognitions are receptive encounters. There are also forms of discursive recognition and, more specifically, recognitives. I propose that expressions of the reactive attitudes are recognitives.

On this picture “Screw you!” not only expresses one’s receptive recognition of another as having done wrong but is *itself* a mode of discursively recognizing the target as having done wrong. Similarly, “Thank you” not only expresses one’s recognition of another as having done you a good turn but is *itself* a way of discursively recognizing another as having done you a good turn. Indeed, “Screw you!” and “Thank you” express their respective kinds of emotional recognition *precisely* by discursively recognizing their target as having done something wrong or good respectively.

What’s more, if expressions of the reactive attitudes are recognitives, then they seek acknowledgment. That is, they are fully successful when their target gives expression to her receptive recognition of having been appropriately recognized. Full success of an expressed reactive attitude then depends in part upon the target receptively recognizing the speaker’s recognition of her as appropriate. She does this, as I proposed in the case of the hail, by *mirroring* the speaker’s recognition of her. For example, if Paul says “Screw you!” to me for having slighted him, I receptively recognize his recognition of me as appropriate by recognizing myself as he has recognized me. He recognized me as having wronged him, and I receptively recognize his discursive recognition of me as appropriate by recognizing myself as having wronged him. Or again, if John recognizes me as having done him a kindness by saying “Thank you,” I receptively recognize his discursive recognition of me as appropriate by recognizing myself as having done him a kindness.

Above we saw that the *other-regarding* unexpressed reactive emotions are modes of receptively recognizing *another* as having done something good, bad, right or wrong. The same analysis can be applied to the *self-regarding* reactive attitudes, namely, guilt, remorse and self-appraisal. After all, the only significant difference between the other-regarding and self-regarding reactive attitudes is their object. When one feels resentment, indignation, gratitude or approval, one is receptively recognizing the import of *another’s* morally significant conduct. When one feels guilt, remorse or self-appraisal, one is receptively recognizing the import of one’s *own* morally significant conduct.

Receptive recognition of oneself as having performed a morally significant action, then, manifests in a self-regarding reactive attitude. This point comes into sharper focus when we remind ourselves that moral agents care or ought to care about the values that lie at the heart of morality. Caring about these values means being vulnerable to feeling negative reactive attitudes when the values are thwarted and to positive reactive attitudes when they are promoted (Wallace 2011).²² This is why moral agents receptively recognize *others’* good action with gratitude and approval and their wrong action with resentment and indignation. And more to the point, it is why moral agents receptively recognize *themselves* as having done something morally good with self-appraisal and something bad or wrong with

²² On the nature of caring, see Frankfurt (1999), Jaworska (2007), Seidman (2009), Shoemaker (2003).

guilt or remorse. Moral psychologists tend to be in agreement on this point: the self-regarding reactive emotions constitute receptive recognition of oneself as having done something morally significant.

Of course, given that recognitives—and the expressed reactive attitudes in particular—aim at acknowledgement, it is not enough for full success that the target experiences a self-regarding reactive attitude. Acknowledgment is a *public* act, and thus expressions of the other-regarding reactive attitudes seek not just that their target feel a self-regarding reactive emotion, but also that she give expression to it. Thus, the target of an expression of resentment or indignation acknowledges the speech act when she gives voice to her feeling of guilt or remorse. The target does this by apologizing and making amends if necessary. Likewise, the target of an expression of gratitude or approval acknowledges the speech act by discursively registering her feeling of self-approbation. This she does by saying, “You’re welcome” in response to an expression of gratitude and “Thank you” in response to an expression of approval.²³

The fact that acknowledgement of a speech act requires both receptive recognition and expression of that recognition leaves room for the possibility of what we might call “pseudo acknowledgment:” performance of the act that conventionally counts as an expression of the relevant receptive recognition absent said receptive recognition. For example, the target of expressed resentment may respond with an insincere apology, i.e., an apology that is not expressive of guilt or remorse. Or again, the target of expressed gratitude may respond with a “You’re welcome” that is not a discursive registering of a genuine feeling of self-approbation. These responses may meet social expectations and fulfill a number of positive functions. Even an insincere apology can go a long way toward mending a relationship. And one might argue that uttering “You’re welcome” is *all* that etiquette requires of the target of “Thank you.” But despite these virtues, apology that is insincere and “You’re welcome” that lacks a genuine feeling of self-approbation are not genuine acknowledgments: genuine acknowledgement requires receptive recognition, and receptive recognition is absent.

The point here is akin to one that is often made about demands. Demands seek compliance. They are fully successful as the kind of thing they are when the target does as directed because she was directed. But often demands are met with conformity rather than compliance: the target may do as directed but not *because* she was directed. When the target of the demand merely conforms, the demand has

²³ To be sure, “You’re welcome” and “Thank you” uttered in these contexts may serve other functions. For one thing, responding to expressions of gratitude and approval with these locutions fulfills social expectations. Norms of etiquette require that we respond to expressions of gratitude with “You’re welcome” and to expressions of approval with “Thank you.” More than that, when I thank another for a moral compliment, my “Thank you” may function to express the gratitude I feel on account of the person taking the time to notice and say something to me about my good deed. In a similar vein, “You’re welcome” may function to tell one’s beneficiary that what one did, one did out of genuine regard for her.

Also, this paper aims to give an account of the expressed *other-regarding* reactive attitudes. This topic, though, has led to a discussion of the *self-regarding* reactive attitudes and the speech acts associated with them. For purposes of this paper I am agnostic as to how to characterize expressions of the self-regarding reactive attitudes. In particular, I remain agnostic on the questions of whether they are recognitives and whether they are expressives in Searle and Vanderveken’s sense (see footnote 4).

received a response akin to a pseudo-acknowledgement. Just as an insincere apology in response to an expression of resentment has only the outward appearance of genuine acknowledgement, so too conformity in response to a demand has only the outward appearance of compliance.

When a demand is met with conformity we can say it is “partially successful.” I propose that we think of an expressed reactive attitude that is met with a pseudo-acknowledgement similarly. But it is crucial to keep in mind that a partially successful speech act has not achieved its internal aim. A demand achieves its internal aim and thus is fully successful only when its target complies. Similarly, and more importantly for our purposes here, expressions of the other-regarding reactive attitudes achieve their internal aim and thus are fully successful only when their target responds with a sincere apology in the negative case and with a discursive registering of self-approbation in the positive. Only these responses constitute genuine acknowledgement, and genuine acknowledgment is what expressions of the other-regarding reactive attitudes seek.

7 Conclusion

In the previous section I put forth a recognitive account of “Screw you!”, “Thank you” and the like. On this account, expressions of resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval discursively recognize another as having done something good, bad, right or wrong, and seek acknowledgment. In the negative case, acknowledgement amounts to a sincere apology, and in the positive, a discursive registering of one’s feeling of self-approbation. In this section, I highlight the recognitive account’s distinct advantages over the demand view.

First, recall that though the expressed reactive attitudes are not *mere* expressives, they are expressives. As such, one of their defining functions is to give voice to the unexpressed reactive attitudes: the expressed reactive attitudes, in a manner of speaking, bring what was private out into the public. But if the expressed and unexpressed reactive attitudes are aptly characterized as private and public forms of the same thing, then we should expect them to be similar in some fundamental way. In other words, we should welcome an account of the expressed reactive attitudes that can fit in a picture depicting these speech acts and emotions as sharing a fundamental nature.

A recognitive account can be part of such a picture. As I argue above, if we take the unexpressed reactive attitudes seriously as emotions, they emerge as modes of recognition. Thus a recognitive account of the expressed reactive attitudes provides us with the symmetry we are looking for: both the expressed and the unexpressed reactive attitudes are modes of recognition. To be sure, they are different modes, but this is a welcome asymmetry given that the former are speech acts and the latter emotions. Too much symmetry would be as problematic as none at all.

Certainly, one might argue that the demand view can deliver a similar kind of symmetry: in principle, it can. The problem is that it can do so only by positing an implausible account of the unexpressed reactive attitudes. If the demand view of the expressed reactive attitudes is correct, then the only way for the expressed and

unexpressed reactive attitudes to have parallel natures is for the unexpressed reactive attitudes to be, like their public counterparts, implicit demands. In fact, this is precisely Darwall’s view of the unexpressed reactive attitudes: “In *feeling* resentment or moral blame toward someone for stepping on your feet, you implicitly demand that he not do so, answer for having done so, and so on” (Darwall 2010c, p. 219, italics mine). But while there is, strictly speaking, nothing incoherent about this picture, it strikes me as counterintuitive. If unexpressed reactive attitudes are implicit demands then they must be speech acts, and it is hard to swallow the idea that an emotion that remains buried in one’s heart is a speech act. Darwall at times identifies the unexpressed reactive attitudes as “quasi speech acts,” but the label just underscores the awkwardness of identifying them as speech acts in the first place.²⁴

Thus one advantage of the recognitive account is that it can fit within a plausible picture of the unexpressed and expressed reactive attitudes’ parallel natures. The demand view cannot.

A second advantage of the recognitive account of the call-type is that it, unlike the demand account, can accommodate the consensus view. In the previous section I argued, following Kukla and Lance, that the expressed negative reactive attitudes seek that their target give expression to her recognition of having been appropriately recognized. The target does this, I proposed, when she feels guilt or remorse and expresses it via apology and amends. This just *is* the consensus view.

But the recognitive account not only accommodates the consensus view, it redeems it. The tendency in the literature is to put forth the consensus view without argumentation. This is understandable given that the view is articulated in the course of pursuing other philosophical aims. Nonetheless, the absence of argumentation leaves a gap in the literature. A recognitive account of the call-type fills this gap. The expressed negative reactive attitudes seek what the consensus view says they seek *because* they are recognitives.

A third and final virtue of the recognitive account is that it, unlike that demand view, provides a plausible analysis not just of the expressed *negative* reactive attitudes but also of the *positive*. Thus, on the recognitive account it is obvious why the expressed positive and negative reactive attitudes comprise a unified class of speech acts. The positive expressed reactive attitudes, like their negative counterparts, are modes of recognition that call for their target to give expression to her recognition of having been appropriately recognized. In the negative case, this amounts to feeling and expressing guilt or remorse. In the positive case, it takes the form of feeling self-approbation and discursively registering it by saying “You’re welcome” in response to an expression of gratitude, and “Thank you” in response to an expression of approval.

This account of the response sought in the positive case shares the virtues of the consensus view. Like the consensus view, this account seamlessly brings together different components of Strawson’s picture. Expressions of the *other-regarding* positive reactive attitudes—gratitude and approval—seek for their target to feel and discursively register the *self-regarding* positive reactive attitude—self-approbation.

²⁴ For further arguments against a demand-based account of the unexpressed reactive attitudes see Macnamara (2013).

Further, recognizing that the positive reactive attitudes seek that their target feel self-approbation helps explain what we all intuitively grasp: that expressions of gratitude and approval contribute to the formation and health of the moral community. Moral communities are not just collections of individuals. Rather, their members are bound together in a network of relationships. Such interconnection, though, is not an immediate consequence of either geographic or normative collocation: it does not just happen automatically when people live in the same space or under the same norms. Community must be built, and kind acts, big and small, help to build it.

Expressions of gratitude and approval are not just responses to good acts, but also catalysts for further good acts. Most obviously, they incentivize further good action in the way that any positive reinforcement does. But a recognitive account of the call-and-response structure of these speech acts brings into focus another way in which they lead to further good deeds. They do so by provoking the feeling of self-approbation in their target. Let me explain.

It is natural to think that the patterns of salience, tendencies of interpretation and orientations of the will constitutive of self-approbation are primarily self-focused—that feeling self-approbation consists in a proclivity to notice one’s own good qualities, a tendency to interpret one’s own actions in the best possible light, a propensity to pat oneself on one’s back or do something nice for oneself. But the psychological literature suggests a different picture: one in which self-approbation is in part constituted by an inclination to do nice things for and build relationships with others (for example, Tangney et al. 2007).²⁵ If this is right, then expressions of gratitude and approval keep the circle of kindness turning not just by incentivizing kindness, but also by bringing it about that benefactors emotionally recognize themselves as having instantiated good in the world. Construing the expressed positive reactive attitudes as recognitives shows that they—just as much as their negative counterparts—seek responses that are crucial to the health of our moral community.

Acknowledgments My sincerest thanks to Elisa Hurley, Christina Hollowell, Zac Bachman, Dan Ehrlich, Chris McVey, Philip Swenson, David Copp and the participants of the 2011 USF Conference on Responsibility, Agency, and Persons for their helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper. I owe special debts of gratitude to Maggie Little, Joshua Hollowell and Monique Wonderly for countless conversations on the issues discussed in this paper and for reading and commenting on numerous drafts.

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²⁵ For more on how positive emotions build relationships see Fredrickson (1998 and 2004) and Fredrickson and Losada (2005).

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