

The objective stance and the boundary problem

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Abstract

This paper investigates some unexplored ambivalences of Strawson's distinction between the participant stance marked by reactive attitudes and the objective stance in which such attitudes are deemed inappropriate. First, a distinction between recipient-oriented and agent-oriented reasons for taking the objective stance is introduced. These are both practical reasons rooted in the agent's position. The former category of reasons refers to the recipient's capacities for moral agency, and the latter to the agent's interests and concerns. Second, it is shown that taking the objective stance for recipient-oriented reasons (a) is a moral move, which alters one's normative relation to others; and (b) it may have severe disempowering effects on others. Third, departing from current debates, this investigation refocuses on cases in which the objective stance is grounded on self-defensive or adversarial reasons. The examination of such cases shows that the objective/participant divide stands behind and organizes the complex dynamics through which moral membership is negotiated. Once agent-oriented reasons are brought into focus, it appears that the divide is contestable and renegotiable: the boundaries of the relevant community can be altered by claiming and reclaiming responsibility. Correspondingly, reactive attitudes should be acknowledged as means and drives of the struggle for moral and political recognition.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In his ground-breaking essay *Freedom and Resentment*, Peter F. Strawson distinguishes two stances one might take in relating to others as agents; namely, the “participant stance” or the “objective stance” (Strawson, 1962, pp. 4–7). In the course of the argument, he belabors the contrast in several ways, but the main argument exploits the notion of “reactive attitudes.” Reactive attitudes signal that one is held morally responsible and engaged with emotionally and rationally. In contrast to this, “to adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken account, perhaps precautionary account, of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained; perhaps simply to be avoided, though this gerundive is not peculiar to cases of objectivity of attitude” (Strawson, 1962, p. 9).

The primary purpose of the distinction is to identify the conditions for ascription of moral responsibility in terms of ordinary social practices, rather than by taking a position about free will. The ensuing debate has mainly considered whether the distinction is adequate for the task. However, there is reason to doubt that the distinction is meant to carve nature at its joints. First of all, Strawson warns the reader that it is but “a crude opposition of phrase where we have a great intricacy of phenomena” (Strawson, 1962, p. 15). Second, Strawson remarks that the objective stance towards others is a “resource” which one can take advantage of for various motives, including the agent’s considerations about the costliness of burdensome personal relations, and the possible “political gains” associated with assuming the objective stance (Strawson, 1962, pp. 10, 13). While the latter remarks are offered incidentally, they reveal an important insight implicit in Strawson’s account; namely, that taking the objective stance is an agential prerogative, a privilege rooted in the agent’s position, and his responsibility.

Building on this reading, the essay argues that the objective stance is, on a fundamental level, disempowering. This is not to say that the objective stance is always morally objectionable or unwarranted, nor to suggest that the practical stance is always morally superior to it. Rather, this investigation calls attention to the grounds on which the distinction is founded, uncovering two categories of practical reasons: recipient-oriented and agent-oriented. We may say that the choice between the objective and participant stance belongs to a more general, practical standpoint, which is the standpoint of rational agents considering the question of how to relate to other’s agency.¹ The paper discusses neglected cases in which rational agents openly adopt the objective stance for agent-oriented practical reasons; that is, for furthering their own ends: in self-protection, for reasons of opportunity, and for political adversarial reasons. Attention to these cases reveals not only unexplored problems concerning the boundaries of the relevant moral community, but it also, more importantly, calls to account the modalities of negotiation of normative standing within the moral community. Claiming and disclaiming responsibility are agentic capacities, which importantly depend on recognition. Recognition can be unilaterally withdrawn or denied by choosing to take the objective stance; that is, by suspending those attitudes, demands, and normative expectations that are appropriate and distinctive to relating to others as equals. Thus, ultimately, this investigation shows that the objective/participant divide stands behind and organizes complex dynamics of recognition, through which the boundaries of the moral community are negotiated. By introducing the distinction between the participant and the objective stance, Strawson provides us with some conceptual resources for articulating what, in a different tradition, has come to be called “the struggle for recognition.” The arguments suggest that reactive attitudes should be recruited in service of the struggle for a more expansive moral and political recognition, in the interest of an open-ended community.

2 | TWO WAYS OF RELATING TO OTHERS AS AGENTS

According to Strawson, holding someone morally responsible involves holding specific reactive attitudes toward them, which are ultimately rooted in the demand of mutual respect and recognition.² The primary purpose of the distinction between the participant and the objective stance is to contrast the two ways in which the agency of others is represented and reacted to. In the participant stance, actions are regarded as doings; that is, as exercises of

rational agency and manifestations of the will, rather than as occasional instances or inadvertent byproducts of causal efficacy. Correspondingly, agents are conceived as fellow participants in a given practice, and are thus fit to partake in cooperative and shared actions.³ This is the stance of mutually accountable and morally responsible agents.⁴ From the objective perspective, instead, actions are causally related events, and “[the agent] is not seen as one on whom demands and expectations lie in that particular way in which we think of them as lying when we speak of moral obligation; he is not, to that extent, seen as a morally responsible agent, as a term of moral relationships, as a member of the moral community” (Strawson, 1962, p. 18; italics are mine).

In commenting on the functions of the objective stance, Strawson remarks that “the objective attitude is not only something we naturally tend to fall into in cases [...] where participant attitudes are partially or wholly inhibited by abnormalities or by immaturity, it is also something which is *available as a resource in other cases too*” (Strawson, 1962, p. 10; italics are mine). To treat the objective stance as a resource of which one can avail oneself suggests that it is not merely a natural habit, nor is it necessitated by the circumstances, but that it is an agential prerogative, rooted in the practical standpoint. Both the participant and the objective stances are available to rational agents as they come to consider how to relate to other agents and their actions.⁵ Indeed, rational agents continuously switch from one stance to another in relating to others. But on which grounds? This is the central question of the essay.

Strawson's remarks about the different reasons behind the objective stance suggest that the matter be investigated by considering the practical reasons that agents have in handling such contrasting stances. Such reasons emerge in the practical standpoint, which is the standpoint of rational agents capable of acting on practical reasons. Within this standpoint, the two stances identify two *relational* modalities open to reflective agents, acting on practical reasons. Such modalities are not mutually exclusive, though they are profoundly opposed. How best to construe their opposition is still to be seen, but this relational interpretation suggests that we conceive of the objective stance toward others as a prerogative available to rational agents in the practical standpoint, rather than as a stance opposed to and independent of personal interactions.

The participant stance categorizes relations in which subjects recognize and relate to one another as fellow-participants in a shared practice or, even more closely, as partners of a joint endeavor. It is the stance characteristic of emotional and rational engagement based on reciprocity and equal standing.⁶ Correspondingly, the participant stance is marked by normative demands and expectations of reciprocity and mutual recognition, as well as by reactive attitudes. By contrast, the objective stance names a range of detached attitudes and measures for dealing with others, insofar as they are not recognized or treated as agents with equal normative standing, and not recognized or treated as standing in second-personal relations of emotional and rational engagement to us.⁷ Both stances are normative and morally significant in their own way; the participant stance relating to others as “addressees” and the objective stance as “recipients.”⁸

I am not arguing for the moral superiority of the participant stance over the objective stance. People can misuse the participant stance to oppress and disempower others, just as they can misuse the objective stance to do so. Scapegoating and public shaming, as well as excessive and harsh opprobrium, are all morally objectionable ways of occupying the participant stance. All of them can be performed for self-defensive or political adversarial reasons and all of them can harm and subordinate their recipients. Similarly, sometimes the objective stance can be taken for good reasons, even if those reasons are self-defensive or political adversarial and, sometimes, this stance can benefit its recipients. The objective stance is something agents *take* toward others; it is not a stance necessitated by the circumstances in which others act or by their capacities and dispositions. Agents may be fully justified in taking the objective stance, but such stance is still intrinsically disempowering in a basic sense: it is either excusing and exempting, or disqualifying and discrediting others as incapable of moral responsibility.

3 | THE PRIORITY OF THE PARTICIPANT STANCE

While both the participant and the objective stance are available to practical agents dealing with one another, the participant stance is the default relational stance in that it is the stance from which others are addressed and

engaged in ordinary personal interactions. This is to say that the participant stance has some kind of *normative* priority. Yet, this is not to say that the participant stance is morally superior to the objective stance, since there are good and bad ways of inhabiting both stances. The practical stance is normatively prior only in the sense that it organizes relations of mutual recognition and reciprocity. It is the stance of moral obligations and entitlements, which are sustained by reactive attitudes.

The centrality of reactive attitudes can be explained by noticing that they belong in a system of normative relations, in which agents are mutually accountable because they are mutually interdependent and vulnerable. It is within this construal of human agents as interdependent and mutually vulnerable that manifestations of good or ill will matter. This claim can be grounded in the fact that all human communities are governed by basic norms of reciprocity.

Correspondingly, the category of reactive attitudes of interest in this context is restricted to attitudes that can be reciprocated. They are co-reactive not only in the psychological sense that they are likely to provoke specific reactions, but also in the normative sense that they call for specific normative and psychological reactions.⁹ To hold people responsible amounts to responding to their behavior with attitudes of approval or condemnation that acknowledge their good or ill will. This claim implies, firstly, that reactive attitudes make sense solely in the participant stance; that is, in a relational modality marked by reciprocity and equal standing. Secondly, they are successful as attitudes pertaining to the participant stance; that is, addressed to others as practical subjects having equal normative standing. Thirdly, reactive attitudes are appropriate insofar as they address others represented as having equal standing. Some of them can be claimed, disclaimed, or reclaimed, insofar as they are attitudes associated with recognition of equal standing, though it is more problematic to say that they can be exacted.¹⁰

The inhibition and suspension of ordinary reactive attitudes mark a significant normative change in the personal relation to others. To undertake this change is a prerogative of agents. In fact, it can be counted as a fundamental agential power or capacity, that of engaging others in personal relations or disengaging from personal relations. The capacity to engage and to disengage on the basis of reasons is constitutive of being a rational agent. Indeed, it is to be counted as intimately tied to practical freedom, and comes with distinctive moral responsibilities. But the capacity to engage and the capacity to disengage from personal interactions are not fully symmetrical. The latter is subordinate and derivative, though it certainly counts as an important prerogative that one may exercise on moral grounds. Taking an objective stance toward others is a deliberate normative act, which takes up a positional advantage. This is not to say that it is morally objectionable, arbitrary, or fully discretionary. On the contrary, the exercise of such a fundamental prerogative is also an onus and comes with specific moral responsibilities.

The agential power to disengage from a personal relation to others is a power that substantially affects its recipients by altering their normative status and changing the normative relation to them. To come to be seen as morally incompetent, unfit for, or undeserving of the participant stance is in itself disempowering in a basic sense: it is unilateral and imposes a loss of the kind of social and normative standing that underpins one's willingness to be called to account.¹¹ This is true even when there are good reasons for holding such a stance. Thus, taking the objective stance toward others is a decisive *moral* move in one's relation to others, which can be morally problematic and questionable when lacking proper rational justification. Arguably, taking the objective stance is subjected to a demand for rational justification precisely because it can be exercised unilaterally, and severely impacts on the normative status of its recipients. If rational agents are entitled to engage in practical relations and free to disengage from them, they are also required to treat others with due respect and moral consideration. Within this framework, it is *wrong* to suspend reactive attitudes or to withhold them without good reasons. One can be wronged by being unduly subjected to the objective attitude.

This is to say that at least some moral categories of right and wrong are also pertinent in the objective stance. For instance, the objective stance does not entail that others can be treated as mere objects, nor does it dispense rational agents from the obligation to relate to their recipients with respect and moral consideration. We will come back to the larger implications of this remark in due course. This section points out that the objective stance is not merely suggested by the natural inhibition of reactive attitudes, but it is an agential prerogative of great moral consequence, the adoption of which requires practical reasons of justification. The various reasons identified by Strawson

could be usefully organized into two broad categories: one oriented toward the recipient and the other one oriented toward the agent; they will be examined in Sections 4 and 5, respectively.

4 | RECIPIENT-ORIENTED REASONS FOR TAKING THE OBJECTIVE STANCE

The primary justification for adopting the objective stance is recipient-oriented and can be brought into focus by spelling out Strawson's remark that adopting the objective stance toward others who cannot fully sustain relations of reciprocity is "civilized."¹² Reactive attitudes are naturally inhibited when someone's behavior is "intelligible only in terms of unconscious purposes," when he is "wholly impervious to the self-reactive attitudes" or "wholly lacking in moral sense" (Strawson, 1962, p. 13).

Recent debates have focused almost exclusively on a special category of recipient-oriented reasons for suppressing or withdrawing reactive attitudes toward other subjects, on the basis of regard for the recipient's defective or dysfunctional capacities, as if the objective stance were merely tracking the recipient's condition. However, on the basis of the considerations afforded in Section 3, this inhibition can be more perspicuously represented as a re-orientation of the relation to the recipient: "seeing an agent in such a light as this tends [...] to inhibit resentment in a wholly different way. It tends to inhibit resentment because it tends to inhibit ordinary interpersonal attitudes in general, and the kind of demand and expectation which those attitudes involve" (Strawson, 1962, p. 13). Reactive attitudes are not just naturally inhibited as a matter of course or civilized habit. Their suppression is also rationally and morally justified in view of special circumstances (e.g., when the subject acts under duress), or in an altered state of mind (e.g., in the case of temporary insanity). Likewise, considerations about some forms of ignorance, mistakes, accident, psychological disorder, and immaturity count as legitimate grounds for excusing or exempting agents from ascriptions of moral responsibility (Strawson, 1962, pp. 2, 5–21, §4). Are they also decisive grounds for withholding reactive attitudes such as resentment, blame, reproach, shame, and indignation, as being morally inappropriate? Strawson believes so, but he also leaves room for further differentiation in the subject, which can be appreciated by distinguishing various recipient-oriented reasons.

4.1 | Considerations of fairness

A prominent argument for recommending the objective stance is moral, and calls into play matters of fairness. The argument appeals to robust recipient-oriented moral reasons. It would be unfair to blame and resent people if and when their behavior was not under their rational guidance because it was, for example, compulsive, unintentional, or accidental. In these cases, taking the objective stance is *protective of the recipients*: it aims at insulating and shielding them from demands and expectations that they could not meet and, correspondingly, from a range of negative attitudes such as blame and resentment, which would be painful and pointless.

To this extent, it is arguable that the objective attitude qualifies as a moral gaze toward others, in recognition of a distinctive vulnerability or fragility¹³. It is a thoughtful and compassionate stance, which responds to some basic form of moral recognition. This stance commands a sort of respect out of moral consideration for specific vulnerabilities, rather than out of recognition of equal standing, which governs cooperative interactions. On this characterization, the objective stance does not entail that others are legitimately treated as objects, nor solely as a matter of social policy.¹⁴

By focusing on the justifying reasons for the adoption of the objective stance, we bring into focus some important aspects of the two stances. Firstly, there are two ways of relating to others as persons: recognition respect due to equal normative standing, and recognition respect as due to basic moral consideration. Both stances organize relations to persons and thus implicitly involve duties and responsibilities regarding how to treat persons, albeit under different descriptions.¹⁵ In both cases, there is a basic form of recognition of moral relevance, though in the participant stance what is at stake is recognition of equal moral standing.

Secondly, in the objective stance, the recipients *can be morally wronged as persons*, quite independently of whether they enjoy the full range of personal relations marked by reciprocity; and though they cannot be wronged as participants in reciprocal interactions, they can certainly be wronged in their legitimate expectations to benefit and profit from the general normative network of relations in which they belong. In other words, the objective stance is a normative stance: there are good and bad ways to inhabit it. It is a morally protected social and normative space, which is governed by norms of recognition-respect. The violation of such norms constitutes a moral transgression.

4.2 | Considerations of efficacy

One way to press the case that the objective attitude can be morally justified by recipient-oriented reasons is to appeal to considerations of efficacy, urging that to address reactive attitudes and ascriptions of moral responsibility to the mentally deranged or the immature would be beside the point or “inefficacious” (Strawson, 1962, p. 3). This argument may be driven by the assumption that the main or only function of reactive attitudes is to modify the conduct of their addressee. On this reading, if their conduct is unmodifiable, then reactive attitudes are beside the point because they inevitably miss their intended target.¹⁶

Furthermore, to address reactive attitudes to people who lack the cognitive or emotional capacities to decode and interpret such reactions correctly could be in itself wrongful because unnecessarily harmful.¹⁷ In some such cases, the addressees feel the emotional force of reactive attitudes, without being able to place them within the appropriate conceptual framework of right and wrong. They would feel attacked without understanding the reason, and punished without connecting the punishment to anything wrong they did.¹⁸ Arguably, the pain of being subjected to a punishment one does not understand is a form of harm and a kind of wrong. Thus, instrumental reasons of efficacy for suppressing reactive attitudes may be also mixed with moral reasons.

4.3 | The case of immaturity

Though the objective stance allows for discipline and social regulation, social conditioning can be interpreted in a forward-looking and constructive way, as intended to work toward enabling, empowering, or rehabilitating the subjects in question, so that they can gain or regain a new or fuller relationship with the community in which they belong. Taking the objective stance can be understood to be temporary, and aimed at restoring or reaching a full practical engagement with them. In this case, the objective attitude is instrumentally valuable insofar as it is conducive to repairing the impaired personal relations and, possibly, reinforcing the reciprocal structure of personal relations that are essential to human life.¹⁹ But it can also be considered intrinsically valuable as a compassionate mode of relating to those incapable of observing basic norms of reciprocity.

In this connection, it is important to mark a distinction between two kinds of incapacities that Strawson separates but does not fully distinguish in relation to the appropriateness of reactive attitudes; that is, the incapacities due to abnormalities and the incapacities due to immaturity. *Prima facie*, they are both subjective conditions that tend to naturally inhibit reactive attitudes, and appropriately so. However, a closer look reveals interesting asymmetries, and calls for a more fine-grained approach.

As Strawson acknowledges, the claim that, in the case of immaturity, reactive attitudes are beside the point or inappropriate is in itself disputable (Strawson, 1962, p. 15). Educational practices everywhere make ample use of reactive attitudes precisely to direct the children's attention to norms of right and wrong, which they do not yet fully grasp theoretically. The practice of judging and holding children morally responsible, even though they are understood to not yet be able to meet the moral expectations of adult life, is intended to have positive forward-looking effects; not only in character building but also, more broadly, in the acquisition of a proper sense of agency, and of the appreciation of the consequences of one's behavior on others through their emotional reactions. Thus, to subject

immature agents to reactive attitudes could be plausibly regarded as conducive and contributive to their moral growth and functional to the acquisition of full moral standing. Vice versa, to suspend reactive attitudes would prevent children from learning the norms of the community in which they belong, their place in the social reality, and possibly slow down their understanding of the categories of right and wrong. This is because emotional interaction is an essential part of the processes of identification with one's own relevant normative community as well as the apprehension of moral categories. To this extent, there is a recipient-oriented argument *in favor* of preserving reactive attitudes toward the immature, as part and parcel of the social processes through which one becomes a full member of the moral community.²⁰ But this also means that the conditions of full moral agency are not merely matched, tracked, or reflected by reactive attitudes. Rather, they are importantly shaped by them.²¹

It is arguable that, even in adult personal interactions, reactive attitudes play a crucial role and represent an important mode of exogenous control. Immaturity may not be due to age, but to some emotional and cognitive developmental impairment which is more a bent of character than a pathological infirmity. The extension of the previous argument to this case helps us see that agential and moral capacities have a distinctive dynamic and social dimension, and characteristically develop through emotional and rational interaction.²² There are some abilities that one refines by navigating through the challenges posited by others and adjusting to their requests and demands. In fact, in some paradigmatic cases, being subjected to criticism and appropriate corrective measures is a decisive part of learning to exercise well one's agential capacities and skills, which are developmental and dialogical capacities.

4.4 | The issue of normalcy

Reflection on the kinds of immaturity also suggests that the boundary between the abnormal and the immature is not hard and fast, and can be drawn according to different normative criteria. Furthermore, it is disputable that reactive attitudes are inappropriate in all pathologies that exempt or excuse from moral responsibility. Extending the recipient-oriented argument sketched above for the immature, it is arguable that some kinds of reactive attitudes are appropriate and sometimes even demanded in the case of some pathologies or abnormalities.²³ In particular, some abnormalities are temporary and can be partly corrected or even overcome by a fuller integration within the relevant community by emotional engagement, rather than by the adoption of the objective stance. To this extent, withholding rather than expressing reactive attitudes can be detrimental to the recipient. At least, in some such cases, the inhibition of reactive attitudes has the effect of marginalizing the recipient by blocking, delaying, or hindering the social processes that work toward a fuller social integration.

These considerations are not limited to emotional interactions, but extend to normative practices of exchanging reasons (Strawson, 1962, p. 10). By treating others as partners in reasoning, we give them the opportunity to learn what is involved in exchanging reasons. The inhibition of second-personal reactive attitudes may deprive people from the opportunity to understand and, possibly, correct their mistakes and failures. There are some mistakes for which the moral relevance one appreciates only indirectly, through understanding how they affect others and by attending at their emotional reactions. One can learn about the impact of one's agency by feeling the emotional force of blame, prior to understanding the kind of wrong that elicited blame. Such an understanding of others' emotional vulnerability and suffering is not always based on or mediated by a prior grasp of moral categories.²⁴ Thus, by shielding people from reactive attitudes, one alters the social processes by which moral and agential autonomy are built. The consequences are morally disturbing, as the power of the recipients to exercise effective practical control over their agency could be seriously undermined.

4.5 | Social and agential integration via emotional engagement

By drawing attention to these consequences, I intend to contrast a tendency in debates over reactive attitudes to focus on formative circumstances as excusing or even exempting conditions for moral responsibility, in which blame

is appropriately suppressed.²⁵ This focus is explained by two factors. Firstly, while Strawson's category of reactive attitudes is large, most commentators have singled out blame, whose social function often reflects asymmetrical relations of power. Secondly, oppression can alter internal capacities and the circumstances of action, hence the moral significance of agency.²⁶ Both oppressor and oppressed can be blinded by oppression in their judgement of the moral relevance of the case, and so oppression seems to alter the blameworthiness and culpability of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Yet, on the basis of the considerations afforded in Sections 4.1–4.4, it is arguable that the broad category of reactive attitudes plays an important role in social integration and moral development, and their suspension does not have only mitigating and exculpatory effects.²⁷ In fact, it is at risk of deepening the gap between oppressed and oppressors, blocking one way to moral repair and social integration.

While there are good recipient-oriented reasons for excusing or exempting people from attributions of moral responsibility and shielding them from the associated reactive attitudes, taking the objective attitude may also have undermining effects on others, insofar as it subverts the ordinary practice of mutual accountability, and alters the second-personal attitudes ordinarily addressed to agents by preventing such agents from fully developing their moral and rational agential capacities and blocking their social inclusion in the normative practices of the relevant community. By being denied confrontation with the reactive moral emotions, the recipients lose an opportunity to acquire or exercise full membership in their community, but they also lose the means to come to terms with the way their agency affect others, whether intentionally or inadvertently. Thus, they lose the sense in which their agency belongs in a shared social space. For instance, reactive attitudes may be found appropriate and justifiable regardless of the capacities of the recipient, because of their testimonial function. That is, they may convey support to the victim and the shared values of the community. When the testimonial function is primarily recipient-oriented, one expresses and manifests reactive attitudes to let the recipient know that one stands by the victim, and thereby makes explicit the values of the community one represents.²⁸

In sum, the case for taking the objective stance in which reactive attitudes are legitimately suspended is more limited than it has been generally assumed, but also morally ambiguous in ways that have not been fully appreciated. The suspension of such attitudes may disconfirm them as agents belonging in a social space, and consequently undermine the relation of authority that they bear to their actions and their sense of social belonging. This is a way in which the objective gaze induces personal alienation. It hinders those agential capacities, which are developmental and dialogical. This is a specific kind of wrong that, in certain cases, is implicit in treating others objectively.

In the next two sections, I point to some further morally problematic implications of the objective stance by bringing into focus a second category of practical reasons in its support, which does not have others in view.

5 | AGENT-ORIENTED REASONS FOR TAKING THE OBJECTIVE STANCE

Strawson is explicit that second-personal reactive attitudes are not always suspended in order to protect the recipient: “but we can sometimes look with something like the same eye on the behavior of the normal and the mature. We have this resource and can sometimes use it; as a refuge, say, from the strains of involvement; or as an aid to policy; or simply out of intellectual curiosity. Being human, we cannot, in the normal case, do this for long, or altogether. If the strains of involvement, say, continue to be too great, then we have to do something else—like severing a relationship” (Strawson, 1962, p. 10).

On the basis of these remarks, we can extrapolate three kinds of practical reasons for the agent to adopt the objective stance: self-protective reasons, reasons of opportunity, and reasons of intellectual curiosity. Focusing on these reasons reveals that taking the objective stance is primarily the operation of agents pro-actively availing themselves to a resource in responding to others, rather than tracking the impaired agential capacities of the recipient. It is a privilege rooted in the agent's position, and thus the agent's own responsibility. In the remaining part of this section, I leave aside the case of intellectual curiosity and concentrate on reasons for retreat. I shall take up reasons of opportunity in Sections 6 and 7, focusing on the paradigmatic sub-category of political reasons.

5.1 | Self-protective retreat

From the practical standpoint, agents have the option of retracting from too burdensome or abusive personal relations, to protect themselves from “the strains of involvement.” A case in point might be that of a victim choosing the objective stance to avoid the strains of an abusive relation. In this case, it signals an impairment of the personal relation that is too grievous and profound to be dealt with through ordinary personal attitudes. Holding on the position of victim might be so painful that one might try to detach and hold off any personal attitudes, coming to regard the wrongdoers “objectively,” as for example, determined by impulses like uncontrollable envy and rage, rather than guided by reasons expressive of their agency. By sustaining a detached gaze, the abused agent means to terminate intimate relations that have become too damaging and painful to sustain.

5.2 | Preventive retreat

The scenario above presumes a past history and thus covers a limited range of cases where there is an “antecedent personal involvement” (Strawson, 1962, p. 18). However, one may decide to suspend a personal relation before it becomes too painful, or else too burdensome, by adopting a strategy of preventive retreat. For example, in a case where one does not want to get involved with someone who is self-obsessed, does not respect boundaries, or takes everything too personally. One may not know whether the relation would become painful, but one may sense that something is off, and need to restore a certain degree of personal distance. The agents may renounce a personal relation because of the way they anticipate that the relation will unfold.

5.3 | Retaliatory retreat

The objective stance may be misused and based on the wrong reasons, as in the case of retaliatory retreat. In this case, the objective stance is grounded on reasons that respond to the recipient's moral agency, whether or not this is a manifestation of good or ill will. This is a complex case, which shows that the adoption of the objective stance can be driven by a reactive attitude of revenge, which responds to being hurt or harmed, though not necessarily wronged. This move is questionable insofar as it is driven by morally doubtful reasons; for example, as a punitive and retaliatory attitude. My point is that in taking the objective stance on these wrong reasons, the agent is not merely misconstruing the purpose of the stance. Thus, this case differs from endorsing the reactive attitude of revenge or retaliation that pertains to the participant stance. The difference is that the objective attitude is held unilaterally, and admits of no reciprocation. It is a means to deny the recipients equal normative standing, by taking away from the recipient the opportunity of personal relations and rational engagement. This offensive move exploits the fact that humans thrive on personal relations, and thus depriving them of reactive attitudes and other personal dealings amounts to imposing a loss.²⁹ While strategic or self-protective, the adoption of the objective stance on the wrong reasons imposes a loss, which may be mutual but it is unilaterally pondered and calculated. In the participant stance, revenge may initiate a moral conversation. For instance, the abuser might eventually demand to be confronted and recognized as a person rather than kept at a distance. In this case, the abuser presses a claim to moral recognition that may be wrong to disregard. By contrast, the adoption of the objective stance on retaliatory reasons precludes any form of moral conversation among the parties. The objective stance can be resented, but resentment does not have the same normative significance as in the participant stance: it is normatively disqualified. In short, it cannot be morally engaged by the recipient in order to press demands of moral recognition.

To wit, taking the objective stance is prerogative people have *qua* agents acting on practical reasons and bears significant moral consequences. Regarding others objectively, rather than as fellow travelers, companions, or partners in reasoning is a positional privilege rooted in the practical stance. Because it alters the normative relation

between persons, the objective attitude is not neutral but “morally charged” and in need of proper justification. Taking a detached view toward others may be fully justified on the basis of reasons protective of the recipient, as well as on the basis of reasons protective of the agent. But in many cases, taking this stance for agent-relative reasons seems problematic: The objective stance can effectively deprive others of a second-personal response to such an extent that it implies that those others lack the normative standing to enter the participant stance. Even the seemingly neutral use of the objective case may have an oblique disempowering effect. In some cases, it discredits recipients and imposes on its recipient a significant loss in personal relations; for example, preventing them from mending the past and repairing broken personal relations, or from exploring and learning from a fuller range of personal emotional and rational interactions.

6 | INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

In relating to others objectively, one regards and treats them as falling outside the moral community (Strawson, 1962, p. 18). Strawson is aware of the challenges one faces in identifying the boundaries of the moral community starting from practices.³⁰ Critics have objected that Strawson underestimates the complexity and the contingency of practices.³¹ But the problem I see with his articulation of the objective stance around reactive attitudes does not arise because of the contingency and complexities of practices of holding others to account. Rather, the problem is that his account has not made explicit enough the fact that the objective stance is *not a morally neutral* move, merely registering who is inside or outside the moral community, but amounts to actively shaping the boundaries of the moral community and thus is a contentious move in a struggle for recognition.

In this context, the objective stance is problematic because of its inherent disempowering effects on the recipients, in the light of the fact that (a) the adoption of the objective stance is presented as a resource rooted in the agent's position, and to this extent the agent's privilege and responsibility (as argued in Section 3); (b) such a resource is not always reached out in order to protect the recipient from unfair attributions, but also in view of the agent's interests and concerns, (as shown in Section 5); and (c) even when the agent's reasons for taking the objective stance rests on recipient-oriented considerations, such reasons are not decisive in all cases and in regard to all kinds of reactive attitudes (as argued in Section 4). This section argues that its adoption is not only a positional privilege rooted in the practical standpoint, but that it can also be exercised as an instrument of power, insofar as the distinction between the objective and the participant stances articulates the boundaries of the moral community.³²

Submitting someone to the objective stance effectively makes them into outsiders. Since this move is unilateral, the contrast between the participant and the objective stance can be recaptured as follows. While the participant stance is characterized by personal relations and normative expectations of reciprocity, based on recognition of equal standing in the moral community, the objective attitude marks an asymmetrical relation: it is to some important extent up to the agent to decide how to relate to others. The oppositional formulation of the contrast is best captured in terms of outsiders and insiders. The privilege consists in the fact that insiders stand in a position of moral authority. This is an authority of a special sort: not the specific authority within the bounds of the moral realm, but the authority over the boundaries of the moral community itself. Recipient-oriented reasons point to the standards of competence for membership in the moral community, but such standards can be altered by social dynamics. Agent-oriented reasons directly point to some such dynamics. The point I am making is that the relevance of such dynamics is not circumstantial. In fact, the distortions of power relations exploit an intrinsic asymmetry of the objective stance, which is inherently disempowering. As members of the relevant community, insiders have an authority that outsiders do not have because they can speak as self-appointed representatives of the relevant community, and on its behalf.³³ They can count on relations of reciprocity within the relevant community, while the subjects are kept at its margins. The modes and the standards of recognition, as well as the modalities of negotiation, are fixed by the relevant normative community. Outsiders are in a position of radical asymmetry in regard to the regular members of the relevant community: “there is no way to break into this circle from outside it,” as Stephen Darwall puts it (Darwall, 2006, p. 12).

These worries about the inherent disempowering effects of the objective stance become more salient when considering that the objective stance may be driven by political adversarial reasons. To this topic, we turn next.

7 | HOLDING THE UPPER HAND: THE OBJECTIVE STANCE AS AN ACT OF POLITICAL DISPLACEMENT

When presenting the objective stance as a resource to which agents avail themselves, Strawson suggests that they may take into account the “political gains” of objectivity (Strawson, 1962, p. 9). It seems, then, that political adversarial reasons figure prominently among the kinds of agent-oriented practical reasons for taking the objective stance. This change in focus is very fertile. The literature about stereotyping and bias reveals that the objective stance does not reliably track the moral capacities of its recipients and is affected by various forms of distortions.³⁴ By refocusing on agent-oriented reasons, I aim to show that taking the objective stance is actually a move *within* a power struggle for moral and social recognition. The objective stance is thus not just unfortunately affected by distortions; it is itself an active political means introducing and sustaining problematic social asymmetries.

Because of the aspects of radical asymmetry between agents and recipients already evidenced, the political use of the objective stance is particularly alarming. The appeal to agent-oriented political reasons shows that the reactive attitudes, which lie at the core of practices of ascription, exoneration, and exemption from moral responsibility can be suppressed, withheld, and unilaterally altered in service of particular considerations of opportunity, or in response to political identities. There could be some specific “political gain” in distancing from one's own judgment insofar as it is instrumentally more effective in advancing a political cause. Strawson has pointed to the way one may actively make use of the objective stance for political reasons, but he has mainly referred to the gains and the opportunities afforded by temporarily suspending our reactive attitudes. The implicit danger, however, which Strawson has not brought out, is the fact that this treatment can be reifying, alienating, disempowering, and robbing others of political agency. Second, Strawson has not discussed a more radical political use of the objective stance that is not merely meant to abstract away from the participant's perspective on others temporarily, but actively robs others of their moral and political status. By calling attention to political reasons for adopting the objective stance, I want to develop Strawson's views further in these two directions.

Differently to other kinds of practical reasons, political adversarial reasons for taking the objective stance respond to others' political identity and aim to constrain the interpersonal attitudes and interactions with some specific political groups by excluding them from the relevant moral community. In the case of the categories of practical reasons discussed in Section 5, the moral legitimacy of the appeal to some agent-oriented and recipient-oriented considerations may be assessed on the basis of the standards shared by the moral community. But this route is not available in the case of political adversarial reasons, since there may be no shared ground to draw the line between insiders and outsiders. It is possible that the kinds of substantive reasons that insiders and outsiders invoke may come apart radically, so as to undermine the entire process of mutual rational justification. This possibility is not foreclosed by the qualification of rational agents, unless one assumes that all moral and political disagreements can be explained away and solved through reasoning. Arguably, reasoning commits to relating to other rational agents as having equal standing, and thus it does not differentiate between outsiders or insiders in any parochial way. Yet it may be open to the question of how far foundational issues about the boundaries of the moral community can be settled by shared reasoning.³⁵ In short, when adversarial political reasons are invoked, the very notion of political constituency is at stake. In such cases, the disempowering effects on the recipients are apparent: indeed, they are the very point of the move. In treating one's adversaries objectively, one intends to exclude them from the relevant normative community. The abstention from (personal, emotional, and rational) engagement with adversaries for political reasons amounts to an act of political displacement, which suspends, undermines, limits, and hinders the recipients' political agency on account of their political identity.³⁶ The effect over time of constantly being treated as a factor to be handled, rather than as political agents to be engaged and reckoned with, is corrosive of agential powers and undermines the very core of political commitment and struggle.³⁷

The case of political adversarial reasons for retreating to the objective stance indicates that the recognition of equal standing, which is structural of the participant stance, can be withdrawn unilaterally and for considerations partial to the insiders. In this case, the suspension of reactive attitudes conveys the denial of recognition of equal normative status and, in particular, of the recipient's standing as a political actor. Adopting the objective stance and the relative objectifying attitudes on adversarial grounds is a modality of disqualifying the other's political agency. These objectifying practices aim at denying the interlocutors' status as political peers, and thus as equal partners in cooperative interactions. Such practices alienate the outsiders by defusing their political agency, and cut them out of cooperative interactions. Thus, the adoption of the objective stance amounts to a withdrawal of political recognition, which bears tremendous normative consequences for the recipients.

The unilateral denial or withdrawal of recognition on political grounds imposes two forms of alienation: alienation from one's political agency, and alienation from the network of reciprocal relations. To this extent, the objective stance is not the protected stance in which the child, the madman, and all others lacking moral standing are safe from harsh criticisms and undeserved punishment, but the stance singling out and excluding the disempowered.³⁸ These considerations apply in the case of the ancient practice of ostracism, which was used as a *preventive* measure against citizens who could pose a threat to the community, for example, by conjuring up against the government. It could certainly be resented but, again, the normative status of resentment depends on membership in the relevant moral community. The case of *retaliatory* shunning or ostracism, such as the case of retaliatory retreat discussed in Section 5.3, is a misuse of the objective stance; but its effects are larger in that they amount to denying moral and political standing in the relevant normative community. Finally, let us consider one vivid example of an extreme case in which the objective stance is part of a political strategy of exclusion, aimed at removing others from the shared normative community: the case of immigrants forced out of their country, entering ports in the Mediterranean Sea, in the last few decades. Displaced people are not refugees and benefit from no legal protection. When crossing borders, they are perceived as a threat to national security. Appealing to national sovereignty, a policy-maker may rank considerations of opportunity or security higher than humanitarian duties to host the displaced and, again, for reasons referring to their political identity. In doing so, the policy maker sets the boundaries of the moral community on national borders.³⁹ The implication of this policy is that, beyond national borders, displaced agents are not recognized any rights or entitlements. Ignoring the demands of hospitality in such dire circumstances is a moral crime, which can be condemned by invoking the violation of duties of humanity, or the no-harm principle. But such a disregard for the immigrants' moral claims also has a political significance, in that it denies such subjects their role and function as political actors in the human community, with tragic alienating effects. When the objective stance works in service of a forced political displacement, it can be appropriately met with reactive attitudes, but only from within the moral community: it can elicit appropriate vicarious resentment or indignation in bystanders. But the victims lie outside the moral community, and thus their hurt feelings do not have the same normative status as the reactive attitudes of the members of the moral community.

The outsiders reacting to these measures with resentment, indignation or blame claim moral standing and the right to speak with moral authority.

8 | THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM

The objective/participant divide is not merely susceptible to relations of powers in the sense that its application may be distorted due to power asymmetries. More precisely, it articulates relations of power between insiders and outsiders. To this extent, it is the locus in which the boundaries of the relevant normative (moral, legal, and political) community are negotiated. Outsiders are not merely relegated to a secondary or subservient position; rather, they are placed outside the relevant normative community as agents whose agency is irrelevant from a normative point of view: they are not considered sources of valid claims, do not constrain the way the relevant community behaves,

and are not met with attitudes that address them as having equal normative standing. Are they thereby denied legitimate entitlements? Can this imbalance be remedied and, if so, how?

This denial of responsible agency and equal standing disqualifies them from participating in a complex network of supporting cooperative interactions. This is a matter of justice in a straightforward sense. However, the means to treat this imbalance do not lie in interventions to correct the pernicious effects of particular stereotypes and implicit biases in the ascription of responsibility.⁴⁰ The problem of the polarization between insiders and outsiders is more radical and it concerns the very constituency of the relevant normative community. It structurally resembles the problem of the boundary in the debate about democratic theory: who counts as a member of the relevant community (*demos*), and on which grounds?⁴¹ We can envision a similar problem regarding the constituency of the normative community, which produces the normative standards for moral responsibility and accountability. In the case of political adversarial reasons, the contest may well appeal to the same principles that are articulated in the debate over the boundaries of the political community: the appeal to territorial jurisdiction or the equalitarian appeal to all affected, and so on.

Strawson's divide appeals to the "moral community" in a way that does not confine to territorial borders, or to ethical and juridical practices which are rooted in particular jurisdictions, but it assumes shared normative practices and normative grounding. By refocusing the debate on the agent-oriented consideration to adopt the objective stance, I have pointed to ambiguities that have not been mapped before. But I have also indicated that Strawson's divide can be recruited in service of critical social analysis. By attending the complex interplay of co-reactive attitudes, we can approach anew the dynamics of recognition in the moral community. We can appreciate that the boundaries are flexible and negotiable, and that they can be contested and renegotiated by articulating emotional engagement, resenting the objective stance and claiming or reclaiming responsibility for action.⁴² To this extent, there is an active role for the whole category of reactive attitude to play at a foundational level; that is, at the level of the very constituency of the relevant normative community.

9 | CONCLUSION

Current debates have largely focused on recipient-oriented reasons for adopting the objective stance. When considering how social inequalities impinge upon ascriptions of responsibility, they have been mainly concerned with how oppressive formative circumstances count as exculpatory insofar as they impact on the control condition and the epistemic condition of responsible agency. By contrast, this essay shifts the discussion onto agent-oriented practical reasons, bringing to light unexplored ambiguities of the objective/participant divide. Once agent-oriented reasons are brought into focus, it appears that the divide is contestable and renegotiable: the boundaries of the relevant community can be altered by claiming and reclaiming responsibility. In this light, reactive attitudes should be acknowledged as means and drives of the struggle for moral and political recognition. They can and should be recruited in service of an inclusive and open-ended moral community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper has been written during the term of Visiting Fellowship at the *Center for Advanced Studies* of the Ludwig Maximilians Universität in Munich, in the Fall 2019. I would like to thank this institution and its personnel for their support and wonderful hospitality, and especially my host, Prof. Monika Betzler. Versions of this paper have been discussed at the Oberseminar at LMU in Munich, at the IX Conference of the European Society of Analytic Philosophy organized by the University of Utrecht in 2020, at the Research seminar on perspective at the University of Parma, and at TINT Centre for Philosophy of Social Sciences in joint session with the Moral and Political Philosophy Research Seminar, and at University of Helsinki in February 2021. I would like to thank these audiences, and especially Joel Anderson, Federica Berdini, Monika Betzler, Sofia Bonicalzi, Christel Fricke, Antti Kauppinen, Arto Latinen, Dane Leigh Gogonish, Wolfgang Huemer, Caj Strandberg, and Anna Wehoftsis. I am also grateful to the journal

referees, and especially to Thomas Khurana for his constructive comments and guidance throughout the refereeing process. Work on this paper has been supported by MIUR - PRIN 2017; Project “Ethics and Science”, grant n. 20175YZ855_004; CUP: D44I19004190008. Open Access Funding provided by Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia within the CRUI-CARE Agreement. [Correction added on 19 May 2022, after first online publication: CRUI funding statement has been added.]

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ By referring to the “practical stance,” I introduce a new term that is broader than the participant stance because I want to show that the objective stance itself is also available from within the practical standpoint as the suspension of the participant stance. The “practical stance” is the stance from which practical reasons for taking the participant or the objective stance toward others are constructed; such practical reasons are either recipient-relative or agent-relative.
- ² Obligations and demands are grounded on a “basic concern,” which is that we expect others to manifest a minimum of good will or moral consideration (see Watson, 2014, p. 17). This basic concern can be also framed in terms of mutual recognition and respect, see Darwall (2006) and Bagnoli (2007).
- ³ The basic expectation is a pre-condition of shared agency, though relevant to all cooperative interactions.
- ⁴ The concept of mutual accountability is more specific than the concept of moral responsibility, as it concerns second-personal relations. Darwall (2006) understands the second-personal frame in terms of the demands that persons address to one another. This reading has been questioned on the grounds that it confuses personhood with moral agency (see Hutchison, 2018). On the contrast between autonomy and moral responsibility, cf. Oshana (2002, p. 267), Scanlon (2008) and Shoemaker (2011) ground mutual accountability in personal relationship, but allow for a more fine-grained view of what counts as a reason-giving personal relationship.
- ⁵ Among the interpretations insisting on Strawson's sociality condition, see first of all Watson (2014, p. 17), but also Bennett (1980); Watson (1987); Wallace (1994); Darwall (2006); Scanlon (2008); McKenna (2012); Vargas (2013); and Shoemaker (2015).
- ⁶ The notion of “equal standing” deployed here is formal and does not entail any prior recognition of social rank, merit, power over a certain situation, degree of capacity, or positive authority (see Bagnoli, 2020). While this formal notion does not by itself generate any specific positive duties of equal treatment, it suffices to signal the fundamental injustice that can be involved in submitting someone to the objective stance on improper grounds. Those considered objectively are not confined to a constricted social position and thus submitted to an inner-social inequality but, more radically, they are not considered as full and active members of the relevant normative social realm.
- ⁷ The objective stance precludes shared practical reasoning and genuine rational exchange: “If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him” (Strawson, 1962, p. 10).
- ⁸ I call “agent” a practical subject endowed with rational and moral capacities, in a position of authority to address others as equals or suspend such address on the basis of reasons. I call “recipient” the object of objective attitudes, and “addressee” the practical subject toward whom the agent addresses reactive or co-reactive attitudes.
- ⁹ In my view, co-reactive attitudes are functional to communities held together by norms of reciprocity. This understanding responds to the critique that Strawson does not offer a full-fledged defense of their indispensability (see Sommers, 2007 and Shabo, 2012). On the normative dynamics of reciprocity and co-reactive attitudes, see Gibbard (1990) and McGeer (2012).
- ¹⁰ This dynamic can be cashed out in terms of a communication between speakers, as in the model of moral interlocution (Oshana, 2004), the conversationalist model (McKenna, 2012), and the model of answerability (Smith, 2015). I recognize the importance of the communicative aspect of the practices of moral responsibility, but I point to agential aspects of practical interactions, which cannot be brought to full light by adopting linguistic metaphors.
- ¹¹ See also Vargas (2018, p. 121).
- ¹² Strawson (1962, p. 8). See also Hutchison (2018, p. 218).
- ¹³ For a similar point, see Mason (2014, pp. 150–151); Hutchinson (2018, pp. 217–18).

- ¹⁴ The effect of the objective stance is not necessarily objectifying. However, despite its being justified on moral grounds or invoked for moral purposes, the objective stance still has disempowering effects, in that it transforms a descriptive feature of the recipient (i.e., inabilities or disabilities of some sort) into relevant normative reasons for disqualifying them as members of the moral community and partners in moral interactions. Secondly, the consideration of the incapacities of others may be based on wrong reasons, and driven by patronizing and paternalistic attitudes, or operate as a cover up, concealing an instrumental take on others or the arrogant presumption of superiority.
- ¹⁵ On most readings, recognition-respect involves equal standing (see e.g., Darwall, 2006, p. 126). This notion of recognition respect is congruent with the feature of reciprocity in Strawson's definition of the participant stance; see Watson (2014, p. 29), McKenna (2012), Oshana (2004) and McGeer (2012). While acknowledging this congruence, Hutchinson argues that the objective stance involves recognition respect for persons, while the participant stance involves "appraisal respect," which is responsive to the extent to which the agent's capacities for moral responsibility are fully developed (Hutchinson, 2018, pp. 225–226). I agree with Hutchinson that moral agency and personhood should be kept separate, and that treating others as moral agents is not equivalent to treating them as persons (see Hutchinson, 2018, p. 216). Unlike Hutchinson, however, I do not think that the contrast between the kind of respect appropriate to the two stances could be differentiated by appealing to the contrast between appraisal-respect and recognition-respect. The right contrast is between two forms of recognition: one governing reciprocal relations of equal standing and the other one governing generic moral status.
- ¹⁶ Some people might be incapable of reform because of some cognitive impairment, which prevents them from learning from past experience, but it is an open issue whether and under which construal they can be held responsible (see Greenspan, 2003).
- ¹⁷ This concern is particularly relevant in case of harsh treatment and punishment, but can be extended to disapproving reactive attitudes, for example blaming, shaming, and reproaching.
- ¹⁸ Notice that the claim is not that these subjects do not think that they deserve punishment, but that they lack the appropriate categories for understanding right and wrong. It is a separate question whether the punishment inflicted by subjecting them to reactive attitudes would be wrong because undeserved. Philosophers engaged in the free will debate have held that reactive attitudes are dispensable and should be curtailed insofar as they are based on desert, which is a misplaced category in a deterministic universe (see e.g., Pereboom, 2001, pp. 98, 200). Furthermore, such philosophers maintain that the absence of reactive attitudes based on desert does not undermine personal relations; see, for example, Pereboom (2001, pp. 199–200) and Sommers (2007), *cf.* Shabo (2012). I agree that desert-based conceptions of reactive attitudes are misplaced, and I am also opposed to a retributivist take on mutual accountability. I am unconvinced, however, that the suppression of all reactive attitudes is socially and morally desirable.
- ¹⁹ Regulating others' behavior does not necessarily have a punitive or retaliatory intent. In fact, it might be a positive help for the agent, especially if the regulation aims at changing the social circumstances under which the agent is led to self-destructive or violent actions; see Walker (2006) and Bennett (2008, p. 65). For an argument that relates exogenous regulation to autonomous governance, see Harcourt (2016), and *cf.* Bagnoli (2020).
- ²⁰ See Calhoun (1989). Importantly, I am considering the large category of reactive attitudes as part of the vocabulary of respect and mutual recognition, and hence not limited to blame. Relatedly, on the claim that positive moral emotions are more useful than blame in character-building, see Pettigrove (2012) and Nussbaum (2016); for the case of personality and psychological disorders, see Greenspan (2003) and Pickard (2011).
- ²¹ A general presumption in this debate is that there is a direct and unproblematic relation between the status of morally responsible agents and their moral capacities. But the recognition of such capacities is in itself socially conditioned, for example by stereotypes and implicit bias, so one should not presume that practices of reactive attitudes reliably track moral incapacities: they may well track social or political identities rather than capacities (see Hutchinson, Mackenzie and Oshana, 2018, p. 9).
- ²² Empirical and philosophical psychology have emphasized the role of emotional interactions and engagement in such development, both in childhood and in adult life; see, for example, Harcourt (2016).
- ²³ For instance, there is a debate about the status of psychopathy. Specifically, whether the relevant constructs are sufficiently robust, and whether at least some kinds of psychopathologies count as disabilities and disease; see e.g., Nadelhoffer and Sinnott-Armstrong (2013), and *cf.* Juriako, Malatesti, and Brazil (2021).
- ²⁴ This claim can be vindicated from a variety of theories: so-called causal-relational approaches to autonomy, the theories of moral scaffolding, and circumstantialism, which take the socio-relational status of people as key determinants of autonomy.
- ²⁵ See, for example, Watson (1987, p. 271). Shoemaker (2015) holds that one cannot be held accountable for one's action if one does not understand the relevant moral norms, although the action can be attributed to one. More recently, there has been growing attention to the relevance of proleptic blame and other reactive attitudes for moral development; see

- McGeer (2012); Vargas (2013, pp. 247–248); Holroyd (2018). In particular, on the relevance of co-reactive attitudes in the processes of restorative justice, see Walker (2006) and Bennett (2008). On the distinction between blame and culpability, see Vargas (2018, p. 119); on the situational aspects of the practices, see Brink and Nelkin (2013); on the separation of responsibility/answerability from blame, see Pickard (2011) and Westlund (2018).
- ²⁶ See Watson (1987); Buss (1997); Brink and Nelkin (2013). This means that “some appeals to ignorance or limited understanding as grounds for mitigation or excuse are far more compelling than others” (McKenna, 2018, p. 42). Oppression does not constitute an incapacitation but may be only mitigating (Vargas, 2018, p. 125).
- ²⁷ Both the control condition and the epistemic condition for ascription of responsibility are likely to be altered by power relations internal to the concrete community. When subjected to asymmetrical power relations, the control condition raises worries about coercion and duress, as well as about the adaptive self-regulation and preferences. The epistemic condition, instead, is problematic because of the inequalities in the access to and distribution of epistemic resources.
- ²⁸ I qualify this testimonial function of reactive attitudes as “recipient-oriented” because the testimonial function may not in all cases have the recipient as the main addressee. In other cases, the main target or interlocutor is the community at large, rather than the recipient. By expressing and manifesting blame toward the wrongdoer, regardless of his agential capacities, one wants the community to know that one stands by the victim. In this case, the recipient is treated instrumentally; but one may argue that it can have a *protestive* function, which drives and supports social transformation of practices and moral reform. Relatedly, Calhoun distinguishes between reasons to blame in light of blameworthiness, and reasons to blame as a means of effecting social change (Calhoun, 1989, p. 389).
- ²⁹ The subjects of such objectification may feel offended by this and demand that the agents refrain from this objectification. Analogous demands may be pressed by people who are dealt with objectively out of intellectual curiosity. It would not be totally inappropriate for the “objects of some studies” to feel offended and resent the objective attitude.
- ³⁰ Strawson notes two challenges to identifying the moral community; the first is cultural relativism, and the second is that many particular manifestations of reactive attitudes “are a prime realm of self-deception, of the ambiguous and the shady, of guilt-transference, unconscious sadism and the rest,” Strawson (1962, p. 19).
- ³¹ See, for example, Watson (1987, pp. 282–283); McKenna and Russell (2008, p. 10). Some of such practices of holding people responsible are unfit for a workable account of moral responsibility because they are biased; see Hutchison (2018); McKenna (2018); Mackenzie (2018); Oshana (2018); Vargas (2018).
- ³² The same conditions that exempt and excuse from moral responsibility, i.e. “children, fools, and madmen,” also deny them access to natural rights; see, for example, T. Hobbes, [1651] (1968, p. 216); Benhabib (2020, p. 75). The critique of disciplinary institutions is a theme in bio-political approaches inspired by Michel Foucault; in stark contrast, I defend shared reasoning as a critical and empowering practical resource in service of moral legitimacy; compare Rawls (1993) and Habermas (1994).
- ³³ As McKenna remarks, “standards for a competent agent’s acting from a reasonable quality of will are understood by reference to the expectations of the moral community positioned to hold responsible” (McKenna, 2018, p. 38). Because of the social and political inequalities internal to the community, such ascriptions may reflect unjust social circumstances. Victims and oppressed are generally understood to be motivated to acquiesce in and adapt, Cudd (2006, p. 81). Oppression is defined as “an institutionally structured, unjust harm perpetrated on groups by other groups using direct and indirect material and psychological forces” (Cudd, 2006, p. 51).
- ³⁴ A recent valuable effort to problematize the social dimension of moral responsibility is Hutchinson, Mackenzie, and Oshana (2018). Unlike most contributors to this study, I am not focusing on the impact of social oppression, stereotyping, and implicit bias on the *practices of mutual accountability*. I am rather turning to the oppressive and disempowering effects that the *adoption of the objective stance* has in ordinary circumstances.
- ³⁵ For the position that practical rationality is tightly related to concrete social, ethical, and political identities, see MacIntyre (1990); for a more nuanced position that acknowledges widespread moral disagreement without renouncing the significant import of practical reasoning, see Rawls (1993).
- ³⁶ “[...] we can in the case of the moral reactive attitudes more easily secure the speculative or political gains of objectivity of view by a kind of setting on one side, rather than a total suspension, of those attitudes” (Strawson, 1962, pp. 18–19).
- ³⁷ Strawson affords no answer to this foundational issue. A similar ambiguity is reflected in his commentators. For instance, McKenna refers to the “concrete” moral community, which has the authority to make demands to its members, and sets the bar for what will count as sufficient or insufficient quality of will (McKenna, 2018, p. 42). On the other hand, he also claims that the quality of will is “a matter of the value of an agent’s regard for others” (McKenna, 2018, p. 43).
- ³⁸ Indeed, there is a consistent historical interdependence between interdiction, criminalization, and detention measures connected to objectifying attitudes; cf. Foucault (1965, p. 7), and Benhabib (2020, p. 75): “The demented and mentally ill of early modernity, the refugees and asylum seekers from Africa asking for hospitality in Europe, and US citizens, affluent and materially secure enough to afford a Mexican cruise but who were potential victims of a virus, are united through

the fact that for various reasons they are not permitted onto the territories of states and their rights as human beings as well as citizens are imbricated with their territorial presence in complex ways.”

- ³⁹ The right to have rights, and hence to partake in the moral community, is made dependent on the right to enter (see Hirsch and Bell, 2017).
- ⁴⁰ This is the route taken by, for example, McKenna (2018); Mackenzie (2018); and Oshana (2018).
- ⁴¹ “The boundary problem is one matter of collective decision that cannot be decided democratically... We would need to make a prior decision regarding who are entitled to participate in arriving at a solution ... [Democracy] cannot be brought to bear on the logically prior matter of the constitution of the group itself, the existence of which it presupposes” (Whelan, 1983, pp. 16, 43). The boundary problem is a foundational issue in democracy theory, which is made vivid by the immigration case (see Benhabib, 2020). As far as I know, neither this problem nor the case of immigration have thus far been connected with Strawson's distinction.
- ⁴² I have argued for this claim in Bagnoli (2021).

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How to cite this article: Bagnoli, C. (2022). The objective stance and the boundary problem. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 29(3), 646–663. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12678>