

Objectivity and Joint Commitment about Truth

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Clearly, some entities in the world exist only because of certain human practices and conventions. Games provide the clearest examples: rooks, strikes, and point guards would not exist apart from the practices of chess, baseball, and basketball. (More tendentiously, some have claimed that the natural world itself depends on the human practice of science.) What is not clear is the relationship between those practices and the existence of such entities or how these entities (or those present in other practices) can be *objective* and so stand as objects to which our cognitive states must be answerable. In this paper we explore these questions, taking as our starting point the work of John Haugeland.¹ Haugeland's account of objectivity and truth follows Heidegger and Kant in assuming that we have access to the objective world, and examines the conditions that make that access possible. Although we think there is much that is right in Haugeland's account, and although we shall simply assume that his basic approach is correct, our aim in this paper is to criticize the individualism inherent in his account and develop a somewhat modified approach that appeals to the idea of a *joint constitutive commitment* made intelligible by interpersonal patterns of emotions.

1 Objectivity and Constitutive Commitment

The central insight behind Haugeland's account of objectivity and truth is the idea that what makes a domain of inquiry objective is not the existence of a mind-independent world to which our cognitions must correspond, so much as whether we are committed to changing our understanding of the entities of that domain in light of recalcitrant phenomena. Haugeland cashes this out by saying that what is needed is a way of making a "*nonarbitrary* distinction between appearance and reality via the entailed refusal to accept apparent impossibilities in entities as discovered".² That is, what objectivity demands is a way of distinguishing encounters with entities as the entities that they are and mere appearances. For example, a stick half submerged in water *appears* bent, but we reject that appearance because when we remove it from water it is still straight, and we hold that submerging and removing sticks from water does not change their shape. Furthermore, we can explain away this appearance by appeal to

1. See his John Haugeland, "Truth and Rule Following," in *Having Thought: Essays in the Metaphysics of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 305–61; John Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, ed. Mark A Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 43–77.

2. Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude," 71.

a broader understanding of how light refracts at the boundary between air and water. As such, we can begin to see how we can make a distinction between when we actually encounter an entity and when we merely appear to encounter one, although we will have to say more in order to understand how that distinction can be nonarbitrary.

Ultimately what Haugeland claims is necessary for this distinction is that objects be *accessible, authoritative, and autonomous*. Objects are accessible just in case we can be responsive to them; they are authoritative in that “they have normative status as criterial for the correct exercise of objective skills”; and they are autonomous in that “they are independent not only of particular exercises [of these skills] but also of any mere consensus”.³ Haugeland calls this his *beholdenness theory of truth*; thus, that we are “normatively *beholden* to” objects for determining the success of our activities and inquiries.⁴

In fleshing this out, Haugeland distinguishes between *discovery*, which concerns how we deal with and learn about entities in the world as the entities they are, and *disclosure* of their being, which is our making sense of entities in such a way that we can discover them. As Haugeland puts it:

The *being* of entities is that in terms of which they are *intelligible as entities*. The qualifier “as entities” (as I am using it) is short for this: with regard to the fact *that* they are (at all) and with regard to *what* they are. Understanding an entity *as an entity*—and there is no other way of *understanding* it—means understanding it in its *that-it-is* and *what-it-is*. Disclosing the being of entities amounts to letting them become accessible in this two-fold intelligibility—that is, as phenomena that are *understood*. When taken with sufficient generality, a pretty good colloquial paraphrase for “disclosing the being of” is *making sense of*.⁵

Disclosing the being of a chair involves making intelligible not only whether there are chairs and what chairs are, but also possible modes or ways in which we can make use of them. Consequently, the discovery of objects presupposes that their being has already been disclosed.

Given this, Haugeland distinguishes between ontic and ontological understanding: an *ontic* understanding is an understanding of how those entities “are or are not *in fact*”, whereas an ontological understanding is an understanding of how they “*could or could-not* be”.⁶ Ontological understanding, then, is of the *being* of entities: an understanding of a range of interconnected concepts, practices, and values in terms of which a variety of phenomena may in turn be discovered or understood ontically. In order to have an (ontic) understanding of what entities are or are not in fact, we must have a prior (ontological) understanding of what is possible or impossible for those entities (what could or could not be).

This notion of ontological understanding gives rise to what Haugeland calls the “excluded zone,” which contains entities which are conceivable and so are possible objects of discovery, but impossible in the sense that our ontological understanding rules them out.⁷ In the first

3. Haugeland, “Truth and Rule Following,” 325.

4. *Ibid.*, 346ff.

5. Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude,” 47f.

6. *Ibid.*, 53.

7. Haugeland, “Truth and Rule Following,” 331ff.

example we were considering of a stick that appears bent in water, we can certainly *conceive* of a stick that upon entering water would bend and then somehow right itself when taken out of water, but given our ontological understanding of the being of simple physical objects, we rule that out as impossible. Thus the excluded zone is supposed to make sense of objects as objective in that they are simultaneously accessible and authoritative in a way that makes intelligible a distinction between appearance and reality.

The upshot of our discussion so far is that the discovery is relative to a particular ontological understanding and indeed, Haugeland claims, is a product of our current historical and cultural background that provides that understanding. Such relativity of discovery to an ontological understanding, however, may seem problematic for making sense of objective truth. For if my understanding is different from yours, perhaps because we have been brought up differently, then it may seem that I thereby discover a different world than you do, which implies that such worlds (and truths within those worlds) are not objective after all: objectivity seems to require independence of such historical and cultural factors, which seem to be simply arbitrary in a way objectivity cannot be. How, then, can we make sense of objectivity if we acknowledge that truth is relative to an understanding?

The answer, Haugeland argues, can be found in the idea of a constitutive commitment to one's ontological understanding.⁸ A *constitutive commitment* is a commitment to seeing that the entities discovered are in accord with the ontological understanding that makes that discovery possible. Consequently, in undertaking such a commitment we must refuse to accept apparent but impossible phenomena. This requires double checking to make sure that our discovery was genuine: perhaps there is a perfectly good explanation for why things appeared as they did, as when a piece of equipment malfunctioned or we mis-recognized what was there. Our discovery of entities is in this way *beholden* to those entities themselves; such ontic beholdenness is a central part of Haugeland's beholdenness theory of truth.

As Haugeland acknowledges, this is so far inadequate for objectivity. For if all that is needed is that our understanding be *in accord* with that which is discovered (given that understanding) it may seem that truth is mere coherence, and the problem of arbitrariness seems to rise yet again: mere coherence with one's ontological understanding is not enough if that understanding itself is simply up to us, relative to a certain cultural background. Rejecting mere coherence,⁹ Haugeland argues that our ontological understanding must be constrained by something that is out of our control and in this sense independent of us. And it is entities in the world that can provide this constraint given both our constitutive commitment and the possibility of breakdown. For in forming a constitutive commitment, we thereby undertake the *responsibility* to see to it that the entities we discover really are possible—really make sense in light of our understanding of the being of such entities. In the face of breakdowns, when double-checking is exhausted, we must either alter or give up on our ontological understanding. Hence we would fail to live up to our constitutive commitment, and so be *irresponsible* were we to encounter apparently impossible phenomena and yet fail either to double-check how things appear to us or, in the face of breakdown, to refuse to deal appropriately with its consequences.

8. Haugeland, "Truth and Rule Following," 34off.

9. *Ibid.*, 344–46.

As Haugeland says:

“Refusing to accept” intransigent impossibilities has a double meaning. One way of refusing to accept is bullheadedly refusing even to *see*—blinding oneself. [Constitutively], that kind of refusal—running away and hiding—is *irresponsible*. Thus, holding itself free for taking it back belongs just as essentially to [constitutive] responsibility as does sticking to it as long as one reasonably (responsibly) can.¹⁰

In the face of impossibility, we must do something. Yet double-checking will not always succeed. If we refuse to hold open the possibility of changing our understanding, then we are being irresponsible.

Consequently, not only is our discovery of phenomena beholden to those phenomena themselves, but so too is our *disclosure* of their being—that which makes such discovery possible. For “that disclosure itself [...] is beholden for its ‘success’ to those very entities as discovered—entities that are independent of it in the concrete and inescapable sense that they are out of control”.¹¹ Our beholdenness to the phenomena is thus a kind of responsibility to those phenomena that is made possible by our constitutive commitment, thereby making those phenomena intelligible not merely as accessible and authoritative, but also as autonomous.¹²

Although we think there is something fundamentally right about all this, there are two related problems left lurking in Haugeland’s account. First, his notion of a constitutive commitment is left quite vague. Haugeland suggests that a constitutive commitment is “a dedicated or even a devoted way of living” analogous to love and faith, rather than the corresponding “deontic” commitments, marriage and monastic vows.¹³ This on its own, however, is not very helpful. In particular, what exactly is it to undertake such a commitment and how are such a commitment and the corresponding responsibility binding on us? Without more details, we might worry about the conditions under which we might escape such a commitment and avoid that responsibility and our beholdenness to the world: what prevents us from arbitrarily abandoning them?

The second problem arises from Haugeland’s understanding of constitutive commitment as essentially an individual matter, involving a kind of responsibility to the phenomena “that cannot be public but can only be taken over by an individual.”¹⁴ Such an individualist account of constitutive commitment may seem inadequate for grounding objectivity. After all, if such a commitment is essentially individual, it seems possible that how I hold myself responsible to the phenomena by modifying my ontological understanding in the face of breakdown could be different from how you hold yourself responsible, and that furthermore each of

10. Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude,” 74.

11. *Ibid.*, 76.

12. Haugeland, “Truth and Rule Following,” 348.

13. *Ibid.*, 341.

14. Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude,” 65; see also Haugeland, “Truth and Rule Following,” 341, where he says, “A [constitutively] committed *individual* holds him or herself to the commitment by living in a resilient, determined way” (our emphasis). Note, however, that Haugeland also says that constitutive commitment, though essentially first personal, is not necessarily first-person singular (*ibid.*, 339), though he does not pursue this idea.

our resulting modified ontological understandings could be equally valid. Consequently any attempt you might make to criticize *my* way of holding myself responsible would be ineffective, so that what counts as a breakdown, how we should respond to it, and the resulting ontological understanding that makes discovery of the world possible could all diverge, and each of our worlds could diverge without any rational conflict. The result would thereby threaten the possibility of meaningful disagreement between us and so also the idea that we together inhabit a single, objective, shared world. Rather, for meaningful disagreement to be possible, there must be a single, shared authority to which we together are beholden and which neither of us can *escape* simply to avoid that criticism. This requires that the relevant constitutive commitment to the world and an understanding of the world must be *ours jointly*, so that *we* can hold each other responsible and so be beholden to an objective, shared world.¹⁵ Understanding responsibility and bindingness individually, does not allow us to make sense of the essentially shared nature of truth and objectivity. At least, this is the idea we wish to explore in fleshing out the notion of constitutive commitment more fully.

2 Emotions and Communities of Respect

Our claim will ultimately be that Haugeland's notion of constitutive commitment should be understood as a distinctive kind of joint caring about truth made intelligible through a certain sort of pattern of emotions. In order to justify this account, we will first (in §2.1) articulate an account of the emotions and how they constitute caring and then turn (in §2.2) to discuss the type of caring we shall argue in §3 is relevant to constitutive commitment; such caring, we shall claim, essentially involves respect for others within particular communities of respect. These accounts will be given largely without argument—enough to make them plausible and motivate what is to come.¹⁶

2.1 Caring and the Emotions

In general, to care about something is to have a concern for its well-being, a concern in which one finds it to be worthy of both one's attention and action. As one of us has long argued,¹⁷ caring is constituted by rational patterns of emotions. To understand this, it is first necessary to say something about the emotions and their objects.

15. Of course, we might assume that what makes intelligible such public objectivity is the world itself: given that there is a single world to which we scientists are all individually committed and beholden, we can expect there to be a convergence in our understandings of that common world. However, it is not clear in advance that there is a single best way to understand the world and so that our individual understandings will converge. That this is so is part of the existential commitment we undertake as epistemic agents, and it requires that we be *answerable* to each other: I cannot escape your criticism simply by claiming you have gone wrong in not being in accord with the norms as I understand them.

16. For arguments, see Bennett W. Helm, *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Bennett W. Helm, "Responsibility and Dignity: Strawsonian Themes," in *Morality and the Emotions*, ed. Carla Bagnoli (Oxford University Press, 2011), 217–34.

17. See, for example, Helm, *Emotional Reason*.

Emotions in general involve implicit evaluations, with each type of emotion having its own characteristic evaluation. The object one evaluates in having a particular emotion is that emotion's *target*, and the characteristic evaluation for each emotion type is its *formal object*. For example, I might be afraid that the kids playing baseball in the street will damage my car or angry at you for stealing my car. In these cases, the kids' playing and you are the targets of my fear and anger, and in having these emotions, I am evaluating their playing as dangerous (the formal object of fear) or you as offensive (the formal object of anger). One question these evaluations raise is why they are appropriate. Here the answer cannot simply be that the kids' playing has the potential to damage my car, for their playing also has the potential to damage the piece of cardboard they are using for home plate, and yet that fact wouldn't normally inspire my fear. The difference is that I just don't care about that piece of cardboard, whereas I do care about my car: it is only because of the relationship between their playing and something I care about (namely my car) that my emotional evaluation of them as dangerous makes sense. We can formalize this idea by understanding the emotions to have a third object in addition to a target and a formal object: an emotion's *focus* is the background object the subject cares about whose relation to the target makes intelligible the evaluation of the target in terms of the formal object. So both my fear of the kids' playing and my anger at you have my car as their focus.

This notion of an emotion's focus is important for understanding the rational interconnections among emotions. For the sense in which each emotion "involves" an evaluation should be understood in terms of a commitment to the worth—to the *import*—of the focus of that emotion and thereby to its target. This means that in having one emotion and so being committed to the import of its focus, one is thereby committed to having other emotions with the same focus in the appropriate circumstances: committed in the sense that, other things being equal, one rationally ought to have such emotions. For example, there would be something rationally odd about my fearing the kids' playing and yet not also being relieved were my car to escape unscathed (or saddened and angry were they to break its windshield). These rational connections among emotions apply even when the emotions do not share a common target: my fear of the kids is rationally connected to my fear of the impending hail-storm and my anger at you for stealing my car. (How do you suppose I would—*should*—feel were I to discover that sometime during the night a large tree branch fell on my car?)

Because a condition of the intelligibility of one's having any particular mental capacity is that one is by and large rational in the exercises of that capacity,¹⁸ one's emotions must in general come in projectible patterns with a common focus. Isolated emotions, not falling within such patterns, therefore manifest emotional irrationality; conversely, once a pattern of emotions is established, one generally ought to have other emotions with the relevant focus when these are otherwise appropriate. To exhibit such a pattern of emotions is therefore to be disposed to attend to the focus of that pattern and to act on its behalf; moreover, the rationality of the pattern is such that one ought so to attend and act. Consequently, I claim, because caring about something—its having import to you—is a matter of finding it worthy of your attention and action, we can see that what it is to *care* about something—what it is for

18. See, e.g., Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 1980).

that to have *import* to you—just is for it to be the focus of such a projectible, rational pattern of emotions.¹⁹ Particular emotions, then, can be assessed for warrant depending in part on whether they fit into such a pattern of emotions with a common focus—on whether they are properly responsive to what has import to one.

Two things are worth noting about our use of ‘import’ and ‘caring’ here. First, these are two ways of describing a single phenomenon. From an objective perspective, we can speak of the import of something as that to which we respond in having particular emotions and as that in terms of which we assess the warrant of these emotions. Yet such import is itself constituted by the overall patterns of one’s emotions, patterns that we might describe from the perspective of the subject as her evaluative attitude towards the focus of that pattern. It is this subjective perspective that we emphasize in talking about caring. Nonetheless, neither these objective or subjective ways of talking is ontologically, conceptually, or explanatorily prior to the other.

Second, ‘import’ is intended to be a generic term for the worth something has to one. Clearly there are many distinct ways in which something can have import. Elsewhere, one of us has distinguished caring from valuing: whereas caring is a kind of evaluative attitude we share with at least some higher animals like dogs and cats, *valuing* is deeper in that it involves finding something worthwhile as a part of an overall life worth living. Consequently, the emotions constituting values must be similarly “deep” in their characteristic evaluations. These emotions, such as pride, shame, and anxiety, are called *person-focused emotions* to reflect their engagement with the quality of life of particular persons. To value something, then, is for it to be the focus of a projectible, rational pattern of person-focused emotions. In general, distinctive kinds of import are constituted by distinctive classes of emotions, classes defined by the way in which such emotions form rational patterns with common focuses.²⁰ This point will become important in understanding the class of reactive attitudes in §2.2.

2.2 **Respect and Reactive Attitudes**

With this basic account of caring and import in hand, we now turn to consider the rational structure of the reactive attitudes.

According to Strawson, the “participant reactive attitudes are essentially natural human reactions to the good or ill will or indifference of [people towards each other], as displayed in *their* attitudes and actions”;²¹ Thus, Strawson includes as reactive attitudes such emotions as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, hurt feelings, esteem, indignation, contempt, self-respect, affection, disapprobation, guilt, remorse, and shame. Yet it is unclear exactly how to extend this list to include other emotions or even how to go about questioning whether

19. This is, of course, an oversimplification, for desires and evaluative judgments can also be a part of the relevant patterns constituting import. For details, see Helm, *Emotional Reason*, Chapter 5.

20. Bennett W. Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

21. Peter F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 195. The passage from which this quote was taken was intended to describe only the personal reactive attitudes; I have somewhat generalized it to include the vicarious and self reactive attitudes as well.

emotions on that list really belong. Is love a reactive attitude? Are the emotions on this list *always* reactive attitudes, or might they be reactive in some cases but non-reactive in other cases?

Wallace, criticizing Strawson's list of reactive attitudes, has argued that it is too encompassing for the purpose of understanding responsibility and that we should instead understand the reactive attitudes to be reactions to the violations of "expectations" or practical requirements to which we hold people in our dealings with them. Consequently, he claims, there are only three paradigm reactive attitudes, all negative: resentment, indignation, and guilt.²² This proposal raises further questions: why only negative reactive attitudes, thereby ruling out gratitude and approbation? And how exactly should we understand this notion of an expectation? In my classes I hold my students not only to the expectations that they not lie or cheat²³ but also that they do the readings and turn in assignments on time. Yet is my frustration with a student who shows up to class unprepared, violating this expectation, a reactive attitude? Even though this seems to fit Wallace's account, it would seem not; nonetheless, a principled reason to rule it out is lacking.

So how should we understand the reactive attitudes: narrowly or broadly? To resolve this issue, we should examine the way paradigm reactive attitudes form rational patterns with a common focus in light of a common commitment to the import of that focus. What, then, is that common focus to the import of which we are committed in having the reactive attitudes?

If I resent you for harming me in some way, my concern for myself makes intelligible the negative evaluation of you implicit in the resentment. This suggests that I myself am the focus of the resentment. (I shall amend this claim in due course.) Of course the type of concern I have for myself in feeling resentment is not the same as the type of concern I have for my car in feeling anger. What distinguishes resentment from anger is that resentment involves an understanding of oneself as having a certain *standing* or *status* that the target of resentment has violated or failed properly to recognize or acknowledge, and the concern implicit in resentment is a concern for this standing. One's own standing, therefore might seem to be the focus of the reactive attitudes. If this is right, then we ought to find rational connections to other emotions having the same commitment to the import of one's standing. Thus, just as my anger at you for stealing my car commits me to having other emotions with the same focus in the appropriate circumstances (including emotions that are both positive and negative, forward-looking and backward-looking—emotions like hope and fear, relief, joy, and frustration), so too my resentment of you commits me to having other reactive emotions focused on me as having the relevant standing: emotions that are both positive and negative and both forward-looking and backward-looking. If this is right then, contra Wallace, were you to support or recognize my standing in a notable way, I ought—given my commitment to the import of that standing—to feel gratitude: a positive, backward-looking reactive attitude. But what about forward-looking reactive attitudes?

Most philosophers tacitly assume that all reactive attitudes are backward-looking: indeed, as *reactive* aren't they are responses to what has already happened? Yet we might construe the

22. R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

23. This example is taken from *ibid.*, 21.

reactivity of reactive attitudes in terms of a response to other persons as themselves having the appropriate standing. After all, inanimate objects and non-human agents are not appropriate targets of reactive attitudes precisely because they do not have the requisite standing. In this way, emotions like trust and distrust can be seen to be reactive attitudes: they are natural human responses to the good or ill will that others may well show us. Indeed, here we find that trust and distrust are rationally connected to paradigm reactive attitudes like resentment as the relevant events in the world occur. Thus, when you betray my trust, I ought, other things being equal, to feel resentment,²⁴ and when you notably uphold my trust I ought, other things being equal, to feel gratitude or respect.²⁵ In short, it looks like there is a distinctive rational pattern of at least what Strawson calls the “personal” reactive attitudes: reactions to the good or ill will someone else shows to *you*, including resentment, gratitude, trust, distrust, and appraisal respect.

As these last examples reveal, we cannot simply understand the focus of such a pattern of reactive attitudes to be the subject as having a certain standing, for the reactive attitudes seem in general to involve an at least equal concern for the standing of others. My trust and subsequent resentment of (or gratitude towards) you when you betray (or uphold) that trust are intelligible as distinct from non-reactive emotions like hope and anger only because they are as much a response to your standing as they are to my own. Indeed, that your standing is something I care about becomes evident when we consider not merely personal reactive attitudes but also what Strawson calls the “vicarious” and “self” reactive attitudes as well. This is a point Strawson himself makes in describing what he calls the “human connection” among the reactive attitudes:

In general, though within varying limits, we demand of others for others, as well as of ourselves for others, something of the regard which we demand of others for ourselves. ... For all these types of attitude alike have common roots in our human nature and our membership of human communities.²⁶

In effect, Strawson is describing rational interconnections among the personal, vicarious, and self reactive attitudes, rightly claiming that my resentment of you for betraying my trust is rationally connected to my own guilt (a self reactive attitude) for betraying the trust of someone else as well as to my indignation (a vicarious reactive attitude) when someone notably betrays the trust of another. If the relevant rational pattern of reactive attitudes includes not just personal but also vicarious and self reactive attitudes, then the common focus of these emotions that makes intelligible the structure of this rational pattern must be more general than just oneself as having a certain standing.

24. This is a point made by Richard Holton, “Deciding to Trust, Coming to Believe,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72, no. 1 (March 1994): 63–76. However, Holton does not explicitly infer that trust itself is a reactive attitude.

25. This is “respect” in the sense of appraisal respect—“*esteem that is merited or earned by conduct or character*” (Stephen L. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006], 122)—which Darwall rightly distinguishes from recognition respect. I’ll have more to say about the latter below on page 11.

26. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” 201.

We can go further than Strawson. Not only are my own personal, vicarious, and self reactive attitudes rationally interconnected in this way; *my* reactive attitudes are also rationally connected with *others'* reactive attitudes. As a first indication of this, it has frequently been claimed that the reactive attitudes have a kind of communicative function; as Gary Watson says:

The reactive attitudes are incipient forms of communication. ... [T]he most appropriate and direct expression of resentment is to address the other with a complaint and a demand.²⁷

Darwall describes the sort of complaint or demand involved in the reactive attitudes in terms of the idea of a second-personal reason: in feeling resentment, I am addressing you with a reason that, given my standing as a person, has a sort of authority to which you ought to respond.²⁸ What I demand or give a reason for is, most fundamentally, that we respond appropriately to each other's standing or authority as members of this human community; such a response is, as Strawson says, "the manifestation of a reasonable degree of goodwill or regard" for that standing.²⁹

Insofar as the reactive attitudes themselves just are ways of responding appropriately to the standing or authority of others, my resentment is in part a demand that you and others respond with the appropriate self and vicarious reactive attitudes; indeed, other things being equal, you and they *ought* to respond precisely because of the authority my standing has. Thus, my resentment (a personal reactive attitude) calls on you to feel guilt (the appropriate self reactive attitude) for the harm you have done me, and it likewise calls on others to feel indignation or disapprobation (the appropriate vicarious reactive attitude); my gratitude (a personal reactive attitude) calls on you to feel what Jonathan Bennett³⁰ calls "self-congratulation" (the appropriate self reactive attitude) and on others to feel approbation (the appropriate vicarious reactive attitude)—all as a part of the demand that we mutually recognize each other's standing as a member of the community. Equally, your guilt calls on me to feel resentment or forgiveness (appropriate personal reactive attitudes) and on others to feel indignation or the nameless vicarious analog to forgiveness ("feeling of restitution?"); and your trust calls on me to respond favorably—to be motivated accordingly—and to feel guilt or self-congratulation depending on how that motivation pans out.³¹

Of course, the demands we make for the recognition of such standing in a community may fail. Thus, I may trust that my junior colleague will bring me coffee every morning and

27. Gary Watson, "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme," in *Free Will and Reactive Attitudes: Perspectives on P. F. Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment"*, ed. Michael McKenna and Paul Russell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 122–23.

28. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*.

29. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," 200.

30. Jonathan Bennett, "Accountability (II)," in McKenna and Russell, *Free Will and Reactive Attitudes*, 47–68.

31. We are here picking up on themes in Karen Jones, "Trust as an Affective Attitude," *Ethics* 107, no. 1 (October 1996): 4–25; Jones claims that trust involves the expectation that the one trusted be directly moved by your reliance on her, and she suggests that to be trustworthy is, other things being equal, to be disposed to be motivated by others' trust. We are generalizing this claim somewhat by understanding trust itself to be a reactive attitude and so to be intelligible in the context of the broader rational pattern they form.

subsequently resent him for failing to do so, seeing that failure as an affront to my standing and so calling on him to feel guilt and on others to feel disapprobation. The appropriateness of the demand, the validity of the reason, and hence the warrant of the resentment itself are not independent of how others in fact respond to that call, taking up and responding to the demand or rejecting it with their own reactive attitudes. Thus, were my colleagues to fail to have the guilt or disapprobation I call on them to have—and, indeed, to feel their own resentment or indignation at my presumptuousness—it would become clear that my resentment fails to fit into the appropriate rational pattern of other reactive attitudes and so is not properly responsive to the import things have. Nonetheless, it is not hard to imagine a different community within which the expectations were different and others did feel disapprobation of my junior colleague; in such a case, my junior colleague would be out of line were he to fail to feel guilty.³²

The upshot is that the rational patterns of reactive attitudes are essentially interpersonal: the personal, vicarious, and self reactive attitudes of each member of a community are rationally connected to those of others.

What, then, does this tell us about the focus of the reactive attitudes and so about the sort of import such patterns constitute? I have said that our reactive attitudes simultaneously both recognize the standing or authority of others and demand that they manifest a similar recognition. As Darwall describes it, such a recognition of another's standing or authority just is a form of respect: it is *recognition respect*, as opposed to appraisal respect (broached above in note 25). Consequently, our claim will be (roughly) that projectible, rational patterns of reactive attitudes constitute the evaluative attitude of recognition respect and, simultaneously, the *dignity* of community members, as that import to which we ought to respond with such respect.

At first blush this may seem clearly false. For the dignity of persons may seem to be that independent value to which we *ought* to respond with recognition respect (and so with the appropriate reactive attitudes), whether or not we in fact do so. Consequently, dignity may seem to be more objective than the sort of import or value discussed thus far: it does not simply correspond with some evaluative attitude like caring or valuing in being relative to the individual.³³ Of course our claim is not that dignity is constituted by patterns of reactive attitudes within a particular individual, as one's cares and personal values are. For the rational patterns of reactive attitudes constitutive of dignity are *interpersonal*, so that one person's failure to respect another can be irrational precisely because it is not properly responsive to the dignity she has by virtue of the pattern found in the rest of our reactive attitudes. Nonetheless, this does not avoid the objection. For what is at issue is the way in which, on our account, dignity is apparently relative to the actual patterns of reactive attitudes we display, whether these patterns are within an individual or are those of a broader community, and it is precisely

32. We do not mean to suggest that what the majority thinks is right actually is right. Surely in general the community can be wrong and can be shown to be wrong by philosophical arguments, among other things. Our claim, however, is that the criteria for correctness will not be independent of our emotional responses. For arguments in a related context, see Helm, *Emotional Reason*, especially Chapter 7; we shall have a bit more to say about it shortly.

33. This is essentially the objection we raised in note 32.

that relativity that seems problematic. After all, historically women and slaves failed to be objects of the rest of our recognition respect, and yet it would be wrong to infer that they did not then have dignity: that failure to give them recognition respect is a failure to respond to the dignity they have anyway, irrespective of our evaluative attitudes.

We have two replies to this. The first, incomplete reply is to acknowledge the way in which import in general can be more objective than simply being the result of already existing patterns of emotions. As one of us has argued elsewhere, we can be wrong about what has (personal) value in our lives: wrong in ways that can show up in deliberation as we explicitly deploy linguistic concepts in an attempt to make best sense of our lives. Nonetheless, the relevant standards of correctness themselves are not independent of the relevant patterns of emotions, for how these linguistic concepts should be understood and deployed depends in part on the ways in which it is possible for them to inform our emotions and so shape the resulting patterns of emotions we feel (Helm, *Emotional Reason*). For the present objection concerning the objectivity of dignity, the worry has its source in our understanding of the concept of a person and the dignity that persons have just because they are persons. Consequently, we suggest, there is at least room on our account to acknowledge how the concept of a person can and ought to shape our emotional responses and so provide reasons why all persons ought to be respected regardless of whether we in fact do so; this is true even while the concept of a person cannot properly be understood apart from the ways in which it can inform our reactive attitudes. Fleshing this out is not something we are prepared to do here (hence the incompleteness of the reply).

Nonetheless—and this is our second reply—we do not think we need to flesh this out, for the battle can be fought on other grounds. In our descriptions above of the rational patterns of reactive attitudes, we appealed vaguely to the idea of our standing or authority within a community and of the ways in which our reactive attitudes are interpersonally connected. What exactly is this “community,” and who are “we” who are members of it? The tendency in recent philosophical thinking about the reactive attitudes has focused on the role they play in ethics in recognizing and responding to others as members of the moral community—the community of persons. We do not think this is required; indeed, we think we can make some headway in understanding what this moral community is, and so what it is to be a person, by first examining what we shall call “communities of respect.”

A *community of respect* is a community within which members ought to respect each other in recognition of the standing or authority each member has to hold each other accountable to certain norms. Thus, groups of philosophers, tennis or chess players, religious or political groups, clubs, study groups, or even (we suggest) the moral community of persons can be communities of respect. In each case, the community is defined by the members’ joint commitment to some activity or project or way of life, where such a commitment simultaneously grounds both each member’s respect for the others and each member’s standing to hold all accountable to the norms of that defining commitment. If this is right, we should be more precise in talking about recognition respect to specify the relevant community: I respect her *as a philosopher* or *as a book club member*, etc. Similarly, we can understand the standing each has within a particular community of respect as a kind of dignity: his dignity *as a chess player*

or *as a person*. Consequently (setting aside complications broached in our first reply), what we wish to vindicate is the idea that someone's dignity as a member of a particular community of respect is constituted by projectible, rational patterns of reactive attitudes.

To see this, assume that the Jones family forms a community of respect and so has a joint commitment to a certain way of life, as this is defined by particular practical norms, such as the norm of putting the toilet seat down after use or of checking to see if others want more of a particular dish before taking seconds. Violations of these norms may, in certain cases, manifest a disregard (or more than minimal regard) for other family members and so be grounds for negative (or positive) reactive attitudes. Thus, when young Ricky starts leaving the toilet seat up ("Why should I put it down? It's just extra work for me!"), the rest of them have grounds to feel disapprobation, and Mrs. Jones, landing on the hard, cold porcelain, has grounds to feel resentment: in the context of their family norms, he's manifesting a selfish disregard for others. Similarly, when Marie quickly gobbles up her pasta and spoons most of the remainder on her plate ("This is so good!"), the rest of them have grounds for resenting her for her greediness. Conversely, if both Marie and Ricky want the last piece of cake, and she cuts it, taking the smaller piece for herself, he has grounds for feeling gratitude for her generosity (and the rest should feel approbation). Here we can begin to see that what the norms of the Jones family are is partly determined by the sorts of behaviors they find appropriately ground the reactive attitudes: putting the toilet seat down is a norm for them because (with minor exceptions) they hold each other accountable for doing so.

The pattern of reactive attitudes similarly defines membership in this community of respect (again setting aside complications broached in my first reply): you are a member of the community just in case, generally speaking, your reactive attitudes are rationally connected with those of other members in response to upholdings or violations of the norms of the community. Thus, if a visitor to the Jones household left the toilet seat up, resentment would not be warranted. This is not merely because he is ignorant of the relevant norm, for it would be rude even to bring this norm to his attention, let alone try to hold him to it. Moreover, if Mr. Jones were to fail to put the seat down, the visitor would not be in a position to object—would not appropriately feel resentment or disapprobation, finding his action to be a slight—precisely because the visitor is not one of the Joneses. For to have the standing to hold others accountable is simultaneously to have the standing to be held accountable oneself: such standing just is the dignity one has as a member of the community of respect.

We are now in a position to return to the question concerning the focus of the reactive attitudes. We have already argued that such a focus cannot be particular members of a community of respect; we can now strengthen that argument. A commitment to the import of the focus is supposed to make sense of the rational structure of these emotions, and we have now seen, partly through Strawson's appeal to the "human connection" among the reactive attitudes, not only that my resentment of you (which may seem to involve a commitment to the dignity I have as a member of the community) is rationally connected to my earlier trust in you (which seems to involve a commitment to your dignity), but also that it is rationally connected to my feeling of guilt were I similarly to betray someone else's trust (involving a commitment to her dignity), and, indeed, to my feeling of resentment of them for their failure

to feel indignation over the harm done to me (involving a commitment to their dignity). Some other, perhaps more general focus must be at issue. It might be thought that the focus of a reactive attitude is some particular norm of the community, for it is violations or upholdings of these norms by members generally that give rise to reactive attitudes. Yet this cannot be right either for similar reasons: my commitment to a particular norm is rationally tied to my commitment to other norms defining the community, for violations of these norms manifest a failure to recognize the dignity of other community members. Hence it is, other things being equal, rationally inappropriate for Mr. Jones to resent Marie's greedily gobbling up the last of the pasta and yet fail to feel disapprobation towards Ricky for leaving the toilet seat up, for each of these is an affront to the dignity of others as members of their community of respect.

All of this suggests that the focus of the reactive attitudes, that to the import of which we are committed in feeling these emotions and that can explain their rational interconnections, is the community itself as a community of respect defined by its central activity, project, or way of life. A member's commitment both to each norm defining that community and to each member of the community is, therefore, subsidiary to her commitment to the community itself, for it is only because of that latter commitment that she finds the norms and the standing of each member to have import in this way. This is analogous to what we find in the case of instrumental rationality: our commitment to the import of the means is subsidiary to our commitment to the import of the end in that we care about the means only as a part of caring about the end. For this structure of instrumental rationality is intelligible in terms of the idea of a *subfocus*: my frustration at failing to attain the means to some end I care about is focused on the end and subfocused on the means, for that frustration fits both into the pattern of emotions constituting my caring about the end and the subpattern of emotions constituting my caring about the means for the sake of that end (Helm, *Emotional Reason*, §4.4).³⁴ Likewise, we can understand the reactive attitudes as being focused on the community itself and subfocused on particular rules or members; indeed we should understand reactive attitudes to have multiple subfocuses. Thus, my resentment of you fits not only into the pattern of reactive attitudes constituting the import of the community itself, but also into the subpatterns of reactive attitudes, subfocused on you (as the perpetrator), me (as the victim), and the norm you violated, constituting my respect for you, me, and a commitment to the norm as binding on us.

An important facet of the rational patterns of reactive attitudes is that they are interpersonal: my gratitude is rationally connected to your self-congratulation and their approbation. Without such an interpersonal structure to the reactive attitudes, we cannot understand the resulting patterns to be responsive to or constitutive of the standing or dignity of members as members, and so we cannot understand the emotions at issue to be reactive attitudes. This interpersonal structure means that rational patterns of our reactive attitudes with a common focus on the defining project or way of life of a community constitutes *our* caring commitment to—our *reverence* for—the community of respect as thus defined and so, as a part of that

34. See also Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self*, where I extend this notion of focus and subfocus to make sense of the way we value what our beloveds value as a part of loving them.

reverence, both *our* respect for each other as members of that community and simultaneously the dignity each has as a member. Consequently, *my* respecting other members as members is something I do only *as one of us* and so only as a part of our reverence for the community and its way of life.

One final point about the reactive attitudes and communities of respect is important. In revering the community and its defining way of life, we thereby undertake a distinctive commitment to our upholding the norms of that community, a commitment that is reflected in the particular reactive attitudes that constitute our reverence. In feeling resentment, gratitude, approbation, disapprobation, and indignation (and the actions these motivate, such as praising, condemning, or punishing), we are thereby *holding* others *responsible* to the community's norms; and by feeling guilt or remorse (and the actions these motivate, such as apologizing and making amends), or self-congratulation or self-approbation, we thereby *take responsibility* for our upholding or failing to uphold those norms. Indeed, as one of us has argued elsewhere,³⁵ our very capacity to take responsibility for our actions in relation to even individual commitments presupposes our being members of a community of respect. For it is only by virtue of interpersonal rational connections within such communities that we are intelligible as having the capacity for reactive attitudes at all, including the self reactive attitudes. Consequently, taking responsibility and holding responsible are possibilities for us only by way of recognizing and responding to the standing or dignity we or others have within communities of respect.³⁶

3 Constitutive Commitment and Objectivity

We now turn to how such an understanding of responsibility and caring bears on questions of objectivity. Recall Haugeland's claim that objective truth requires a constitutive commitment to an ontological understanding of the being of the world, a commitment in which one makes that understanding beholden to the entities themselves in a way that makes entities intelligible as accessible, authoritative, and autonomous. Haugeland takes this commitment (and the entailed responsibility) to be a wholly individual matter. As we argued in §1, it is unclear both how we should understand this commitment in such a way as to make intelligible how it is *binding* on us and whether Haugeland's individualist account of constitutive commitment can make sense of the sort of objectivity we are concerned with in domains such as science and everyday perception. To make such objectivity intelligible, we have suggested, the world and so our constitutive commitment to our ontological understanding of its being must be *shared*, in that what is disclosed, and thus what can subsequently be discovered, must be *accessible* in principle to others with whom we thereby have the possibility of *genuine disagreement*.

35. Bennett W. Helm, "Accountability and Some Social Dimensions of Human Agency," *Philosophical Issues* 22 (2012).

36. It is, therefore, inadequate to understand responsibility, as Haugeland does, as "a responsiveness that finds what is ruled out in the responding entity's *own* actions to be unacceptable *to that entity itself*" (Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude," 60). For such an account omits from responsibility the responsiveness to the dignity of oneself and others and so fails to acknowledge that the type of caring at issue in such recognition is reverence.

Genuine disagreement is disagreement that can be resolved by appeal to a single, shared, autonomous authority and therefore is one in which at least one of those involved in the disagreement must be wrong. In the absence of such a shared authority (as seems to be the case with Haugeland's understanding of constitutive commitment to be fundamentally an individual matter), nothing prevents them from having divergent ontological understandings of the phenomena and so failing to have a common subject matter for disagreement to be possible. Understanding constitutive commitment to be a joint commitment, such that we together are committed to the world as a common, shared authority, thus clears the way for genuine disagreement.

A joint constitutive commitment to the world as a shared authority means that assertions that any of us who are party to that commitment make about how the world is—either about matters of fact or about our ontological understanding—are implicitly claims about how others should see things and so are essentially contestable. By contesting such claims, either by asking for reasons or giving reasons for an alternative, we criticize each other and thereby attempt to hold each other responsible to the world. Our doing so requires that we have standing to criticize each other, a standing that derives from our being party to the joint commitment. If I cannot be held responsible to others, either because my ontological understanding precludes it or because I am simply too stubborn to listen to their criticism, my commitment cannot be understood as to a shared world, and thus falls short of what is needed for objectivity.

Moreover, our being responsible parties to this joint commitment means that we cannot in general ignore criticism raised by those with standing to criticize. Of course, we cannot be expected to respond to criticism or to give an account every time criticism is raised. Those who criticize us may be prejudiced or in other ways blinded to the truth, they may have ulterior motives leading them to distort the truth, or they may lack the necessary expertise, so that their criticisms utterly miss the mark.³⁷ In such cases, attending to and responding to criticism may be otiose. Consequently, in being responsible and responding appropriately to criticism we need to be mindful not only of the *content* of criticism raised, but also how responsible our criticizer is to the world as shared. For example, an evolutionary biologist may dismiss the criticisms leveled against her by a young-earth creationist, because the biologist cares not only about what the criticism is, but also what sort of understanding his criticizer has and whether he is properly responsive to the world. As such, the biologist is able to give reasons for ignoring the criticism, perhaps expressing scorn or disapprobation—appraisal disrespect—at the creationist's poor ontological understanding. Indeed, such appraisal disrespect is in turn an attempt to hold the young-earth creationist responsible to their constitutive commitment; generally to ignore the criticism without holding him responsible would manifest irresponsibility on her part, for which others who do have the proper standing to hold her responsible.

The upshot is that, insofar as a constitutive commitment to a shared world must make genuine disagreement possible, it must also be a commitment to recognizing one another as

37. Consider the community of respect defined by the practice of philosophy. If someone's criticism of my account amounts to deliberately setting up and attacking a straw man, I obviously need not take such criticism seriously.

having the proper standing to criticize each other and to holding each other responsible to that commitment. We can see this same point in a somewhat different way by considering a case not of someone who has a poor ontological understanding but rather of someone who abuses the joint constitutive commitment for personal gain. Thus consider Raymond, an established scientist who has gained others' appraisal respect through solid publications of rigorous and creative studies. Because of Raymond's responsible habits, other scientists in his field have reason to *trust* him and so to take his views and criticism (both implicit and explicit) quite seriously. Assume, however, that in his most recent study, Raymond fabricated results, and deliberately misrepresented data in order to support his hypothesis. Such fabrication and misrepresentation betrays other scientists' trust in him, providing them with reason to *resent* him as a scientist, thereby holding him responsible to their joint constitutive commitment. Holding him responsible in this way calls on him to take responsibility: to feel guilty for his betrayal of their trust and his manifest irresponsibility.

As such, our responsibility is not only to a shared world and thus to the shared understanding such a world presupposes, but it must also be a responsibility that involves, other things being equal, each responding appropriately to criticism and to giving appropriate reasons to others (and asking them for reasons). Because taking each other seriously implicitly involves recognizing each other as having the standing to give criticism, this responsibility is not merely a matter of relying on each other, in the way one relies on a thermometer. For although we often speak in ways that suggest a similarity (the piece of equipment is responsible for the bad data; a faulty thermometer is to blame, the balance is true), and so although we can in a sense "blame" a thermometer for giving us bad data, we cannot hold the thermometer to account for its failure or demand that it gives us an account or offer us reasons as we can others who are also committed to shared, objective truth. By contrast, when others who have the proper standing criticize us they are *holding* us responsible for our understanding and *calling on us* to respond appropriately; if we don't, they can blame us for that failure—for being irresponsible. Such holding responsible is in part a way of calling on us to *take* responsibility for our understanding by taking that criticism seriously—a call that we cannot without reason ignore given our commitment to shared, objective truth and so to our and others' status as responsible to the world as shared.

Such intra- and interpersonal rational connections among the reactive attitudes is precisely what defines the relevant community as a community of respect. The reactive attitudes and communities of respect make intelligible constitutive commitments—revering shared, objective truth—and the practice of holding each other accountable for our understandings. We claim that the best way to make sense of these practices of holding ourselves and others responsible to the objective world, and so to make sense of constitutive commitment to objective truth, is by appeal to the place the reactive attitudes have in constituting a community of respect such that we jointly revere objective truth and, as a part of this reverence, jointly respect (in the recognition sense) each other as members of that community. This means that each member has the standing to hold others responsible to the norms and practices of that community: norms and practices that are grounded in and make intelligible our constitutive commitment to—our joint reverence for—objective truth. Likewise, each member ought, as

a part of her reverence for objective truth, to take responsibility for her epistemic actions. As we have argued, such taking responsibility and holding responsible is in large part a matter of feeling the reactive attitudes and so calling on others to respond appropriately. If this is right, then we should not say with Haugeland that constitutive commitment is fundamentally an individual matter: our capacity to take responsibility for our epistemic agency—to hold ourselves responsible to the objective world—is intelligible only insofar as we can be held responsible by others (and can hold others responsible) as members of a community of respect. A constitutive commitment to the objective world is something *we* undertake jointly.