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The Second Person:
Comparative Perspectives

I. Overview of the Aim of the Seminar

Our summer seminar proposes to examine the concept of *the second person*. On the one hand, this concept has recently moved into the center of research in a number of distinct fields, though not necessarily under this description. On the other hand, researchers within each of these fields are largely unconscious of the parallel developments within the other fields. This is in no small part due to the fact that the level at which our topic is conceptualized, and thus the terminology employed to designate it, varies tremendously from one field to the next, ranging over topics apparently as diverse as "joint intention", "bi-polar relations", "trust", "authority", "recognition", and "acknowledgment", to mention just a few of the relevant candidates. The primary aim of the seminar is to do justice to the particularities of the phemonena appearing in these different guises, while at the same time to reveal a common problematic, thus uncovering the ubiquity of a certain conceptual structure.

Our method will be to examine the topic of the second person comparatively – that is, across a variety of contexts of disciplinary inquiry – with a special focus on the following five disciplines, which have thus far explored its significance in relative isolation from one another: (1) practical philosophy, (2) theoretical philosophy, (3) jurisprudence, (4) primatology, and (5) theology. We will also be concerned to explore the historical evolution of thought about this topic across all of these disciplines in both the Anglo-American and German intellectual traditions. For, as will become clear below, certain historical junctures had a decisive influence in shaping current understandings of the possible scope and nature of the second-person concept within each of these traditions. (Two further disciplines that will concern us peripherally, and in which this topic is currently receiving an increasing degree of attention, are linguistics, where it arises in the form of an inquiry into the second person as a syntactico-grammatical form, and sociology, where it arises in the form of an inquiry into the structure of communicative social action). Our secondary aim is to overcome a number of disciplinary and institutional divides that have thus far plagued inquiry into this topic, not only between these fields, but also within them. As will also become clear below, the following four divides will concern us in particular: (1) between historians of ideas and contemporary theoreticians, (2) between European-Continental and Anglo-American theoretical traditions, (3) between traditions of empirical inquiry into and a priori reflection on the capacities of higher animals, and (4) between theorists of the foundations of practical agency and theorists of the foundations of theoretical cognition. It is our hope that our seminar will help foster the desperately needed communication and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization between these five disciplines and four sorts of institutional divide.

At first blush, it might seem that we really have to do here with four disciplines, one of which we have slyly undertaken to count twice, by representing the first two disciplines listed above – practical and theorical philosophy – as two separate fields of inquiry, rather than as two branches of one discipline: philosophy. Our claim is not that they ought to be so divided from one another (quite the contrary), but rather that, as a matter of cultural and institutional practice, they have been conducted as if they were thus isolable, thus obscuring the fundamental role played by the second-person relation in all cognition, practical as well as theoretical. It is simply an accomplished fact about the structure of the division of intellectual labor at universities on both sides of the Atlantic that, when it comes to a topic such as ours, practical and theo-

retical philosophy are pursued as if they were two independent self-standing disciplines. Indeed, the disciplinary divide *within* philosophy is in many respects deeper than it is *across* some of the disciplines that are relevant to our topic. For, while there is at least some degree of overlap and communication between scholars interested in this topic in practical philosophy and those in law and primatology and sociology (where, in each case, the problem is conceived as pertaining in some way to the dynamics of social interaction), as there is also between scholars in theoretical philosophy and those in linguistics and theology (where, in each case, the problem is modeled in some way on the grammatical second-person form of address), there is virtually none between these two sets of disciplines. Mirroring the contemporary institutional divide within philosophy itself, each of these two sets of disciplines looks back, for its fundametental concepts, to one of these two "areas" of philosophy, while neglecting the other.

II. The Second Person across the Five Disciplines

1. The Second Person in Contemporary Practical Philosophy

This is the area in which the most extensive attention has been paid to the concept of the second person in recent years, and in which the most thorough conversations have taken place about its form, function, scope, and proper analysis. In contemporary analytic moral philosophy there has been in the past five years or so an undeniable explosion of interest in this topic. However, even those authors who are in agreement about the importance of this topic for moral philosophy are often deeply in disagreement with one another about the proper analysis of its foundations. Two broad tendencies have emerged – a Kantian and an Aristotelian one – represented most influentially by Stephen Darwall and Michael Thompson respectively. In his recent book, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (which appeared in 2006 and received extraordinary attention and thus can be presumed to have touched the nerve of its subject), Darwall represents the relation of human beings to each other as second persons as fundamental to morality: the meeting of minds in which one person addresses another is the manner in which both recognize themselves as joined together by an unconditional practical law. Thus, according to Darwall, this law – the moral law – governs not subjects in isolation, but subjects that relate to each other as second persons. Darwall represents the fundamental insight in question here as Kantian in origin in the sense that it rests on a conception of the sort of relation that *rational* beings *as such* necessarily owe to one another. Thompson, in his equally recent paper "What is it to Wrong Someone?", also develops a conception according to which the fundamental moral relation between persons is a two-place one. Though certain aspects of the final picture on Thompson's account are very similar to Darwall's, the manner in which they are arrived at is very different. Thompson represents the fundamental insight in question here as Aristotelian in origin, in that it rests on a conception of the sort of relation that specifically *human* beings, joined together in characteristically human practices, owe to one another.

A philosophical tradition associated most prominently with the names of Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth is shaped by what appears to be at bottom the same idea as the one that animates Darwall's book. Habermas finds the foundation of morality in an interaction of subjects in which they recognize each other as determinable by the force of reasons: discourse. Honneth develops the idea that, contra Hobbes, who holds that human beings as such relate to each other as a threat to their survival, human beings fundamentally relate to each other in a struggle for recognition, which, as it is already a moral relation, is the source of a moral development toward a just form of society. In the work of Habermas and Honneth, the words "the second person" are not prominent. But many terms signify the intended structure: recognition is a second-personal relation; "*Teilnehmerperspektive*" is another word for the second-person standpoint; and "*intersubjectivity*" in this context signifies a unity of subjects that relate to each other as second persons. There is no reference to Habermas in Darwall's book. And yet, the convergence is no coincidence, but manifests a common root in the tradition of German Idealism: while Darwall traces his idea to Fichte, Honneth's account takes its departure from the early Hegel. One goal of the seminar will be to trace and explore this common root.

There is here also the first of several opportunities that will concern us, where a certain sort of philosophically nuanced work in the history of ideas can be especially helpful to an understanding of our topic. Thus, for example, interesting historical work has been done specifically on the topic of the second person in an exegetical context by Anglo-American historians of German Idealism, such as Paul Franks

and Robert Pippin; and this work has yet to be brought into conversation with the contemporary currents in both Anglo-American and German moral and social philosophy. Not only has there been no sustained dialogue yet between such historians of philosophy and contemporary philosophers working on this topic, but the aforementioned Anglophone-analytic and European-continental traditions have yet to acknowledge one another's existence! At least this was the situation until very recently. In the past couple of years, several German philosophers literate in both the analytic and Continental traditions, most notably, Christoph Menke, Pirmin Stekeler, and Lutz Wingert, have shown an interest in bridging one or another of the aforementioned philosophical and cultural divides. In the summer of 2012, the three of them would play a central role in our seminar. In addition, three further European philosophers – one French, one Swedish, and one Finnish – have shown a recent interest in different aspects of our topic: Jocelyn Benoist, Martin Gustafsson, and Lars Herzberg. Our plan is to involve each of them in one of the meetings in the summer of 2012.

2. The Second Person in Contemporary Theoretical Philosophy

In his book, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, Stephen Darwall takes second-personal reasons to be constitutive of the kind of reasons that moral reasons are. This view is common among the authors discussed in the previous section. Darwall is unusual only in that he takes the trouble to argue that there are no irreducibly second-personal theoretical reasons. This then makes for a sharp distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning: while practical reasoning admits of irreducibly second-personal reasons, theoretical reasoning does not. Yet a number of recent authors have attempted to undercut this way of drawing the distinction between practical and theoretical philosophy by making a case for the existence of irreducibly second-personal epistemic reasons. The two most substantial cases have both been made very recently and utterly independently of one another: by Mark Lance & Rebecca Kukla, in their *Yo! And Lo!: The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons* (2009); and by Benjamin McMyler, in his *Testimony, Trust and Authority* (forthcoming, 2010). Both of these accounts, however, build on earlier seminal writings by G. E. M. Anscombe, J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell, Richard Moran, and Angus Ross.

The strongest case for second-personal reasons in the sphere of theoretical philosophy, as Darwall notes, is to be found in the *epistemology of testimony*, the branch of the theory of knowledge concerned with how we acquire knowledge from the say-so of other people. On all accounts, a great deal of what we know is in fact acquired in this way, and therefore general epistemological theories of the nature of knowledge and justification ought to have something to say about the kind of knowledge and justification acquired from the word of others. Yet, until very recently, this has been a strangely neglected topic. The aim of the seminar in yoking this topic together with the broader topic of the seminar is to demonstrate that the epistemology of knowledge based on testimony reveals one of the ways in which the human mind is a constitutively social phenomenon – one of the ways in which being the kind of minded being that we are essentially involves participating in social relationships. Attention to testimony helps, in particular, to bring out how the category of other persons plays a distinctive and irreducible role in theoretical, as well as practical, cognition. We bear relations of epistemic (and not only practical) dependence on others that are irreducibly interpersonal in nature, relations that we do not bear to non-persons, and such epistemic dependence is an essential feature of what it is to be a human being. Or so we will be concerned to suggest.

The philosophy of testimony is arguably the area in which a proper appreciation of how deeply second-personal reasons are anchored in our cognitive lives comes most into conflict with our current picture of how knowledge works. Knowledge based on testimony is said to involve "taking another's word for things", "taking things on the authority of another", or "trusting another for the truth". For the vast majority of philosophers, however, such terms are (and indeed must be) mere placeholders to be replaced in the end by epistemological concepts that are deemed vastly more palatable – concepts like that of inductive evidence or reliable causal belief-producing processes. The idea that there might be something *sui generis* about the epistemology of testimony having to do with the way in which it is connected to the notions of trust and authority is thus roundly dismissed as not only false but verging on the nonsensical. This calls for a diagnosis of why, from a philosophical point of view, the role of the second person in this sphere of our lives can seem so difficult to accept. There is a crucial feature of the philosophical legacy of the Englightenment that we have yet to overcome: the idea that fully rational cognitive agents are always, qua self-standing individuals, solely epistemically responsible for the justification of their own beliefs. There is therefore here a further opportunity for philosophically nuanced work in the history of ideas to illuminate our topic. Benjamin McMyler, in particular, has argued that an extremely important, though largely unrecognized, shift occurred in the Early Enlightenment period in philosophical conceptions of

testimony and testimonial knowledge. Whereas prior to the Enlightenment testimonial knowledge or belief was often taken to be based on faith, a cognitive capacity distinctively connected to authority, figures like John Locke and David Hume began to portray testimony as a kind of inductive evidence, thereby severing the traditional connection between testimony and authority. This shift in the way in which testimony was conceived was a straightforward application to the epistemic realm of broader Enlightenment suspicions concerning the place of authority in political and religious affairs, but it is one that is seldom recognized. It amounts to a substantive claim about the nature of theoretical rationality, that fully rational cognitive agents are epistemically autonomous. Standard contemporary theories concerning the epistemology of testimony are typically framed in such a way as simply to assume this epistemic autonomy thesis. This has helped to hide from view the way second-personal relations play a constitutive role in the theoretical as well as in the practical sphere.

3. The Second Person in Contemporary Jurisprudence

One area in which an enormous amount of work has been done on the analysis of a particular species of second-personal nexus is in the jurisprudence of torts. In the Anglo-American literature, the writings of three theorists of tort law stand out here: Arthur Ripstein, Martin Stone, and Ernest Weinrib. Tort law is concerned with a particular sort of situation – one which is as ubiquitous in human affairs as it is inherent, as a possibility, in the fact of human action: a situation in which the actions of one person are connected to the misfortune of another. Tort law asks: Is the plaintiff's suffering a consequence of some impropriety on the defendant's part, or is it a mere misfortune, a case of bad luck? If there is impropriety – if, for example, the likely prospect of the plaintiff's suffering makes it negligent for the defendant to have acted as he did – then the plaintiff is entitled to receive, and the defendant is obliged to pay, compensation. How is the nature of this nexus between individuals to be understood?

Until recently the dominant account of this nexus was in functionalist terms and the primary source of controversy had to do with which account of these terms was the correct one. Ripstein, Stone and Weinrib have all argued, however, that functionalist analyses are unable to yield an account of tort law capable of attaching direct normative significance to the relation that exists between two persons whenever it appropriately can be claimed, concerning a certain harm, that one person did it and the other suffered it. The bi-polar character of the nexus between doing and suffering of wrong, on their account, is the key element in the situation which brings a concern for the sort of corrective justice dispensed by tort law into play. And this nexus is a second-personal one and it is fundamental to the phonemonon in question. As in contemporary epistemology, so too in contemporary legal theory, second-personal phenemena (in the one case: the nexus of testimony, in the other: that of the tort) can only come into view as mere epiphenomena which are putatively reducible to something more fundamental. Indeed, it is remarkable to what degree the current anti-functionalist movement in this area of the analysis of law recapitulates central lines of thought in Kant and Hegel, which in turn are formative influences for the current debates in moral philosophy.

These issues also arise in international private law, where they acquire a peculiar urgency, on account of the absence of any overarching territorially neutral legal framework. This form of the issue is currently a focus of research among the members of the legal-theory research-group *Wandel des transnationalen Arbeits- und Wirtschaftsrechts* in Frankfurt am Main. This group is part of the *Excellence Cluster Normative Orders* in Frankfurt am Main, led by Klaus Günther (Jurisprudence) and Rainer Forst (Political Science), whose members also include Honneth and Menke, who are important figures in the Habermas tradition of the theory of recognitive relations. One aim of the workshop is to bring this community of researchers in Frankfurt into better dialogue with some of their North American counterparts and vice versa.

4. The Second Person in Contemporary Primatology

Recent studies of animal cognition, in particular of the cognitive powers of animals (such as monkeys and apes) that are closely related to humans along the evolutionary lineage, have sought not only to identify precursors of faculties that humans inherited from their relatives in the animal kingdom, but also to pinpoint a fundamental difference that explains the startling divergence in manner of life. One currently prominent line of inquiry suggests that human beings are distinguished by their power to enter into a spe-

cial kind of unity of consciousness with each other. In its most elementary form, this power is manifest in shared intention and joint attention, which arguably form the ontogenetic basis of language acquisition. The relation to our theme first comes into focus when it is noted that the point is *not* that human beings are alone in conceiving of their conspecifics as intentional and cognitive creatures (for they are not alone in this), but rather that there is a *special form* in which human beings figure in the minds of one another, namely, not just as one of the things with which one must reckon (in the ways appropriate to a thing of this kind, e.g., a creature of perception and intention), but rather as one with whom one is joined in practical and cognitive acts in such a way that the act in question (attention or action) is possible only as performed by both. Although the point is not made in this area of research in these terms, it is evident that the underlying claim under contestation here is that it is in fact the second-person concept which defines the *conditio humana*.

Conversely, both the moral philosophers and the epistemologists mentioned above, who place special weight on the irreducible role of the second person in our lives, tend to assume that in so doing they are identifying a constitutive feature of what it is to be human. An exploration of the extent to which primates are able to enter into such relationships with one another is therefore simultaneously a test of the extent to which these philosophical claims (about what is constitutively human) are able to withstand empirical scrutiny. Frans de Waal and his co-researchers have been concerned to argue that the roots of the manner in which human beings relate to another qua moral beings are, indeed, to be found in the interactions of members of certain other social animal communities. This claim has drawn fire from a number of leading philosophers (such as Christine Korsgaard), but is also contested by other primate scientists. Michael Tomasello's findings, for example, point in a different direction, suggesting that there is a manner in which human beings relate to one another that has no parallel in the animal world. A number of his experiments, on the one hand, seem to show that the actions of two primates, even when they are interrelated, do not have their origin in a single shared intention. Related complementary experiments on human infants, conducted by his co-workers at Leipzig, Henrike Moll and Hannes Rakoscy, on the other hand, suggest that such a capacity to enter into second-personal relations is indeed fundamental to human infant development.

5. The Second Person in Contemporary Theology

In the wake of the Enlightenment, academic theology was one of the disciplines that sought to understand the category of knowledge it investigated in terms that could be rendered consistent with a principle of epistemic autonomy. Especially under the influence of the work of Schleiermacher, it sought its basis in the autonomous self-consciousness of the pious subject. However, the 20th century, most forcefully in the work of Martin Buber, returned to and rejuvenated the traditional thought that theology rests on a relation to God, which (since God is a person) is formally a relation to a person; that is, it is a second-personal relation. In recent work, Eleonore Stump and Christina Aus der Au have explored the consequences of this idea for the method of interpretation of biblical scriptures and for a Christian ethics of nature. But the thought has a formal side which lends it an interest that reaches beyond theology: the relation to God is not one among many (for God is not one among many); rather, it is the first and fundamental address that grounds and thus is manifest in any second-personal relation among humans. This latter thought responds to a motive that is equally present in recent moral philosophical work on the issue: in a second-personal relation, one represents oneself as depending on the other and the other on oneself. It appears that such a relation of mutual dependence itself depends on something that a priori conjoins both parties and therefore transcends them. Various proposals have been made as to what this is: *the human life-form* (Aristotle, Thompson), *the moral law* (Kant, Fichte, Darwall), *Sittlichkeit* (Hegel, Pippin). It appears an open question whether any of these is successful. Hence it seems, on the one hand, that the theological approach to these issues might well have something to contribute to the others, and, on the other hand, that it cannot itself be fully thought through in isolation from a proper appreciation of the considerations that arise in these related areas of inquiry.

Again, especially here, philosophically nuanced work in the history of ideas, in this case theological ideas, promises to help clarify the intellectual sources and subsequent development of the topic under investigation in this seminar. For arguably the relation between the human and the Divine was the original context in which the *sui generis* character of the second-personal relation was first subjected to a searching

analysis – in connection with questions such as "What is the difference between believing that God exists and having faith in God?" and "What is the difference between trusting that God is good and trusting in God's goodness?". Such questions came back into the focus of theology, initially through the work of Søren Kierkegaard, and in the subsequent elaboration of his ideas on the character of the human/Divine relation in the writings of Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Even in the recent philosophical context, it is noteworthy that the seminal source for certain contemporary ideas about the second person both in analytic epistemology (e.g., on what it is to trust someone's word) and in philosophy of language (e.g., on what the semantic significance is of the syntactically marked difference between, say, trusting or believing *that* and trusting or believing *in*) is a set of essays of G. E. M. Anscombe's in the philosophy of religion, initially devoted to clarifying what it is involved in talk of belief in God. These theological sources of various current cutting-edge moral, epistemological, and linguistic theories have fallen completely out of view.

III. Schedule and Format of the Seminar

Each of the summer sessions of the seminar will divide into four units. In the first summer, these units will be as follows: (1) Analytic practical philosophy, (2) the philosophy of testimony, (3) a historical interlude on the British empiricist critique of relations of authority and trust, and (4) the theory of tort law. In the second summer, the units will be as follows: (1) the Habermas/Honneth tradition of the theory of recognition, (2) a historical interlude on the common German Idealist root of Anglo-American and contemporary German interest in the concept of the second person, (3) primatological research on the possibility of non-human second-personal relations, and (4) theology, as the original source, as well as an important contemporary locus, of reflection on the second person.

The rationale for this organization of the material is due partly to intellectual and partly to logistical considerations. Our intellectual grounds are the following. We wish to begin the seminar as a whole with analytic practical philosophy, as that is where our central concept has hitherto received the most explicit attention. And we wish then to move immediately on to theoretical philosophy, as recent work in that area permits us to see how fundamental our topic is to *any* account of human mindedness, not just ones concerned with practical agency. The first historical interlude will bring to light parallel motives operative in both practical and theoretical philosophy that have served as impediments to a proper appreciation of the significance of the second person to human mental life. In the second summer, a return to the problematic as it arises in practical philosophy will allow the seminar to re-boot, as it were, though now from the German side, by focusing on a dominant contemporary school of thought in which it has resurfaced in a striking fashion. The second historical interlude, through a reflection on the shared historical antecedents of our two traditions of thought, will allow us to connect back up with the literature discussed in the first summer. Closing the seminar with primatology and theology respectively, moving first all the way down to the animal sphere and then all the way up to the Divine sphere, will permit us, by way of conclusion, to probe and gauge the scope of our guiding concept.

We would like to have the seminar meet in Chapel Hill for the first summer in 2011 (in order to be able to take advantage of the excellent facilities at the National Humanities Center) and then in Berlin for the second summer in 2012 (in order to be able to take advantage of the expertise of the staff at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in organizing such ventures). This plan is connected to the logistical justification for our distribution of topics. It will allow us to explore those aspects of the topic most under discussion in North America while conducting the seminar on that side of the Atlantic. Conversely, the topics selected for the second summer permit us to take advantage of the presence of experts in Europe (especially in Helsinki, Paris, and Stockholm) and, above all, in the German-speaking world (especially in Basel, Berlin, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Zürich) who have worked on the topics that figure in our final four units. The advantages of such an arrangement (especially if one takes into account that we will be inviting outside experts whom we have reason to anticipate will be very eager to participate) is that it will allow us at a very low cost to invite one outside expert per unit, for a total of four per summer. Our provisional candidates for our two sets of outside experts are Darwall, Moran, McMyler, and Stone, for the first summer, and Honneth, Pippin, Tomasello, and Aus der Au, for the second summer. As mentioned above, we also plan to invite Christoph Menke, Pirmin Stekeler, Lutz Wingert, Jocelyn Benoist, Martin Gustafsson, and Lars Herzberg to some of the seminar meetings as additional participants during the second summer. The latter would be guests of the seminar and arrangements will be made for each to be in Berlin during part of the

summer of 2012 at their own expense. They have all expressed an interest in participating. These six guests are to be distinguished from the aforementioned eight outside experts. These eight will have their work assigned and discussed in the seminar and will receive an honorarium for their participation.

We would like to solicit applicants from all of the following disciplines: anthropology, German studies, history of science, history of religious thought, Jewish studies, law, linguistics, philosophy, primatology, sociology, and theology. We would call upon the respective expertise of Aus der Au, Stekeler, Stone, and Tomasello for assistance in vetting applicants from the correlative disciplines of theology, sociology, linguistics, law, and primatology. We would like our applicants to be in the final stages of completing their Ph.D. or to have completed it within the last few years. In the summer of 2011, the focus of activity for the participants we select will be preparing and discussing the assigned readings and interacting with our outside experts. In the summer of 2012, the focus will shift, as we will ask each participant also to prepare and distribute a text of their own for discussion in the seminar. Our rationale for this schedule is that we wish to allow the participants to have a chance to digest the material covered in the first summer, with the benefit of the entire intervening year to work on their texts.

The format of the seminar will be the following: all reading material will be distributed to the participants four weeks prior to the beginning of each summer session, with the expectation that the participants will come to the first meeting having already done all of the reading for that summer. This rule will also apply to the texts by the participants to be discussed during the summer of 2012. The readings will be of two sorts: seminal published texts on our concept, on the one hand, and cutting-edge unpublished work solicited from our outside experts or contributed by our participants. We wish to keep presentations in the seminar to a minimum in order to allow maximum time for discussion. Outside experts and participants alike will be given to understand that the papers they have sent will have been read in advance by everyone and thus do not need to be read out in the seminar. Each morning and afternoon session will begin with a short synopsis and comment on the assigned readings by one of the seminar participants, followed by an intensive discussion, structured and led by the co-conveners. For each session, one of the participants will also be assigned the task of taking a protocol and writing up the central results of each discussion. Given the interlude of an intervening year between the two halves of the seminar, the existence of such an archive will help to ensure the smooth continuity of our joint investigation.