

The Egoist's Seesaw

Reflections on Korsgaard's Publicity of Reasons Thesis

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1

Bert: Oh, Ernie, what are you doing with those cookies in bed, huh?

Ernie: Oh, the cookies? Well, I was just hungry, Bert, so I thought I'd have a few cookies before I went to sleep.

Bert: Ernie, Ernie, don't eat those cookies while you're in your bed, huh?

Ernie: Why not, Bert?

Bert: Because you'll get crumbs in the sheets, that's why.

Ernie: Gee, Bert, I'll get crumbs in the sheets?

Bert: Yeah, Ernie, and if there are crumbs in the sheets, they'll get in your pajamas.

Ernie: Oooo, crumbs in my pajamas, Bert?

Bert: Yeah, yeah, Ernie, and if you get crumbs in your pajamas, they'll make you itch.

Ernie: Oh, I don't like to itch, Bert.

Bert: No, and if you itch, you won't be able to sleep, Ernie. So don't do it, okay? Good night. (Goes back to sleep.)

Ernie: Oh, gee, if I eat the cookies in bed, I'll get crumbs in my sheets. And if I get crumbs in the sheets, I'll get crumbs in my pajamas. And if I get crumbs in my pajamas, I'll itch! And I won't be able to sleep! (Gets up, carrying the plate of cookies.) Oh, Bert, thank you so much for stopping me from eating cookies in my bed!

Bert: Alright, Ernie. Just ... just go to bed, though, okay?

Ernie: Okay. And I'm never going to eat cookies in my bed again!

Bert: Okay, good. (Ernie starts getting into Bert's bed with the cookies) Ernie? What are you doing?

Ernie: I'm gonna eat cookies in your bed, Bert. Move over. (Begins eating them as Bert sighs)

Call Egocentric someone for whom other people's reasons do not so much as offer themselves for consideration; other people's reasons are, as it were, not even on sites. Contrast that with the familiar Egoist, who *discounts* other people's reasons: the Egoist takes herself to be aware of and even, in a sense, to acknowledge other people's reasons (you are entitled to promote your interests at my peril, as I am mine at yours, the Egoist will typically say). But she takes other people's reasons, in and of themselves, to lie outside what she regards as legitimate sources of motivation¹.

¹ What sense we can make of the notion of "other people's reasons" is the topic I am exploring. I am less concerned at this point with *what* the Egocentric is not seeing and the Egocentric is not responding to, than I am in *that* they are not.

The Egoist poses a significant obstacle in the way of Kantian foundational accounts of morality. She purports to vouch *both* a commitment to the practicality of reason *and* a rejection of morality. She therefore hits the Kantian where it hurts: the Kantian takes his finest achievement to lie in showing *that* reason is practical; the Egoist suggests that his finest achievement – or what it comes to - does not get him what he wants. *What* reason's practicality amounts to is not, at least not necessarily, morality.

Now consider the sketch above. Part of the amusement comes of course from what Ernie *does*; it's funny even just reading. But when you watch it you'll see that the *way* Ernie does it adds to the amusement. The casualness and ease² with which he moves to Bert's bed suggest that this is an extreme case of Egocentricity. Moreover, the settings of the sketch reveal none of the familiar circumstances where Egocentric behavior is to be expected: the context is not competitive, no threat to life and limb is in the offing, etc.. This suggests that Ernie's Egocentrism is pathological; *we* would surely have been aware of Bert's prospective discomfort. But why is *that* funny? I think at least in part because of the releasing of a certain fantasy. For us, eating in Bert's bed represents a familiar, all too often present, *Egoistic* temptation, a temptation to behave selfishly *despite* other people's interests to the contrary, to discount their reasons. Ernie's expression of extreme, all but autistic obliviousness to other people's reasons, enacts the shedding off of this familiar, familiarly vexing moral baggage.

Consider for a moment the workings of this region of the joke. Think how natural it is to go for an Egoistic Ernie. If someone steps on my foot, and does so, for all the world, intentionally, I should think that they have done so in spite of my reasons, rather than unawares. Ernie's Egocentrism is comic because Egoism is, as it were, the default stance, the form of explanation we naturally opt for. If this is true then the Egoist can be thought to pose the Kantian not merely a theoretical challenge but also a phenomenological one: suppose that reason's practicality does give

² Not *too* many nuances there, it is, after all, a puppet. But one should use one's imagination watching these kinds of things. To me it's almost as if Ernie is whistling while making his way to Bert's bed.

us morality, what sort of “error” then is the Egoist making exactly, and what accounts for its pervasiveness? Why is it that our mind so persistently slants, as it were, in that particular way? Why is Egoism, as opposed to Egocentrism, unremarkable?

Here already lies a call for philosophy, perhaps I should say philosophy of a particular kind. The nature of the challenge suggests that the muddle at hand is in some sense *deep*. Presumably, we are not all *missing something*, nor do we all happen to make the same crucial *mistake* when entertaining the Egoistic option. And yet philosophers have traditionally approached the matter in this vain³. Their accounts seek to open our eyes to the fact that other people's reasons are among the things one ought to care about. In other words, they try to provide us with reasons – reasons the Egoist fails to appreciate - to respect other people's reasons.

In suggesting that the Egoist misses a connection between *her* reasons and *other people's* reasons, one already grants that reasons *may belong to someone in particular*. But what if we reject that idea? What if reasons essentially bind oneself and other people all the same, ie, are essentially communal, shared? The Egoistic predicament may then take on an entirely different shape: instead of thinking that morality represents a progress from an earlier *naïveté*, it may be open to us to think of Egoism as a kind of vitiation of a logically prior moral stance. Instead of thinking that the Egoist is, as it were, en route *to* morality, awaiting our opening her eyes to some missing consideration, it might now be open for us to think that her view demonstrates a particular way of distorting the moral stance, a stance already in some sense hers.

A significant achievement of Christine Korsgaard's “Publicity of Reasons” thesis lies, to my mind, in its insistence that there is room to re-conceptualize our approach to the Egoist along these lines. We had taken the Egoist to (unlike the Egocentric) see other people's reasons, *and* discount them for her own. But if the publicity thesis is correct then something has got to give: *either* I see other people's reasons, as Korsgaard likes to say, as reasons - i.e. as normative for them and me - *or* I discount them. This puts pressure on the distinction between the Egoist and the Egocentric, as the

³ *Sources*, 132-3

former might now also be thought to display a form of blindness to “other people's reasons”. But she is not, as it were, *oblivious* to these reasons. Rather, her blindness may be figured as a kind of denial, a refusal to acknowledge what she knows. While the Egocentric is blind, if you will, the Egoist shuts her eyes. My inquiry into the nature of Korsgaard's Publicity Thesis, then, is tuned in an Egoistic key; you might say I treat the sketch above like a grammatical joke. How is it deep?

2

Korsgaard addresses the Egoistic objection to her account of the reality of morality in two locals in her work: early on, in *The Sources* and more recently in *Self Constitution*⁴. The arguments against the Egoist both turn on the idea that normativity is public, in the following sense: grant that you stand in an “ought relation” to a reason or a value, and you have already allowed others right of passage to the same relation. The Egoist blunders because she acknowledges the normativity of reasons, but holds also that others *cannot* stand in the same “ought relation” to them she does.

In “The Myth of Egoism”⁵ Korsgaard argues against attempts, dominant especially in the social sciences, to “naturalize” the Egoistic principle by equating it with the principle of instrumental reason. She is not so much interested in the refutation of Egoism, as in its unmasking: Egoism is a substantive normative thesis, and the robes of the principle of instrumental reason will not cover its normative ambition: the claim that the principle of maximal satisfaction holds ultimate normative authority. This is crucial to Korsgaard's fending off of the Egoist's objections to the arguments in favor of the reality of morality. For Korsgaard's arguments against the Egoist build on the assumption that *the Egoist distinguishes herself from the practical skeptic*: hers is *not* the position that one isn't bound to do anything. It thus is not the case that the Egoist, when making her objections to Korsgaard's arguments for the reality of morality, believes that, since there is no justificatory account to be found in support of *any* substantive normative agenda, one choice is as good as another, and she - why not? - *picks* the principle of maximal satisfaction to guide her

⁴ Korsgaard, Christine M., *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, and *Self-constitution agency, identity, and integrity*, Oxford Press, 2009.

⁵ Korsgaard, Christine M., “The Myth of Egoism”, *The Constitution of Agency*, Oxford Press, 2008, 69-99

policies. Rather, our Egoist perceives Egoism to be in line with what is *rationally required* and to take it that some things *are* so required. Purporting to stand as a counterexample to the Kantian, the Egoist does not denounce the reality of practical reason itself, but only vies with the Kantian conception of its demands.

Thus, the Egoist butts in at a very particular moment in both Korsgaard's arguments. Conceding one part of the argument - the part that shows that there *is* an answer to the question "what ought I to do"? - the Egoist proceeds to reject the contention that those things that *I* ought to promote are things *you* ought to promote as well; or to put it another way, that "my reasons" are also "your reasons". Korsgaard suggests that the objection comes too late: in granting that one is bound by certain reasons, one is already signing off on others being bound by those reasons as well. To make good on this highly contentious claim we shall of course need to look carefully into what exactly one grants, in Korsgaard's Kantian framework, when one grants that one is bound by a reason. I will be interested to show, however, that the Egoist is fully aware of what she is granting, and yet still resists the implication, and that *that* is revelatory of her predicament. The Egoist's thinking that her position may be squared with the first part of the argument - allegedly establishing that only she is bound - thus shows that really she *distorts* it; for the thought that I am bound, in Korsgaard's Kantian framework (which, again, the Egoist - out of the internal logic of her position, and not as it were failing to notice what she is getting herself into - embraces), already contains the thought that you are bound.

In this paper I survey the two locals of Korsgaard's rebuttal of the Egoist. I am not offering a defense of Korsgaard's positive account concerning the reality of morality. Moreover, I do not mean to suggest that her rebuttals of Egoism as they figure in the course of this positive account are beyond criticism. And anyway, since they take on an Egoist who grants a big chunk of preceding Korsgaardian argumentation, even if they are beyond criticism, their scope is quite limited. Rather, my examination of Korsgaard's arguments is functional and illustrative. I want to use the dialectics

they offer to trace the lineaments of the Egoistic predicament. In particular, I want to substantiate my hunch, gestured at in the opening remarks, that there is room to press the distinction between Egoism and Egocentrism. The inherent instability of the Egoist's position is introduced through an examination of the rebuttal in *Self-Constitution*. I then examine the rebuttal in *The Sources*, which was the target of much criticism. I show that a dominant line of criticism in the literature fails, and in failing, reveals the very structure of the Egoistic predicament I discern. This reinforces somewhat my conviction that there is something inherently philosophical in Egoism, and so I conclude the paper suggesting that we look into the possibility of understanding Egoism as a variant of skepticism.

3

Let us start by getting a feel for the transcendental nature of the publicity thesis. Publicity, according to Korsgaard, is a condition of possibility of both theoretical and practical reason:

“If you are to think of your experience as perception of an object, and perception as a way of knowing that object, then you have to think that if you were to come back to the same place tomorrow, and nothing had changed in the meantime, you would have the same experience again. And that is the same thought as the thought that if another perceiver were suitably situated, he would have the same experience: both scenarios, after all, just involve a change of position. If you cannot have that thought—that if you come back to the same place later, and nothing has changed, you will have the same experience again—then you cannot think of your experience as perception of an object, and of yourself as the knower of that object, and your mind shatters into a mere heap of unrelated experiences.

It follows that if you are to take “I saw it” as a reason to believe it, you must take it as a reason with universal and agent-neutral or “public” normative force. So it is not that we know in advance, somehow, that the world conforms to the principles of theoretical reason, and we should therefore expect true beliefs to do so as well. Rather, that the world conforms to the principles of theoretical reason is a presupposition of the world’s being the sort of place we can think about and know about at all.”

The parallel in the practical realm also goes through the idea of authority persisting through time:

“Ask yourself, what is a reason? It is not just a consideration on which you in fact act, but one on which you are supposed to act; it is not just a motive, but rather a normative claim, exerting authority over other people and yourself at other times. To say that you have a reason is to say something *relational*, something which implies the existence of another, at least another self. It announces that you have a claim on that other, or acknowledges her claim on you....The acknowledgment that another is a person is not exactly a reason to treat him in a certain way, but rather something that stands behind the very possibility of reasons. I cannot treat my own impulses to act as *reasons*, rather than mere occurrent impulses without acknowledging that I at least exist at

other times.”

The other (or myself at other times), does not come into view as another bearer of reasons, a creature who, because similar to me in other respects, a semblable, also bears under reasons similar in form. Rather, essential to the thought of a reason itself is the thought of another - a being other than myself at the time of engaging the thought, having the same thought, bound by that very reason. This means that an argument that tries to *first* establish that one stands in a certain relation to reasons - as it were without so much as considering other people - and *then* to include others in that relation by some further consideration, gets things upside down, or better, inside out. Others sharing in one's relation to one's reasons is a necessary condition on the relation being formed in the first place. Korsgaard's argument, then, takes the shape of showing that others' sharing one's reasons is in effect *implicit* in one's having them.

3.1

I said that the egoist wishes to drive a wedge between the two parts of Korsgaard's argument. In *Self-Constitution* we may identify these two parts as follows. First Korsgaard suggests that there *are* reasons for action, that practical reason is real. The argument for that starts from a certain intuitive conception of the standpoint of practical reason and shows on its basis that choice implies identification with a universal. Korsgaard calls this “The Argument Against Particularistic Willing”⁶. Choice guiding universals are then very weakly constrained: they must not undermine the conditions of choice itself. The categorical imperative is said to express this constraint in that it stipulates that maxims must be able to be willed (i.e. chosen) as universal laws. Naturally the crux of the matter lies in just how we mean “universal” here. We may mean that the agent must be able to will that the law apply for all future similar cases that befall her. This sense indeed seems to guide “The Argument Against Particularistic Willing”: the agent cannot be distinguished from forces operating on or in her - and thereby fails to constitute herself as an agent - unless she identifies with a certain policy, makes a commitment to act in accordance with the law in this *and*

⁶ Chapter 4 of *Self-Constitution*

future similar circumstances.

But there's another way of hearing “universal”, which is the focus of the second part of the argument. We might take the law to extend also to *other people*; take it to be the case, that is, that the policy the agent identifies with must not only be able to be willed as universal in the first sense (binding her and all her future selves), but must also be able to be willed as a policy binding her and all other agents. She must thus be able to will that everyone else act as she does in similar circumstances, thereby rendering Egoism impossible.⁷

Here the Egoist objects. She grants that she must be able to universalize her maxim across cases, but rejects that she must universalize across people. She accepts she must be able to will her maxims to be universal laws for her and in so doing takes herself to be respecting *her* humanity, *her* status as a chooser. And, recognizing that she is “simply a person, one among others who are equally real”⁸, she grants that they must universalize across cases as well. But all that follows from *that* is that she ought to respect her status as a chooser, her humanity and they theirs.

The Egoist supposes that the first part of the argument establishes a constitutive standard of agency, while the second leaves off the notion of constitution and suggests independent considerations in support of universalizing across people. She thus reads Korsgaard's argument in the following way: “to become an agent one must act so as to be able to distinguish oneself from the many forces operating in and on one, and this cannot be done by “willing” particular acts but only by willing act types. *Once* successfully constituted, however, one notices that other agents like oneself, other choosers, exist. Korsgaard's further argumentative step has to do with showing that the commitments taken on in the argument from constitution, namely, commitments to a certain

⁷ Note, the Categorical Imperative doesn't say that one must be able to *allow* that other people conduct themselves in accordance to the policy. It is completely consistent with the Egoist's position that others are not bound to respect her humanity, that though they are necessitated to respect their own humanity, they are free to disrespect hers, as she theirs. In fact, the Egoist flaunts this very feature of her position as marking the difference between her and the Egocentric. The Categorical Imperative on this second sense of universalization says, rather, that the policy the maxim expresses must be able to be *willed* to apply to others as well. That is, should the situation arise where another were, say, to be offered a 1000\$ to kill her, the Egoist must be able to *will* that he kills her, which she of course cannot.

⁸ *CKE*, “The Reasons We Can Share”, 277. Korsgaard borrows (with slight modification) this formulation from Nagel (*PA*, 100). I use it extensively in what follows; it marks a truth the recognition of which the Egoist supposes distinguishes her from the Egocentric.

way of interacting with one's future self, must be respected when in dealing with other people as well. She claims that since when constituting oneself one was treating one's future self in a certain way, it would be irrational to fail to treat other people in the same way. This is because, Korsgaard thinks, unlike the Egocentric, the Egoist pays heed to the fact that she is 'simply a person, one among others who are equally real'. It is inconsistent to both consider yourself to be one human (chooser) among others and at the same time to fail to acknowledge that you owe others the same respect it took only your humanity to establish that you owe yourself”.

“However”, the Egoist continues, “notwithstanding my recognition of the humanity in others, still I am *partial* to myself now and in other times. If I were to expect of other people partiality to *me*, you would be right to charge me with inconsistency. But I don't. I allow other people the same self partiality I practice myself. It is true that I interact with my future self in the way the argument from constitution describes; but I grant only that another must interact *with herself* in this way too – for only in so interacting with ourselves will either of us be constituted as an agent; I don't grant, however, that I ought to interact with *her* as I do with my future self, and, fair is fair, *vice versa*”.

3.2

The Egoist's position is revealing, because it grinds against the transcendental heart of Korsgaard's conception of constitution. For what is this *partiality* the egoist speaks of? Exactly *who* is being partial *to whom*? Remember that the image of interaction with one's future self enters stage as part of a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of agency. It appears in this account as a minimal condition of possibility of a choice taking place at all, of there being something we might call an agent performing an action in the first place.

The relevant partiality here is of course partiality *in action*. It is to endorse an attitude towards oneself such that the maxims of one's actions and their respective laws express this partiality. The Egoist, for example, might decide to endorse a law to always offend *other* people's

humanity (conditions of choice) so long as it is reasonable to expect that the overall outcome of the offense will promote the maximal satisfaction of her desires. This law expresses partiality insofar as it is clear that the corresponding policy in the case of one's future self must not be endorsed.

It is easy to see the problem: an attitude of partiality to oneself or to one's future self may only be endorsed *if* it fulfills the conditions of self-constitution. I mean, the actions that express such endorsement are themselves subject to the conditions the argument from constitution specifies. Light is shed on this categorical muddle in an example Korsgaard borrows from Parfit. A Russian nobleman asks his wife to promise to hold him, in the future, to his present commitment to distribute his future wealth, even if his future self comes to think it's the wrong thing to do. One might think that the problem in this case lies in the nobleman's lacking respect for his future self. This makes it seem as though respect for one's future self is an external constraint imposed on a present self deliberating what to do. But according to Korsgaard

“[The Russian nobleman's] respect for his future self is not what is at stake here. This isn't because his future self has no standing, but rather because his future self is just himself. He can decide to disagree with his own future attitude. But *unless* he is then also prepared to regard his own future attitude as one of weakness or irrationality, he is not according the reason he himself proposes to act on *right now* as having normative standing. For he is not making a law for himself unless he thinks of his future attitude as a violation of that law, and if he does not think he can make laws for himself then he lacks self-respect. So his problem is not his disunity with his future self, but his disunity with himself here and now. And his problem is not disrespect for his future self, but disrespect for himself here and now.”⁹

The temptation to view one's future self as distinct from the present self, an other to which the task of constitution demands that you pay respect, is the same temptation that befalls the Egoist when she cares to distinguish her attitude to her future self from her attitude to other people. Neither one's future self nor other people, so far as the task of constitution is concerned, represent external entities that place demands on an as it were separate present self for *its* constitution. What comes out in the example of the Russian nobleman is that, as per the task of self constitution, there is not really a standpoint from which to even consider one's attitude towards one's future self. Treating one's future self as an obstacle to one's current policy – as the Russian nobleman does in making his

⁹ *Self-Constitution*, 203-4, my underline

wife the keeper of his promise - amounts to a refusing to so much as *will* that policy. It is to fail, right now, in distinguishing oneself from the multitude of forces operating in and on one, to fail to constitute oneself as the being that identifies with, that is committed over time to, this policy. One's present self and one's future self are not agents differently located on a time-line, a present agent facing a decision that will impact a future agent that it is important for her (for what reason, indeed?) not to offend. The constitution of agency¹⁰ is a task practical reason still faces when these abstract entities are at play: it is only by universalizing across them that I meet the condition of possibility of (among other things) adopting practical attitudes towards my present or future self in the first place.

Our problem is therefore this: whatever the basis for the egoist's distinction between herself and other people is, she envisages herself making that distinction at the level of constitution. That level, however, is the level of testing whatever policy one wishes to adopt. Partiality to oneself may, sometimes, be a policy that does not conflict with the conditions of choice. But it cannot inform those conditions because the conditions are responsible for there being an agent choosing the policy in the first place.

Suppose one can identify a set of incentives that are the Ego's own; the compossible set of incentives the Egoist marks as yielding maximal satisfaction, say. The Egoist's commitment to the

¹⁰For Korsgaard the first question is always the question of the normativity of practical reason. How is normativity possible? A major source of attraction of the constitutional answer is that it addresses the question from the first person deliberative standpoint, using only the resources that that standpoint offers. In doing so, it purports to connect the possibility of normativity to the possibility of agency. If there are, from the perspective of the deliberative standpoint, constitutive standards to acting, to our movements counting as expressing the actions of an agent, then those standards are normative in the following sense: from that perspective, we cannot but act in conformity to them, that is, we must act like they tell us to if our movements are to count as movements of agents. This means that, insofar as those standards are not met, there is also a sense in which it is not correct to say that someone failed to act or act properly. The failure, rather, is a failure of constitution. Better put it like this: from the perspective of the deliberative standpoint, there fails to be someone who acts.

This has been of course the focus of many criticisms of Korsgaard's arch-argument, especially around the idea of the implausibility of her account of bad action, in particular what sense this picture makes of responsibility attributions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address these topics, of course. I will, however, say that it seems to me that one is only going to have a problem with bad action if one has a problem with the idea of self constitution itself. That is, the paradoxes one finds when examining the failure of self constitution, it seems to me, are no different than the paradoxes one finds when examining its success. It is asking a lot to stomach the idea of making yourself into someone. Yet Korsgaard spends a lot of time trying to assuage what she herself refers to as "the paradox of self constitution", and I think criticisms of her account of bad action need to address those attempts as well if they are to take the bull by its horns.

set cannot precede her commitment to *being someone who acts*. This is an obnoxious way of putting it, however, because one's identity as an actor does not stand, in the argument from constitution, as a commitment to be adopted, on a par with other possible commitments. Acting, in the argument from constitution, is not an end. Our 'commitment' to the Categorical Imperative is not a means to the end of having a certain identity. Rather, the Categorical Imperative specifies the form of all possible action, and in that sense it is beyond commitment¹¹: in so far as a commitment is a practical business, that is, in so far as it amounts to an endorsement of (however indefinite) plan of action, or signals an identification with a trajectory of practical responses, the categorical imperative specifies the form such plans and responses must take for what you're doing (in 'endorsing' and 'identifying') to so much as *be* a commitment. And that is precisely the issue. The argument from constitution provides the conditions of possibility for acting towards whatever end and thereby qualifies all possible commitments. The Egoist attempts to insert her commitment to the satisfaction of her compossible set to the level of practical thinking that is meant to determine which commitments she can so much as take in the first place.

It thus turns out that the suggestion that one may limit the extension of one's law to one's future selves prejudices the very issue that the argument from constitution is meant to address: which incentives may one pursue? The Egoist singles out a set of incentives and insulates them from the test of normativity from the start by tailoring the extension of the law. It is unlikely that much damage to the Egoist's maximal satisfaction set will ensue if the extension is so restricted. The enduring self that realizes the ends the set sets – the subject of the argument from constitution on the Egoist understanding - is after all the same self whose present and future occurrences serve as the measuring rod of satisfaction. *But if the Egoist really means to distinguish herself from the Egocentric*, we need to hear more about the grounds for thus refusing to include others in the test of normativity. What will the Egoist say to justify, for example, *not* distinguishing between her pre-70

¹¹ Actually, in so far as one is thinking of oneself as committed in this way to the (Kantian) Categorical Imperative, one is being heteronomous.

y.o. and post-70 y.o future selves? Both supposedly equally competent choosers, just as both she and her friend are equally competent choosers. What's to stop her then from offending her post 70 humanity for the sake of her pre-70 satisfaction? That she *regards valuable, identifies*, with her post 70 satisfaction as well? Why not so regard the satisfaction of another then? But then again, the question of what we may regard valuable is precisely the question the test of normativity addresses. Wherever we decide to draw the line of satisfactions to be included in the set, we take an attitudinal stand towards a chooser other than our present self facing the task of constitution. And such a stand must itself bear under the test of normativity, rather than inform it, if a categorical blunder is to be avoided.

3.3

At one point Korsgaard considers an Egoist committed only to the incentives that arise in him as an embodied individual, but you can fill in whatever compossible set of incentives you'll have the Egoist endorse:

“We *constitute* our own identities. So what counts as me, my incentives, my reasons, my identity, depends on, rather than preceding, the kinds of choices that I make. So I *can't* just decide I will base my choices only on *my own* reasons: because that category – the category of incentives that counts as mine and from which I construct “my reasons” – gets its ultimate shape from the choices that I make. So to say that *only* the incentives that arise directly in me in the course of my individual embodied existence can be the source of “my reasons” is simply to beg the question against the possibility of personal interaction. I *must* interact with the conscious inhabitants of my body, because I must act with my body. But I *may* also interact with other people, and when I do, then their reasons, as well as my own, become as it were incentives in the deliberative process that we undertake together, resources for the construction of our shared reasons.”

I said that the Egoist purports to distinguish herself from the Egocentric in that she recognizes other people as legitimate sources of reasons, choosers no different than her. Our investigation showed she doesn't: *the Egoist's failure to constitute herself stems precisely from refusing to recognize other people as choosers just like her when legislating*. At the level of constitution, the exclusion of others from the extension of the law *can* have no warrant (warrant is, as it were, what is at stake *in* legislating), and so, let me say, the only way to avoid being considerate to others is to not consider them.

Maybe you disagree with Korsgaard's argument. For sure there is no shortage of metaphysical material for you to argue against. Like I said, I am not trying to defend Korsgaard's foundational account, nor am I claiming her reply to the Egoist successful on all fronts. Nevertheless, I think the above dialectic flashes out something important about the Egoistic predicament, a certain instability that's at its heart. As I think of the matter, the Egoist attempts to occupy a position distinct from, and in a sense lying between, two major players in the scene of moral skepticism: the practical skeptic, on the one hand, and the Egocentric, on the other. In purporting to set a counterexample to the Kantian, the Egoist moves away from skepticism about practical reason: she believes that rationality requires something, and that her position is consistent with whatever it requires. On the other hand the Egoist wishes to distance herself from the Egocentric in that she recognizes that she is "simply a person, one among others who are equally real".

Now, *it is important that this recognition of others plays out in making out what the rational requirements are.* For the distinction between the Egoist and the Egocentric is a distinction between two ways of going about the question what to do, two ways of proceeding to give an answer. If other people do not so much as figure (as equal in their humanity) in one's deliberation, if one merely *believes* that one is part of a community of equals, and that belief has no bearing whatsoever on one's deliberative process, then all one can claim to be is an Egocentric with a theoretical grasp of certain truths. After all, if the grasp of these truths suffices to elevate one out of one's Egocentrism, why stop at Egoism? Why not say one is virtuous? It's true that for all I've been saying, there's no reason to suppose that the distinction between the Egoist and the Egocentric manifests in their *actions*. To be sure, it might turn that it doesn't so manifest, that the Egoist and the Egocentric behave exactly the same in similar circumstances. Still, it must *turn out* to be the case, i.e, the recognition must find expression in the Egoist's deliberation, and fail to find expression in that of the Egocentric.

That means that the Egoist must have the acknowledgment of other people's equal standing as choosers operative as she is engaged in self constitution; she must lose the grip on the distinction between her future self and other people at that level of the argument, and so have the CI indicate that she must be able to will that others be bound by the law as well. But of course, once one grants the second sense of “universal law” one is well within the bounds of the moral point of view.

We may now see how in trying to veer away from both these forms of skepticism, the egoist cannot seem to find sure ground. The commitment to the normativity of practical reason means that the Egoist must renounce all sources of normativity that do not conform to reason's requirements. Among other things she must not assume from the start that the compossible set of incentives that yields maximal satisfaction conforms to reason's requirements. To maintain her selfishness in the face of this distance from the practical skeptic, the Egoist is pushed in the direction of an Egocentric reading of the argument. She pictures an agent operating, as it were, in a vacuum: the conditions of possibility of acting are considered when only the agent's present and future selves – her own continuous existence as a chooser – are in view. You might think that the objections to the Egoist's position I've laid out in §3.2 do not knock her out; fine. I'm not interested in that. What I hope you *are* starting to appreciate is how they expose her for the Egocentric she is, or at least how they press her to acknowledge that she is if she wants to retain her selfish ways and not to endorse practical skepticism.

Thus, due to an intimate connection, revealed in the argument from constitution, between normativity and publicity, the practical skeptic and the Egocentric stand as the Egoist's Scylla and Charybdis. The argument from constitution makes manifest how the very possibility of normativity implies a perspective that transcends the particular choice at hand (“The Argument Against Particularistic Willing”), say, the perspective of policy making. But the policy cannot, at the level where the very authority of the Ego's bidding is being weighed, be enacted from the perspective of the self alone. Because, at this point of the argument, nothing ties the present self to her future self

that doesn't tie her to any other potential chooser. The only way to avoid the moral point of view is thus to adopt an Egocentric perspective, essentially to legislate as though other people were not fellow choosers but *things*. Trying to avoid practical skepticism, the Egoist finds that the only way she can retain her selfish ways is if she closes her eyes to the reality of people around her. For the same reason, moving away from Egocentrism, the Egoist cannot retain her selfishness without endorsing practical skepticism. For if practical rationality requires anything it requires first that the ability to choose be respected, and if you disavow of Egocentrism, it requires that it be respected in the other as it does in you.

4

Korsgaard's argument against the Egoist in *The Sources*, I propose, shares the general structure of the argument from constitution. The Egoist signs off on the reality of practical reason but vies over the scope of its demands, and the connection between publicity and normativity is taken to show that the limitation of the scope is incoherent. The argument here makes for a particularly interesting case study of Egoism because it was subject to much criticism in the literature. The criticism is essentially a defense of Egoism in the face of Korsgaard's rebuttal, and we may therefore, in studying it, get a better glimpse of the Egoistic predicament.

4.1

In chapter 3 of *The Sources* Korsgaard presents an argument, which she claims can be traced back to Kant's *Groundwork*, whereby if one is to act or value anything at all, one is required to value one's own humanity. Your humanity, the fact of your being a chooser, a valuer, oughts you, by virtue of the structure of reflective consciousness (let's from now on say, simply because you are practically rational) to respect it, to value it. You must value, by virtue of the nature of your valuing faculty (let's from now on say simply because you are practically rational), your valuing faculty. She then goes on to say: "But to value yourself just as a human being is to have moral identity, as the Enlightenment understood it. So this puts you in moral territory. *Or at least, it does so if valuing*

humanity in your own person rationally requires valuing it in the persons of others”.¹²

The Egoist of course claims there is no such requirement. And at the same time she rejects the accusation that in so doing she is making an exception for herself. She insists that she grants the same normative standing to her humanity as she does the other's, in the following sense: his humanity binds him, and hers her. What she finds objectionable then is the contention concerning *the extension of the normative force of (reasons originating in) your humanity*. Korsgaard thinks one's humanity demands the respect of everyone when really, the Egoist contends, all that has been established is its normative force on oneself.

Korsgaard maintains that the Egoist's objection can only come up when in the thrall of a particular view of reasons. What is the view? And why is it a condition for the objection?

According to the Egoist's private reasons conception, a reason is private if it bears some *ineliminable* reference to the agent for whom it is a reason. When a reason is private for some agent A, it cannot, in principle, be picked up by another agent B without some further reason that explains why B should take A's reason into account; it can only be picked up by B indirectly, as it were, and thus never in the same way. For example, the fact that you are in pain may serve as a reason for you to have me lift my foot from off yours, but it alone cannot (without some further reason, say, my caring about your feelings) serve as a reason for me to stop stepping on your foot.

This may seem to come out of thin air. Why should the Egoist subscribe to the existence of reasons of this sort? Well, if you think about the way the argument of chapter 3 of *The Sources* works, you'll see that the Egoist *must* adopt the private reasons conception if she is to prevent the normative force of her humanity from extending to other agents. *If she grants that reasons are public – that they have no ineliminable reference to the person for whom they are reasons, that they can bind her and others in the same way - then upon granting that her humanity is a source of reasons that hold normative force on her simply because she is practically rational, she will have to grant also that these reasons exert normative force on others because they are practically rational*

¹² *Sources*, 121, my emphasis

too.

Let me make this clearer. If I were to put forth an argument that shows, for instance, that the fact that a certain thing is a rare flower exerts normative force on me (say, to the effect that I ought not to pick it) *simply because I am practically rational*, the Egoist will *not* ask: “I concede that the argument works in your case, but why should it work in mine?” Since, in her commitment to avoid the Charybdis of Egocentrism, she acknowledges the humanity (the practical rationality) of others and hers alike, the flower's rarity becomes her reason just the same. The Egoist finds it problematic to think of reasons originating in *my* humanity in the same way she would think - were an argument to be produced - of reasons originating in the rarity of flowers because she thinks that reasons originating in *my* humanity stand in a unique relation to *me*, a relation in which no one else, in principle, can stand. Note, if others so much as *could* stand in the same relation as I do to the reasons originating in my humanity then, because all the relation exploits is one's being rational, they *would*. It is this “unique relation” thought that legitimizes the Egoist's stopping the normative force of her humanity from reaching other people. *The Egoist will not allow the normative force of reasons originating in her humanity to extend to others because she thinks there's something special about these reasons that makes them hold normative force over her in particular, and in a way that in principle is not applicable to others.* Yet, since obviously others can in fact respect her humanity, it might seem that these reasons can after all be shared. But the Egoist insists they cannot. Because, she claims, whereas for me the mere fact that I am practically rational suffices to make my humanity binding, for someone other than myself the fact that he is rational will not do to make my humanity binding; for others, a *further* reason is required to get there (“like friendship or contract”¹³). And that is just to say that reasons originating in my humanity cannot bind me and others in the same way. Those reasons bear a unique relation to me.

So, if an argument could show that the idea of private reasons is incoherent, show, that is, that for a reason to be said to bind, for it to be said to have normative force, it must be be a public

¹³ Sources,

reason, a reason capable of binding you and me in the same way, the Egoist's challenge will have been met.

You may object. It is not, you may say, that reasons originating in my humanity bind me *simply because I am practically rational*. These reasons have normative force on me because *I am the practically rational creature in question, the human being whose humanity is the source of these reasons.*

Observe, however, that this objection is but a reiteration of the private reasons conception at the level of the argument of chapter 3. To say that certain reasons hold normative force on me because I'm me, because I am *the practically rational creature* whose humanity is the source of these reasons, is to say that certain reasons can have normative force on no one other than me, not in the same way – for no one else is me, no one else is *that* practically rational creature. But, as said, Korsgaard is set to show that a reason that is tied to an agent in a way not open to others is an incoherent notion. Thus, if she is successful in discrediting the private reasons conception, she will have by that discredited this objection as well.

The private reasons conception occupies in *The Sources* the logical place that the Egoist's opting for (what I called) constitution in a vacuum, did in *Self-Constitution*. While the argument of chapter 3 has the Egoist avoiding the Scylla of practical skepticism, the private reasons conception marks her falling to the hands of the Charybdis of Egocentrism. She may retain the normativity of her humanity, we shall see, only at the price of failing to acknowledge other people's humanity, their status as fellow choosers.

4.2

Here is Korsgaard's argument:

“Meaning is relational because it is a *normative* notion: to say that X means Y is to say that one ought to take X for Y; and this requires two, a legislator to lay it down that one must take X for Y, and a citizen to obey. And the relation between these two is not merely causal because the citizen can disobey: there must be a possibility of misunderstanding or mistake. Since it is a relation, in

which one gives a law to another, it takes two to make a meaning... We could make a parallel argument against private reasons: reasons are relational because reason is a normative notion: to say that R is a reason for A is to say that one should do A because of R; and this requires two, a legislator to lay it down, and a citizen to obey. And the relation between them is not just causal because the citizen can disobey: there must be the possibility of irrationality or wrong doing. Since it is a relation, indeed a relation in which one gives a law to another, it takes two to make a reason.”¹⁴

This argument was subject to a certain misinterpretation, one Korsgaard herself later laments. She says: “Many readers have a misimpression about how I intended that argument to go. I did not intend to suggest that the publicity of reasons can be *inferred* from the publicity of meanings”¹⁵. Those who misinterpret the argument take it to suggest that reasons inherit their publicity from language: *As* pieces of language, reasons are public in the sense in which all meaningful utterances are public. This misinterpretation leads, in turn, to a charge of equivocation, which is part and parcel of almost every criticism found in literature about that argument¹⁶. Here’s how R. Jay Wallace puts it:

“The notion of privacy relevant to the private language argument is the notion of a meaning that cannot in principle be understood by others... but this is not the notion of privacy at issue in the discussion of publicity thesis. To say that reasons are public... is to say that the considerations that provide or ground your reasons equally provide or ground reasons for me. But surely one can deny that reasons are public in this sense without in any way running afoul of the thesis of the publicity of language. That is, even if reasons were private in respect to their normative force, the language in which we ascribe reasons to each other could easily be a public language, in the sense of publicity relevant to Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument”¹⁷

As meaningful utterances, reasons inherit the publicity of meaning, naturally, but, Wallace points out, all *that* means is that my reasons must be *understood* by others, not that they must bind them as well. To his merit, however, Wallace qualifies the criticism, raising the suspicion that there’s a straw man here: “These points cannot have escaped Korsgaard’s notice”¹⁸, he says. Clearly, then, if we take her argument seriously, we must look for another, less outrageous way to unpack the connection between the publicity of reasons and the publicity of language.

¹⁴ *Sources* 137-138.

¹⁵ *Self Constitution*, 289

¹⁶ See, for instance: Gert, Joshua, “Korsgaard’s Private-Reasons Argument”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 64, No. 2, 303-24. I shall take issue with parts of that paper in what follows. Another critical essay is: Lebar, Mark, “Korsgaard, Wittgenstein, and the Mafioso”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 39, No.2, 261-272

¹⁷ “The Publicity of Reasons”, Wallace, R Jay. P. 21, online paper -<http://philosophy.berkeley.edu/file/17/Publicity.pdf>

¹⁸ There, 21

4.3

Note first that Korsgaard's argument does not set out to prove the normativity of reasons. Rather, the normativity of reasons is assumed, and Wittgenstein is taken to help us see why it implies their publicity. This is Scylla again: the Egoist grants that reasons are normative. Not everything you actually take to be a reason is a reason; you can go wrong. For example, you can act contrary to what your practical rationality requires, and kill yourself. Now call *rationalizations* those considerations that a person actually takes to be reasons, the considerations he acts on. Rationalizations provide an answer to the question why the agent did what she did, they explain her behavior by cluing us in on the agent's actual motives. But this level is descriptive. If there is such a thing as normativity in action, it should account for the possibility of judging whether what an agent takes to be a reason really is one; or whether her rationalizations (really) are (good) reasons.

The argument then starts from the fact that meaning and action are normative realms. It suggests that *publicity is a feature of normativity, no matter the realm*. The sense of publicity, as I understand it, is that of a shared *capability to be bound* by the demands of the relevant realm, a shared *capability to be necessitated*. That normativity depends on the sharing of capabilities represents a familiar enough way of taking Wittgenstein's rule following considerations. Jonathan Lear formulates the idea elegantly¹⁹. In discussing the normativity of logical inferences he says:

“ [T]he context of there being logical inference, the context in which one can use *modus ponense* correctly or incorrectly, depends on the fact that we tend to agree in our judgments, our modes of thought, our perceptions of similarity and relevance: on the fact that we are like minded. Logic itself does not ‘take us by the throat’ and forces us to a conclusion. That we feel we are being taken by the throat and forced to a conclusion depends upon the fact that we are minded as we are.”²⁰

Korsgaard's argument relies on this dependence of normativity on agreement in judgments. If only one person can, in principle, feel the force of a demand, be open to it, *obey* it – if the bidding of one's “mindedness” can, in principle, find no companion- then it is no demand at all, normativity

¹⁹ Stanley Cavell makes the same point in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge press, 1976 p. 52. John McDowell relies heavily on the idea, alluding to Cavell's formulation, in a couple of influential papers on practical reason. See his *Mind Value and Reality*, Harvard Press, 1998 : “Non Cognitivism and Rule Following” and “Virtue and Reason”

²⁰ Lear, Jonathan, “Leaving the World Alone”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79 (1982), pp. 382-403

cannot stand. In the PLA sharing capability of obedience is made impossible because of the stipulation that no one but the diary keeper can in principle obtain epistemic access to what is represented by the entry S. But exclusive epistemic access is merely what occasions principled privacy in the case Wittgenstein sets up. The essential thing is that in order for the connection between S and what it refers to to be able to place a demand on me (to be such that I can succeed or fail in the future in pinning S to the thing it refers to), others must be able to feel the force of that demand as well:

“When I make a language, I make its meanings normative for me. As Wittgenstein puts it, I *undertake* to use words in certain ways. And however I go about binding myself to those meanings, however I ‘bring it about that I remember the connection *right* in the future’ it must be possible for me to bind another in exactly the same way”.²¹

The Egoist wants of *practical demands* what the diary keeper wants of representational demands: that there be such a thing as a demand *that only she is open to*, a necessitation whose force only she can feel. And just like the PLA excludes the possibility of such representational demands on the grounds that they trump a necessary feature of normativity, so, Korsgaard thinks, it should, given that reasons are normative, exclude the possibility of private practical demands.²²

4.4

Now recall we've seen that it is enough to debunk the privacy of reasons conception in order to move from valuing one's own humanity to valuing humanity in general, and by that meet the Egoist's challenge (§4.1). And we are now also positioned to see that talk of 'move' here is but a figure of speech. For it is not the case that a *further* requirement to respect other people's humanity is added to the requirement to respect one's own. We are not going, as it were, from the inside (me)

²¹ *Sources*, 138-9

²² Notice that while we are bound by the demands of logic for example, simply by virtue of our rational nature, representational connections such as the PLA depicts give rise to normative demands that anchor judgments of correctness, also by virtue of antecedent stipulation, say the convention or stipulation that this stands for that. To put it another way, whereas to be minded the way we are is a sufficient condition for being bound by the demands of logic, it is only a necessary condition for being bound by a representational demand. Korsgaard's reading of the PLA focuses on the necessary conditions of normativity: what must be the case for a *demand* to so much as be possible. The answer, as I explicated it, is that we share the capability to be bound by the relevant demand. We've seen that Korsgaard's argument of chapter 3 takes it that to say that reasons are normative is to say that they give rise to practical demands just by virtue of one's practical rationality. In their unconditioned nature, therefore, they are thus more akin to demands of logic.

out (other people). Rather, the very nature of normativity renders the Egoist's claim to limit the domain of the demand incoherent. We are going from the outside in: by the time the Egoist concedes that she is *necessitated*, solely by virtue of being practically rational, to value herself, she had already conceded that others are necessitated to value her as well (you are thinking: no! Others are necessitated to respect *themselves*, not her. That is the Egoist's frame of mind. It's the gem this paper wants to study. We were first introduced to it with the Egoist's "all I need for proper constitution is my future selves, and all others need is theirs, I am partial to, have special standing with, mine, and they with theirs". And now recall §4.1: to suggest that the demand to respect your humanity binds only you because you are *the* practically rational creature whose humanity it is to reiterate the commitment to the private reasons conception Korsgaard's adaptation to the PLA precisely tackles. It is to suggest action is a normative field that places a demand on you that others in principle cannot be open to, which the adaptation to the PLA denies is possible). The Egoist cannot coherently grant both that she is "one person among others who are equally real" and yet insist that somehow her humanity is a source of reasons for her but not a source of reasons for other people. If her humanity is a source of reasons that bind her *solely on the grounds that she is practically rational* and if the nature of this sort of binding, normative binding, is such that others *can* be bound by these reasons in the same way, then these reasons bind other people in the same way, *because they are practically rational as well*.

5

The thought that motivates objections such as Wallace's is that normativity can make do with sharing the capability of *seeing that* a reason is binding on someone²³. Put another way, we share the capability to feel the force of the *cognition* that something is someone's reason, the truth of it, say. But we needn't feel the force of that reason in the sense that it also binds us, since it is her reason, not ours. The capability to to cognize that fact (that it is her reason), is what we share; the truth of that fact is what we are all capable to be bound to affirm. For example, we both can see just

²³ Presumably it is this capability that the pathological Egocentric lacks, and the Egoist has.

the same that your pain is a reason for you to promote X. Yet that needn't mean that your pain can provide me with a reason to promote X in the same way it does you.. Wittgenstein's PLA rests on the connection between normativity and agreement in judgments. By conceiving reasons as subjects of *cognition*, this line of thought proposes to re-anchor agreement in judgments - which the Egoist will not allow in the practical domain (he will not allow sharing the capability to be bound to *do* something rather than to *cognize* something) - in the domain of theory. The suggestion is that this is in keeping with the normativity of reasons: one may still be wrong in taking something to be a reason; publicity means not that others too ought to *treat* the thing as a reason, but that they all are able to *correct* one.

I want you to see that the idea of inheritance in the publicity of language drives this objection: the shared capability (to be bound) to *see* whether someone has a reason has its source in our mastery of *the meaning* of reasons, in the fact that reasons are *linguistic* entities, in a broad sense. Joshua Gert formulates the point using an analogy between the publicity of indexical terms and that of reasons:

“Wittgensteinian publicity fails to entail Korsgaardian publicity for the same reason that the impossibility of a private language does not rule out indexical terms like ‘myself’, ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ from public language. These indexical terms *refer essentially* to the agent. But their meanings are, of course, public. That is, it is possible to teach and to test the words ‘myself’, ‘mine’ and ‘yours’. This shows that there are public criteria for their use which make it possible to tell if someone is using these indexical words in a way which is consistent with their meanings. In the same way, private reasons of the sort Korsgaard argues for also are public in the following sense: there are public criteria for determining whether someone has acted in accord with, or against, such a reason... But this is not the publicity Korsgaard wants. For her, publicity is equivalent to agent neutrality. Thus, if reasons are public in her sense, it cannot be true that the fact that an action will save *my* life provides a reason *only* for me, in virtue of its being *my* life. It must *also*, on her account, provide a reason for *any reflective being*”²⁴

“Wittgensteinian publicity fails to entail Korsgaardian publicity” because if we all, as language speakers, share the capability to *assess* (cognize, see) whether someone has a reason or not, then the normativity of reasons is safeguarded - there is wrong and right about reasons, *without* our having to share each other's reasons. A demand can address in principle only one person,

²⁴ Gert, 313

making the reason private. But it can be recognized as a valid demand by all, and in this way it is public.

I am going to suggest that this way of going at Korsgaard's argument *shifts the subject of discussion*. It moves from the normativity of reasons-as-*practical*-entities – from our *being bound to do* certain things, to the normativity of reasons-as-*linguistic*-entities – to our *being bound to cognize* certain explanations as valid. Korsgaard's argument, as I have explicated it above, never even mentions the normativity of reasons-as-linguistic-entities. It discusses reasons as *practically normative entities*, that is, entities that *necessitate action* rather than ones that necessitate cognition. Scrutinizing the nature of publicity at the theoretical level of reasons-as-linguistic-entities, therefore, does nothing to discredit Korsgaard's argument. It is but an attack launched against the misreading of the argument: since Korsgaard does not derive the publicity of reasons from the publicity of language, showing that the publicity of language squares with the privacy of reasons does nothing to discredit her argument.

5.1

It is safe to say that by “reasons” Gert means what I earlier called rationalizations (§4.3), things one *takes to be* reasons. For he suggests that the propriety of a use that attributes a reason to an agent is tested against the agent’s *actual* performance, her conduct, broadly construed²⁵. And it is true that, as per the normativity of language, there are good and bad ways *to rationalize*, just as there are good and bad ways to use indexicals. The criteria in this segment of language are rich and complex, for sure. They are informed by facts from human psychology in general and moral psychology in particular, as well as by theoretical knowledge of causes and effects. As linguistic, these criteria are geared towards *making sense* of an agent’s conduct, why she acted the way she did. They are responsible for there being good and bad ways to *explain* behavior. Thus, for instance,

²⁵ For example, Gert says: “Even agent relative reasons which stem from an agent's contingent desire are public in this sense [the sense that there are public criteria for determining whether someone has acted in accord with, or against, such a reason]; for there are public criteria for whether or not someone has satisfied her desire”(Gert, 313). That is, If you have acted in a way consistent with satisfying the desire you stated as a reason, saying that you had it counts a proper language use. What we are interested in is thus the reason you act on, what you *take* to be a reason, your rationalization.

in answering a mother's question "why did you beat up your little sister?" a child will display mastery of these criteria in saying (a) "because she stole my toy", but not in saying (b) "because she was standing next to me"²⁶. Criteria here have within their scope also patterns of behavior and history, so that things like long standing traits of character and circumstances of life are at play as well. And here too, failure to satisfy criteria frustrates *understanding*; the explanation fails to meet standards of meaningfulness. To go back to our example, hearing (a), the mother might reply: (1) "*I don't understand, you love your sister, you wouldn't beat her up over a toy*"

And clearly Gert is correct in saying that rationalizations "essentially refer". Like with indexicals, where we have to figure out who utters them (or where they are uttered etc.) before we can make sense of what they say, we have to know to whom a rationalization is attributed before we can assess its sense and truth.

All that is well and good. But we must bear a distinction of crucial importance to Korsgaard's argument, namely, the distinction between reasons and rationalizations (§4.3). When deliberating what to do we look to *choose between possible rationalizations*. We do not choose between sets of movements but rather between alternative ways to behave meaningfully. For example, one might beat up one's sister because she stole one's toy, or, instead, only solemnly protest and make sure she is denied access to one's toys in the future. Both choices can be equally meaningfully rationalized. The contention that reasons are normative points to a normative dimension at the level directing *that* choice; that is, not at the *linguistic* level of putting forth meaningful rationalizations, but at the *practical* level of choosing between them; not at the level directing the explanation or the making sense of an activity, but at the level directing *acting*. The contention that reasons are normative means that some rationalizations, while adequately explaining one's actions, express a choice or a policy that is inadequate. That there is right and wrong *in action*.

²⁶ "Because she was standing next to me" can be supplemented with a story that does give a proper rationalization, but until it does we suspect the child lacks the skills for providing proper explanations to his actions.

(1) is a response to an explanation that fails to make sense. When (a) is considered in light of the larger scope of the son's behavioural patterns, the mother comes to see that, like in (b), the explanation is flawed. She doesn't see how the proffered rationalization could so much as *be* a rationalization. But the mother might also say: (2) "That is no reason to beat up your little sister, young man". This is a response of a different *kind*. The explanation makes complete sense. Indeed, it is because the explanation makes sense, because a rationalization *is* proffered, that a response like (2) can emerge. The rationalization is fine; it is the choice that it represents that is being *reproached*.

So we might mean two *different domains of normativity* in discussing the normativity of reasons: one guiding the *explanation of action*, deciding right and wrong *rationalizations* – assessing meaningfulness - and the other guiding *action itself*, deciding right and wrong policies of behaviour, or, simply, right and wrong *reasons* – assessing practicality. The problem with the line of thought I explicated in §5, supported however it is by many in the literature, is then this. *Contending that the publicity of reasons is overthrown by the referential quality of rationalizations overlooks the fact that Korsgaard is simply not speaking of rationalizations, but rather of reasons. But from the fact that rationalizations - as linguistically normative entities - essentially refer surely it doesn't follow that reasons - as practically normative entities- do.*

When the Egoist complains that her "being bound by a reason" necessitates only that others cognize that she is bound, she really *arrogates* the expression "being bound by a reason". Since to be bound by a reason is to be bound *to act* – that is, as per the argument of chapter 3, to have a demand addressed to you simply in virtue of being practically rational - and that can only be in view once a domain of *practical* normativity is in view. What the Egoist and others cognize is not that she is bound to act but that her actions are explicable, make sense in light of the circumstances she is in. In truth we have here only one realm of normativity, linguistic normativity, and it is as public as can be; it is just that the relevant cognizance to which we are all bound in that realm essentially apply to agents ("essentially refer"), and therefore require specification of their subject before they

may be (publicly) assessed.

But if normative force remains public in this way, if the contending view amounts to pointing out that a rationalization that applies to me needn't necessarily apply to you, then I don't see why this should bother Korsgaard. The adaptation of the PLA is aimed against the Egoist who finds it plausible that there is an answer to the question "what is a good *reason* for someone to promote X" rather than the question "what is a good *explanation* of someone's promoting X". It is clear that the answer to the second question bears an ineliminable reference to "the someone" about whom the question is asked. Explaining someone's behavior requires matching their *particular* motivational make up with what they did, what they acted to promote. It can be, in a particular case, that people are similarly motivated, but it doesn't have to be so, and therefore we need to know who we are talking about before we know if the cited explanation makes sense²⁷. But why should the answer to the first question have this feature? Why should it matter whether you are the murderer or the victim to answer the question whether either of you have a *reason* to prevent the impending murder? Why can't you share it?

In granting Korsgaard practical normativity in the way that that is conceived in chapter 3 of *The Sources*, the Egoist cannot avoid the conclusion that at least the reasons originating in one's practical rationality are public, shared. The picture of normativity with which the Egoist is working at the point where she concedes that she must, whatever her inclinations, respect her own humanity, is a picture of categorical practical necessitation: she concedes that what binds her to respect her own humanity is nothing particular to her, nothing of the make up of her Ego. The Egoistic temptation at that point is similar to the one we detected in *Self Constitution*. The *Self Constitution* Egoist distinguishes herself from others by opting for the possibility of partiality to the self at the level of constitution. The *Sources* Egoist distinguishes herself from other people by opting for the possibility of being practically bound by a reason in a way that is in principle not open to anyone else: being bound by it because she is herself. The private reasons conception is the position the

²⁷ Most times, of course, the circumstances are enough. But then we assume that we know the agent's motivations.

Egoist is pushed to whilst trying to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis: if there is such a thing as a reason that can only necessitate oneself, that may never bind others in the way it does oneself, then one can avoid both skepticism and Egocentrism.

Like I said, I am not engaged in a defense of Korsgaard's adaptation to the PLA. I'm rather interested in the characterization of the position it is trying to combat. We have now seen the dialectic, whose basic form I presented in §3, unfolding in a different argumentative setting, and in conversation with other philosophers. Once it is recognized that respect for one's humanity is grounded in one's practical rationality alone (avoiding Scylla), and that others *are* capable of being bound by one's reasons (the publicity insight), it takes only the acknowledgment of the fact that others are human beings, practically rational creatures (avoiding Charybdis), to see that they are bound to respect one's humanity as well²⁸. We've seen further, that the philosophical criticisms to the adaptation of the PLA rely on obfuscating the distinction between reasons and rationalizations, and thereby reinforce my picture of the Egoistic predicament. In thinking that the adaptation to the PLA can only go so far as showing that we must all be able to *recognize* a reason someone else *has*, the critics essentially forgo the idea of practical necessitation - forgo, that is, the thought that one is practically necessitated by a reason - and supplant it with a focus on theoretical necessitation - "bound" now does not designate the relation of one to *one's reason*, but rather the relation of one (and now unproblematically, of everyone) to *the recognition* that a rationalization is applicable to one.

6

Korsgaard thinks we shouldn't argue in favor of public reasons on the basis of a conception of private reasons. It is a typical strategy:

²⁸ It is interesting to note the contrasting ways in which others are brought under the domain of morality in both arguments: once as subjects and once as objects of moral requirements. In *Self-Constitution*, we find that *we* must treat others as we treat ourselves: the coupling of the argument from constitution and the publicity of normativity yields a picture of interaction with oneself that, when joined by the acknowledgment of other choosers, necessitates morality. In *The Sources*, we find that *others* must treat us as we treat ourselves: the answer to the normative question demands that we respect ourselves, a demand that the publicity of normativity, when joined by the acknowledgment of other people, reveals as public.

“Either the individual’s reasons are served by attention to other people’s reasons, as in the neo-Hobbesian arguments; or the individual’s private reasons are found logically to commit her to taking other people’s reasons into account, as in the neo-Kantian arguments...these arguments [are] trying to *construct* the public character of reasons, starting from the assumption that reasons are private. If I have reason to take your reasons into account, and you have reason to take my reasons into account, then we have reason to share our reasons, and we could just as well call them *our* reasons: public reasons.”²⁹

The problem is that even if such arguments succeed they won’t get us what we want. Reasons on such accounts are “shared” *because* private reasons vindicate them, and so normative force remains a private matter. We get an appearance of sharing reasons because agents promote similar things, but really their reasons are different: each agent is necessitated by their own private reasons. Take for instance self interest (avoiding prospective punishment, for example) as a private reason for obeying the law. Say for a moment that the laws express the conclusions of practical reasoning from the view point of the good of the republic. Although self interested citizens, in obeying the law, look for all the world like they share in the public reasons the good of the republic breeds, really they do not: they each follow a separate, private reason, that is for each her own self interest.

This shows how deep a misunderstanding, and how shallow an exegetical effort, lie at the basis of criticisms of Korsgaard that take her to suggest that reasons inherit in the publicity of language. For such critics take her to equip an initial private reason with an unquestionable normative force and then to rely on Wittgenstein to make plain how a *further* reason, now with respect to you, is implicit in the first one. This is but a variation of the Neo-Kantian argument, where the publicity of language is given the role Neo-Kantians assign to consistency considerations: a rational requirement that originates privately meets publicity considerations to yield a *further* rational requirement, one depending on the initial, privately originated, requirement, extending it as it were. In so reading the argument these critics take Korsgaard to be *following the very strategy she rejects in preparing for her argument*, the strategy the infelicity of which she calls up precisely to motivate, by negation, her own competing suggestion.

²⁹ Sources, 133-4

Indeed, it is this Neo-Kantian and Neo-Hobbesian “fly bottle” dynamic that leads Korsgaard to Wittgenstein in the first place. A prominent feature of Wittgenstein's PLA is its setting out to break the hold of a certain picture of language, which underlies the fantasy of the possibility of a private language. According to this picture, representation is a matter of labeling essentially private mental entities. The picture makes human communication seem miraculous, since it is thought of as the co-ordination of a myriad of isolated laws connecting public signs and private phenomenon³⁰. In showing that the picture is deleterious to the possibility of the normativity of meaning Wittgenstein's PLA demonstrates the publicity of language *qua* normative.

Korsgaard utilizes Wittgenstein's argument to make a parallel move, aiming to break the hold of the private reasons conception on our thought of normativity in action. My remarks in the beginning of the paper suggest that there may be more to be done here with Wittgenstein. For it is a further crucial point of his argument that the fantasy of private language expresses something essential to our life with language, a kind of built in possibility of, and temptation to, skepticism. Is there a parallel to be made to the case of reasons? Why is our life with reasons such that we are so prone to entertaining a fantasy of seclusion, a fantasy that makes normative entities - entities that have their home in our holding each other *answerable, responsible* for what we do - seem like inaccessible, private mental entities to which we have an *exclusive* relation? And suppose that the fantasy of private language is a piece of philosophy; can we say then that Egoism is philosophical?

I think Korsgaard's publicity thesis, with its invocation of Wittgenstein, encourages such questions and perhaps hints at a possible direction to ponder them. The original home of reasons, we are to think, occasions a communion with other people such that I see in the other just another myself. The communion results from the suspension of the hold that the biddings of the Ego have on me, a suspension that must be imagined if I am ever to be *answerable* for what I do. It is not too much of a stretch, I believe, to think of the Egoist's recoil from such communion as a type of

³⁰ See Finkelstein, David, “Wittgenstein On Rules and Platonism”, *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary & Rupert Read, Routledge, 2000

skepticism, especially if skepticism is pictured, after Cavell, as the avoidance of love (for the world, for other people).

The fantasy of retreat to a secluded place of authority, nonthreatening because impenetrable, expresses always an anxiety from assuming responsibility for our criteria, responsibility for the significance with which we imbue our dealings with the world and one another. In the case of the Egoist the anxiety is carried, as it were, on the surface: where what is at stake is *how we should treat one another*, the Egoist seeks a respectable position where *that* is no longer his question. She wishes to be licensed to ward off the burden of the effects of her actions on others *qua* effects on others. I have tried to trace in this paper the Egoist's efforts to maintain two key elements of her position: that she is normatively bound, and that she is “just a person, one among others who are equally real”. But the Egoist is tempted to keep both these elements separate: one finds what one ought to do without so much as considering other people; sameness with others is entertained as a theoretical insight one may only engage after a secure and secluded source of normativity, namely, the Ego, is in place.

The Egoistic temptation corresponds with the skeptical temptation to turn our attitude towards the world or other minds into an intellectual problem, a problem of knowledge. Like the skeptic, the Egoist envisages a private realm of unquestionable authority, and in so doing conceives the question of the attitude to be taken towards other people as like an insoluble philosophical problem, the problem of bridging two distinct realms, one private and immediately accessible, the other external and, all but in principle, unreachable. Korsgaard's ingeniousness, I suggested, lies in insisting, and in seeing the relevance of Wittgenstein for such insistence, that the initial separation of the realms is bogus: *the criteria that make up the realm of reasons dissipate if we cease to acknowledge other people*. Our task in the face of the typical skeptic is to reveal, and rebut, the underlying picture that generates a philosophical difficulty where there is an existential difficulty, say, a difficulty to cope with the terms of being human. I take Korsgaard's publicity thesis to

provide the beginnings of such work, to show, if you will, the Egoist's seesaw: between practical skepticism and Egocentrism.