

## Article

# Presence, forgiveness, and anger in second-personal morality: a reply to Williges and Vogelmann

*Presença, perdão e raiva na moralidade de segunda pessoa: uma resposta a Williges e Vogelmann*

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## ABSTRACT

In this article I respond to the criticisms of Flavio Williges and Rafael Vogelmann regarding my book *The Heart and its Attitudes*. I clarify that the notion of presence and heartfelt second-personal connection should not be confined to agents with deontic competence: we can also be mutually present and emotionally connected with children and animals. I further defend my distinction between deontic and heartfelt forgiveness, maintaining that the absence of affective content in the former does not undermine its second-personal character. Finally, I argue that what I describe as “personal anger” – even if not universally categorized as anger – is a genuine form of emotional appeal for recognition within intimate relationships, and should be understood as belonging to the domain of attitudes of the heart.

Keywords: Second-personal morality; Forgiveness; Anger; Attitudes of the heart; Reciprocity

## RESUMO

Neste texto respondo às críticas de Flavio Williges e Rafael Vogelmann à minha obra *The Heart and its Attitudes*. Esclareço que a noção de presença e conexão afetiva de segunda pessoa não deve ser restrita a agentes com competência deontica: também podemos estar presentes e conectados de modo recíproco com crianças e animais. Defendo ainda minha distinção entre perdão deontico e perdão do coração, sustentando que a falta de conteúdo afetivo no primeiro não elimina seu caráter de segunda pessoa. Por fim, argumento que o fenômeno que descrevo como “raiva pessoal” é uma forma autêntica de apelo emocional por reconhecimento em relações íntimas, e deve ser compreendido como integrante das atitudes do coração.

Palavras-chave: Moralidade de segunda pessoa; Perdão; Raiva; Atitudes do coração; Reciprocidade

## 1 INTRODUCTION

I am very grateful to Flavio Williges and Raphael Vogelmann (henceforth W&V) for taking such care with my book. There is little to disagree with in their review but let me take this opportunity to clarify some points and to acknowledge a mistake I made in the book that I think can be corrected without any change to my overall aims there. I will address the latter first.

## 2 PRESENCE AS MUTUAL EMOTIONAL CONNECTION AND SECOND-PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

W&V note that I say that people who seek heartfelt connection want to be in one another's *presence*—they want to be present *to* one another—and that presence is a second-personal notion. Lovers seek to be with each other: in each other's presence and present to one another. Thus, presence is a second-personal notion. I quote the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of presence: as "The place or space in front of or around a person; the immediate vicinity of a person; the company or society of someone." I then say that the relevant sense of 'person' is itself a second-personal concept "that can be "understood only within a network of concepts involving the idea of (second-personally) addressable claims and demands" (13). This entails, they note, that only beings who are capable of holding themselves accountable—as Locke put it are "capable of a law"—can enter into heartfelt relation. This is not something I should have said. My aim in the book is to argue that there is a form of second-personal relation that it is *not* deontic—heartfelt connection—and that we can connect in this way to (other) animals and to human beings that lack second-personal deontic competence, like young children.

What I should have said is presence is a relation in second-personal space in the broader sense I introduce in the book, namely, involving, a reciprocating relation *either* of mutual accountability *or* of reciprocal heartfelt connection. I have no doubt that we can connect emotionally and be mutually present with children and animals in the heartfelt way I discuss in the book. So I am grateful to W&V for noting the conflict with

what I say about presence in the book and giving me the opportunity to clarify my position.

### 3 DEONTIC FORGIVENESS AND PERSONAL ANGER

There are two other matters I would like to clear up. W&V note that I distinguish between two kinds of forgiveness: deontic and heartfelt forgiveness. The former, I say, involves accepting apology and releasing someone from any demands for further accountability. Deontic forgiveness forgives the debt that the injurer incurred in wronging the injured party. W&V object that this means that this robs deontic forgiveness of “genuine affective content.” That’s true, but I can’t see that it matters. Forgiving someone in this sense—forswearing resentment—retains its second-personal character in being expressed *to* the injuring party, and resentment is certainly affective.

W&V note that it would be odd to describe the father of the prodigal son as having forgiven his son if he simply stopped blaming or resenting him. Some “inner change” is required, they say, so that father had an attitude of “good will” toward the son. This is an interesting case. I agree that good will is required for genuine forgiveness, but that concerns the will and not the heart. But, more than that, since the fathers typically love their sons in a heartfelt way, we are inclined to think the forgiveness in this case should be heartfelt forgiveness.

Finally, W&V take issue with what I call “personal anger” as not holding its object accountable in the way that genuine anger does. “The “usual characterization of anger,” they say, “involve[es] an appraisal of its object as an offense and motivation for retaliation.” What I am describing, they continue, “may not be anger at all, but a different affective posture - one that belongs to the heart yet does not align with the conceptual contours of anger.”

So far as I can see, this is a verbal dispute. They do not deny the phenomenon I’m pointing to—in their words “an emotional appeal for recognition”—but do not think it is aptly called “anger.” So be it. Still, being furious with a partner for failing to recognize and value what one cares about, and so failing to recognize and value them, is a

phenomenon that is akin to moral or righteous anger. The point of the example I give in my book where one partner pays insufficient attention to what the other holds precious, thereby seeming not to care enough about them is meant to be one in which trying to give an account of oneself rather than attending carefully to the first adds fuel to the fire. In other words, treating the first's fury as *moral* anger does nothing to mollify them. Whether we call it personal anger or not, W&V do not dispute that it is a genuine phenomenon. Jilted or scorned lovers who can hardly charge their ex with moral wrong are good examples of the phenomenon I am pointing to, whether we call it a form of anger or not. It is, as I put it, form of "aggressive heart protection".

## REFERENCES

Darwall, S. *The Heart & its Attitudes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024.

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