Moral obligations can often be spotted together with *claims* that people can make on one another. Like, for example, your obligation not to bully me, on the one hand, and on the other my claim against you not to bully me. That claim could be expressed by my protest directed at you at the time of the bullying, or later by my blame, your apology to me, or the special standing that I have to forgive you. What, though, is the connection between the obligations and the interpersonal claims that accompany them? In this book, Wallace advances the view that it is a constitutive connection. That is, he argues that any given moral obligation is constituted by the legitimate claim of the person to whom the obligation is owed. As such, it is because you owe it to me not to bully me that you have an obligation to refrain from doing so, and it is because you violated your obligation that I am entitled to blame you. On this view, all moral obligations share the fundamental character of this bullying scenario in that they must always feature pairs of agents: one who is constrained by the obligation, and another to whom the obligation is owed.

The major advantage of this view, to which Wallace gives the name 'the relational interpretation of morality' (1) (or just 'relational morality' for short), is that it can offer such a straightforward explanation of exactly that connection between moral obligations, and the interpersonal relations in which those obligations play out through demands, blame, apology, forgiveness and so on. Wallace's relational view does this whilst at the same time preserving another explanandum of moral obligations, namely the fact that they exist, and ought to constrain the will of agents, independently of whether any demand or blame is in fact expressed by those to whom the obligations are owed. Call this explanandum the independence of morality. It is the fact that I have the claim right against you not to bully me that means you are bound accordingly by morality, and it should not require me to exercise that claim for it to be an active consideration for you.

Other moral theories struggle to accommodate what Wallace sees as these central explananda. Some views, such as consequentialism, are perfectly capable of accounting for the independence of morality from any particular exercise of a claim-holder's claim right. This is because according to consequentialism, it is the fact that an action will produce (sufficiently) bad consequences that makes it morally wrong. The wrongness of the action need not be dependent on the agent's relations to others. Yet for that very reason, views such as consequentialism are not well-placed to make sense of the apparent relationality of morality. The fact that obligations can so often be spotted together with these interpersonal claims is a curiosity for consequentialists, and one that Wallace thinks they cannot properly explain (86-7).

On the other hand, there are some views that have been popular in recent years which, like Wallace's account, do acknowledge the significance that interpersonal relations have in grounding moral obligations. Views such as Stephen Darwall's (2006) second-personal account of morality also regard obligations as constitutively related to claims, and thereby to blame and the other dimensions of the relationality of morality. For Darwall, moral obligations are grounded in the possibility of their being legitimately demanded of the agents who stand under them, by others, through a second-personal (I-you) form of address. The problem for this school of views, though, is the second of the two explananda already mentioned: the independence of morality. Insofar as Darwall thinks that morality is dependent on second-personal address, his view appears to be a form of voluntarism, which Wallace finds problematic. Voluntarism has a hard job accounting for the fact that if a given action is morally required, then this will be the case whether or not anyone demands it (second-personally or otherwise). *The Moral Nexus* could in fact be seen fundamentally in terms of these explananda. It is the most developed attempt to date to think through a view of morality that explains its relationality without being voluntaristic.

The contrast between Wallace's view and Darwall's is useful for illustrating a further distinctive feature of the outlook set forward in this book. In Darwall's picture, the relationality of an obligation to the person to whom it is owed is indirect. On that view, I have a duty to you not to, say, tread on your foot, but the reason I owe my conduct to you is that you are a representative of the moral community. Darwall's theory would have it that I owe the same behaviour (avoiding your foot), not only to you, but to any and every other member of the moral community. But, as noted above, Wallace's conception of morality is derived from the normative relations between pairs of individuals – and is, in that sense, a *bipolar* account of morality (a term introduced by Michael Thompson's influential discussion, with which Wallace engages at length). So for Wallace, my obligation not to tread on your foot is constituted by the fact that I owe that much to you, and not to anyone else. Others – third parties – may blame me for treading on your foot, of course, but they can only do so by in some sense taking up your standpoint as the one whose bipolar resentment is warranted. The slogan for this aspect of the view (drawn from Strawson) is that third-party blame is the vicarious analogue of resentment (99).

Besides simply developing a position that accommodates the two key explananda of morality mentioned above, Wallace builds an independent argument for relational morality through the course of the book. That positive argument comes in two phases. First (in Chapter Two) he provides an analysis of moral thought, arguing on conceptual grounds for a conception of moral considerations as obligatory, in the sense of being presumptive requirements on the wills of agents: reasons promoting actions over which the agent has no discretion. The notion of a requirement is, on the face of it, a puzzle for any *intra*personal conception of morality – i.e. any conception that views moral thought as being comprised exclusively of an agent's own reflections on what is good and worth doing. This is because insofar as it is the agent themselves who is authoritative to determine for themselves the best course of action, it seems that they have a kind of authority or discretion that is incompatible with their being under a practical requirement or obligation. Whilst that issue for any intrapersonal theory of morality may not be insurmountable, Wallace argues that it is the basis of a consideration in favour of his preferred *inter*personal theory of morality. The relational view is, by contrast, well-placed to explain the obligatoriness of moral considerations: it says that such considerations take the form of requirements on the agent because they have their source in something outside of the agent, namely in another person. So the first phase of his arguments starts from an analysis of moral considerations and argues for their deeply social quality.

The second phase moves in the opposite direction. There (in Chapter Three) Wallace takes up the social phenomena that are centrally connected to moral obligation: accountability, blame, moral repair, apology, forgiveness. And here he argues that just as moral requirements were best understood as arising from interpersonal relations, the normative structure of interpersonal relations are also best understood as built around moral requirements. The crucial insight that Wallace focuses on explaining here is that moral requirements are not of normative significance only for the agents who stand under them. Rather, those requirements themselves are recognised by others who also are responsive to them from their own perspectives. For example, if you flout your obligation not to tread on my foot, then it becomes immediately apparent that the obligation was not merely a private consideration of yours. I too was conscious of it, and am now adjusting my attitude towards you in light of your disregard for the requirement. I may well, for example, blame you for treading on my foot, and expect an apology to be forthcoming. If your requirement is constituted by my claim on you not to tread on me, then it is plain to see why the consideration had this relationality of being normatively significant to both of us. This is, therefore, a major strength of the view that Wallace advances.

Indeed, the book has many other strengths, which lie, in large part, in the rich, subtle argumentation that fills its subsequent chapters, which deal with the normative foundations, scope and practical consequences of relational morality. I haven't the space to summarize all of those arguments, so it will have to suffice to have presented the core of the position that Wallace puts forward. That position is at once quite familiar from other modern discussions of interpersonal morality, and yet undoubtedly novel in the way that the view is filled in. Having already described several of the important things that Wallace's account does, in turning now to register some thoughts in a more critical vein, I will discuss something that the account does not do.

Wallace's view explains the relationality of moral obligations, of practical requirements the flouting of which licenses resentment and blame and calls for apology. What he does not explain is the relationality of supererogatory altruistic reasons, that is, he does not account for the way that it can sometimes be other people's business whether we act in their interest, even in cases where doing so would go above and beyond what morality specifically requires of us. In what remains of this review, I propose to consider how much of a problem that might be.

Moral obligations are not the only kind of practical reasons that seem to have normative significance for people other than the agent for whom they are reasons. Compare the following two cases. First, consider a case of a directed duty that I have to you. I am under a moral obligation to save you from being physically maimed in an accident when I am especially well-placed to save you, and doing so will not come at any perilous cost to me. This obligation, on Wallace's analysis, is exemplary of relational morality. It is obviously in your interest not to be maimed, and that interest itself may not be relational in any significant sense. But that interest, together with the other relevant features of the situation including my relatively costless capacity to save you, gives rise to the eminently relational claim that you have against me to save you. My obligation, then, is just the first-personal reflection of your claim. And this relational structure can be put to work in Wallace's theory in explaining how you are entitled to hold me to account if I fail to save you, by feeling resentful about it, and demanding that I do whatever I can to try to make it up to you. It is in virtue of the fact that my obligation was keyed to your claim that it is you to whom I owe an apology in the event of my failure to heed that obligation. And, likewise, that same relational structure explains how you are uniquely well-placed to forgive me later for the wrong we are supposing I did to you. Both the form of the deliberation that I should have entertained, and the normativity of the considerations that would have appeared there, are irreducibly relational according to Wallace (159).

That's all very well. Indeed, I find Wallace's way of making sense of that example persuasive. But here's the second case, which involves a supererogatory altruistic reason. Suppose that you and I are friends, and you have an idea for a trip we might embark on together: a week-long walking holiday that would take up a substantial amount of both of our annual leave from work, but on which we would be able to enjoy each other's company, just the two of us. But I decline, saying that I'm afraid I had been thinking of spending my holiday this year with a new group of friends.

Whilst there may be some friendships in which to decline in this manner would seriously contravene the mutually acknowledged commitment that the relationship involves – and whilst those might be contexts in which it could even be morally wrong to slight one's friend by declining their holiday invitation – I am imagining the friendship between you and I to be of a different sort. You acknowledge that I am perfectly within my rights not to spend the holiday with you: you were only asking, not demanding that I come away with you. As such, you don't exactly blame me for my decision. However, you might well have some feelings that are a bit like blame, but weaker. You might feel personally hurt by my decision. You are not betrayed, but you may well, reasonably, feel

let down. You don't expect an apology, but nonetheless you do think it would be appropriate for me to try to make it up to you. And if I did make it up to you, you wouldn't be in a position to forgive me, exactly, since you don't think I did anything wrong, but you would be glad of the repair I had done to our friendship and that might be enough for you to let the feelings of being hurt and let down slip away and be forgotten. This example poses the problem to Wallace that it seems to involve a practical reason that is deeply relational, and is in some sense moral, but which is not conceptually connected to any claims or directed duties, and so which is not officially part of the sui generis domain of relational deliberation that his theory posits. The obligation in the first example was relational in the sense of (i) stemming from an interest of yours which (ii) led you to expect a certain action of me, and where the consideration in question was not just a private matter for me but something that was (iii) normatively significant for you too in that its being flouted (iv) licensed certain reactive attitudes of yours that were directed at me and which (v) called for a response from me. The supererogatory reason in the second example looks to be relational in all of these ways too, and yet its relationality calls for a different kind of explanation than one that derives from the special deliberative status of practical requirements.

There are of course routes available via which Wallace might be able to deal with this kind of objection. I raise it, as much as anything, just to press the significance of the book's eponymous nexus between people, which may extend even further than is covered in Wallace's pioneering treatment.

References

Darwall, S. 2006. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. Harvard University Press