

Co-hosted with Women's Studies

## 'Moral Bindingness'

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Are moral reasons binding on us, and if so, in virtue of what? This paper first examines Jamie Dreier's analysis of categoricity found in the one kind of categorical imperative he believes in, that found in means/ends reasoning, or the rule (M/E), in the hopes it might shed light on what categoricity would have to be like for moral reasons. (M/E) states: If you desire to  $\psi$  and believe that by  $\Phi$ -ing, you will  $\psi$ , then you have a reason to  $\Phi$ . Dreier explains the categoricity of (M/E) as follows: someone who is rational and has an end-desire and the relevant instrument-belief should also have the means-desire – if she or he “accepts” (M/E). “Accepting” is “whatever it takes to be actually motivated by the kind of reason in question.” Dreier analogizes the bindingness of (M/E) to that of modus ponens (MP). Yet he makes an interesting caveat that sheds more light on bindingness and, thus, categoricity: (M/E) reasoning can fail locally, while (MP) and other principles of logic *necessarily* a rational agent, because rational agents necessarily “accept” them. This suggests that the categoricity of instrumental reasons lies with something different from that of the principles of logic, for Dreier.

I aim to show that valid argument forms might bind more like (M/E) than Dreier suggests. Using an argument about the problem of evil that takes the form of modus tollens (MT), I argue that there is a third personal reading on which (MT) does not bind necessarily, and that for both (M/E) and (MT) and other logical forms, “accepting” them itself involves making them first-personal, allowing us to shift from “*there is a reason*” to “*I have a reason*,” which is necessary for bindingness. Taking a first-person perspective means that the agent has to “step into” the argument, or “own it.” I argue that additionally the agent needs to link her or his first-personal beliefs in the right way. I explain bindingness ultimately in terms of there being an inconsistency in the agent's *rational self*, not just in the link between the set of premises and the conclusion, that explains the irrationality of a person who believes in the premises but not in the conclusion. Finally, I use three cases from moral epistemology (the psychopath, the socially privileged person who is unable to “step into the shoes” of the nonprivileged, and Maggie Little's/John McDowell's view that we all need certain emotions to know what is morally required) to support the view that “accepting” moral reasons involves taking a kind of first-person perspective on them.

**Friday, January 11, 2013**  
**Hagey Hall, Room 334**  
**3:30 p.m.**