

5

Reasoning as Responsive Conversation

5.1 Two Pictures: An Austenian Interlude

Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet does not go well. Elizabeth, unable to register her rejection with him ends by crying, "Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart." Mr. Collins replies that she is "uniformly charming" and claims that he is "persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority of both your excellent parents, my proposals will not fail of being acceptable." Austen concludes the scene by telling us that "to such perseverance in willful self-deception Elizabeth would make no reply, and immediately and in silence withdrew."¹ Sometimes more talking is not the answer.

What exactly has gone wrong? And what might be done about it? Austen offers at least three diagnoses, and despite their sources, they are all worth taking seriously. Mr. Collins thinks nothing needs to be done because nothing has gone wrong. Austen begins the next chapter with him in "silent contemplation of his successful love."² Now, this may merely be a result of his obtuseness and willful self-deception, but the problem cannot merely be that his proposal has been rejected this time. After all, things do not appear to stand any worse with Mr. Collins at this point than they do for Mr. Darcy after he first proposes. If anything, Darcy's initial proposal, considered as an argument meant to compel assent with the unforced force of reason is worse than Mr. Collins's: "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."³ This is followed, Austen reports, by

¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. I, ch. XIX, 83–4.

² *Ibid.*, vol. I, ch. XX, 84.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, ch. XI, 145.

a rather passionate enumeration of all the reasons he has for *not* proposing to Elizabeth. And Elizabeth's initial response is more final than the one she tries to impress on Mr. Collins: "You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any possible way that would have tempted me to accept it . . . I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed upon to marry."⁴ And, yet, this exchange, unpromising as it seems, turns out to be the beginning of a successful proposal, a model of the kind of responsiveness characteristic of reasoning as portrayed by the social picture. So it may be that Mr. Collins's mistake is not in seeing failure as success, but in prematurely judging it a success.

What about those who recognize Mr. Collins's initial failure? We have heard from Elizabeth, and will need to come back to her diagnosis. Her basic point is that Mr. Collins's failure lies in his lack of responsiveness to her rejection, which amounts to a failure to treat her like a rational creature, to reason with her. This leaves room for the possibility of a proposal that succeeds at reasoning but fails to secure acceptance. One way to respond properly to the rejection of a proposal is to withdraw it. Austen, however, gives us a third perspective on the exchange that is worth considering. For while Elizabeth and Mr. Collins were alone together in the dining room, someone was eagerly lurking by the door. As soon as Elizabeth withdraws, in rushes Mrs. Bennet, who congratulates "him and herself on the happy prospect of their nearer connection."

Mr. Collins received and returned the felicitations with equal pleasure, and then proceeded to relate the particulars of their interview, with the result of which he trusted he had every reason to be satisfied, since the refusal which his cousin has steadfastly given him would naturally flow from her bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her character.

This information, however, startled Mrs. Bennet;—she would have been glad to be equally satisfied that her daughter had meant to encourage him by protesting against his proposals, but she dared not to believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But depend upon it, Mr. Collins," she added, "that Lizzy shall be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it myself directly. She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest; but I will *make* her know it."⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. vol. I, ch. XX, 84.

Mrs. Bennet, like her daughter, sees the attempted proposal as a failure of reasoning, but unlike her daughter, pronounces a different diagnosis of the problem. Whereas Elizabeth holds that Mr. Collins has failed to show her the responsiveness owed to a rational creature, her mother sees her failure to act in her own manifest interest as a sign of *her* irrationality. The failure to reason is hers, not his, but it is a failure she can be made to overcome: she can be “brought to reason.”

Mr. Collins, confident that Elizabeth’s words need not be taken seriously, is pleased with his reasons and their capacity to ultimately bring about the end he desires. Elizabeth, confident that Mr. Collins’s failure to hear her words shows that he is not reasoning with her, sees a failure that can be placed squarely at his feet. And her mother, while accepting the impact of her daughter’s rejection, takes them as a sign of her irrationality, and so while she takes the episode to be a failed attempt at reasoning, she places the blame for this on Elizabeth. How might we understand the impetus behind them? It might merely trace back to the personalities of the people involved: Mr. Collins is self-satisfied and obtuse, Elizabeth finds him so, and her mother wants nothing more than to marry off her daughters in a way that secures the family’s financial security. But something deeper and more philosophically interesting is also at work here. These differing diagnoses derive what plausibility they have from the picture of reason they share, and so they bring out the impact that this picture has on our approach to the world and those with whom we share it.

According to the standard picture, the activity of reasoning is characterized derivatively, in terms of reason and reasons.⁶ That is, what determines whether we are reasoning on the standard picture is whether we are invoking reasons and/or being guided by reason. So, if we ask, from within this picture, whether a purported stretch of reasoning really is reasoning, we are asking not about the nature of the activity itself, but its content: is what is said really a reason? Is what is thought guided by principles of reason? I fail to engage in the activity of reasoning on this picture if the steps in my thinking process are not really reasons, but arbitrary stipulations or falsehoods or mere assertions of preferences or desires, or if I fail to connect them in a way determined by their inferential relations to one another. This kind of failure is what leads Mrs. Bennet to describe Elizabeth as headstrong and

⁶ See Chapter 1.2.

foolish for so completely failing to attend to the obvious considerations in favor of accepting Mr. Collins. And, from this perspective, Mrs. Bennet is absolutely correct. Given the society Elizabeth lives in, her place in it, and absent the beneficent hand of an omnipotent author who is preparing a better option, she is thwarting her interests in refusing Mr. Collins's offer. These considerations, after all, lead her very sensible friend Charlotte to angle for and accept Mr. Collins's next proposal, an action she defends to Elizabeth by saying "I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."⁷

Although particular theories will disagree about what reasons we face, all of them involve the further claim that part of what makes a consideration a reason is that it bears the appropriate authority, which, according to the standard picture, is the authority of command. That is, one way in which we might call into question whether someone's bald and unsupported assertion counts as a reason is that it has no authority to command or direct our own thoughts. Just because you say that the sky is orange or up is down or right is wrong doesn't make it so. These pronouncements cannot command my perceptions and thoughts, which is to say that they are not reasons.

The authority of command must be grounded in a backward-looking manner if it is to be legitimate. Thus, determining whether a stretch of reflection is really reasoning (as this is understood on the standard picture) requires us to look backwards, to something prior to the particular reflection itself, that might ground the authority in question. Among the kinds of things that are generally brought forth in consideration at this point are features of the world, the person purportedly reasoning, or what is being said. I can call into question whether you are reasoning by pointing out that your premises are false, or do not capture your actual beliefs and desires, but are mere fantasies or wishes, or that the considerations you are bringing forth are not suitably general to count as reasons. On the standard picture, the characteristic norms of reasoning govern these kinds of issues: they delineate the space of reasons or lay down principles of reason. They tell us directly or give us a way to determine ahead of time what reasons there are, which interests are grounds for accepting a proposal, and whether one's

⁷ *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. I, ch. XXII, 96.

own expected happiness in companionship is one of them. From this perspective, it is not at all unreasonable for both Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy to propose to Elizabeth in the complete confidence that she will, if she is rational, accept, and thus take any refusal on her part as a sign that she is headstrong and foolish, or not sincere in her rejection. The reasons she has for accepting either of them are plain as day, and precede anything they may say by way of making their proposals appropriately appealing. How a proposal is made or an argument presented is, on this picture, mere window-dressing, a question of manner, not substance, and certainly does not affect whether it is a reasonable one or not.

There is, however, a fourth possible interpretation of Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins's proposal, one that grows out of the social picture of reasoning. It follows from some of the results of the last chapter, and, given the course of the novel, is arguably the one Austen favors. It holds that whether Mr. Collins and Elizabeth are reasoning depends on what happens going forward. The social picture begins from the activity of reasoning itself. It distinguishes reasoning from other forms of interaction such as commanding or deferring or bullying or professing. As a result, determining if a stretch of activity is really reasoning on this picture requires looking at the nature of the activity itself. It is the features of the activity that determine whether the considerations brought forth in the course of it are to count as reasons. Reasoning on this picture is an activity of inviting others to take our words as speaking for them as well and doing so in a manner that remains always open to criticism. It requires certain levels of responsiveness to our reasoning partners. On this picture, what makes something really a reason is that it figures in a stretch of reasoning. That means that reasons cannot be identified ahead of time, absent the context in which they are offered. Something might be a reason if deployed in one way, but not another. The context sensitivity here turns on how the consideration is offered, rather than, as on the standard picture, for what it is offered as a consideration. A consideration may count as a reason on this picture when offered as an invitation, but not when used to specify or bolster a command, even if in both cases, it is offered as a consideration for the same thing.

Furthermore, the kind of authority that reasoning constructs here is the authority of connection. Since the authority of connection is grounded in a forward-looking manner, the question of whether we are really reasoning will also require a forward-looking answer. That there are forward-looking

considerations that serve to determine whether someone is engaged in a particular activity should not be entirely surprising. Think of the examples of playing chess from the previous chapter. There are, of course, things we can have already done or failed to do that make it the case that we are not (or no longer) playing chess despite sitting at a board and taking turns moving the pieces. These are backward-looking considerations. But, if we are to be playing chess, it must be the case that certain rules continue to be obeyed. Some of these can be cashed out in our present and past intentions, but not all of them. It is always a possibility that our criteria disappoint us, that we find that what we thought we were doing is not in fact what we were doing all along. That what we have been doing all along is not yet settled but depends on what comes in the future is what it means to say that there are forward-looking considerations that determine the nature of our activity. The point can be illustrated more vividly with cases where it is really indeterminate in the course of an activity what activity it is. Think, for instance, of a toddler taking her first steps. She gets to her feet, picks up one foot and puts it down a little further on without falling. She has taken a step. Is she walking? We don't know yet (nor does she). It will depend on what happens next.

So how might it be the case that whether we are presently reasoning is determinable in part by what happens down the road? There are of course cases we can imagine where something that starts out like a perfectly good stretch of reasoning on the standard picture disintegrates somewhere along the way. In fact, these are all too common: someone makes a cogent case for something up to a point, and then relies on a fallacious move, makes an unwarranted leap, or introduces a faulty or irrelevant piece of evidence. But in these cases, the person was reasoning until that point, or she was reasoning, but badly. The kind of forward-looking considerations that determine that we are reasoning on the social picture are somewhat different. If I offer you a consideration for believing something or doing something or picturing the world a certain way, what determines whether I am reasoning with you is whether I am issuing an invitation or attempting to command. And what determines that, in part, is both how you respond and how I respond to that, and where those responses take our interaction going forward. These are the sort of considerations that lead to Elizabeth's diagnosis of Mr. Collins's proposal as a failure of reasoning: it is not the considerations he brings forth or the facts that support them that is the problem, but his utter failure to be responsive to what she says in reply.

Note, however, that as ridiculous as his initial proposal is, we are not in a position upon hearing it to know whether he is reasoning with Elizabeth or not, at least if we are thinking of reasoning according to the social picture. The very same words could be reasons if they were the beginning of a different interaction. It is only because of the exchange of words that follows them that we can determine that they were not steps in the activity of reasoning. Until their conversation completely breaks off, it is always possible for him to retrospectively change the nature of their interaction by changing the nature of his responsiveness. This, in fact, is what happens with Mr. Darcy. And though he shows more responsiveness in the initial encounter in that he accepts her refusal for what it is, it is what happens after he leaves the room that makes his activity, taken as a whole, one of reasoning. Rather than dismissing her rejection, he asks for her reasons, and rather than taking these as signs that his ends can be more easily met with another woman, he spends the rest of the novel responding to them, both by arguing against them and by changing in response to them. Though, as Austen makes clear, he does not initially propose with the intention of reasoning with Elizabeth (either in the standard sense or the sense given by the social picture) his attachment to her makes it the case that, at least on the social picture, this is what he ends up having done. One important consequence of this fact about reasoning on the social picture is that there is a deep sense in which it is never too late to change the past: we can always change how we respond to one another in a way that will turn our interaction, including what has gone before, into reasoning. But to do so will involve not bringing each other to reason in the sense Mrs. Bennet has in mind. It will involve inviting them to reason.

5.2 The Norms of Reasoning: An Overview

Escaping the standard picture of reasoning in order to bring fully into view the activity of reasoning pictured by the social picture and thus describe an ideal of living together, requires a characterization of this activity in terms of a set of characteristic norms that distinguish reasoning from other forms of speaking, without relying on the standard picture's characterization of certain kinds of considerations as reasons. These norms would enable a diagnosis of failures of reasoning without recourse to the standard picture,

and identify the skills needed to reason well. If reasoning is a form of responsive conversation, then its features and characteristic norms should carve out a subset of all conversational interactions. At the same time, following these norms should yield an activity recognizable as reasoning quite apart from the theoretical apparatus being assembled here. The considerations that get brought forth in reasoning had better share some essential features with the considerations otherwise called reasons. And, so as not to fall back into a version of the standard picture, what must give these considerations their normative status as reasons has to trace back to the norms of the activity, not something that precedes it. That is a lot to ask.

Here, roughly, is my proposal. The norms discussed below follow from the three central features of the activity of reasoning: (1) it is a form of inviting; (2) to take our words as speaking for others as well; and (3) is always open to criticism. These features each serve to narrow the category of conversation and give rise to three kinds of norms that parallel those that govern conversation more generally. They also explain why the considerations that count as reasons on this picture have features that we associate with reasons more generally: objectivity, universality, and authority.

Conversing with someone requires that what we say is intelligible to them. Reasoning with them requires, further, that what we say to them is intelligible as an invitation. That requires that what we say can be heard as an invitation, given the context. An invitation is a kind of opening up or making public, and so considerations offered as invitations must be public. Publicity then takes the place of objectivity. One consequence of thinking of reasoning as inviting is that it highlights the public or social nature of the activity of reasoning. This does not mean that we cannot reason alone, but that in reasoning, we cannot be engaging in a pattern of reflection that isolates us from others. We fail to reason then, not by being headstrong or foolish, but by isolating ourselves, even in the presence of others.

Conversing with someone requires sufficient levels of equality that we can speak with them and not merely to them. Reasoning with them requires the possibility that they accept what we say as speaking for them as well, and that requires that we are open to the possibility that they can speak for us. Reasoning is an invitation to share a certain kind of normative space, and sharing a space in this sense involves making room for each of its occupants to inhabit it as their home, not merely as a passing guest. Reasoning thus requires a level of reciprocity that makes it possible that

there is a “we” for which we can both speak. Since not all invitations are offered with the hope or even desire that they be accepted, reasoning only requires this possibility, and not an actual “we.”⁸ Nevertheless, the need to advert to even a possible “we” makes all reasons social reasons. Though considerations that can speak for us need not be universal, they have a kind of extension beyond my individual subjectivity that secures what universality secures for reasons on the standard view. Since they have this extension only because we give it to them, the social picture also brings out clearly the responsibility we bear for the scope of our reasons.

Finally, conversing requires that we are sincere, that we stand behind our words enough that they can be taken as speaking for us. Reasoning further requires a kind of good faith which can be understood as having two components, both of which follow from reasoning being an invitation to share a particular kind of normative space: a space of reasons. First, in order to be genuinely offering an invitation, I have to be responsive to its rejection. Second, in order for the space I invite you to share with me to be a space of reasons, it has to be fully open to criticism, not only by those who inhabit it, but by anyone. This gives reasons a kind of dual structure: they are subject both to rejection by some and criticism by all. It is this openness of what we say to rejection and criticism that opens the possibility that what we say might bear the authority of connection. And so, in opening what we say to criticism, we lay the ground for our reasons to have authority. Once again, coming to understand reasoning in this way shifts what counts as a failure of reasoning. Someone who, like Mr. Collins, deploys universal, objective, authoritative considerations in pursuit of his ends, and takes himself to be justified in ignoring all opposition because he has reason on his side will turn out, on the social picture, as well as in the mind of Elizabeth Bennet, to be the one who is headstrong and foolish.⁹

⁸ As we will see in the next chapter, those forms of reasoning which are concerned to establish or maintain an actual “we” form an important subset of the full category of reasoning.

⁹ Here I am in broad agreement with Michel Foucault’s distinction between polemics and “the serious play of questions and answers” aimed at “reciprocal elucidation.” The activity of reasoning described by the social picture involves the serious play of questions and answers, and one of the dangers of confining our understanding of reason to the standard picture is that we lapse into polemics as we reason. See Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 381–90 (London: Penguin, 1984). Thanks to David Owen for directing me to this discussion.

5.3 The Norms of Intelligibility

In order for what I say to you to be intelligible, you need to be able to understand not only the meaning of my words, but my point in saying them to you.¹⁰ If what I say to you takes the form of an invitation, then for it to be intelligible to you as an invitation, you have to be able to understand the point of my inviting you. And that, in turn, requires that I have such a point. As was discussed in Chapter 1, there are a variety of considerations that make issuing an invitation appropriate. I may issue an invitation in complete confidence that you will accept it, but in a situation where I am nevertheless not in a position to or do not wish to command you. I may issue a genuine invitation, when I hope for your acceptance, but am unsure of it. And I may issue an invitation out of mere politeness, both confident in and hopeful that you will refuse my offer, either to show you that I have nothing to hide, or to affirm a different kind of relationship between us, one of civility or respect, though not friendship or intimacy. My point, then, in inviting you depends on which of these kinds of invitations I mean to make, and my intelligibility in making the invitation will depend on our sharing enough of a background that we can work out what kind of invitation is being made.

Similarly, there are a variety of contexts in which we might reason with one another. Perhaps we have to come to an agreement or make a decision together.¹¹ Perhaps we merely want to work out where each of us stands on a matter that has come up, either because it is itself important or because our conversation has turned that way. Perhaps I want to be left alone, and yet think you deserve reassurance that I have nothing to hide in so wanting. Which of these we are doing determines the kind of invitations we offer, and thus our point in offering one invitation rather than another. If we are not both sufficiently sensitive to the context in which we are reasoning and thus the kind of invitations we are offering, then our interaction threatens to degenerate into mere talking to or at each other. Think, for instance, of a case where one person is trying to lay out her position as one a reasonable person could occupy, but the person with whom she is talking thinks she is trying to convert him to her position. Whether they are talking about

¹⁰ See Chapter 3.4 and 4.2.

¹¹ This kind of case will be the focus of Chapter 6.

matters as important as religious belief or as trivial as how to load a dishwasher, the reasons that she offers seem to him to be faulty or beside the point or question-begging, because none of them offer him an invitation he is moved to accept. As long as he does not understand what her point is in reasoning with him about this matter, he finds her invitations unintelligible as invitations.

The need for our invitations to be intelligible as invitations in order for us to be reasoning brings out three important features of reasoning on the picture being developed here. First, reasoning is essentially a social activity. It is something we not only do in the presence of others, but with others. Reasoning with others does not require their literal presence as we engage in reflection. But solitary reflection only counts as reasoning if it is answerable to others: it could be intelligibly done in their presence. Second, reasoning involves making a certain space public or reaffirming its publicity. A description of a space of reasons only counts as an invitation if the description makes that space publicly available, at least to those to whom the invitation is offered. If, in contrast, I describe some space I occupy in great but ultimately idiosyncratic detail and thus render the space unintelligible to anyone else, then I cannot be understood as inviting someone to share it with me. Third, reasoning turns out to be an activity that is highly context dependent. Not all invitations can be intelligibly offered to everyone in all situations, and so the mere fact that we cannot understand someone as offering an invitation to us or in this circumstance and she makes no attempt to render her invitation intelligible to us need not mean that she is not reasoning. It only means that she is not reasoning with us. All three claims have counterparts on a standard picture of reason, and it will be helpful in unpacking them to contrast them with these more familiar claims.

One of the central debates in philosophy in the last several decades and arguably the last several centuries has been between those who approach reasons and reasoning as natural psychological phenomena, and those who regard them as fundamentally normative.¹² Thinking of reasoning as a natural psychological phenomenon involves thinking of it as proceeding according to certain more or less causal laws, and this goes hand in hand with thinking of reasons as made up of some combination of psychological

¹² For a description and analysis of this divide, see Onora O'Neill, "Four Models of Practical Reasoning," in *Bounds of Justice*, 11–28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

states such as beliefs and desires and features of the world that can affect our psychological states. Thus, to take a simple example, we might think that a person has a reason to take a certain action when she has a desire for something combined with a belief that taking that action will somehow result in or bring her closer to that desired end. On such a view, reasons look like they are importantly private. Your desire for a double-cheese pizza may give you a reason to pick up the phone and order one, but it doesn't give me a reason to do so (unless of course, I have the same desire or a separate reason to act to satisfy your desires). Your desire as such does not have the same authority for me that it does for you. Reason's privacy in this sense is also a form of context dependence. What is a reason for what depends on a variety of other contingent psychological states. My belief that picking up the phone is part of a process that will eventually lead to the delivery of a pizza is only a reason for me to pick up the phone if I want a pizza.

In contrast to this, many philosophers who work downstream from Kant make a point of highlighting the normative nature of reasons, and argue that reasons cannot be understood as made up of psychological states. Reasons stand in judgment of those states. Reasons are, to use T. M. Scanlon's phrase, "considerations in favor of" forming certain attitudes. And while some psychological states might serve as such considerations, it is a mistake to think of reasons as such states.¹³ Something can be a consideration in favor of forming an attitude as a result of certain inferential or causal or other relations to other things beyond our psyches. To say that reasons are normative is to say that they have a certain authority: if I have a good enough reason to believe or do something, then, barring reasons not to, I ought to believe or do it. And if this reason is a result of something other than my particular psychology, then it also looks as if its authority will have to hold more broadly. According to this line of thinking, the reason you have for ordering a pizza is not your desire, but the considerations that make that desire reasonable: the combination of the gooey cheese and the tangy sauce, the relative ease of having pizza for dinner compared to shopping for ingredients and cooking something, and so forth.¹⁴ From here, there is an argument to show that reasoning is a

¹³ *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 41–9.

¹⁴ I elide here various concerns about the picture of desire that even this account of reasoning rests on. For a trenchant discussion of these problems and an attractive alternative, see Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

public activity. In order for something to be a reason, it must wield a certain kind of non-idiosyncratic authority. Wielding such authority requires that it applies across situations and persons, and that implies that reasons have a certain level of generality in virtue of their being reasons. That is, something that does not have this generality and thus does not have authority across some suitable range of cases is a merely idiosyncratic consideration and not a genuine reason. Since reasons must be general in this admittedly vague sense, invocations of reasons must also have a kind of generality to them. So it should be impossible to undertake a stretch of reasoning that was entirely idiosyncratic and not open to anyone else to follow. Your reasoning about the pizza does not go: I want pizza, I believe picking up the phone is a step on the route to eating one, therefore I will pick up the phone. Rather, it goes more like this: eating something cheap, easy to procure, and on the greasy side would be good given my circumstances (poor, lazy, and hard-wired to find fatty foods pleasant). A pizza is all of those things. Therefore, I have reasons to eat a pizza. Picking up the phone . . . And this line of reasoning is authoritative for others. They may not be in your circumstances, and so the reasoning may not yield a reason to pick up the phone for them. But this is not because your reasons are private, but because your circumstances are special.¹⁵ Note that this route to the publicity of reasoning involves denying a certain level of context-sensitivity of reasons, as it relies on their generality (the circumstances that make the considerations into reasons can't be too idiosyncratic). It also takes the position to be argued against to be the naturalist one, which has trouble showing why my reasons should have any bearing on you. And so it generally takes itself to be successful if it can show that reasons can be both public and authoritative.

In contrast to this position, we arrive at the publicity of reasoning on the social picture in a rather different manner. Reasoning is the activity of offering a certain kind of invitation to others. It is thus essentially public because it is directed at others. This is why it is a central activity in living together. The publicity of this activity then also has implications for the publicity of its content. If reasons are the invitations that are offered in the course of reasoning, then they also cannot be entirely idiosyncratic.

¹⁵ For an example of this kind of argument, see Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

If I attempt to offer you an invitation that is not one you can understand as meaningful, or as an invitation, then I am not actually inviting you. So, if I cite sufficiently idiosyncratic considerations in my attempt to reason with you, then you will not be able to understand my invitation as genuine. The requirement that reasons be public comes, then, not from their need to be general in order to wield the authority of command, but from their need to play a role in the activity of inviting. This means that the publicity reasons have on the social picture need not push against their context dependence. What makes reasons public is that considerations count as reasons only when invoked within a certain activity. That activity, however, is itself context dependent, and so the reasons that get invoked within it can also be context dependent. To put the contrast schematically, on the standard picture, reasons are grounded in objective features of the world. Because the grounds are objective, they can be shared, and so the considerations they invoke are public. On the social picture, the order goes in reverse: reasoning is an activity of making public, and so counts as reasoning only when it yields considerations that are shared. Among those who share these considerations, they function as objectively grounded.¹⁶

The differences between these approaches are further clarified by considering how each picture diagnoses failures of reasoning. Consider the case of John Nash, the Nobel-prize-winning mathematician who suffered from schizophrenia. Nash's biographer, Sylvia Nasar, opens her account of Nash's life, *A Beautiful Mind*, with a scene in a mental hospital in 1959. He is being visited by Harvard professor George Mackey, who finally asks him, "How could you, a mathematician, a man devoted to reason and logical proof... how could you believe that extraterrestrials are sending you messages? How could you believe that you are being recruited by aliens from outer space to save the world? How could you...?"

Nasar continues:

Nash looked up at last and fixed Mackey with an unblinking stare as cool and dispassionate as that of any bird or snake. "Because," Nash said slowly in his soft,

¹⁶ A similar schema and argument on its behalf and for endorsing the social side of it can be found in Christine Korsgaard, "The Reasons We Can Share," in *Constructing the Kingdom of Ends*, 275–310 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On this point, as on several others, Korsgaard's account of reason is in line with the social rather than the standard picture.

reasonable southern drawl, as if talking to himself, “the ideas I had about supernatural beings came to me the same way that my mathematical ideas did. So I took them seriously.¹⁷

The guiding thought beyond Nash’s comparison of his mathematical insights and schizophrenic delusions is that in each case, he took himself to have encountered a consideration in favor of making a certain judgment. Anyone who has puzzled over a difficult problem will recognize that sense of insight when you see some feature of the problem as relevant or that some method is the right one to try here. There can be, in such cases, a clear recognition that one is on the right track, and this can even seem to be something like the way the sense descends on one that something is a consideration in favor of taking a suggestion seriously, as something that at least purports, on a view like Scanlon’s, to be a reason for forming a judgment or an intention. (Scanlon describes this stage of reflection as something “seeming to be a reason”.)¹⁸ If we are both working on the problem, and I have such an insight, I might say to you, as I start madly scribbling on the board: “Hold on, I think I see it.” Moreover, we might get proficient at recognizing at the moment of insight whether the flash of recognition is going to be productive or is mere grasping at straws. Nash claims that the voices he hears are, from his point of view, indistinguishable from the insights, and so they strike him as considerations in favor of forming judgments about their reality and perhaps in favor of what they urged him to do. Among other things, they weren’t obviously nonsensical: they demanded that he do things for the right kinds of reasons: to bring about world peace or to protect the secrecy of what they were doing. And so even if he subjected them to the type of critical reflection Scanlon describes, it might not have changed his view of what reasons he had. Schizophrenics are, after all, notoriously rational and consistent in their thinking, even if they are disconnected from reality (a feature they share, after all, with pure mathematics).

Any account of reasoning will want to say that something has gone wrong in the course of Nash’s thinking. The difference between the two pictures is not that one applauds his reasoning and the other condemns it. What differentiates them is how they diagnose the failure, and what that diagnosis

¹⁷ Quoted in Sylvia Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 11.

¹⁸ *What We Owe to Each Other*, 65.

implies about other failures to reason. From within the standard picture, the problem is that what seemed to Nash to be reasons were not, in fact, reasons. The promptings of his inner voices and visions were not in fact considerations in favor of following them because they were merely the promptings of his inner voice. If he had thought about them more clearly, he would have seen that. What, in contrast, made his mathematical insights genuine insights was that they picked out genuine reasons, genuine considerations in favor of approaching a particular problem in a particular way. It may be that in either case, the only way for Nash to tell which were insights and which delusions were to follow them out to see where they led, but from our point of view, we can distinguish their goodness as reasons by pointing to their connection or lack of fit to some fact about the world beyond Nash's mind. Messages from aliens are delusions because there were no aliens sending secret messages. The thought that the embedding problem could be solved by developing methods for solving seemingly unsolvable differential equations is an insight because it led to a solution of a long-standing problem in mathematics.¹⁹ In one case, Nash saw something that was true of the world (insofar as the world includes mathematical structures) and in the other, he only saw a figment of his imagination. His failure to reason amounted to not being able to tell the difference. Mackey's incredulity at Nash's behavior amounts to not believing (or understanding) how someone could make such a mistake.

Things look different from within the social picture. If there is a failure of reasoning here, it must be traceable not to a set of faulty reasons, but a flaw in the activity itself. Only a fuller description of his reflection can determine if it amounts to reasoning. Reasoning involves issuing invitations, and so the first question to ask is: to whom are Nash's invitations offered? What, from this perspective, differentiates the reflection that leads to mathematics from the reflection that leads to madness is that one is public while the other is private. When hit with a mathematical insight, I may not be able to transfer the sensation to your head, but the insight is only as good as the mathematics it produces, and so unless and until I can offer you a way of thinking about the problem that you can find intelligible, that insight won't have produced reasons because it won't have led me to the activity of reasoning. That is, even if I am working things out in the privacy of my own study, what I am

¹⁹ Nasar, *A Beautiful Mind*, discusses Nash's work on and solution to the embedding problem (at 157–63).

doing is preparing an invitation to others, and the success of my attempt to reason will depend on whether anything intelligible as an invitation is forthcoming. The mark of reasoning here is precisely this making public of a space and thus the turn towards others, the setting out terms for connection. The reflections that follow Nash's schizophrenic delusions lack precisely this publicity. The spaces they created for him were not spaces that could be made public. They were not spaces from which invitations could be offered. So what marks the trains of thought that followed Nash's delusions as something other than reasoning is that they isolated him, made what he said and did in their wake unintelligible to others. In other words, what distinguishes the schizophrenic from the mathematician is not the soundness of his logic, but his isolation.

In Nash's case, it may not seem to matter which diagnosis we adopt. Both seem correct. But they do suggest different remedies, and this points to important differences in the respective pictures of reasoning. If Nash's problem is that he sometimes uses faulty logic, then the remedy is to help him correct his logic. Mackey views Nash's situation this way. Properly comfortable in and sure of his own rationality, Mackey wants to bring Nash to reason in more or less the same way that Mrs. Bennet wishes to do with her daughter. In both cases, someone has strayed from the path of reason, and needs to be brought back to their senses, made, if necessary, to see reason. That may require a stern lecture from her father (Mrs. Bennet's preferred method) or electroshock therapy (Nash's doctors' remedy of choice). Given that they have abandoned reason, they will not be brought to reason through reason itself. If, however, Nash's problem is that he is isolating himself from others, then the loss is not merely to Nash but to those from whom he is isolating himself. And the remedy may not be so much to bring him around to correct thinking, but to reach out to him, to hold out the possibility of mutual intelligibility. This strategy does not mean accepting that the voices Nash hears are anything but delusions. It may involve inviting him to see that he cannot make the reflections they prompt public, and that this is ground for being suspicious of them. This process may require cultivating the bonds of trust, so that leading him to be suspicious of his voices is not met with further withdrawal as he thereby becomes suspicious of those reaching out. This remedy involves, according to the social picture of reasoning, that we reason with Nash, that we invite him to share our space of reasons again, and be responsive to his response to

those invitations (which may not mean withdrawing them). We thus have two very different diagnoses of irrationality leading to two very different remedies. On the standard picture, the remedy for irrationality will be non-rational means of bringing someone to reason. On the social picture, the remedy can be more reasoning.

This difference points to a fundamental divergence of attitudes underlying the two pictures. The standard picture can lend a certain kind of arrogant confidence to those who are secure in the knowledge that they have reason on their side. Faced with those who disagree with them or whom they find inscrutable, their picture of reason gives them no reason to adapt or change or move from their positions. If they reach out to those whom they do not understand, it is only to bring them to reason. If, however, we are committed to reasoning as this is conceived of on the social picture, then we are committed to reaching out, to making our reflection and their grounds public, where this may require that we adjust what we think or where we stand to find common routes of communication and shared spaces with others. The kinds of failures that the standard picture identifies sometimes do happen, and the remedies the standard picture suggests are sometimes appropriate. But sometimes they are not. Moreover, accepting the diagnosis and remedies offered by the social picture is not to put reason aside. Which picture is more helpful in dealing with schizophrenic delusions is a question beyond the scope of this book, but it is an interesting fact that Nash's own description of his recovery seems to follow the path laid out by the social picture.

The social picture also offers a different way to think about encounters between cultures that have very different conceptual landscapes and ways of communicating and organizing their lives. If, as on the standard picture, the publicity of reasoning is a result of the objective grounding of our reasons, then those who think or approach the world and their problems through other methods than we do will only count as reasoning if there is a way to fit their activities into ours. We are then likely to either misunderstand what they say and do in order to render it rational, or dismiss it as non-rational, possibly headstrong or foolish, possibly primitive or deluded. So, for instance, when early twentieth-century European anthropologists looked at traditional African cultures' approach to magic, they were unable to fit this worldview into a scientific one, and so they approached it as a form of religion rather than something like an alternative theoretical description of

how the world works.²⁰ Or when settler nations looked at Indigenous law, which is often developed through sets of shared stories that include connections between a people and the land and its other inhabitants, they didn't see universal normative codes of conduct that could count as law, but stories and myths that had nothing to say on legal matters.²¹ On the standard picture of reasoning, we are faced with an unappetizing choice in these cases. To dismiss African magical thinking or aboriginal storytelling as irrational practices is to prepare the way for arguments for assimilating them to our way of doing things, bringing them to reason, civilizing them. But if we reject that response, it looks like we are left accepting their claims about what the world is like as on a par with the claims of science and logic, but incommensurable nevertheless. And this conclusion leads to a kind of relativism that devalues both ways of thinking as nothing more than a set of contingent and local ways of thinking or doing things: just what we do around here. Among other problems, this blocks the thought that each society might have things to learn from the other.

We might, however, approach these divides with the diagnostic approach we generated from the social picture. In this case, a failure of publicity, of an ability to speak intelligibly across a cultural gap, is a problem, first and foremost, of isolation. Isolation, however, is a two-way street. Members of both societies lose something when they cannot share certain normative spaces. One response to such isolation is to reach out to one another, to seek ways to make intelligible invitations to one another, in part by finding ways of bridging our reasoning practices. On this view, we need not think of one group as those who reason and the other as needing to be brought to reason, but rather of two groups, each of which has practices that allow them to share normative spaces within their group, but neither of which yet has the means to reason with the other.

This process of reaching out resists a facile relativism that holds that there is no way for members of one culture to criticize the practices of another.

²⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 107–36 discusses African practices involving magic and questions the interpretation of these as forms of religion rather than akin to science. His text provides a model of the kind of reaching across conceptual frameworks to enable reasoning together that I am advocating here.

²¹ James Borrows, *Drawing Out Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) offers a discussion of indigenous legal practices and reasoning and the failure of settler nations' legal systems to appreciate them as forms of law or reason. It is also a model of how to bridge that gap.

We need to distinguish cultural pluralism from cultural relativism. Cultural relativism denies that there are *any* normative standards that are not themselves grounded in culturally accepted norms. Cultural pluralism, however, is merely the claim that some of the norms within any given culture are culturally specific and that these norms can ground genuine reasons within that culture. If the scope of the “some” that cultural pluralism accepts is sufficiently narrow, it is not terribly controversial. If I am having dinner in a culture where food is eaten with one’s hands and it is culturally taboo to eat with one’s left hand, then those norms give me reasons to eat with my right hand even if, being left-handed, I am more likely to make a mess of things by eating this way. In contrast, in the absence of this taboo, I have no reason to eat with my right hand. Although the scope of the cultural pluralism of the picture I am sketching will be broad enough to be controversial, it is important to see that it is not so broad as to lead to cultural relativism.

With this distinction in place, we can make two further points. First, coming to recognize the practices of another group as a form of reasoning is precisely not to foreclose the possibility of criticizing them. It is to recognize the work that may need to be done in order to be able to properly articulate and formulate criticisms, as well as to simultaneously recognize the possibility that they can criticize our practices. And, second, the mere fact that any group is intelligible internally does not make it the case that they are reasoning. Although mutual intelligibility will be a necessary condition for a claim to be a reason, it is not sufficient. Although reasoning is a social activity, it is a social activity with preconditions. In order to get a fix on those preconditions, we need to turn to further features of the activity of reasoning on the social picture.

5.3 Norms of Reciprocity

Conversation involves speaking with others, and thus involves a sufficient level of equality that I can be touched by what my conversation partner says. It does not require that I hold my space of reasons open and public, and it does not require that I offer to share that space. Reasoning requires that I do both of these things. In order to genuinely offer to share a space, I have to not only be open to being affected by what my interlocutors say, but I have to be prepared to, as it were, move over within my space to make room for

them. Chapter 1 argued that the invitation I make for you to take my words as speaking for you as well is, when we reason, premised on the thought that there is or could be a “we” that can be spoken for by either of us. And that implies not only that I might offer to speak for you, but that you might offer to speak for me. Sharing a space in a manner that lets either of us speak for the other requires, then, a level of reciprocity that goes beyond the kind of equality necessary for mere conversation. It is not enough that I can be touched or affected by what you say. In offering to speak for us in the manner that makes what I am doing reasoning, I must acknowledge your authority to speak for us as well, and to accept that I have only spoken for us if you accept my words as doing so.

Reasoning so conceived is not a matter of wielding the authority of command by bolstering what I say with the force of reason, but rather extending the authority of connection to you, by making my words answerable to your acceptance or rejection of them. I have to be open to the possibility that I can find my position changed in virtue of what you say even if that change involves a recognition that here I do not speak for you, that this is not a space we share. In the absence of this possibility, the mere fact that what we say to one another is mutually intelligible does not make what we are doing reasoning. And this offers a further response to the worry about cultural relativism above.

Since reasoning requires reciprocal answerability, I can only engage in this activity if there are others around me to whom I can stand in this relationship. And that may not be fully up to me to determine. That is, what establishes that we stand in a relationship in which we can reason with one another goes beyond our own attitudes towards each other. As we saw in the last chapter, background features of our society may make even the equality necessary for conversation difficult to come by. Since the requirements in order to be reasoning are even more stringent, we should expect that even more background features will need to be in place to enable this activity. If I have social power and status over you that allows me, without recourse, to decide what each of us will do and why, then even if I choose to forgo such power, my doing so is a gift to you, and we are not in the position of two people reasoning with one another, but more like a commander and a supplicant. We can further fail to be in a reciprocal relationship when the space I claim to invite you to share with me is already so firmly established by my practices and norms that though I can invite you

into it, I cannot invite you to share it without radically changing my own relationship to it.²² In such a situation, my making myself intelligible to you will not, on its own, make it the case that we are reasoning with one another.

Being fully capable of reasoning, being fully reasonable, turns out to require a kind of social achievement. Thus, we can say about some cultural practices that they prevent the possibility of being fully reasonable, because by setting up hierarchical relationships or establishing certain norms as themselves beyond the reach of challenge, they make it impossible or at least prohibitively difficult for the exchanges between people in those relationships to count as reasoning. A society need not go so far as to exclude some people from the circle of humanity to violate this requirement. It need only have in place social practices that leave some people able to decide whether they will take seriously what some others say to them. How serious a barrier such practices place in the way of their reasoning together depends on the content of those practices, the wider social context, the possible existence of countervailing practices, and, to some extent, the efforts of the individuals involved to overcome or find ways around those practices. To suggest that social practices and institutions can place barriers in the way of genuine reasoning together is not to claim that there is no point in trying to reason together before we reach a state of full justice. Our interactions can be more or less reasonable and there can be value in working to be more reasonable even where social institutions block our being fully so. And, as we have seen, that work can itself take the form of trying to reason together.

Accepting levels of reciprocity with others, like accepting the equality necessary for conversation, amounts to accepting a certain level of vulnerability. If I invite you to share my space, who knows what you will do once you are there? But it also makes possible the establishment of genuinely shared spaces: places where we can, in fact, speak for each other. To say that we can speak for each other is to say that there are considerations that count as properly authoritative for both of us, which is to say that they count as reasons for us. So the contours of the activity of reasoning as issuing a certain

²² On the importance and difficulty of this kind of radical shift by members of a dominant group towards their own conceptual space as a precondition for genuine reasoning with other people in their society, see María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, "Have We Got a Theory for You!," in *Hypatia Reborn*, ed. Azizah al-Hibri and Margaret Simons (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

kind of invitation further shape how the social picture will describe reasons. By starting from the activity of reasoning and then defining reasons as those things offered in the course of reasoning, a picture emerges of reasons as considerations that are, under suitable conditions, offered as invitations. When those invitations are accepted, then the considerations become reasons that are shared across the “we” for whom we accept that we can each speak. But even when the invitation is rejected, if the invitation was a genuine one, then what was offered still counts as a reason, though not for both the speaker and the one spoken to. That she could genuinely offer it to him shows that it is a reason for her. That he did not accept it shows that it is not a reason for him. Depending on the consideration in question and the context of their relationship, there will be cases where a consideration not being a reason for them undermines its claim to be a reason for her, but not every case need be like that.

What comes into view here is a point from Chapter 1: on the social picture, all reasons are social reasons or “we”-reasons, which is to say both that all reasons have a scope that extends beyond a single person (they are public and shared, they connect rather than isolate), and that this scope is not universal and not identical for all reasons.²³ Different reasons are reasons for different “we”s. The fact that something becomes a reason only when it can be a “we”-reason shows how the considerations that count as reasons on the social picture, like the considerations that count as reasons on a standard picture, are not merely subjective. This does not rule out the possibility that the “we” for which a reason is a reason is one that is not yet constituted, either because the offering of a reason is an attempt to constitute it or because one’s thoughts have not yet found the audience who can properly hear them. We cannot determine that a consideration connects rather than isolates by merely counting heads, but that does not call in to question the conceptual difference.

The route that reasons take to their non-subjective status on the two pictures is rather different, and that may lead to worries. The claim that all reasons are “we”-reasons can seem implausible from two directions. Some

²³ See Chapter 1.3, and esp. n. 19 for references to discussions of social reasons. As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, something is a social reason not only in virtue of its scope of application but because it is what Stephen Darwall calls “second-personal”: it is directed at someone (see *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006)).

may wonder how such a view can explain the case of seemingly obvious inferences, like those made in the course of routine instrumental reasoning. If my reason for crossing the street is to get to the restaurant, it is hard to imagine that this is any kind of a “we”-reason or that in reflecting on it, either alone or by way of justifying my changing direction to cross the street to you, that I am offering to speak for you. Others will worry that since “we”-reasons are always tied to a particular “we,” making all reasons “we”-reasons leaves out the category of universal reasons, whether these are moral reasons or theoretical reasons such as canons of belief formation. How is, “because I see it in good light, etc.” a “we”-reason for believing what I see is there, or a goldfinch? How is “because it would be wrong” a “we”-reason? Making all reasons “we”-reasons appears to be giving up on the very thing that reason promises.

To begin to answer the first worry, note that one of our criteria for regarding someone’s reasons to be genuine reasons is their intelligibility.²⁴ The importance of intelligibility to others arises clearly in the case of John Nash, but it is also at work in more mundane exchanges between people not suffering from mental illness. Offering as a reason for one’s action or decision that “it will promote my long-term well-being,” or “it is a means to my end” also depend on their intelligibility for their status as reasons. So, for instance, neither is a reason if the actions they attempt to justify are not intelligibly understood by others as justifiable in that way. It is easy to miss this point because many mundane reasons work against a vast degree of shared intelligibility. When, however, that background is thinner, as in cases that involve elements of cross-cultural communication the importance of intelligibility becomes clear. In Germany until recently, an American visitor might have found herself having the following exchange with her German host: “Why are you crossing the street?” “Because the restaurant is on the other side.” “Yes, but the light is red.”

²⁴ This is a recurrent theme in certain readings of Hegel as offering a social account of reason. See, in particular, Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The role of intelligibility is also stressed by Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, and in J. David Velleman’s work on practical reason, most recently in *How We Get Along* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). I return to the relation between intelligibility and reasoning in Chapter 9.

Or think of the difference between symbolic actions that are part of familiar traditions (even when these are not our own) and those that are the signs of eccentricities and mental illness. “Why do you wave your hands over the candles after you light them?” “In order to welcome Shabbat.” vs. “Because that is what the voices say to do.” Explanations or justifications of actions that make reference to some shared symbolic practice can serve as acceptable reasons in a way that those that only refer to idiosyncratic symbolic practices cannot. That is, though explaining that I wave my hands at the prompting of voices only I can hear may help you to understand the inner workings of my mind, it does so in a way that isolates me from you, and so is open to the objection, “But that’s no reason at all.” On the other hand, if I offer an explanation that makes references to shared practices that you do not share, and thus in some sense deny a connection with you, I do not do so in a manner that isolates me, but rather in a way that connects me to others. If you find what I say inscrutable, you can, as we saw above in the case of African and indigenous practices, try to reach out to me and find ways of understanding my practices that do not distort them, and I can reach out to you by trying to explain them. What separates the two cases is that the reference to a set of shared practices (even when they are not shared between speaker and listener) is capable of ultimately rendering the action intelligible whereas the references to voices, relying on idiosyncratic and private practices, is not. So the essential point is that what makes blindingly obvious reasons blindingly obvious is the thickness of the shared background of intelligibility in which they function. Since that background is shared, these reasons are “we”-reasons.²⁵

To address the worry that universal reasons ought not be treated as “we”-reasons, note that a universal reason is just a “we”-reason where the “we” in question is maximally inclusive. There are two things to note about this claim. First, it treats the universality of universal reasons as a result of inclusion rather than generality. There are, in general, two methods of increasing the extension of any group or set. Increasing the inclusiveness of the set involves adding to the list of members of the set. Increasing the generality of the set, in

²⁵ Cf. Raimond Gaita’s discussion of cranks, in Raimond Gaita, “Forms of the Unthinkable,” in *A Common Humanity*, 171–86 (London: Routledge, 1998), esp. 161–7. What makes the crank a crank is not, according to Gaita, that he is unwilling to subject his claims to critical scrutiny, but that he does not accept a shared background against which such criticism must proceed in order to count as a form of reasoning. Thanks to David Owen for pointing me back to this discussion here.

contrast, involves thinning out the criteria of membership. Thus, I can extend outwards from the set that comprises my family by adding other families: those who live on my block, in my city, in my country, etc., or by thinning out the criteria: from people who share my family name or that of my wife and live in our house to those who share the name to those whose names start with the same letters to those who have names, and so on.

It is rather common to think of universal reasons as universal in virtue of their generality, and thus having extremely thin or no criteria for their application to a given subject. If universal reasons are universal in virtue of their generality, then there is a problem with understanding them as being reasons in virtue of their ties to any particular “we,” even one whose extension is maximally wide. Armed with a consideration that is general in this sense, I can wield it in an argument that applies to you without addressing myself to you. If, moreover, generality is not just another characteristic of a certain class of reasons, but is criterial of being a reason at all, as some theories of reason hold, then the attempt to spell out what reasons are in terms of their being “we”-reasons will seem completely misguided.

If, however, universal reasons are maximally inclusive, not maximally general, then universal reasons can be a species of “we”-reasons. To hold that a given reason is universal is to hold that it is a “we” reason for the “we” that includes everyone. One consequence of this way of characterizing “we”-reasons is that I can extend a reason’s scope to everyone without having to characterize the group “everyone” in terms of some common trait in virtue of which the reason applies to them. Universal reasons thus do not need to rely on a substantive account of our common human nature. A reason earns its universality by being addressed to everyone, and that requires being responsive to their rejection of its demands.²⁶

At the same time, calling a moral reason a “we”-reason for the “we” comprised of all of humanity rather than a general reason calls attention to an important and overlooked fact about our use of moral vocabulary: it does not necessarily carry with it a universal scope of application. That is, it is perfectly possible to develop a rich moral vocabulary and moral theory that one takes to apply to all persons or all rational beings, and yet not take that category to extend to all members of the species *homo sapiens*. Treating universal reasons

²⁶ Again, it is important to stress that being responsive to the rejection of an invitation does not always require that we withdraw it in the face of rejection.

as general reasons loses sight of this fact, because it leads to the conclusion that the universal scope of our moral concepts comes from their logic or grammar. But as work by feminists, critical race theorists, and others has shown, the history of moral philosophy includes any number of examples of theories of general moral reasons combined with non-universal theories about who counts as human for the sake of the theory.²⁷ A commitment to the universality of our moral terms is not something we get for free from their apparent generality: it is a separate commitment that we need to make on moral grounds and thus for which we must take responsibility.²⁸ By deriving universality from inclusion, the social picture makes this point easier to see. The conceptualization of moral reasons as a variety of “we”-reasons then comes to look not like a theoretical shortcoming but a possible form of moral progress. Taking responsibility for the scope of our reasons is one of the ways that adopting such a picture would contribute to our enlightenment. For the maturity that Kant described as the condition brought on by Enlightenment involves the willingness to take responsibility for one’s stands and positions, and not to hide behind the supposed authority of others.²⁹

We can put this point in terms of another characteristic norm of reasoning: I must take responsibility for the scope of my invitations. By inviting you to share a space with me, I, implicitly or explicitly, mark out a group of people to whom the invitation applies, and in doing so, determine the scope of the reasons I offer. What the above reflections bring out is that there is not necessarily anything in the nature of the particular reason that marks its scope, and so if, for instance, I wish to try to extend its scope, to include more people in my invitation, then I have to find a way to do this. The form of the reason I offer does not do it for me. That reasons have particular domains of coverage, and that those domains may be up to us to determine, and are written into neither the reasons themselves nor the fabric of the universe marks another important difference between how reasoning is conceived on the two pictures being contrasted here.

²⁷ See, for illustrations, Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), Richard Rorty, “Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality,” in *On Human Rights*, ed. Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley, 111–34 (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

²⁸ For a related concern about the need to take responsibility for our moral stands, and not to assume that they come to us for free with our theories or our grammar, see Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 215–17.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, 54–60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Finally, by describing moral reasons as “we”-reasons, our attention is directed towards the particular substantive basis each of us might offer for her moral arguments. Is the “we” that the speaker aims to be universal the “we” made up of God’s children, of rational beings, of fellow inhabitants of the planet, or members of what Hume called the “party of humanity”? How we conceive of this “we” goes a long way to shaping our moral ideals and commitments and the reasons that structure them. Similar arguments could be made about other seemingly universal reasons, like the canons of belief formation.

All of which is fine and good, someone who continues to hold on to the sort of normativity that the standard picture of reason promises, but it is somewhat beside the point. The important aspect of universality that reasons must claim is not in their application but their authority, she will say. That is, there is no disagreement about the fact that some reasons apply to only some people or some situations in virtue of the particular features of their circumstances. Though we may get different interpretations of that fact, this is not where the trouble lies. The standard picture provides a clear handle on the thought that the authority of reasons is not contingent: if a consideration in favor of doing or believing something counts as a reason for someone situated as I am situated, then it is not up to me to decide whether to heed it while maintaining my rationality. Its being a reason means that it has authority over me, full stop. It looks as if this is the very aspect of the universality of reasons for which treating all reasons as “we”-reasons cannot account. A reply to this objection is to be found in the final set of norms of reasoning.

5.4 Norms of Good Faith

The final set of norms of reasoning involve refinements on the norm of sincerity that governs casual conversation more generally. They are norms of good faith. In following them, I demonstrate that my participation in the activity of reasoning is genuine, that I am participating in good faith. These norms follow from the final piece of the description of reasoning on the social picture. Reasoning is not only inviting others to share a space, but to share a space of reasons, which is to say a space the elements of which bear the authority of connection. As was argued in Chapter 2, the authority of connection is only constructed by holding the considerations that claim it

always open to criticism. So I can only invite you to share such a space by holding its contents open to criticism. That, in turn, requires that I hold my invitation always open to criticism as well. Opening my invitation to criticism is a different and further requirement than issuing a genuine invitation, and thus being answerable to its rejection. The particular activity of inviting that amounts to reasoning is thus open to two forms of criticism or rejoinder. First, I have to be responsive to your rejection of my invitation for it to have been a genuine invitation. But second, for it to be an invitation to a space of reasons, it must remain always open to criticism, not only from those whom I invite to share it, but to anyone at anytime. This gives considerations that can possibly count as reasons on the social picture a kind of dual structure: they have a limited scope of authority in the sense that they are reasons only for those who are members of the “we” who can speak for each other, but at the same time, they have an open scope of challenge in order to establish that authority. And there are different consequences for rejecting a reason depending on which form of criticism or rejection is made. If I am issuing an invitation to you, among others, to take my words as speaking for all of us, you can decline my offer, and withdraw from or not join or deny the existence of the “we” I am trying to construct or reaffirm. That may leave me with a reason, but one that is not a reason for you. My response to your rejection of my invitation may be to accept that there is nothing that I can say that speaks for you as well, or at least that this is not one of the things that could be so said. All of this can be consistent with my reasoning and our reasoning, and thus with the consideration I have brought forward continuing to be a reason for me. Not all reasoning aims at agreement. Some invitations have a point even if they are rejected. Of course, whether what I am doing is reasoning depends on what I do in the wake of your rejection. What makes it the case that Mr. Collins is not and Mr. Darcy is reasoning with Elizabeth when each proposes is how they respond to her rejection, and not that one is and the other is not ultimately a successful suitor.³⁰

In certain kinds of cases, there is a variant of this move that is open. In these cases, I not only try to speak for those I address, but claim to speak for others I may represent. Though these others may not be present as we reason, they should be understood as also covered by the invitation. So it is

³⁰ Though, of course, one of the things that makes Mr. Darcy ultimately successful is that he shows Elizabeth that they can reason together.

open to them to reject what I say, claiming that in saying that, I do not speak for them. This has a similar effect as when my invitation is rejected by those to whom it is explicitly offered.

In addition, looking on, others who are not even implicitly included in the scope of the invitation can criticize the considerations I bring forth in making an invitation to you, and those criticisms can call into question whether or not my invitation counts as part of reasoning. Perhaps I only appear to give you room to respond. Perhaps our relative social positions give you no grounds from which you might meaningfully reject my offer. Even if you don't see that, someone else can criticize my reasons in a way that undermines their claims to be reasons. Such criticisms may rely on the norms of reasoning explored here. Others may rely on the grounds for the evaluation of the invitations that reasons make that will be the subject of Part III. Or someone might criticize the course of our reflection using the canons and principles of logic and reason familiar from the various theories of reason and rationality that work within the standard picture. Even when they engage in these latter forms of criticism, the import of their criticism is different from within the social picture. From the point of view of the standard picture, criticizing a course of reflection at the bar of reason shows that it is not reasoning, and thus, perhaps, that the person so reflecting is not reasonable or rational, which is to say that she might be headstrong or foolish, someone we will have to bring, perhaps kicking and screaming, to reason. From within the social picture, to criticize a course of reflection as failing to meet the canons of rationality is to point out that it isolates the speaker, not only from us onlookers but even from those with whom he purports to be reasoning. This may or may not be a matter of concern for either of us. We may or may not be mistaken to have that attitude. But the separation is a mutual affair, and so it can, in principle, be bridged from either side.

Finally, one line of criticism that is always fatal to a claim to be reasoning is that in making an offer, I have not left it open to criticism. As Kant says in the quote that organized Chapter 1, "should [reason] limit freedom of criticism by any prohibitions, it must harm itself. . . Reason depends on this freedom for its very existence."³¹ This has important consequences for the identification and diagnosis of failures to reason.

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1933), 593 (A738/B766).

Even if each of us wants and is in a position to reason with one another, this requirement means that the best we can hope for is a kind of provisional success, a judgment that we have not yet let our reasoning dissolve into something else. That is, there is no move within the activity governed by this norm by which we can declare that what we have said is definitively a reason, for once we do that, we have closed off further discussion, and thereby violated the norm of openness. Similarly, there is no move we can make from outside that declares once and for all that what was said counts as a reason.

Like the authority of connection that reasons bear, the activity of reasoning itself is something that can be supported as reasoning only by also looking ahead. There is no point in time at which we can definitively say that we have been reasoning. We can only, at any given moment, say that to this point, nothing we have done has undermined the possibility that we are reasoning. Reasoning, like establishing the authority of connection, is a forward-looking activity, and this further explains why it makes sense to understand it as embedded not within the goal-directed activities of concluding and deciding, but within the aimless though norm-governed confines of conversation. The social picture of reasoning does not allow us to derive reasons or principles of rationality, but merely to diagnose failures of reasoning and perhaps to suggest ways to remedy them. This chapter has considered several failures of reasoning, including Mr. Collins's proposal and John Nash's delusions. According to the social picture something similar goes wrong in each: each is closed to the possibility of criticism, and thus each involves people who isolate themselves from others, retreating into a private world of their own. Whether they are beyond reach may depend on many things, including whether they are sufficiently blind or self-satisfied to not notice or not mind their isolation. But in any case, what is needed to bring them back to the activity of reasoning is not to make them see their interests, perhaps by laying down the law or the other civilizing forces at our disposal, but to invite them back into the human fold, as people who might take what we say as speaking for them as well, and as people who might have things to say to and with and for us. In other words, the remedy for failures of reasoning will, on this picture, be more reasoning.