

EDITORIAL

The second-person perspective is familiar to anyone who says ‘you’ to someone else, but the implications of this mode of interpersonal relatedness have received comparatively little attention until recently. One reason for this neglect may be the inherent difficulty of articulating what this perspective means. As an example, Augustine would be unlikely to think that the famous prayer from his *Confessions*, ‘Late have I loved you’, could be considered equivalent to, ‘There is a person, “I”, who has been late in loving another person, “you”’. Nevertheless, to explain precisely what is wrong with this description can be challenging if using only those tools of intellectual enquiry developed principally to describe the world in objective or third-person terms. As another example, Jerome might say, ‘Late have I loved Paula’, if Paula is absent, but if Paula is present he would properly say *to her*, ‘Late have I loved you’. Hence ‘you’ as well as ‘I’ cannot be treated as an ordinary designator or name like ‘Jerome’ or ‘Paula’, since ‘I’ only address someone as ‘you’ in a situation of some kind of mutual personal presence. These examples show that the second-person perspective shares in common with the first-person perspective a peculiar irreducibility to third-person terms, what Thomas Nagel might call a ‘view from nowhere’. Indeed, a line of thought inaugurated especially by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas has proposed that the first and second-person perspective are symbiotic.

As these examples show, research into the second-person perspective has obvious relevance to the philosophy of language, but in recent years there has been a growing appreciation of its importance to a wide range of other fields especially connected with ethics, human development and flourishing. A motivation and means for such research has been the study of conditions under which second-person relatedness is atypical, as seems to be the case for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and Williams Syndrome. As a result, many disciplines such as experimental psychology and social neuroscience are now able to provide a wealth of empirical data pertinent to the second-person perspective.

These developments, together with the prevalence of second-person modes of address to God in many religious texts, such as Augustine’s *Confessions* cited above, serve as preliminary indications of the potential fruitfulness of the study of the second-person perspective for the philosophy of religion. Moreover, there has been a growing body of work in recent years that has brought new insights from second-person research to bear on a range of perennial questions in this field. For

these reasons, we have welcomed the generous opportunity provided by the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* to dedicate this issue specifically to the second-personal in the philosophy of religion.

The papers presented in this issue are based on presentations from a conference at Oxford University, *The Second-Person Perspective in Science and the Humanities*, 17-20 July 2013, together with a paper on a similar theme presented at a conference the preceding year, *Persons and their Brains*, 11-14 July 2012. Both conferences were organised by the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, part of the Theology and Religion Faculty at Oxford, and benefited from sponsorship from the John Templeton Foundation. From the many presentations, we invited a selection of speakers who were willing and able to offer contributions of particular relevance to the philosophy of religion, especially knowledge of persons and interpretations of special divine action in various second-person modes.

The selected papers have been grouped thematically as follows. Tim Chappell, Eleonore Stump, and Stina Bäckström examine what it is like to perceive and know persons, exploring specific differences from other kinds of perception and knowledge. The first two papers extend this theme to knowing God and the indwelling of a personal, maximally present God. Papers by Joshua Johnson and Andrew Pinsent then examine the implications of the second-person perspective for issues regarding language and the virtue of truth. A paper by Eva Buddeberg also explores how attempts to ground morality on the second-person perspective still need to be balanced with other perspectives. The next two papers present example applications of the second-person perspective to the interpretation of specific texts of scripture and tradition. Susan Eastman examines the second-person concept of sin in Paul's Letter to the Romans, and Andrea Hollingsworth re-interprets an influential text of Nicholas of Cusa. The final two papers examine questions of spirituality. Helen de Cruz and Johan de Smedt explore what is second-personal in the phenomenology of nature aesthetics, and Donald Bungum examines the so-called 'dark night of the soul' in the light of purported second-person relatedness to God. Aside from their intrinsic merits, we hope the diverse themes addressed by these papers illustrate some of fruitfulness and expanding potential of the second-personal in the philosophy of religion.

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