Dimensions *of* Practical Necessity

"Here I Stand.
I Can Do No Other."

Edited by
Katharina Bauer, Somogy Varga, Corinna Mieth

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Editors

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CHAPTER 1

Dimensions of Practical Necessity: An Introduction

Katharina Bauer, Somogy Varga, and Corinna Mieth

According to one common understanding, saying that "X necessarily is" amounts to saying "X cannot be otherwise than it is." As Fine (2002) notes, there are necessary truths of logic and metaphysics, as well as necessary connections among events in the world. While debates on necessity often take place in the realm of metaphysics, there is a form of necessity that is pertinent to practical philosophy. "*Here I stand. I can do no other*," a phrase habitually attributed to Luther, is often interpreted as revealing underlying normative reasons that exhibit a special kind of necessitating force, experienced as an inescapable constraint by the agent. The course of action that these reasons dictate forces itself upon the agent with such authority that alternative courses of action are rendered practically impossible.

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In such a case, due to the nature of necessitation, one could be led to think that the agent is not responsible for her action. However, this would be an overly hasty conclusion. One of the features that make this phenomenon so fascinating is that the inescapability is often deciphered as stemming from a form of necessitation that not only does not compromise agency or self-control (Watson 2002), but often expresses the agent's autonomy. This is because such necessitation is one the agent identifies with and one that carries the mark of the agent's endorsement (Frankfurt 1988, 2006). In fact, the necessitation depends on the agent's identifications, which is at least in part why, then, the incapacity to choose alternative courses of action does not necessarily undermine or diminish the agent's responsibility.

Different conceptions of practical necessity or incapacity play a crucial role in recent debates in fields of ethics, moral philosophy, and moral psychology. The practical necessity that is expressed in statements like Luther's can be interpreted as expressions of *personal necessity*, implying a normative force that stems from individual structures of personality or character and cannot be universalized or translated into a straightforwardly moral vocabulary. Luther's case is discussed as an example of steadfastness or heroism in different contexts (cf. Dennett 1984; Calhoun 1995; Arpaly 2006; Varga 2011).

However, expressions of practical necessity can, in some cases, also be interpreted as stemming from the normative force of certain moral reasons. For some, practical necessity is a phenomenon that underscores objectivity in ethics and the authority of moral reasons (see Bagnoli 2009). In addition, some connect necessity to the unconditional principles of ethics (Fine 2002), while Kantian-inspired philosophy (e.g., Christine Korsgaard) underlines the absolute and objective *necessity* of the categorical imperative, which is distinguished from the *subjective necessity* of hypothetical imperatives and related to the *necessitation* that is executed by the universal moral law: "For only law carries with it the concept of an unconditional and objective, hence universally valid necessity, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, i.e., followed even against inclination" (Kant 2002, G 4:416).

Questions surrounding practical necessity are at the core of many prominent debates in the current philosophical landscape. It is quite clear that discussions about the nature of practical necessity are closely linked to questions about responsibility, as the phenomenon might be interpreted as a challenge to the principle of alternative action, which is traditionally regarded as a necessary condition of responsibility. In addition, practical necessity is

related to debates about freedom of the will and self-constitution, addiction, as well as about the moral role of character, the demandingness of morality in human life, virtues and vices, moral luck, and *eudaimonia*. Moreover, the experience of personal necessity can conflict with moral demands and "external" values, sometimes leading to a type of internal conflict that can initiate the expression of a specific ideal of integrity and personal autonomy. This is, in part, why a thorough analysis of the phenomenon of practical necessity helps to understand different types of normative reasons as well as autonomous self-constitution.

This collection of chapters provides a systematic investigation of practical necessity and offers novel perspectives on this intriguing phenomenon. The authors deal with the questions of what *practical necessity* means, and they examine the consequences of being necessitated by such practical necessities. They distinguish between different dimensions of practical necessity and critically discuss its validity as a philosophical term. Some chapters investigate what terms like "*practical necessity*," "*moral necessity*," and "*personal necessity (or incapacity)*" denote in different contexts. Others examine the causes of "necessitation" and its upshots for self-constitution, integrity, autonomy, responsibility, and morality. Based on concrete examples of practical necessity and incapability (in necessities of love, the unforgivable, etc.), they explicate the normative claims that are implied in theories of practical necessity, as well as the relation to virtue theory. Another group of chapters approach the topic from a different angle and consider normative and "volitional challenges" like *akrasia* and ambiguity, as well as psychopathological challenges (against the background of empirical research).

Part I. Examples: The Necessity of Love and the Unforgivable

2. Loving Eyes of My Own: Love, Particularity, and Necessity (Marya Schechtman)
3. "I cannot forgive you." The Unforgivable as an Example of a Practical Necessity (Oliver Hallich)

The collection starts with two concrete examples of practical necessity and incapacity via love and unforgivability. Marya Schechtman investigates necessitation through love. She seeks to identify and salvage what is compelling in Harry Frankfurt's analysis of the necessity of love.

Frankfurt argues that love imbues the beloved with an importance it otherwise would not possess and creates, rather than responds to, value. Through reflection on the salient characteristics of Luther's stand (which Frankfurt invokes as a defining instance of practical necessity) and analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's work on self-reliance, Schechtman's chapter sketches a view in which autonomous necessitation by love rests on a particular kind of perception of intrinsic value in the beloved, which is not available to everyone. This means motivation by love requires a known assumption of a particular kind of epistemic and agential risk. This picture, it is argued, captures the special nature of love as a form of practical necessity without falling prey to the difficulties that beset Frankfurt's view. To illustrate her account, Schechtman deals with the example of "torch songs"—sentimental songs that express ideas like a woman "Can't stop loving that man of mine" even though she knows he is not good for her.

While Schechtman critically considers the possibility of the negative implications of being necessitated by love, Oliver Hallich raises a more general criticism against the concepts of practical necessity or incapacity as such. He tackles the question of how, if at all, we can make sense of the idea that it is sometimes impossible to forgive an act of wrongdoing. Can there be acts of wrongdoing that are *unforgiveable* like, for example, the incredible crimes of the Holocaust? "I cannot forgive you" is construed as a counterfactual evaluative judgment about the speaker: To call a deed unforgiveable is not to say that it is impossible to forgive it but that to forgive it would be a sign of a bad character. Hallich tentatively suggests that *all* statements of practical necessity—statements like "I can do no other" or "I must do this" or "It is impossible for me (not) to do X"—are "systematically misleading expressions" in the Rylean sense. They should be conceptualized as counterfactual evaluative statements about the subject who claims he "must" or "cannot" do something. If this is true, Hallich argues, to forestall confusion in our moral discourse, we should reformulate statements of practical necessity and analyze them as evaluative judgments. Hallich convincingly shows that "practical necessity" is an attackable term of practical philosophy. This tenuous position makes it even more interesting to discuss what the use of this term contributes to a better understanding of human action and self-understanding.

Part II. Normative Claims: Personal Practical Necessity and Practical Identities

4. Christine Korsgaard and the Normativity of Practical Identities (Christoph Bambauer)
5. What if I Cannot Do What I Have to Do? Notions of Personal Practical Necessity and the Principle "Ought Implies Can" (Michael Kühler)

The next two chapters of the volume concentrate on normative claims that are related to personal practical necessity. They ask in how far personal practical identities can generate practical necessity and what happens if the circumstances prevent a person from realizing what seems to be personally necessary for her. Christoph Bambauer discusses Christine Korsgaard's theory about the normativity of practical identities. According to Korsgaard's account of practical identity, we as human agents are not only bound by the normativity of moral necessity—we are also addressees of strict claims that are grounded in our own individual personality. Then, any agent would—at least in principle—be entitled to say "Here I stand I can do no other—because I am *me*." Bambauer investigates why Korsgaard holds that "being yourself" should have any strict normative implications and what kind of normativity is involved here. He comes to the conclusion that Korsgaard justifies the practical necessity of being a person—of being *somebody*—but she does not justify being *me* or being *you*. Furthermore Bambauer hints at a structural inconsistency of Korsgaard's theory as she presupposes a strict normativity of relationship-based reasons even though she does not show that they are constitutive of action.

Michael Kühler endorses the idea that there are personal practical necessities in terms of normative claims, which are constitutive of an individual self. He addresses the question of what to make of the idea of personal practical necessity in situations in which circumstances prevent the person from actually succeeding in meeting those claims. Based on the principle "ought implies can," one's personal practical necessities then seem to become either conceptually impossible or at least silly things to identify oneself with. Kühler first discusses four influential views on the constitution of the self (existentialism, essentialism, social-relational accounts, and narrative accounts) and their respective implications for the notion of personal practical necessity. Second, he elaborates on the two most influential views regarding the principle "ought implies can," namely a

conceptual interpretation and a normative interpretation. He argues that for all four mentioned views on the self, a normative interpretation of the principle "ought implies can" is better suited to analyze and take seriously the (more or less tragic) predicament of being unable to act according to one's personal practical necessities.

Part III. Normative Challenges: Vice and *Akrasia*

6. Vice, Practical Necessity, and Agential Self-Destruction (Jonathan Jacobs)
7. Three Ways to Understand Practical Necessity and *akrasia*: Aristotle, Davidson, and Frankfurt (Kathi Beier)
8. Here I stand, I could do other: Can a Person of Integrity Be Weak-Willed? (Arnd Pollmann)

The next chapters grasp the historical background of current debates about practical necessity by reference to the Aristotelian origins of virtue ethics and to his theory of *akrasia*. Jonathan Jacobs refers to Aristotle to argue for a theory of character-based necessity, which is essential for the understanding of virtue and vice without diminishing responsibility or voluntariness. To a large extent, aspiring to virtue involves striving to acquire cognitive and motivational dispositions by which certain ways of acting become practically necessary. Vices can practically disable an agent for acting well, on account of motivational and cognitive dispositions shaping necessities and impossibilities. Jacobs maintains that the explication of character-based necessity shows how practical necessity and impossibility can become durable, significant features of one's character as a result of voluntary activity even if the acquisition of those features was not intended. Jacobs shows that there is an asymmetry between virtuous and vicious practical necessity: What the virtuous agent "must do" is integral to his self and it corresponds to the right way of seeing and interpreting the world. What the vicious agent "must do" can also be regarded as a character-based necessity, but it is necessary only within the framework of a (self-)deceptive view of himself and the world.

Beier's chapter intends to show that it is Aristotle who offers the most plausible account of what practical deliberation is, which is necessary for any theory of practical necessity. Aristotle's account helps not only to explicate the concepts upon which the idea of practical necessity rests—concepts such as unity, identity, and integrity—but also to understand possible defects of integrated agency—such as incontinence or weakness

of will (*akrasia*). Aristotle's explanation of incontinence consists of three different components: (a) moral realism, (b) a concept of knowledge that allows for degrees, and (c) a theory of the unity of human life and agency qua form, including an explanation of possible defects. Kathi Beier shows that the best-known contemporary account of incontinence, that is, the one presented by Donald Davidson, misses at least one of these crucial elements. This also holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for Harry Frankfurt's account of volitional necessity. Beier argues for a sound Aristotelian-inspired theory of practical necessity that is compatible with free human agency.

Arnd Pollmann investigates the relationship between *akrasia* and practical necessity from a different angle. He asks in what sense virtuous persons should avoid *akrasia* and whether persons of integrity can be week-willed. Pollmann offers a sophisticated distinction between different examples and types of being week-willed. He argues that a person of integrity is committed to some practical necessities integral to her identity. Therefore, a person of integrity cannot be a person with a strong personal tendency to get weak when integral parts of her identity are at stake. However, this does not mean that integrity would be completely incompatible with being week-willed. It allows for some exceptions and for singular actions that are not compatible with a ground-project a person wholeheartedly identifies with. A person with integrity could sometimes say: "Here I stand, I could do other. And I should do other as well. But I won't."

Part IV. Volitional and Psychological Challenges: Ambiguity, Psychopathy, and Shame

9. Where? Me? Indeterminacy and Ambiguity in Human Motivation (Jan Bransen)
10. Shame and Necessity *Redux* (Heidi Maibom)

Apart from classical theories of vice, incontinence, and *akrasia* there are other descriptions of deficiencies of character and agency that can be related to practical necessity or incapacity, like ambiguity and psychopathy. Jan Bransen deals with the problem of identity-threatening ambiguities. He interprets Luther's saying, "Here I stand; I can do no other," as a paradox, since it expresses both Luther's deliberate autonomy and his being radically constrained to merely one course of action. To dissolve this paradox, Bransen explores the commonly neglected import of the indexical mode of presenting the limits of one's agency that is characteristic of

Luther's saying. This leads him to argue against both Harry Frankfurt's and Michael Bratman's influential accounts of practical necessity, which can be shown to be inadequately individualistic. Bransen holds that the limits of a person's agency are dynamic and are co-determined by the intersubjective background conditions implicitly shared by the agent and his—real or anticipated—audience. He argues for an interesting twist that should be given to the role of love in understanding the practical necessities that are part and parcel of the finite human beings we are: The "necessity of love" implies a necessity of being loved by others as well as by oneself. Likewise, Luther's saying can imply the appeal to "please bear with me"—an appeal to receive love and recognition—and it can be the expression of a prolific status of ambivalence: A status in between self-transformation and self-affirmation in which it becomes necessary for the speaker to determine his course of action as well as the only available alternative of himself.

Heidi Maibom puts even more emphasis on the relevance of the perspective of the other than Jan Bransen. She discusses how practical necessity is related to taking the third-person perspective on oneself and one's actions and how it is connected to identity, morality, and responsibility. Maibom investigates the phenomenon of practical necessity against the background of the phenomenon of shame and with particular regard to psychopaths who lack the ability to view themselves as others see them. She argues that it is a mistake to think of practical necessity as being some peculiar force that we feel merely concerns ourselves. If we were alone in the world, it is unlikely that we would feel either the pull of practical necessity or shame. The necessity that is felt is connected to our social identities, our identity as one being among others. Personal practical necessities thus have to be interpreted as social practical necessities.

Part V. Concluding Evaluations

11. Katharina Bauer: Here I Stand. About the Weight of Personal Practical Necessity
12. Corinna Mieth: Morality and Happiness: Two Precarious Situations?

The final two chapters of the volume open the investigation of practical necessity to general evaluative debates about ideals of character and of the good life. Like Maibom, Katharina Bauer considers the social and

socio-cultural contexts of the phenomenon of practical necessity. She investigates why the incapacity of alternative action is not regarded as a restriction or deficit in Luther's case, but it seems to "lend some added weight" to his decision. She deals with the question what kind of value is attributed to experiences of practical necessities or incapacities, in particular if they derive from the individual structure and the limits of someone's personality. Bauer argues that there are different legitimate ways to attribute an added weight to expressions of practical necessity. This weight can be derived from the virtue of standing for something and being an example of what everybody should do, but it can also be related to the valid claim of standing by the demarcation line of one's personality and defending it against the threat of losing oneself.

Corinna Mieth discusses the relation of personal practical necessity to tensions between happiness and morality. She sketches four general ways of relating morality and happiness: the identity thesis, the harmony thesis, the dissonance thesis, and the incompatibility thesis. In a second step, she discusses how far individual life plans are compatible with moral demands. In this context, Mieth outlines the Kantian theory of morality as being worthy of happiness and then turns to Bernard Williams and Friedrich Nietzsche, who were both proponents of a view based on the concepts of individual authenticity and prudential rationality. There are good reasons for not abandoning the theories of Williams and Nietzsche in general; however, the strict demands of morality require subordinating our personal life plans to moral values and obligations. Finally, Mieth argues that even if we include claims to individual happiness in our moral considerations, in specific cases it often depends on chance whether morality and happiness complement each other or are mutually exclusive.

Overall, then, this book provides the first systematic, multi-perspective analysis of a crucial concept in contemporary philosophical debates, and it contributes to debates on practical identity, personal autonomy, motivational structures, and moral agency. The collection of chapters is the outcome of two international workshops about dimensions of practical necessity that were financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and generously supported by the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (KWI) in Essen. We are grateful for the financial support and we also have to thank Heidi Samuelson for her very helpful comments and for assisting us with the editorial work. Throughout the volume, Luther's famous expression serves as a leitmotif for an exploration of different claims and challenges. The chapters consider concrete examples and

critically discuss phenomena like the necessity of love and the incapacity of forgiving, they deal with current positions about normativity as well as historical accounts of virtue theory and present theories of character, they involve empirical research about moral psychology, and they open up to broader evaluative questions about the good life. They combine different philosophical backgrounds, traditions, and methods in a fruitful way. They give insights into some of the most interesting current topics of practical philosophy and deal with questions that are relevant for expert readers, as well as for scholars, students, and any reader with an interest in practical philosophy and moral psychology. The complex philosophical investigations are based on familiar, everyday experiences, in particular on the experience that sometimes we "just can do no other."

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PART I

Examples: The Necessity of Love and the Unforgivable

CHAPTER 2

Loving Eyes of My Own: Love, Particularity, and Necessity

Marya Schechtman

In some of his later work, Harry Frankfurt reflects on the phenomenon of volitional necessity, a circumstance in which we can do no other than we in fact do, but are nonetheless free. These reflections intersect with another topic that occupies his later writings, the importance of what we love or care about to our volitional structure. There has been a fair amount of philosophical analysis directed at questions of how we are motivated by the moral law or the laws of reason, Frankfurt says, but not as much attention given to the question of how we are motivated by love. All three forms of motivation can, on his view, provide instances of volitional necessity. This is well accepted with respect to morality and reason, he points out, and one of his goals is to show that it is also true of love.

I have found Frankfurt's discussion of these topics insightful and fruitful, but also somewhat frustrating. While much of his analysis seems very attractive, on closer inspection it is sometimes difficult to understand precisely what he is saying and, insofar as it is clear, it seems often to lead to implausible or troubling consequences. In what follows, I will aim to

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untangle these responses, identifying the elements of Frankfurt's views that seem attractive and important as well as those that are problematic and considering how we might retain the former while avoiding the latter.

Background: Frankfurt on Love and Volitional Necessity

Frankfurt's views are by now very well known. Here, I will just review some of the key points that will be important for what follows. To begin we need to have at hand his notion of volitional necessity, in which someone is simultaneously compelled and free. Using the hierarchical model of autonomy he developed earlier, Frankfurt analyzes instances of volitional necessity in terms of the wholehearted endorsement of (or identification or satisfaction with) the motives that move us to action. In cases of volitional necessity we are truly compelled. We cannot help but have the motivations we have, and they are so powerful we cannot resist acting on them. We are, however, happy to have these motivations and have no desire to fight against them. We would not have our motivational profile other than it is even if we could. In this sense, when we act on these motivations we are free. This is in contrast, for instance, to the unwilling addict, who is overwhelmingly motivated to take drugs but wishes his motivational profile were different than it is.

In defining the notion of volitional necessity, Frankfurt offers Luther's famous proclamation as a paradigmatic example. It is presumably, he says, in a case where the will is structured as he has described:

> Luther made his famous declaration: "Here I stand; *I can do no other*." An encounter with necessity of this sort characteristically affects a person less by impelling him into a certain course of action than by somehow making it apparent to him that every apparent alternative to that course is unthinkable. It is clear, of course, that the impossibility to which Luther referred was a matter neither of logical nor of causal necessity. … What he was unable to muster was not the *power* to forbear, but the *will*. I shall use the term "volitional necessity" to refer to constraint of the kind to which he declared he was subject. (Frankfurt 1988, p.86)

Although there is a genuine and meaningful sense in which Luther was compelled to take the stand he did, the form of compulsion is such that we do not feel any inclination to judge that he is therefore weak of will or nonautonomous. To the contrary, he is frequently held up as a model of integrity and forbearance (cf. Bauer 2016).

The questions I will be addressing here concern the intersection of Frankfurt's analysis of volitional necessity with his discussion of the importance of what we love or care about (for him, love is a species of caring). As Frankfurt uses the term, "love" is not an emotion or an attitude. "That a person cares about or that he loves something," he says, "has less to do with how things make him feel, or with his opinion about them, than with the more or less stable motivational structures that shape his preferences and that guide and limit his conduct" (1999, p.129). In particular,

> a person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it, giving particular attention to such things and directing his behavior accordingly. (1988, p.83)

Love, as Frankfurt sees it, is an intrinsically higher-order emotion (1999, p.137). When we love something we wholeheartedly endorse our desire to act for its benefit. Frequently, Frankfurt says, we care about something so much that we find it impossible to act against its interests; we simply cannot bring ourselves to do so—it would be *unthinkable* (1988, p.86). When this happens, being compelled to do what we do by love is a form of volitional necessity, and we act autonomously.

In this respect, motivation by love is like motivation by reason or the moral law. In each case, according to Frankfurt, we are constrained in our actions by something we do not choose and cannot control. He is quite clear that we do not choose what we love: "the unconditional importance to the lover of what he loves is not a voluntary matter. The lover cannot help being selflessly devoted to his beloved. In this respect, he is not free" (1999, p.135). He often speaks of the lover as being "captivated" by the beloved object, saying that "he is guided by its characteristics rather than primarily by his own. Quite commonly, he feels that he is overcome—that his own direction of his thoughts and volitions has been superseded" (1988, p.89). In all three of these forms of motivation, then, we submit our will to unchosen impulses, but in each case we are satisfied with the fact that our wills are controlled in this way.

There are, however, also important differences between motivation by reason and the moral law, on the one hand, and by love, on the other. Love, unlike these other forms of motivation, is particular rather than universal in its claims. The normative demands of morality and reason are typically taken to apply to everyone, but the demands of love are not.

The people or causes that I love make a claim on me, but they do not make a similar claim on those who do not love them, nor do those I do not love make a similar claim on me. This is related to a deep difference between the sources of the claims made by these different forms of motivation. The claims made on us by the moral law and rationality are presumed to be connected to intrinsic features of an external entity. These sources thus make a legitimate claim on us whether we recognize it or not. The normative structure of love is, however, quite different. In the case of love, it is not necessary that what we love have or even be thought to have any intrinsic value or antecedent claim on us. Frankfurt tells us that "there are two distinct (albeit compatible) ways in which something may be important to a person. First, its importance to him may be due to considerations which are altogether independent of whether or not he cares about the thing in question. Second, the thing may become important to him just because he does care about it" (1988, p.92).

A good example of this second kind of phenomenon is found in the kind of unconditional love that parents often have for their children. Frequently, parents come to love their children and make them the center of their universe long before they are in a position to know much about their intrinsic merits. These parents would not suggest that they love these children *because* of some particular set of valuable attributes or that they would cease to love them if they lost those attributes. They also would not be able to justify (nor feel that they should justify) lavishing their attentions on these children rather than any others. Love is not like that. Because I have these children, I love them, and it would be unthinkable to do anything to harm them; if I had other children with quite different attributes I would have loved them, and it would have been unthinkable to harm those children.

What we learn from such cases is that the source of the normative claim made on us by what we love or care about is quite different from that made by morality or reason. When we are motivated by love, the normative claim of those motivations comes not from the intrinsic importance of what we love but, rather, from the fact that we love it. When we love something, we identify wholeheartedly with our motivations to devote ourselves to its flourishing. If we act against these motivations, we are therefore undermining our own agential identity and betraying ourselves. "The authority for the lover of the claims that are made upon him by his love," Frankfurt thus says, "is the authority of his own essential nature as a person. It is, in other words, the authority over him of the essential nature of his own individual will" (1999, p.138). He makes it abundantly clear that the lover need not perceive any intrinsic merit in the beloved for motivation by love to be autonomous: