

## Heuer on Personal Reasons and Deontic Restrictions

In her defence of deontic restrictions, Heuer (2011) introduces the notion of a personal reason. Personal reasons are a subclass of agent-relative reasons. While agent-relative reasons that are not also personal reasons »give rise to reasons for others to ›promote‹ the agent’s compliance with that reason« (254), an agent-relative reason that is also a personal reason »is a reason only for the agent, and [...] its presence does not give any reasons to others« (255).<sup>86</sup> The mark of personal reasons is thus that if person A has personal reason to  $\varphi$ , this does not imply that some person B has derivative reason to see to it that A  $\varphi$ s.<sup>87</sup>

Correspondingly, if some persons B and C have personal reason not to  $\varphi$ , some other person A does not have reason to prevent B’s or C’s  $\varphi$ -ing. *Ipsa facto*, A will not have reason to  $\varphi$  herself in order to prevent B or C from  $\varphi$ -ing. Thus, if the reason not to  $\varphi$  is a personal reason, it will follow immediately that there is a deontic restriction against  $\varphi$ -ing – at least if the personal reasons against  $\varphi$ -ing are the only reasons relevant when it comes to  $\varphi$ -ing.

Heuer presents her argument in favour of deontic restrictions both with regard to a potential deontic restriction against breaking promises and with regard to a potential deontic restriction against killing the innocent. I will follow her lead and adopt this structure for two reasons. First, discussing the case of promising will help to illuminate the basic idea and structure of Heuer’s argument. Second, Heuer considers her case for a deontic restriction against breaking promises to be stronger than her case for a deontic restriction against killing the innocent. Thus, discussing the case of promising first might help fostering the plausibility of Heuer’s approach in the first place.

### 5.1 Heuer on a Deontic Restriction against Promise-Breaking

Here is a summary of Heuer’s argument regarding a deontic restriction against promise-breaking:

86 In this chapter, all page numbers in parenthesis refer to Heuer (2011), if not indicated otherwise.

87 Personal reasons thus contrast with shared reasons, cp. Ridge (2011).

1. When it comes to promising, two types of reasons to keep one's promises are relevant: content-independent and additional reasons.
2. The content-independent reason to keep one's promises is a personal reason.
3. Thus, as far as content-independent reasons are concerned, if B has reason to not break her promise, this does not imply any reason whatsoever for A to see to it that B not break her promise. Thus, there is no reason for A to break a promise herself in order to prevent B or others from breaking their promises. To put it in other words, as far as only the content-independent reasons for not breaking a promise are concerned, there is a deontic restriction against promise-breaking.
4. Some of the additional reasons to keep one's promise are non-personal, that is, shared reasons. Thus, if B has additional reason to keep her promise, A might have reason to see to it that B does as she promised. However, A's reasons will not be reasons to see to it that A keeps her promise, strictly speaking, but rather reasons to see to it that the corresponding valuable outcomes (which give rise to there being additional reasons) are realised. Only if the only means to realise those outcomes is that B keeps her promise, this will provide A with derivative and instrumental reason to see to it that B does as she promised.<sup>88</sup>

As this summary makes clear, Heuer's argument relies both on there being a content-independent reason to keep a promise *and* on that content-independent reason being a personal reason. If there is no content-independent reason to keep a promise, then, in all cases in which there is reason to keep one's promise, those reasons would be additional reasons to keep one's promise – reasons that potentially provide others with reason to see to it that one does as one promised. If the content-independent were not a personal reason, then it would also give others reasons to see to it that one does as one promised.

In what follows, I will first elaborate on Heuer's claim that there are both content-independent and additional reasons to keep one's promise; based on this, I offer some reasons to doubt the first part of this claim (5.1.1). Next, I will critically examine the idea that the content-independent reasons to keep a promise (if there are such reasons) are personal reasons indeed (5.1.2). If I

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88 The reason is *derivative* in that A's reason to see to it that B does as she promised would not exist if B had no reason to do as she promised in the first place. It is *instrumental* in that A has reason to see to it that B does as she promised because B's doing as she promised is the means to the end that A has non-instrumental reason to bring about: the realisation of the valuable outcome that results from A's doing as she promised.