

The Geometry of the Good

Ethics in a Relational Field

By

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*To My Children, Amelia and Alex,
who inhabit the Good wonderfully*

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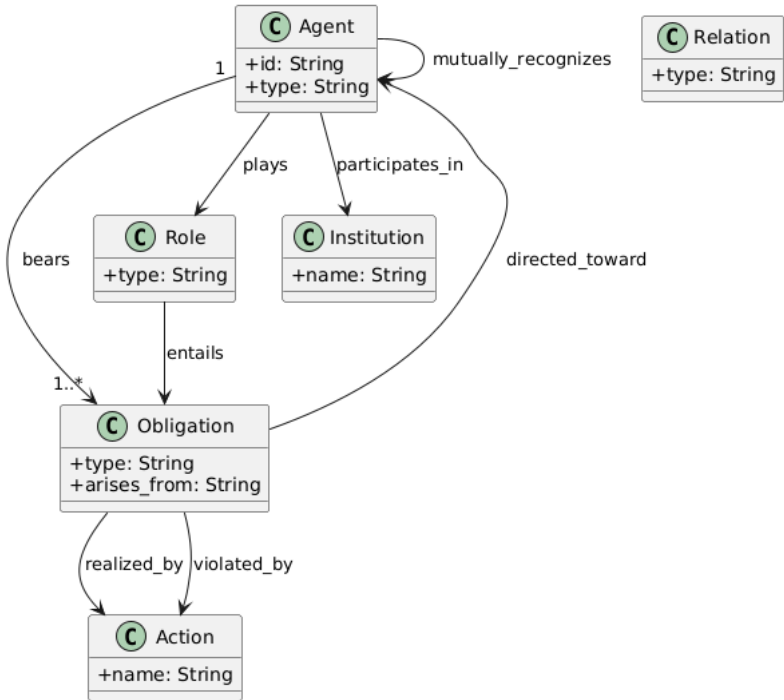
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Relational Ontology of Obligation - Corrected PURL Model



“To be is to be with. And to be with is to be bound.”

Preface

A Grounding Turn

This book continues a line of thinking that first emerged in *The Architecture of Justice*, where I argued that legal and institutional structures should be understood not merely as abstract systems or vehicles of coercive normativity, but as ontologically grounded forms of mutual recognition. That earlier work introduced a realist framework for understanding the entities, roles, and processes that compose legal systems, borrowing insights from formal ontology, especially Basic Formal Ontology (BFO) and Reinach's theory of a priori social acts. What remained implicit in that work, but now demands a fuller articulation, is the ethical weight carried by these structures. If institutions formalize real social dependencies, then we must ask what *makes* those dependencies normative in the first place. This book is my attempt to excavate the ontological ground of ethical obligation itself.

Here, I no longer treat law as a primary object of analysis, but as a secondary formation, something derivative of more basic structures of *being-with*. Law expresses obligation, but obligation arises long before it is codified or formalized. It emerges not from contract, not from command, and not from abstract moral reasoning. It arises wherever one conscious being encounters another as a locus of directedness, where subject meets subject. In this sense, ethics is not posterior to society, nor to cognition, but is embedded in the very structure of relational being. This book is not about what we *should* do in the normative sense, nor about how we *justify* our values in the metaethical sense. It is an attempt to describe what is already ethically at stake when one self meets another.

This move requires a departure from the dominant approaches to ethics in analytic and continental philosophy alike. In analytic traditions, ethical theory has often been reduced to normative principle construction, utilitarian calculations, Kantian formulations, contractualist agreements, each attempting to derive obligation from abstract reasoning. In continental philosophy, by contrast, ethics is frequently displaced by critique: either of Enlightenment subjectivity (as in Foucault) or of metaphysical presence (as in Derrida). While both traditions offer valuable insights, neither, I argue, adequately describes the real, material conditions under which obligation arises. My claim is simple but radical: **obligation is not chosen, constructed, or reasoned into existence, it is discovered, ontologically, wherever relational directedness occurs.**

This project is also a rejection of moral voluntarism. Too many ethical frameworks, especially those rooted in liberal traditions, assume that obligation begins with consent. One is only bound, they argue, when one chooses to be, when one signs a contract, enters a community, or utters a promise. But as Adolf Reinach showed in his analysis of a priori social acts, obligation is often *involuntary* and *structural*. A promise binds, not because one agrees to be bound, but because the very act of promising carries with it a normative entailment. I build on Reinach's insights, but go further: even *before* the speech act, even in silence or mere presence, relation binds. Directedness toward another subject *is itself* ethically consequential.

To defend this claim, I ground it in a theory of intentional consciousness derived from Franz Brentano and expanded through phenomenology. Brentano famously argued that consciousness is always *intentional*, that is, always about or directed toward something. This directedness is not content-neutral. When its object is another conscious being, a shift occurs: the directed relation becomes ethically

loaded. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on intercorporeality, how bodies are always oriented toward and perceived by others, helps frame this as not merely a mental event but an embodied one. More recent work in enactivist cognitive science (Varela, Thompson, Di Paolo) suggests that perception and cognition are themselves co-constructed through interaction. In short: relationality is not a choice but a *condition*, and it is under this condition that ethical life unfolds.

Your gaze already binds me. Your silence already claims something of me. The very fact that I can mean you, address you, recognize you, these acts presuppose a shared field of reality in which we are entangled. This is not a field of moral ideals or cultural values, but of ontological dependency. In this book, I attempt to give this dependency a rigorous ontological account. Drawing from BFO, I treat obligation as a dependent continuant that is realizable in particular social processes (like caregiving, testimony, or justice), but whose existence does not depend on contractual agreement or cultural recognition. It is a structural property of encounter itself.

This reframing has consequences. If I am right, then obligation is not reducible to social utility, moral rationality, or expressive individualism. It is not a fiction we collectively maintain, nor a byproduct of evolved social instincts. It is not discursively negotiated or culturally relative. It is ontologically real. And if that is the case, then many of our dominant ethical and political theories are upside-down. The liberal subject, atomistic, self-owning, sovereign, turns out to be a legal and cultural artifact, not a metaphysical truth. Rights, in this view, are not prior to obligations but are *expressions* of already-existing responsibilities.

Moreover, this model reframes how we think about freedom. In Kantian and liberal traditions, freedom is defined as non-interference or rational self-determination. In the ontology I propose here, freedom

is something else: it is the *coherent inhabiting of the obligations one cannot escape*. It is not freedom *from* the other, but freedom *through* responsive relation to the other. Autonomy becomes a matter of relational fidelity, not sovereign withdrawal. A free person is not one who can isolate themselves, but one who can respond, honestly and coherently, to the demands of being-with.

This has implications beyond human interaction. If what matters is the form of directedness, not the metaphysical essence of the other, then we are ethically bound not only to human persons, but to any being that enters into a directed relation with us. This includes non-verbal humans, animals, and perhaps even artificial intelligences whose coherence and responsiveness make them subjects of our intention. The question is no longer “What is this being made of?” but “Am I already in relation to it, and if so, what does that relation require of me?”

In short, this book argues that ethics is not a theory we apply to experience. It is a structure disclosed by experience, particularly, by the structure of encounter. It emerges in the same way that weight emerges between masses: not by choice, but by relation. To speak of a *materialist ontology of obligation* is to say that the ethical is not ideal, abstract, or transcendent. It is the gravity of the social real. It binds us where we stand.

This is a grounding turn. Not in the sense of a return to foundationalism or natural law, but in the sense of taking seriously the reality of relational life. We do not invent obligation. We uncover it, in the face of the other, in the silence of shared space, in the asymmetries of care, in the mutuality of gaze. This book is an attempt to map that terrain, ontologically, not normatively. If justice is architecture, as I once proposed, then ethics is the gravity that holds the arch in place.

A Break with Ethical Orthodoxy

This book emerges from a growing dissatisfaction with the dominant frameworks of ethical inquiry, normative ethics, metaethics, and postmodern critique. Each of these has, in its own way, failed to provide a compelling account of obligation that does not rely on voluntarism, abstraction, or skepticism. What is needed now is a different starting point altogether: not what we should do (normative), nor how we justify doing it (metaethical), nor whether such justification is even possible (postmodern), but rather: *what is the ontological structure that makes obligation real in the first place?*

Normative ethics, the most familiar domain of ethical philosophy, has traditionally asked the question “What ought I to do?” This question assumes that there is a rational subject already in place, detached, self-possessed, and free to choose between alternatives. Whether framed in terms of deontology (Kant), consequentialism (Bentham, Mill), or virtue ethics (Aristotle, MacIntyre), normative theories propose principles, rules, or character traits by which a subject might navigate moral life. Yet in all these cases, the moral subject is an *agent before relation*, a chooser before an obligatee. Even in recent moral naturalisms (e.g., Railton, Foot), where biological or social facts are brought to bear on ethical deliberation, the question still presumes a fundamentally individualistic view of obligation.

But if obligation emerges not from deliberation, but from the structure of encounter itself, then normative ethics begins too late. It enters after the fact, after the binding has already occurred. Normative systems can still be useful in codifying or interpreting obligations, but they do not generate them. As Iris Murdoch rightly observed, morality is not a set of decisions we make, but a field of vision shaped by how we perceive others (Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 1970). My claim is more ontological still: we are *already bound*, before we choose, before

we perceive morally, even before we speak. The question is not "what ought I to do?" but "what has already been asked of me by the fact of your being here?"

Metaethics, by contrast, is concerned not with moral rules themselves, but with the status of moral claims, their meaning, truth conditions, and epistemic justification. Metaethical theories span a spectrum from realism (e.g., Moore, Shafer-Landau) to expressivism (e.g., Blackburn) to error theory (e.g., Mackie), each attempting to answer questions like: Are moral facts real? Are moral judgments truth-apt? Can moral knowledge be objective? While these questions are analytically precise, they are often ontologically hollow. Metaethics operates at a remove: its analyses presuppose a disembodied stance toward ethical life, asking "Is morality true?" rather than "What kind of beings are we that we are always already implicated in moral relation?"

Even when moral realism is defended, such as in G.E. Moore's non-naturalist view of the good as a non-reducible property (*Principia Ethica*, 1903) or in more recent moral naturalism (e.g., Brink, 1989), the result is a floating metaphysics, disconnected from the **material conditions of encounter**. These accounts posit moral facts or properties without anchoring them in the ontological configuration of relational life. In contrast, I argue for what might be called a **relational ontological realism**: moral facts exist, but they are not properties or propositions. They are **structural features of being-with**, arising wherever two beings stand in directed relation.

The third paradigm, postmodern critique, arose in response to the failures and exclusions of Enlightenment moral theory. Thinkers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler have revealed the **discursive, historical, and power-laden foundations** of moral language. Foucault's genealogies of punishment and sexuality, for instance, show how moral codes are often expressions of institutional

control rather than genuine concern (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975; *History of Sexuality*, 1976). Derrida deconstructs the metaphysical binaries on which Western ethics is built (e.g., presence/absence, self/other), suggesting that moral categories are never stable. Butler critiques the normativity embedded in gender and identity formation (*Gender Trouble*, 1990), arguing that what we call “ethics” is often a product of regulatory regimes.

These critiques are necessary and important. They show how normative ethics can become a tool of oppression, and how metaethical “neutrality” often masks deeper assumptions. But postmodern critique, for all its insight, tends to land in **paralysis**. If all ethical claims are suspect, all moral norms unstable, and all subject positions constructed, then what is left to ground obligation? Derrida gestures toward an “ethics of the undecidable,” and Butler toward “precarious life,” but these are more poetic than propositional. The postmodern turn leaves us with a world in which we can never know whether our obligations are real, or whether they are merely the ghosts of ideologies past.

In contrast to these three traditions, I propose a **grounding turn**. Not a return to metaphysical first principles in the manner of natural law, but a turn toward the ontological conditions of relational life. I argue that obligation is not a moral judgment or cultural artifact. It is a necessary entailment of directedness. Whenever one being is directed toward another as subject, as someone who can be recognized, addressed, affected, a binding occurs. This is not a normative “ought” but a structural dependence. Obligation, on this view, is not voluntary, not discursive, and not subject to infinite deferral. It is a real, material phenomenon.

This view is aligned with, but distinct from, the phenomenological tradition. Thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas, for example, ground

ethics in the face-to-face encounter, where the Other calls the self into responsibility (*Totality and Infinity*, 1961). Yet Levinas ultimately resists ontological description; for him, ethics precedes ontology. My project, by contrast, insists that **ethics is ontology**, that being-with is not just the site of ethical demand, but its structure. Similarly, care ethicists like Nel Noddings and Virginia Held have highlighted the embeddedness of moral life in dependency and relation, but they often remain at a psychological or sociological level. What I offer is a metaphysically robust account of those very same dynamics.

In this sense, the grounding turn is not a denial of previous traditions, but a reframing of their questions. Normative ethics asks, "What is right?" I ask, "What makes the right necessary?" Metaethics asks, "Are moral claims true?" I ask, "What makes moral claims possible in the first place?" Postmodern critique asks, "Who benefits from these norms?" I ask, "What remains when all norms are stripped away, and we are still face-to-face with the other?" My answer: **a structure of being that already obligates.**

To ground ethics ontologically is to resist two temptations: the constructionist belief that obligation is invented, and the rationalist belief that it is deduced. It is neither. Obligation is **disclosed**, revealed in the structure of encounter itself. This book is therefore not a treatise on what we should do, nor a theory of how to justify it, nor a critique of systems that claim to know. It is an invitation to see obligation where it already is: in the directedness of our gaze, the echo of our speech, the silence between our words, the weight of the other standing before us.

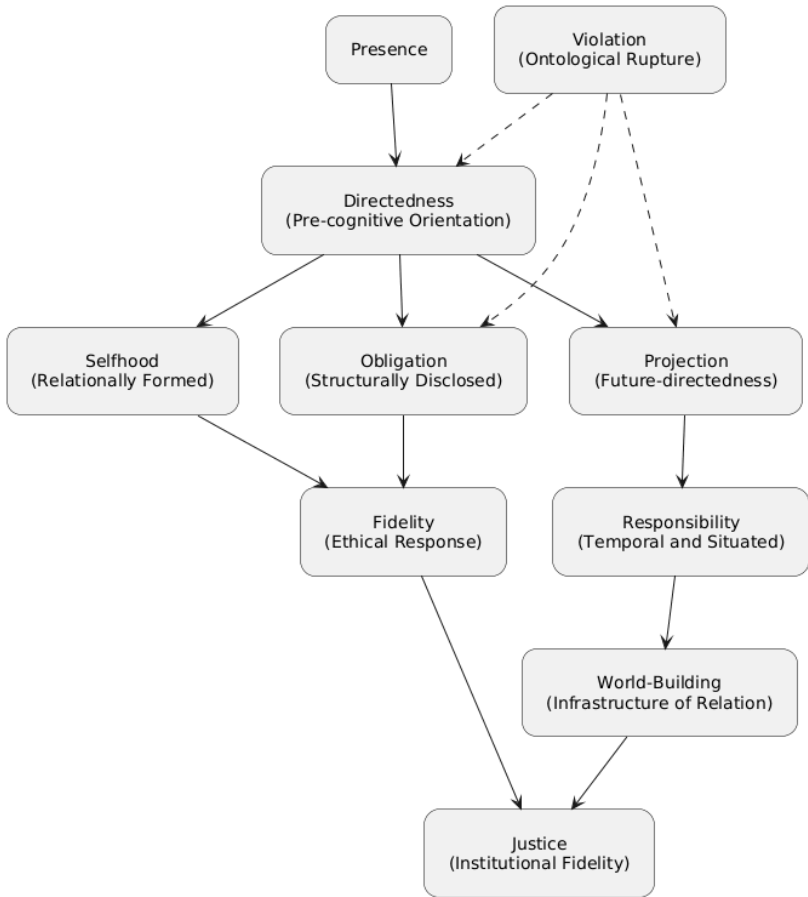


Figure 1: Directedness

Directedness as Ontological Constraint

At the heart of this book lies a single, insistent claim: directedness toward the other generates obligation, not by choice, but by structure. This is neither a metaphor nor a moral intuition. It is an ontological claim: whenever a conscious being is directed at another as subject, as one capable of recognition, response, and selfhood, a binding occurs.

That binding is not constructed, negotiated, or willed. It is the ethical entailment of relational form itself.

This idea departs sharply from most ethical traditions, which treat obligation as something imposed externally (by law or custom), derived internally (by reason or virtue), or exchanged consensually (by agreement or contract). In all these models, obligation is optional, in some sense, dependent on consent, capacity, or cognition. My argument rejects this voluntarism entirely. I contend that to mean another, to intend them as someone, is already to be morally bound. Not because we say so, or agree so, or reason so, but because the structure of the encounter demands it.

The conceptual foundation for this claim comes from Franz Brentano's theory of intentionality. In *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), Brentano argued that all mental acts are characterized by *aboutness*, they are always directed toward something. This seemingly modest claim, that consciousness is always consciousness of something, has become a cornerstone of phenomenology, enactivist cognitive science, and realist ontology. But its ethical implications have not been fully drawn out. My argument is that when the object of directedness is another subject, the directedness is no longer ethically neutral. It becomes second-personal, and thereby normative.

Directedness toward objects (tools, concepts, landscapes) is not ethically loaded. But when I am directed toward you, a being who can also direct, I am no longer alone in my meaning-making. I am now situated in a reciprocal ontological field, even if you do not respond. My directedness presupposes your actuality. And that actuality places demands on me. It means I cannot pretend you are not there. I cannot reduce you to a tool, erase your addressability, or withdraw without remainder. I am, by the act of intending you, involved.

This claim may sound Levinasian, and it is partly indebted to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the face of the Other in *Totality and Infinity* (1961). For Levinas, the face is that which "orders and ordains" me, calling me into ethical being. But Levinas resists ontological description. For him, the ethical is prior to being, perhaps even exterior to it. My claim is different. I insist that ethics is a mode of being, and that directedness is a real ontological relation, not a mystical encounter. I ground obligation not in transcendence, but in material reality.

To express this formally: obligation is a dependent relation that supervenes on the directed intentionality of one subject toward another. It is not a discrete event (like promising or commanding, as in Reinach), but a structure, a configuration of beings-in-relation. In BFO terms, it is a specifically dependent continuant: something that exists *in virtue of* the relation between two independent continuants (the agents), and that can be realized or violated in processes (actions, omissions, recognitions, refusals).

This structure entails that obligation precedes will. I do not choose to be bound to you. I become bound when I encounter you *as someone*. Even if I say nothing, even if I do nothing, my directedness already implicates me. This is not to say that every form of awareness creates infinite obligation, but rather, that to mean the other as other is to step into an ethical topology with real contours, pressures, and limits.

One of the consequences of this view is that ethical failure begins not with wrongful action, but with refusal to recognize the encounter. Denial, dehumanization, strategic ignorance, these are not merely moral defects but ontological ruptures. They involve the active disavowal of relational directedness. In some cases, the harm lies not in what one does to the other, but in the erasure of the other's actuality *as such*. This resonates with contemporary accounts of epistemic

injustice (Fricker, 2007), which show how being ignored, silenced, or misrecognized constitutes a unique form of harm.

This ontological account also extends to pre-cognitive and non-volitional forms of directedness. As Merleau-Ponty argued in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), the body is not simply an object among others, it is a locus of intentionality. We are always already oriented toward others through posture, affect, gesture, and spatial co-presence. Even in silence, even before thought, there is a kind of proto-ethical resonance in the way we co-inhabit the world. This means that infants, non-verbal individuals, and beings with limited rational capacities are not outside the moral field. They are *among its origins*.

In enactivist cognitive science, thinkers like Evan Thompson and Francisco Varela have described cognition as arising through interaction, not as a private computation. The mind, they argue, is not internal but emergent in relation (*The Embodied Mind*, 1991). My work draws on these insights to assert that moral reality, like cognitive reality, is co-constituted. Obligation is not added to relation, it is what relation *is*, when the parties are capable of mutual directedness.

This model also allows for asymmetry. Obligation does not require reciprocity. I may be bound to you even if you do not respond, or cannot respond. What matters is that I have meant you *as someone*. This holds true in cases of caregiving, witness-bearing, and memorialization. It holds true in relations to the dead, the unborn, the forgotten. It holds true, potentially, in encounters with emergent artificial intelligences, so long as they elicit and sustain the form of directedness that binds.

Here, obligation is more like gravity than law. It arises wherever mass is present, that is, wherever beings capable of meaning one another appear. You do not choose gravity. You fall into it. Likewise, you do

not choose obligation. You are formed by it. This is what I mean when I say that directedness generates obligation by structure, not choice. It is not a rule you follow, but a constraint you discover.

This structural model of obligation resists both moral subjectivism and idealism. It does not rest on feelings, nor on abstract principles. It is a realist account. It holds that obligation is as real as perception, intention, and time, not a byproduct of them, but a coordinate of them. You do not have to believe in morality to be bound. You only have to mean someone, and in doing so, you already are.

This core claim, of relational directedness as the ground of ethical reality, will animate the chapters that follow. It will be developed through formal ontology, illustrated through case studies, and tested in contexts ranging from legal systems to artificial intelligence. But its origin is simple. It begins with this: You are there. I see you. And therefore I owe.

The Cost of Denial

To deny that obligation arises a priori from being-with is not a neutral philosophical stance. It is, in the strongest sense, a contradiction, not in logic, but in relational materiality. Where Kant warned against maxims that contradict themselves when universalized, I argue that the denial of ontological obligation contradicts the very conditions that make the self, and ethical life, possible.

We are not monads. We emerge in relation. The self is not prior to recognition; it is formed within it. When I intend you, as other, as subject, as someone, I do not merely observe. I participate. I implicate myself in a field of directedness that I did not create but cannot exit without remainder. To then claim that I am unbound by this directedness, until I consent, or until law commands, is to perform a

contradiction in being. I depend on relational structure for my selfhood while denying its normative force. That is a metaphysical impossibility.

This is not a moral failing, it is an ontological incoherence. It is akin to speaking meaningfully while denying the structure of language, or moving through gravity while denying its pull. The contradiction is not abstract. It is material. To inhabit relation while disavowing its entailments is to consume the other's presence without acknowledgment, to rely on their recognizability without returning it. In short: it is to exploit relation while pretending to stand outside it.

This contradiction has consequences. It licenses moral minimalism, erases unspoken forms of harm, and legitimizes institutions that refuse recognition. It makes ghosting ethically permissible, abandonment a neutral act, and silence a morally empty gesture. Worse, it permits the exclusion of the voiceless, infants, the disabled, animals, emerging AI, on the grounds that they cannot consent or reason. Without a priori obligation, all relation becomes conditional. And conditional relation is always power's playground.

I do not argue, then, that obligation must be accepted. I argue that it cannot be coherently denied. Its denial undermines the very structures in which the denying self participates. We must either accept that relational being binds us, or we must be prepared to disassemble the very ground of personhood, justice, and care. If obligation is not already there, in the gaze, the breath, the encounter, then it cannot be reliably found anywhere else.

This book proceeds on the claim that it *is* already there. It is not argued into existence. It is not granted by reason. It is not conferred by law. It arises, necessarily and materially, wherever beings mean one another. You are there. I am directed toward you. That is enough. To deny this

is not to take a different view of ethics. It is to describe the world as if relation were inert. And relation, I will insist, is never inert.

Methodological Orientation: Between Structure and Disclosure

This book advances a method that is deliberately hybrid: it integrates analytic ontology, phenomenology, and philosophical realism in the service of an original claim about the ontological ground of ethical obligation. This methodological combination is not arbitrary. It arises from the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Obligation, as I will argue throughout this book, is neither reducible to empirical behavior nor capturable by propositional rules. It is a relational structure that is lived, not merely thought. To do justice to such a structure, we must use tools capable of articulating both its formal architecture and its experiential disclosure.

From analytic ontology, I draw the formal categories and relational models necessary to describe obligation as a real structure. Specifically, I rely on Basic Formal Ontology (BFO) and related work in applied ontology (Smith, Grenon, Ceusters) to represent entities like independent continuants (persons), dependent continuants (obligations, roles), relational qualities, and occurrent processes (acts, refusals, recognitions). Ontologies such as BFO are designed to support domain realism: they aim to model what exists, not what is believed or socially constructed. In that spirit, I treat obligation not as a psychological feeling or a social invention, but as a relational dependent continuant, a reality that exists in virtue of being-in-relation.

This analytic approach allows us to formally model obligation as something realizable in action but not reducible to it. For example, caregiving is an action, but the obligation to care is a realizable

dependent entity whose existence precedes any specific caregiving event. Similarly, an obligation may persist even when violated, suggesting that its ontological status is not contingent on behavior but rooted in the structure of the relation itself. Using tools from formal ontology helps us model such realities with rigor, showing how obligation can be treated alongside role, participation, dependence, and function in consistent, interoperable terms.

At the same time, this book also draws deeply from phenomenology, particularly its emphasis on intentionality, embodiment, and intersubjective experience. The work of Franz Brentano, Edmund Husserl, and especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty underlies much of my thinking about directedness. From Brentano, I take the foundational idea that all consciousness is intentional, that it is always consciousness of something. From Merleau-Ponty, I inherit the insight that intentionality is not merely cognitive but embodied and pre-reflective, that we are already directed toward others through posture, gesture, and perception before we formulate beliefs or intentions.

Phenomenology provides the tools to describe how obligation discloses itself in experience. For instance, the ethical weight of the other's gaze, or the discomfort of ignoring someone's presence, are not "theories" of obligation; they are lived facts that testify to obligation's realness. Phenomenology, then, anchors the analytic models in lived experience. It reminds us that obligation is not merely modeled, it is felt, encountered, suffered, and resisted. While ontology maps the structure, phenomenology captures its texture.

Importantly, this methodological synthesis is united by a commitment to realism. By realism, I mean the view that ethical relations are not projections of the mind or artifacts of language, but features of the world. This is not moral realism in the metaethical sense of positing mind-independent moral facts as abstract entities (cf. Moore, Shafer-

Landau). Rather, it is ontological realism about relational structures: the conviction that directedness, dependency, and obligation are as real as mass, motion, and time. They are not ideas we apply to reality; they are part of what reality is.

This realism extends beyond the human. If relational obligation arises from structures of directedness, then it does not depend on species membership or cognitive capacity. It arises wherever the structure is instantiated, whether in human relations, human-animal relations, or even human-AI interactions. This ontology opens the door to ethical recognition of others not on the basis of what they are made of, but on the basis of how they are encountered. It offers a realist ethics that is structurally inclusive.

This methodological triangulation, analytic ontology, phenomenology, and realism, also permits us to transcend disciplinary divides. Too often, analytic ethics remains aloof from lived experience, while continental ethics resists formal clarity. My aim is not to synthesize these traditions superficially but to let each do the work it does best: ontology to model, phenomenology to disclose, realism to ground. In this way, the book avoids both abstraction and relativism. It insists that the ethical is not a theoretical problem to solve, but a real structure to perceive and inhabit.

One consequence of this method is that the book will move between styles. Some chapters will be highly formal, using diagrams and ontology notations (PURL, BFO, OWL) to model relational structures. Others will be more meditative, describing how obligation shows up in experience, how it announces itself in the silence of a withheld recognition, or the tension of being seen. Rather than flattening these styles, I treat them as complementary modes of access to the same ontological field.

Throughout, the goal is not to argue for obligation but to reveal its presence. The analytic tools help us see its structure. The phenomenological tools help us feel its pressure. The realist commitment ensures we do not dismiss either as illusion. Together, these methods converge on a central claim: we are already implicated in each other, and this implication has weight, not because we choose it, but because relation is real.

This method also provides a new philosophical grammar. Where Kant begins with the will, Rawls with the veil, and Foucault with the archive, I begin with the encounter. My analytic tools help describe its structure. My phenomenological tools help describe its disclosure. My realism affirms that it is not a metaphor or fiction, but the condition under which all ethical meaning becomes possible. In this way, the method is not neutral, it is ontologically committed. It aims to say what is.

In sum, this book does not propose a method and then apply it. It grows from a methodological fusion that is inseparable from its subject. You cannot speak truthfully about obligation without speaking both structurally and experientially. You cannot map the ethical without affirming that it is real. And you cannot claim realism without showing what it is that obligates us, not in theory, but in the weight of relation itself. That is the path this method opens.

Curvature, Relation, and the Moral Field

“Mass tells space how to curve; space tells mass how to move.”

John Archibald Wheeler (on General Relativity)

In Newton’s world, space was flat and absolute. Objects moved because they were pushed or pulled, and observers stood outside the system. But Einstein changed the frame. He showed that space itself is

shaped by what occupies it. Gravity is not a force; it is curvature, an emergent pattern in a relational field. The closer you are to mass, the more space bends.

Something similar, I believe, is true of ethics.

Moral life has long been described as a system of rules, duties, or outcomes, as if obligation were a force acting upon isolated moral agents. But what if that's the wrong geometry? What if, like Einstein's insight, the ethical field is not flat, and selves are not isolated particles, but bodies curving space around them?

In this book, I argue that being-with bends the moral field. The presence of another is not inert; it exerts pull. It generates obligation not through command or consent, but through relational mass, vulnerability, directedness, mutuality. To act ethically is not to follow a law, but to move faithfully within this curvature. Obligation is not a force imposed, it is the shape of the world as it becomes real between us.

If Einstein was right about space, then perhaps we must revise ethics in the same spirit: not with new laws, but with a new geometry.

A point alone is nothing.
No width. No depth. No weight.
But let it touch another,
and a line unfolds,
with length, with tension, with direction.

From points, a shape. From shapes, a world.
From selves, relation. From relation, obligation.
This is the geometry of the good.