Which Relationships?*

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We have, or at least we take ourselves to have, reason for patterns of action and emotion toward our parents, siblings, friends, spouses, children, and others with whom we have significant ties. This partiality involves seeing to it that both these relatives and our relationships to them fare well, as well as respecting both in our decisions. It also involves feeling certain positive emotions (e.g., joy, relief, gratitude) when they fare well or are properly regarded, and feeling certain negative emotions (e.g., grief, anxiety, resentment) when they fare poorly or are not properly regarded. Famously, these reasons for partiality are agent-relative. I have reason to be partial to my relatives, whereas you do not, and you have reason to be partial to your relatives, whereas I do not. Less often noted, these reasons support requirements that are owed to our relatives. When we breach these requirements, we wrong our relatives, if not morally, then in some other sense. We give them claim, which others lack, to privileged kinds of complaints, such as resentment.

This presents a puzzle, however. Although we have countless interpersonal relationships, we have reason for partiality only in some. Why is this? Why is there reason for friendship and love of family, but not for racism or omertà?

Without an answer, without a principled

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1 Compare John Cottingham, “Patriotism, Favouristism, and Morality” Philosophical Quarterly 36 (1986): 357–373; Simon Keller, “Making Nonsense of Loyalty to Country,” in Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher S. Zurn (eds) New Waves in Political Philosophy (Palgrave...
distinction between the relationships that support partiality and the relationships that don’t, a creeping skepticism sets in about partiality as a whole.

My hope is to make some progress toward a principled distinction, or set of distinctions. In section 1, I clarify the challenge. The challenge would be easy to meet, I observe, if reasons for partiality were not, in a certain sense, “basic.” The problem is that some reasons for partiality are basic, in that sense. In section 2, I discuss a neglected phenomenon, “resonance,” which might help us to meet analogous challenges about other domains, such as the moral emotions. In section 3, I apply resonance to our challenge, suggesting how it might explain why some relationships—friendship and cultural membership are the examples—support partiality. In section 4, I suggest how resonance might explain why other relationships do not support partiality, paying special attention to the case of racism. In section 5, I distinguish various reasons for familial partiality, focusing on the relationships between parents and children. In particular, taking seriously the deep and widespread view that genetic relationships matter, I conjecture that reasons for partiality to genetic children and genetic parents may be yet another instance of resonance. In section 6, I end with some reflections on the implications of this account for other relationships, such as co-citizenship; for the defense of partiality in general;


A lot of ethical theorists are happy to notice the friends, family and community cases, but they do not see the problem of where it might end…. How about my colleague, my tribesman, my countryman, my gender, my patient, my co-religionist or my species? These are all controversial and disputed. We need to ask the question: which loyalties are okay and which are not?… When do indexical considerations contribute to determining a moral property? This is a fundamental moral question—perhaps even the fundamental moral question (280).
and for the difficult relations between partiality and other norms, most notably those of impartial morality.

1. A Request for Explanation

Think of the challenge this way. Imagine the exhaustive List of partiality principles: of all of the true normative claims of the form:

one has reason for parental partiality toward one’s children,

one has reason for spousal partiality toward one’s spouse,

and so on. We need not imagine the List fully enumerated. It is enough to imagine it including relatively uncontroversial cases, like parental and spousal partiality, and excluding relatively uncontroversial cases, like prison-gang and blood-type partiality. Our challenge is then to explain the List: to explain why all and only the partiality principles that it contains are true.

To be clear, the challenge is not to provide reasons to believe the List.2 This latter challenge might be met with abductive arguments to the effect the List best explains our particular judgments about reasons for partiality. But the challenge to explain the List cannot be met in this way. Nor is the challenge is to explain how any partiality principle could be true. Such a challenge might be issued, for example, by philosophers who find agent-relative reasons, in general, inexplicable. Rather, granting (at least for the sake of argument) that partiality principles are not otherwise problematic, the challenge is to explain why only those partiality principles on the List, and no others, are true.

I assume that all normative claims, which, by stipulation, are of the form “One has reason...”, are explained only by other normative claims and claims with no normative or

2 Christopher Heath Wellman, “Relational Facts,” in particular, seems to confuse the challenge to explain the List with this latter challenge to provide reasons for believing it.
evaluative content.\(^3\) Given this assumption, it may seem that the explanation of any normative claim must take one of two forms. The first form, *instantiation*, derives a normative claim by universal instantiation from a normative principle, say, of the form:

For all \(X\), persons \(Y\), if \(R(X,Y)\), then \(Y\) has reason to \(\phi(X)\) or feel \(E(X)\),

and some nonnormative fact, say, of the form \(R(A,B)\). For example, the explanation why I have reason to admire Twain may be that Twain is a great author, and that for all persons \(X\), \(Y\), if \(X\) is a great author and \(X\) is not \(Y\), then \(Y\) has reason to admire \(X\). The other form of explanation, *facilitation*, exploits Joseph Raz’s “Facilitative Principle”:

that for all actions \(\phi\) (but presumably *not* emotions \(E\)), persons \(X\), if \(X\) has reason to \(\phi\), then, because of this, \(X\) has reason at least as strong to take some sufficient means to \(\phi\)-ing.

Thus, the explanation why I have reason to travel to New York is that I have reason to be in New York, and traveling there is part of any sufficient means to being there.\(^4\)

Can we explain the List by appeal to just instantiation and facilitation? Yes, say *reductionists*. They hold that no partiality principle is, in a certain sense, basic: more precisely, that every partiality principle:

one has reason to be partial in ways \(P\) to people with whom one has an interpersonal relationship of type \(R\),

\(^3\) I relax this assumption in footnote 8, below.


Like instantiation, facilitation represents a normative fact as following, by universal instantiation, from a more general normative principle—namely, the Facilitative Principle—and auxiliary premises. The difference is that, unlike instantiation, one of these premises is itself normative: namely, that I have reason to be in New York. Put another way, the Facilitative Principle takes us from reasons to reasons; it is a principle of transmission, one might say. The normative principles to which Instantiation is applied take us instead from nonnormative facts to reasons.
can be explained, by instantiation or facilitation, from normative principles that are not partiality principles.\(^5\) Instead, reductionism appeals to a normative principle of the form:

one has reason to \(\phi\) (or to feel \(E\))

and a nonnormative response equivalence of the form:

being partial in way \(P\) to people with whom one has \(R\) is an instance of, or facilitates, \(\phi\)-ing (or feeling \(E\)).

For example, the reductionist might seek to explain the partiality principle:

one has reason to be parentally partial to one’s children,

by appeal to the normative principle that:

one has reason to maximize well-being,

and the nonnormative claim that:

being parentally partial to one’s children is an instance of, or facilitates, maximizing well-being (because, e.g., one knows their needs better than others do).

Or the reductionist might seek to explain the partiality principle:

one has reason to be spousally partial to one’s spouse,

by appeal to the normative principle that:

one has reason to fulfill expectations, that one has voluntarily and intentionally, or voluntarily and negligently, led others to form, that one would perform morally permissible actions

\(^5\) This discussion of reductionism is indebted to Samuel Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26 (1997): 189–209. However, Scheffler defines reductionism as the position that reasons for partiality “actually arise out of discrete interactions that occur in the context of… relationships” (p. 190). For present purposes, this definition is, in one way, too narrow, and, in another way, potentially misleading. Too narrow, because some reductionist explanations (such as the one below that appeals to well-being) need not appeal to any discrete interactions between relatives. Potentially misleading, because a nonreductionist might hold that although reasons for partiality arise from relationships and not discrete interactions, some of the relevant relationships (such as the histories of encounter discussed below) are *constituted* by discrete interactions. The whole provides reasons that the parts do not.
and the response equivalence that:

being spousally partial is an instance of, or facilitates, fulfilling such expectations.

Reductionists thus have at least a clear *strategy* for explaining the List. They can claim that there are relevant response equivalences for all and only the partiality principles on the List. For example, they can claim that being gang-partial to one’s fellow Aryan Brothers, or being blood-type-partial to fellow O positives is not an instance of, and does not facilitate, maximizing well-being, or fulfilling expectations of morally permissible actions.

Yet, setting aside whether it explains why the List *excludes* what it does, I doubt that reductionism explains why the List *includes* what it does. First, consideration of some familiar proposals suggests that reductionism does not explain reasons for many of the partial actions that we take ourselves to have reason to perform. For one thing, I may be no more efficient than strangers at promoting my relatives’ well-being. If my mother became senile, it might not matter to her whether I or a stranger cared for her, and it might be clear enough to a stranger what her care required. For another, I may be no more efficient at promoting my relatives’ well-being than strangers’ well-being. Some children are much worse off materially than my daughter, and a deranged stalker might be no less emotionally vulnerable to me than my wife. Some reductionists may reply that the difference is that I did not voluntarily and intentionally (or negligently) lead the stalker to become vulnerable to me. But a voluntary act cannot be necessary, since I have reason for partiality to family members, such as my parents and siblings, regardless of any such act. And voluntarily and intentionally (or negligently) leading someone to become vulnerable to my failing to be partial to her cannot be sufficient, as the familiar phenomenon of “leading someone on” confirms. Someone might voluntarily and intentionally encourage me to form the mistaken belief that she has the attitudes constitutive of being my
friend or lover, thereby leading me to become vulnerable to her not treating me as her friend or lover. We would all agree that she has reason to “let me down gently.” But no one believes that she has reason to treat me as a friend or lover, precisely because there is no relationship that would make sense of such partiality.6

Next, even if reductionism explained some reasons for partial actions, these are not the reasons on which people, in being partial, act. When moved to do something for my daughter or my wife, for example, it would be oddly estranged to view her claim on me as merely that of a stranger whose well-being I could promote, or whose expectations I have raised. Finally, reductionism does not explain reason for partial emotion. Even if, on occasion, I have reason to do the same for a stranger’s daughter as for my own, I do not have reason to feel the same way about the stranger’s daughter.

It is natural to react to these last two points with the thought that the motivations and emotions distinctive of partiality have nothing do with reasons. “Those motivations and emotions are simply love itself, and love is not a response to reasons. Indeed, it cannot be: Love is focused on a particular, e.g., Jane, and something’s being the very particular that it is is not a reason for anything.” To take this view, however, is to misunderstand ourselves. As I have tried to argue elsewhere, it is false to the lived experience of love, rendering it an unintelligible urge; it is contradicted by our reflective judgments that love is called for by some objects (such as our own children) and not by others (strangers’ children); and it fails to explain a variety of other facts about love, such as the prediction that I would cease to love my wife if I lost all memory of our history together, even if I retained memories of what preceeded that history that allowed me

to recognize her as the very particular she is (whatever that comes to). To love someone, I think, just is, in part, to see one’s relationship with her as providing reason for partiality to her.\(^7\)

All of this, at least if taken at face value, suggests nonreductionism: the view that some partiality principles are not explained via instantiation and facilitation from normative principles that are not partiality principles: that some partiality principles are, in this sense, basic. If so, then our question is how nonreductionism can explain the List. Clearly it cannot explain the List as reductionism does: by showing that all and only the partiality principles on the List follow by instantiation or facilitation from normative principles none of which are partiality principles. What alternative is there?

Nonreductionists might propose, with reductionists, that all and only the partiality principles on the List follow by instantiation or facilitation from other normative principles, but, against reductionists, that some of these principles are partiality principles. In particular, they might appeal to a Generic Partiality Principle:

One has reason for Generic Partiality toward people with whom one has a relationship of the Generic Type.

And they might seek to derive all other partiality principles on the List, by instantiation or facilitation, using response equivalences of the form:

being parentally partial to one’s children is an instance of, or facilitates, being Generically Partial to people with whom one has a relationship of the Generic Type,

being fraternally partial to one’s siblings is an instance of, or facilitates, being Generically Partial to people with whom one has a relationship of the Generic Type.

The explanation of List would then be that relevant response equivalences obtain for all and only its entries. But this approach seems hopeless. There seems no way to specify the Generic Type, other than by a disjunction of all of the relationships on the List, which would hardly meet the

challenge. Moreover, there is no one kind of Generic Partiality. Parental partiality, for example, is quite different from fraternal partiality.  

8 We have been assuming that the explanation of the List would appeal to solely to facts of the form: “One has reason…” However, some might think that facts of the form “One has reason…” are explained by facts of the form: “Such and such is of value…” or “Such and such ‘provides’ (or is a ‘source’ of) reason…”.

While this is plausible, it does not help with our problem. Again, there will appear to be two kinds of explanation. Promotion explains the fact that X has reason to phi, or to feel E, by showing that the fact that X’s phi-ing, or feeling E, would bring about something of value, or prevent something of disvalue. Recognition explains the fact that X has reason to phi, or to feel E, by showing that X’s phi-ing, or feeling E, would properly respect or acknowledge or be for the sake of something of value, or disvalue. To say that something “provides” or “is a source of” reason, I think, is just to say that it plays the role of the thing of value (or of disvalue) in an explanation of that reason.

Now, nonreductionists might well explain each entry on the List by appealing to facts of this kind. The explanation would presumably appeal to recognition and would take the relationship mentioned in the entry as the relevant value, or source of reason. For example, nonreductionists might explain why:

one has reason to be parentally partial to one’s children

by saying that:

one’s parental relationship to one’s children is something of value, and being parentally partial to one’s children properly respects this value,

or:

one’s parental relationship to one’s children provides, or is a source of, reason to be parentally partial to one’s children.

And nonreductionists might then propose to explain the List by claiming that all and only the relationships mentioned by partiality principles on the List are valuable, or reason-providing, in the relevant way. (Compare the suggestion of Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities,” that the relationships provide reasons for partiality are just those that we have “reason to value noninstrumentally.”) This is why all and only the partiality principles on the List are true.

The problem is that this seems only to postpone the challenge. Why, one now wants to know, are all and only the relationships mentioned by the partiality principles on the List valuable, or reason-providing, in the relevant way?

This is why it is unhelpful to suggest that the partiality principles on the List involve relationships of just those kinds that contribute to their participants’ well-being, or the meaning of their lives. The suggestion would be not the reductionist claim that one’s reason for partiality is to enhance one’s own well-being overall, but instead that relationships of kinds that contribute to one’s well-being other things equal are associated with the partiality principles on the List, principles that are not explained via instantiation or facilitation from other normative principles. (In a given case, such a relationship might not enhance one’s well-being overall, because of the sacrifices it requires.) This connection to well-being or meaning is plausible, and it may even be useful in identifying, or justifying belief in, the principles on the List. But it does not help to explain why those and only those principles are on the List. On the most plausible views, when
At this point, one might well ask why we should expect an explanation of the List.

“Consider an analogy. Why should we be troubled that we cannot explain, by appeal to further normative principles, why the principles:

one has reason to seek knowledge,

one has reason to cause pleasure,

belong on the list of true normative principles, whereas the principles:

one has reason to cause pain,

one has reason to count blades of grass,

do not? Perhaps we should be troubled if we accepted Monism: that all normative claims follow by instantiation or facilitation from a single normative principle. But we should not be Monists.”

We need not be Monists, however, to expect an explanation of the List. Granted, we may not expect a common explanation of why knowledge and pleasure provide reasons. But this is because knowledge and pleasure are so manifestly different, both in themselves and in the responses they call for. By contrast, friendship and marriage are remarkably similar, both in themselves and in the responses they call for. And where there are similar phenomena, we expect a common explanation. There ought, it seems, to be something that we can say about the partiality principles on the List that explains why they, and only they, are true.

So the challenge to explain the List remains. All that we have settled so far is that if we are to meet it, we need to find another kind of normative explanation, beyond those that we have already discussed.9

activities and experiences contribute to well-being and meaning, they do so because they are independently valuable. So the challenge recurs: Why are these relationships, and no others, independently valuable?

9 The problem can look easier than it is. Keller, “Making Nonsense of Loyalty to Country,” writes:
2. Resonance

To illustrate what this kind of normative explanation might look like, consider a similar request for explanation about the moral emotions: responses—most notably, guilt, resentment, gratitude, and indignation—to attitudes, expressed in decisions, toward certain people and things. Why do I have reason to feel a given moral emotion toward some decisions, but not others? For example, why do I have reason to resent it when, say, a pediatrician expresses in his decisions a lack of concern for my child, but not when he expresses a lack of concern for the parasite that threatens her health?

“Because,” one will say, “you have reason to care about your child, whereas you do not have reason to care about the parasite. That is, you have reason to feel certain natural emotions in response to how she fares: positive natural emotions (e.g., hope, relief, joy) when she fares well, and negative natural emotions (e.g., anxiety, fear, grief) when she fares poorly.” But what is the nature of this “because”? This answer, namely that:

I have reason to feel negative natural emotions at my child’s faring poorly, but not at the parasite’s faring poorly,

does not explain by instantiation or facilitation why:

I have reason to resent lack of concern for my child, but not lack of concern for the parasite.

The necessary response equivalence:

There are some loyalties that you should not have…. It is easy to explain why each of these loyalties is objectionable. Loyalty to the Nazi Party is immoral…. [L]oyalty to a bank is imprudent. You should not be a loyal fan of Bon Jovi, because the object of that loyalty is aesthetically unappealing.

But, first, one might think whether loyalty is immoral depends, in part, on whether or not there are reasons for that loyalty. If so, then we cannot appeal to its immorality to explain why there are no reasons for it. Second, if my wife remained loyal to me though I became ruined, incapacitated, or ostracized, her loyalty would be imprudent. Finally, the object of her loyalty is aesthetically unappealing (looking something like a cross between a monkey and a squirrel).
resenting lack of concern for my child is an instance of, or facilitates, feeling a negative natural emotion at her faring poorly, does not obtain. First, the responses themselves differ. The negative natural emotions—such as anxiety, fear, grief, loss—lack resentment’s distinctively communicative register. Because resentment concerns how another person regards what we care about, it lays claim to responses from that person: apology, acknowledgement, respect, and so on. Because natural emotions concern simply what happens to what we care about, by contrast, they do not demand anything from anyone. They merely celebrate or lament the course that events take. Second, they are responses to different things. If some malevolent no longer has the power to harm my child, then I have reason for resentment, but not for anxiety. And if good intentions, or mindless nature, harm her, then I have reason for grief, but not for resentment. One might put the point this way: the natural emotions and the moral emotions are addressed to different dimensions of importance. It matters to us not only that certain people and things fare well in nature: that they escape harm, flourish, and so on. It matters to us also that they be properly regarded by others.

Why, then, do we take the fact, that I have reason to care about my child, but not about the parasite, to explain why I have reason to resent lack of concern for my child, but not lack of concern for the parasite? Because, it seems, we accept the more general principle that:

one has reason to resent decisions that aim at, or fail to prevent, events or conditions about which one would have reason to feel negative natural emotions.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) I am trying to state the question neutrally, although it could be stated in terms of the contractualism of T.M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), to which I am sympathetic. Why do I have reason to resent, rather than feel grateful for, a willingness to act in such a way that a principle permitting such actions could be reasonably rejected on the basis of what people in my position would have reason to want (where wanting, when fully spelled out, might simply consist in a disposition to experience such emotions)?

\(^{11}\) There is more to it than this, of course. First, the action must lack a certain kind of justification. Second, the events and conditions must involve things that are specially related to oneself: things that one has agent-relative reason, which others lack, to feel certain natural
But what explains this principle? Why shouldn’t one have reason to resent decisions that aim at events about which one would have reason to feel positive natural emotions? The underlying thought, as I will put it, is that moral emotions should resonate with natural emotions.

Resonance of moral emotions: one has reason to respond to a decision by which someone expresses an intention (or a lack of concern to prevent) that X fare a certain way with a moral emotion that is similar to the natural emotions with which one has reason to respond to X’s actually faring that way, but that reflects the distinctive importance of how others regard what one cares about.

Moral emotions should be “similar” to natural emotions at very least by sharing their “valence.” For example, since I have reason for negative natural emotions, such as grief, when something bad happens to my child, I likewise have reason for negative moral emotions, such as resentment, when someone’s decision aims for that bad thing to happen (or does not take care to prevent its happening). Since I have no reason for negative natural emotions when something bad happens to the parasite, I have no reason for negative moral emotions when someone’s decision aims for it to happen.

Here is another example of resonance. Certain aims are agent-neutrally important. That is to say that everyone has reason to respond to them in certain ways: reason not to impede their advancement, reason to hope that they progress, or simply reason not to deny or disparage their worth. However, when one has a personal history with a particular aim, when it has been, say, one’s life’s work to advance it, then that aim takes on a further dimension of agent-relative emotions about. Otherwise, one would have reason to feel indignation, not resentment. Finally, one can also have reason to resent decisions that do not aim at any natural event or condition, such as decisions to treat one unfairly. The point is only that, where there is a corresponding natural event or condition, it is an one about which one has reason to feel negative natural emotions.

12 I do not have a general account of the difference between “positive” and “negative” responses to offer. I am here just relying on our shared intuitive grasp of the difference.

13 Compare the reasons for respect discussed by Joseph Raz, Value, Respect, and Attachment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
importance. One has reason, that others lack, to care specially whether that aim is advanced: to care more about it than one does about other, equally worthy, aims with which one shares no history. And one may also have reason, that others lack, to care specially whether one advances the aim oneself: reason, for example, to care whether someone else, even if equally qualified, replaces one in one’s life’s work.\textsuperscript{14}

Here a similar request for explanation arises: Why do some personal histories provide these agent-relative reasons whereas others do not? Why has a researcher, who has spent years pursuing a cure for some disease, reason to care whether he succeeds, whereas a lunatic who has spent years counting blades of grass on the asylum grounds, has not? The explanation has something to do with the fact that the cure is agent-neutrally important, whereas knowledge of the sum is not. But again the explanation cannot proceed by instantiation or facilitation from a response equivalence. There is no response equivalence, since the agent-relative importance that finding a cure has for the researcher goes beyond its agent-neutral importance for the rest of us.

Again, I think, the explanation is to be found in resonance.

\textit{Resonance of personal aims}: one has reason to respond to a history of pursuing some aim with a concern for that aim, and one’s pursuit of it, that is similar to the responses that one has reason to give that aim apart from such a history, but that reflects the distinctive importance of a personal history.

The aim of finding a cure is agent-neutrally important for anyone—everyone has reason, say, to hope that it is achieved—and so the aim is agent-relatively important for the researcher—she has

reason to feel elated when her work moves forward and defeated when it is set back. The aim of counting blades of grass is agent-neutrally pointless—no one has reason to care whether it is achieved—and so the aim is also agent-relatively pointless for the lunatic—he has no reason to care whether he fills another tally sheet.

The point can be generalized. Many things of agent-neutral importance, not only aims, can come to have agent-relative importance for us when we are personally related to them: when they are specially “ours,” in some sense. The personal relation is often that of having a history of a certain kind with the thing: the history of pursuing an agent-neutrally important aim, the history of engaging with an agent-neutrally important culture or institution, or the history of experiencing some agent-neutrally important adversity or loss. But the personal relation might also be some ahistorical situation involving the thing. One might be exposed to some agent-neutrally important adversity, whether or not one has experienced it, or one might have some agent-neutrally important trait or capacity, whether or not one has manifested or exercised it. In all of these cases, the suggestion goes, the agent-relative importance of the thing for oneself resonates with its agent-neutral importance for anyone.

We have seen, then, several instances of the general phenomenon of:

\textit{Resonance}: one has reason to respond to X in a way that is similar to the way that one has reason to respond to its counterpart in another dimension of importance, but that reflects the distinctive importance of the dimension to which X belongs.\footnote{A further instance of resonance may be the relation, explored by Thomas Hurka, \textit{Virtue, Vice, and Value} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), between virtues and “base-level” goods: such as pleasure, knowledge, and achievement. Although virtues are no less “intrinsic values” than base-level goods, Hurka suggests, they stand in a systematic relation to base-level goods: roughly, virtues consist in “loving” base-level goods for themselves. (Somewhat more precisely, virtues are defined recursively as love of what is intrinsically valuable (including base-level goods and virtues) for itself and hatred of what is intrinsically disvaluable (including base-level evils and virtues) for itself.)}
A deeper explanation of resonance is elusive. One might suggest that if natural emotions were not to resonate with moral emotions, or if our responses to things with which we have a personal history were not to resonate with our responses to those things whether or not we have such a history, then our normative outlook would be, in a certain way, incoherent. We would thank those who deliberately sought to destroy what we most cherished, while resenting those who came to our aid. We would attach great meaning to our history of pursuing aims that we otherwise saw as trivial, while attaching no meaning to our history of pursuing aims that we otherwise saw as important. However, I wonder whether appealing to “coherence” in this way gives us any deeper explanation. Our sense that such a normative outlook would be “in a certain way, incoherent” may simply be our expectation of resonance under another description.

3. Resonance and relationships

In any event, our aim is not to explain why there is resonance, but to appeal to it to explain the List: why we have reasons for partiality in some relationships, but not in others. To do this, we first need a clearer view of what “relationships”—that is, relationships of the sort with which the debate about partiality is concerned—are.

3.1 Shared histories of encounter

Consider first histories of encounter. One person has an encounter with another person when the actions, attitudes, or reasons of one affect, or are about, the other. Histories of encounter are temporally extended patterns of encounter involving the same people. Such histories of encounter include, for example, the relationships between spouses, friends, and siblings.

The suggestion, then, is that the proper responses to a history of encounter should resonate with the proper responses to the discrete encounters of which it is composed. Take
friendship. I share a friendship with someone when we share a history of encounters of certain kinds: aiding one another, confiding in one another, pursuing common interests, and so on. A discrete encounter of one of these kinds might occur outside the context of a friendship. For example, a stranger might aid me, intentionally, disinterestedly, and respecting my autonomy. This encounter would give me reason for gratitude, consisting in reciprocating, or in expressing my thanks, in some way proportional to the help received, with like disinterest and respect. Friendship is a history of, *inter alia*, encounters of aid. And friendship calls for, *inter alia*, feelings and actions that might naturally be seen as resonant with, *inter alia*, the gratitude that discrete encounters of aid call for.16

The natural worry is that this is really a reductionist explanation, by instantiation, from a normative principle that is not itself a partiality principle. “Friendship is just a series of encounters of mutual aid, and the partiality of friends is just the discharge of the sum of the debts of gratitude thereby incurred. In other words, the partiality principle:

one has reason for friendship toward one’s friends,

is derived by instantiation, from the normative principle:

one has reason for gratitude toward people who have helped one,

and the response equivalence that:

one’s friends are people who have helped one many times, and friendship is gratitude many times over.”

This is false to the phenomenon, I think, in ways that at first may seem overly subtle, but on reflection appear fundamental. Imagine a lone traveler, of a bygone age, making his way

16 I have focused on encounters of aid, but friendship is, of course, also constituted by encounters of other kinds, such as sharing confidences and pursuing joint interests. Discrete episodes of sharing confidences elicit trust, albeit limited. Discrete episodes of pursuing a joint interest elicit cooperation, albeit instrumental. According to resonance, therefore, friendship should provide reason for more open-ended trust and noninstrumental cooperation.
west. Along the way, he helps and is helped by the people dwelling in the places he passes through, creating and incurring various debts. Contrast him with a different traveler who helps and is helped in the same ways, but by one and the same companion throughout. The companioned traveler has reason for responses that are not simply the sum of the responses for which the companionless traveler has reason, but just re-focused, as it were, on a single person. The companionless traveler has accumulated a series of debts that he might repay and then move on. But things are not like that for the companioned traveler. He has reason for a concern for his friend’s interests that is open-ended: that keeps no ledger and that asks only that like concern be reciprocated. And he has reason not to move on, but instead to sustain his friendship going forward. Their history together roots an expansive loyalty, in a way in which no string of encounters with a changing cast could. Such is the distinctive kind of importance that only a shared history with another person can have.

Our present proposal, generalizing a bit, is:

Resonance of histories of encounter: one has reason to respond to a history of encounter in a way that is similar to the way that one has reason to respond to the discrete encounters of which it is composed, but that reflects the distinctive importance of a history shared with another person.\(^{17}\)

It is hard to say, in general terms, what “reflecting the distinctive importance of a shared history” is, because in any particular case it will depend on the responses called for by the particular

\(^{17}\) “Suppose that someone benefits me time and again, without any reciprocation,” one might worry. “If these discrete encounters give me debts of gratitude, then why should not the shared history of these encounters give me reason for friendship, or something like it, toward this benefactor?” If one is troubled by the suggestion that a friendship might be imposed on one unilaterally in this way, it is probably because one imagines that these discrete benefactions are either invasive or servile—as they most likely would be. But if they are invasive or servile, then they do not give one reason for gratitude. So resonance would not imply that a history of such encounters gives one reason for friendship, or something like it. Things might be different, say, when one castaway nurses another back to health after being shipwrecked on a desert isle. But in this case it does not seem so troubling that this shared history gives the beneficiary reason for partiality.
discrete encounters of which the particular shared history is composed. In some cases, as we have seen, it takes the form of love or loyalty, because the relevant discrete encounters call for resonant responses, such as gratitude, trust, and cooperation. However, in other cases, as we will see, reflecting the distinctive importance of a shared history cannot take this form, because it resonates with discrete encounters that call for no responses at all, or for responses of rejection.18

3. 2 Common personal histories and situations

Another important class of relationships is constituted by personal histories or situations of the kind discussed in section 2: for example, the personal history of pursuing an aim, or enduring some trial. I share a common personal history or situation with someone just when she and I each have a personal history or situation of the same kind, involving the same thing. We may share this personal history or situation even if we never had any encounter. For example, I may have a personal history of engaging with a particular culture, having been initiated into its traditions and lived its way of life. This personal history gives me reason to continue engaging with, and seeking to preserve, the culture. By facilitation, I may already have reason to care whether others have a personal history of the same kind. It will be easier for me to engage with, and preserve, the culture if others do as well. But the fact that we share this history, it is ordinarily thought, provides us with reason for a partiality that goes beyond this. It gives me reason for a kind of solidarity with them. If I were to betray the culture, for example, I would have reason to feel not only that I had betrayed it, but also that I had betrayed them.

Resonance of common personal history or situation: one has reason to respond a common personal history with, or situation involving, a thing in a way that is similar to the way one has reason to respond to the personal history or situation itself, but that reflects the distinctive importance of sharing a personal history or situation with another person.

18 Strictly speaking, it resonates with the responses, not the encounters. But putting it this way makes the sentence almost unparsable.
As before, what “reflecting the distinctive importance of sharing a personal history or situation with another person” comes to in any particular case depends on the personal history or situation in question. In some cases, as we have seen, it takes the form of a solidarity that is specially focused on the thing with which one has that history or situation. If what one shares is a history of engagement with an institution, for example, then the solidarity is focused on the survival and functioning of the institution. For example, one owes it to the others to close ranks in defense of the institution, but not necessarily to see to it that their lives go well in other ways. If the personal relation is of experiencing, or being exposed to, adversity—to take an example that will be important for what follows—then the solidarity is tied to efforts to recognize, alleviate, or overcome the effects of that particular adversity. As we will now see, however, in other cases reflecting the distinctive importance of a common personal history or situation cannot take this form, because it must resonate with a personal history or situation that calls either for no responses at all, or for responses of rejection.

4. Relationships that do not provide reasons for partiality

Our question, recall, is whether resonance explains why there is reason for certain kinds of partiality, but not for others. So far we have seen how it might explain why certain partiality principles are on the List. Now we need to ask whether resonance can explain why certain other (possible) partiality principles are off the List.

4.1 Trivial relationships

The easiest cases are the countless trivial interpersonal relationships that no one imagines provide reasons for partiality. The fact that someone always gets off the train at the station where I get on, or that I have a kidney of the same weight as his, do not provide reasons for partiality. Resonance explains this straightforwardly. Neither the discrete encounter of boarding
a train that another is leaving, nor the personal situation of having a kidney of a specific weight, matters. One has no reason to respond to this encounter, or to this personal situation, in any particular way. Thus, according to Resonance, one has no reason to respond in any particular way to the corresponding history of encounter, or common personal situation. There is, so to speak, nothing for partiality to resonate with.\footnote{Keller, “Making Nonsense of Loyalty to Country,” asks why loyalty to a coffee mug, or to a group of people whose names start with ‘P’ involves a kind of error. Because, he answers, it involves mistaking “the object of loyalty to be something with which you could share a relationship of mutual recognition and care.” The same error, he provocatively suggests, is involved in loyalty to country. In contrast, I think that one can have reason for partiality to persons (such as an autistic child) or things (such as one’s life’s work) with whom or which one cannot share a relationship of mutual recognition and care. So I prefer the explanation in the text: that the encounters one has with one’s coffee mug, and the situation one shares with other people whose names start with ‘P,’ are trivial.}

\subsection*{4.2 Externally and internally negative relationships}

The same cannot be said of what we might call negative relationships, however. Consider, first, externally negative relationships, which are either (i) shared histories of encounter in which relatives jointly wrong some nonrelative, or unjustifiably disrespect or harm some thing of value, or (ii) common personal histories in which relatives have individually wronged some nonrelative, or unjustifiably disrespected or harmed something of value. Examples are the relationships between members of the same prison gang, secret police, fascist party, military junta, terrorist cell, concentration-camp detail, polluting industrial concern, or iconoclastic cult (these last two being examples of harming things, rather than necessarily wrongdoing people). Consider, second, internally negative relationships, which are composed of discrete encounters in which one relative wrongs the other. Examples are the relationships between master and slave, pimp and prostitute, abusive husband and abused wife, exploitative boss and exploited worker, or enemy and enemy. One surely has reason to respond to the
discrete encounters and personal histories that constitute these relationships. So, according to resonance, one should have reason to respond to the relationships themselves. Yet this may seem like precisely the result that we sought to avoid: that these relationships do provide reasons.

While resonance may imply that externally negative relationships provide reasons, however, these are not reasons for partiality. One does not have reason to respond to discrete encounters, or a personal history, of wronging others, or harming something of value, by continuing to do so. Instead, one has reason to feel guilt, to repair the damage, and so on. According to resonance, one has reason to respond to an externally negative relationship with responses that are similar to these, but that reflect the distinctive importance of a shared history with another person. Perhaps this means seeing to it that one’s relatives make amends. Or perhaps it means distancing oneself from them, just as one might have reason to distance oneself from one’s own past history of wrongdoing. Either way, it means not sustaining, but rather undoing, these relationships (at least as externally negative relationships). Of course, a particular relationship may belong to more than one type of relationship, or may share constituents with another particular that belongs to a different type. Thus, two people who share an externally negative relationship may also share a friendship, or some other kind of camaraderie or collegiality. In such cases, they would have conflicting reasons arising from both types of relationship.

There is a more basic problem with the idea that internally negative relationships might provide reason for partiality. It seems to offend against a generalization of the principle of ought implies can: that it be possible, at least in principle, for every participant in a relationship to respond to the reasons that that relationship gives them. This is not possible when the relationship is internally negative and the putative reasons are reasons of partiality. If the
wrongdoer responds to his (putative) reason of partiality to care about his relative, then he ends the internally negative relationship, thereby failing to respond to his (putative) reason of partiality to sustain that relationship.

The worry about internally negative relationships, I take it, is not that they provide reason for partiality, but instead that they provide reason for, as it were, partiality’s negative image. The worry is that the master-slave relationship, say, gives slave reason to submit to master, and master to exploit slave. As Katja Vogt puts it: “Have we just as much reason to harm our enemies as we have to help our friends?”

A discrete encounter of wrongdoing, again, gives the wrongdoer reason to feel guilt, to make reparations, and to seek forgiveness. It gives the wronged victim reason to feel resentment, to seek reparations, and to demand apology. It may also give the victim reason for other hostile or distancing responses, such as ceasing to wish the wrongdoer well, or refusing to trust and cooperate with him. I assume, however, that it does not give the victim reason for retribution, or reason of any other kind to harm the wrongdoer. Therefore, whatever resonance implies, it is not that an internally negative relationship gives the wrongdoer reason to continue wronging the victim, or the victim either reason to submit to it, or, alternatively, reason to seek vengeance. If anything, resonance implies the opposite: that the wrongdoer has reason to make amends, and that the victim has reason to stand up for herself, but not to pursue retribution. For wrongdoer and victim to respond to these reasons just is for them to end the relationship.

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20 “Haben wir ebenso viel Grund, dem Feind zu schaden, wie wir Grund haben, dem Freund zu helfen?” “Freundschaft, Unparteilichkeit und Feindschaft,” p. 525. Vogt reminds us that this view was commonplace in antiquity, referring, in particular, to the exchange between Socrates and Polemarchus in Republic 1. I am also indebted to Hans Sluga, who put the same question to me, referring to the same text, after a talk some years ago.

21 Some relationships may involve conflict or opposition, but no wrongdoing. Consider competitors in sports or adversaries at law (such as an assistant D.A. and public defender who
I have been trying to dispel the worry that resonance implies that negative relationships provide reasons for certain objectionable responses. In doing so, I have made some assumptions about the responses called for by the discrete encounters, or personal histories, of which these negative relationships are composed. All that matters for the dialectic is that those who find these responses objectionable also find these assumptions plausible. No doubt, other assumptions can be made. Imagine a warrior code according to which a raid on a neighboring tribe gives the raiders no reason to make amends, but gives their neighbors reason to take revenge. When applied to such a code, resonance might well imply that enmity—the history of blood debts issued and collected—gives one reason to harm one’s enemy. But this is no objection to resonance. For no one who is troubled by the implication, namely that enmity gives one reason to harm one’s enemy, subscribes to such a code.22

4.3 Racism and racial partiality

confront one another regularly in court), who have long played by the rules of a permissible contest. Discrete encounters of this kind provide no reason for reparation or resentment. Perhaps they are really instances of an abstract form of collaboration, in which cooperation at one level makes possible competition at another. Resonance might therefore imply that a shared history of such encounters provides reason for respect and fair dealing. But this consequence does not seem objectionable.

22 Among extant treatments of the subject, the one closest to the view discussed here is Thomas Hurka, “The Justification of National Partiality,” in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan, The Morality of Nationalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 139–57.

Some activities and states of people, most notably their doing good or suffering evil, call for a positive, caring, or associative response. Others, such as their doing evil, call for a negative or dissociative response. Partiality between people is appropriate when they have shared history of doing good, either reciprocally or to others, partiality between them in the present is a way of honoring that good fact about their past. (This is why partiality among former SS colleagues is troubling; it seems to honor a past that properly calls for dishonor.) (152)

See also Thomas Hurka, Virtue, Vice, and Value, pp. 200–204. The suggestion that the relevant shared histories are either of “suffering evil” together, or of “doing good” together, however, is too restrictive. For example, parents need not do good together, or suffer evil together, with their young children.
The challenge that we have been considering is often dramatized in the following way: Unless we explain why partiality to members of the same race belongs off the List, we commit ourselves to racism. As it stands, however, this a category mistake. Racism is, in one way or another, organized around the belief that one race is superior to others. The belief that one race is superior neither implies, nor is implied by, the belief that there is reason for partiality to members of one’s race. When agent and beneficiary belong to the allegedly superior race, it may be hard to see the practical difference between these beliefs. But the difference is evident in other contexts. If there is reason for partiality to members of one’s race, then members of the allegedly inferior race do not have reason for partiality to members of the allegedly superior race, but they do have reason for partiality to one another. According to the racist, by contrast,


Some of the discussion of this section applies similarly to other forms of group chauvinism, such as sexism.

24 A standard dictionary definition of “racism,” for example, is: “a doctrine or teaching, without scientific support, that claims to find racial differences in character, intelligence, etc., that asserts the superiority of one race over another or others.” Webster’s New World Dictionary, Third College Edition (New York: Webster’s, 1988), s.v. “racism.” No doubt this is too narrow a definition, since racism is not limited to explicit doctrines or teachings. As the phrase, “in one way or another, organized around the belief,” is meant to acknowledge, racist attitudes and practices are often far less directly connected to the belief in racial superiority: a fact that helps to explain their resilience. For discussion, see Tommie Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory,” The Philosophical Forum 34 (2003): 153–88. The claim is only that some connection to such a belief is constitutive. For criticism of even this weaker claim, see the work of Jorge Garcia—his “Racism and Racial Discourse,” The Philosophical Forum 32 (2001): 125–145, gives a succinct summary—and Josh Glasgow, “Racism as Disrespect,” (unpublished). For a response to Garcia, to which I am sympathetic, see Tommie Shelby, “Is Racism in the ‘Heart’?” Journal of Social Philosophy 33 (2002): 411–20. At any rate, even on Garcia’s and Glasgow’s alternative conceptions, racism is not distinguished by a belief that everyone has reasons to be partial to members of his or her own race. So their criticism does not affect the main point that I am making here.
members of the inferior race do have reason for deference, submission, etc. to members of the superior race, but they do not have reason to do anything for one another. (For example, insofar as the antebellum slave owner thought that there was a rationale for slavery, and did not turn a deaf ear to questions of justification, he did not believe that this rationale gave slaves reason to assist one another in resisting him. Instead, he thought that slaves ought to recognize their inferiority in the eyes of God or the order of Nature, and acquiesce in what, given that inferiority, was a justified social arrangement.) Since the claim that there is reason for partiality to members of one’s race is not racism, to claim that there is reason for partiality to relatives of certain kinds is not to incur some special burden to explain why racism is false. At any rate, the burden is easily discharged. No race is superior to others.

The challenge must be restated. Even if racists do not believe that there is reason for partiality to members of one’s race, someone might believe this. Does resonance vindicate this belief? Since I share a race with many people whom I have never encountered, relationships of shared race are not histories of encounter. However, sharing a race might consist in sharing a personal history or situation. But which personal history or situation? I take it that members of the same race share no biologically interesting essence. And I take it that the manifest ethnic and cultural diversity within familiar racial classifications shows that members of the same race do not share a personal history with some common ethnic or cultural heritage. Two possibilities seem to remain. On the somatic basis view, the personal history or situation is that of having (or, following the “one-drop rule,” being the genetic descendant of people who had) the superficial, physiognomic traits by which members of a given race are classified. On the social consequence
view, the personal history or situation is that of experiencing, or at least of being exposed to, the social consequences of that racial classification.

Having the somatic basis associated with a certain racial classification is, in itself, of no significance. Like having attached earlobes, or a widow’s peak, it provides no distinctive reasons. So, according to resonance, sharing this personal situation with another provides no distinctive reasons. The social consequences of racial classification, by contrast, are far from trivial. Since different racial classifications have different social consequences, members of different races have different kinds of personal histories and situations. American blacks, for example, share a personal experience of, or exposure to, a specific kind of adversity: namely, that of being mistreated because of their racial classification. In general, a personal history of adversity gives one reason to honor what the adversity destroyed and to repair what it harmed. To the extent that some part of oneself was harmed, then one’s efforts at repair will be focused, to that extent, on oneself. According to resonance, therefore, a common history of adversity provides reasons to work with, or minister to, other people who faced adversity of the same kind, in order to honor, repair, and preserve the things at which it struck, including aspects of those other people themselves. This does not seem an implausible conclusion, at least if the widespread acceptance of organizations such as the NAACP and of the sense of solidarity that they embody is any guide.

Why, then, does the relationship of shared whiteness not likewise give whites reason to minister specially to the needs of other whites? Why should we not welcome equally an NAAWP? Because whites do not share, as whites, a personal experience of, or exposure to, 

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25 As noted earlier, one can be exposed to adverse social consequences without yet having experienced them.
26 This understanding of the relevant relationship is heavily indebted to Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Harvard: 2005).
mistreatment on the basis of their classification as whites. If they share a personal history or situation as whites it is that of fostering, acquiescing in, or at very least benefiting from, the practice of mistreating blacks (and others) on the basis of their racial classification. While such a personal history or situation might provide some reasons, they would be reasons to repudiate benefits received and to ameliorate harm done. So the common personal history or situation of whites would not provide reasons for the same sort of responses as the common personal history or situation of blacks.27

One might object that this explanation is circular. “How have blacks been mistreated? By being excluded from the partiality that whites show other whites. But to call this ‘mistreatment’ is already to assume that whites have no reason for partiality to other whites. And this is precisely what you set out to explain.” The reply is that blacks have been mistreated in ways (e.g., slavery, disenfranchisement, their enduring effects) that went, and go, far beyond merely being excluded from favors that whites may have done one another. Moreover, this mistreatment was born of, and still is largely sustained by, the doctrine, objectionable in itself, that blacks are inferior.

“But indulge in a fantasy that unburdens us of our past,” the objector will counter. “Those who would be classified as white have lived together, with peace and justice, as political and economic equals, with those would be classified as blacks. Suppose that, in this world, whites were partial to other whites. To claim that whites had no reason for this partiality, you would have to claim that they were mistreating blacks. But in order to call it mistreatment, you would have already to have assumed that they have no reason for this partiality.” The reply here

Of course, racist organizations often appeal to the rhetoric of adversity (e.g., “Too long have whites sat back while their rights have been taken from them.”) Perhaps this betrays some dim recognition of the justificatory power of a common history of adversity.
is that we do not need to claim that whites would be mistreating blacks in order to explain why whites would not have reason for such partiality. Once we strip away the social consequences that our collective past attaches to whiteness, shared whiteness is just a shared somatic basis, which, as we saw earlier, provides no reasons.

5. Parents and children

From the start, I have been assuming that there are reasons for partiality within family relationships. Even if this is true in some sense, however, it is far from obvious that there is *the same* reason for partiality within *every* relationship that is, in some recognizable use of the terms, a relationship between “parent” and “child,” “sibling” and “sibling,” and so on. The challenge, “Why do we have reason for partiality in some relationships, but not in others?” seems to recur within kinds of relationship that, loosely understood, call for partiality. To keep things manageable, I focus on relationships between parents and children.

5.1 Collective Responsibility

I take it that the:

*Genetic Claim:* The fact that a child developed from the ovum or sperm of some adult itself provides that adult—the child’s “genetic parent”—with reasons for parental partiality to it, and provides the child—that adult’s “genetic child”—with reasons for filial responses to him or her

does not provide a *complete* explanation of the reasons of partiality that parents have toward children. This is because:

(1) adoptive parents have reasons for parental partiality to their adopted children, and adopted children have reasons for filial responses to their adoptive parents.

So let us set aside the Genetic Claim for the time being. For we need, at very least, *other* resources to explain the reasons of partiality that parents and children have.

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I believe that some of the other resources are, in fact, reductionist. We have a collective responsibility to care for those unable to care for themselves, such as the very young and the very old. Shares of this collective responsibility must somehow be assigned to those of us who can fulfill it. 29 In some cases, a particular child becomes counterfactually dependent on one of us, in the sense that unless she cares for it, no one else will. In these cases, Nature, so to speak, makes the assignment. 30 In most cases, however, it is not true of any of us that if she does not care for this child, no one else will. In such cases, we need a practice to assign shares of this collective responsibility in a fair and efficient way. 31 Assigning a specific adult care for a specific child is plausibly one such way. In many cases, the assignment will be fair because the adult performed some voluntary and intentional (or negligent) act (such as having sex, consenting to a medical procedure, or signing adoption papers). But it might be fair for other reasons: because, say, the adult is compensated, or because everyone else bears a similar burden. Assigning genetic parents care for their genetic children may be efficient, because typically they are “first on the scene” and strongly motivated to care for their genetic children. Assigning parents who

29 See Jeffrey Blustein, Parents and Children: The Ethics of the Family (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), Pt. II.

30 Compare Henry Sidgwick, Methods of Ethics: “[L]et us suppose that I am thrown with my family upon a desert island, where I find an abandoned orphan. Is it evident that I am less bound to provide this child, as far as lies in my power, with the means of subsistence, than I am to provide for my own children?” (346–47). As far as Collective Responsibility is concerned, the answer is no. But History of Responsibility and perhaps also the Genetic Claim, below, would imply that if providing for this child would prevent one from providing for one’s own, one has reason to give priority to them. Compare McMahan, The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 374.

31 If more than one practice would be fair and efficient, then one’s share of the collective responsibility may depend on which practice is actually established in one’s society. In this way, reasons for partiality toward one’s family may depend on social expectations. Compare Christina Hoff Sommers, “Filial Morality” Journal of Philosophy 83 (1986): 439–56.
volunteer to adopt a child care for that child may be efficient because their volunteering is a
reliable signal of their ability and motivation.\textsuperscript{32}

However, this explanation—call it \textit{Collective Responsibility}—is insufficient, for reasons
reminiscent of our earlier discussion of reductionism. First, I don’t view my reasons for
partiality to my daughter as simply the reasons I have for discharging my share of a collective
responsibility. They have to do, instead, with something between her and me. Second, I see
myself as having reasons for partiality to my daughter \textit{in particular}. Suppose that my wife and I
are approached by another couple, who propose, for our mutual convenience, swapping our
children. Collective Responsibility does not explain why we ought to refuse. We can suppose
that our children would continue to be cared for in at least as good a way as before, and the
burdens on us parents would be no less fair. Surely, it would be acceptable to redistribute shares
of any \textit{other} collective responsibility in this way. But parental responsibility is different.
Finally, I have reasons for responses that there is no collective responsibility to give. I have
reason for emotions toward my daughter now, and I will have reason for partiality to her even
after she comes of age.

5.2 \textit{History of Responsibility}

So we need some nonreductionist supplement: some relationship between parents and
children that provides reasons for these further partial responses. Some have claimed that the

\textsuperscript{32} For discussion of other factors potentially relevant to the assignment of responsibility,
see Francis Schrag, “Rights Over Children,” \textit{Journal of Value Inquiry} 7 (1973): 96–105; and
Ferdinand Schoeman, “Rights of Children, Rights of Parents, and the Moral Basis of the
Family,” \textit{Ethics} 91 (1980): 6–19, who suggests that a further justification for assigning genetic
parents care of their genetic children lies in “the \textit{conventional meaning} given to [the biological
relationship between parents and children] within our culture,” p. 18.
necessary supplement is a friendship, or something like it, between parent and child. According to this Assimilation to Friendship, familial relationships, like friendships, are “response dependent.” You and I are friends only if I have been partial to you in the past, and you have been partial to me. Suppose I am a stalker, and I claim that, because we are friends, you have reason for partiality to me. It is enough for you to reply that, because you have not responded partially to me in the past, we are not friends, and so you have no such reason.

The problem is that familial relationships are not response dependent. From the fact that I have never responded partially to my daughter or mother until now, it does not follow that I am not her father or son. Nor does it follow that I have no reason to be partial to her. What seems to follow, instead, is that I am open to criticism for having failed to be partial to her in the past. In

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33 See Diane Jeske, “Families, Friends, and Special Obligations,” Canadian Journal of Philosophy 28 (1998): 527–556; as well as: “Associative Obligations, Voluntarism, and Equality,” Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 77 (1996): 289–309; “Friendship and Reasons of Intimacy,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 63 (2001): 329–346; and “Special Relationships and the Problem of Political Obligations,” Social Theory and Practice 27 (2001): 19–40. Although Jeske describes her position as “reductionist,” it is, as I understand the interesting contrast here, nonreductionist. On her view, the “intimacy” that is distinctive of friendship is supposed to give rise to reasons that are not derived by instantiation or facilitation from any further normative principle. Jane English, “What Do Grown Children Owe their Parents?” in Onora O’Neill and William Ruddick, Having Children (Oxford: 1979), pp. 351–56; and perhaps Brewer, “Two Kinds of Social Commitment”; and Lionel McPherson, “The Moral Insignificance of ‘Bare’ Personal Reasons” Philosophical Studies 110 (2002): 29–47 take similar views. At times, McPherson seems only to deny that biological or “metaphysical” relations are reason giving, which is compatible with much of what I say here. At other times, he seems to claim, more restrictively, that only relationships constituted by “belief, intention, and choice” and “interactions, experiences and expectations” between the participants are reason giving. This is incompatible with my claim that some reasons for partiality are response independent. In part, the Assimilation to Friendship is motivated by what Scheffler, “Relationships and Responsibilities,” labels the “voluntarist objection”: that participants should not be burdened by partial reasons that arise from relationships into which they did not chose to enter. However, as Scheffler observes, the objection is highly elusive. After all, it is not in general objectionable that unchosen conditions should give rise to reasons. Jeske replies that unchosen relationships differ because they are not “intrinsic features” of the object of the partial responses. But this suggestion is itself rather elusive.
defense of the Assimilation to Friendship, Diane Jeske acknowledges that although I cannot be criticized for failing to respond to a responsibility provided by a relationship, I can be criticized for failing “to avail [myself] of a good opportunity to develop” a relationship. “After all, family situations are often very conducive to the development of intimacy, and intimacy is objectively valuable.”

According to Jeske, the criticism that might be made of me for failing to care about my mother or daughter is the same criticism that might be made of me for failing to cultivate a potential friendship. While Jeske suggests that this latter criticism is “moral censure,” it is not clear that it really has this character. The criticism is, at most, that I have imprudently passed up an opportunity for something that I might have found fulfilling, and if anyone has special standing to complain about this, it is myself. Moreover, if there are many other things to fill my life, my declining to cultivate another friendship is not even vulnerable to this criticism. By contrast, the criticism that might be made about my failing to care about my daughter or mother goes beyond a charge of mere imprudence, and it is clear that someone else has special standing to complain about it: namely, my daughter or mother. Moreover, I can’t escape this criticism simply by entering into enough relationships with other peoples’ daughters and mothers.

The necessary supplement to Collective Responsibility, therefore, must be response independent:

(2) Parents have reason for parental partiality, of the kind that Collective Responsibility does not explain, to their children even if those parents have not responded partially to them in the past. Children have reasons for filial responses, of the kind that Collective Responsibility does not explain, to their parents even if those children have not responded partially to them in the past.

Recall that, in light of (1), this response-independent relationship cannot be the genetic relationship. So what is it?

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Consider the discrete encounter that consists in an adult being assigned, for a limited time, or in a limited way, part of the collective responsibility for raising a particular child. Discrete encounters of this kind might take place in an orphanage with a rotating staff, or in a village of the kind that Hillary Clinton says it takes. If Nature or convention so conspires, an adult may come to share a history of such encounters with a specific child. This relationship is response independent. One not need have been partial to a child in order to have a history of bearing the collective responsibility for raising it. And this relationship might account for the kind of parental partiality that Collective Responsibility fails to account for. According to resonance, having this history of responsibility, or being a historical parent, calls for responses that are similar to those that an episode of bearing part of the collective responsibility for raising a child calls for, but that reflect the distinctive importance of sharing a history with one child in particular. Resonance thus suggests that I would see my reasons for partiality to my daughter as arising not only from the collective responsibility, but also from my shared history with her; that I would have reason to be loyal to her in particular, there being no other child with whom I share this history; and that I would have reason for responses of a kind that there is no collective responsibility to give, such as emotions toward her now and partiality to her even when she becomes an adult.

When we turn from the reasons of parents to the reasons of children, however, this explanation—call it History of Responsibility—appears to have a worrying implication. It seems to suggest that a child has reason for filial partially to any adult who has had a history of responsibility for it. Granted, a child may have reason for filial partiality to an adult who was willing to fulfill his responsibility. But it does not seem true that a child has reason for filial partially to an adult who was not willing: to a neglectful or abusive historical parent.
(3) Children have reasons for filial partiality, of a kind that Collective Responsibility does not explain, to their parents, only if their parents were willing to fulfill their responsibilities.\(^{35}\)

If we look more closely, however, we see that resonance does not imply otherwise. Consider again discrete encounters in which an adult bears some share of the collective responsibility for raising a child. Such an encounter gives the adult reason to fulfill the responsibility. But what it gives the child reason for depends on whether the adult is willing to fulfill the responsibility. If the adult is willing to fulfill the responsibility, then the child has reason for trust and gratitude,\(^{36}\) as well as, perhaps, for relevant cooperation and obedience. But if the adult is unwilling to fulfill the responsibility, then the child has reason for distrust and resentment. Resonance thus implies that children of neglectful or abusive parents have reason for responses quite different from the responses that children of loving parents have reason for.

5.3 The Genetic Claim

At the outset, I observed that the Genetic Claim does not completely explain reasons of partiality between parents and children, because it does not explain (1): the reasons for partiality between adoptive parents and children. We then proposed to explain (1) by appeal, on the one hand, to Collective Responsibility and, on the other, to History of Responsibility. It is still

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\(^{35}\) As its proponents often note, the Assimilation to Friendship explains (3). An abusive or neglectful parent is not his child’s friend, so the child has no reasons for friendship to him. Again, however, the Assimilation does not explain (2), and by the very same token. An abusive or neglectful parent is not his child’s friend, so the parent has no reasons for friendship to it, and an abusive or neglectful child is not its parent’s friend, so the child has no reasons for friendship to him.

\(^{36}\) To be clear, the claim is that the responses of children toward their historical parents resonate with responses of gratitude for discrete performances, not that they can be reduced to them. For a fair-minded discussion of the difficulties with the reductionist claim, see Mark Wicclair, “Caring for Frail Elderly Parents: Past Parental Sacrifices and the Obligations of Adult Children,” *Social Theory and Practice* (1990) 16: 163–89.
possible, however, that the Genetic Claim is part of a complete explanation of reasons for partiality between parents and children.\(^{37}\)

Deep and powerful reactions suggest that genetic ties matter. Of course, it is possible that genetic ties matter, but not in the way that the Genetic Claim suggests: not by providing parents with reason for parental partiality, of the kind that History of Responsibility describes, to their genetic children and genetic children reason, of the kind that History of Responsibility describes, for filial responses to genetic parents. But I will explore the Genetic

\(^{37}\) David Velleman, “Family History,” Philosophical Papers 34 (2005): 357–78 and “The Gift of Life,” Philosophy and Public Affairs (forthcoming) argues, along reductionist lines, that we have special reason to raise our genetic children because we are specially placed to provide them with knowledge of their genetic capacities and with the fruits of our experience of coping with similar capacities. (In “The Gift of Life,” Velleman emphasizes the latter, and brings it in only to explain why the obligations arising from Responsibility for Creation, below, cannot be transferred.) I wonder whether Velleman does not overstate the importance of such information, particularly when he claims that genetic donation is wrong, because existence is too costly for the children created from it, because they are deprived of the information that (at least) one genetic parent would provide. (For example, would parents, if given the option, really have special reason to create genetically identical siblings, staggered in age, who would provide one other with much better information about their genetic capacities than anyone else could? Is having an identical twin such a boon? One might reply that there are diminishing marginal returns to genetic information. But this would tend to undermine the idea that it is a great loss to be deprived of the information of a second genetic parent.)

At any rate, this seems not to exhaust the significance of genetic relationships. At least in theory, if not in practice, information about our genetic capacities could be gained without any interaction with our genetic relatives. Indeed, it could be gained without any information about our relatives, other than that they had similarly related genetic capacities. Complete information of this kind would still leave something out. We don’t just want to know what our genes allow. We want to know our family history itself: what actually happened, or happens, to our genetic relatives. And we want to know this, it seems, because what happens to them means something to us.

It is not clear how far, if at all, Velleman would disagree with this. He suggests other ways in which genetic relationships matter: for example, that they answer the “need for a non-elective bond with something more stable than the self” (“The Gift of Life”) and that they help us “come to terms with our bodily selves” from which we are susceptible to alienation (“The Gift of Life”). It is not clear to me whether these justifications are also supposed to be based on our interest in knowledge about our genetic relatives, albeit knowledge about something other than their genetic capacities. It is also worth noting that Velleman explicitly forgoes, for the purposes of argument, other considerations about “mythic and symbolic significance” that he “sees as genuinely meaningful” (“Family History,” p. 362).
Claim for two reasons. The first, methodological reason is that the Genetic Claim is a limit case; it seems the strongest version of the idea that genetic ties matter. By identifying ways in which the Genetic Claim is too strong, we may home in on a more accurate view. The second, substantive reason is that some reactions suggest that we actually accept the Genetic Claim. Consult your reaction to the stories, which appear every so often, about newborns sent home with (as we are apt to think of them) the wrong parents. Why are these stories irredeemably tragic? Or imagine that you learn that your genetic child, about which you never knew, is languishing in an orphanage, when you are well equipped to care for it. Could you respond to this news as you respond to your standing knowledge that other children are languishing in orphanages?

One might object that Responsibility for Creation explains these reactions just as well. This reductionist account proposes to derive parental responsibility from the normative principle that:

one has reason (indeed, a responsibility owed to them) to protect people from, or compensate them for, the harms that one has voluntarily exposed them to,

and the response-equivalence-supporting fact that:

causing a child to exist exposes it to harm.

38 Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, p. 376, suggests that something weaker than the Genetic Claim may be true.

While responsibilities for creation of this kind are important, I doubt that they fully account for our reactions. Those reactions stubbornly remain, I think, even when we imagine that the genetic parents did not voluntarily cause their genetic children to exist: even when we imagine the intercession of love potions, or rogue geneticists. (Contrast your reaction to discovering that your blood, which you donated ten years ago expressly for medical research, had been used instead to prevent the miscarriage of a genetically unrelated embryo, with your reaction to discovering that your genetic material, also donated for medical research, had been used instead to create an implanted embryo, which then developed into a child, now eight years old.)

Moreover, genetic parents have reason for partiality of a kind—emotional responses, desires for connection—that Responsibility for Creation cannot explain.⁴⁰


Responsibility for Creation is resisted along two main lines. The first is that more than mere voluntariness—some intention to create or failure to take reasonable precautions to avoid creating—is necessary for such responsibilities. Taking reasonable birth control measures, therefore, would insulate parents from them. See Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1971): 47–66. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, p. 365; and Shiffrin criticize this view persuasively. However, there remain, to my mind, some difficult cases, such as voluntary sexual intercourse between parties who are non-negligently ignorant that it might create a child. The second line of resistance is that the creation of a child does not give the parent reasons to provide protection or compensation beyond that which is necessary to ensure that the child was benefited, on balance, by his creation (or, noncomparatively, that his creation was a good thing for him). This is typically motivated by analogy to permissible, non-responsibility-generating, actions that (i) harm a victim, or expose him to harm, (ii) are necessary to prevent him from suffering (or being exposed to) a more serious harm, and (iii) so, even without protection or compensation, leave the victim better off overall. See McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, pp. 362–72, 375. Shiffrin argues persuasively that this analogy fails, for a reason that McMahan acknowledges at the end of his discussion: namely, that it is not necessary to create a child to prevent it from suffering a more serious harm.

⁴⁰ Furthermore, Responsibility for Creation cannot explain the responses of children to their genetic parents, or of genetic siblings to one another, since neither enters such relationships voluntarily. The responses of children to their genetic parents, however, are often complicated by the fact that their genetic parents were not willing to fulfill their responsibilities to them, a
Since the Genetic Claim asserts that genetic parents have reason for parental partiality, it implies that a genetic parent wrongs his genetic child by failing to raise it, at least in certain circumstances: when he can do so, when doing so would not be too costly for his child or himself, when doing so would not wrong his child or others, and so on. This does not mean that a genetic parent, any more than a historical parent, always wrongs his genetic child by giving it up for adoption. His caring for the child might be too costly for it, or for him. Nor does it mean that a genetic parent, any more than a former historical parent, ever owes it to his genetic child to wrest it from its present historical parents. Again, doing so may be too costly for it. Moreover, the genetic parent also owes it, not only to the child, but also to the present historical parents, to respect the relationship that has arisen between them. However, the Genetic Claim may well imply the genetic parent owes it to his genetic child to do other things, which are not too costly for it or him, and which respect its relationship to its present historical parents.

If the Genetic Claim implies that, at least in some circumstances, a genetic parent can wrong his or her existing genetic child by giving it up for adoption, it might seem to imply similarly that that a prospective genetic parent can wrong his or her future genetic child by donating sperm or ova, because this is something like giving it up for adoption in advance.

41 It is worth recalling here a point made in the introduction: that reasons for partiality are, in general, owed to one’s relatives, so that one can wrong one’s relatives by failing to respond to them.

42 If a fetus (at a given stage of development) is not a person, or lacks some other status that would give one reason not to abort it, then, I assume, the genetic “parent” of that fetus does not have reason to be partial to it (any more than he or she has to be partial to his or her sperm or ova). So the Genetic Claim does not affect the argument that it is permissible to abort a fetus (at that stage) because it is not a person, or lacks some other status that would give one reason not to abort it.

43 And even if these conditions are not met, there may be good reason for the law to allow genetic parents to give their children up for adoption. It is sometimes the case that the law ought to allow people to do what they ought not do.
Indeed, in one way, genetic donation might seem more likely than normal adoption to wrong the child. The genetic donor cannot claim that the alternative would be more costly for the child, whereas the parent of an existing child can. So, our question is whether, because of the Genetic Claim:

(4) a genetic parent wrongs his or her genetic child when he or she both supplies genetic material that will be used to create it and, by giving the child up for adoption in advance, prevents him- or herself from fulfilling (at least some of) the responsibilities that the genetic relationship would otherwise provide.

Of course, doing this can wrong the child in ways that have nothing to do with the Genetic Claim. Most importantly, it can wrong the child because coming to exist is excessively costly for it (e.g., because it comes into the world with a painful and debilitating congenital disorder). But set these other possibilities aside.

I do not think that the Genetic Claim implies (4). My choice whether or not to supply genetic material has the following form. If I \( \phi \) (e.g. supply), then (i) I am unable to \( X \) (e.g., care for my genetic child) and (ii) I come to be in a situation (e.g., being my genetic child’s parent) such that, if I were able to \( X \), I would wrong someone (e.g., my genetic child) by refraining from \( X \)-ing. If I do not \( \phi \), then I am in a situation such that I neither wrong this person by refraining from \( X \)-ing, nor would wrong them, if I could \( X \), by refraining from \( X \)-ing.

In general, when I face a choice with this structure, I need not wrong anyone by \( \phi \)-ing. An example with much lower moral stakes: On Sunday, my broker, \( en \ route \) to his remote Alaskan getaway, invites me to join him for the week. There is only one flight in, on Monday, and one

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44 Indeed, Velleman, “Family History” argues that the child will bear excessive costs because one will not raise it (and so it will be deprived of information about its genetic capacities). Shiffrin, “Wrongful Life” at least raises the possibility that any cost is excessive. See note 39.

45 Another, fairly obvious, argument is available if one accepts the controversial ideas (i) that we greatly benefit people by causing them to exist and (ii) that we may give our children up for adoption not only to save them from costs, but also to provide them with benefits.
flight out, on Friday, and no other links to the outside world. Right before he passes out of cell phone reach, he tells me that he has little-known, although not privileged, information about probable, major movements in WidgetCorp stock in the coming week. My friend is heavily invested in WidgetCorp, but he is abroad, and can be reached only by phone. I know that, if I spend the week with my broker, I both will be unable to contact my friend and will learn something such that, if I could contact him, I would wrong him by not telling it to him. I do not think that I wrong my friend by accepting my broker’s offer.

Even if the Genetic Claim does not imply that genetic donors wrong their genetic children, it does explain why people often have strong reservations about being genetic donors: reservations that remain even when they are assured that existence will not be excessively costly for their genetic children. First, even if genetic donors do not have a responsibility to raise their genetic children (because they cannot), they are in a situation, like mine at my broker’s retreat, in which they would have such a responsibility, if only they could fulfill it.46 There can be something torturous about such situations. Second, genetic donors may have responsibilities to do other things for their genetic children, besides raising them (because they can do these things): such as agreeing to meet with them and answer potentially intimate and painful questions. Finally, even if genetic donors have no reason to do anything for their genetic children (because they cannot do anything for them), they still have reason to feel certain things about their genetic children. Granted, the less they know about their genetic children, the more abstract these feelings. At the limit, perhaps there is just the unnerving sense that some genetic child or children might be out there, whether faring poorly or well one will never know. One

46 What prevents genetic donors from fulfilling their responsibility need not be some physical impediment, or lack of information. It may be a moral obligation, arising from a promise, or the value of the relationship between the child and its adoptive parents.
may have reason to accept these burdens; one might selflessly want to make an infertile couple’s
dream come true. But to see nothing else on the scales is, if the Genetic Claim is correct, to be
blind to a kind of meaning that is actually there.

The Genetic Claim may seem to imply that:

(5) merely genetic children always have reason for filial partiality to their merely genetic
parents.

This would seem to mean, for instance, that, if a genetic child should discover the identity of his
genetic donor, it would have reason to care for that genetic donor in his or her old age. But the
Genetic Claim need not imply this. If the reasons of children regarding genetic parents are like
the reasons of children regarding historical parents, then children have reason for filial partiality
to their genetic parents only if their genetic parents were willing to fulfill their responsibilities to
them. Some estranged genetic parents were willing to fulfill their responsibility to their children.
A genetic mother might have taken an unrelated child home from the hospital, thinking that it
was hers. Or she might have given up her child for adoption only in order to remove it from a
war zone. Or, as in the cases documented by the Argentine Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, she
might have been assassinated, with her genetic child given over to a childless couple favored by
the regime. But genetic donors are not like this. They willingly prevented themselves from
acquiring such a responsibility, by preventing themselves from being able to fulfill it.

Even if the Genetic Claim, so understood, does not imply that children have reason for
partiality to genetic parents who were not willing to fulfill their responsibility to them, it does
imply that they have reason for other responses to such parents. They may have reason for
feelings of resentment or loss, for example. The Genetic Claim implies that genetic relationships
still have meaning for such children, as indeed they often feel that it has.

The Genetic Claim may also seem to imply that:
adoptive, historical parents have weaker or less extensive reason than genetic, historical parents for partiality to their children, and children have weaker or less extensive reason for partiality to adoptive, historical parents than to genetic, historical parents.

But this seems wrong. My aunt and uncle do not have more reason to love their younger, genetic son than they have to love their older, adopted one.47 Were I to discover that my daughter—the girl for whom I have been responsible since birth—was in fact not my genetic child, I would not take this to mean that I had less reason to love her. However, the Genetic Claim need not imply otherwise. We need not suppose that, if there is already a history of responsibility, then a genetic relationship somehow doubles the force or urgency of the reasons, or somehow amplifies what they call on agents to do. We may say instead that, when there is already a history of responsibility, the reasons that a genetic relationship provides are simply redundant. In such cases, the genetic relationship makes only a counterfactual difference. It only makes it the case that, even if there had there been no history of responsibility, there still would have been reasons for parental partiality.48

Although the Genetic Claim does not imply (4)–(6), it does imply two further claims, which may be uncomfortable. It implies that:

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47 To this example, one might object that, because it is important for siblings to be treated equally, my aunt and uncle have “exclusionary” reasons to ignore the additional reason that their genetic relationship provides. I find it implausible that they have extra reason that they need to ignore. At any rate, this objection does not apply to the next example.

48 Compare McMahan, p. 374. However, this conclusion sits uneasily with, if it does not strictly contradict, the belief, which many hold, that, if they are to be parents, they have at least some reason to create a genetic child that is not equally reason to adopt an existing, but genetically unrelated child. (Of course, they may also have reason to adopt an existing child (whether genetically related to them or not) that is not equally reason to create a child (whether genetically related to them or not): namely, that the former, but not the latter, saves a child from a worse fate.) This belief suggests that a genetic relationship has some importance that an adoptive relationship lacks. And if this is so, then why should a genetic relationship not provide reasons that an adoptive relationship does not?
(7) whatever there is to be said in favor of societies in which children are raised collectively, or in which paternity is not recognized, there is at least one thing to be said against them: they fail to respect the importance of genetic relationships, which may seem like cultural imperialism. And it implies that:

(8) a woman bearing a child of rape has reason for parental partiality toward her genetic child, which may seem callous. Recall that a genetic parent does not have responsibility to care for her genetic child if she cannot do so, or if doing so would be too costly to her or to it. The fact that the child is the product of rape likely fulfills these conditions. Still, if the Genetic Claim is true, she may have other reasons, such as reasons to have certain feelings for her genetic child. It is surely unfair that, through no choice of her own, she should have these reasons. However, the fact that it is unfair that she should have these reasons does not mean that she does not have them. The rape might give her many reasons (e.g., to report the crime) that it is unfair that she should have. This is part of what makes the violation so terrible.

Supposing that the Genetic Claim explains our reactions, what, in turn, might explain it? Since genetic relatives need not encounter one another, genetic relationships are not histories of encounter. But one might suggest that the genetic relationship is a shared personal situation: that of having genes of the same type.

One might initially object that in principle one can share more genes with someone one is less closely genetically related to, in the familiar sense. To this, it seems fair to reply that, apart from cosmic accidents, one will share more genes with one’s genetic parents than with people one is genetically related to less closely. A similar objection, however, has more force. According to resonance, the common personal situation of having genes of the same type matters only insofar as the personal situation of having genes of that type matters independently. And having genes of a given type matters, it would seem, only insofar as they give one traits or
capacities that matter. This suggests that the relevant shared situation is not similarity in genes \textit{per se}, but instead similarity in the traits and capacities that they give one. The problem is that, in my important traits and capacities, I am often more similar to people with whom I am less genetically related, or even with those with whom I share fewer genes. Worse, it is arguably not the mere possession of a capacity, but instead its actualization that matters. In the actualization of capacities, I may be even more similar to people with whom I share fewer genes.

Taken for what it is, the genetic relationship consists neither in a shared history of encounter, nor in a common personal situation or history. It consists instead in the fact that the child’s creation was, and its biological life has been, later stages of a continuous biological process (i) that began as an episode in the biological life of the parent and (ii) that has been governed throughout, in part, by the parent’s genetic code: or, less clinically, by the parent’s principle of organization, or specific Aristotelian form. This is, I think, the literal core of the thought that your genetic child is your flesh and blood.

Why should being linked to someone by a process of this kind matter? In my view, the most plausible views of “egoistic concern”—concern for persons who, in normal cases, are identical to oneself—maintain that a person at one time has reason for egoistic concern for a person (or thing of some other kind that we essentially are, such as animal) at another time only if the former is, or has, the same, or enough of the same, organism, or relevant organs (such as those that support mental life), as the latter.\textsuperscript{49} And an organism, or organ, at one time is identical

\textsuperscript{49} By “normal” cases, I mean, in effect, “non-branching” cases. In “branching” cases, a single person at one time stands in the same relevant relationship to several persons at a later time, as when, in hypothetical cases, each hemisphere of a person’s brain is transplanted into a different body. A particularly attractive view of this form is that of Jeff McMahan, \textit{The Ethics of Killing}, Pt. I. See also (although some of these discussions are focused more on identity than on egoistic concern) Michael Ayers, \textit{Locke: Epistemology and Ontology} (London: Routledge, 1991), Ch. 25; Eric Olson, \textit{The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology} (New
with an organism, or organ, at another time only if, or just when, the life, or functioning, of the
each is a stage of a continuous biological process, governed by the same genetic code. The same
is true of the relationship between genetic parent and genetic child. Both are necessarily
constituted by continuous biological processes, governed by the same genetic code. The
conjecture is then as follows: I have reason for partiality to myself at other times. The
relationship that provides me with these reasons—my relationship to myself at other times—is
similar to my relationship to my genetic children. So, as an instance of resonance, I have reason
for partiality to my genetic children which is similar to my partiality to myself, but which reflects
the fact that this is, like friendship, a relationship to a separate and independent person.50 The
idea is not that one has any special reason for one’s biological processes, as such, to continue:
something which might be achieved by keeping one’s gametes in suspended animation. For this
relation to one’s gametes would not be a relation to a person or anything else of importance. Nor
is the idea that one bears a relationship of the same type to one’s genetic children that one bears
to one’s later self. Since one’s genetic children do not share the same organ or organism, one
does not literally live on through them, or enjoy the sort of authority over them that one has over
oneself. The conjecture is instead that the relationship that one bears to one’s genetic children is
similar enough to the relationship to one’s future self to call forth, as an instance of resonance, a

50 I am indebted here to a conversation years ago with Sam Scheffler. Raymond
Belliotti, “Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother and to Thine Own Self Be True,” Southern Journal
of Philosophy 24 (1986): 149–162, also appeals to considerations of personal identity to explain
the reasons of genetic parents and children.
similar kind of concern, modified to reflect that is a relationship to a separate and independent person.

Much more would need to be said, of course, to vindicate this conjecture. For one thing, it depends on a controversial theory of egoistic concern. According to Derek Parfit’s powerful and influential alternative, the basis for egoistic concern is “psychological connectedness,” which consists in the sort of links that in a normal case we would call the “memory of past experiences” or the “fulfillment of past intentions,” and/or “psychological continuity,” which consists in “overlapping chains” of “strong” psychological connectedness.\(^{51}\) Indeed, David Brink, who is persuaded by this view of egoistic concern, suggests, first, that genetic relationships do not matter and, second, that the relationships that do matter involve the same sort of psychological connectedness.\(^{52}\) I don’t find Brink’s proposal plausible, even when applied to the relationships, such as friendship, that seem most congenial to it.\(^{53}\) Granted, my friend and I remember experiencing many of the same events; his beliefs, values, and intentions have causally affected my beliefs, values, and intentions, and so on; and many of our beliefs, values, and intentions have the same contents. But, first, Brink’s proposal faces a dilemma. On the one hand, unless we place further restrictions on these events, causal relations, and attitudes, some negative relationships will involve as many of these connections as friendship.\(^{54}\)

\(^{51}\) Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Pt. III.


\(^{53}\) Even setting aside genetic relationships, there are relationships that Brink’s proposal seems, on its face, unable to account for. Some shared personal situations—such as exposure to the same adversity—do not involve any particular psychology.

\(^{54}\) If one wonders how negative relationships might produce similarity of content, consider the Stockholm Syndrome.
other hand, the needed restrictions would not be explained by the analogy to personal identity. For example, one might insist that there be reciprocal causal influence, or concern for the other. But my later self cannot causally influence my earlier self, and my earlier self need not have any concern for my later self (even if he ought to). Second, and more fundamentally, the “psychological connections” between friends are simply different from the “psychological connections” that can plausibly be taken to constitute the basis of egoistic concern. I may remember experiencing the event that my friend also experienced, but I do not remember (or even “quasi-remember”⁵⁵) his experience of it. The primary difference is that my mental states are causally related to one another in a way in which they are not causally related to my friend’s mental states.⁵⁶ Indeed, I suspect that the relevant causal relations, when fully described, will have to refer to biological processes of the kind that account for the identity over time of an organism, or organ.⁵⁷ Setting aside whether Brink’s view is correct, the more important point for present purposes is that it suggests that opposition to the idea that biology matters to who we care about is closely linked to opposition to the idea that biology matters to who we are. It thus indirectly corroborates the conjecture that the significance, if any, of biological relationships lies in the significance, if any, of biology to personal identity.

Next, even if this conjecture explains reason for some kind of partiality to our genetic children and genetic parents, it is not clear how it explains reason for parental partiality to our genetic children and filial responses to our genetic parents. Is parental partiality really like egoistic concern? Why, on this conjecture, should filial partiality to genetic parents depend on

⁵⁵ See Parfit, Reasons and Persons, Sect. 80.
⁵⁶ Compare David Velleman, “The Identity Problem,” (unpublished): “the aspect of psychological connectedness that really counts is the causal relation that connects me to past and future selves and gives me an informational channel for first-personal reference to them. Whether the same connections preserve any of my features is relatively unimportant.”
their having been willing to fulfill their responsibilities? Perhaps features of the relationship of genetic parent to child and of the relationship of genetic child to parent can explain why the former calls for parental partiality, whereas the latter calls for filial partiality. Or perhaps the Genetic Claim needs to be qualified; perhaps genetic relationships call not for parental and filial partiality as commonly understood, but instead for partiality of another kind. As I said earlier, the Genetic Claim is a limit case, chosen, in part, for methodological reasons: the strongest version of the idea that genetic ties matter that one might expect to be advanced.

6. Implications

I end with a few words about what this account implies about the broader debate about partiality.

6.1 Partiality in other relationships

Apart from the Genetic Claim, I have tested the account by considering relationships that relatively uncontroversially belong on the List, or off it. One hopes, however, that once calibrated against less controversial cases, the account might then provide guidance about more controversial ones. Among these more controversial relationships, co-citizenship has attracted perhaps the most interest recently, no doubt because of the profound differences in the actual treatment of co-citizens and non-citizens. In the present framework, co-citizenship might be understood as a common personal history of involvement with the institutions of the state. The responses for which this common personal history gives reason should resonate with the responses for which the personal histories give reason. And these responses should resonate, in turn, with the responses for which the institutions provide reason, apart from any history. It would take another paper to explore what this would imply in any detail. In broad outline, though, it would seem to suggest that the responses that co-citizenship calls for will depend on
an independent appraisal of the value or disvalue, justice or injustice, of the state in question—and, indeed, of states in general.

6.2 Other objections to nonreductionism

I have aimed to defend nonreductionism against only one objection: that it cannot explain the List. While other objections are possible, this defense suggests that these objections are not available to certain philosophers: namely, those who accept that there are reasons for moral emotions, or reasons to respond to personal histories or situations. There is something unstable, or at least unmotivated, about accepting that discrete encounters can give us reasons for moral emotions while denying that the histories that those encounters compose can give us reason for partiality, or in accepting that personal histories or situations can give us reason while denying that sharing them can. To accept that there are reasons for resentment, guilt, and gratitude, or that personal histories or situations can have agent-relative importance, is to accept that there are agent-relative reasons. And to accept that there are reasons for the moral emotions, which are keyed to reasons for the natural emotions, or to accept that there are reasons to respond to personal histories and situations, which are informed by the agent-neutral importance of the aims, institutions, or sufferings that they involve, is to accept the phenomenon of resonance. Provided there is intuitive support for the claim that relationships of these kinds provide reason for partiality, therefore, it is obscure what theoretical basis for denying it might remain.

6.3 Partiality and other norms

Finally, this account may shed some light on the troubled relationship between partiality and other norms. Most important among these are the norms of impartial morality: what we owe to others whether or not we share any special relationship to them. But partiality can also come into competition with other norms, which do not reflect what we owe anyone, but instead govern
how we are to relate to things of impersonal value, such as cultural achievements and the natural environment. Proper responses to shared histories of encounter, I have suggested, resonate with proper responses to discrete encounters. And the proper responses to discrete encounters are largely the province of impartial morality. Similarly, proper responses to common personal histories and situations resonate with proper responses to personal histories and situations. And proper responses to personal histories and situations are informed by other norms: by the importance, moral or otherwise, of the aims, institutions, experiences, etc., that they involve. This does not mean that reasons for partiality cannot conflict, in particular cases, with other norms. But it does mean that partiality does not represent an outlook somehow divorced from, or incompatible with them.\(^{58}\) On the contrary, it draws its content from other norms.

A consequence of this, which I end by noting, is to raise the stakes of a much-discussed complaint: that certain conceptions of impartial morality, such as consequentialism, are overly demanding, because they would morally prohibit responding to reasons of partiality, such as those of friendship. If consequentialism is true, then departures from maximizing the agent-neutral good are instances of wrongdoing. So, if consequentialism is true, the discrete encounters of which friendship is composed are, in all but rare cases, instances of wrongdoing. So, if consequentialism is true, friendship is an externally negative relationship, which provides no reason for partiality. So, if consequentialism is true, there are no reasons of friendship in the first place. However, the point cuts both ways. If there are reasons of friendship, then it follows immediately that consequentialism is false.

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