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Which Relationships Justify Partiality? The Case of Parents and Children

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.¹ 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

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1. Throughout, I make certain claims about what "we" take to be true of ourselves. I don't mean to presume somehow that every reasonable or decent reader will agree with every such claim. The hope is only that enough readers will agree with enough of these claims for the attempt to make sense of them to be of interest.

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*?² Without an answer, without a principled 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 I, I clarify the challenge: to explain why some relationships support partiality whereas others do not. The challenge would be easy to meet, I observe, if reasons for partiality were not, in a sense that I will define, "basic." The problem is that some reasons for partiality are basic, in that sense. In Section II, I discuss a neglected form of normative explanation, "resonance," which might help us to meet analogous challenges about other domains: for example, to explain why we have reason to feel reactive attitudes, such as resentment, toward certain decisions, but not others. In Section III, I apply resonance to our challenge. I sketch how it might explain why certain relationships support partiality, using friendship and shared culture as programmatic examples, as well as how it might explain why certain relationships do not support partiality, such as trivial relationships, or relationships of exploitation or enmity. In Section IV, I try to push the program a bit further, by distinguishing various reasons for familial partiality, with a focus 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.

2. Compare John Cottingham, "Patriotism, Favouritism, and Morality," *Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1986): 357–73; Simon Keller, "Making Nonsense of Loyalty to Country," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy*, ed. Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher F. Zurn (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), pp. 87–104; Katja Vogt, "Freundschaft, Unparteilichkeit und Feindschaft," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 40 (2001): 517–32; Christopher Heath Wellman, "Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory: Is There Magic in the Pronoun 'My'?" *Ethics* 110 (2000): 537–62; and Nick Zangwill, "Against Analytic Moral Functionalism," *Ratio* 13: 275–86, at p. 280.

I. 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 (or, if that sounds too institutional, to one's "life partner"),

and so on.³ 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 give criteria for inclusion and exclusion that would explain the List: that would account for the relatively uncontroversial cases and provide guidance on more controversial ones.

To be clear, the challenge is not to provide reasons to believe that this or that partiality principle belongs on or off the List.⁴ This latter challenge might be met with abductive arguments to the effect the inclusion or exclusion of the relevant principle best explains our particular judgments about reasons for partiality. But the challenge to explain why this or that partiality principle belongs on or off the List cannot be met in this way. Nor is the challenge to explain how any partiality principle could be true. Such a challenge might be raised, 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 the List includes the partiality principles that it does.

Two broad ways of explaining normative claims are relatively familiar and uncontroversial. The first, *deduction*, shows how one normative claim follows from a more fundamental normative claim (and perhaps further non-normative premises) by rules of inference familiar outside of the normative domain. For example, the explanation of the claim that I have reason to admire Mark Twain may be, first, that if someone is a great author, then everyone has reason to admire that person, second,

3. The general form of a partiality principle is: one has reason to be partial in ways *P* to people with whom one has an interpersonal relationship of type *R*.

4. 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.

that Mark Twain is a great author, and, finally, universal instantiation, twice applied. The second kind of explanation, *facilitation*, shows how one normative claim follows from a more fundamental normative claim and a *transmission principle* of the rough form: if one has reason for something, then one has reason for the (causal or constitutive) means to it.⁵ For example, the explanation why I have reason to travel to New York consists, first, of the normative claim that I have reason to be in New York, second, of the nonnormative *facilitation claim* that my traveling there is a means to my being there, and, finally, of the transmission principle that if one has reason for something, then one has reason for the means to it.

Can we explain the List by appeal just to deduction and facilitation? Yes, say *reductionists*. They hold that no partiality principle is *basic*: that every partiality principle can be explained via deduction or facilitation from normative principles none of which is itself a partiality principle.⁶ 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, nonpartiality principle that:

one has reason to maximize well-being,

and the facilitation claim that:

being parentally partial to one's children is a means to maximizing their well-being (because, e.g., one knows their needs better than others do).

5. How, more precisely, such transmission principles should be formulated is a matter of some controversy. See Joseph Raz, "The Myth of Instrumental Rationality," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 1 (2005): 1–28, and my "Instrumental Transmission," unpublished.

6. This formulation of reductionism is indebted to Samuel Scheffler, "Relationships and Responsibilities," *Philosophy & 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.

Similarly, 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

and the facilitation claim that:

being spousally partial constitutes fulfilling such expectations.

Reductionists thus have at least a clear strategy for explaining the List. They can claim that there are relevant facilitative claims, or deductive relationships, 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 neither is a means to maximizing well-being, nor constitutes 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 a stranger or I 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.⁷

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 akin to 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.⁸

My aim here is not to make a conclusive case against reductionism, which the foregoing no doubt fails to do. It is only to say enough about the apparent limitations of reductionism to motivate interest in the alternative, *nonreductionism*. This is the view that some partiality principles cannot be explained via deduction and facilitation from normative principles none of which is itself a partiality principle: that some partiality principles are, in that 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 deduction or facilitation from normative principles none of which is itself a partiality principle. What other kind of normative explanation is there?

II. RESONANCE

To illustrate what an alternative kind of normative explanation might look like, consider a similar request for explanation about the *reactive attitudes*: responses—most notably, guilt, resentment, gratitude, and

7. Compare Talbot Brewer, “Two Kinds of Commitments (And Two Kinds of Social Groups),” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66 (2003): 554–83, at p. 557.

8. It is natural to react to these last two points with the thought that the motivations and emotions distinctive of partiality have nothing to do with reasons. I argue against this in “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” *Philosophical Review* 112 (2003): 135–89.

indignation—to attitudes, expressed in decisions, toward certain people and things.⁹ Why do I have reason to feel a given reactive attitude toward some decisions, but not others? For example, why do I have reason to resent it when, say, a doctor expresses in his decisions a lack of concern for my health, but not when he expresses a lack of concern for the parasite that threatens my health?

“Because,” one will say, “you have reason to care about your health, whereas you do not have reason to care about the parasite. That is, you have reason to feel certain *nonreactive emotions* in response to what happens to yourself: positive nonreactive emotions, such as hope, relief, and joy, when things go well for you, and negative nonreactive emotions, such as anxiety, fear, and grief, when things go poorly for you.” But what is the nature of this “because”? This answer, namely that:

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

does not explain by deduction or facilitation why:

I have reason to feel the reactive attitude of resentment at the doctor’s lack of concern for my health, but not his lack of concern for the parasite.

The latter can’t be deduced from the former. Nor is it plausible that my resenting the doctor’s lack of concern for my health is somehow a causal or constitutive means to my feeling nonreactive emotions about my failing health (granting that transmission principles even apply to emotions). For one thing, these are responses to different things: reactive attitudes are responses to the attitudes that an agent expresses in his decisions, whereas nonreactive attitudes are responses to what happens, viewed in abstraction from its relation to any agent’s attitudes. If some malevolent person no longer has the power to harm me, then I have reason for resentment, but not for anxiety. Conversely, if good intentions, or mindless nature, harm me, then I have reason for grief, but not for resentment. One might put the point this way: It matters to us not

9. The label “reactive attitudes” comes from Peter Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1–25. For a persuasive redrawing of the boundaries of the reactive attitudes, see R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

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. Correspondingly, nonreactive emotions and reactive attitudes are themselves different responses: that is, they differ not only in what they respond to, but also in how they respond to it. The negative nonreactive emotions, such as anxiety, fear, grief, and 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, acknowledgment, respect, and so on. Because nonreactive 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.

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 deliberately or negligently fail to prevent, events or conditions about which one would have reason to feel negative nonreactive emotions.¹⁰

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 nonreactive emotions? The underlying thought, as I will put it, is that reactive attitudes should *resonate* with nonreactive emotions.

Resonance of reactive attitudes: one has reason to respond to a decision by which someone expresses an intention (or a lack of concern to prevent) that a person or thing fare a certain way with a reactive attitude that is similar to the nonreactive emotions with which one has reason to respond to that person's or thing's actually faring that

10. 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 nonreactive 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 some "natural" event or condition (which can be understood in abstraction from people's attitudes) and so do not call for any particular nonreactive emotion. An example would be a decision to treat one unfairly. The point is only that, where there is a corresponding natural event or condition, it is one about which one has reason to feel negative nonreactive emotions.

way, but that reflects the distinctive importance of how others regard whom or what one cares about.

Reactive attitudes should be “similar” to nonreactive emotions at very least by sharing their “valence.”¹¹ For example, since I have reason for negative nonreactive emotions, such as grief, when something bad happens to my health, I likewise have reason for negative reactive attitudes, 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 nonreactive emotions when something bad happens to the parasite, I have no reason for negative reactive attitudes when someone’s decision aims for it to happen.

Compare a similar request for explanation. 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.¹² 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* 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.¹³ So the request for explanation arises: Why do some personal histories provide these agent-relative reasons

11. 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. The similarity is not restricted to valence. For example, note 19 and the preceding text describes more substantive ways in which the responses called for by a discrete encounter are similar to the responses called for by a shared history of encounter.

12. Compare the reasons for respect discussed by Joseph Raz, *Value, Respect, and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

13. This may be the phenomenon that Harry Frankfurt, “On Caring,” in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 155–80, has in mind, when he writes, “Certain kinds of activity—such as productive work—are inherently valuable not simply in addition to being instrumentally valuable but precisely because of their instrumental value” (p. 178). See also his “On the Usefulness of Final Ends,” in *Necessity, Volition, and Love*, pp. 82–94; and the ditch diggers described by David Wiggins, “Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life,” in *Needs, Values, Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 87–137, at pp. 132–34.

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 surely has something to do with the fact that the cure is agent-neutrally important, whereas knowledge of the sum of blades is not. But again the explanation cannot proceed by deduction or facilitation. The agent-relative reasons that the researcher has to pursue and care about her own search for a cure go beyond the agent-neutral reasons that just anyone would have. The explanation, I think, is to be found in a further kind of resonance.

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.¹⁴ 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

14. This is not to say that agent-relative importance is always explained by appeal to something of corresponding agent-neutral importance.

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.

These explanations—of why we have reason to resent some things but not others, of why personal histories of pursuing some aims but not others give us agent-relative reasons, and so on—share a common pattern, namely:

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.¹⁵

This is merely a description of an abstract structure shared by principles like Resonance of Reactive Attitudes and Resonance of Personal Aims; it isn't meant to provide a deeper explanation of them. Accordingly, the content of "counterpart" and "dimensions of importance" is best illustrated by reference to those principles. People's attitudes toward the persons and things that we care about matter to us in a distinctive way, different from the way in which what happens to the persons and things that we care about matters to us. The difference between reactive attitudes and nonreactive emotions—the distinctively communicative register of the former, for instance—reflects this difference in the kind of importance¹⁶ that each has.¹⁷ In this sense, the doctor's neglect of my failing health belongs to a "dimension of importance" different from that

15. A further instance of resonance may be the relation, explored by Thomas Hurka, *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.)

16. "Importance" is meant here as a broad covering term. Something is important if it is something of value or disvalue, or if it affects reasons for positive or negative responses.

17. The idea that what happens to what we care about and how people regard what we care about belong to different dimensions of importance, to which different kinds of responses are keyed, is famously characterized, in developmental terms, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 166:

to which my failing health itself belongs. Nevertheless, Resonance of Reactive Attitudes describes a way in which the doctor's neglect and my failing health are "counterparts": the doctor's neglect is an expression of a lack of concern for my failing health. The thought is then that I have reason to respond to my doctor's neglect in a way that is similar to the way in which I have reason to respond to my failing health—at a minimum, negatively—but that also reflects the distinctive dimension of importance to which my doctor's neglect belongs—for instance, by taking the form of an interpersonal address, suited to its being a response not to what has happened, but instead to what another person has willed to happen. Thus, I have reason to respond with resentment at the doctor's expression of a lack of concern for what gives me reason for grief. Likewise, my personal history of pursuing an aim matters to me in a distinctive way, different from the way in which the aim itself would matter to anyone. Although my personal history and the aim itself belong in this way to different dimensions of importance, the two can be said to be counterparts, in the sense that the former is a history of pursuing the latter. Accordingly, I have reason to respond to my personal history in a way that is similar to the way in which I have, or anyone else has, reason to respond to the aim itself (positively if it is a worthwhile aim, indifferently if it is a worthless one) but that reflects the distinctive importance of the dimension to which it belongs: that has the agent-relative character of an aim that one has made "one's own."

A deeper explanation of Resonance, or, rather, of the more specific principles whose common structure it describes, is elusive. One might suggest that if reactive attitudes were not to resonate with nonreactive 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

As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another the idea of consideration had taken shape in their mind, everyone claimed a right to it, and one could no longer deprive anyone of it with impunity. From here arose the first duties of civility even among Savages, and from it any intentional wrong became an affront because, together with the harm resulting from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt for his person, often more unbearable than the harm itself.

See also Rousseau's note 15, where he distinguishes *amour de soi*, a kind of self-love that knows no comparisons, from *amour-propre*, a kind of self-love that is concerned with one's rank relative to others and, specifically, one's rank relative to others in the eyes of others.

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 such forms of resonance under another description.¹⁸

III. 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.

A. Shared Histories of Encounter

Consider first *histories of encounter*. One person has an *encounter* with another person (to use the term in a somewhat artificial sense) when the actions, attitudes, or reasons of one involve, 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.

18. Even if the consideration that a certain pattern of response would, or would not, be incoherent does not explain why there is, or is not, resonance between particular kinds of responses, such a consideration can still be evidence that there is, or is not, such resonance. And there can be other kinds of evidence. To take just one instance, a claim of resonance can imply something false. Suppose it is said: “We have reason to respect people with even-numbered birthdays. Therefore, since people with odd-numbered birthdays are their opposites, ‘Resonance of Birthdays’ tells us that we have reason to disrespect them.” A sufficient reply (although much else can be said against the proposal) is that while it is true that we have reason to respect people with even-numbered birthdays (because we have reason to respect all people), it is false that we have reason to disrespect people with odd-numbered birthdays. So we have good reason to disbelieve Resonance of Birthdays; it implies a falsehood.

The suggestion 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.¹⁹

The natural worry is that this is really a reductionist explanation, by deduction, 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 deduction, from the normative principle:

one has reason for gratitude toward people who have helped one, and the fact 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 west. Along the way, he helps and is helped by the people dwelling in the places he passes through,

19. 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.

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 refocused, 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. Further, 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.

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 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.²⁰

B. Common Personal Histories and Situations

Another important class of relationships is constituted by personal histories or situations of the kind discussed in Section II: for example, the

20. Strictly speaking, it resonates with the responses, not the encounters. But putting it this way makes the sentence almost impossible to parse.

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. This seems to reflect something like:

Resonance of common personal history or situation: one has reason to respond to 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.

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. In other cases, as we will see, 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.

C. Relationships That Do Not Provide Reasons for Partiality

Our question, again, is whether our resonance principles explain why there is reason for certain kinds of partiality, but not for others. So far we have seen how they might explain why certain partiality principles are on the List of valid partiality principles. But our resonance principles also help to explain why certain other (possible) partiality principles are off the List.

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, does not provide reasons for partiality. Our resonance principles explain 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 our resonance principles, 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.

This is not the same for *negative* relationships. *Externally* negative relationships, such as those experienced by members of, say, the same prison gang or repressive secret police, are shared histories of encounter, or common personal histories, in which relatives jointly wrong some nonrelative. According to our resonance principles, externally negative relationships provide reasons, but not reasons for partiality. One does not have reason to respond to, say, discrete encounters of wronging others by continuing to do so. Instead, one has reason to feel guilt, to repair the damage, and so on. According to our resonance principles, therefore, 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).

Internally negative relationships, such as those between master and slave, or enemy and enemy, are shared histories of encounters in which one relative wrongs the other relative. According to our resonance principles, internally negative relationships do not provide reason for partiality. Nor do they provide reason for, as it were, partiality's negative image. Slave does not have reason to submit to master, or master to exploit slave. Enemy does not have reason to harm enemy. 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 our resonance principles imply, 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.²¹

IV. PARENTS AND CHILDREN

There is much more to be said about why some relationships provide reasons for partiality, whereas negative and other problematic relationships, such as those of shared race, do not. I try to say more about such relationships in a companion paper, "Which Relationships Justify

21. Among extant treatments of the subject, the one closest to the view discussed here is Thomas Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 139–57. See also Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, pp. 200–204. His 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.

Partiality? General Considerations and Problem Cases.” For the rest of this article, however, I focus on a genus of relationships that might at first be classified as unproblematic: family relationships. At least, that is what we assumed from the outset: that family relationships uncontroversially provide reasons for partiality. 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.²² To keep things manageable, I sketch a response that focuses on relationships between parents and children.

A. 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.

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

22. Compare Wellman, “Relational Facts,” p. 554.

it.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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 volunteer to adopt a child care for that child may be efficient because their volunteering is a reliable signal of their ability and motivation.²⁶

However, this explanation—call it *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

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

24. 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?” (pp. 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 Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 374.

25. 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.

26. For discussion of other factors potentially relevant to the assignment of responsibility, see Francis Schrag, “Rights Over Children,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 7 (1973): 96–105; see also Ferdinand Schoeman, “Rights of Children, Rights of Parents, and the Moral Basis of the Family,” *Ethics* 91 (1980): 6–19, who suggests that a further justification for assigning genetic parents care of their genetic children lies in “the *conventional meaning* given to [the biological relationship between parents and children] within our culture” (p. 18).

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 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 other collective responsibility in this way. But parental responsibility is different.²⁷ Finally, I have reasons for responses that there is no collective responsibility to give. I have reason for partial emotions toward my daughter now, and I will have reason for partial actions to her even after she comes of age.

B. 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 necessary supplement is a friendship, or something like it, between parent and child.²⁸ According to

27. Perhaps, as an Editor of *Philosophy & Public Affairs* suggests, this is because parents have reason to be not only causes, but also agents, of the child's well-being and development.

28. See Diane Jeske, "Families, Friends, and Special Obligations," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1998): 527–56; 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): 329–46; 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 deduction or facilitation from any further normative principle.

Jane English, "What Do Grown Children Owe Their Parents?" in *Having Children: Philosophical and Legal Reflections on Parenthood: Essays*, ed. Onora O'Neill and William Ruddick (New York: Oxford University Press, 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

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 mere 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.²⁹ What seems to follow, instead, is that I am open to criticism for having failed to be partial to her in the past. In 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.”³⁰ 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. Although 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

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 choose 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.

29. Of course, it might follow from the different fact that she has (say) abused me (whether or not I have responded partially to her in the past). We return to this possibility in connection with observation (3) below. The present point that my not having responded to her partially in the past is not sufficient for my lacking reason to be paternally or filially partial to her, whereas it is sufficient for my lacking reason in the case of friendship.

30. Jeske, “Special Relationships,” pp. 28–29.

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 people's 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.

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

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 U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once said 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 need not 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 of Histories of Encounter 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 partiality 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 partiality 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.³¹

If we look more closely, however, we see that Resonance of Histories of Encounter 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,³² 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

31. As its proponents often note, the Assimilation to Friendship explains (3). An abusive or neglectful parent is not his or her child's friend, so the child has no reasons for friendship to him or her. Again, however, the Assimilation does not explain (2), and by the very same token. An abusive or neglectful parent is not his or her 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 or her.

32. 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* 16 (1990): 163–89.

children of neglectful or abusive parents have reason for responses quite different from the responses that children of loving parents have reason for.

C. 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 possible, however, that the Genetic Claim is part of a complete explanation of reasons for partiality between parents and children.³³

33. David Velleman, "Family History," *Philosophical Papers* 34 (2005): 357–78 and "Persons in Prospect," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 36 (2008): 221–88, 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 "Persons in Prospect," Velleman emphasizes the latter, and brings it in only to explain why the obligations arising from something similar to Responsibility for Creation (with a notion of "predicament" importantly replacing that of harm), 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, or casts them into the "predicament" of life without giving them what they need to "cope" with 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.

I wonder how far, if at all, Velleman would disagree with this. He suggests other ways in which genetic relationships matter: for example, that they link us "to humanity, the

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 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.³⁴ 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 whom 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, by deduction, 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 fact that

realm of life, the causal order" ("Persons in Prospect," p. 265) and that they help us "come to terms with our bodily selves" from which we are susceptible to alienation ("Persons in Prospect," p. 260). 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).

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

causing a child to exist exposes it to harm.³⁵

Responsibilities for creation of this kind are surely important. But I doubt that they fully account for our reactions, or at least the reactions of many of us. I suspect that these reactions are apt to remain, 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

35. See, especially, Seana Shiffrin's brilliant and troubling "Wrongful Life, Procreative Responsibility, and the Significance of Harm," *Legal Theory* 5 (1999): 117–48; as well as Claudia Mills, "What Do Fathers Owe Their Children?" in *Fact and Value: Essays on Ethics and Metaphysics for Judith Jarvis Thomson*, ed. Alex Byrne, Robert Stalnaker, and Ralph Wedgwood (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 183–98, at p. 190; Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, p. 249; and A. John Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 198–99.

Responsibility for Creation should be distinguished from the claim, made as part of some versions of Collective Responsibility, that assignment to voluntary creators is fair or efficient. This is the view of Blustein, *Parents and Children*, pp. 142–47; and, it seems, Onora O'Neill, "Begetting, Bearing, and Rearing," in O'Neill and Ruddick, *Having Children*, pp. 25–38, at p. 26.

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 & Public Affairs* 1 (1971): 47–66. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, p. 365; and Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life," 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, nonresponsibility-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, "Wrongful Life," 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.

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.³⁶

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 placing it for adoption.³⁷ His caring for the child might be too costly for it, or for him.³⁸ 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 placing the child for adoption, it might seem to imply similarly that a prospective genetic parent can wrong his or her future genetic child by donating sperm or ova, because this is something like placing it for adoption in advance. That is:

36. 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 point I return to below. And, in order to have a manageable focus, we are not considering siblinghood.

37. 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.

38. And even if these conditions are not met, there may be good reason for the *law* to allow genetic parents to place their children for adoption. It is sometimes the case that the law ought to allow people to do what they ought not do.

- (4) a genetic parent will have wronged his or her genetic child if and because he or she supplies genetic material to create it while preventing (e.g., by having the child's identity kept secret) or prohibiting (e.g., due to respect for the adoptive parents' relationship to the child, or a promise to them) him- or herself from fulfilling responsibilities that the genetic relationship will, or would otherwise, provide.

It is not obvious, however, that it follows from the fact that (at least in certain circumstances) a genetic parent wrongs his or her child when and because he or she fails, after the relationship comes into being, to fulfill the responsibilities to which the relationship gives rise, that a genetic parent will have wronged his or her child by preventing or prohibiting him- or herself, before the relationship comes into being, from fulfilling the responsibilities to which the relationship will, or would otherwise, give rise. Perhaps surprisingly, the timing of the action may matter. Suppose, by comparison, that I know something of importance to my friend, which is somewhat costly for me to convey to her. The balance of considerations is such that I would wrong her by not telling her given that she is my friend, but not so important that I would wrong her by not telling her if she were a passing acquaintance. Presumably, I would wrong my friend no less by deliberately causing myself to forget the information, or deliberately incurring an even weightier obligation to a third party not to tell her. It is less obvious, however, I will have wronged my friend if I do so at a time before we become friends, when we were only passing acquaintances, even if I had anticipated that we were likely to become friends (e.g., because we were slated to be roommates next year). At very least, it would be odd to describe this as an act of disloyalty to, or a betrayal of, the friendship that did not yet exist. It is crucial to keep in mind that our question is whether genetic donation wrongs the genetic child in virtue of the responsibilities to which the genetic relationship gives rise. This is why the comparison with responsibilities arising from another kind of relationship, friendship, is supposed to be relevant. Genetic donation may well wrong the genetic child in virtue of other responsibilities, such as that involved in Responsibility for Creation. The genetic parent may know that by creating the child while preventing or prohibiting him- or herself from caring for it, he or she is exposing the genetic child to harm without adequate protection.

Perhaps the prospective parents are unfit, or the child will have a painful and debilitating congenital disorder.³⁹ Here, with regard to the responsibility not to expose others to harm without adequate protection, the timing of the action seems irrelevant. If one would wrong an existing person by failing to protect her from harm to which one voluntarily exposes her, then one will have wronged her by one's preventing or prohibiting oneself, before she comes into existence, from protecting her from harm to which one voluntarily exposes her. My suggestion is rather that timing may matter to responsibilities that arise from relationships: that it may not follow from the fact that doing something in the context of an existing relationship would violate its requirements that one will have violated its requirements if one does something, prior to the existence of the relationship, that prevents or prohibits one from doing it in the future. Such temporal sensitivity may be a consequence of the historical character of the relationships at issue.

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 an undefeated responsibility to raise their genetic children (because they cannot or are required not to), they are in a situation in which they would have such a responsibility, if only they could, or were permitted to, fulfill it. 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 may have reason to accept these burdens; one might selflessly want to help

39. Velleman and Shiffrin suggest that genetic donors may wrong their children in this way in a wider range of circumstances. See notes 33 and 35.

an infertile couple. To see nothing else on the scales is, however, 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 its 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 placed 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 abducted and secretly imprisoned, 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:

- (6) 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.⁴⁰ 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 been no history of responsibility, there still would have been reasons for parental partiality.⁴¹

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

- (7) there is something to be said against social arrangements in which children are raised collectively, or in which paternity is not recognized: namely, that they fail to respect the importance of genetic relationships,

which may seem like cultural imperialism. However, (7) is consistent with there being much to be said in favor of such societies, such as that they promote a more egalitarian ethos. This may just be an instance of a more general truth that not everything of value can be realized within a single social formation. And it implies that:

40. 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.

41. 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. If this is so, then why should a genetic relationship not provide reasons that an adoptive relationship does not?

- (8) a woman bearing a child of rape has reason for parental partiality toward her genetic child,

which may seem callous. As mentioned before, 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 the child. 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 one of the many ways in which she was wronged by it. Although the point is sometimes neglected, part of what makes many actions wrong, or aggravates their wrongness, is precisely that they unfairly burden their victims by changing their normative situation.⁴²

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 common 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 of Common Personal Situation, 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 common situation is not similarity in genes 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.

42. This often overlooked fact is noted by Shiffrin, "Wrongful Life," who suggests that creating a child may wrong it, in part, by burdening it with moral duties.

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. 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.⁴³ 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? Here is a doubly speculative conjecture, which appeals both to a controversial view of "egoistic concern" and a kind of resonance that goes beyond those that we have so far considered. The view of egoistic concern (concern for persons who, in normal cases, are identical to oneself) that I have in mind holds 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 in the right way, e.g., a brain rather than a kidney), as the latter.⁴⁴ And an organism, or organ, at one time is

43. Again, it is not simply the qualitative similarity of genetic code that matters here, but also the historical link, through a continuous process, to an episode in the biological life of the parent. This is why Irie Jones of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000) can meaningfully wonder whether Millat Iqbal or his identical twin Magid is the father of the child she carries.

This formula, however, raises the possibility that we might bear the same relationship to our genetic clones, provided they developed from us in the right way, that we bear to our genetic children.

44. 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, *The Ethics of Killing*, Pt. I. See also (although some of these discussions are focused more on identity than on egoistic concern): Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology* (London: Routledge, 1991), chap. 25; Eric Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (New York: Oxford, 1997); and—with second thoughts—*What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology* (New York: Oxford, 2007); Paul Snowdon, "Persons, Animals, and Bodies," in *The Body and the Self*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez,

identical 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, as we have just said, of the relationship between genetic parent and genetic child. Both relationships consist in continuous biological processes, governed by the same genetic code. Needless to say, my relationship to my genetic child belongs to a different dimension of importance from my relationship to myself at other times. The former is a relationship to a separate and independent person; I do not literally live on through my genetic child, or have the sort of authority over him or her that I enjoy over myself. But, as we have just seen, there is a natural way to see them as counterparts. Again, both of these relationships consist in continuous biological processes, governed by the same genetic code. The conjecture, then, is that here too there is a further kind of resonance. I have reason to respond to my relationship to my genetic child in a way that is similar to the way in which I have reason to respond to my relationship to myself at other times, but which reflects the distinctive dimension of importance to which the latter belongs. If I have reason to be partial to myself at other times, then I have reason for a kind of partiality to my genetic children that nevertheless reflects the fact that this latter relationship is to a separate and independent person. Perhaps what is reflected by the meaning that we attach to our relationships to our genetic children is the incipient sense of a kind of incoherence in attaching paramount importance to one's biological continuity with this person—one's later self—but none at all to one's biological continuity with this other—one's genetic child.⁴⁵

Anthony Marcel, and Naomi Eilan (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 71–86; and “Persons and Personal Identity,” in *Essays for David Wiggins: Identity, Truth and Value*, ed. Sabina Lovibond and S. G. Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 33–48. This view is forcefully criticized by Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Sec. 96.

45. I am indebted here to a conversation years ago with Samuel Scheffler. Raymond Belliotti, “Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother and to Thine Own Self Be True,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 149–62, also appeals to considerations of personal identity to explain the reasons of genetic parents and children.

Note that the idea is not that one has any special reason for one's biological processes, as such, to continue: something that 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.

Much more would need to be said, of course, to vindicate this conjecture. For one thing, as I have said, 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.⁴⁶ Indeed, some who are persuaded by this view of egoistic concern propose, first, that genetic relationships do not matter and, second, that the relationships that do matter involve the same sort of psychological connectedness.⁴⁷ It is worth noting that, whether or not this proposal is correct, the proposal

46. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Pt. III.

47. See David Brink, "Impartiality and Associative Duties," *Utilitas* 13 (2001): 152–72. In the opposite direction, Jennifer Whiting, "Friends and Future Selves," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 547–80; and "Impersonal Friends," *Monist* 74 (1991): 3–29, explains concern with one's future, psychologically connected self by analogy to friendship (which she understands, in turn, as explained not by shared history, but instead by shared virtue).

I don't find Brink's proposal plausible. Even setting aside genetic relationships, there are relationships that it seems, on its face, unable to account for. Some common personal situations, such as exposure to the same adversity, do not involve any particular psychology. Furthermore, Brink's account seems questionable even when applied to the relationships, such as friendship, that initially seem most congenial to it. 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. (If one wonders how negative relationships might produce similarity of content, consider the Stockholm Syndrome.) On the 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," in the sense of Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Sec. 80) 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 (a point compellingly made by Velleman, "Persons in Prospect," p. 239). 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, as suggested by McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, pp. 59–66.

itself suggests that opposition to the idea that biology matters to whom we care about is rooted in 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 for 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 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.

V. CONCLUSION

Granting that certain partiality principles, such as those about friendship, belong on the List of true partiality principles, whereas other partiality principles, such as those about having kidneys of the same weight, belong off it, our challenge was to provide criteria for inclusion and exclusion that would explain these uncontroversial cases as well as to guide us in adjudicating more controversial ones. The immediate dilemma was that it appeared that the only avenues of explanation open to us—deduction or facilitation—led to reductionist explanations that seemed in tension with our ordinary self-understanding.

The way out was to uncover some different structure of normative explanation. Such a structure was suggested by (among other things) the resonance of reactive attitudes with nonreactive emotions: by the way in which we have reason to respond to how people regard what happens to what we care about resonates with the way in which we have reason to respond to what happens to what we care about, even

though the former reasons cannot be explained by deduction or facilitation from the latter. Similarly, we suggested, the way in which we have reason to respond to (among other kinds of relationships) shared histories of encounter might resonate with the way in which we have reason to respond to the discrete encounters of which those histories are composed, without being explained by deduction or facilitation from the latter. This would explain why there are reasons of partiality toward friends, who share a history of encounters which, taken discretely, provide reasons for responses of gratitude and cooperation, whereas there are not reasons of partiality among enemies, evildoers, or people who regularly exit trains at the same stop, who share histories of encounters which, taken discretely, provide reason for different kinds of responses, or no reasons at all.

We then turned to family relationships, focusing on the case of parents and children. We worked, as it were, both from above and from below: trying to clarify at once what needed to be explained, that is, which sorts of relationships between parents and children provide reasons for which sorts of responses, as well as what might explain it. We suggested that the central relationship between parents and children, whether adoptive or biological, is a shared history of a certain kind of encounter: an encounter in which one adult has responsibility, whether he has or has not fulfilled it, for a particular child. Thus, the partiality that parents and children have reason to have for one another in response to this shared history resonates with the responses that they have reason to have in response to the discrete encounters of responsibility of which it is composed. Among other things, this helps to explain why, in contrast to friendship, one can have reason for parental or filial partiality even if one has not been parentally or filially partial in the past, while honoring the intuition that children whose parents have not fulfilled their responsibilities do not have the same reasons for filial partiality as children whose parents have fulfilled them. We then grappled with the vexed question of whether genetic relationships between parents and children might independently provide reasons for partiality. Noting the stubborn residue of the thought that genetic relationships do matter in this way, we explored its consequences and speculated about a possible explanation: namely, that a partiality called for by our biological continuity to our genetic children may resonate with the partiality called for by our biological continuity to our later selves.

No doubt, much remains to be said about the phenomenon of resonance, both in general and in these, and other, specific applications of it. But I hope that enough has been said here to show that nonreductionism can reply articulately to the challenge, “Why these relationships, and not those?” To the extent that we are ourselves drawn to nonreductionism, resonance, in its varied guises, may promise more. It may both deepen our understanding of the explanatory roots of the partial attachments that we confidently accept and guide us in the evaluation of more doubtful or contested attachments, such as those between conationals, which have, for reasons of both practice and theory, attracted so much attention of late.