

The Puzzle of Partiality

Anthony Cross, Princeton University

across@princeton.edu

Abstract

This paper considers the puzzle of partiality: what explains the fact that we take ourselves to have reasons of partiality, i.e. good reasons to be partial to those individuals with whom we share special relationships? I argue that, in the case of personal relationships, such reasons can be explained entirely in terms of a set of more fundamental values that such relationships facilitate and instantiate. These include: the value of personal and joint projects; the value of the individual participants in these relationships; and general moral values such as trust, care, reciprocity, and gratitude. My view, which I call the Complex Theory of reasons of partiality, is therefore a form of reductionism about reasons of partiality. This approach departs from a popular nonreductionist view—defended by Samuel Scheffler and Niko Kolodny, among others—that special relationships are normatively fundamental entities which independently give rise to reasons of partiality. I first argue that the Complex Theory offers a better explanation of partiality than rival forms of reductionism. I then undermine the main arguments for nonreductionism. Finally, I argue that the Complex Theory can offer a better explanation of which relationships warrant partiality than the explanation offered by nonreductionists; this is a reason to prefer the Complex Theory to nonreductionist theories more generally.

1 The Puzzle of Partiality

Suppose that you're out on a midwinter stroll alongside the river when you hear a commotion ahead—a splash of water and calls of distress. Running forward, you happen upon the scene of two individuals who've fallen off a pier into the swift-flowing, ice-cold river. There happens to be one life preserver on the pier, which you grab while running towards the edge and prepare to throw. Because the river is moving quickly, you'll only be able to throw the life preserver to one of the individuals who has fallen in; you'll be able to tow that person to safety, but the other individual will be carried away by the river. As you reach the end of the pier, you realize with a shock that one of the individuals in the river is your mother. Without another thought,

you throw the life preserver to your mother, towing her in to shore as the other individual—a stranger to you—floats away down the river.

After the fact, your friends might ask you why you acted in the way that you did. Although you might feel as though you've acted rightly, on reflection you might nevertheless worry about your justification for acting to save your mother rather than the stranger. This is to face the *puzzle of partiality*: What *explains* your sense that you've acted rightly in being partial?

1.1 Partiality and Its Reasons

We can get clearer on the puzzle of partiality by reflecting on the phenomenon of partiality within special relationships. As I understand it, *partiality* consists in differential concern towards those with whom one shares special relationships: romantic partners, friends, parents, children, and so on. This concern manifests itself in a number of different ways. It manifests itself in deliberation and action: you choose to aid your mother rather than the stranger; and more generally, you might prefer to spend time with your friends or privilege the interests of your children over those of others. Partiality also manifests itself in differential emotional investment: If you hear on the news that a stranger has died, perhaps you feel a momentary pang of sadness or make a remark about the awful news to your friends. If instead you hear that your close friend has died, it would in most cases be grounds for emotional devastation. Some have even argued that partiality manifests itself in our beliefs and epistemic practices: I believe that my wife is the most beautiful person in the world, Timmy's parents think that his piano recital performance of *Für Elise* is the best in history, and in *The Third Man* Holly Martins refuses to believe that his friend Harry Lime is a hardened criminal—all despite abundant evidence to the contrary.¹

What is striking about the phenomenon of partiality within special relationships is not just its existence, but also the fact that we generally take its manifestations to be reasonable. We view our actions and attitudes not just as brute facts but rather as appropriate responses to certain

¹My wife of course *is* the most beautiful person in the world. For more discussion of the phenomenon of epistemic partiality, see Stroud, 2006.

features of our circumstances. We even go so far as to chastise those individuals who have failed to appreciate and act on these reasons: an individual might be reproached as a bad friend or a bad parent insofar as they fail to be partial to their friends and loved ones. Let's characterize this with a bit of terminology: in participating in a special relationship, we take ourselves to be responding to a set of what we might call *reasons of partiality*: a set of considerations that count in favor of being partial in one's actions and attitudes towards another individual with whom one shares a special relationship.²

More precisely then, the puzzle of partiality is the question of why such reasons have the normative force that they do. Why should I have reasons to be partial to some individual just because that individual is my friend, or my parent, or so on?³ What is it about such relationships that explains the existence and the force of reasons of partiality? Why should I treat these individuals preferentially, especially given the reasonable assumption that all individuals deserve equal moral consideration? To answer these questions is to provide a solution to the puzzle of partiality.

1.2 How to Solve the Puzzle: Two Strategies

In this paper I discuss two strategies for solving the puzzle of partiality. One strategy, quite popular of late, is *nonreductionism*. Nonreductionists like Samuel Scheffler, Niko Kolodny and others argue that reasons of partiality can be explained simply by reference to the intrinsic or final value of special relationships themselves.⁴ They maintain that, insofar as such relationships are finally valuable, they serve as sources of reasons of partiality; valuing a special relationship

²I follow Keller, 2013 in my terminology. Others have referred to such reasons as "relationship-dependent reasons" (e.g. Scheffler, 2006) or "reasons of intimacy" (e.g. Jeske, 2008). As best as I can tell, this is only a terminological difference: all parties to the literature are concerned with considerations that count in favor of the sorts of partiality that I've discussed above. One important note: I am using the term 'reason' in an expansive manner that includes obligations and requirements: your duty to help your friend is a reason for you to help them, albeit a particularly weighty one, and one for which your friend can blame you if you fail to help them.

³For the purposes of this paper, I will leave aside consideration of generalized skepticism about the claim that we ever have reason to be partial in the way I've described above. cf. Scheffler's discussion of such skepticism in Scheffler, 2010, pp. 105-106.

⁴cf. Scheffler, 1997, p. 197; Kolodny, 2003, pp. 150-151; Wallace, 2012, p. 187.

involves seeing it—and considerations associated with it—as counting in favor of partiality.⁵ On this approach, special relationships are *fundamental* in explaining reasons of partiality: In explaining the existence and normative authority of these reasons, one need not appeal to any further normative facts beyond the existence of special relationships themselves. This strategy provides an answer to the puzzle of partiality by introducing a new normative primitive—the significant relationship—which grounds reasons of partiality.

The other strategy—which I favor—is *reductionism* about reasons of partiality.⁶ Reductionists argue that special relationships are *not* fundamental in explaining reasons of partiality. Rather, a full explanation of our reasons of partiality requires reference to some further set of normative facts beyond the mere existence of the relationships themselves. On this approach, relationships are *derivative* sources of reasons of partiality: what explains the existence of reasons of partiality is a set of non-normative facts about the connections between special relationships and a set of independent normative facts. Reductionists aim to explain the class of reasons of partiality by reference to some other set of more fundamental reasons and values which special relationships facilitate or instantiate.

Reductionism about reasons of partiality has traditionally not fared very well, largely because reductionists have generally offered explanations of partiality in terms of some *one* fundamental value. For example, utilitarians like Sidgwick attempt to explain partiality entirely in terms of its contributions to general happiness, whereas voluntarists attempt to explain partiality solely in terms of voluntarily incurred commitments. The problem with these kinds of reductionism is that they can't do justice to the wide variety of reasons of partiality that we encounter in our special relationships. Consider an analogy: if you were to try to explain the value of art solely in terms of moral value—as Tolstoy did—or in terms of significant form—à

⁵Jeske, 2008, ch.4 and Scanlon, 1998, pp. 88-90 pursue a similar, but distinct, strategy: each has argued that facts about the existence of special relationships in themselves directly constitute reasons of partiality. For insightful discussion of how Jeske's and Scanlon's positions differ from the value-based views discussed above, see Keller, 2013, ch. 3. As far as I can tell, this makes no difference for my argument: my criticisms of nonreductionism should apply equally to these kinds of view.

⁶Here I understand reduction as an *explanatory* notion. B reduces to A if A is required to explain B. cf. Chang, 2001, p. 16140.

la Clive Bell—you'd fail to explain many of the reasons for which we might value an artwork. There are plenty of artworks which lack moral value, or fail to possess significant form, but which nevertheless strike us as deserving of artistic appreciation. Persons are even more diverse than artworks, as are our relationships with them. Partiality manifests itself in many different ways, and we may encounter very different reasons of partiality depending on the particular relationship in question. Monistic forms of reductionism tend to fail in offering explanations of partiality for just this reason.

What's needed to do justice to this diversity, I argue, is a more sophisticated, pluralistic form of reductionism. In the second section of the paper, I present the Complex Theory of reasons of partiality, which explains reasons of partiality in terms of a set of values and reasons which special relationships facilitate and instantiate. In the third section of the paper, I demonstrate how the Complex Theory builds on three alternative reductionist theories of partiality which are particularly prevalent in the literature: the projects view, the individuals view, and the moral obligations view. I show how the Complex Theory provides a better explanation of partiality than any of these alternative theories, while at the same time avoiding serious objections that plague each.

Is there ultimately reason to prefer such a reductionist approach to that favored by the non-reductionists? In the fourth section of the paper, I undermine what I take to be the main argument for nonreductionism about reasons of partiality. In the fifth section of the paper, I argue that adopting the Complex Theory has further theoretical advantages: in particular, it answers the difficult question of how we might explain which relationships justify our partiality. I argue that nonreductionists are unable to provide a similarly adequate answer—and this explanatory benefit serves as indirect proof for the reductionist approach to explaining reasons of partiality. What's more, as I argue in the concluding section of the paper, the Complex Theory paves the way for understanding instances of partiality that extend beyond our personal relationships.

2 The Complex Theory of Reasons of Partiality

I defend the Complex Theory of reasons of partiality. The Complex Theory can be stated rather simply:

COMPLEX THEORY: Reasons of partiality can be explained entirely in terms of a set of independent values that special relationships facilitate or instantiate.

On its own, the Complex Theory doesn't say much; what's needed is some further elaboration about the set of independent values which special relationships facilitate or instantiate. Here are three such values that special relationships facilitate or instantiate:

1. The value of individuals' projects;
2. The value of individual persons; and
3. Moral values of trust, vulnerability, reciprocity and gratitude.

While this list may not be a complete list of the values that relationships facilitate or instantiate, I do think that it *is* a complete list of those values which will play a major role in explaining partiality within special relationships.⁷ This amounts to a reductive explanation of reasons of partiality within special relationships. The explanation depends on a set of independent normative facts about the value of projects; the value of individual persons; and moral values of trust, vulnerability, reciprocity and gratitude; paired with the non-normative claim that special relationships manifesting partiality facilitate or instantiate such values. In the remainder of this section, I'll provide some initial motivation for the Complex Theory; in the next section, I'll provide further support for the Complex Theory by showing how it builds on theories of partiality which each take *one* of the items in the above list as central in explaining partiality.

⁷My approach bears important similarities to reductionist attempts to explain the value of special relationships in terms of a set of independent values. Two convincing examples of this approach are Ross, 1930, pp. 140-141; Hurka, 2010, ch. 5. My approach differs from these in that—as stated above—I am only aiming to explain the phenomenon of partiality within special relationships—rather than the value of special relationships more generally. There may be further ways in which special relationships are valuable which nevertheless do not play a role in explaining why we have reasons to be partial within them.

As already suggested above, the major motivation for the Complex Theory is the recognition that special relationships—and the reasons of partiality that attend them—are a rather diverse bunch. This diversity occurs at two levels. First, there are many different kinds of special relationships. We have reasons to be partial to our friends, our romantic partners, our families, our associates—and, according to some, to our fellow citizens or members of our society. Within each of these kinds, there is even greater diversity: some friendships involve a commitment to shared projects and joint activity; others involve a dedication to mutual support and interdependency; while others involve some combination of each of these.⁸ Individual friendships might differ from each other as much as friendships differ from parent-child relationships. The Complex Theory can accommodate this intuition by acknowledging a wide range of values that generate reasons of partiality; together, the set of these values are sufficient to explain why we have reason to be partial to those with whom we share special relationships.

Central to the plausibility of the Complex Theory is the important disclaimer that not every special relationship will involve the facilitation or instantiation of all three of the specified kinds of values and reasons. Although I think that most special relationships involve some combination of these three kinds of values, it's possible that many will not: Some special relationships will involve no moral obligations. Perhaps both participants might consciously release each other from all such obligations of this sort. Other relationships will not involve projects: in one's relationship with an estranged partner or a distant friend, one might no longer view one's relationship as constituting or involving one's ground projects. Finally, some relationships might fail to present their participants with privileged or effective means of responding to the value of persons: take, for example, the case with which the paper began, where one has an equal opportunity to save one's mother and a stranger who, by stipulation, have equal value as persons.

The major advantage of the Complex Theory is that it can explain why, in each of these

⁸*Pace* worries that Aristotelian *philia* differs from friendship (cf. Nehamas, 2010, p. 274), this seems to be the truth in Aristotle's discussion of different kinds of friendship; aside from claims about which form of friendship is genuine or best, Aristotle seems happy to accommodate even friendships of pleasure or friendships of utility as actual friendships. cf. Cooper, 1977.

cases, we might still take ourselves to have reasons to be partial. In a relationship in which there are no moral obligations, one might nevertheless still be motivated to be partial by the fact that caring for a loved one is one's ground project. In a relationship which no longer constitutes or involves one's ground projects, one might nevertheless still have moral obligations to be partial which are sourced in the expectations and dependencies that one has accepted within the context of one's relationship. Finally, in cases where one neither has a relationship-based project nor moral obligations within one's relationship, one might still nevertheless have reasons to be partial sourced in the neutral value of persons.⁹ In virtue of this flexibility, the Complex Theory gets the extension of reasons of partiality correct: it is able to explain, in a very diverse set of cases, why we take ourselves to have reasons of partiality.

The Complex Theory also delivers an account of reasons of partiality that accords with our common-sense intuitions about the kinds of reasons that reasons of partiality are. It is able to deliver a picture of partiality in which we are responding to the *right kind* of reasons to be partial. In particular—and as I discuss further below—reasons of partiality seem to be a rather heterogenous bunch. Some paradigmatic reasons of partiality appear to us to be *agent-relative* reasons: your promise to favor your friend applies only to *you*, and not to any other agents. But there also appear to be legitimate reasons of partiality which are *agent-neutral* in character: as utilitarians are quick to point out, adopting a policy of partiality may be the best means of promoting general welfare—and to this extent, everyone has an agent-neutral reason to be partial within their own personal relationships. The Complex Theory, insofar as it explains reasons of partiality by reference to a set of values that includes agent-relative *and* agent-neutral values, is able to do justice to both kinds of reasons of partiality.

Beyond these general remarks, the overall plausibility of the Complex Theory will depend on the particular story to be told about how each of the three values in question generates reasons of partiality within the context of special relationships. How and why do the value of projects,

⁹This sort of case is tricky, in that in such a case reasons of partiality would not be agent-relative—which seems to be an important feature of our common sense understanding of reasons of partiality. I discuss this in more detail below.

the value of individuals, and the moral values I've listed generate reasons to be partial to our friends and loved ones? I explore this issue in the next section by examining three approaches to explaining partiality, each of which aims to explain partiality *entirely* in terms of one of these values. As a complete explanation of partiality, each of these three approaches fails; however, each *does* provide valuable insight into how each value generates a subset of the class of reasons of partiality. Incorporating them into the Complex Theory will yield an account of partiality which is both extensionally and qualitatively adequate to fully explain reasons of partiality.

3 Three (Partial) Theories of Partiality

The Complex Theory builds on three other reductionist approaches to the puzzle of partiality which are well-represented in the literature: the projects view, the individuals view, and the moral obligations view. Each of these views gives us a story about how the particular value in question generates reasons of partiality within the context of special relationships. However, none of these views has the resources to provide an adequate explanation of partiality on its own. In showing how each of these views go wrong, I'll also demonstrate how the Complex Theory—which explains partiality by reference to the set of all three values—is better able to explain partiality.

3.1 The Projects View

The example with which I began the paper owes much to Bernard Williams. Williams famously deploys a similar example as a means of challenging the predominant picture of the moral agent as impartially motivated: if, in such a case as the one I described, one were to contemplate the impartial moral permissibility of saving one's mother rather than the stranger, this would constitute "one thought too many."¹⁰ While this claim about motivation has attracted a great deal of interest, what's less often noted is the implicit account of reasons of partiality upon which Williams's claim relies.

¹⁰Williams, 1981, p. 18.

Williams's account is an instance of what we might call the *projects* view.¹¹ According to the projects view, one's reasons of partiality are explained by reference to the reasons generated by one's projects, along with the claim that many personal relationships constitute or involve such projects. On this view, caring for a loved one and participating in a special relationship is similar in kind to—to take Williams's example—being dedicated to pacifism, or working on writing one's novel. Insofar as each one of us has reasons to be partial to our own projects, this will also give us reason to be partial to those relationships of ours which constitute or involve such projects.

To gauge the plausibility of the projects view, we first need to get clearer on the notion of a project. Williams introduces the notion of a *ground project* as follows:

A man may have, for a lot of his life or even just for some part of it, a *ground* project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life.¹²

We can expand on Williams's initial statement in several ways: First, we might suggest that ground projects consist of a set of concerns, interests, aims or goals. Some of these may be outcome oriented, e.g. finishing a novel, whereas others might be ongoing, e.g. volunteering at the hospital. Ground projects are distinguished from mere desires or preferences by (a) the extent to which agents find such projects to give their lives meaning; and (b) the existence of a history of concern and commitment to the project.¹³ My long-term commitment to writing a book is quite different from my occasional yen to, say, experience space travel. The latter is not a project to which I am especially committed or which I find deeply meaningful, nor is it one that I have acted on or intend to act on. Finally, it seems plausible that being committed to such a ground project involves taking oneself to have reasons to devote oneself to it, which following Scheffler we might refer to as *project-dependent reasons*.¹⁴

¹¹For further examples of the projects view, see Frankfurt, 2004; Stroud, 2010. My discussion of the view owes much to Keller, 2013, ch. 2.

¹²Williams, 1981, p. 12.

¹³I don't develop the notion of meaningfulness here. However, I am very sympathetic to the fitting fulfillment view defended by Susan Wolf in Wolf et al., 2012, pp. 25-33.

¹⁴Scheffler, 2006. Of course, project-dependent reasons are open to the same set of questions that I've asked

The main claim of the projects view is that we can explain reasons of partiality as instantiations of such project-dependent reasons. This might occur in two ways: First, as Williams suggests, a commitment to another person might constitute a ground project in and of itself. For example, in a loving relationship, caring for one's beloved often comes to be more or less central to one's life. Romantic partners usually have a stable, long-standing interest in understanding and contributing to each other's good. In many cases, this concern can become meaningful in its own right: being there for one's beloved in good times and bad, supporting them, and caring for them can come to play an important role in the self-conception of each. Insofar as such caring for another individual takes on the role of a ground project, and insofar as such caring calls for favoring that individual's concern over others, such projects will generate reasons of partiality.

Of course, special relationships usually involve much more than their participants' robust interest in doing good for each other.¹⁵ Take, for example, two parents of a newborn: they change diapers, trade late-night wake-ups, arrange visits to the doctor, and juggle visiting relatives. They deliberate about how to raise their child, together: what kind of life should the child have? What do they need to do in order to support this? They are in agreement about the importance of some things, but disagree about others. They're hashing it out as they go, all while trying to eke out a couple hours of sleep here and there. Neither is particularly focused on their individual projects of caring for the other. What they are dedicated to is something else—namely, the *joint* project of raising their child. This is a project that they perform together, as a plural agent of sorts.¹⁶ It is also central to their lives, and deeply meaningful to both of them. This gives us a second route to project-dependent reasons of partiality within special relationships: insofar as I am involved with my relationship partner in pursuing a joint project—such as raising our child—this gives me reason to show greater concern for my partner

about reasons of partiality. I remain neutral here on the question of whether we should pursue a nonreductionist or a reductionist account of project-dependent reasons.

¹⁵As David Velleman has pointed out in Velleman, 1999, p. 353, a lover “whose love was a bundle of these urges, to care and share and please and impress—such a lover would be an interfering, ingratiating nightmare.”

¹⁶For a more in-depth discussion of plural agency within the context of friendships in particular, cf. Helm, 2010, ch. 8.

than for others, insofar as without my partner, pursuing the joint project simply would not be possible.¹⁷

As promising as the projects view might seem, it faces a serious objection. This is the problem of duties of partiality: A number of our reasons of partiality present themselves as requirements, obligations, or duties concerning the individuals with whom we share special relationships. Parents have duties of care to their children and friends are bound to be loyal to each other. Samuel Scheffler has argued that reasons of partiality differ from project-dependent reasons in this respect:

We normally suppose that many of our relationship-dependent reasons are reasons on which we are morally required or obligated to act, at least in so far as they are not outweighed or otherwise defeated by competing considerations. By contrast, we do not normally think that we are obligated to act on our project-dependent reasons, but merely that we are permitted or entitled to do so, even when they are the strongest reasons we have.¹⁸

Consider the case of writing a novel; perhaps the fact that this is one's project gives one reasons to devote a great deal of time and resources to finishing it. However, as Scheffler would have it, one isn't *required* to continue working on it. If one ceases to view it as a meaningful endeavor that one cares about, one is permitted to give it up, as one has no obligations to the project itself. Projects don't generate duties or obligations, but special relationships are shot through with such obligations: parents are obligated to care for the children, married partners are obligated to care for each other, and friends are obligated to be loyal to each other. Thus the projects view fails to yield an explanation of reasons of partiality that is extensionally adequate.¹⁹

The Complex Theory takes on board the strengths of the projects view, insofar as it explains *some* of our reasons of partiality in terms of the value of personal projects. However, it avoids the main objection facing the projects view, insofar as it provides room for obligations of partiality generated by the commitments and expectations entered within the context of a special

¹⁷Stroud, 2010, pp. 145-149 offers further discussion of the role of joint projects in explaining reasons of partiality.

¹⁸Scheffler, 2006, p. 258.

¹⁹Another way to put this objection would be to say that, if one were to cease to actually care about a project, one would be permitted to end one's commitment to it. This does not seem to be true of many special relationships. Diane Jeske offers an objection to the projects view along these lines in Jeske, 2008, ch. 2.

relationship. On the Complex Theory, duties of partiality can be explained by reference to the moral value of meeting these normative expectations.²⁰

3.2 The Individuals View

Iris Murdoch suggests that “love is knowledge of the individual.”²¹ In this claim, we find the seed of another attempt to explain our reasons of partiality which we can refer to as the *individuals* view. The individuals view attempts to explain reasons of partiality entirely by reference to the agent-neutral value of persons; in particular, partiality within special relationships is put forward as the best means of responding to the value of persons more generally.²²

The details of the view will depend on a further account of the value of persons: there are therefore Kantian versions of the individuals view, utilitarian versions of the individuals view, and so on. The basic thought goes something like this: individuals have a certain value—usually explained in terms of their welfare or their autonomy—and this value generates reasons for all agents to respond to this value in appropriate ways. However, participating in a special relationship gives us an especially efficient means of experiencing, understanding, and responding to the value of the individuals with whom we share those relationships. We can respond to their value much better than we can respond to the value of strangers—just as others can respond to the value of their friends and loved ones much more effectively than we can. Therefore, we each have reasons to be partial to our friends and loved ones, on the grounds that this is the best way to respond to the value of persons generally.

There are two major problems for the individuals view. The first problem is that it depends on an empirical claim that partiality within special relationships is really the best means of responding to the value of persons. Is this true? While this is a difficult question to answer conclusively, defenders of the individuals view are generally able to make a good case for their claim. Frank Jackson has argued that being partial to our nearest and dearest accords best with

²⁰I discuss these further below, in presenting the moral obligations view.

²¹Murdoch, 1970, p. 28.

²²For variants of this view see Velleman, 1999; Keller, 2013, ch. 4-5; Setiya, 2014.

our motivational structures: we are much less likely to lose motivational steam in promoting the good of individuals that we antecedently care about.²³ Kantians on the other hand might argue that responding in full to the autonomy of persons involves a significant outlay of time, energy, and resources, making it the case that we humans are only able to do so within the context of a few special relationships.²⁴

The second and more serious problem for the individuals view is the fact that reasons to respond to the value of persons seem to differ in kind from some paradigmatic kinds of reasons of partiality. Suppose that we vary the case from the beginning of the paper in two ways: first, your mother is the only one who has fallen in the water; and second, I arrive at the pier rather than you. In this case, I would certainly take myself to have good reasons to save your mother. The fact that she is in danger along with facts about my causal ability to help her would count in favor of my throwing her the life preserver. These would be reasons that anyone would have in the circumstances, sourced in your mother's value as an individual. Even if this were the case, I wouldn't take myself to have the same *kinds* of reasons as you do to assist her. You are moved to save your mother by the fact that this is *your mother*, the person who raised you and cared for you in your childhood, with whom you have a particular history. To put it simply, I don't have access to the same kinds of reasons of partiality that you have; she is not my mother.

Another way to put the point would be to say that all reasons to respond to the value of persons are *agent-neutral*, insofar as they are reasons that all agents within similar causal positions would share, whereas at least some reasons of partiality are *agent-relative*, insofar as they are reasons that one possesses in virtue of something more than just one's causal position.²⁵ The problem for the individuals view, then, is that the reasons of partiality which the value of individuals generate are exclusively agent-neutral reasons, whereas some (if not all) reasons of

²³Jackson, 1991, p. 480.

²⁴cf. Velleman, 1999, pp. 370-373.

²⁵This is only a definition of agent-relative *reasons*—and not agent-relative values. That said, I think that the most natural way to explain the existence of such reasons is in terms of agent-relative values, which generate reasons only for a particular subset of the class of agents. 'Neutral' values would be values relativized to the class of *all* agents. This would amount to a value-based theory of reasons, paired with the claim that all value is relative. However, almost all of what I say here should be compatible with either Scanlon-style reasons fundamentalism or with a neutral-value based theory of reasons.

partiality are agent-relative. Therefore, reasons of partiality cannot be explained entirely in terms of the value of individuals.

Simon Keller attempts to respond to this objection on behalf of the individuals view by arguing that while, strictly speaking, reasons of partiality can be explained entirely in terms of the agent-neutral value of persons, facts about relationships serve as Dancy-style enablers: one is only able to experience certain reasons associated with the value of persons—of the kind mentioned above—if one stands in the right kind of relationship to the individual in question. This allows reasons of partiality to be agent-relative in the sense discussed above: one only has access to certain kinds of reasons of partiality if one is in a particular special relationship. The problem with this approach, as Keller admits, is that “there is no explanation here of *why* the fact that you share a relationship with someone should enable her self-standing value to generate special reasons for you.”²⁶ Taking Keller’s route therefore amounts to giving up on the goal of offering a reductionist explanation of reasons of partiality; it amounts to a form of nonreductionism about reasons of partiality, insofar as special relationships are fundamental in explaining reasons of partiality.

The Complex Theory, on the other hand, is able to explain this difference in kind: It’s likely that you either view your relationship with your mother as a ground project, or that you take yourself to have obligations of gratitude and reciprocity to your mother due to her history of caring for you in your early life. Both of these aspects of your relationship would explain why you have additional reasons which I lack—reasons which are relativized to you in virtue of the history that you and your mother share.

This is not to deny that the value of individuals does provide us with reasons to be partial; indeed, one major lesson to take away from the individuals view is the fact that some (if not all) reasons of partiality *are* agent-neutral in character. The class of reasons of partiality is diverse, and involves both agent-relative *and* agent-neutral reasons. It is just this kind of diversity that the Complex Theory reflects.

²⁶Keller, 2013, p. 135.

3.3 The Moral Obligations View

The *moral obligations* view is narrower in scope than the projects view or the individuals view: it aims only to explain the responsibilities or duties of partiality that one has towards those individuals with whom one shares special relationships. The proposal is that the responsibilities that we have to the individuals with whom we share special relationships can be explained entirely in virtue of more general moral requirements. These might include at least the following: requirements of *trust* to meet the expectations of others that we have intentionally raised through our past actions;²⁷ requirements of *vulnerability* to care for those who we have led to be dependent on us; and requirements of *reciprocity* and *gratitude*, to repay or respond in kind to individuals who have benefitted us in the past.

Such moral requirements are, in principle, requirements that we might have to anyone, including individuals with whom we do not share special relationships. If I make a promise to a stranger on the street that I'll keep an eye on his bike for a few minutes, I'm morally obligated not to take off with it as soon as he's around the corner. However, as proponents of the moral obligations view observe, special relationships serve as especially dense networks of such requirements. According to the moral obligations view, these obligations exhaust the requirements of partiality: we can understand your obligation to save your mother entirely in terms of, say, your duties of reciprocity and gratitude for her past care to you.

R. Jay Wallace has objected to the moral obligations view on the grounds that that our duties within special relationships—which he refers to as duties of love—differ both in quality and in extension from more general moral obligations. He argues instead that duties of love are *sui generis* obligations which “escape the net of moral principles that the reductionist appeals to.”²⁸ If Wallace is right, this would indicate that requirements of partiality cannot be wholly reduced to more general moral obligations.

Wallace presents two set of considerations meant to support this claim. First, he claims that

²⁷For more on expectationalism generally and an expectationalist account of promising, cf. Scanlon, 1998, pp. 296-309.

²⁸Wallace, 2012, p. 185.

the duties of love seem to differ strikingly in kind from duties accrued on the basis of general moral principles. To motivate this claim, Wallace appeals to the following thought experiment:

Imagine a situation in which we have benefited in comparable measure from the efforts of someone unknown and unrelated to us—a secret benefactor, say, who randomly singled us out to be the recipient of their largesse, where this in turn has had enormous positive effects on our life...We would no doubt have extensive moral obligations to such a benefactor, under general principles of generosity and reciprocity, but the nature and quality of these obligations would make them very different from the duties we have to our actual aging parents.²⁹

The point of Wallace's claim is that the quality of our concern for our parents would be quite different from the quality of our concern for the anonymous benefactor, which is supposed to support the claim that duties of love cannot be reduced to moral obligations.³⁰

Second, Wallace claims that there may be duties of love even when one has no moral obligations. To support this claim, Wallace appeals to a case in which one's life partner is at the end of their life and one is faced with the decision of whether or not to spend time with them in the hospital. However, Wallace stipulates that in this case, both partners have released each other from all obligations, and no further duties of care or of reciprocity or gratitude apply. There are therefore no obligations sourced in these moral duties. Wallace claims that,

We might nevertheless feel under these circumstances that we owe it to our beloved to be there for them in this phase of our lives, and that it would somehow be disloyal of us to turn our backs on them in the present situation. This would seem to be a *sui generis* duty of love, which cannot plausibly be reduced to moral principles of the kind that potentially apply to other cases, since by hypothesis we would not be in violation of such principles if we were to fail to live up to the duty that is in question.³¹

Given that, by stipulation, there are no moral obligations in this case, Wallace argues that this constitutes evidence for a distinct class of duties of love.

While each of these cases seems to have a strong intuitive pull, I think that we can nevertheless explain both without appeal to a class of *sui generis* duties of love. In the first case, the difference in the quality of concern for our parents can be explained by the fact that caring for

²⁹Wallace, 2012, p. 186.

³⁰Wallace provides no indication of *how* such duties differ in character. I'll say more about this below.

³¹Wallace, 2012, p. 186.

our parents is likely one of our ground projects, whereas this simply isn't possible with respect to an anonymous benefactor. This explains the sense in which caring for our parents and carrying out our obligations to them is more meaningful to us—and therefore different in kind—from our consideration of our obligations to an anonymous benefactor. My response to the second case is quite similar: it's likely that in the end of life case, caring for one's partner is one of one's ground projects. We can explain the sense in which one would feel disloyal not as a kind of disloyalty to one's partner, but rather as a worry about one's own integrity to one's ground projects.

One might reply on behalf of Wallace by arguing that in this case one appears to have a *duty* to visit one's loved one in the hospital, and by reaffirming the point that projects do not generate duties. One avenue of response to this reply would be to underline the weight of our project-dependent reasons: as Harry Frankfurt has argued, such reasons often present themselves as especially weighty reasons—Frankfurt characterizes them as “volitional necessities.”³² Even if these are not reasons involving moral duties, they might nevertheless be reasons with similar weights. A second avenue of response would be to argue that there *are* duties bound up with our personal projects, albeit not duties *to* those projects. Perfectionistic traditions in ethics emphasize self-regarding duties, and while there is a great deal of dispute about the content of such duties, I think that one plausible candidate for such a duty would be commitment to some project or other which one finds meaningful; this seems to be either a necessary condition for leading the best kind of life, or a constituent of such a life.³³ There is a range of ways that one might meet this duty, and changing one's commitments over time is permissible: one can trade out the novel that one is working on in order to commit oneself more fully to one's family. However, what seems to violate this duty is giving up on one's meaningful projects altogether. Given that special relationships are among the most meaningful projects in life for many agents, such a self-regarding duty might play a role in explaining why, in the case of the partner in the hospital, one still feels a duty to care for them; this residual duty would not be a *sui generis*

³²Frankfurt, 2004, pp. 45-47.

³³For a dissenting view on commitment, cf. Calhoun, 2009.

duty of love. Rather, it would be a duty to oneself: one couldn't live with the thought of giving up on one's most meaningful projects, especially if in doing so one would have no similarly meaningful projects to commit oneself to.

I've argued that the moral obligations view has resources to respond to Wallace's objections. However, there is one further problem for the moral obligations view as an explanation of reasons of partiality: insofar as it only aims to deal with the obligations that we face within special relationships, it does little to explain much of the broader class of reasons of partiality. Partiality is not always a matter of appreciating one's duties or obligations. We take considerations about our friends and loved ones to favor or warrant certain kinds of action rather than require them: it would be good to take my friend out for his birthday, but in normal cases if I do so, I don't do so because I'm *required* to do so. Even if the moral obligations view can serve as a satisfying reductive account of obligations of partiality—and I think it can—it cannot serve as a comprehensive reductive account of all of our reasons of partiality. Like the projects view, it isn't extensionally adequate to explain all of our reasons of partiality.

The Complex Theory, on the other hand, has the resources to explain reasons of partiality which are not obligations or requirements. The Complex Theory incorporates the strengths of the moral obligations theory—most if not all requirements within special relationships can be explained by reference to particular instantiations of more general moral duties—while supplementing this account of the duties of partiality with a further account of reasons of partiality sourced in personal projects and the value of individuals. Because of this flexibility, the Complex Theory is able to give an extensionally adequate explanation of the reasons of partiality.

3.4 The Complex Theory and Completeness

I've argued that three prominent reductionist accounts of the reasons of partiality provide us with at best partial explanations of our reasons of partiality. The Complex Theory is a synthesis of these three theories: it incorporates the strengths of each in order to provide an explanation of reasons of partiality that is both qualitatively and extensionally adequate.

Is the Complex Theory complete as an explanation of reasons of partiality? Consider the following variation of the initial example: Suppose that you are walking to the pier to meet your mother for the first time; you were separated from her at birth, and the two of you have never met. You only know that she will be wearing a red coat. As you arrive at the pier, you see two people in the water, one of whom is wearing a red coat. You choose to save the person in the red coat, because she is your mother.³⁴ It would seem that, in this case, your reason for saving your mother can't be explained by reference to your projects—you don't have a relationship-based project with your mother, as you don't have a relationship. It can't be explained by reference to your moral obligations; you have no moral obligations to your mother that you don't have towards the stranger. And finally, it can't be explained by reference to your ability to better respond to the value of your mother; without a history of interaction with and concern for your mother, it seems unlikely that you could better respond to her value than you could respond to the value of the other stranger.

There are two strategies of responding to such a case on behalf of the Complex Theory. First, one might respond by arguing that in this case, one *doesn't* have any reason to be partial to one's mother. Perhaps, if one were to choose to save one's mother, this would come to constitute a relationship which might then generate reasons of partiality.³⁵ And perhaps it is the prospect of forming such a relationship which might lead one to favor saving the woman in the red coat. But strictly speaking, at the moment of choice, one does not have any relationship with either individual, and so has no reasons of partiality. On the other hand, it's also possible to adopt an accomodationist strategy by dropping the claim that the Complex Theory is complete. Perhaps there is some other kind of value which also generates reasons of partiality which the Complex Theory does not reference. This might explain the existence of reasons of partiality in the above example.

While I prefer the former strategy, I would be amenable to the latter pending some plausible explanation of the above case. I think that the Complex Theory is sufficient for explaining

³⁴I owe this example to Gavin Lawrence.

³⁵I thank Barbara Herman for suggesting this line of response to me.

the great majority of the class of reasons of partiality, however it is possible that there may be further values that special relationships facilitate or exemplify. In this spirit, the Complex Theory should be regarded as a theory in progress: it remains open to the accommodation of new classes of value in providing the best explanation of the class of reasons of partiality.

Despite the strengths of the Complex Theory as a reductionist explanation of reasons of partiality, one might nevertheless argue that there are reasons to prefer a nonreductionist explanation of reasons of partiality. In the next section, I show that the most promising direct arguments for nonreductionism are unconvincing; this sets the stage for my defense of the Complex Theory on the grounds that it yields greater explanatory benefits than nonreductionist explanations of reasons of partiality.

4 The Fundamentality Claim and Nonreductionism

The core of the nonreductionist approach to the puzzle of partiality is the claim that special relationships are *fundamental* in explaining reasons of partiality. Recall that this is the claim that reasons of partiality can be wholly explained in terms of facts about the existence of special relationships: the final value of such relationships generates reasons of partiality. One needs to cite no further normative facts in order to explain reasons of partiality.

What direct arguments are there for the nonreductionist position? Here I consider what I take to be the most promising argument for non-reductionism: this is the claim that our common sense understanding of such reasons views their normative force as deriving simply from facts about the existence of special relationships.

R. Jay Wallace presents an argument for this claim at the level of obligations: First, he notes that in justifying our behavior to others, we need only cite the facts of our relationship in order to justify certain things that we must do for our loved ones. For example, one might legitimately explain the cancellation of one's appearance at an upcoming conference simply by explaining that one's mother is in the hospital. This serves to articulate one's obligation to go to the hospital to be with one's mother. Wallace then notes that "there is nothing to justify the

obligations that I articulate in these cases beyond the fact that I have a relationship of one of these kinds with someone.”³⁶

Wallace’s description is convincing: we often do cite our special relationships to justify our partiality. What’s more, while Wallace’s example applies only to obligations within special relationships, I think that this practice of justification applies more generally: quite often, we cite our special relationships as providing us with reasons to be partial, in addition to requirements or obligations. Suppose that I am trying to decide on what to do with my day when my friend Henry calls me to tell me that he’s in town and visiting for the day only. If someone were to ask me why I’d decide to spend time with Henry rather than going to the local soup kitchen, I might simply say that Henry is my friend. This is usually enough to provide justification for my action.

Wallace’s argument is that this practice of citing our special relationships as a means of justifying partiality provides us with the “normative appearance” that special relationships in and of themselves *do* provide independent justification for partiality. Absent any reason to reject this picture, Wallace argues that we should therefore opt for the nonreductionist picture, according to which relationships themselves are finally valuable, and thereby independently provide us with reasons to be partial.³⁷

I think that Wallace is correct that in many conversational contexts, a justification of this sort will suffice. However, I don’t think that this directly settles the matter of whether or not relationships themselves are normatively fundamental. After all, couldn’t it be the case that appealing to my relationships serves as a shorthand for appealing to the independent reasons and values which my relationships facilitates or instantiates?

Wallace anticipates this response; he admits that it is possible to adopt a view according to which, “referring to the nature of your relationship to the person for whose sake you are acting can be a convenient way of conveying to your interlocutor information about the real

³⁶Wallace, 2012, p. 184.

³⁷*ibid.*, p. 184. Scheffler makes a similar argument in Scheffler, 1997, pp. 195-196.

normative basis of the obligations you take yourself to have.”³⁸ However, he suggests that it doesn’t seem to gel with what he refers to as “normative appearances.”³⁹ Common sense seems to indicate that appealing to the existence of one’s relationship is all that is necessary to provide justification. Therefore, unless there is compelling reason to opt for the reductionist position, Wallace claims that we should instead opt for nonreductionism.

In response to Wallace, I think it’s far from clear that the “normative appearances” support nonreductionism. It’s not obvious that a strategy of citing the fact of one’s relationship as justification for partiality will work in *all* conversational contexts: Imagine a case in which one is with one’s therapist, discussing one’s recent trip to the hospital to visit one’s mother. The therapist might ask the further question of *why* one took oneself to have such an obligation: what is it about one’s relationship with one’s mother that explains the existence of such an obligation? In this case, simply repeating the claim that she is one’s mother wouldn’t seem to suffice. Perhaps the fact that in many contexts such an explanation will suffice relies on the assumption that, generally speaking, such relationships facilitate or instantiate these independent values. What is at issue with the therapist is the question of whether or not this is true in one’s own *particular* case. In this context, mentioning the fact that one is in such a relationship does little to no justificatory work. It’s likely that, at the therapist’s prompting, one would then go on to describe one’s relationship with one’s mother; I’d wager that this description would make reference to many of the qualities of relationships in virtue of which they facilitate or instantiate the independent values I’ve identified above.

I take the above to show that it is at least as plausible on the basis of our conversational practices that our reasons of partiality issue from an independent set of values that special relationships facilitate or instantiate. Appealing to the conversational practice of claiming that one’s relationship warrants partiality doesn’t settle the matter of whether or not such relationships are normatively fundamental. Thus one needs to appeal to some independent set of considerations in order to settle the issue.

³⁸Wallace, 2012, p. 185.

³⁹Ibid., p. 185.

Perhaps one might attempt to offer a direct counterexample to the claim that the normative authority of reasons of partiality derives from a set of independent reasons and values that special relationships facilitate or instantiate. What's needed is an example of a relationship in which no independent goods would be facilitated or instantiated. If such a relationship alone nevertheless generated reasons of partiality, then this would constitute an example that would show that relationships really are normatively fundamental. This would amount to a sort of Moorean isolation test of personal relationships: in isolating the relationships themselves from any of their connections to other goods, we might determine whether the bare fact of the relationships in question might seem to present us with reasons of partiality.⁴⁰

Barring examples involving strange sci-fi scenarios it is very difficult to imagine how we could even contemplate such a case. The fact is that our personal relationships are constituted by their interactions with other objects; on most views, personal relationships consist in histories of interaction between two particular individuals. As such, our relationships are embedded in our lives and our histories to a point that, in simply trying to isolate the fact of the relationship itself from any particular relata, one loses any grip on what it is that one is even talking about. If this is true, then it may be the case that it is not possible to conclusively, directly settle the matter between nonreductionists and reductionists about reasons of partiality.⁴¹

In this section, I've undermined what I take to be the strongest direct support for the claim that special relationships are normatively fundamental. I've argued instead that it is at least as plausible that special relationships are normatively derivative: our reasons of partiality within such relationships can be explained in virtue of the set of independent values and reasons which such relationships facilitate or instantiate. On these grounds, there is no reason to favor nonre-

⁴⁰Note that a stronger argument is required here than would be required to show that the Complex Theory is incorrect as a reductionist explanation of reasons of partiality; in order to show that the Complex Theory is false, one would need to show that there exist some reasons of partiality that cannot be explained by reference to the value of personal projects, the value of individuals, or more general moral obligations. (That said, I believe that no such reasons of partiality exist, and that the Complex Theory is correct.) What is the issue here is not whether the Complex Theory is the correct reductionist account, but rather whether there are reasons to prefer nonreductionism to *any* reductionist explanation of reasons of partiality.

⁴¹Simon Keller explores several more arguments against the claim that special relationships are intrinsically valuable in this sense in Keller, 2013, pp. 56-64.

ductionism as compared to the hybrid theory.

There is, however, an indirect means of settling the question: we might see which theory proves more fruitful in explaining certain aspects of our evaluative practice. It seems to me the Complex Theory has important ramifications for explaining the evaluations both of classes of relationships and of particular relationships. In particular, it allows us to answer a set of questions surrounding the justification of partiality in these individual cases which nonreductionists have a difficult time answering. I turn to this topic below.

5 Explanatory Benefits

Some of our relationships warrant our partiality; we seem justified in responding to reasons of partiality within them. Such relationships might uncontroversially include: what Aristotle called friendships of character; stable and supportive romantic relationships between equal partners; familial bonds between parents and children; and pedagogical relationships between teachers and students. Participants in each of these types of relationship treat these relationships as sources of reasons to act in certain ways within the context of the relationship in question and doing so seems appropriate upon reflection to (almost) everyone. However, there also seems to be a class of personal relationships that do not warrant such reason-responsiveness, even if they might seem to present participants within those relationships with reasons to act in certain ways. Examples might include *folies à deux*, abusive relationships, relationships founded upon deception, and so on. Even if these relationships might seem to present their participants with reasons to be partial, it should be clear that these reasons have no normative force.

What explains the difference between these two sorts of relationships? In other words, how might we explain the fact that some relationships do seem to present us with reasons to be partial to the individual with whom we share the relationship (and to respond to reasons of partiality therein) whereas others do not? In a recent paper, Niko Kolodny has raised this question in an especially acute manner:

Imagine the exhaustive List of partiality principles, of all of the true normative claims of the form:

one has reason for parental partiality toward one's children,
one has reason for spousal partiality toward one's spouse,
and so on. We need not imagine the List fully enumerated. It is enough to imagine it including relatively uncontroversial cases, like parental and spousal partiality, and excluding relatively uncontroversial cases, like prison-gang and blood-type partiality. Our challenge is then to explain the List: to explain why all and only the partiality principles that it contains are true.⁴²

The challenge, then, is to provide some principled means of explaining why certain of our relationships—those relationships on the List—warrant partiality while those not on the list do not.

I contend that, by accepting the Complex Theory, one will be able to provide a better explanation of the List than one would if one were to accept a nonreductionist account of reasons of partiality. This provides indirect, although perhaps not conclusive, evidence for the former view. To show this, I'll first lay out such an explanation, then I'll compare it to the explanation offered by Kolodny on behalf of nonreductionists.

On my view, what explains the List is simply the fact that some relationships do facilitate or instantiate a set of independent values, whereas others do not. Those relationships which constitute or involve ground projects, contribute to the value of the individual participants, or exemplify moral virtues of trust, care, reciprocity or gratitude will warrant our partiality, insofar as these independent values provide reasons of partiality to participants in those relationships. This explains why the set of partiality principles populating the List are true. Those relationships which do not facilitate or instantiate any such values or reasons, or relationships in which these values are trumped by negative considerations, are relationships which do not warrant our partiality. They do not warrant a corresponding partiality principle on the List. This explanation of the List is relatively straightforward, and it involves the introduction of no new theoretical resources.

What options for explanation of the List are open to the nonreductionist? One option is

⁴²Kolodny, 2010, pp. 170-171.

simply to maintain that some relationships do warrant our partiality, whereas others do not, dependent upon whether those relationships do or do not generate reasons. However, this isn't much of an explanation at all: it simply replaces the problem of explaining the list with another problem of explaining how we might determine which relationships generate such reasons.

Nico Kolodny attempts to do better than this on the part of the nonreductionist: in order to explain the list Kolodny appeals to the phenomenon of *resonance*. According to Kolodny, resonance is an instance where “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.”⁴³ To make the general phenomenon clearer, I'll illustrate with the example of personal projects. Suppose that I have a long history of trying to catalog each and every species of ant in the Philippines. (Thousands, at last count.) Given that, from an impartial perspective, this is valuable as an instance of scientific inquiry, anyone might have reasons to respect it, not to interfere, etc. But given my own history of working on the project—and the fact that it is one of my ground projects—this end has an importance for me that goes beyond such neutral reasons: in my commitment to the project I respond to a distinctive class of project-dependent reasons that the project grounds. According to Kolodny, the agent-relative value that my project has for me resonates with the agent-neutral value that it has for everyone; my reasons to respond to the project, although they go beyond what most other individuals without such a history might take to be their reasons, are somehow similar. Now, compare this case with one in which I have a long history of trying to count every blade of grass on the lawn outside the philosophy department. (Millions, at last count.) Presumably no one has any good agent-neutral reasons to engage in attempting to carry out such a project. So, although I take myself to have reasons to count each and every blade of grass, the importance of this project does not resonate with any agent-neutral goods.

Kolodny's suggestion is that the phenomenon of resonance can provide an explanation of

⁴³Kolodny, 2010, p. 181.

the List: namely, any personal relationship in which an individual's concern for the final value of the relationship resonates with some other set of values or reasons will be a relationship that warrants partiality. To elaborate, let's begin with the nonreductionist suggestion that a personal relationship, which consists of a history of discrete shared encounters, will generate a set of agent-relative reasons for an individual to react to that relationship in ways suitable to the relationship. From an impartial perspective, we might understand each of these discrete shared encounters as (potentially) generating a set of reasons to respond for *any* individual: a kindness warrants one's gratitude, a promise should be kept, an individual's need should be provided for. Kolodny's suggestion is that, in cases where a relationship justifies partiality, the reasons of partiality generated by a relationship will resonate with the agent-neutral reasons generated by each of the discrete encounters. In cases where each of the discrete encounters generate no agent-neutral reasons, then the participant's reasons do not resonate with anything, and this explains why that relationship does not belong on the List.

The problem for Kolodny is that it is very difficult to understand the relationship of resonance, except as an instance of facilitation or instantiation. What I mean by this is that the most natural way to understand how reasons generated by the final value of relationships are similar in kind to reasons generated by independent values would be in terms of the facilitation or instantiation of these values. Consider the example of the project again: my reason to continue cataloging bugs instantiates the good of knowledge and facilitates scientific inquiry. Being partial in my special relationships—and responding to reasons of partiality therein—instantiates my ground projects and facilitates more general moral values. This seems to be the most natural means of understanding what it is for reasons of partiality to “resonate” with independent goods. Opting for this understanding of resonance gives us a clear understanding of why such instances of resonance would explain those partiality principles which are on the List: namely, it gives us an explanation identical to the reductionist explanation I defended above.

Kolodny is quick to deny this possibility, insisting that resonance is not an instance of facilitation. But it's not clear what the relationship is meant to consist in, or what explains why

resonance is the determining factor for inclusion on the List. This leaves him with the unwelcome conclusion that “a deeper explanation of resonance is elusive.”⁴⁴ Kolodny is therefore left with an explanation that either reduces to the explanation I offered above, or results in the introduction of an unexplained and mysterious relationship of “resonance.”

Adopting the Complex Theory offers a better explanation of why certain of our relationships justify our partiality, whereas others do not. In arguing for this, I’ve considered only one nonreductionist explanation—Kolodny’s—and have argued that it either reduces to my own explanation, or involves the introduction of additional (and unrequired) theoretical posits. It is possible that a better explanation might be forthcoming. However, in the mean time, I suggest that this provides at least some indirect evidence that the reasons of partiality can be explained in virtue of a set of independent values and reasons.

6 Conclusion

I set out to discuss two strategies for responding to the puzzle of partiality: a nonreductionist approach, according to which special relationships are normatively fundamental, and a reductionist approach, according to which special relationships are normatively derivative. I argued for a version of the latter—the Complex Theory—according to which reasons of partiality can be wholly explained in terms of the value of personal projects, the value of individuals, and moral values of trust, care, reciprocity, and gratitude. I also aimed to undermine the main argument for nonreductionism—that such an account is supported by common sense—and showed how the Complex Theory can readily explain which relationships in particular warrant partiality. Given the difficulties for nonreductionists in explaining this phenomenon, I argued that this provided indirect support for the Complex Theory.

I’ll conclude by highlighting what I take to be three major takeaway lessons about partiality. First, if the Complex Theory is correct, then perhaps asking general questions about partiality can only get us so far. Reasons of partiality are a heterogenous bunch, grounded in a number of

⁴⁴Kolodny, 2010, p. 181.

different values that significant relationships facilitate and instantiate. Rather than reflecting on the common character of these reasons, the Complex Theory pushes us to look more carefully at the range of values that significant relationships facilitate and instantiate. It encourages us to better understand: why projects might be ethically significant and how relationships constitute or facilitate individual or joint projects; whether and how certain kinds of relationships benefit the individuals who participate in them; and the structure of expectations and requirements that form within the context of continued and repeated interactions over time. This approach would also allow us to raise questions about how such values might conflict, both with each other and with the demands of impartial morality. It is quite often argued that our special relationships can be morally dangerous.⁴⁵ Adopting the Complex Theory leads us to develop a fine-grained account of how this might (or might not) be the case: it allows us to concentrate on whether the value of ground projects or the values of trust and loyalty might pull against impartial moral values.

The second lesson is that what ultimately explains partiality is not some special class of personal relationships, but rather facts about values that are potentially realizable in many kinds of relationships. This paves the way for the examination of other instances of partiality that might occur outside of personal relationships. Take, for example, one's relationship with a work of art to which one is partial. Can such partiality be accommodated as reasonable, or is it instead only a manifestation of personal preference for which no justification can be given? The Complex Theory gives us a means of answering this question by guiding us towards the particular values that such relationships instantiate or facilitate. I think that there is reason to believe that such relationships facilitate and instantiate a similar set of values as do personal relationships—and this fact has a role to play in justifying partiality to those artworks with which one has such relationships.⁴⁶ A similar approach might be applied to relationships with one's country or with one's personal ideals. Accepting the reductionist approach embodied by

⁴⁵Wolf, 1992, pp. 254-256; Cocking and Kennett, 2000; Nehamas, 2010.

⁴⁶I develop this point in much greater detail in the later chapters of my dissertation, *Art, Value, and Relationships of Partiality*.

the Complex Theory can therefore give us a foothold in explaining whether or not partiality is warranted in such non-central cases.

The final lesson is one that I offer to nonreductionists in particular: Perhaps the nonreductionist might take on board everything that I've said about how personal relationships facilitate and instantiate a set of independent values—and thereby accept that we can explain *some but not all* reasons of partiality by reference to these goods—while maintaining that the final value of special relationships nevertheless generates the remainder. Perhaps a case could be made for this position. The nonreductionist will also be quick to point out that I haven't provided knock-down argument against nonreductionism here; my argument doesn't conclusively show that *none* of our reasons of partiality are grounded in the non-derivative final value of relationships. The general lesson is that such a position might lead one to overstate the similarities of special relationships and to underestimate the extent to which the value of such relationships can be explained by reference to other, more basic values; the nonreductionist should be careful not to obscure either the diversity of relationships of partiality or the important connections that such relationships bear to other dimensions of value within our lives—a point which, I hope, my discussion of reasons of partiality makes clear.

References

- Calhoun, Cheshire (2009). "What Good is Commitment?" In: *Ethics* 119 (4), 613–641.
- Chang, R. E. (2001). "Value Pluralism". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Ed. by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes. Oxford: Pergamon, pp. 16139–16145.
- Cocking, Dean and Jeanette Kennett (2000). "Friendship and Moral Danger". In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 97 (5), pp. 278–296.
- Cooper, John M. (1977). "Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship". In: *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (4), 619–648.
- Frankfurt, Harry G (2004). *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Helm, Bennett W. (2010). *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Social Nature of Persons*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hurka, Thomas (2010). *The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters*. Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, Frank (1991). "Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection". In: *Ethics* 101 (3), 461–482.
- Jeske, Diane (2008). *Rationality and Moral Theory: How Intimacy Generates Reasons*. New York: Routledge.
- Keller, Simon (2013). *Partiality*. Princeton University Press. 178 pp.

- Kolodny, Niko (2003). "Love as Valuing a Relationship". In: *The Philosophical Review* 112 (2), pp. 135–189.
- (2010). "Which Relationships Justify Partiality? General Considerations and Problem Cases". English. In: *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships, and the Wider World*. Ed. by John Cottingham and Brian Feltham. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 169–193.
- Murdoch, Iris (1970). *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nehamas, Alexander (2010). "The Good of Friendship". In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110 (3pt3), 267–294.
- Ross, W. D (1930). *The Right and the Good*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Scanlon, T. M. (1998). *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap.
- Scheffler, Samuel (1997). "Relationships and Responsibilities". In: *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 26 (3), pp. 189–209.
- (2006). "Projects, Relationships, and Reasons". en. In: *Reason And Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*. Ed. by Michael Smith et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 247–269.
- (2010). "Morality and Reasonable Partiality". In: *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships, and the Wider World*. Ed. by Brian Feltham and John Cottingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 98–130.
- Setiya, Kieran (2014). "Love and the Value of a Life". In: *Philosophical Review* 123 (3), 251–280.
- Stroud, Sarah (2006). "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship". In: *Ethics* 116 (3), 498–524.
- (2010). "Permissible Partiality, Projects, and Plural Agency". In: *Partiality and Impartiality: Morality, Special Relationships, and the Wider World*. Ed. by Brian Feltham and John Cottingham. Oup Oxford.
- Velleman, David J. (1999). "Love as a Moral Emotion". In: *Ethics* 109 (2), pp. 338–374.
- Wallace, R. Jay (2012). "Duties of Love". en. In: *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 86 (1), 175–198.
- Williams, Bernard (1981). "Persons, Character and Morality". In: *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–19.
- Wolf, Susan (1992). "Morality and Partiality". In: *Philosophical Perspectives* 6, 243–259.
- Wolf, Susan et al. (2012). *Meaning in Life and Why It Matters*. English. Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press. 168 pp.