Blackwell
Companions to
Philosophy

A Companion to Applied Ethics

Edited by
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and
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Blackwell
Publishing

38

Personal Relationships

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As a concern in moral philosophy or the theory of value, personal relationships generally refer to certain categories of human relationship – friendship, familial relationships, romantic love. Familial relationships are, in turn, generally understood to encompass four subtypes: parent/child, child/parent, spouse, and sibling. Let me make explicit that, contrary to the reigning paradigms of these relationships, friendships can be between persons of different sexes, romantic love can take place between persons of the same sex, and families can be adoptive. "Spouse" is, in this chapter, an ambiguous category, as some religious groups recognize same-sex marriages, and some political entities recognize same-sex unions in a form that encompasses much of what people ordinarily mean by "spouse": spousal benefits, visitation rights during hospitalization, the ability to adopt children together, and so on. Let us call this the "categorial" sense of "personal relationship." Personal relationships differ in voluntariness of formation, with friendships, romantic loves, and spousal relations at the voluntary end, child–parent and sibling at the non-voluntary end, and parent–child somewhere in between. (We may choose to have a child, but not a particular child.) Social and legal conventions govern both ease and form of voluntariness of both entry and exit from different sorts of personal relationships. Nevertheless, no personal relationship takes the form of a *pure* contractual relation in which everything done for and to the other is explicitly agreed upon beforehand.

But "personal relationship" can also refer to the quality of a specific relationship, whether it actually involves deep concern, involvement, commitment, care, loyalty, intimacy, and other virtues, sentiments, and qualities taken to characterize worthy instances of personal relationships in the categorial sense. Let us call this the "quality" sense of "personal relationship." The categorial and the quality senses can differ because some instances of categorial personal relationships lack these qualities. Some parents, children, and siblings barely relate to their children, parents, and siblings. Some lovers and friends do little more than "go through the motions" with a particular lover or friend. The resultant relationship might in the "quality" sense not be thought a *personal* relationship at all, even if it still exemplifies a category of relationship we call "personal."

On the other side, instances of categorially non-personal relationships might possess characteristics of a personal relationship in the quality sense. For instance, a

doctor might develop a close personal attachment and involvement with a patient. Indeed, while categorially, "professional" and "personal" name two distinct types of relationship, what it is to be a *good* doctor, teacher, or social worker involves some such characteristics; for example, caring, knowing the other well, being strongly invested in the other's well-being. There would still be a point to the categorial distinction, however. To call the relationship "professional" would mean (in part) that the professional member of the pair would not cross certain personal boundaries, and would discourage the client from doing so. It would also mean that the dimension of the patient's well-being about which the professional cared was limited and specialized (the doctor for the patient's health, but not necessarily her career); it does not extend to the individual's well-being as a whole, as does the caring involved in friendship and parenthood. Finally, professional relationships lack the reciprocity of friendships; the caring is primarily in one direction, for example. (They do not, however, differ from parent-to-child relations in this regard.)

Personal and Impersonal within "Personal Relationships"

A relationship can be personal in the categorial but not the quality sense in a different, more subtle, way as well. In the quality sense, care, intimacy, commitment, and involvement are properly directed toward the other person in that person's particularity as a specific and perhaps unique individual. However, one can also become attached to someone not so much as a unique individual but as exemplifying a general category (LaFollete, 1996). I might want a friend, any friend, and Xiu-Sheng comes along at that moment. I form an attachment to Xiu-Sheng, but continue to view him as an interchangeable instance of the category "friend" rather than as a unique individual, the loss of whose friendship could not be compensated for by finding another friend. Here the other is seen in an "impersonal" rather than a "personal" way.

The extent to which elements of impersonality must be absent from worthy personal relationships (in the quality sense) can be overstated. In practice most relationships mix impersonal and personal elements. Even when one cares deeply about a friend as an individual, one may be glad that one has a friend *of this sort*, and not only this particular friend. Predominantly impersonal relationships, such as one typically has with salespersons, may develop personal elements arising from frequent contact.

Personal Relationships and Morality

Personal relationships raise several distinct moral issues. One is whether personal relations involve moral requirements. It may seem that they do not, since at least their ideal forms must be based on love and care for the other's well-being. To act from *obligation* to further the friend's well-being seems to be at odds with acting from *friendship*.

We have less difficulty acknowledging moral requirements in familial relationships. A (grown) child has obligations to care for her parents, based partly on

gratitude, and reciprocity, for having been taken care of. And parental obligations to look after their children rest, in part, on a social foundation. Society has a stake in seeing that the young and vulnerable are cared for. Indeed, if parents (or other relatives) are unable to do so, the state generally assumes this responsibility. Nevertheless, as in friendship, it is much preferable if the parent (or child) takes care of the child (or parent) out of love rather than out of obligation.

Although society lacks a similar stake in the maintenance of friendships, friendship also involves moral requirements. For example, a friend is morally bound, because of loyalty, to stand up for her friend in the face of unjust attack, even if by doing so she jeopardizes her acceptance in the group deriding her friend. One also has obligations of beneficence toward friends (children, parents, siblings, lovers), which prescribe many of the same actions as would characteristically be prompted by care and love. But it is a familiar and not shameful aspect of human nature that we sometimes lack the inclination to provide what our moral commitment to our friend bids us. The moral obligations of friendship can supply the missing motivation. Indeed, as John Deigh (1989: 112) points out, the trust that obtains between good friends rests in part on a recognition that the friend accepts the moral requirement to come through for her friend should she lack the direct inclination to do so. Moral requirement does not, in any case, function in personal relationships solely as a direct source of action but sometimes as a reminder of legitimate expectations that might elicit an attentiveness to the friend and the friendship that evoke caring motives.

Nevertheless, a personal relationship in which most of what is done for the other is prompted by obligation rather than love or care is a seriously problematic or deficient one. This is partly because obligations govern only a subset of the conduct appropriate to personal relations. A father who did for his child only what the duties of parenthood required him would be a poor father. Moreover, what is provided to the other directly from obligation – for example, comforting the depressed – has a different quality from the same act-category prompted by love. Loving comforting has a different quality from dutiful comforting. (Indeed, the dutiful comforter has a meta-requirement to keep the comforting from seeming to the child or friend too duty-driven.) Moral requirements are integral to personal relationships, but it is best if they are infrequently adverted to directly.

Ideal Friendship and Morally Good Character

Morality is thought to bear on personal relationships in another way as well. Following Aristotle, some, like Hugh LaFollette (1996), argue that the best form of friendship is one between two people who love one another for their morally excellent (traits of) character. I agree that the best friendships involve loving the friend for her own sake. In this regard, Aristotle was correct to contrast such friendships with two lesser forms, which he called "advantage" and "pleasure" friendships, depending on the main bond cementing the friendship. These friendships seem of a lower order because once the parties stop deriving mutual pleasure, or benefit, from each other's company, they stop being friends. Aristotle might have mentioned a fourth type, based on a shared context of activity, such as two persons who are genuine friends in

their work setting, but if one changed jobs, their friendship would lose its foundation. While these are all less than ideal forms of friendship, John Cooper (1980) has argued that (at least for Aristotle) they do involve a genuine concern for the other's well-being; otherwise, although they would possess some sort of relationship, it would not be friendship.

Yet it seems unnecessarily narrow to construe "loving *X* for her own sake" as "loving *X* for the sake of her morally excellent traits." There are two reasons for this. When I love someone for her own sake, I love a totality that typically involves a good deal more than her morally good traits of character. (This does not mean, however, that when I love a person, I love *everything* about that person.) I care that she attains her deepest wishes, even if these are not morally exemplary (although perhaps they must meet some minimal moral standard to be worthy of an admirable form of friendship love).

Second, although a friend must find some qualities in her friend appealing, there are other sources of appeal than being morally admirable – being insightful about people, having an interesting aesthetic sensibility, or being clever, for example. More significant, the qualities that appeal in the other person may not be objectively valuable ones, as Aristotle's model requires, but rather good only in relation to the other person in question. For example, Keisha may make Ana feel comfortable, able to "be herself," and this may be the main source of Ana's attraction to Keisha. Perhaps, for whatever reason, both Keisha and Ana feel uncomfortable with most other people. Their comfort with each other may have no clear explanation. Yet it exists, and is a basis for a deep and sustaining friendship, in which each comes to love the other for her own sake; yet that foundation has little to do with inherently morally admirable characteristics.

Perhaps there is something especially worthy, Aristotelianly, in a friendship of two morally exemplary individuals who appreciate each other's moral excellence. But it overplays the moral dimension of friendship not to allow that excellent and admirable friendships involve the friends loving each other for their own sake, without either of them being particularly morally exemplary in any general way, and without their moral traits playing such a central or defining role in their friendship.

Can Immoral People be Friends?

Are only morally good (not necessarily morally exemplary) people capable of establishing and maintaining close personal relationships, as LaFollette claims and Aristotle implies? This seems too restrictive. People's caring, and their moral energies more generally, can be "specialized." Just as some people can show generosity, loyalty, attentiveness, delight in the happiness of their children, or their partners, but be generally selfish and ungenerous (i.e. toward most other persons), so can some persons do the same with friends, or some particular friends. To be sure, the ability to care for even one individual other than oneself is lacking in a total psychopath. In that sense a minimal level of moral substance is required for any friendship. But even when friendships are morally good ones, at least in the sense of exemplifying certain virtues, that moral goodness need not carry very far over into

the friend's character as a whole. It may or may not be an unfortunate fact about human beings that they are capable of moral specialization, compartmentalization (Badhwar, 1993: 12) and moral inconsistency, but it is a fact.

Can a Friendless Person Lead a Satisfying and Moral Life?

Is it a moral deficiency not to have any personal relationships in the quality sense (for example, not to be personally close to members of one's family, nor to have more than limited and superficial friendships)? It may be. Someone may simply be too selfish to be willing to expend energy attending to the well-being of any other person. But there may be other reasons much less connected to one's moral character for being incapable of friendship. One may find intimacy threatening, or otherwise emotionally difficult to manage. Many ways of exhibiting a concern for the welfare of others – through one's occupation, or civic or community involvement – do not require personal relationships in the quality sense. An individual can even lead a morally exemplary life while having no such personal relationships.

Moreover, a life without such personal relationships need not render an individual unhappy. Many forms of engagement with the world (as above) are not only worthy, even morally worthy, but can also be sources of deep satisfaction. Nevertheless, a life without personal relationships in the quality sense is a life that lacks some of life's most precious goods; and it would certainly be wrong to assume that the lives of everyone who lacked such relationships contained other forms of deep satisfaction that rendered their lives happy and satisfying ones. Nevertheless, given the diversity of human psychology with regard to friendship, Aristotle overstates when he says, "No one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods" (Aristotle, 1985: VIII, I, 207).

Although friendships involve a deeper cherishing of the other for her own sake than do what I have acknowledged as "lesser" forms of friendship, the importance of this value hierarchy should not be overstated. Ideal forms of friendship should not be overvalued. Friendships involve a range of human satisfactions largely unconnected with the qualities that render them morally worthy – the enjoyment of one another's company, and the ability to be open and share one's concerns with the other, for example. In this regard it seems wrong to put advantage and pleasure friendships on the same level, as Aristotle appears to do. The friends' enjoyment of one another is much more central to friendship than is mutual benefit with regard to goods external to friendship itself.

Friendship and the Demands of Impartiality

I have been cautioning against an over-moralized understanding of friendship and its value, one which can stem from several distinct sources. But there is another vantage point, within both philosophy and certain religious traditions, which lodges precisely the opposite complaint – that friendship stands in opposition to morality. Mo Tzu (fourth century BC), the Chinese philosopher who challenged the Confucian

emphasis on the moral significance of particular relationships, and Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) regarded universal love as the highest form of human love and found romantic and philial (friendship) love to be deficient in being particularistic. For Kierkegaard (in *Works of Love*, 1962), Christianity bequeathed to the world the idea of universal love of neighbor, and has rightly demoted all forms of "preferential love." (Kierkegaard's view is inextricably religious, and it is unclear whether he unequivocally regarded love of neighbor as *morally* superior, especially in light of his earlier work *Fear and Trembling*, in which the moral is consigned a distinctly lower status than the religious.)

Kierkegaard: Universal Love and Unconditional Love

Kierkegaard's view is weakened by his regarding love of neighbor as the only form of love that is genuinely directed toward the good of the other for her own sake. He sees all friendship and sexual love as forms of self-love (1962: 65), involving "no ethical task" (1962: 64). Kierkegaard is distinctly Kantian in identifying ethical task with obligation. He is wrong to regard friendship and love as devoid of obligation, and as mere forms of self-love. The attainment of a satisfying friendship is, in part, a matter of good fortune (as Kierkegaard agrees with the figure he calls the "poet" in claiming). However, attending to the other (in both the sense of seeing the other clearly and in taking care of the other when appropriate), being loyal, appropriately trusting, caring for her for her own sake, and other elements of friendship are "ethical tasks" essential to such a friendship. Indeed a seeming paradox of friendship and other love relationships is that in order for them to provide the deepest forms of human satisfaction for the agent-friend, she must generally not directly seek the good of friendship but act, on at least some occasions, selflessly on behalf of her friend. That is, it is required by the concern for the other's well-being that a friend must be willing to place the friend's good above (the good of) preserving the relationship itself, in the infrequent situation when the two diverge (for example, when it is to the friend's benefit to take a job in another country where maintaining frequent and intimate contact will be difficult). Only by acting selflessly for the good of the other can one achieve the personal satisfaction of friendship of the highest order. So, contrary to Kierkegaard, friendship (in its highest forms) does involve selfless love.

Kierkegaard regards love of neighbor – a universal love – as the only form of love that is unconditional, independent of the personal qualities of the beloved. Ironically, a more common model of unconditional, feature-independent, love in the Western tradition is that of parents for children. The good parent loves the child unconditionally, independent of what the child is like. Romantic and friendship love contrast, in this respect, in being in some way grounded in specific features of the other. In expressing parental love, and in caring for the child, the parent must very much take the child's particularity into account. A child prone to paralyzing self-doubt that expresses itself in lashing out at the parent is loved no less than the confident, easy-going child, but the former must be steered toward developing his inner resources to cope with his doubts. Parental love is thus particularized yet

unconditional, while for Kierkegaard love of neighbor is universal and unconditional.

Secular Western philosophical traditions such as Kantianism and utilitarianism or consequentialism have emphasized the need for a universal, impersonal, or impartial point of view, a vantage point from which particularistic relationships may seem ethically defective. Why should we prefer the welfare of our less needy friend, or child, to that of a needier stranger? Much current ethical theory wrestles with this concern. Roughly, two distinct forms of challenge to personal relationships emerge from the impartialist encounter with personal relationships. One is that obligations to human beings *qua* human beings, independent of any particular relationship in which they may stand to us, must be given their due and sometimes allowed to override preferences for, and even obligations toward, friends and other loved ones. This approach does not deny obligations and other forms of moral pull exerted by personal relationships, but avers that more universal moral claims may override them, perhaps more often than common sense would seem to sanction. (This view often operates in tandem with the consideration that the moral requirements and permissions of personal relationships themselves have an impartial dimension, in that they license preferential beneficence toward friends and family on the part of *anyone* standing in that relationship.)

Challenging the Legitimacy of Personal Relationships

The second approach lodges a full-scale challenge to personal relationships as a form of moral relationship, although the challenge is sometimes stated in what seems a more limited way: why should we prefer (in our resources, attention, and beneficence) our friends, lovers, and family members over other human beings? The framing of the question implies that our conception of friendship, parenthood, and so on is intelligible *without* those relationships exerting distinct moral pull on the parties to them.

But a relationship between two parties (alleged to be friends) in which one party is constantly at the ready to provide assistance and attention to someone who might, in the moment or in the long term, seem to need it more than the "friend" would not be what we think of as a friendship. And someone who had begotten a child but then placed the child in the care of a neighbor, the better to be able to be open to occasions in which other children (in the neighborhood, or elsewhere in the world) could gain more benefit from his care than his offspring would count as the child's "parent" in only a biological sense.

As James Rachels says, in the process of lodging this second form of challenge to personal relationships, "All these relationships... seem to include, as part of their very nature, special obligations" (Rachels in Graham and LaFollette, 1989: 47). To challenge these special obligations is to challenge the moral legitimacy of these relationships themselves. It is to question whether it is actually morally legitimate to *have* friends, lovers, or children, or whether, instead, one should refrain from all such relationships, the better to be able to fulfill one's obligations to humanity. On this scheme, it might turn out, as Rachels proposes in a utopian thought experi-

ment, that if one happened to give birth to a child, one might be "assigned" this child to care for, on the grounds that doing so would turn out to be the best arrangement for ensuring that child's care (Graham and LaFollette, 1989: 56). Many children might thereby become their birth parents' wards; but the idea of a parent, with its implication of a rich, deep, many-faceted emotional and moral relationship will have disappeared.

Similarly one could have friend-like connections to other persons. And one might aid them just because one is in the best position to do so, just as, in Peter Singer's (1972) famous example, one would have to wade into a pond to save a drowning child just because one happened to be the person passing by when the child fell into the pond. What one could not do is to adopt the sense of morally charged commitment, bound up with a range of emotions and attachments, that is integral to what we mean by "friendship." This is not to clinch an argument against the impartialist who fully throws into question obligations or commitments of personal relationship. But it is to make clear what it at stake in that challenge.

Doubts that we should take such a drastic path come from several quarters. Lawrence Thomas (1989) gives philosophical shape to empirical evidence that we learn how to care for others, and to be responsive to moral considerations, in intimate personal relationships, especially with one's parents, but with one's friends as well. A child brought up without the particularistic, unconditional love of parents is much more likely to be unable to care about others, to lack both the psychological security to develop a capacity to care and to lack models of how to do so. And it turns out that an inability to care about persons correlates with an incapacity to recognize and be moved by moral demands.

In addition, common observation suggests that people who are responsive to the claims of humanity as such in the form of the plight of unknown strangers – for example, flood or famine victims, or homeless persons in their communities – are no less likely to have than to lack morally committed personal relationships. Actual responsiveness to the claims of distant others has not been shown to correlate with the lack of personal moral involvements, and it is not likely to be.

The Real Moral Conflict between Impartiality and Personal Relationships

It is worth nothing, furthermore, that ordinary moral thought does indeed recognize a tension between a moral demand for impartiality and the claims of personal relationship. For example, an individual sitting on a hiring committee for a job for which a friend applies is morally bound to give no preference to his friend; if he feels unable to manage that impartiality, he is expected to recuse himself. That there are certain contexts in which modern states under the rule of law demand that preferences for friends and loved ones be put aside makes it clear that ordinary moral thought does not regard such a demand as a standing requirement applicable at every moment of a person's life.

Nevertheless, none of these arguments, of course, shows that in some fashion morality does not take the form of a universalist or impartialist demand that we

abandon the moral commitments of personal relationships – that we abandon such relationships in the forms that we know them – because of their partialist challenge. But they do throw into some question whether the claims of humanity in general will actually be well served by such a drastic move. Nor do they engage with the counter-argument that, even if there is some tension between impartiality and particular relationships, that conflict should be, at least often, resolved in favor of the latter.

In this regard it is striking that most contemporary adherents of Kantianism and consequentialism do not follow Rachels's implied path in throwing personal relationships, with their moral claims, into question. Rather, substantial creative energies have gone into showing that the impartial point of view demanded by morality is perfectly consistent with all of what we pre-theoretically regard as valuable and morally significant in personal relationships. Whether these attempts at reconciliation are ultimately successful, they greatly mute the challenge that impartiality seemed to pose to personal relationships. They imply little of practical significance, and I will not discuss them further.

Misunderstanding the Preferences in Personal Relationships

The first, more modest, charge from the impartialist against personal relationships – that we use the demands of personal relationships to inappropriately license unchecked resource allocation especially to our children, and thereby defend against the legitimate claims of humanity – is a more practically serious one. Upper middle-class Americans (and perhaps their counterparts elsewhere) spend vast sums for their children on computers, cars, clothes, and education supplements to enhance their grades and performance on tests to advantage them in the next phase of educational selection. In the face of the grinding poverty of many of the world's inhabitants, and the diminished life prospects of many of their fellow American citizens, this is not a morally acceptable arrangement. Rachels proposes a plausible modest moral principle – that we should not prefer a trivial item for our children when other children lack necessities – yet it is one whose acceptance (even granting the inevitable dispute over what counts as "trivial" and "necessary") would impinge substantially on what privileged Americans regard as appropriate to provide for their children.

Rachels's argument for this conclusion implies (as mentioned earlier) that the particularistic demands of personal relationships are morally questionable. But the conclusion does not require this stance. It is only the vast and unjust inequities in life chances among the world's populations that renders certain forms of familial preference problematic, not those preferences themselves. Those inequities are not, for the most part, the fault of well-to-do Americans (and their counterparts in Western Europe and elsewhere). The solution to these inequities cannot come primarily from the efforts of individuals moved by a moral argument about the claims of humanity, but from rearrangements in national and international priorities (debt relief, foreign aid, United Nations development efforts, and the like).

Still, individuals who live within unjust social arrangements may be subject to moral requirements that would not apply in just societies. Lavishing every advan-

tage on one's child may have to be morally constrained. Yet, in addition to recognizing such constraints, perhaps addressing the claims of humanity could be accomplished through considerations internal to those particularistic relationships. We want our children to grow up with good values, with a sense of what is important in life, and what makes life worth living. The acquisitiveness and consumerism that afflicts many young people from middle to upper middle-class families (and others as well) is, arguably, contrary to such goals. Children are well served by recognizing a range of values in their lives that would temper the focus on material objects, and by a recognition that some advantages in the race for acceptance to the most prestigious schools, colleges, and jobs are unfair and unworthy of them. They might well be better people and lead better lives if their parents succeed in teaching them that persons in comfortable circumstances must forgo certain wants so that, for example, other children do not go hungry – and if they construct a set of values for themselves in which such a personal limitation makes perfect sense. One is arguably a better parent if one promotes wider moral sympathies in one's children that provides them with moral resources to resist rampant consumerism and an ethic of success-above-all, independent of the fairness of the conditions in which such success is achieved.

In contrast to an argument that throws into question the moral legitimacy of personal attachments with their partialist implications, this argument brings a regard for the claims of humanity into those very relationships. Doing so would not forestall all conflict between particularistic and universalistic claims – between the claims of loved ones and strangers. These are endemic to a morally engaged existence. There is no formula for resolving them, although rules of thumb can be found. However, this conflict does not constitute a fundamental challenge of impartial morality to the morality of personal relationships. It accepts both as legitimate, and the corresponding relationships as typically giving life meaning.

Feminism and Personal Relationships

Feminist philosophers have put the dispute between impartial morality and personal relationships into historical perspective. The domain of personal relationships, and the domestic domain in particular, has not been accorded much attention or value in modern moral philosophy; Aristotle's valorizing of friendship thus stands as a striking exception in the history of Western philosophy. Feminists have seen a gender blindness or bias behind this value slant. Men have taken the public world of the state, law, markets, and other relations between non-intimates as the paradigm moral domain. This accounts for the centrality in moral philosophy of impartialism, impersonal rules and principles, and contract models of human relationship.

Contemporary feminists have taken the articulation of a morality appropriate to the various domains of personal relationship to be part of the task of recovering and valorizing women's lives and experience. But, although some feminists retain the identification of women with the domestic sphere, most feminists see the morality appropriate to that sphere as applicable to men as well. If personal relations are valuable, they are valuable to men as well as women.

Care Ethics and Personal Relationships

"Care ethics" has been the most prominent version of a general ethic growing from this feminist concern with the domain of personal relationships. Developed initially by Nel Noddings (1984), though influentially suggested by the psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982), care ethics emphasizes attentive concern to the individual other person in her particularity, rather than a focus on universal principles.

Care ethics is clearly suited to the domain of personal relationships, where particularized concern for the other's well-being is appropriate. However, it is of more general relevance, applicable at least to persons who might be unrelated and unconnected to the agent but who are encountered by her in the course of daily life. For example, caring might appropriately lead me to give money to a homeless person on the street and to do so in a manner that treats him with respect and dignity rather than perfunctorily or with a devaluing gesture. Responsiveness to encountered others in their particularity is part of care morality. So, while care is always particularistic, it does not require personal relationships for its appropriate operation.

Some feminist philosophers, such as Noddings, Virginia Held (1993), Jane Roland Martin (1992), and Sara Ruddick (1989), have suggested that the caring relations most paradigmatically evidenced in personal relationships can also serve as at least partial models for broader social institutions (schools, medical institutions, workplaces of many sorts).

The Limits of Care Ethics

At the same time some feminists have criticized care ethics for an uncritical valorizing of caring, and of personal relationships in general. Many personal relationships in the categorial sense are quite destructive to one or both individuals, or defective in some other way. Feminists have pointed especially to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse of women by men (and some have recognized that women can abuse other women, in lesbian love relationships, for example). Even in the absence of actual abuse, relationships in which one party has too much power over the other, and/or in which one party develops an unhealthy dependence, are instances of unhealthy and damaging personal relationships.

In addition, the two parties can develop forms of mutual dependence that degenerate into a sick symbiosis, destructive to both parties. In a different sort of case, two persons can develop a relationship which, while in some ways fulfilling to them, can become an "*egoisme à deux*" in which they support one another in callous treatment of others.

This critique goes beyond the mistreatment of women in personal relationships (even if structural features and gender expectations in many societies make women more likely to be victimized than men). It makes a larger point about personal relationships, often neglected in the philosophical literature. Personal relationships, in the categorial sense, are not automatically to be valued. The value of a particular instance depends very much on its particular quality. Some typical aspects of per-

sonal relationships – intimacy, attachment, dependency – can be used or exploited (consciously or not) by one party to victimize the other.

Some feminists have sought norms to protect personal relationships against such turns for the worse in concepts like justice, respect, reciprocity, and equality, some of which are associated more commonly with universalist or impartialist traditions. Marilyn Friedman (1993) has especially skillfully attempted to balance concerns of care and justice within a theory of personal relationships, especially friendship. Others, such as Noddings, have sought such resources from within care ethics itself, for example by building in a strong requirement of the virtues essential to recognizing the actual welfare of the other, not merely wanting whatever seems to the agent to be what the other needs.

Personal Relationships and Culture

However, there seems an unavoidable cultural relativity in assessing the value of personal relationships. For example, the Chinese Confucian tradition places a greater emphasis on honoring one's parents (and one's ancestors more generally) than does Western ethical thought. If a culture views familial relations as more important and valuable than friendship; or if cultures differ in the relative importance placed on adhering to the formal role requirements of a relationship as contrasted with having certain emotions appropriate to it, it is difficult to see how we could say that one culture is right and the other wrong. We may, however, be able to say that certain goods are not as fully recognized in one culture than another.

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