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# The Enmity Relationship as Justified Negative Partiality

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**Abstract.** Existing discussions of partiality have primarily examined special personal relationships between family, friends, or co-nationals. The negative analogue of such relationships – for example, the relationship of enmity – has, by contrast, been largely neglected. This chapter explores this adverse relation in more detail and considers the special reasons generated by it. We suggest that enmity can involve justified *negative partiality*, allowing members to give less consideration to each other's interests. We then consider whether the negative partiality of enmity can be justified through projects or the value inherent in the relationship, following two influential views about the justification of positive partiality. We argue that both accounts of partiality can be conceptually extended to the negative analogue, but doing so brings into focus the problems with such accounts of the grounds of partiality.

## 1. Introduction

All of us have positive personal relationships that we value, especially with our families, friends, or colleagues. We see these engagements as giving us reasons that others lack for certain actions and attitudes. We see ourselves as owing more to our children, spouses, and friends than to people who are completely unrelated to us. We feel joy and excitement when our intimates fare well and sadness and grief when they fare poorly. These instances of justified positive partiality – a special kind of concern in terms of both our actions and our attitudes – have received a great deal of attention in the literature because they challenge an impersonal understanding of morality, yet are considered a central part of human flourishing.<sup>1</sup>

However, we are also commonly caught up in personal relationships that are antagonistic and involve members who do not value each other. The roots of such relationships are as diverse as their positive counterparts, with origins ranging from competitive rivalries to histories of bullying or offence among colleagues or classmates. Enmity can emerge from disillusionment between romantic partners, estrangement among former friends, or mere passive-aggressive behaviour among neighbours.

In prior work (Lange 2020; Brandt 2020), we have extensively defended the claim that some negative personal relationships can give rise to justified negative partiality in the form of permissions or even obligations to discount the interests of people with whom we stand in such relationships. We here expand upon this work and explore both the nature of and the justification for the enmity relationship in particular as a species of the genus of negative personal relationships.

Our question in what follows will be: Can relationships of enmity justify negative partiality? And if so, how? We argue that some instances of enmity have distinctive features that represent the negative analogue of positive personal relationships between friends, giving rise to distinctive responses and attitudes on the part of their participants. These responses entail that enemies (at least in some cases)

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the literature on positive partiality, see Goodin (1985), especially Ch. 1; Feltham (2010); Keller (2013), Ch. 1; and Lange (2022), which provides a recent overview of the literature on the ethics of partiality.

have reason to give less consideration to each other's interests than to those of strangers (or than are called for by what we might call 'baseline' obligations).

Section 2 begins by exploring the general phenomenon of enmity, bringing it into sharper focus. We distinguish enmity from other adversarial personal relationships, such as those involving certain forms of wrongdoing or those that are exclusively one-directional in nature. We then argue that some enmities may justify participants in giving diminished consideration to each other's interests and that these responses may be conceptualised as a form of negative partiality. Section 3 begins to consider how negative partiality among enemies may be justified, drawing on the traditional project view of partiality. We argue that intuitions regarding the permissible conduct of enemies seem disconnected from projects and that for this reason, projects are not a plausible ground of the enmity relation in fact, even their role in grounding positive partiality is not quite what it has appeared to be. Section 4 discusses the influential view that the duties and permissions of special relationships are grounded by the intrinsic value of these relationships. Here too, we argue that what is valued (or disvalued) in enmity is disconnected from the special permissions that intuitively apply to this relation, and for this reason, we also reject value as the ground of enmity. These reflections are then deployed as a more general critique of value as a ground of partiality. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## **2. The Phenomenon of Enmity**

There is relative consensus about what behaviours and relationships exhibit partiality to our intimates. A friend might talk you through romantic troubles or give you a place to crash when you are down on your luck while having no disposition to confer these benefits on others. Parents invest in the raising and education of their children, make financial sacrifices to help them develop their talents, and commit to shaping their moral character. In turn, children frequently care for their elderly parents. In all such cases, greater weight is attached to the interests of one's intimate than those of a stranger. Unlike

the ethical aspect of friendships or family relationships, which, in most cases, paradigmatically contribute to our well-being, the goodness of our lives, or human flourishing, the arena of morality that concerns relationships between enemies may seem much less intuitive or well-grounded.<sup>2</sup>

Enmity, in our view, refers to a distinctive personal relationship that differs from other adversarial relationships. In a broad sense, negative personal relationships may include hindering and distrust, conflict and opposition, passionate hatred, and, in extreme cases, direct aggression, oppression, and harm. However, relationships characterised by these features do not necessarily amount to enmity relationships of the kind that we are focusing on here. In warfare, for example, states often declare each other enemies and seek to dehumanise each other's leaders or citizens. However, this act does not create intimate personal relationships, which are our primary focus here. Extreme cases of adversity may also be exclusively one-directional. These forms of victimisation may concern relationships in which a perpetrator seriously wrongs an innocent party; the relationship between master and slave is a paradigm example.<sup>3</sup> Other extreme one-directional cases concern unprovoked acts of aggression and harm that may justify acts of self-defence on behalf of the victim or a third party.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, a single party may assault, abuse, or exploit another. These cases of one-directional wrongdoing may also give rise to distinctive responses (as instances of victim-perpetrator relationships), but they differ from enmity in their lack of mutuality.

The distinctive relationship we set out to understand here is the conflict-laden relationship where *both* parties contribute to the discord between them. Intuitively, we believe that the reasons generated by relationships for whose negative polarity both individuals must accept accountability are distinctive in nature. By contrast, for example, we should expect victims to have the most forceful reasons for discounting the well-being of their abuser as they have (by stipulation) done nothing to contribute to the

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<sup>2</sup> See Raz (1989), pp. 14–15; Miller (2005), p. 65; and Mason (2000), p. 99. Other writers who emphasise 'human flourishing' are Seglow (2013), p. 4, and Scheffler (2001), p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> See Friedman (1991), who emphasises the importance of considering adversarial relationships within a full account of partiality.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the literature on self-defence, see Frowe and Parry (2021).

relationship; likewise, perpetrators have clear ethical reasons to make amends and reparations and to apologise. But when both parties have contributed to a negative relationship, the moral landscape is more open: should the relationship dissolve or continue? Is there *latitude* regarding the future of the relationship? Where two parties have voluntarily wronged or harmed each other, the moral requirements to apologise, make amends, and offer reparations may be sensitive to different considerations (e.g. the actions of the other party).

In characterising enmity as involving two parties who both contribute to a discordant relationship, we aim to pick out a class of relationship that includes the voluntarism and intimacy of friendship, yet inverts the value contained in positive relationships. There may, accordingly, be uses of the word ‘enemy’ that are not captured by our analysis (e.g. an individual A’s view of B as an ‘enemy’ in a case where B has no knowledge of A’s existence; B might reasonably respond, using ‘enemy’ in our sense, that A and B cannot be ‘enemies’ without B’s knowledge, no matter how things look to A<sup>5</sup>). However, in gesturing at a class of relationship that parallels friendship, we do not lay claim to *the* particular set of necessary and sufficient conditions that must be met in order for enmity to hold. Much as with discussions of friendship, there may be disagreement about the precise conditions that must hold for a relationship to qualify as enmity. For example, it may be unclear whether enemies must hold each other’s *character* in disregard, much as there are debates over the need for friends to hold each other’s character in *high* regard; there may also be reasonable disagreement over the degree and nature of the intimacy required for enmity.

Despite our gesturing at a class of relationship rather than outlining the necessary and sufficient conditions for it, there are helpful generalities we can speak of to further bring this family-resemblance concept into view. Enemies typically distrust each other, are afraid of being attacked or harmed by each other, and, perhaps most importantly, possess a strong sense of having been historically wronged

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase ‘we are enemies’ would be misleading here insofar as it refers to animosity that functions in one direction. A person may lay claim to being another’s unreciprocated enemy much in the same way that person could claim to be another’s unreciprocated friend, but these uses pick out a different kind of relationship from the thick and intimate relationship we have in mind.

by each other (beliefs regarding wrongdoing, which may very well be incorrect, may play as much of a role in establishing the relationship as any *factual* history of wrongdoing). Enemies are frequently ‘close’ in terms of the emotional intensity of their attitudes (e.g. resentful contemplation of the other), but unlike friends, they need not interact much with each other; in contrast to the sharing in joint activities typical of friends, their interactions may be distant, cold, and characterised by a general lack of communication.

In many instances, enemies are rivals in the sense of competing for some common end – though not every relationship that is characterised by competition is one of enmity (for instance, competitors in chess may be good friends despite being rivals over the chessboard).<sup>6</sup> To better illustrate this kind of relationship, consider a marriage that has turned sour and led to a drawn-out alimony dispute, two childhood best friends who have become estranged through envy and competition and now work against each other in a once-shared pursuit, or two neighbours who both hit it off on the wrong foot, leading to a series of passive-aggressive acts of bullying. These can exemplify personal relationships that, despite an absence of legally enforceable rights between the parties, intuitively change the permissions and obligations of their members. We think that while they often give participants reason to resolve their disputes, they also, in some cases, give participants reason to stand up for themselves and give diminished priority in action and attitude to the interests of the other party. This may entail participants’ having reasons to avoid benefiting each other and reasons to ignore or even to harm one another.<sup>7</sup>

Enmity is a conflict-laden reciprocal personal relationship, but if it is to *justify* the ongoing discounting of interests, the relationship must be constituted by a history of normatively significant interactions –

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<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, we consider enmity to be the normatively salient type of negative relationship that gives rise to distinctive negative responses, with rivalries that give rise to similar responses counting as a subclass of this type of relationship.

<sup>7</sup> For a more extensive defence of this claim, see Brandt (2020) and Lange (2020) on permissions and the special obligations to act in certain ways with respect to one’s enemies. See also Brandt (forthcoming) on negative partiality and forgiveness.

most plausibly, a history of mutual wrongdoing. Much like partiality to friends or family, the discounting involved in enmity must be grounded on a distinctively agent-relative basis. This constraint draws from the well-established critiques of impersonal characterisations of friendship: if friendship is grounded on, for example, a person's intrinsically good characteristics (intelligence, virtue, etc.), there will be no basis for ruling out the 'replacement' of a friend with another individual who possesses similar qualities or even 'trading up' to a new friend whose qualities are more impressive. Likewise, enemies plausibly must see themselves as having special reasons for discounting the well-being of the *particular other* (and not just any person who has a morally questionable character), and for this reason the grounding of the relationship cannot be non-relational.

The *mutuality* condition of enmity, when combined with the observation that enmity is importantly connected to a sense of having been wronged, may raise questions regarding the *origins* of this relationship. The thought of two independent actors simultaneously wronging each other may seem far-fetched; it may seem that there must always be *someone* at fault for the breakdown of an intimate relationship or *someone* who initially transgresses the obligations that hold between unrelated parties. We would tend to agree with this assessment, and for this reason, enmity should be thought of as a relationship that typically springs from an initial relationship involving a perpetrator and victim. Nonetheless, there are natural psychological processes that push relationships with this initial structure towards meeting the mutuality condition. Wrongdoing typically engenders resentment, distancing, or retribution on the part of the victim.

While there are limits to the extent and scope of justified responses, this arena of morality is unclear and often the subject of dispute. Further compounding this situation is that there are no impartial assessors of wrongdoing to adjudicate interpersonal morality. For these reasons, it is not atypical for a cycle of negative and disproportionate responses to follow an initial act of wrongdoing. Consider an *initial* victim of infidelity who responds by sleeping with their spouse's best friend as revenge. While we may assume that this response is disproportionate, the victim may have a different perspective. Given the undefined terrain of interpersonal immorality that is out of the reach of our social institutions designed to mete out justice, it is not surprising that both victims and perpetrators are often

unsatisfied with how wrongdoing is rectified. A natural consequence is that a relationship morphs into mutuality.

The two predominant bases for the mutual wronging that stand out from the discussion above include false beliefs and disagreements about the norms of interpersonal ethics. These factors may be present not only in contested intimate relationships but also, more broadly, in relationships between neighbours, colleagues, and acquaintances. For example, there is common disagreement regarding the favours that individuals in these distant relationships can demand from each other. A colleague who refuses to grant what is perceived to be a minor request for assistance may improperly respond with a sour attitude going forward, and this attitude may itself engender a disproportionate response. The misperception of wrong and corresponding responses can, again, create a vicious cycle whereby ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ have, based on their beliefs (whether justified or not), reasons to continue responding with negative partiality. Our view of the phenomena is that enmity typically has unfortunate origins in disagreements about what is owed, false beliefs about circumstances, and unacceptable responses to initial wrongs; much like victimisation in general, enmity arises through moral mistakes.

As noted, personal wronging by an enemy most plausibly grounds these distinctive responses of giving diminished consideration to the enemy’s interests. But while wrongdoing<sup>8</sup> is discussed in the literature on punishment and desert, these are impartial, rather than personal, phenomena. And while personal wronging plays a central role in the analyses of forgiveness and resentment, the former focuses on a positive response, and the latter is usually narrowly understood as a reactive attitude, which does not necessarily imply action. Revenge does involve action, but this response is extreme (involving harm)

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Wrongdoing’ covers the general category of acts that are impermissible to perform. ‘Wronging’ refers to a subcategory of impermissible acts where there is a victim with a particular claim against the perpetrator of the wrong. To illustrate, a billionaire may donate excess capital to trivial causes and thus fail to live up to an imperfect duty of beneficence. However, this wrongdoing does not tend to produce victims with claims against the billionaire as no particular person was entitled to claim those resources. We believe that the distinction between third-party and second-party responses to wrongdoing is typically drawn on the basis of the victim’s having a claim against the perpetrator.



and does not necessarily parallel the ongoing structure of friendship: where the partiality of friendship is marked by an ongoing disposition to continue benefiting a person, revenge can be understood as a discrete action that settles a debt. The partiality of enmity we wish to explore would be marked by an ongoing disposition mirroring the one typical of friendship.

How mutual enmities may justify ongoing responses in the form of de-prioritising one's enemy is best appreciated through reflecting on the distinctive features and responses to which friendships give rise. Consider a paradigmatic case, such as a childhood friendship that lasts throughout one's life. Friendships are characterised by a history of normatively significant interactions, including, for example, aid, trust, gratitude, or cooperation with respect to some common end. Sharing such experiences builds a bond between friends that gives rise to distinctive behavioural responses. It leads to both individuals' having agent-relative reasons to care for each other's well-being that they do not have with respect to other people. Similarly, their friendship will entail certain distinctive attitudes with respect to each other: each will feel joy and excitement when the other's personal endeavours succeed and sadness and grief when they fail. Now consider two estranged friends whose relationship has transitioned into an enmity in which each actively wishes the other ill. Each may wish the other to come to grief, even if not actively working for this at the moment. The other's disappointments and thwarted goals bring satisfaction, even if one hasn't brought these about. These actions and attitudes are the result of a shared history of *negative* interactions, such as hindering, distrust, ingratitude, lack of cooperation, or insult. And in the same manner that positive interactions ground reasons for positive responses in the form of caring about one's friends, in the case of enmities, negative interactions give rise to negative responses.

We accordingly suggest that the relationship between enemies be conceptualised as the negative analogue or mirror image of the friendship relationship. If friendship is a form of positive partiality that grounds distinctive positive responses to give greater consideration to one's friend, then enmity is a form of negative partiality that grounds distinctive negative responses to give diminished consideration to one's enemy.

In describing enmity and friendship as ‘mirrors’ of each other, we do not take them to be mere opposites. Friendship and enmity may share certain features in common. As friendship and enmity intensify, parties may possess increasingly detailed knowledge of each other, spend more time with each other, and become increasingly involved in each other’s emotional lives. Moreover, an individual’s identity may be shaped around who has become their enemy as much as whom they have chosen as friends (again, a feature that represents a form of intimacy). In sum, both relationships may possess a certain kind of intimacy. Relatedly, enmity often mirrors friendship by possessing features of friendship itself (the transformation of a friendship into enmity most clearly illustrates this point). What is distinctive about enmity is the inverted regard that members have towards each other – in many other respects, the elements that strengthen friendship may be present in enmity such as familiarity and may likewise strengthen this relationship.

Here is one way to provide a deeper rationale for this approach. Most who defend the legitimacy of partiality believe that a variety of relationships can increase what we owe to someone. A historically noteworthy example of such a view is C. D. Broad’s ‘self-referential altruism’ (1971). Broad presents this view as the common-sense account of how we ought to promote the good. This account of our special relationships offers a paradigmatic image of how to understand the obligations to be partial:

Each person may be regarded as a center of a number of concentric circles. The persons and the groups to whom he has the most urgent obligations may be regarded as forming the innermost circle. Then comes a circle of persons and groups to whom his obligations are moderately urgent. Finally, there is the outermost circle of persons (and animals) to whom he has only the obligation of ‘common humanity’.

Broad pictures our partiality as coming in degrees based on the requirements of different relationships. Parents owe more to children than friends owe to friends, and friends owe more to each other than do mere co-nationals, etc. Strangers (i.e. people with whom we have no relationship) occupy the edge of Broad’s moral picture. However, we argue that the moral edge does not terminate at people unrelated to ourselves but at those who fall into some kind of negative relationship with us. Relationships of enmity thus occupy rings that *lie beyond those occupied by strangers*. Although Broad’s picture of

concentric circles is metaphorical, the image of enmity as a relation that lies ‘beyond’ strangers might, of course, be in one respect misleading; it might not convey the fact that enmity can involve a kind of intimacy. Therefore, it might be helpful to imagine instead two series of concentric circles: one to represent our positive relations and one to represent the negative. The inner circle of each kind of relation would represent the most intense kind of normative change, with outer circles of decreasing intensity that approach the circle occupied by strangers.

### 3. The Project View of Partiality

We have argued that enmity can be conceptualized as a form of negative partiality. We now consider if two of the most paradigmatic accounts of partiality, the project view, and in the next section, the relationship view, can justify this phenomenon.

If enmity is a relationship characterised by wishing another person ill, there are clearly reasons to be sceptical about the justification for this relationship. After all, a harmful outcome is typically seen as generating a *pro tanto* reason against the performance of an action; the telos of enmity may, therefore, seem to be contrary to the standard obligations (prohibiting harm) recognised by a wide range of moral theories. Moreover, insofar as harm is intrinsically bad, wishing for it may be seen as vicious. While harming and wishing for harm are morally dubious activities, there are justified instances of harm. A paradigm example is self-defence, i.e. the use of reasonable force with the aim of preventing unjustified harm to oneself. However, self-defence is an unlikely route to the justification of enmity, as self-defence is a discrete response to a discrete action (or the anticipation of such an action): it is not a general disposition taken towards another.<sup>9</sup> Enmity, however, *is* such a general disposition.

Harm may also be characteristically justified through desert (although this idea is itself not without controversy). Retributivist theories of punishment, for example, take the imposition of harm to be

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<sup>9</sup> For example, a general disposition to discount the interests of a former perpetrator of a wrong seems to violate the ‘necessity’ condition of self-defence. For a recent discussion, see, for example, McMahan (2016).

justified in virtue of an offender's wrongful conduct; the harm is said to be justified to the extent that it is deserved.<sup>10</sup> Could enmity likewise be justified through the relation of desert? While elements of this approach may be promising (e.g. wrongfulness seems to be at least part of what justifies enmity), we think that desert is insufficiently fine-grained as a concept to capture enmity as a *relationship*. Desert is an *impartial* characterisation of how good or bad ought to be present in a person's life: it does not pick out the particular reasons that people have to generate goods or ills in each other's lives.<sup>11</sup> However, enmity is intuitively a relationship whose parties *do* have particular reasons (not necessarily shared by others) for bringing about ills (or the avoidance of goods) in each other's lives. And in contrast to desert, it also seems that both parties to the enmity relationship have these reasons.

If enmity is a relationship that involves having special reasons for bringing about (or not preventing) ill in another person's life, then a more promising approach for examining how this relationship may be justified is to consider how positive analogues have been justified. Friendship, for example, has traditionally been defended as an instance of partiality that is justified because it is a project, and projects create a justifiable push-back against the impersonal demands of morality. In what follows, this line of thinking is reconstructed in detail to see whether a similar argument might transpose to enmity.

### 3.1 The Project View of Positive Partiality

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<sup>10</sup> For a classic discussion, see Morris (1968), pp. 475–501.

<sup>11</sup> A classic statement of this impartial characterisation can be found in W. D. Ross's view that there is a *prima facie* duty to bring about welfare in proportion to virtue. See Ross (2002).

According to the traditional project view of partiality, we have reasons of partiality in virtue of a prerogative to pursue our projects.<sup>12</sup>,<sup>13</sup> According to Williams (1981), projects are a subset of the psychological commitments that constitute an individual's identity. Williams takes a further subset of these projects, ground projects, to give our life meaning; given that projects and ground projects are connected to having a meaningful life, a moral system that asks a person to abandon these projects would be too demanding. The demands of such a moral system would be asking a lot of people not simply in terms of effort, but in terms of a kind of personal sacrifice:

There can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of the impartial good ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in the world at all.<sup>14</sup>

Williams does not criticise an impartial picture of morality because of the mere *possibility* that it will ask people to abandon their projects; rather, his point is that conflicts between impartial morality and projects should not *automatically* be resolved in favour of the impartial principles. On this interpretation of his argument, Williams believes that our projects can sometimes defeat the demands of impartial morality: there is a *point* at which morality can ask too much. Insofar as our projects include the partiality of our relationships (as more explicitly defended by Stroud in the arguments below), this view justifies a permission to be partial. Nonetheless, Williams' position is not entirely clear on when impartial morality improperly demands that we abandon a project.

Sarah Stroud (2010) further develops the view that impartial morality can be excessively demanding, specifically with respect to overriding our interest in being partial, and argues that the permission to be partial can be captured through a more general permission to pursue our projects.<sup>15</sup> Insofar as we

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<sup>12</sup> Traditionally, the project view is understood as generating prudential reasons, but it depends on the approach taken. A shared-projects approach may have features of both prudence and morality.

<sup>13</sup> Williams (1981) pioneered the project view. Other writers who have defended it include Wolf (1982, 1992), Sandel (1982), MacIntyre (1984), Stroud (2010), and Betzler (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Williams (1981), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> See Stroud (2010).

have projects that involve promoting the interests of a particular person, we will be permitted to be partial to them. Stroud further suggests a *reason* why morality must make room for our projects. She argues that agency is partly defined by having projects and that morality must make room for the nature of agency. By denying us the permission to pursue our projects, morality denies us agency. The connection between projects and agency on Stroud's view is analogous to the connection between *meaningfulness* and projects on Williams' view. By threatening our projects, morality either asks individuals to give up the meaningfulness of their lives (cf. Williams) or threatens their agency (cf. Stroud). Each of these requirements is taken to be overly demanding in a way that may render problematic the condition of being an agent.

The project view faces a number of important objections. Sara Goering poses the following question: '[C]an one for instance, rightly claim moral legitimacy for building a life project around racism and sexism [...] Surely we want to find some limit for the range of acceptable partiality'.<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Ashford raises a similar objection to the significance of our projects:

[A]ny plausible account of moral obligations must hold that slave owners should have questioned and opposed their way of life and the norms to which they subscribed, even at the cost of alienation from what were previously deeply held commitments and moral self-conceptions.<sup>17</sup>

Even if slave-owning gives a person their life's meaning or is the central project upon which a person builds their life, there is no special permission to pursue this project. There are, therefore, some obvious outstanding concerns with the project view, some of which may re-emerge as we examine the application of this view to the case of enmity.

### 3.2 The Project View: The Negative Analogue in the Case of Enmity

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<sup>16</sup> Goering (2003), p. 400.

<sup>17</sup> Ashford (2000), p. 424.

The drawbacks of the project view when applied to positive partiality are further illuminated by difficulties that arise with justifying the case of enmity. To examine a parallel, consider that if the project of friendship is itself a reason for pursuing the friendship (which permits the partiality of friendship), it would seem to follow that a project of enmity would provide reasons for pursuing enmity, along with the associated forms of displaying negative partiality. There are obvious problems with this position. The mere fact that one desires to construct a negative personal relationship with someone cannot entitle us to treat them worse than others. Like their positive counterparts, projects of enmity seem to require independent justification that is responsive to moral considerations that do not merely amount to having the project. This speaks against the project view as a *sufficient* account of the justification of enmity and parallels the difficulties that others have raised in the existing literature on friendship.

A weaker way to understand projects as grounding partiality is by taking them to be a necessary, but insufficient, condition of its justification. Consider, for example, two academics who disparage each other's work over the course of many months. Two scenarios may ensue: the parties to the dispute may (either individually or jointly) form a project that involves continuing to undermine each other's activities, *or* they may (either individually or jointly) decide to cool the tensions and develop a more collegial relationship. Does the existence of such projects, one way or another, tell us whether enmity is justified? If projects are connected to the meaning of a person's life *or* to their agency, we might be inclined to accept the legitimacy of the enmity project *so long as* other conditions are met (e.g. a history of wrongful conduct). Insofar as enmity involves members' departing from impartial ideals, we would have an account of the justification of the departure from impartial morality that seems present in enmity. However, the necessity of the project seems questionable. Must the members of this historical dispute actively take on the project of *continuing* a relationship of enmity in order to have a permission to give diminished consideration to each other's interests? Intuitively, the answer is 'No': to the extent that both individuals are victims, they may simply choose to avoid benefiting each other. This analysis is consistent with how we analyse the normative significance of wrongdoing in other contexts: someone might be unaware or fail to acknowledge that they are owed an apology or compensation for wrongdoing. But a failure to acknowledge such entitlements does not undermine the fact that

they are owed something. Likewise, where a particular kind of history is present between two individuals, further active engagement with a project does not seem required to justify the negative relationship going forward.

While we have argued that projects are neither necessary nor sufficient for justifying partiality, a narrower version of this view takes projects to give us *more* reason to be partial when it is *otherwise* justified. In support of this weaker thesis, consider two formerly paradigmatically good friends who become distant, each having lost the caring attitude and intentionality associated with their prior friendship. Imagine further that their shift in attitude is not due to any bad conduct: they have simply grown apart, and their changing interests have led to the psychological parting and the abandonment of the friendship. Given the constraint that both individuals share the same attitude, we might be inclined to accept that the loss of the project that was their friendship weakens their reasons for partiality. Conversely, if they cared more about each other, they would seem to have more reason for partiality. This example speaks in favour of the more limited view that projects can strengthen existing reasons for partiality.

The parallel negative view would maintain that when people are justified in their enmity and a shared project of enmity has developed, the project provides strengthened reasons for treatment that departs from impartiality. To evaluate this view about enmity and projects, we can compare two scenarios with the same justification for negative partiality but differing as to the presence of a relevant project. Suppose that Celeste discovers that her best friend, Sam, has repeatedly failed to be faithful to a promise to keep an embarrassing story in confidence. In the first scenario, Celeste harbours no ill will and merely distances herself from Sam. In the second, Celeste is extremely resentful of Sam, harbouring a strong dislike and deciding that raining harm upon Sam is now a key life goal of hers. Intuitively, we do not think that the strong subjective sense of dislike and the ensuing project affect what Celeste ultimately owes to Sam. To look at it the other way around, whatever special permission Celeste may have to discount Sam's well-being, we do not see a compelling reason to think of it as *weaker* in the



first scenario simply in virtue of the fact that she still cares about Sam or lacks a project to discount Sam's well-being.<sup>18</sup>

There is therefore a potential asymmetry between our intuitions about the project accounts of positive and negative partiality: projects seem to make a difference in justifying the partiality of our positive, but not our negative, relationships. We believe this asymmetry should be dissolved rather than justified or explained. In stating that the asymmetry should be dissolved, we admit the apparent intuition that projects may strengthen the reasons for partiality in *otherwise* justified friendships and the asymmetrical intuition that the project of enmity does not intuitively strengthen the reasons for negative partiality. However, we adopt an error-theoretic attitude towards the intuition that the project of friendship strengthens existing reasons for partiality. If our error-theoretic assessment holds, it restores symmetry between the positive and the negative reasons for partiality: in neither case do projects make a difference to the baseline reasons for action in an existing relationship. Our view is that the intuition that projects strengthen existing reasons for partiality can be explained by features of the relationship that are *incidental* to the project itself. For example, in a friendship whose parties no longer care for each other, it is plausible that they have *wronged* each other; while it is true that they no longer have the project, the absence of the project is not the fundamental explanation for the weakening of their reasons to continue the relationship. Rather, the wrongdoing is the fundamental explanation.

Similarly, where parties to a friendship lack the project of friendship, there are likely good impersonal reasons to discontinue the relationship, even if the underlying reasons to be partial remain. Those impersonal reasons, we suggest – and not the loss of the project – are what really drive the weakening of the original reasons for partiality. And if the loss of the project was not what weakened the original reasons, then the presence of the project was not what enhanced their earlier strength. The idea here is that individuals who have reasons to be partial may have even stronger reasons to dissolve the relationship and move on, and those reasons are what have explanatory force. The case may be more

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<sup>18</sup> In general, resentment provides an epistemic basis for thinking that a greater harm has been caused, so it could plausibly reflect the significance of an act of wrongdoing. But here we are stipulating that the act is the same in both cases.

apparent and familiar in the family context: parents, siblings, and children may all share reasons for partiality grounded in historical ties, but these reasons may be overshadowed by reasons to avoid contact. Where two individuals lack the project of friendship, there may be good reasons to avoid further contact, even if the original reasons for partiality remain the same. These reasons, not the presence or absence of a project, are the ground for associated changes in the polarity or degree of partiality.

#### 4. Valuable Relationships

Another broad approach to justifying the special duties and permissions of relationships is by appeal to the *value* of such relationships.<sup>19</sup> Might enmity possess a kind of value or *disvalue* that can justify the special duties and permissions that are intuitively associated with it? The better to understand this approach to the justification of special duties and permissions, consider Samuel Scheffler's influential argument that having reason to (non-instrumentally) value a relationship entails that we have special obligations.<sup>20</sup> The first step in his argument is the principle that non-instrumentally valuing a relationship with a person necessarily involves seeing the other person as a special source of reasons for

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<sup>19</sup> See Raz (1989), Scheffler (1997, 2001, 2004), and Kolodny (2003). See also Scanlon (1998) and Jeske (2008) for other variants of the relationship view.

<sup>20</sup> See Scheffler (2001, 2004). David Miller (2005) offers an argument with a very similar structure to Scheffler's: 'ground-level special duties... arise only from relationships that are intrinsically valuable. Furthermore, the duties in question must be integral to the relationship, in the sense that the relationship could not exist in the form that it does unless the duties were generally acknowledged... A final condition for the existence of ground-level special duties is that the attachments that ground them should not inherently involve injustice' (pp. 65–66). Miller frames his conditions as being both necessary and sufficient, while Scheffler frames his argument as giving a sufficient basis the arising of partiality. There are further differences and similarities that we will not explore here. Similarly, Joseph Raz (1989) argues that 'the justification of the duties of friendship is that they make, or are part of, a relationship which is intrinsically valuable. This is an internal justification since it justifies the duty by reference to a good which is itself made in part by that duty' (p. 20).

action; as he describes it, to value a relationship is ‘in contexts which vary depending on the nature of the relationship, to see that person’s needs, interests, and desires as, in themselves, providing me with presumptively decisive reasons for action’.<sup>21</sup> Special obligations are therefore conceptually connected to valuing a relationship intrinsically. Scheffler acknowledges that, while intrinsically valuing a relationship is connected to acting as though we have special obligations, we do not always have good reason to value a relationship. For example, the parties to an abusive relationship do not have reason to value it and therefore (at least on the value theory) intuitively do not have reason to be partial. By contrast, he asserts that when we *do* have reason to value a relationship (e.g. in paradigmatically good friendships), we thereby have the special obligations that are connected with valuing it.

Scheffler’s argument is schematic. He says relatively little about what counts as a relationship, and he does not defend the claim that relationships have intrinsic value. Our suggestion at this stage is to set aside these controversies, looking instead at how the view may be extended to the case of enmity. This extension may offer some further insight into this general approach to the justification of special obligations.

If reasonably intrinsically valuing a relationship implies that we have partial duties that characterise special relationships, then reasonably attaching negative value to a relationship might likewise be thought to imply a justification of the special permissions of negative relationships. What counts as an intrinsically disvaluable relationship will, of course, be at least as controversial as determining what counts as an intrinsically valuable (positive) relationship. However, relationships of enmity are a reasonable candidate for this kind of relationship. The antagonistic back and forth between two rival academics or the strain between neighbours who have harassed each other seem to be likely candidates for relationships that are reasonable to disvalue in themselves. It would be a substantial undertaking to establish that these relationships have intrinsic negative value for certain, so we will only give a cursory motivation for this view by analogy to the positive case. Friendship seems to be an intrinsic good because of the particular nature of this relationship: friendships are histories of interaction in

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<sup>21</sup> Scheffler (1997), p. 196.

which parties come to gain knowledge of each other, share pleasant experiences, express affection, rely on each other, shape each other's character in positive ways, and perform acts of benevolence. A plausible story about friendship's intrinsic value is that it results from the combination of these extrinsically valuable properties within a single relationship over time. When combined in the context of a relationship, extrinsic goods ground a new intrinsic good, that of friendship. Even if we can similarly experience these extrinsic goods diffused across many different interactions with different people, we would be losing out on the good of friendship if they were so diffused.

If a relationship gains intrinsic value in virtue of containing a history of extrinsically valuable interactions, then an enmity seems to be *prima facie* disvaluable in virtue of containing a history of negative interactions. Enemies who wrong each other typically make each other's lives go worse and have violated the trust and goodwill that might otherwise be expected to exist between people. The question is whether reasonably disvaluing a relationship is a sufficient condition for justifying the *norms* of enmity, that is, for justifying responses such as giving diminished priority to the needs of one's enemy or ignoring their requests and needs altogether.

To better evaluate whether such norms of enmity might be justified by the fact that the relationship can reasonably be disvalued, it is worth examining how enmity unfolds and how the component elements of enmity emerge through individual instances of wrongdoing. Consider, for example, the simple one-way wrongdoing that emerges at the *onset* of enmity. Suppose, for example, that a vicious academic begins a cycle of malice with an unnecessarily harsh critique of a colleague's work. The victim of this action has reason to disvalue this relationship *and* plausibly also has reason to discount the interests of the perpetrator. This fits Scheffler's model: having reason to intrinsically disvalue a relationship accompanies the idea that some form of negative partiality is justified. However, to further test this view, we should also consider how the perpetrator should see themselves in this relationship. Plausibly, the

perpetrator of a relationship should *also* disvalue this relationship. To value a relationship of harassment is clearly an inappropriate response to one's own poor conduct. Rather, the perpetrator should feel shame or regret for the relationship, which at least implies a desire for it not to exist.<sup>22,23</sup>

The analogue of Scheffler's view of positive partiality seems to capture half the story about the relationship between a victim and perpetrator. The victim of such a relationship has reason to intrinsically disvalue the relationship and reasons for negative partiality. However, the other half of the story concerns the perpetrator of the wrongdoing. While it seems plausible that the perpetrator of a wrongdoing should not value the relationship with the person they have victimised, the perpetrator of a wrongdoing clearly does not gain reasons for negative partiality in virtue of wrongdoing. Where does this leave us with a Schefflerian approach to understanding how the special duties and permissions associated with enmity might be justified? A relationship of enmity is *plausibly* a case where there are reasons to disvalue the relationship. Additionally, the mutual wrongdoing present in enmity that gives rise to these reasons for disvaluing seems to fit with a story about why the negative partiality associated with enmity is well-grounded. However, when we break down a relationship of enmity into its component interactions, we see that the reasons for disvaluing the relationship do not give rise to a directly corresponding explanation of what justifies the special permissions intuitively associated with enmity. The history of *perpetrating* a wrongdoing cannot help explain why negative partiality is justified, yet it *does* figure in the explanation of why the relationship should be disvalued. This could give rise to absurd implications. A relationship of enmity where, for example, one party has more seriously and consistently wronged the other would seem to offer stronger moral reasons for the more vicious party to disvalue

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<sup>22</sup> See also Kolodny (2010), Section 4.2.

<sup>23</sup> By analogy to our positive relationships, we can imagine that the party at fault in a relationship of one-way wrongdoing is replaced with a clone of the individual who did the wrong. While developing a relationship with the clone might be instrumentally deleterious, because the clone will have the same conflict-conducive qualities as the original, the victim does not seem to have the same intrinsic reasons to disvalue the relationship with the clone as to disvalue the relationship with the original.

and consequently dissolve or transform the relationship. If reasons to disvalue the relationship translated directly into justifications for negative partiality, this would mean that the more vicious party had the greater justification of the two to exhibit negative partiality. This provides us with significant reasons for rejecting the Schefflerian approach.

Might these reflections on enmity offer us insight into Scheffler's generalised account of the justification of *positive* partiality? We believe they do.

What gives rise to the issue with *value* and enmity is that we may have reasons to disvalue a relationship that are not connected to our justification for exhibiting negative partiality. A parallel issue emerges when we examine friendship, which parallels enmity in its mutuality but inverts the reasons for valuing. If we assume that a friendship is intrinsically valuable, we can ask *how* the relationship is valued. Various options present themselves: we can value a relationship for our own sake, for the sake of the other, for the sake of both parties, or simply for the sake of the relationship. With these different senses in mind, we can consider whether it is sensible to intrinsically value a friendship for one's own sake. Is it intelligible that I value a friendship solely for its contribution to my *own* good? If I can see a particular friendship as valuable *to me* (because friendship contributes to the good life) and value it solely for myself, I do not thereby seem committed to seeing the other person's interests as mattering more for their own sake. However, there is an incoherence implicit in this selfish attitude. In order for a genuine friendship to exist, it seems that patterns of valuing the other *must* exist, i.e. if I am not disposed to be partial to a person (i.e. to promote their interests as a *final* end), then it seems that I cannot be a friend. It seems then that even if I value a friendship for my own sake, I must also value the interests of my friend for their own sake.

If the above analysis is correct, when we have reason to value a relationship that involves partiality, we have reason to be partial. However, while valuing certain relationships ends up committing us to caring about another for their own sake, the *basis* of this partiality can still end up being conceptualised in entirely self-regarding terms. Consider again the selfish person who values a friendship for its contribution to the good life. Being a prudent person, they recognise that they must be partial *in order to* have friends, and they therefore (in Scheffler's terms) have net non-instrumental reason to value the

relationship. The issue here is that the selfish friend may have entirely prudential reasons for caring about the other. While it is true that achieving this valuable relationship requires certain selfless acts, the reason for such selfless acts ends up being the agent's more fundamental goal of attaining value for themselves. It appears that reasonably valuing certain relationships might require partiality, yet the reasons for partiality will be grounded by reasons of prudence. The issue here is that reasons of prudence are not a genuine ground of friendship. We are, for example, typically permitted to neglect or abstain from what we have prudential reasons to sustain or perform. Any person has net reason to value their own pleasure, but they can permissibly forsake it to pursue worthless projects. While they can be accused of being irrational for such pursuits, they cannot be accused of failing to live up to obligations. Similarly, we may have net reason to value friendships, but if we only have prudential reasons for this valuing, we are permitted to give up the relationship and its consequent obligations. This is at odds with the requirements of partiality.

Enmity involves histories of interaction where there has been mutual wrongdoing, and the intrinsic disvalue of such relationships may seem to provide the basis for justifying negative partiality. However, the reasons for the disvalue of a relationship of enmity are broad and go beyond what, in fact, plausibly contributes to the justification of negative partiality. Likewise, the reasons for intrinsically *valuing* a friendship may be broader than what, in fact, justifies the duties of friendship (prudential reasons should not count towards the justification of the *duties* of friendship).

## 5. Conclusion

We have focused on distinctive kinds of relationships of enmity throughout this discussion and argued that certain instances of these relationships can give rise to distinctive reasons of response on the part of their participants to give diminished consideration to each other. These justified responses, we suggested, can be conceptualised as forms of justified negative partiality. We then explored two paradigmatic accounts of partiality, the project view and the relationship view, and how they could be extended to negative partiality. We have brought out challenges with each approach and shown that they

extend to the negative domain. In the case of projects, we have shown how projects seem to be neither necessary nor sufficient for the justification of enmity. Additionally, projects do not seem to play a part in *strengthening* the existing reasons for negative partiality. While projects may appear to function distinctly for the positive counterpart, we have argued that positive and negative partiality are, in fact, symmetrical with how they relate to projects. In part, this analysis illustrates how analysing negative partiality may shed light onto positive partiality.

In the case of the relationship view, a structurally analogous worry applies. The relationship view sees the source of *positive* partiality as emerging from the value of a relationship. However, we have argued that reasons for valuing can be understood in entirely self-regarding terms: the value of a relationship to a person fails to capture the sense in which we have duties towards our friends, family members, or co-nationals. A similar set of issues arises in the negative analogue: the basis for disvaluing a relationship seems even more apparently disconnected from the reasons that justify negative partiality (recall the case of the more vicious party to an enmity, who has more reason than the other, ethically speaking, to dissolve or transform the relationship but who intuitively has less justification than the other party for negative partiality).

There is a broad theme that emerges from this analysis. Positive partiality as in the case of friendships is grounded by relational structures that have an independent moral justification in that they ought to represent sources of moral virtue in themselves. Negative partiality as in cases of enmity requires the converse: some relevant form of wrongdoing must be present in the relationship to justify enmity. Neither projects nor what we have reason to value appropriately track these distinctive moral concerns. While this thin requirement does not provide in itself a full account of the grounds of partiality, it offers a starting point for further exploring this apparent asymmetry between the partiality inherent in positive relationships such as those of friendship, on the one hand, and in negative relationships such as those between enemies, on the other, in future research. Enquiry into how current justificatory theories of partiality apply to the negative domain can therefore provide insights into the plausibility of those theories.



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