Personal Concern

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I

Recent moral philosophy has been characterized by some serious attempts to show that both Kantian and utilitarian moralities leave us with insufficient room to pursue our personal projects and relationships. These moralities have been charged with demanding a kind of impartiality that leaves us with too little space for developing ourselves and our friendships, family relations, communities, and nations in the ways best suited for us. Critics claim these theories implausibly maintain that if our personal relationships and affinities do not further the ends of moral duty or maximum utility, they are of no value and hence we lack reason to devote ourselves to them. In what follows, I will assume that a conception of morality would indeed be implausible if it were to demand impartiality in the strong sense that it would be impermissible to favor our own projects and ambitions, to care especially about the welfare of certain persons rather than others, and sometimes to give preference to those we care most about, even when we could benefit strangers more. The ambitions and relationships we find most meaningful usually re-

1 I am grateful to Lionel McPherson for illuminating discussions on this topic and have learned much from his PhD dissertation, Special Concern and the Reach of Moral Principle (Harvard University, 1999). This paper has also benefited from criticisms I received from Hugo Bedau, Norman Daniels, David Estlund, Barbara Herman, David Stevens, and the editors of the Canadian Journal of Philosophy. A version of this paper was presented at the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in March, 1998. I thank my commentator Philip Clark and also members of the audience for their comments and criticisms.
quire a concentration of attention and resources which we could but would often rather not spend ministering to the (perhaps urgent) needs of greater numbers of people. Surely, each of us is entitled to some measure of personal autonomy to develop and foster ‘partial’ concerns in the form of personal projects and relationships. Our interest in some measure of personal autonomy must be compatible with the demands of any practical conception of morality. A concession to partiality can be described as responsive to a need we generally share and regard as basic, one which the Kantian and the utilitarian could deny only at the cost of not being able convincingly to defend and promote their theories.

What should not be rejected in ‘impartialist’ conceptions of morality, however, is the requirement that we reasonably be able to think that the principles that guide our social behavior are compatible with the fundamental interests of persons generally, including those with whom we do not have personal relationships or affinities. By ‘social behavior,’ I mean to refer to behavior that directly or substantially affects other persons. The requirement that such behavior be compatible with the interests of those affected by it conveys an idea of what it could mean to say that all persons have equal moral status. We should be concerned that persons who share the aim of meeting this requirement do not have a reasonable objection to what we do; the equal moral status of persons, in this sense, should not depend on whether we care about them in a personal way. I shall refer to this requirement that we conduct ourselves in accordance with principles that are compatible with the interests of persons generally, as the moral compatibility requirement. This requirement sets limits to ‘agent-relative permissions’ to be partial to our own personal projects and relationships,\(^2\) that is, it can be used to determine the proper scope of autonomy for persons and groups. Those who are committed to standing in morally acceptable relations with other persons will grant deliberative priority to the equal moral status and claims of persons generally, whether or not doing so expresses personal concern between

\(\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{2} An agent-relative permission (or reason) holds only for a particular person(s). An agent-neutral permission (or reason), by contrast, holds for anyone. If I have an agent-relative moral permission to save my own arm rather than a stranger’s life, it would not follow that anyone else is morally permitted to save my arm rather than a stranger’s life. If my permission to save my arm rather than a stranger’s life were agent-neutral, then anyone would be permitted to save my arm rather than some stranger’s life. See Derek Parfit, ‘Innumerate Ethics,’ Philosophy and Public Affairs 7 (1978), 287 and Reasons and Persons (New York: Oxford University Press 1984), 143. See also Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere (New York: Oxford University Press 1986), 152-3.}
the affected parties, broadens the set of values they share, or strengthens their personal goals or sense of common purpose.

The view that we are morally accountable to persons as such is common to the most plausible versions of impartialist moral theories. My aim is to defend the moral compatibility requirement against proposals to narrow the class of persons to whom we may be held accountable, proposals designed to promote the importance of the personal. I will focus on aspects of the personal that involve relationships and identifications with other persons. The concern we have for particular others I will refer to as 'personal concern.' My thesis is that when personal concern is supported by or gives rise to reasons that cannot satisfy the moral compatibility requirement, those reasons should not be considered morally justifiable. In such cases, attempts to justify personal concern with moral reasoning would obscure and distort the character and point of moral reasoning as reasoning that can be addressed to other persons generally and is sensitive to the reasons they have. The way our behavior affects other people matters no less, morally speaking, when we do not share their values or care for them in a personal way. We should acknowledge a potential gap between our personal reasons and our moral reasons. Not everything that matters to us personally matters morally or can be given a moral justification. Although it is an important source of value, morality is not the only source of value. The limits of morality, in this sense, must be conceded if we are to appreciate the special nature of its value. When our actions do not bear on the basic interests of other persons, on the other hand, our reasons for personal concern may need no moral justification. Tolerating personal differences and disagreements with other persons about many questions of value, be they philosophical, religious, or aesthetic, is part of what it means to take the moral status of other persons seriously. The limits of moral

3 I do not plan to explore how far or how adequately particular versions of Kantian or utilitarian theories can accommodate our basic interest in and need for developing personal projects and relationships. For an excellent discussion of the capacity of Kant’s ethics to accommodate the requirements of the personal, see Barbara Herman’s essays, ‘Integrity and Impartiality,’ and ‘Agency, Attachment, and Difference,’ The Practice of Moral Judgment (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993).

4 By ‘morally justifiable reasons,’ or more simply ‘moral reasons,’ I mean reasons that are either morally required or morally permissible. We may think of the demand for justification as arising pragmatically, in view of potential conflict with others, for instance. Thus the moral compatibility requirement need not imply that we must reason about and attempt to justify everything we do.
justification acknowledge the moral status of persons as both equal and independent.

Some defenders of a stringent conception of personal autonomy doubt that what we experience as the requirements of personal affinities and relationships — of family, community, nation — can or need always be justifiable to persons outside of these relationships, even when those persons' basic interests are concerned. It is enough, they maintain, if these requirements are acceptable to a select class: those we care about most, in particular, or those who share our interests and values. Imagine that I have some influence within the medical community and my spouse is badly in need of an organ transplant. I could use my influence to secure an organ for him, even though other possible recipients are better candidates or have stronger claims, by standard procedures I recognize as legitimate. Could I have moral reasons, stemming from my personal concern for my spouse, to do this? Consider another example. Suppose I live in a wealthy society that enjoys a much higher standard of living than do other societies with which my society has economic relations. Could I have moral reasons to support the continued utilization of the natural and human resources of poorer nations (for example, by multinational corporations) in a way that transfers the benefits of those resources from their economies to our own?

The question is whether the moral assessment of my reasons in either of these cases depends on whether or not persons who I may care much less about, persons with whom I have no personal relation or affinity, have a reasonable objection to the resulting distribution of resources. Some critics of ‘impartial’ morality, including Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer, Samuel Scheffler, and Charles Taylor maintain that it may not, or at least that moral assessment does not rest exclusively on the test of moral compatibility with the interests of persons generally. They would

argue that personal concern requires a greater degree of partiality than is allowed by the moral compatibility requirement. At the same time, these critics maintain that the value to us of the personal relationships we care about most is something that should be acknowledged by morality. Morality can acknowledge this value only by recognizing that we have some moral reasons to favor such relationships. Thus, so the challenge goes, we should rethink our understanding of the source of moral justification and its relation to the personal. Our moral reasons need not always satisfy the moral compatibility requirement.

I will examine and argue against two versions of a critical attempt to relocate the locus of the moral to encompass more of the domain of the personal and what we value about it. The first maintains that the moral acknowledgment of the claims of others is an extension of personal concern. Rorty holds this view. He argues that we do not in fact recognize any duties to human beings as such, and that this is not a moral shortcoming. There is nothing in virtue of which every person has equal moral status. Only those whom we identify as 'one of us,' that is, as 'our sort of people' are those to whom we owe something morally, where this group is 'something smaller and more local than the human race.'

Morality depends on partiality, rather than finding itself in tension with it.

Let us return briefly to the two examples introduced above. It is possible that proponents of Rorty's version of moral partialism could

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6 See the essays referred to in footnote 5.
7 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 190-1.
8 Rorty carries his critical proposal even further, holding that when there are no persons who share our interests and values, we may treat our personal commitments as morally justifiable simply because they define the terms of an individual life. He claims that,

any such thing can play the role in an individual life which philosophers have thought could, or at least should, be played only by things which were universal, common to us all.... Any seemingly random constellation of such things can set the tone of a life, Any such constellation can set up an unconditional command- ment to whose service a life may be devoted — a commandment no less unconditional because it may be intelligible to, at most, only one person. Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 37.

Such things might include, says Rorty, 'what ... people do with their spouses and children, their fellow workers, the tools of their trade, the cash accounts of their businesses, the possessions they accumulate in their homes, the music they listen to, the sports they play or watch, or the trees they pass on their way to work' (Ibid.). It is, however, not obvious what an unconditional commitment within a personal relationship would amount to or why we should ever take it to be a requirement of personal concern.
come out on the side of what would appear to be impartial justice, at least in the first case. At issue here, however, is not simply the outcome, but how moral deliberation would proceed. As we shall see, on Rorty's view, the nature and size of the morally relevant groups are not fixed by anything other than the circumstances that shape the identities of those persons engaged in moral deliberation. Moreover, people's identities are complex and may include multiple affinities. Rorty emphasizes that in liberal societies such as ours, many people feel an allegiance to their fellow citizens that can underwrite shared standards of justice, standards that apply impartially within that group (i.e., nation). As good liberals, we may come to the conclusion that shared standards of justice ought to restrain our more personal ambitions and relationships. For the sake of fairness and justice, I may forego the opportunity to use my influence within the medical community to secure an organ for my spouse. The point is, however, that I do this for the sake of a 'larger loyalty' to my fellow citizens; justice is itself a form of partiality that I hold in high esteem, at least with regard to certain public matters.9 Furthermore, conflict with narrower forms of partiality may not be eliminated as moral conflict, even if my commitment to liberal justice comes out on top. I believe it would be considerably more difficult for Rorty to defend the moral case against wealthier nations who exploit the resources of poorer nations.10 He suggests that greater familiarity with select 'outsiders' could over time foster a sense of loyalty to them as well.11 But a loyalty of this sort would seem to fall short of a general concern to conduct ourselves in ways that are compatible with the interests of persons as such.

A second sort of critical attempt to relocate the locus of the moral to encompass more of the domain of the personal admits that we have some duties to persons as such and, to that extent, the moral compatibility requirement should be satisfied. But in addition, it is claimed, we have


10 Some defenders of the moral compatibility requirement could resist what I am suggesting are the implications of that requirement for this case. They would have to show that the 'sacrifice' that would be imposed upon wealthier nations would be too burdensome, and hence could reasonably be rejected. This argument is not very convincing, especially when basic human rights are at stake. See Henry Shue, Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980), especially chapters 4 and 5.

11 Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism,' 529-30
‘special duties’ to persons with whom we stand in particular relationships. Special duties may be generated by certain personal interests, for example, or by the value of a culture, tradition, or community. These special duties may sometimes take priority over our duties to persons as such and can justify claims on scarce resources. Scheffler and Taylor appear to take this position.12

This approach clearly makes room for the claims of impartial justice; duties to persons as such are not necessarily weaker than special duties to particular persons, and the former may sometimes be overriding. But it remains a form of partialism because it acknowledges that the potential conflict between impartial morality, on the one hand, and special duties that do not meet the test of the moral compatibility requirement, on the other, is a moral conflict. Regardless of how examples such as the ones I have been considering are resolved, this partialist approach accepts the moral legitimacy of reasons on both sides.

II

On the view that morality in general grows out of and is bounded by personal concern, patterns in the development of our personal attachments limit the content of our moral obligations. Morality always retains a certain personal dimension. Walzer, for example, describes our moral development in this way: ‘we begin by understanding what it means to have fellow citizens and neighbors.... Then we extend the sense of moral fellowship and neighborliness to new groups of people, and ultimately to all people.... No doubt commitments and obligations are diminished as they are extended.’13 Walzer supposes not only that we can have a sense of the nature of the moral claims our fellow citizens and neighbors can have upon us before we have any sense that persons as such have moral status, but also that the former functions as the anchor for our more extended sense of moral obligation to strangers.14 If we succeed in completing the extension, and we may not, then in addition to what I have referred to as ‘special duties,’ we will have some obligations to persons as such.15 Walzer suggests, however, that our moral obligations

12 See the essays referred to in footnote 5.
13 Walzer, ‘Spheres of Affection,’ 126
14 Cf. Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 194-5
15 In this conception both sorts of duties will have basically the same source.
will diminish as we press the boundaries of personal concern. This is because the content of all moral duties is drawn from our 'spheres of affection,' that is, what he thinks of as 'particularist' (versus universal) commitments.

Rorty echoes this sense that the boundaries of our capacity for personal concern limit the content of our moral obligations. In his analysis, the moral claims of strangers upon us are contingent upon whether we can make sense of the particularities of their behavior. 'Making sense' of a stranger, however, is not purely, or perhaps even primarily, a cognitive exercise; it involves more fundamentally the exercise of imagination and sympathy. We must be able, for instance, to imagine a stranger as a 'possible conversation partner,' and thus as someone we can learn from and identify with.\(^{16}\)

The realization of our capacity to do this is not merely incidental to that stranger's moral status. Rorty's claim is that the moral status of strangers depends on our ability to sympathize with and to learn from them. It is not that we discover their moral status by doing this; that would be to assume illegitimately that human nature (or the like) provides a (universal) substrate that grounds the moral status of persons.\(^{17}\)

According to Rorty, the engagement of our sympathy and imagination is what constitutes the moral status of particular persons (in our society), and nothing else could.\(^{18}\)

Anthropologists, 'connoisseurs of diversity' and other 'specialists in particularity' facilitate the prospect of incorporating strangers in this way into our moral community.\(^{19}\)

Rorty doubts we will ever complete the extension Walzer describes. Moral solidarity involves identification with persons we regard as 'one of us,' and for complex 'historicosociological' reasons to which Rorty merely alludes, even an expanding 'us' typically requires a 'them.'\(^{20}\)

The content of moral concern will remain limited by its partialist origins. According to this view, morality is parochial and there are no obligations to human beings as such, but only to those with whom we identify. Rorty calls this view ethnocentric and is willing to affirm it as such. 'To be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others. The first group — one's ethnos

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16 Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz,' 529
17 See Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 196
18 This is essentially a Humean view.
19 Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism,' 529-30
20 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, 190-1
— comprises those who share enough of one’s beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible.21

What is striking about this view is that moral concern is not thought to be different in kind from personal concern. But this cannot be established simply by showing that moral concern has its origins in personal concern. Even if it is true (and it may not be22) that moral concern issues from personal concern, as Rorty and Walzer claim, that would not imply that our reasons for personal concern have moral weight as such. One could maintain, as I do, that moral development involves learning to check our reasons for personal concern against a requirement of moral compatibility with the interests of persons generally.23

In response to Rorty, I will look in some detail at what inspires and guides our personal concern for particular others (individuals or groups). Reflection on the nature of personal concern shows that we can distinguish between reasons that provide justification for our concern and merely circumstantial causes of it, a distinction glossed over in Rorty’s account. An examination of the nature of the reasons justifying personal concern can then lead us to an understanding of the contrast between these reasons and moral reasons. Moral reasons are subject to standards of mutual acceptability, while our reasons for personal concern are not.

III

Personal concern should not be viewed as a brute fact for which there can be no rational justification. On what I will call the Brute Fact View, the only ‘reasons’ we have for caring about the particular persons we care most about are explanatory reasons. We can cite causes but not rational justifications. This view need not trivialize the importance to us of our personal relationships and the objects of our personal concern. But

21 Rorty, ‘Solidarity or Objectivity?’ 13

22 It could be argued that moral concern is grounded in an innate universal benevolence, for example. This was Francis Hutcheson’s view. See his Illustrations on the Moral Sense (Part II of An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense [1728]), Bernard Peach, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1971). See also Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics (1874; Indianapolis: Hackett 1981), 238-63.

23 For an account of how a morality of principles that meet this requirement could develop from a morality of personal attachments, see John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1971), chapter 8.
even so, against the Brute Fact View, we do not generally think that we have no reasons for our personal concern. Even the view that our reason for caring is that we want to have something be important to us represents a departure from a view of personal concern as a brute fact.  

In her illuminating essay 'Impersonal Friends,' Jennifer Whiting rejects the Brute Fact View and argues that we can have 'justifying' reasons for personal concern in the following substantive sense. Our concern for our friends (particular others) depends significantly on an appreciation of their distinctive features or virtues. She writes, 'We may approve of someone’s character, projects and commitments and so come to think her worthy of our concern.' This approval is something for which we can cite reasons that account for why the objects of our affection are worthy of it. The reasons we have to admire a person’s particular traits are reasons we might offer to those who share our values. Drawing upon Aristotle, Whiting emphasizes that these reasons have an impersonal character. They call attention not to the uniqueness of the object of our concern, but to the sort of person she is. That there are likely to be other people who also exemplify the features we admire is not a challenge to the source of our personal concern; we may have some reason to appreciate or care about them as well. The impersonal reasons we have for our attachments underdetermine the particularity of the object of choice. Whiting writes,

> At this point, contingent and non-justifying factors may enter into determining (and hence explaining) which of the many deserving candidates I in fact befriend. The fact that x has blue eyes (which I happen to like) may help to explain (without providing any additional justification for) the fact that I befriend x rather than the apparently equally deserving y. Similarly, the fact that I met x first and the demands of my friendship with her prevented me from getting to know the perhaps even more deserving y may serve to explain (without providing any additional justification) for the fact that I am friends with x rather than y. (Ibid.)

Given the impersonal nature of our reasons for concern, what ends up distinguishing the object of our concern from its potential competitors are purely contingent circumstantial causes. Our concern has, to that extent, no rational basis at all. Our ‘reasons’ are purely causal, identified

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24 See Harry Frankfurt’s discussion of the idea that we can make something important to us by caring about it, ‘The Importance of What We Care About,’ reprinted in The Importance of What We Care About (New York: Cambridge University Press 1988), 80-94.

in terms of their effects upon our passions, judgments and actions. They are from a rational point of view arbitrary.26

The distinction between reasons that have a justification and those that do not (because they are purely circumstantial causes) is an important one, something which Rorty's view does not grant. While we may accept the circumstantial causes and even be glad for them, if their role is too prominent we think this tends to detract from, if not to undermine, the value that we place on having reasons to think that the objects of our concern are especially worthy of it. It is often important to us that there be something special about the people we care about most, even if we acknowledge that this will be recognized only by persons who share our interests and values. But if one views our reasons for caring about other persons as given by whatever in fact gives rise to our sympathetic identification with them, as Rorty does, it is not clear that the distinction between justifying reasons and purely circumstantial causes can be appreciated, for both our justifying reasons and the relevant nonrational causes have a hand in this. As Whiting points out, while there is a real sense in which rationally arbitrary factors influence the formation of our personal attachments, the impersonal reasons we have to value particular attachments can still be important to us. Rorty's view would appear to be in tension with the concern we may have to be able to identify an impersonal source of value in our personal relationships, even though he claims to take the value we place on such relationships as his starting point.

Furthermore, and even more seriously, if a view that concentrates on the existence of a person's sympathetic identification with the good of another is to avoid the brute fact position that there are no reasons for personal concern, the only stable reason-giving aspect of the picture would seem to be the existence of the relationship itself, namely, the relationship characterized by one's sympathetic identification with that person. This picture threatens to make the reasons for my continued interest in the good of my loved ones depend on the relationship those persons bear to me: the reasons I have to appreciate their strengths and to wish them well are not independent from (and justifying of) my loving

26 Whiting agrees that once a relation based upon personal concern has been established, even if largely in a rationally arbitrary way, one may well have further reasons to continue to care for the particular person one cares about that one did not initially have. Ibid. For instance, one may have certain moral reasons. Personal relations are often relations of dependence; the welfare of those I care about may come to depend on my concern. Insofar as I have through my caring encouraged this dependence, I may have a reason or responsibility to respond to the needs I have helped to cause.
identification with those persons but are (from my point of view) constituted by it (Ibid., 9). That is, my reasons for personal concern are entirely dependent on the importance I (already) attach to our relationship. Whiting identifies such a view as egocentric: concern for others turns out to be an extension of self-concern. I take myself to be justified in caring about the good of another insofar as I have made that good part of my own. But surely our relationships need not take this form. We can appreciate the traits and virtues of another as good for that person and hope for that person's continued success, regardless of his or her future relationship to ourselves. Indeed, the other-directed nature of personal concern would seem to be a highly valued feature of it. In failing to acknowledge this, Rorty's view distorts the nature of genuine concern.

Thus we may be concerned that our reasons for personal concern are both rationally defensible and other-directed. In virtue of having these features, they may appear to bear something in common with moral reasons. I now take up the difference between personal and moral reasons, addressing first the significance of the non-rational aspects of personal concern. If it is correct, the above analysis reveals that our concern for those we care about is in a significant measure arbitrary. The factors inclining us to become attached to a particular person may reach beyond and even be independent of the reasons we recognize as generated by that person's virtues or distinctive traits. Where we happen to be born, who we happen to meet, the events that influence our psyches and the formation of our desires, all influence the choice of our objects of concern. We might think of these as the contingencies of time, place and disposition. Now if these contingencies could be the source of moral reasons for concern, the moral status of persons would thus depend on rationally arbitrary factors. While Rorty might not be troubled by this, I believe it offends our sense that the features of persons relevant to their moral status should as such have a justification, and that our moral regard for others should have a stable interpersonal basis. My argument here is strengthened by a parallel that can be drawn between the rational

27 Otherwise I could have some reason to care also about other persons who exemplify the traits I admire in my loved ones. My reasons would be, in that sense, impersonal.

28 Communitarians avoid this objection by focusing on examples of reciprocal concern: persons are justified in caring about one another insofar as they have made each other's good part of their own. Concern for others is still related to self-concern, but the identity of the self is embedded in (and not prior to) interpersonal relations. Hence the view is not obviously egocentric. This response was suggested to me by Bernard Williams. It seems to me, however, that the communitarian position can still be described as egocentric in a more extended sense.
aspects of personal and moral concern. Even though we may tolerate less rational stability and justification with respect to our reasons for personal concern than we do in the case of moral reasons, I have argued (against Rorty) that a concern for justification can be identified in the realm of personal concern as well. Our anxiety about the limits of rational justification in the personal realm leads us, or should lead us, to look for stricter standards of justification in the moral case. To a large extent, we may accept a lack of reasons for our particular attachments, and we should tolerate a lack of reasons for the personal attachments and attitudes of others. Irrational feelings of dislike other persons may experience toward us may even be morally unobjectionable. But we may reasonably be more demanding when it comes to their behavior toward us, and we should be willing to justify our behavior toward them. Insofar as our personal concern (or lack thereof) is shaped by factors that are rationally arbitrary, it is shaped by factors that are considerably more arbitrary than we should want the moral status of persons to be.

Let us turn, next, to the rational aspects of personal concern. First, note that the justifying force of our reasons for personal concern is something about which reasonable persons can disagree. That is, reasonable persons can disagree about the value of the traits that may generate the personal concern one feels for another person. There is nothing rationally required about the value I place on sensitivity to music, for instance, or a talent for philosophy, even though it may be true that I have reasons for holding these values. Plenty of people care little if at all about these things, and they may not be the worse for it. Because the value of personal attributes from the point of view of personal concern is not likely to be the object of agreement in the way that the basis of moral concern should be, our moral status as persons should not depend on being and having the features of a particular sort of person. Rorty praises liberalism as a political philosophy for its accommodation of pluralism about value. By embracing liberal values (such as toleration) in the public realm, persons who disagree about how best to lead one's personal, familial or communal life can still regard one another as fellow citizens who share a social world and should have equal rights. We can generalize from this lesson about how we can constructively respond to the fact of pluralism. We should not have to share other people's values as we would be required to do if moral status, in a sense that extends beyond the political, were to depend upon reasons for personal concern.

A second and related point is that our reasons for personal concern may bear a significant relation to desires that are not rationally required. We may admire the talents of others, like the way they look, enjoy their jokes, et cetera. The reason-giving character of these considerations depends on our desires and interests; if we were not moved by them, they would not count for us as reasons to care especially about certain
persons. The normative force of our reasons for personal concern can depend in a rather fine-grained way upon facts about our motivations.

Because they are notably contingent in these ways, the rational aspects of personal concern do not directly give rise to moral reasons. We should not conclude, however, that our reasons for personal concern have no moral relevance, for we can accept that they have an indirect bearing on our moral reasons.29 We can recognize the moral status a person has in virtue of that person's capacity for leading a life that someone (oneself or another) could have reason to care about, since the importance of having relationships of personal concern can reasonably be thought to be generally shared. But notice that the impersonal has reasserted itself. It would seem that, on this view, all persons have moral worth. Moral status is no longer dependent on the personal concern of anyone in particular.

We should not make the moral status of persons dependent on what I have called the contingencies of time, place, and disposition, nor should it depend on values that are the object of reasonable disagreement. We can decide to abstract from these contingencies in our moral thinking in order to maintain a serious commitment to the moral compatibility requirement, viz., the requirement that we conduct ourselves in accordance with principles it is reasonable to think are compatible with the fundamental interests of all affected persons. Our moral relations with others would thus be supported by reasons that avoid such contingencies. The moral compatibility requirement itself may be contingent in the sense that our allegiance to it could in fact be historically and culturally specific;30 contra Rorty's charge against moral impartialism, we need not assert that morality has a transhistorical metaphysical basis. But we can nevertheless differentiate various forms of contingency and aim to eliminate those that seem irrelevant to or inconsistent with our best understanding of the point of moral reasoning and our moral relations with other people. This means, I have been arguing, that the content of moral

29 I have already acknowledged, in the opening paragraph of this paper, that the interest we each have in some measure of personal autonomy has moral value. Here I am addressing how the rational aspects of personal concern can be seen to support the moral significance of the importance that relationships of personal concern have for us.

30 Or it could be argued that morality has (non-metaphysical) psychological roots in innate universal benevolence. In that case, the cause of moral concern would bear a close relationship to its content. I defer discussion on the difference between moral motivation (understood as motivation to meet the moral compatibility requirement) and benevolence.
reasons should not be grounded in either the causes or the rational aspects of personal concern, excepting those rational aspects of personal concern that can generally be shared.

IV

Now I turn to views that acknowledge the moral compatibility requirement but also hold that personal relationships give rise to special obligations that may conflict with it. On these views, a conflict between moral accountability to persons as such and the demands of the personal may actually involve a conflict between types of moral duties. These views attempt to secure more room morally for the demands of personal concern than the more ‘impartial’ moral compatibility requirement can allow by requiring, as did Rorty, that the domain of moral obligation include the demands of personal relationships, even when these demands cannot be accounted for in terms of reasons non-members can share. Nevertheless, proponents of these views do not wish to give up the moral compatibility requirement altogether. They maintain that the demands of personal concern do not always trump the more impartial demands of that requirement. Scheffler describes this dual position as implicit in ‘common sense morality.’ He writes,

The commonsense morality of our culture holds that each of us has certain responsibilities toward other people simply as such — to avoid various forms of mistreatment, for example, and also to provide limited forms of assistance in certain contexts. At the same time, commonsense morality holds that there are additional and often much greater responsibilities that the members of significant social groups and the participants in close personal relationship have to each other.31

Scheffler calls these additional responsibilities ‘associative duties.’ His twofold conception of morality must hold that the justification of some of our associative duties is addressed only to a particular person or group of persons, otherwise its claims could satisfy the moral compatibility requirement. That is, if all persons have reason to accept that an individual may have a greater responsibility to attend to the welfare of his spouse than to multiple others, for example, then so acting can be justified. But Scheffler seems to be claiming that our associative duties can exceed the limits set by this test of accountability to others. The benefits of personal relationships are significant, he stresses, even aside

31 Scheffler, ‘Families, Nations, and Strangers,’ 1
from the benefits that accrue directly from the fulfillment of associative duties. He acknowledges that we cannot expect those who are already disadvantaged by failing to secure the intrinsic benefits of friendship and love to accept the further disadvantage of being deprived of benefits that a more impartial morality would accede to them as a right.\(^{32}\) That is, we cannot reasonably expect them to accept the further disadvantage of a lowered status in the domain of moral concern. But Scheffler believes this does not invalidate the idea of associative duties. Thus, accepting his strong conception of these responsibilities entails giving up the idea that they must satisfy the moral compatibility requirement. In other words, Scheffler is not simply and in a neutral way pointing to a deep tension in moral thought between the notion of associative duties and the demands of impartiality. To accept the tension as a deep one is to reject the idea that the moral compatibility requirement is essential to moral reasoning.\(^{33}\) I am arguing that the dilemma Scheffler thinks we are caught in is not a moral one.

Our discussion to this point leads us to the conclusion that if there are associative duties, then it must be something other than the basis of persons' moral status generally that underwrites them. What could that be? Scheffler explores the view that these duties can be generated by membership in a group or participation in a relationship, apart from any voluntary acts of will and, as suggested above, despite the fact that third parties may suffer disadvantages as a result. He says, 'virtually any kind of group or personal relationship that has significance for the people it unites may be seen by them as giving rise to associative duties.'\(^{34}\) His view seems to be that it is the very significance of the group or personal relationship for the persons it unites that generates their special duties to one another; valuing personal relationships involves viewing them as entailing a fundamental class of moral duties.\(^{35}\) Thus, rather than referring to the 'impartial' moral compatibility requirement, the justification of associative duties arises immediately from the (agent-relative) value of the relationships they help to structure. What is required to form and maintain important personal relationships carries moral weight as such;

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32 I draw this point from Scheffler's discussion of the 'distributivist objection' (Ibid., 9-18). See also his 'Relationships and Responsibilities,' 192-4, 205-9.

33 I thank Philip Clark for pushing me to be clearer on this point.


35 Philip Clark's comments helped me to formulate this point.
the limits on partiality set by what is compatible with the interests of all affected parties do not apply.

Although Scheffler concedes that the impartialist case against associative duties is a strong one, he remains sympathetic to 'a tenacious strand of ordinary moral opinion that dismisses [the] objections, and continues to see associative duties as central components of moral experience.' I suggest that the 'tenacious strand of ordinary moral opinion' to which Scheffler refers is driven by the idea that the source of moral justification should match what is most important to us. In order to elaborate this idea, let me turn briefly to another philosopher whose thought seems to guided by it.

V

Taylor argues that some goods are genuinely 'collective' goods. Collective goods are goods that persons enjoy together and, furthermore, persons' common enjoyment of those goods at least partially constitutes the value of those goods for them. Joke-telling is an example of a collective good, and so is friendship. Genuinely collective goods contrast with merely 'convergent' goods, such as security. A convergent good may be enjoyed collectively, since we may not be able to get it any other way, but the collective enjoyment of a convergent good is merely incidental to its value for individuals. 'In the unlikely event that an individual could secure it for himself, he would be getting the same valued condition that we all get now from social provision.'

According to Taylor, some collective goods involve associative duties; without these duties the goods would not be possible. For example, regarding the alleged associative duties of patriotism (vs. a 'cosmopolitan' concern for persons regardless of their nationality), Taylor writes,

[We] need patriotism as well as cosmopolitanism because modern democratic states are extremely exigent common enterprises in self-rule. They require a great deal of their members, demanding much greater solidarity toward compatriots than toward humanity in general. We cannot make a success of these enterprises without strong common identification. And considering the alternatives to democracy in our world, it is not in the interest of humanity that we fail in these enterprises.

36 Scheffler, 'Families, Nations, and Strangers,' 18
37 Taylor, 'Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,' 191
38 Taylor, 'Why Democracy Needs Patriotism,' 120
Our question is, Can these ‘duties’ meet the moral compatibility requirement? Taylor’s reasoning suggests that they can. The associative duties encompassed by an ethic of patriotism make democracy possible, he claims, and it is better for human beings generally that democracies exist and function well. Ideally, then, it is in the interests of all persons that citizens in democracies have special patriotic duties to one another, duties that may sometimes take priority over duties to persons as such.

This reasoning exemplifies a kind of reasoning about patriotic allegiances that meets the moral compatibility requirement. Elsewhere, however, Taylor seems to place greater emphasis on claims about the intrinsic value of particular cultures and ways of life. He suggests that the unifying impact of the history and culture of a republic upon its people, for instance, can both create and justify their patriotic allegiance. He writes,

[The] bond of solidarity with my compatriots in a functioning republic is based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing itself is of value. This is what gives this bond its special importance, what makes my ties with these people and to this enterprise peculiarly binding, what animates my “vertu” or patriotism. (Ibid., 192)

Here Taylor clearly equates the special importance of a historically emergent collective bond with the (moral) bindingness of its ties, and it is not at all clear that its special importance derives from the democratic government it may help to make possible. Again venturing away from the argument concentrating on democratic values, Taylor argues,

There are also modern democratic societies where patriotism centers on a national culture, which in many cases has come to incorporate free institutions, but which is also defined in terms of some language or history. Quebec is the prominent example in my experience, but there are many others...A society like Quebec can’t but be dedicated to the defense and promotion of French culture and language, even if this involves some restriction on individual freedoms. (Ibid., 203)

Taylor is defending the idea that minority groups may have no legitimate objection to legislation that aims to preserve the dominant culture (in Quebec), even when it involves curtailing some individual liberties.

39 I interpret Taylor to be saying that the existence of democracies also benefits persons who are not members of democratic states because, for instance, democratic states are less likely to be aggressive and expansionist. If the ‘interest of humanity’ is not understood in this way, then it is not clear that the associative duties of patriotism that Taylor praises would meet the moral compatibility requirement.

40 Taylor, ‘Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,’ 188
He thinks justification to minority groups may not be essential to the justification of legislation promoting a particular culture or way of life shared by the majority. Why should we accept this?

Taylor’s argument appears to depend on the idea that the value of a collective good (for those who enjoy it) may be so great that it can offset the requirements of justification to outsiders; in that sense we might think of it as constituting a distinct source of moral reasons. Taylor explores and defends a ‘politics of difference’ which he believes supports the idea that bonds between people based upon a shared culture and history may generate associative duties. The politics of difference holds that particular groups may be entitled, and even morally required, to take measures to ensure the survival of their culture. In examining the justification for this, Taylor says,

The politics of difference is full of denunciations of discrimination and refusals of second-class citizenship. This gives the principle of universal equality a point of entry within the politics of dignity. But once inside, as it were, its demands are hard to assimilate to that politics. For it asks that we give acknowledgment and status to something that is not universally shared.41

What I believe Taylor is arguing is that while the ‘politics of difference’ springs from a universal principle that accords value to the equal dignity of each person, it is not, from the inside, limited by this universal principle. The politics of difference takes on an ethical life of its own. The value groups place upon the cultural beliefs and practices which have come to define their identities may generate moral imperatives that are not constrained by the moral compatibility requirement. Consider what Taylor says in defense of the goal of ‘cultural survival’:

It is axiomatic for Quebec governments that the survival and flourishing of French culture in Quebec is a good...It is not just a matter of having the French language available for those who might choose it...But it also involves making sure that there is a community of people here in the future that will want to avail itself of the opportunity to use the French language. Policies aimed at survival activity seek to create members of the community, for instance, in their assuring that future generations continue to identify as French-speakers. (Ibid., 58-9)

‘After all,’ writes Taylor, ‘if we’re concerned with identity, then what is more legitimate than one’s aspiration that it never be lost?’ (Ibid., 40)

Here again, as with Schef fler, we encounter the idea that what is important to a certain group, and in particular, what comprises the terms of

41 Taylor, ‘The Politics of Recognition,’ 39
that group's identity, is entitled to a protected place from a moral point of view, one that may justify that group in making claims on others that are not guided by concern for what would be compatible with their interests.

I have attempted to show that the 'tenacious strand of ordinary moral opinion' to which Scheffler and Taylor appeal in order to support associative duties is driven by the notion that the source of moral obligation should match what is most important to us. When our moral reasons do not match our most basic motives, these philosophers claim our selves lack the harmony and support we need to flourish. Michael Stocker shares this view. He describes this gap between reasons and motives as 'moral schizophrenia,' and argues that we suffer from moral schizophrenia when we either fail to be moved by what we value, or fail to value what moves us.42 He charges that moral schizophrenia is a consequence of adopting modern ethical theories; the impartialist orientation of modern ethical theories does not square with the particularist nature of the motives that emerge in interpersonal relationships. Personal concern seems to preclude the motives that comprise ethical justifications, and vice versa (Ibid., 461).

As should be clear by now, my view is that there is some truth in this charge against impartialist ethical theories. As these theories describe morality, many of our motives of personal concern are not generated by morality, and they can fail to be justified by it. When our motives of personal concern are morally permissible, this is shown by reasoning that is motivated by considerations that have little to do with the particularities of personal relationships. The motive is a general desire or commitment to act only on the basis of considerations that take the interests of all affected persons into account, and thus should be acceptable from the point of view of all persons who share this desire or commitment.43 But while this motive is not the motive of personal concern, it is not incompatible with valuing relationships of personal concern at the same time; we can do so for non-moral reasons. I have urged avoiding the equation of the value of personal ties with the moral justification of associative duties. The 'impartialist' need not deny (although she also does not affirm), for example, the value of a sense of unity generated by common history and culture for those thus unified,

42 Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories,' The Journal of Philosophy 73 (1976), 454

43 For a similar account of moral motivation, see T.M. Scanlon, 'Contractualism and Utilitarianism,' Utilitarianism and Beyond, Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press 1982), especially 111, 116-7.
but merely holds that promoting a collective good must meet a certain test of moral compatibility with the interests of outsiders if it is to be thought to generate genuine associative duties. Neither meeting nor failing to meet the moral compatibility requirement, however, is incompatible with acknowledging the value of collective goods for those who enjoy them. Of course, when particular relationships of personal concern are incompatible with the fundamental interests of affected persons, this would seem to give us good reason to rethink our commitment to those relationships. Even if a collective good could not exist without implicit associative duties, it is not obvious that it should exist if it cannot be morally justified.

These possibilities would not seem to constitute ‘moral schizophrenia’ in any objectionably threatening sense. Stocker’s charge is overblown. We ought to be able to accept that our personal reasons for caring may not constitute moral justifications. In fact, our moral respect for others requires that we acknowledge a gap between the personal and the moral.

To review, insisting that our moral reasons match our personal reasons implies that: (1) Morality would largely lack a reasoned basis. (2) The reasons we acknowledge are reasons we cannot generally expect others to accept. Thus (3), our practical reasoning would display indifference (at best) to the reasons other persons have, including reasons they may have to object to what we do.

This indifference to others is a form of intolerance and a rationale for disregarding their moral status and claims. We should reject it. Fairness to others requires that we recognize the limits of the moral and maintain its ‘impartial’ character. What gives us personally most reason to care may not count morally, i.e., many of our most basic primary reasons may turn out to have no moral weight at all. I see no reason why this need be especially disorienting to our sense of self. Morality is not the only source of value, and there are many values, relations, and ways of life compatible with it. Of course whether one finds the constraints of morality disorienting will depend on the sort of person one is. Morality might require some of us to change in basic ways — to change ways in which we think about ourselves and our priorities, that is, if it is the case that we take morality seriously and we find that it is in tension with our personal projects and relations. Morally required changes may indeed alter our identities, but this need not engender schizophrenic dissociation from or distortion of reality.

I have maintained that the moral does not necessarily encompass the personal, and hence that their demands may conflict with one another. This leads us to the following question: When the demands of moral and personal concern do conflict, could one rationally conclude that personal concern takes priority? That is, could the demands of personal relationships or projects rationally override our moral concern for others?
Williams' discussion of the case of Gauguin in 'Moral Luck' suggests that it could. According to Williams, Gauguin may turn out to have been deliberatively (i.e., rationally) justified in pursuing his interest in art at the expense of his moral obligations to his family. I would argue, however, that to portray his decision as the resolution of a conflict in which moral commitment figures prominently is misleading. When the personal overrides the moral, it would seem to do so by more or less discounting the moral overall. What I am claiming is that if we pick and choose when to do what is morally right based upon its potential fit with our personal interests and desires, we may rightly be said to lack moral commitment. This is not to say that rationality requires us to do what is morally right, but only that a commitment to morality may sometimes require personal sacrifice, and if we are unwilling to accept that sacrifice, the sincerity of our commitment to morality should be questioned.

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