

PARTIALITY AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHARED HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

We have reasons to act differently toward some people than we do toward others, just in virtue of our relationships with them, while other relationships give rise to no special reasons. What can explain the difference between relationships that give rise to partiality and those that do not? Niko Kolodny has recently tried to explain the difference by appeal to shared history, but his account does not explain why or how shared history matters. This leaves him unable to defend his claims about which relationships call for partiality. I argue that shared history between two people is important because of the psychological connectedness that forms between them. People affect each other's values and beliefs, and this reciprocal influence grounds special reasons. This account gives us a fuller understanding of the significance of particular relationships, and as a result, calls for revisions to Kolodny's conclusions about what reasons those relationships give rise to.

INTRODUCTION

We seem to have reasons to act differently toward people we know than we do toward strangers, just in virtue of our relationships with those certain others. We have reasons to do things for our own children that we do not have for the neighbor's children, and which the neighbor does not have for our children. Each of us participates in many relationships that seem to give rise to special reasons like this, and these reasons are often felt to be among the most significant in people's lives. Yet other relationships seem not to give rise to special reasons, such as the relationship between white separatists or all those who have the same blood type. Two questions that these observations raise are: how are reason-giving relationships different from other relationships that seem not to give rise to such reasons, and what is it that makes reason-giving relationships special?

The special reasons we have toward certain others are reasons of *partiality*. They contrast with reasons of impartiality, meaning reasons we have to treat all others equally, regardless of

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our relationships to them. “Reasons of partiality” have much in common with similar terms used elsewhere, such as “special tie obligations,” “associative duties,” and “relationship obligations,” although I do not assume these reasons are necessarily moral.¹ These reasons are special in the sense that they apply only to certain people and not others unlike, say, a reason not to harm another person. I have reason to check that my own child’s homework is done, but my neighbor does not have any such reason (though the neighbor does have such a reason toward her own child).

In a recent pair of articles, Niko Kolodny has contributed to the discussion about reasons of partiality by giving an account of why relationships that give rise to partiality do so, and how they differ from relationships that do not (2010a, 2010b). Kolodny argues that relationships give rise to reasons of partiality through a history of encounter, which resonates with the reasons that arise through the discrete encounters that comprise it. One advantage of Kolodny’s account, which distinguishes it from other discussions of partiality, is that he bases his theory of partiality on an account of what he takes to be normatively significant about relationships. The significance of relationships is often taken as a starting point for debate on their moral implications, with some claiming that the importance of relationships gives them moral status, and others denying this (Archard, 1995; Baron, 1991; Dagger, 2000; Horton, 2006; Wellman, 2000; Wolf, 1992).

This debate cannot proceed without considering the prior question of what makes relationships important in the first place. Without an account of what matters about relationships we have no basis for understanding the reasons that they give rise to.

My purpose in this paper is not to justify reasons of partiality to those who doubt their existence. Instead, I address those who think that there are such reasons, including those who think they exist but have concerns about how to systematically distinguish between relationships that call for partiality and those that do not.

Kolodny’s view has two problems: he does not give support for key parts of his view of relationships, and while his argument gives a theory of relationships based on a shared history of encounter, he only claims that reasons of partiality apply to some histories, without justifying the narrower claim. Kolodny’s theory of relationships does not explain why discrete encounters have normative significance, or why a history of encounter is not reducible to individual encounters. So while Kolodny’s account improves on other accounts of partiality in his attention to what makes relationships significant, it falls short of what is needed in these very respects. He gives *some* account of the normative significance of relationships: many are composed of discrete encounters. But he does not explain why discrete encounters matter for relationships. He also claims that while relationships should be understood in terms of these discrete encounters, they also are not reducible to those encounters, but he only gestures at reasons why this should be. The lack of explanation for these claims has consequences for his analyses of particular cases: the gaps leave him unable to defend his claims about which relationships do or do not call for partiality. This failure underscores the need for a more thorough analysis of what the normative significance of

¹ Morality is often identified with reasons of impartiality, so defined. If that is correct, and the definition of impartiality given above accurate, morality excludes reasons of partiality. Thus, one purpose of this paper is simply to draw attention to the fact that people have such reasons, which may or may not fit within the moral sphere. I do not here engage with the debate of whether reasons of partiality properly belong within the sphere of morality. For further discussion of this point, see: Archard, 1995; Baron, 1991; Wolf, 1992.

relationships consists in, before a solid theory of the reasons they give rise to can be developed.

I propose that discrete encounters have normative significance in virtue of the psychological connectedness they produce. This account is sympathetic to Kolodny's theory while also filling in the gaps he leaves open. We influence, and are influenced by, others in the course of our encounters with them, and this mutual influence psychologically connects us. Psychological connectedness with another person over an extended period has a different sort of influence from similar encounters over the same period with many individuals. This account gives us a fuller understanding of the significance of particular relationships, and in some cases, calls for revisions to Kolodny's conclusions about what reasons those relationships give rise to. Thus my account is broadly sympathetic to Kolodny's view, but diverges from it in some respects as well.

KOLODNY'S THEORY OF RESONANCE

In this section, I briefly lay out the key features of Kolodny's account, and in the next section I will explain what I take to be problematic or missing about his view. Of particular concern is his lack of explanation for two key parts of his theory, and how they go together: why particular, discrete encounters are the best way to understand what matters about relationships, and why extended relationships are more than the sum of these encounters.

Kolodny starts by positing a List of partiality principles, such as "one has reason for partiality toward one's children," or "one has reason for partiality toward one's spouse" (2010a, 39). The List includes all those relationships that give rise to partiality, and excludes those that do not. One's relationship with one's children, spouse, or parents seem to be prime candidates for the List, while one's relationship with all those who share the same blood type does not, but some might worry that there is no principled way to distinguish them. Even more worrisome, for some, is how to explain why family relationships should be included but relationships with others of the same race should not. Why is this? Answering this question requires a principle explaining why certain relationships are on or off the List.

According to Kolodny, relationships that give reasons for partiality can be explained in one of two ways: shared histories of encounter or common personal histories and situations. If I encounter someone, and that person helps me in some way, I have reason for gratitude, and some expression of that gratitude, toward her. Some relationships, like friendship, are best understood as extended histories of such encounters (Kolodny, 2010a, 50). Similar to the way a single encounter calls for a certain response, extended histories of such encounters call for many such responses, but in a way that reflects "the distinctive importance of a history shared with another person" (Kolodny, 2010a, 51). If a history of encounter with another person is comprised of discrete encounters, each calling for responses of gratitude, respect, courtesy, etc., then the history of encounter overall calls for similar responses. In Kolodny's terms, the proper response to a shared history of encounter should "resonate" with the proper responses to the particular encounters that comprise it.

Kolodny defines resonance as: "one has reason to respond to X in a way that is similar to the way that one has reason to respond to its counterpart in another dimension of importance, but that reflects the distinctive importance of the dimension to which X belongs" (2010a, 47). So, resonance describes a relationship between reasons of different dimensions, according to

which a reason of one dimension is not reducible to a reason of another dimension. Other relationships between reasons of different dimensions include deduction and facilitation (Kolodny, 2010a, 40). Kolodny argues that reasons of partiality are explained via resonance. He gives the principle: Resonance of Histories of Encounter. According to the principle, “one has reason to respond to a history of encounter in a way that is similar to the way that one has reason to respond to the discrete encounters of which it is composed, but that reflects the distinctive importance of a history shared with another person” (Kolodny, 2010a, 51). Unlike deduction or facilitation, resonance is non-reductive.

Kolodny’s theory is non-reductive in two ways here. First, the reason that one has to respond to a history of encounter is not reducible to non-partiality principles. Contrast the above principle with a reductionist account of partiality, according to which reasons for partiality can be derived by deduction from a normative principle such as reason to promote others’ well-being. On the reductive account, a parent has reasons of partiality toward her child in virtue of the facts that we all have reason to promote others’ well-being, and that parents are well-placed to do this for their children. Kolodny, by contrast, argues that this reductionist approach does not explain some reasons of partiality that we seem to have, such as someone’s reason to care for a close family member even if others are more skilled in that person’s particular needs, and even if the relation is not voluntarily acquired, such as between siblings, or child to parent. More importantly, even when they can explain reasons of partiality, they give the wrong sorts of reasons for partial actions. In Kolodny’s words, there is something “oddly estranged” about giving a universal normative principle as a reason for benefitting one’s spouse (2010a, 41-42). It would be unusual and even a little disturbing for a parent to say “I care for my child because I can meet her needs more efficiently than a stranger,” or that “I provide care for my sick spouse because I voluntarily committed myself to this position, and voluntary commitments should be kept.”

A second kind of non-reductionism that figures into Kolodny’s account is that a history of encounter is not reducible to the discrete encounters of which it is composed. Kolodny takes there to be a “distinctive importance” in discrete encounters that are all shared with a single person, as opposed to encounters shared with different people. He gives an example of a traveler on the road, who is helped by many people along the way. This traveler has reason for gratitude toward each helper, but no particular loyalty to any, and when the debt is repaid, he moves on. Compare this with a traveler who is helped in the same ways, but by a single companion (Kolodny, 2010a, 50-51). The companioned traveler has an open-ended reason for concern for his companion, in a way that the other traveler does not. It is only a history of encounter, according to Kolodny, that calls for an “expansive loyalty” (2010a, 51). Toward his companion, he has reason “not to move on, but instead to sustain his friendship going forward.” An implication of Kolodny’s view of relationships, then, is that relationships can consist in histories of encounter, but not singular encounters. A single encounter with another individual does not amount to a relationship. Only the reasons arising from extended histories of encounter are reasons of partiality.

This second kind of non-reductionism, non-reductionism of relationships, is related to the first kind, non-reductionism of reasons of partiality. Reasons of partiality are not reducible to non-partiality reasons in part because extended histories of encounter are not reducible to discrete encounters. If relationships were reducible to discrete encounters, then reasons of partiality would be reducible to the appropriate responses to discrete encounters, like a reason the traveler has to repay a debt while on the road. Relationships call for more “open-ended”

reasons than this because they are not reducible to the discrete encounters of which they are composed. Kolodny's account of reasons of partiality, then, depends on his account of relationships. In what follows, I will expand on this second kind of non-reductionism, but I will not directly address the first.

Resonance of Histories of Encounter gives us information for what reasons of partiality belong on the List, according to Kolodny. Relationships are on the List if the discrete encounters are "encounters of aid," which call for gratitude by reciprocating or expressing thanks, and which resonate with those encounters in that they call for responses of "love and loyalty", while relationships composed of harmful or painful encounters are off the List (Kolodny, 2010a, 50-51, 53-54). Thus he claims that relationships are on the List only if they resonate the right way. This additional condition represents a problem for Kolodny, which demonstrates a common ambiguity about the meaning of the term "partiality." I'll return to this later.

In addition to extended histories of encounter, relationships also come to be on the List if two people have a personal history in common, such as of pursuing an aim, like curing cancer, or have a common personal situation, like attending the same school, according to Kolodny. When someone has a history of engagement with an institution or a culture, that history gives her reason of solidarity with others who have a similar history of engagement (Kolodny, 2010a, 52). This gives rise to Kolodny's second principle for explaining the List: Resonance of Common Personal History or Situation. According to this principle, "one has reason to respond to a common personal history with, or situation involving, a thing in a way that is similar to the way one has reason to respond to the personal history or situation itself, but that reflects the distinctive importance of sharing a personal history or situation with another person" (Kolodny, 2010a, 52). I will not address this condition in this paper, for the most part, although I do have some doubts about it, which will be briefly noted.

These principles exclude some kinds of relationships from the List, according to Kolodny, especially trivial and negative relationships. When Kolodny refers to trivial encounters, he has in mind encounters like passing someone who is getting off a train as you are boarding it (2010a, 53). "One has no reason to respond this encounter... in any particular way. ...There is, so to speak, nothing for partiality to resonate with." Negative relationships are separated into two categories: externally and internally negative. Externally negative relationships are those where people come together for the purpose of jointly hurting or wronging someone not in the group, like pirates or prison-gangs (Kolodny, 2010a, 53-54). Resonance of History of Encounters applies, but the discrete encounters do not call for partiality in this case, according to Kolodny. They do, however, give rise to other reasons, such as seeing to it that one's partner(s) make amends, or distancing oneself from them (Kolodny, 2010a, 53).² Kolodny refers to hurtful encounters, or encounters in which one person causes another unnecessary suffering, as "internally negative encounters," because the negativity is internal to the encounter or relationship. Like externally negative encounters, they call for certain responses, such as on the one hand, resentment and demands for reparations, and on the other, guilt and performance of reparations. But Kolodny believes they do not call for partiality, because the abuser does not have reason to continue with the abuse, and the victim does not have reason to continue to submit.

² Externally and internally negative relationships provide some of the clearest examples in Kolodny's articles of the ambiguity in the term "partiality." More on this below.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

While Kolodny's principle gives some explanation for why some troublesome cases are off the List, the explanation is limited by his failure to develop or support his claim that what matters about a relationship is the discrete encounters of which the relationship is composed, and that while these are the building blocks of such relationships, the relationships also somehow go beyond the sum of those discrete encounters. In other words, Kolodny offers us only a brief sketch of what it is about relationships that gives people reasons to respond in certain ways. This lack of development leaves Kolodny unable to defend his claims about which relationships belong on the List, and even contributes to an ambiguity in the term "partiality" itself.

One result of these missing pieces is that it is unclear why we should understand relationships in terms of discrete encounters at all. Even if shared history seems somehow relevant to an account of relationships, it does not follow that the discrete encounters themselves are important to their composition. After all, a friendship may develop over weekly cups of coffee, and become an important part of one's life, while any one of those coffee breaks seems normatively insignificant. It might be thought, for instance, that what matters is the repetition and frequency of the coffee breaks instead, such that no single encounter makes a difference, but all together they do. The coffee breaks might provide the occasion for forming the friendship, rather than composing it. It just isn't clear why the discrete encounters matter for relationships. If relationships are not composed of discrete encounters, then the reasons of partiality that attach to those relationships may not be associated with those encounters, even in a relatively loose, "resonant" way.

Another problem is in Kolodny's claim that reasons of partiality are not reducible to reasons given by discrete encounters: there is a "distinctive importance" to sharing those encounters all with a single individual. Kolodny does not attempt to develop this distinctive importance, other than through his comparison between the solo and companioned travelers. What is it that is distinctive about an extended history with a particular other person, as opposed to encounters with many different people? The distinctive importance of an extended history with another further underscores the concern above: why think that relationships should be analyzed in terms of their discrete encounters? Maybe an extended history with another is simply qualitatively different from the discrete encounters. This also raises questions about his claim to explain reasons of partiality in terms of a history shared with another person. Why think that the appropriate response to a shared history is in any way connected to the appropriate response to discrete encounters?

The lack of answers to these questions has implications for Kolodny's ability to explain the List. Insofar as he lacks a developed analysis of the normative significance of shared history, he lacks the resources to give principled reasons why particular relationships belong on or off the List. His principles work at too high a level, so to speak. They give some explanation for why some relationships are on the List and others are not, but they do not provide grounds for making determinations about harder cases.

Another problem with Kolodny's account is that while his arguments develop a general theory of relationships, he claims that relationships are only on the List if the discrete encounters of which the relationship is composed are "encounters of aid". Relationships that are composed of negative encounters, on the other hand (either internally or externally

negative) do not belong on the List. But he doesn't say, for instance, whether relationships that are composed of both externally negative encounters and encounters of aid belong on or off the List. One might worry that most relationships are like this: composed of both negative and positive encounters. He doesn't give any reason why only relationships composed of encounters of aid belong on the List, when his argument seems to depend on this. Why should the List be limited in this way?

Kolodny's conclusions about externally negative relationships, like pirates, are especially revealing here. Pirates represent a hard case for Kolodny, because while some of their discrete encounters are quite nasty, others are positive and mutually beneficial. Drawing on the principle of Resonance of Histories of Encounter, the reasons given by externally negative relationships should resonate with the reasons given by externally negative discrete encounters. Kolodny believes that these discrete encounters call for guilt and repairing the damage, and thus such relationships call for similar responses (Kolodny, 2010a, 53). Since pirates have relationships composed of externally negative encounters, they do not belong on the List. However, it is far from clear that this is the right conclusion about relationships that include such discrete encounters. Two pirates may have a positive, caring relationship between themselves, in which one has nursed the other back to health from a bout of scurvy, and the other has whittled him a peg-leg. Their relationship is further cemented by the thrilling project (along with their other fellow-pirates) of boarding and plundering a merchant ship. So, perhaps such pirates do belong on the List after all, even according to Kolodny's own reasoning. Certainly, what relationships these pirates have *with the merchants* calls for guilt and reparation, but those are internally negative relationships.

Furthermore, Kolodny does not actually give a principle for determining whether a relationship belongs on the List. Kolodny distinguishes between encounters that call for gratitude, love and loyalty, and those that do not: he believes that only the former give reasons for partiality. Yet the principles he proposes for explaining the List, Resonance of Histories of Encounter and Resonance of Common Personal History or Situation, do not reflect such a distinction. Resonance of Histories of Encounter apply regardless of whether the encounters call for gratitude, love or loyalty, or the opposite. Kolodny argues that internally negative relationships, such as those between pirates, do not belong on the List because the discrete encounters of which they are composed resonate in the wrong way. But according to the Principle of Resonance of Histories of Encounter, they do give rise to some special reasons for responses, like guilt and repairing the damage. If Kolodny really thinks that partiality only applies to the positive relationships, then he has not given us a principle for the List at all. He would need to give, and defend, a principle distinguishing between types of responses, to do that.

This problem for Kolodny is symptomatic of a confusion about the concept of "partiality," I believe. Partiality, and reasons for partiality, can be understood in a narrow sense or a wide sense. In a narrow sense, reasons of partiality refer only to positive reasons, like gratitude, loyalty and care, and attach only to healthy relationships, in which the parties do not hurt or otherwise make each other worse off. On this view, special reasons that arise from internally negative relationships (and maybe also externally negative relationships) would not be reasons of partiality. In a wide sense, reasons of partiality refer to any reason that holds in virtue of a relationship, and which one does not have to people, irrespective of relationship. This way of using the term emphasizes the way partiality contrasts with reasons of *impartiality*. This contrast has far-reaching importance in ethics; some of the deepest issues

that partiality raises for ethics relate to conflicts between the proper responses to certain people with whom one has some kind of particular attachment and the proper responses to people with whom one has no particular attachment. If hurtful attachments call for responses that are different from one's responses to strangers, as I think they do, then on the wide view of partiality, they would be considered reasons of partiality. Doing so is consistent with drawing other distinctions regarding the *content* of partiality in particular cases, whether it be gratitude or restitution.

The Principle of Resonance of Histories of Encounter provides reason for including relationships on the List if partiality is taken in the wide sense. The Principle gives us a way to distinguish between relationships that give rise to special reasons (i.e., relationships that exhibit a "distinctive importance in a history shared with another person") and those that do not. But if partiality is understood in the narrow sense, Kolodny has given us no explanation for which relationships belong on the List, since by his own argument some reasons-generating relationships do not.

So, Kolodny's account leaves at least three questions unanswered which are crucial to his view of reasons for partiality. The first is: what is the normative significance of discrete encounters that matters for relationships? Another question is: what is the distinctive importance of a history of encounters that is all shared with one person? Finally, a third question is: what responses are appropriate to particular discrete encounters? In other words, when someone does something nice for us, how do we determine the content of the response that is called for?

My aim is to elaborate on Kolodny's theory and fill in the missing pieces, by giving a response to the first and second questions. Filling in those pieces leads to revisions in some respects which perhaps Kolodny would find congenial. The third question I leave for another occasion.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONNECTEDNESS AND SHARED HISTORY

Kolodny's account lacks a theory of what it is about discrete encounters with other people that has normative significance. This may not strike some people as a problem, since after all, it may just seem obvious that when someone does you a good turn, you ought to say thanks, or return the favor in some proportional way. However, such encounters take on a different kind of significance if they are the building blocks of most interpersonal relationships. Analyzing relationships in terms of discrete encounters, any one of which may be fairly trivial, may seem unlikely, even to those who are convinced that there is a List.

I suggest that what matters about discrete encounters is the psychological connections that form between the two parties in the course of such encounters. When two people interact, they affect each other's mental states, such as their beliefs, desires, or values. It is this mutual influence that gives normative significance to discrete encounters. When two people talk or otherwise interact, they affect each other's beliefs, desires, and values, in small and big ways. This influence is reciprocal: each of them both influences, and is influenced by, the other in the course of the encounter. For passing encounters, such as with a traveler on the road, that influence is likely to be small (though even brief encounters occasionally have a profound effect), but for extended histories of encounter, such as a traveler with his companion, that influence is likely to have a significant impact on both the traveler's and the companion's

mental states.³ This reciprocal influence may even extend beyond mental states, such as to sub-conscious verbal patterns, or physical memory. This influence will rarely be straightforward, in the sense that ideas or beliefs are rarely imported wholesale from one person to the other, but exposure to those ideas leads to new ideas or perspectives in the other.⁴

Mental states have special importance. Who we are, as people, is captured at least in part by our mental states, such as what we believe, desire, and value. Some might even say that our mental states *are* us, that they capture everything important that makes us individuals (this is Parfit's view). Part of what makes Sally Sally is her passion for gardening, her kindness, and her sharp sense of humor, along with the particular history that influenced her to become who she is now. Without these features she would no longer be Sally. Of course, this overstates things slightly, since there are perfectly comprehensible ways in which Sally might lose one or all of these traits, and still be recognizably herself. The point is that such changes in individuals are changes in mental states, which illustrates the central importance of mental states for who we are.

The importance of our mental states for who we are explains why influences on our mental states have normative significance. When we interact with others, we bring about changes in who they are, and they change us as well. This gives us reason for acknowledgment toward those we encounter, for their contribution to making us the people we are, and also, at the same time, reason for special responsibility toward those we encounter, for our contribution in shaping who they are.⁵ Our mutual influence on each other's mental states gives rise to reasons to act differently toward each other than we act toward strangers. What matters about encounters, on this view, is that we contribute in some way to shaping the beliefs, desires, and values of people we encounter, and they go some way to shaping us. Some encounters contribute to shaping us more than others, so the appropriate response to an encounter is sensitive to its degree of influence. Even brief encounters with strangers may contribute to shaping one's mental states, although their influence is typically slight. A chat with a stranger at a bus stop would call for a proportionate response, such as

³ This account is loosely based on Derek Parfit's theory of personal identity (1984). Parfit argues that what makes an earlier self identical (or near enough) to a later self is the special causal influence that the earlier self has over the later self's mental states (206). He calls this influence psychological connectedness, and later argues that it is a basis for special concern for one's future selves (313). The account I develop here resembles Parfit's account in some ways, in that I believe *inter*personal relations bear some similarities to Parfit's *intra*personal account, in ways I try to draw out. David Brink deserves credit for initially proposing the parallel between the intrapersonal and interpersonal theories (1997). Brink, however, takes the similarity further than I do, arguing that interpersonal connectedness erodes the metaphysical boundaries between individuals. I think that the differences between the intrapersonal and interpersonal cases do not warrant this step.

⁴ Given a wide enough understanding of reciprocity, the account can be extended to include indirect influence: one person might influence another's mental states, who in turn influences someone else in some way sufficiently tied to the original idea for it to be traceable. In such cases, the first person influences the third, without necessarily even knowing that person at all. Reciprocity would apply, in a wide sense of the concept, if both parties are part of a larger, sufficiently dense network of influence, such that, in some sense, as each person contributes to that network, each gets something important out of it in return. This extension of the psychological connectedness view is speculative and would need to be developed further. If it holds, it may turn out to account for at least some of the cases Kolodny calls "Common Personal History or Situation," like two students who attend the same school.

⁵ By "reason for acknowledgment," I mean something like gratitude. However, gratitude is too narrow a term here, since I claim that we have reason to acknowledge the influence others have on us, even when that influence is damaging or harmful in some way. All of our experiences, not just the positive ones, contribute to making us the individuals that we are, and because of that ought to be acknowledged. This is consistent with responses of resentment and anger, when appropriate.

giving your fellow bus-rider help with her bags. A history of encounter with a single individual contributes much more to shaping us; one reason relationships between parents, children, and siblings are paradigmatically important for our lives is the profoundness of the influence these relationships typically have in shaping who we are (and in those cases where the influence is less than average, the appropriate responses are correspondingly less demanding).

Kolodny's theory is non-reductionist in part because a history of encounter is not reducible to the discrete encounters of which it is composed. Psychological connectedness contributes to explaining why this is so. On the psychological connectedness account of shared history, when one has a history of encounters with a single individual, all of those influences come from the same source, giving them a coherence of influence that would be lacking if the same encounters were had with many different people. This is something like the difference between a story written by passing around a paper on which everyone writes one sentence and a story written by a single author. Those that we are close to, with whom we have extended relationships, have an influence on us that gives our own stories a kind of coherence they would otherwise lack. This coherence grounds reasons like "expansive loyalty" alongside, and independently of, resonance.

The importance of coherence is perhaps most evident between children and primary caregivers (usually parents): imagine the difference between a child who is passed from home to home, with many different caregivers, and a child raised consistently by the same caregivers. Children who move from home to home face challenges that other children do not, even assuming that each caregiver is caring and nurturing. For adults, too, something is lost or missing for those who choose a wandering life, with no long-standing relationships.⁶ The less continuity in one's life, the greater the opportunities for reinventing oneself, but by the same token, the less coherence in that life. The perpetual wanderer may have a hard time knowing who she "really" is. Just as a story with many authors lacks coherence, so does the life of the perpetual wanderer.⁷ Compare these examples with an attempt one might make to have an extended relationship with a person suffering from some mental damage, such that she never remembers you from visit to visit, or worse, has no stable preferences or desires of her own. To whatever extent this can be considered an "extended relationship" at all, it seems that it cannot have any value beyond the value of the discrete encounters.⁸ There is something special and valuable about an extended relationship with another individual, which is more than the sum of the discrete encounters. So the appropriate responses to such relationships are not reducible to the appropriate responses to each encounter.

One alternative account of the List, that some people may find attractive, is that social roles which we are either born into or enter voluntarily, such as grandparent, student, or sister, ground reasons for partiality, rather than or in addition to shared history. Michael Hardimon develops such a view (1994). On the psychological connectedness account, social roles do not have any special normative significance in themselves. They may serve as rough-and-ready proxies for typical social patterns in relationships, and thus as convenient generalizations for

⁶ This is not to say that there aren't special advantages to the wandering life—there surely are. But such a life has costs, this among them.

⁷ Of course, this comparison is not exact, since the effect of an encounter on someone's mental states is more complicated than the effect of an author on a story.

⁸ The visits may have some additional value for the visitor, but that additional value cannot be attributed to the relationship, on a psychological connectedness view, since there is no extended connectedness.

the appropriate responses to those relationships, but those responses are only appropriate in particular cases insofar as the particular relationship holds to the typical social pattern. A good candidate for the List, for instance, is partiality towards one's sister. But some sisters have close relationships, while other sisters do not, and thus resonance of history of encounter in each case would call for different responses. The quality of "being a sister" or "having a sister" does not in itself commit one to a set of appropriate responses in which all sisters participate (or even all sisters in a given social context). Kolodny seems to agree, noting that children have reason for different responses toward their parents, depending on the parents' willingness and success in meeting their responsibilities toward their children (2010a, 60-61).

Alternatives to the social roles account, like the biological relationship between parent and child, I take to be even less compelling. Such an explanation is necessarily incomplete, since many relationships calling for partiality are not biological. So at least, some further explanation would need to be provided for why such relationships have normative significance. Further, it doesn't support some cases, such as the reasonable idea that biological parents who do not participate in raising their child have no reason to expect partiality in the future, or that adoptive parents with no biological connection do have such reasons.

Kolodny's explanation of the partiality that holds between parents and children illustrates what is missing from his account, which psychological connectedness provides. He claims that parents have reason to care for their children that is rooted in a more general collective responsibility that society has for children, but with the additional condition that parents have special responsibility for their particular child, due to the "distinctive importance of sharing a history with one child in particular" (2010a, 59). Again, Kolodny draws on his theory of resonance to explain what's special about parents' reasons to respond to their children. This analysis illustrates what is missing from Kolodny's account, and which psychological connectedness adds. There is something odd about taking parental responsibility to be a kind of special case of a more general collective responsibility—my share of the collective responsibility might be better met by abandoning my child and caring for another—and Kolodny recognizes this. His theory of resonance, and shared history especially, is supposed to supplement the account and address this worry, but it is hard to see how it changes things to the extent necessary to explain the very big difference between the responsibilities that parents have and the responsibilities of others in the community. Shared history itself, without further explanation, seems inadequate to explain the difference.

This further explanation is what psychological connectedness provides. The influence that a parent (or any primary caregiver) has on a child's beliefs, desires, and values, is unlike any other, especially because of the special role the parent has in the very development or formation of that child's mental states, and children have a special kind of influence on their parents as well, so parents and children are psychologically connected in a particular way. This influence is what makes even seemingly trivial encounters between parents and children normatively significant. Notice that this development of the significance of shared history renders the claim that parents have a share of collective responsibility irrelevant for reasons of partiality. While parents may well have a kind of collective responsibility toward their

children in addition, their reason for partiality is not based in that responsibility, even with the resonance supplement.⁹

Clearly, some encounters have more significance than others on the psychological connectedness account of shared history. In some cases, a single, brief encounter can have profound impact on someone's mental states, while in other cases, an encounter may have no impact whatsoever. What sort of encounter might produce no psychological connectedness at all? I don't propose to give a full analysis here, but I think that one answer to this lies in the conditions for communication. For an encounter to bring about psychological connectedness, one person must be able to communicate some thought or feeling to the other. If communication (including non-verbal communication) is impossible, for whatever reason, then one person has not influenced the other, so no psychological connections are formed. The ability to communicate is consistent with important disagreements over substance, but probably requires having at least some mental states in common. Ronald Dworkin has argued that some agreement at a high level of abstraction (which he calls the level of "concept") is probably necessary for meaningful disagreement at lower levels (the levels of "conception"): we agree on the values of justice or liberty, even while we disagree as to more specific aspects of those values, including their proper application (1986, 70).

OTHER CASES

In this section, I focus on relationships that Kolodny believes do not call for reasons of partiality: trivial and negative relationships. By filling out what matters about relationships, the psychological connectedness account deepens and in some cases revises Kolodny's conclusions about such relationships.

Kolodny claims that trivial encounters do not provide reasons for partiality, because such encounters do not give rise to any particular reason to respond. Psychological connectedness bears out some of Kolodny's assertions about trivial encounters, but shows us that it is more complicated, too. Most singular encounters are trivial, but occasionally they can be tremendously important. Waiting with someone at a bus stop is typically trivial, but could have a profound influence on one's life—for instance, if she turns out to be one's future spouse. Kolodny lacks the resources to explain what distinguishes a profound singular encounter from a trivial one, other than to say that the reasons stemming from a profound singular encounter should resonate with its significance. What my account adds is an explanation of what makes a profound singular encounter special: when one has such an encounter, one's way of seeing or thinking about or valuing the world is noticeably changed. Profound encounters give rise to reasons for response that are different in content and weight from reasons brought on by genuinely trivial encounters (if the latter produce any reasons at all). Since reasons of partiality apply only to relationships, which are not reducible to the encounters that comprise them, even a profound singular encounter does not belong on the

⁹ Psychological connectedness does not explain why parents have reasons to initiate encounters with their children in the first place. One possibility is that they have no such reasons—which would explain why parents may give up their children for adoption at birth. Another possibility is that they do bear special responsibility from birth, for reasons other than psychological connectedness, such as a version of collective responsibility. Reasons of psychological connectedness apply once the relationship has begun.

List. Profound encounters might lead people to want to see each other again, though, and eventually to develop a real relationship.

Passing someone getting off a train as one boards probably is not the sort of encounter that involves communication, and therefore influence, of one person's mental states on another. The same holds with the relationship between all those of the same blood type. This sort of trivial encounter should be distinguished, however, from other encounters, which might be thought of as trivial, but are repeated over and over, such as daily greetings exchanged with the neighborhood crossing guard. Although the influence of each individual encounter is slight, over time, such "trivial" encounters could lead to significant reasons for partiality.

Psychological connectedness calls for us to reconsider Kolodny's position that externally negative relationships do not belong on the List. Pirates may share encounters that are both strong and supportive, such as when one pirate teaches another an old sea shanty, or two of them work together to take in the sail on a gusty day. In this way, pirates can form positive psychological connections with each other, despite also engaging in vicious, harmful acts toward outsiders. This is true even when partiality is understood in a narrow sense, in that many of the pirates' encounters with each other are, in Kolodny's terms, "encounters of aid." They have reasons to care for each other when they are sick, or share the last piece of hard tack. At the same time, they may also have reasons to cease plundering, and to convince one's fellow pirates to do the same. Asking about the psychological connectedness gives us a way to evaluate the significance of particular encounters beyond what Kolodny provides. When we consider our pirates in this light, they clearly have special reasons to help each other.

What Kolodny calls "internally negative" relationships are "shared histories of encounters in which one relative wrongs the other relative", such as the relationship between pirates and those whose possessions they plunder (2010a, 54). This sort of relationship poses a problem for a psychological connectedness view, because internally negative encounters often, if not always, have a significant psychological effect on the participants, yet many people would be reluctant to say that such encounters give rise to reasons of partiality.

One way to respond to this problem is to deny that internally negative encounters do give rise to reasons of partiality. Perhaps only positive or constructive psychological connectedness gives rise to reasons of partiality. This would include "externally negative" relationships such as that between our pirates, but exclude relationships characterized by actions resulting in psychological or other damage, such as between pirates and the merchants they plunder.

Another possibility is that internally negative encounters also give rise to reasons of partiality. While this position initially seems counter-intuitive, there are some reasons to think it is plausible. If "partiality" is understood in a broad sense, to refer to all special reasons generated by association, then it becomes much more likely that relationships composed of internally negative encounters give rise to such reasons. I suggested earlier that we have reason to adopt the broad sense of partiality. Reasons of partiality are special, but not necessarily positive or caring—they may be special reasons for anger or avoidance. We need to distinguish between the *existence* of such reasons and their *content* and *weight* in deliberation.

Kolodny's resonance theory is also helpful here. According to Kolodny, the appropriate response to a history of encounter should resonate with the appropriate response to the discrete encounters of which it is composed. For hurtful encounters the appropriate response

will be different from the appropriate response for other sorts of encounters, but this is different from saying that no particular response is called for. The shared history between two people, even in internally negative relationships, seems to give both parties reasons to act in particular ways toward each other that they do not have to strangers.¹⁰ This is another point in favor of the broader understanding of partiality.

Someone inclined to skepticism about reasons of partiality might say that internally negative encounters produce reasons for response that are not specific to partiality. But Kolodny's non-reductionism of relationships goes some way toward a response here. On this view, there is an important difference between an internally negative singular encounter, like a mugging, and a relationship composed of a pattern of such encounters, like domestic abuse. If so (and assuming non-reductionism of reasons) the appropriate responses to the latter are not reducible to the appropriate responses to the discrete encounters of which it is composed. It is unclear whether Kolodny would agree with this, though, since he writes that internally negative relationships do not give rise to reasons of partiality.

According to Kolodny, internally negative relationships do give rise to some particular appropriate responses, such as giving the victim reasons to feel resentment, seek reparations, and demand apology. It gives the abuser reasons to feel guilt, make reparations, and seek forgiveness (2010a, 54). This is another case where Kolodny draws conclusions about the content of those special reasons while not accounting for why or how those special reasons come about. Although I am not quarrelling with his account of those reasons, so given, I think that by looking more closely at the influence of harmful encounters on the parties' mental states, we get a better understanding of how they come to have those reasons, as well as the grounds to draw out nuances and decide about exceptional cases that Kolodny's account is unable to do.

We can get a better grasp on why the appropriate responses to hurtful encounters differ from others by drawing on the psychological connectedness account of shared history. Let's take a relatively simple case, of a bully tormenting another child at school. We'll assume that they have had no significant encounters other than those relating to the bullying (the two students are not in the same class). The effect of the bullying encounters on each child's mental states is likely to be asymmetrical, in that the bully has a profound influence on the mental states of the bullied, but the bullied child is likely to have a relatively weak influence on the mental states of the bully. There are two ways to understand the failure of the bullied child to impact the bully. The bully's reasons for engaging in these encounters most likely have little to do with the bullied child directly: she may do it as an outlet for frustration stemming from problems at home, or as a way to impress other children with her superiority. The bully may also have some mental barrier to seeing the bullied child as the sort of being capable of communication, which would also prevent her mental states from being influenced by the bullied child.

If this is the right understanding of the bullying encounters, then the impact that each child has on the other's mental states is asymmetrical: the bully is less influenced by the bullied than vice versa. As a result, the bullied child has reason to acknowledge the influence

¹⁰ This conclusion stands in contrast with Thomas Hurka, who writes that only shared histories composed of "doing good" or "suffering evil" together give rise to special reasons (Hurka, 1997). Kolodny cites Hurka approvingly, though Kolodny thinks his conditions are too restrictive, since parents and children need not "do good" or "suffer evil" together. This shows Kolodny's confusion between the narrower and wider view of partiality (Kolodny, 2010a, 54, footnote 21).

the bully has had on her, but does not have reasons of responsibility toward the bully, because she has not influenced the bully. The bully has reasons of responsibility, but not reasons of acknowledgment. The difference in appropriate responses corresponds not only to the differences in the type of influence each has on the other, but also on the weight of that influence. The bully's appropriate responses, to apologize and make amends, are more important, and a bigger problem if they are not carried out, than the appropriate responses that the bullied has to the bully, if any.¹¹

CONCLUSION

While Kolodny's account is incomplete, his explanation of partiality principles does contribute significantly to thinking about partiality, especially in his attention to a non-reductive account of the special reasons that arise, given by an account of the normative significance of relationships. I think there is a lot of merit in the shared history part of Kolodny's account in particular, and especially in his approach of analyzing that history in terms of discrete encounters (while not reducing relationships to them), but it falters regarding what matters about discrete encounters and what is distinctive about patterns of such encounters. These holes are filled in part by the psychological connectedness account I have advanced here. Developing an account of the normativity of relationships in this way gives us stronger theoretical ground from which to analyze particular relationships and explore their normative implications.

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¹¹ The bullied child does have significant reason to take some actions, such as to let adults know about the behavior, and do what she can to make it stop, but I think that these are best understood as reasons toward herself, and perhaps towards other potential victims, rather than reasons she has towards the bully.

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