

For the Sake of the Friendship

Relationality and Relationship as Grounds of Beneficence

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Abstract: I contend that there are important moral reasons for individuals, organisations and states to aid others that have gone largely unrecognised in the literature. Most of the acknowledged reasons for acting beneficently in the absence of a promise to do so are either *impartial and intrinsic*, on the one hand, being grounded in properties internal to and universal among individuals, such as their pleasure or autonomy, or *partial and extrinsic*, on the other, being grounded in non-universal properties regarding an actual relation to the agent, such as common membership in a family or culture. In contrast, I articulate and defend the existence of two unrecognised reasons for beneficence that can take the form of being *impartial and extrinsic*. One is that a being's capacity to be part of a sharing relationship with us can provide some reason to help it, and another is that a sharing relationship *qua* relationship is an end-in-itself that can provide some reason to help another. I differentiate these considerations from one another and from the more standard reasons for beneficence, provide arguments for thinking that they are central to beneficence, and rebut objections that are likely to be offered by friends of the more standard reasons.

Keywords: beneficence; friendship; impartiality; moral status; partiality; poverty; reasons for action; relationships.

Introduction

Why should one person, A, help another, B, when she has not voluntarily assumed an obligation to do so by, say, having made a promise? I seek a moral answer to this question, where by 'moral' I mean considerations that provide some reason for an agent to feel guilty when she fails to act in accordance with them or for others to feel resentment when she fails to do so. I therefore am not interested in pru-

dential reasons for A to help B, or in any other ‘non-moral’ reasons such as the idea that A would have more meaning in her life were she to help B.

It does not appear that the duty to help others is primitive in the sense that it cannot be grounded in some other, broader conception of moral reasons for action (contra Ross 1930: 16–47). It parallels the question of why it is wrong to kill others, which admits of a variety of plausible principled answers, among which it is difficult to choose. Besides being philosophically interesting in itself, the question of what moral reasons there are to aid others will likely affect the way one properly responds to further questions regarding whom to aid, what to give to them, how much to give them and so on, issues of interest to a wide array of ethical and political theorists.

I believe there are attractive and under-explored kinds of *extrinsic* answers to the questions of why, e.g., children should help their parents and states should improve the lot of the worst-off. As I explain, an extrinsic account of moral reasons for A to help B invokes a property that cannot be found within either A or B alone, but that instead, very roughly, makes essential reference to both of them.

Considerations of partiality are currently the most salient instance of extrinsic reasons to aid that are to be found in the literature; the fact that A is actually related to B in some way is widely believed to be able to ground a reason for the former to help the latter. In this article, I articulate and defend the existence of two additional extrinsic reasons for beneficence that go beyond familiar, partialist ideas and that should be taken seriously as factors to supplement standard partialist and impartialist, viz., utilitarian and Kantian, perspectives (if not to supplant them, upon further theorising).

I begin by analysing the most common distinction invoked when characterising different moral reasons for action, namely, between self- and other-regarding considerations, after which I point out that both sorts, as traditionally construed, are properly understood as intrinsic reasons to help others, which I contrast with extrinsic ones. Next, I spell out a kind of extrinsic reason for one person to aid another individual, which I call ‘reasons of modal-relationality’, that has not been recognised in the literature. The basic idea is this: the fact that a being is capable of a sharing relationship with us of a certain kind provides *pro tanto* moral reason to help it. Such a conception of a reason for beneficence grounds a novel account of the impartial reasons to aid, one that I argue is in many ways more attractive than those implied by Kantianism and utilitarianism. In the following sec-

tion, I describe another under-explored extrinsic reason for beneficence, which I call a ‘reason of relationship’. Here, the idea is roughly this: a sharing relationship with another *qua* relationship provides *pro tanto* moral reason to help others. I differentiate this sort of reason to aid from a partialist one, and defend its centrality to the duty of beneficence by advancing positive arguments and by rebutting objections that Simon Keller and other influential partiality theorists have made. I conclude by pointing out some implications of the argumentation in this article, one of which is that, contrary to an implicit assumption in much of the literature, an impartialist can plausibly accept the idea that extrinsic properties ground unassumed duties to aid others; not all attractive reasons of relationality and relationship for beneficence entail partiality, so I demonstrate.

Self- and Other-Regarding Reasons

In asking why, with regard to morality, A should help B, I am enquiring into *good reasons* for A to do so, and not, or at least not necessarily, proper motives for A when she does so. My question is similar to the question, ‘Why be moral?’ Such a question is not asking about what an agent’s end, intention or justification should be when she acts morally, but rather why she must, on pain of ‘objective’ irrationality or unreasonableness, act morally at all. Similarly, I am enquiring into basic, that is, non-instrumental, normative reasons for thinking that one person should aid others, setting aside what the person may or may not have in mind when she does so.

One answer to the question of why A should help B is that if A does so, B or others will be more likely to help, or at least not to harm, A in return down the road. However, in this article I set aside ethical egoist rationales of this sort; for I presume there can be moral reason for A to help B even when A does not expect to benefit therefrom in the long run.

Another answer, then, is that A should help B because A wants to help B. However, I also set aside this instrumentalist rationale. I suppose, for the sake of argument, that there can be ‘categorical’ reasons for A to help B, that is, moral considerations for A to help, even if she lacks a desire to do so.

A third answer, then, is that A would be a *better person* insofar as she helped B. This is a *eudaimonist* or self-realisation view, one that I also do not explore here. For one, it seems false to suppose that the

only basic reason for one to help another is that doing so would promote one's own true self or valuable nature; something about the person who could be helped seems relevant to a complete explanation of why one might have a duty to help him. For another, such views invariably maintain that an agent should help others not for the sake of the agent, but for their sake. So, when it comes to motivation, *eudaimonist* theories usually include an other-regarding dimension, but that is incoherent: they maintain that an agent should *falsely* believe that others provide her a reason to help them, for only thereby can the agent become a good person, the *only genuine* reason for her to act (see Metz 2007: 382-386).

The first three answers to the question of why A should help B are *self-regarding*; they say that reasons for A to help B are ultimately a function of facts about the agent, A. I shall not argue against self-regarding accounts of moral reason here, at least not any more than I have, and instead suppose that there exist some considerations that are not self-regarding. That is, there are facts about *not-A* — in particular, facts about B that provide at least some basic reason for A to help him.

An other-regarding account, as construed here, is the view that facts about individuals other than the agent considered in themselves provide moral reason for an agent to help them. The most salient other-regarding accounts are found in the utilitarian and Kantian traditions. The former suggest that A should help B because B and potentially others will be expected to be better off in some way. Accounts of well-being differ, of course, with the standard views being that A should help B in order to make B (and potentially others) feel more pleasure, obtain more desire satisfaction or exhibit more conditions such as autonomy and knowledge.

Kantians, in contrast, suggest in the first instance that the reason for A to help B is not that B will have a better quality of life, but rather that A will have shown respect for B's capacity for autonomy, roughly, B's ability to set and pursue ends. Concretely, many in the Kantian tradition would say that the reasons for A to help B are largely constituted by the facts that B would be more likely to have his particular ends realised or that B's general capacity to realise ends would be enhanced.¹ There are some Kantians, probably including Kant himself, who believe that respect for another's capacity for autonomy can also provide one a reason to promote his well-being, at least under certain conditions. For instance, Kant's conception of the highest good is happiness proportionate to virtue, a state of affairs he maintains we are obligated to promote.

Of course, one could simultaneously hold both self-regarding and other-regarding views. That is, one could maintain that reasons about A and reasons about B each independently provide reason for A to help B. My claim, though, which I begin to spell out and defend in the next section, is that these do not exhaust the plausible reasons for beneficence.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Reasons

The standard self-regarding and other-regarding views, canvassed above, share a common feature in that they all ground reasons to aid on *intrinsic* properties, by which I mean this: they place the ultimate reason for A to help B in either facts about A, or facts about B (or other individuals), or both. Intrinsicness, here, is equivalent to what is often called ‘non-relational’ in the literature, but I do not use that term since I save it for another distinction below. An intrinsic property, as understood here, is a property that is internal to an individual and that makes no essential reference to any other being. So, A’s desire being fulfilled is internal to A, A’s self-realisation is internal to A, B feeling pleasure is internal to B, B having a dignity in virtue of her capacity for autonomy is internal to B. None of these grounds for A to help B makes any necessary mention of a being other than either A or B.

I maintain, though, that there are certain, under-appreciated non-intrinsic or *extrinsic* reasons that should not be neglected by theorists of beneficence. That is, there are certain properties about A and B as *relata* that can plausibly ground A’s having a moral reason to aid B. For there to be an ‘extrinsic’ property for A to help B, in the sense that I mean, is for there to be a consideration that makes essential reference to both A and B, or at least to one of these beings and some other being.

In the contemporary literature on beneficence, extrinsic properties are familiar from debates between partialists and impartialists. Defenders of the idea that beneficence is at least somewhat partial often claim that the fact that A is related to B in some way beyond promise-making (or other voluntary assumption of obligation) can constitute a good answer to the questions of *whom to help* (compatriots over foreigners, e.g., Lazar 2009) and of *how much to help* (more to compatriots than to foreigners, e.g., Miller 1998). More strongly, some partialists also claim that an extrinsic property

grounds an answer to the question of *why help*? For them, a basic reason for A to assist B can be that 'A is related to B' in a personal or other special way (for just a few examples, see Blum 1980; Rorty 1997; Jeske 2008). So, for example, if B is A's father, then some would say that A should, at bottom, help B at least in part 'because they are relatives'. Such a rationale for A to help B differs dramatically from both the self-regarding and other-regarding accounts adumbrated in the prior section.

Although a partialist about beneficence is conceptually committed to an extrinsic account of reasons, the friend of an extrinsic account of reasons need not be a partialist about beneficence. In the next sections, I motivate belief in the existence of two extrinsic reasons to aid others that go beyond familiar, partialist considerations, along the way indicating that they imply that the intrinsic/extrinsic and partial/impartial distinctions are logically independent, something not often acknowledged in the literature.

Actual-, Hypothetical- and Modal-Relational Reasons

The overwhelming majority of discussion about the respect in which extrinsic properties might ground duties of beneficence appeal to the kinds of examples from the previous section, instances of what I call '*actual-relational*' properties. That is, nearly all cases in which theorists cite a non-intrinsic property as a reason for A to help B involves an existent relationship between them. The weakest and most influential cases are the presence of love, friendship, care, solidarity, a sense of identity and a common way of life.²

Although these are distinct relationships, I submit that they can be neatly unified under the heading of *sharing*. One shares one's emotional reactions by sympathetically feeling bad when others flounder and feeling good when they flourish. One shares one's time, labour and money. One shares a sense of self, thinking of others as members of a common group, a 'we'. One shares goals, at least in the sense of committing not to get in one another's way, and at most in engaging in coordinated behaviour such as songs and rituals. Different relationality theorists will appeal to different aspects of sharing, with some including all of them.

Sharing, in some sense, is a *prima facie* attractive ground for morality, if not in its entirety, then at least for beneficence. Or so a number of theorists in the Aristotelian (under the heading of 'friend-

ship' or 'politics'), Marxian (our non-egoist species-being), Christian (love for one's neighbour), communitarian (common language, customs), feminist (ethic of care or sympathy) and sub-Saharan (identity and solidarity) moral traditions would be inclined to think, even if they have not used the term 'sharing'.

If the concept of sharing has any chance of being taken seriously as substantially constitutive of the basic ground of beneficence, then appealing to actual-relational properties is patently insufficient. After all, you can have strong reason to aid an utter stranger, the proverbial young girl drowning in a shallow pond, with whom you have heretofore not shared anything. There is an ineradicably impartial dimension to beneficence for which I deem it essential to account, requiring me to consider additional relational properties beyond actual ones.

A friend of actual-relationality who is loathe to multiply properties as a ground for beneficence might try to argue that you in fact always already share something morally relevant with the drowning girl. Perhaps you think of her as a member of the human family, or she surely has the same DNA as you, or maybe her life has its source in God just as yours does, or she at least no doubt sprang from the same planet.

In reply, first note that, in some cases, you might not share a given property with the girl but intuitively would still have moral reason to aid her. If you were a misogynist who thought of the young girl as failing to count as a human being, you would nonetheless have a duty to rescue her, if you could do so at little cost to yourself. Furthermore, there might not be any divine realm that is the common source of your lives, but there would still be reason for you to save the girl — perhaps even greater reason given her fragile nature, viz., her lack of an immortal substance that will survive the death of her body.

Furthermore, in other cases, you might well unavoidably share a certain property with the girl, but it fails to plausibly explain the reason to aid her. So, yes, you and the girl share the same planet, but a particular rocky location in the universe does not seem to be a good candidate to ground reasons of beneficence. Similar remarks go for sharing a similar DNA. A large majority of moral philosophers would invoke 'alien' counterexamples, say, a drowning girl who is silicon-rather than carbon-based but functionally equivalent to the latter, which suggest that the best explanation of reasons to aid are properties that transcend common geographical or biological features.

I therefore consider additional relational properties, in order to capture the impartial dimension of beneficence. One suggestion is to appeal to *hypothetical*-relational properties, the idea being that one

can have a moral reason to help another if that person *would* share something with one in the relevant sense upon being helped. This is a straightforward way to read Nel Noddings' classic ethic of care, where she suggests that if a stranger would respond to your exhibition of care toward her, then you can have a reason to aid her even if you do not yet have an actual caring relationship with her (1984: 86).

However, the problems that beset the actual-relational view also ultimately apply to the hypothetical-relational one. Intuitively you can have good reason to aid someone who is unlikely to share anything with you upon her reception of assistance from you. Perhaps the drowning girl will be ungrateful, and will simply stick out her tongue at you and run away. Maybe she is a stranger in a foreign land where you are touring and she is likely to recover in a hospital only weeks later, after you have returned home.

A more promising and much less common manoeuvre, I submit, is to appeal to *modal*-relational properties. According to this perspective, at least one basic reason for A to help B is that B is *capable* of sharing something in the relevant sense with A, or, more carefully, with human beings in general.³ For there to be good reason to help B, B needs neither in fact to be sharing with A, nor to be such that she would share with A upon certain conditions. Instead, the bare capacity to share with A (or normal humanity) is sufficient.

B's capacity to share can come in two forms, the ability to be sharing oneself, the 'subject' of a sharing relationship, and the ability to be shared with, the 'object' of one. For example, supposing that care is exemplary of the sort of sharing relationship that plausibly grounds beneficence, a subject of care would be one who cares, while the object would be one cared for. The present rationale for beneficence, then, is that there is reason to help a being insofar as it has either the capacity to share (care) or the capacity to be shared with (cared for).

Capacity is a form of possibility, and talk of 'possibility' invariably needs to be disambiguated. Let me say, then, that the capacity to share is to be understood in terms of A's and B's *essential* properties. To be 'capable' of being sharing or being shared with means being able *in principle*, without changes to a thing's nature. Contingent obstacles to being able to share are not constitutive of a thing's 'incapacity' in the relevant sense.

Examples of contingent inability to be an object of sharing, e.g., cared for, irrelevant to whether there is reason to aid a being, include the facts that the being is: the object of false beliefs and the object of negative emotions such as fear or disgust. While these might hinder a

being's actually becoming part of a sharing (caring) relationship us, they are not relevant to determining whether there 'can' be reason to help it, for it nonetheless could become part of one in light of its nature and ours. A being that 'cannot' be part of a sharing relationship in the relevant sense would, for instance, be one that utterly lacks the ability to have a better or worse life, say, a rock. A moral agent cannot share a sense of togetherness with a rock, cannot share a way of life with it, cannot share resources that would improve its quality of life, and cannot share feelings in the form of sympathetic reaction to it.⁴

Examples of contingent inability to be the subject of a sharing relationship such as care include: being asleep, having drunk too much alcohol, electing not to sympathise, being temporarily insane, being too sick to help others and being ignorant of what would benefit others. While these might hinder a being's actually becoming a sharing subject, they are not relevant to determining whether it is a good candidate for aid, for it nonetheless could become such a subject in light of its nature. A being that 'cannot' be the subject of a sharing relationship in the relevant sense would, for instance, be one that is genetically unable to be aware of the existence of others and to act for their sake.

To illustrate, return to the case of the drowning girl. Although she might well lack a relevant sharing relationship with you, and although she might not exhibit one were you to rescue her, the modal-relational account entails that you have reason to save her nonetheless; for she is essentially capable of sharing with you and is capable of being shared with by you. Even if you were to leave the country where she resides and never return, it would be in principle possible for you to share, in light of your natures, and that is one moral reason to help her now.

Such an account of beneficence is novel, and, in part for that reason, might not seem to have much pull. Readers might be more inclined to suggest that the sole reason to save the girl is merely that she would be better off, or that she has a dignity that merits respect in virtue of her rational nature. Even if the modal-relational view provides the intuitively correct *entailment*, it might not seem to provide the correct *explanation*.

In reply, I believe that one should begin to take the modal-relational view's explanatory power seriously, for two reasons. First, it does not have the counterintuitive implications that one might initially think, and, second, it accounts for a wide array of intuitions that neither utilitarian, Kantian nor partialist accounts can. If its explanation

alone generates many correct entailments that other views cannot, then one has reason to reconsider one's initial reaction that the explanation is of the incorrect sort.

With regard to rebutting negative considerations, then, note that the modal-relational view is not arbitrary in the way that, say, the appeal to genetic code or planetary residence are. It is a capacity-based view, which means that there can be basic reason to aid creatures with quite different biological foundations and geographical locations than ours. Now, it is true that the relevant capacity is human-centred in a way, so that beings must be capable of, say, caring for us or being cared for by us, in order for there to be reason by the present rationale for us to help them. However, as I demonstrate below, it is precisely this feature that enables the view to account for several cases that its competitors cannot.

Note, too, that it does not follow from the modal-relational view that one invariably ought to 'turn the other cheek' and help another being, no matter what. In particular, it need not entail the absurdity that one must aid a person who is culpably aggressing against you. There are two ways it could reasonably be interpreted so as to avoid such an implication. Most easily, the friend of modal-relationality may sensibly claim that there is always *some (pro tanto)* reason to aid another, even an aggressor, but that this reason can be outweighed by other considerations, such as self- and other-defence. More trickily, the modal-relational view could be read as providing a reason for helping another that is conditional on other factors obtaining. Just as one can coherently say that the *purpose* of punishment by the state is merely to give offenders what they deserve, but that a *necessary condition of justifiably acting for that purpose* is that the punishment is cost-effective, so one may say that one is required to aid another so as to give due consideration to it as a being capable of sharing, but that a necessary condition of being so required is that the being is innocent.

There are additional counterintuitive implications that can be plausibly avoided, while retaining the core features of the modal-relational view. For example, it might appear that the view entails that there is no reason to help the dead and the permanently comatose, as they can be neither subjects nor objects of a sharing relationship. As a first reply, consider that there might indeed no possible way to *help* these beings, viz., to make their lives go better, even if there are ways of *showing respect* for them. In this article, I aim to provide an account of beneficence in the first instance, not a complete theory of morality. Secondly, if there were indeed a way to help these beings (cf recent debate about the possibility of posthumous harm), then the

modal-relational view could readily account for that, for then it would be possible for them at least to be objects of a sharing relationship such as caring.⁵

Somewhat similar remarks apply to the concern that the modal-relational view cannot account for there being reasons to aid infants, who are beings who cannot care for us or more generally share with us. The natural reply to make is that although infants cannot be subjects of a sharing relationship, they can be objects of one. We can identify with them, can care for them, can sympathise with them, etc., which by the present account is sufficient for there to be basic moral reason to help another.

Let us reflect some more about the reasons to aid infants, as I begin to go on the offensive for the modal-relational view of beneficence. The central positive reason to favour this view is that it can account for differential strengths of reasons to aid beings, which rival accounts such as utilitarianism and Kantianism cannot, or least not nearly as clearly. For example, one long-standing and outstanding intuition is the judgement that the strength of the reason to aid a human increases along with its development from an embryo to a foetus to a newborn. The modal-relational view, or at least natural instances of it, can entail that embryos lack a moral status, since they can neither share nor be shared with, say, in the form of exhibiting sympathy or being sympathised with, or in the form of caring or being cared for. They lack the capacity for pleasure and pain and more generally lack the capacity for a better and worse life (even if there is a sense in which life as such has intrinsic value), and so cannot be the objects of these types of relationships, unlike later-term foetuses and newborns. And newborns and foetuses, while sometimes identical in biological terms, are not identical in respect of essential functions, and partly for this reason are not identical in respect of capacity to be the object of a sharing relationship with characteristic human beings. Babies cry, look people in the eyes, ingest food through their mouths, and are out in the world, which probably enables them to be more readily conceived as a 'we', sympathised with, and helped by normal humans. If indeed infants have a greater capacity to be the object of a sharing relationship than foetuses, then the modal-relational theory easily entails the judgement that there is more reason for us to help them.

In contrast, utilitarianism draws no distinction between foetuses and newborns, as both are often equally capable of pleasure and desire satisfaction, such that, notoriously, if abortion of a foetus is

permissible, so is infanticide. And Kantianism entails either that none of these beings has a moral status, as they lack the developed capacity for rationality, or that all of them have an equal moral status, as they all have the potential for it in a broad sense. Appeal to neither welfare nor intelligence can ground intuitions about differential degrees of reason to aid young humans.

The strength of reasons to aid non-human beings grounds a similar argument in favour of the modal-relational account of beneficence. I have been assuming that B is a human, or person, in asking about the non-instrumental moral reasons why A should help B. However, many ethical theorists believe that there can be basic reasons for A to help B where B is an animal of some kind. Individuals sometimes should give to charities that will promote fishing techniques that will kill fewer dolphins, that fight for wilderness where apes can flourish, and that prevent over-breeding among feral cats; governments sometimes should adopt laws or at least policies that prevent gratuitous cruelty to animals of all kinds; and these agents sometimes have reason to do these things for the sake of the animals themselves. However, it is also part of moral commonsense to think that the reasons to aid animals are less weighty than they are to help human beings. If one had to choose between saving the life of a deer and that of the person who had (perhaps, negligently) run over it, one would have most moral reason to help the person.

Neither utilitarianism nor Kantianism accounts for these firm and widespread judgements with much plausibility. The Kantian cannot account for the intuition that animals themselves provide reason to help them; any rationale the Kantian provides must appeal to an ultimate requirement to treat rational nature with respect. And the neo-Kantian theory of Tom Regan (2004), according to which animals have a dignity by virtue of being subjects of a life (roughly, having propositional attitudes toward the past and future) entails that both animals and persons have an equal principled claim to be helped. Utilitarianism encounters the same difficulty: many animals and persons have an equal moral status since both are equally capable of pleasure and pain, or desire satisfaction and frustration. Some welfarists maintain that persons should come first because they, unlike animals, have 'global' desires about their lives as a whole, but it is hard to see how, within the logic of a welfarist perspective, this desire can be given qualitatively more weight. And, in any event, the utilitarian will still deem there to be equal reason to aid a severely mentally incapacitated human being and an animal such as a deer.

It might appear that the modal-relational account entails the same thing, for neither a severely mentally incapacitated human being nor an animal is capable of being a subject of a sharing relationship with us, while both are capable of being an object of one with us. However, it is natural to suggest that, roughly, the greater a being's essential capacity for sharing relationship with us, the greater its moral status. There are degrees to which beings are capable of being objects of a sharing relationship with human beings, and even abnormal human beings have a much greater capacity for such than typical animals. Human beings are generally much more disposed to share, in many senses, with other, uncharacteristic human beings than they are with non-human beings who might exhibit the same capacities for welfare (pain/pleasure, desire satisfaction/frustration) or intelligence (rationality, autonomy).

Hence, the modal-relational rationale is to be credited with providing a reasonable explanation of why two individuals with the same internal capacities might nonetheless have a different moral status. It provides what is perhaps the first genuine reason to doubt the 'argument from marginal cases' (e.g., Singer 1993; Dombrowski 1997), the rationale that at least some animals are in principle entitled to as much help as humans, since the two are the same with regard to their capacities for pleasure, intelligence and the like. The modal-relational view entails that even if there is no intrinsic difference between two beings, there might be an extrinsic difference between them, *qua* capacity to have a life that can be the object of a sharing relationship with characteristic human beings that grounds differential degrees of reasons to be beneficent. The idea that humans have a greater moral status than animals, or at the very least warrant more aid in cases of conflict, is a persistent intuition, and invoking the property of degree of capacity for sharing relationship is a more attractive way to account for it than is the speciesist one of claiming that only human life is sacred.

There are additional cases that would have to be addressed in order to provide a conclusive justification for accepting a modal-relational rationale for beneficence.⁶ My aim here is the more limited one of articulating this novel perspective and providing *prima facie* warrant to take it seriously as a complement to, if not alternative to, utilitarian and Kantian perspectives. The basic suggestion has been that it captures the impartiality of the latter views, which appears essential to any adequate account of beneficence, while uniquely obtaining the additional advantage of accounting for differential degrees of reasons to aid beings. First, the modal-relational view

entails all beings essentially capable of being either subjects or objects of a certain sharing relationship with us provide a moral agent with some (*pro tanto*) reason to help them. That includes drowning girls with whom there has been and will be no relationship with a given agent, as well as mentally incapacitated human beings and non-human beings such as many animals. Appealing to modality, and not appealing solely to actuality, can rescue a relational perspective from falling into an implausibly narrow partialism. Second, the modal-relational view supports a more attractive sort of impartial beneficence than the intrinsic views of utilitarianism or Kantianism, in that it alone promises to both entail that and explain why there are differential strengths of reasons to aid not only animals in relation to humans, but also embryos in relation to foetuses and foetuses in relation to newborns.

Reasons of Relationship

There is an additional, under-recognised extrinsic property that I argue provides a reason for A to help B. In this section, I differentiate an appeal to the kinds of extrinsic reasons discussed in the previous one, which I call (merely) ‘relational’ properties, from another sort, properties of ‘relationship’. To assert that A should help B *because B is (or could be) related to A* is not, or not necessarily, to say that A should help B *because of their relationship*.⁷ Here are some ways to clarify this distinction, as well as to motivate the idea that it helps us understand more clearly and fully all the plausible moral reasons for A to help B.

First off, note that actual-relational reasons, at least of the standard sorts such as care and sharing a way of life, are necessarily partial, focusing on the relation between the one who could be helped, B, and the agent, A. In contrast, an appeal to relationship as a reason to aid is logically consistent with (though does not require) a strictly impartial account of right action. Consider, for example, a form of agent-neutrality according to which an agent has basic reason to maximise friendly relationships and to minimise unfriendly ones, wherever she can affect them and regardless of whether she is party to them. Keeping such a moral theory in mind should help differentiate between a *relationship* being a reason for one to act and another *agent related to one* being so. It provides another indication, distinct from modal-relationality, of the way that an appeal to extrinsic prop-

erties can ground an impartial approach to ethics and need not entail a strict partialism.

Even in the case of an agent's own relationships, he could conceivably — and often *does* — act for their sake, and not merely for the sake of people related to him. For example, if B has recently wronged A, it would not be unusual for A to help B while saying, 'I am doing this not for you, but because of our friendship.' Sometimes one articulates his reasons for helping another who has done him an injustice as doing so out of respect for what they have had in the past, and not for the other person in the present. For another example, spouses often speak of wanting 'a good marriage', and not merely of wanting 'what is good for the person to whom I am married'.

Moving now from clarifying the distinction to maintaining that it is useful, note that the fact that we speak in these terms is some evidence that we in fact think this way, viz., believe that relationships themselves, as logically distinct from the individuals who constitute them, can ground reasons for beneficent action. Very roughly, we appear to hold something like this: having shared with someone provides some reason to continue sharing with him. Friendships, and not merely friends, should be honoured. Such a proposition best explains the intuition about what one should do in cases where one has a choice between repairing a broken friendship with one person or starting a new friendship with someone else. Most believe the better course of action would be to extend what was begun, even assuming that the intrinsic outcomes of pleasure and the like would be the same regardless of how one chose.

One might object that prizing one's friendships, and not merely individuals who are friends with us, would be to 'reduce' individuals to 'relata', or to treat them as mere tools essential for the formation of friendly relationships, hardly a genuine foundation for beneficent action. Such treatment might seem akin to the way that a total utilitarian has been said to view people as 'containers' for pleasure (Rawls 1975), or similar to the problem of having 'one thought too many' when it comes to helping a loved one (Williams 1976). More recently, Simon Keller (2009) has suggested that people who value friendships *qua* friendships are undesirable as friends; we would rather be close with people who care *for us*, not for the relationship of which we are a part, so he suggests.

I have several replies to this natural objection. First, one could of course deem a relationship to be *one* end-in-itself, not the *only* one. That is, an agent might, attractively, act both for the sake of the friend-

ship and for the sake of one with whom he is friends. Second, deeming a relationship to be an end-in-itself leaves open the proper means by which to protect it or even promote it. It is coherent to claim that one ought to continue, or start, a relationship of a certain kind but to avoid doing so in certain, degrading ways. Third, an intuitively appropriate way to respond morally to a relationship is to respect or honour it, and the concern about treating individuals merely as a means to a relationship, or otherwise failing to appreciate their worth, arises most naturally in a contrasting, teleological framework instructing one solely to promote relationships as much as possible. Fourth, and most deeply, when a person acts for the sake of a relationship that he has had with someone, that other person is not fungible. The *historical* relationship-with-that-person is what matters, so that when one acts ‘for the sake of our friendship’, one is inherently including reference to a specific other person. To prize a ‘we’ does not imply a failure to properly value a ‘you’, or so lovers the world over can attest.⁸

Another major objection to the idea that individuals do, or properly should, prize relationships as such is the claim that it can often be appropriate to end relationships, when necessary for the sake of the person to whom one has been related (Friedman 1993: 42; Keller 2009). The best explanation of why the relationship should end, so the argument goes, is that the relationship itself is not the proper object of valuation, only the person or her well-being is, as per an intrinsic account of reasons to aid.

In reply, I make two points. First, one could, again, reasonably think that there are reasons both of relationship and of another sort, which reasons need to be weighed up against each other when considering how to act all things considered (cf. Kolodny 2003: 150). One need not think that relationship provides no reason for action, in order to explain why a relationship should end for the sake of the person one is related to; an equally good explanation is that sometimes there are extrinsic reasons of relationship but they are outweighed by other, intrinsic considerations.

Second, and more interestingly, I submit that reasons of relationship can themselves provide reasons for a ‘relationship’ to end. If, for example, your beloved can no longer be happy in a marriage with you, then *the right sort* of relationship, a good marriage — one of genuine *sharing* — is no longer possible. Hence, one has no reason of relationship if a good marriage is no longer possible, which provides at least an equally good explanation of why the marriage as such should end.

One might wonder, though, whether this reply is fair, for the appeal to a desirable sort of relationship being available or not appears to smuggle in considerations of whether the parties to it are well off.⁹ Instead of saying that the parties have (extrinsic) reason to part ways because a good relationship is no longer possible, one could equally, or perhaps more accurately, say that the parties have (intrinsic) reason to part ways simply because they can no longer be happy with one another, so the rejoinder goes.

It is true that those who appeal to the idea of relationships being ends-in-themselves often think of them as ones that are at least likely to make the parties to them better off. Sympathy, care, friendship and love all have that in common. Here are two ways to see that extrinsicness is nonetheless doing much of the work. First off, imagine a marriage in which the parties to it are satisfied merely because they take ‘happy pills’, on the one hand, and one in which the parties are satisfied because they go out of their way to make one another feel good, on the other. By hypothesis, in both cases we have marriage and no difference in the degree to which the parties are happy. Nonetheless, virtually all of us would prefer the latter one, and it is the extrinsic consideration of relationship that explains why. If so, then, when parties are no longer happy in a marriage, it is not the bare fact of unhappiness that alone provides reason for them to part, but also the fact that, say, the parties are not willing to go out of their way for one another, or cannot do so in an effective way anymore.

A second reason for thinking that considerations of relationship as such are part of what explains why marriages should sometimes end is that there are extrinsic facets of marriage that do not concern well-being at all. For example, a sense of togetherness, such as spouses thinking of themselves as a ‘we’, is not something that in itself concerns welfare, but is an essential part of a good marriage and provides reason for a marriage to end when it is permanently gone. Similar remarks go for time spent together and participating in common activities.

So far, I have argued that, at the *interpersonal* level, an individual sometimes finds it appropriate to help another person for the sake of a marriage or friendship she has, and not solely for the sake of the person with whom she is in the relationship. A similar rationale appears in a variety of *institutional* policies and practices that seem appropriate. That is, it appears right that certain formally organised groups aid people in ways respectful of, or likely to foster, certain kinds of relationship, and to do so for this reason. Defending any one of the following examples thoroughly against rival, intrinsic

approaches such as utilitarianism and Kantianism would take much more space than I have here. So, I hope the reader will instead appreciate the cumulative effect, the suggestion that the idea of relationships *qua* ends-in-themselves promises to explain a wide array of comparatively uncontroversial cases.

Consider, first, why it is just for a public healthcare system to offer cosmetic surgery to the grotesque and deformed, and not, say, to the beautiful who would like to become downright gorgeous, and why this would be just even if the former could instead be given ‘happy pills’ that would alleviate the pain of a lack of romance and even if the latter would be upset at not receiving plastic surgery.

Also in a medical setting, think about why it is apt for a state hospital to treat those who have sex with the dead or those who are ‘intimate’ primarily with lifelike dolls. Even if such people were happy or autonomous, there would be good reason for the state to treat them for mental illness, naturally conceived at least in part as a matter of being unable to have healthy relationships with others.

In the context of criminal justice, note that it is *ceteris paribus* desirable for a state to punish in a way that is likely to effect reconciliation between an offender and those whom he has wronged. It would be right for it not merely to seek to prevent further crime, even by virtue of rehabilitation, but also to adopt programmes by which offenders were given opportunities to apologise to their victims, to work off debt owed as a result of wrongful harm done, and to be accepted back into the community.

When it comes to education, surely it is fine for a state to seek to inculcate some sense of national identity among pupils, one that transcends racial and class divisions, among others. Furthermore, the state ought to provide uniforms to those children who cannot afford them in contexts where they are expected at school, so as to prevent alienation.

At a national level, reflect on why it is just for the state to seek to foster national cohesion, say, by trying to integrate groups that have historically been alienated from each other, by sponsoring sports teams who compete on the global stage and by adopting public symbols such as flags and monuments, and, furthermore, why it would be just for it to promote national cohesion in such ways, even if it would do little to protect people’s liberal-democratic rights to a greater degree in the long run.

Lastly, and closest to home, consider why many lecturers and post-graduate students believe it is important to protect and develop a sense of community in an academic department. Of course, people

are more likely to get work done, or work better together, if they feel a sense of togetherness, but the suggestion, here, is that it is also worth cultivating for its own sake.

I have adumbrated these various cases in order to make plausible the idea that one reason for A to help B can be that doing so would be a way to prize sharing relationships. The point is not merely that there is reason for the state to promote such relationships, but rather that the relationships themselves provide part of the reason for it to do so, beyond the individuals who are likely to benefit from them. Relationship as such is a normative category of public morality that differs from an appeal to the fact that B would be better off (utilitarianism), it would respect B's autonomy (Kantianism), or the relevant institution is already related to B (actual-relationalism). My intention has been to propose, with *prima facie* justification, the existence of an additional, extrinsic ground for both institutions and individuals to aid others.

Conclusion

I have sought to articulate and defend two neglected moral accounts of why an agent ought to help others, whether the agent is an individual, a philanthropy or a state. What both accounts have in common is that they appeal to extrinsic features of individuals, properties of individuals that make essential reference to another being, in order to explain why they ought to be aided, which contrasts with the dominant approaches. The most influential impartial theories, such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, appeal to features intrinsic to individuals, usually their pleasure or autonomy, which make no essential reference to others, in order to explain why there is moral reason to help them. And while partialist accounts of beneficence, appealing to extrinsic properties that I have called 'actual-relations', are familiar to the literature, I have spelled out and defended two additional, less often considered extrinsic properties that plausibly account for duties to aid in ways that promise to underwrite the impartial dimension of beneficence. One such property, 'modal-relationality', is the capability of a being to be part of a sharing relationship of some kind with us, even if that capacity has not yet been actualised. The principle that the greater a being's essential ability to be a subject or object of a sharing relationship with us, the greater the reason to help it (or more generally share with it) clearly entails that there is moral reason to aid (nearly) all human beings and many animals, while also, I have

argued, being uniquely able to entail differences in the strength of the reasons to help various beings. The other extrinsic property that is a plausible explanation of why one should help others is the sharing relationship *qua* relationship that exists, or could exist, between them. The idea, here, is that one can have reason to act in helpful ways not merely for the sake of an individual with whom one is related, but also for the sake of the sharing relationship that has been or could be manifested. If certain sharing relationships as such morally matter, then there could be reason for agents such as states to seek to foster them, even if they are not party to them.

While spelling out reasons of modal-relationality and of relationships for beneficent action and arguing for their existence, I also noted that these extrinsic properties can ground the impartial dimension of beneficence, whereby one appears to have moral reason to aid strangers with whom one lacks an actual-relation. I conclude by noting that these properties occasion awareness of a kind of moral theory that, to my knowledge, has not yet been thoroughly considered by the field, namely, one grounded entirely on extrinsic properties (relationality and relationships) that accounts well for both the impartial and partial aspects of beneficence, and potentially right action as a whole. That is something for ethical and political theorists to take seriously, supposing, as seems true, that the intrinsic properties appealed to by impartial theories such as utilitarianism and Kantianism cannot easily ground partiality (e.g., duties to friends and compatriots), and that partiality does not exhaust the domain of right action (*viz.*, that there is *pro tanto* reason to help any human being and many animals).¹⁰

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Notes

1. Immanuel Kant himself held, at least on some occasions, that B's capacity for moral action is what grounds reason for A to help him (1797: Ak. 423, 434-435), making Kant a historical precursor to the kind of 'modal-relationality' account that I develop below.
2. Other ideas, like residing in the same demarcated territory or being influenced by the same historical institutions, are more controversial, and are less likely on their own to ground reasons of partiality.
3. I have encountered only two clearly modal views in the literature. According to one, an agent has reason to aid those capable of caring about others (Jaworska 2007), while, according to the other, an agent has reason to aid those capable of being an object of sympathy (Mercer 1972: 129-130, 132-133). For some sporadic modal language, with unclarity about whether the concept is intended, see Hadley 2007: 75; Slotte 2007: 17.
4. Perhaps there are other things that can be shared with a rock, but they are going to be very poor grounds for a duty of beneficence.
5. Still more, if it were possible to help these beings but not for them to be subjects or objects of the relevant sharing relationship (say, one could not share a way of life with them, where that is key), then one could still account for intuition by saying that there is reason to aid beings that *have had* the capacity to share in the relevant way.
6. What about having to choose between helping a chimpanzee, who can exhibit sympathy, and a mentally incapacitated human being, who cannot? What about having to choose between a stereotypical Mother Teresa, with a great capacity for sympathy, and a normal human person? I take up such cases in other work ('An African Theory of Moral Status'), which focuses on moral status more broadly, and which also addresses the issues of rankings within the animal kingdom and the moral status, or lack of it, in the vegetable and mineral ones.
7. The one in the literature who is most aware of the distinction I have in mind is Kolodny (2003). The distinction I draw here is similar to, but ultimately different from, Simon Keller's distinction between reasons of relationship, on the one hand, and reasons of individuals (whose properties are epistemically apprehended in relationship), on the other. See Keller (2009).
8. For additional, different responses to the objection, see Kolodny (2003).
9. Simon Keller made this rejoinder in correspondence with the author.
10. For written comments on a previous draft of this article, I am grateful to Ward Jones, Simon Keller, David Martens, Samantha Vice and three anonymous referees for *Theoria*, one of whom provided unusually detailed and thoughtful feedback.

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