
THE VIRTUE OF BEING SUPPORTIVE

BY

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Abstract: I develop an account of the nature and value of being supportive in interpersonal relationships. In particular, I argue that the virtue of being supportive, construed as a modally demanding value, facilitates the autonomy of one's intimate and promotes a sense of unity in one's relationship. Moreover, the practice of being supportive plays an important role with regard to the familiar need to reconcile the normative demands of one's own projects with one's responsibilities to intimates.

Recent moral philosophy has focused significant attention on the conflict between the demands of morality, on the one hand, and the reasons of love, friendship, and personal projects, on the other. But relatively little attention has been given to the conflicts that often arise between the reasons of love, friendship, and personal projects themselves. I want to address these conflicts by considering something else that has been largely overlooked by philosophers: the value of a distinctive stance and practice that participants in close interpersonal relationships can adopt toward one another – *being supportive*.

That support is distinct from (though not unrelated to) love and friendship is suggested by the observation that people taking pause on the successful completion of a significant project to thank those who have played a part in their success often cite the support (not just the love and friendship) they have received. 'Thank you so and so for your love *and* support' is probably the single most common line in the prefaces of books, speeches of Academy Award winners, and college commencement addresses. These days talk of support is ubiquitous. People do not just express gratitude for support received. They also lament its absence and demand it from those with whom they share special ties – friends, lovers, even community members.

Empirical studies have shown that couples are happier, more likely to remain in their relationships when partners see each other as supportive; the perceived failure of the other party to be supportive is often cited as a reason for relationship and marital dissatisfaction.¹ These findings are not surprising, given the common notion that part of what is to be a good romantic partner or friend is being a supportive partner or friend. Many of us think support is an important ingredient – a constituent, perhaps – of close, interpersonal relationships. But what is it exactly to be supportive? Why, and in what ways, is it valuable?

My aim is to examine the value of being supportive in the context of interpersonal relationships. To do so, I shall attend both to the valuable other-regarding attitudes and dispositions of the supportive person as well as to the valuable effects of support on the supported person and the relationship. I shall argue that what I call *the virtue of being supportive* facilitates the autonomy of the person supported, and promotes a sense of unity in the relationship. Moreover, the (mutual) practice of being supportive plays an important role with regard to the familiar need to reconcile the normative demands of one's own projects with the responsibilities to the special other incurred through the relationship. In other words, receiving support from an intimate reduces the potential conflict between the reasons of one's own projects and the demands of one's relationship, thereby making it easier to live up to what might otherwise be conflicting sources of reasons (for example, between one's career and one's marriage).

My discussion is structured as follows: in Section 1, I offer a general characterization of the stance and practice of being supportive, outlining the variety of discrete benefits that supported persons enjoy and variety of costs taken on by supportive persons. In Section 2, I outline four central kinds of support-relevant circumstances: unchosen misfortune, self-inflicted misfortune, self-expressive pursuit, and valued (but non-self expressive) activity. The remainder of my discussion concentrates on the special case of supporting someone in their self-expressive pursuits. In Section 3, I distinguish between providing mere support and exercising the virtue of being supportive, characterizing the latter as a modally demanding value. In Section 4, I argue that the virtue of being supportive furthers the supported person's autonomy and promotes solidarity in the relationship. In Section 5, I explain how support plays a crucial role in reconciling the normative tension between self and other – in mitigating, if not wholly eliminating, the potential conflicts between the reasons of our own projects and our relationship-based reasons.

A few caveats are in order at the outset. First, my discussion will be restricted to the context of *thick* interpersonal relationships between two autonomous adult, able-minded persons. Paradigmatically, these include close friendships, romantic or committed relationships, and the relationship between parent and adult child. They may also include relationships

between siblings, colleagues, and neighbors. What makes these relationships *thick* in the relevant sense is a certain shared history between the individuals in the relationship – some sufficient degree of engagement, interaction, and regard between them over time. In such cases, we naturally say not merely that the participants *stand in some relation to* one another, but that they *have a relationship with* one another.

Second, while my focus is on the close interpersonal context, the practice of being supportive also occurs in broader, larger-scale institutional contexts. Institutions, corporate agents, and communities too engage in the practice of being supportive, though the practice is typically recognized under the different description of *accommodation*.² For example, governments are supportive of their citizens' religious convictions in granting exemptions of conscience to the military draft. Employers are supportive of their employees' family commitments in offering them the opportunity to take parental leave. Indeed, these larger-scale institutional forms of support facilitate and promote autonomy and solidarity in ways that parallel interpersonal support. To avoid complicating matters, though, I will not make that case here.

The third preliminary point concerns the ordinary English language usage of the expression *being supportive*. Even if the expression *being supportive* is not always used to refer to a single class or kind of phenomenon in interpersonal contexts, there is a recognizable usage of the expression that refers to a familiar and normatively important phenomenon. My interest is in describing the stance and practice the expression commonly refers to in a way that brings out its normative significance: its power to enable autonomy, promote solidarity, and reduce the (potential) conflicts participants in close relationships may confront between their relationship-based reasons and their other project-based reasons. To achieve this aim, I need to provide some characterization of the stance and practice I have in mind, doing so with an eye to explaining why it matters, given the potentially autonomy-constraining effect of participation in a close relationship. But my aim is not to provide a definition of *being supportive* in the sense of offering sufficient and necessary conditions for its application.

1. *Support as bearing costs to hold up*

Consider the use of the word *support* in its literal, physical sense: 'The dome was supported by the columns.' Here, quite literally, that which is the support of a thing (or that which provides it support) serves as its prop or crux or foundation. In a more figurative sense, we speak of evidential or rational support. In the epistemic sense of support, that which provides support – the evidence or reasons – undergird or hold up the conclusion or theory,

providing the basis or grounds for believing it. In the interpersonal context, the term 'support' is associated with the idea of lending aid, giving care and comfort, and offering encouragement and advice, particularly to someone who is undergoing a trial or ordeal. Just as a bridge needs support because of the downward pressure of gravity, so the person in need of support needs it because there is something in their life that can be expected to bring them down. In supporting someone, we do our part to hold them up in the difficult circumstance.

The notion of *weight* in the literal idea of support as bearing the weight of something suggests that being supportive in the interpersonal context can involve bearing burdens that one would not otherwise. Pursuing this suggestion, let us say that to be supportive of someone is to hold them up, by means that can involve bearing or shouldering or absorbing or assuming burdens or costs on their behalf. Examples of such cost-bearing: parents taking out second home mortgages to finance their children's university education; spouses quitting their jobs to re-locate to another part of the world so that their significant other can accept a promotion or advance their career; and neighbors preparing meals for the couple grieving the recent loss of a child. A less weighty but noteworthy example of cost-bearing is that of holding up our friends in their romantic pursuits: say, by enduring unpleasant social outings with a friend and their insufferable significant other, or cancelling important plans to give comfort when their relationship falls apart. It is a familiar fact that the broken-hearted are often long-winded and repetitive in airing grievances and regrets; supporting a broken-hearted friend can demand significant amounts of time and energy. What this sampling of cases brings out is that holding someone up can involve assuming significant costs in time, opportunities lost, financial and non-financial resources, and psychic and physical energy.

Sometimes, holding someone up can even involve acting in a way that stands in uneasy practical tension with one's ideals or principles.³ For example, in social contexts where gay-marriage is not legally sanctioned, feminists and gay activists of certain bents may still attend the weddings of their heterosexual friends, despite their objections to the intrinsic or contingent properties of the marriage institution. Indeed, they may go beyond merely attending the weddings of their heterosexual friends and assist with the wedding planning. Similarly, someone who is an ethical vegetarian might support a friend's plans to open up a non-vegetarian restaurant (say, by providing a loan or getting the word out about the grand opening), even despite their serious scruples about the practice of eating meat. Indeed, ethical vegetarians will often dine out with their non-vegetarian friends (say, to cheer up a despondent mutual friend), and refrain from initiating discussion of the ethics of eating meat. Willingly splitting the bill equally with their omnivorous friends, they effectively subsidize the others who order the more expensive meat dishes. These cases involve a kind of compromise of one's

ethical commitments (to marriage equality, to animal rights): in lending support, one does not act in a way that meets the highest or purest standards of the relevant ideal. (Of course, there is an important difference between *acceptable* and *unacceptable* compromises of one's ideals. And there are limits to what our intimates may reasonably or fairly ask of us in terms of support in conflict scenarios – certain things may be non-negotiable. I shall return to this point.)

It is worth distinguishing between two types of costs that a supportive person can take on: transferrable and non-transferrable costs. Transferrable costs are costs to me that in a direct sense relieve costs to you. In bearing these costs, I assume costs that you would otherwise have to incur. For example, you may have to cover your tuition fees if I do not support you in your pursuit of a college education; but in supporting you, I can take on some of these fees. Importantly, the costs that are transferrable needn't be material or financial. Suppose that I support you in your significant project (running for political office), one involving many sub-projects or tasks. I may offer to take on one of the minor sub-projects (calling potential donors) to enable you to focus attention on other more important and interesting sub-projects (preparing for the debate).

Non-transferrable costs are costs that do not involve relieving direct costs that the supported person would otherwise bear. Suppose I cancel my plans to provide you support when you are in a time of need. The opportunity costs I take on are not straightforwardly costs that you would otherwise be bearing, costs which are now being transferred to me. Time is another kind of non-transferrable cost. In cancelling plans to comfort you, it's not as though costs to me in time and cancelled plans are direct costs that you would otherwise be bearing. Reputational or status costs are another kind of non-transferrable costs. In supporting a loved one who is currently in prison for murder, there may be costs in my reputation – there may be a stigma attached to me now that would not attach otherwise. This cost in reputation and social esteem as a result of associating with certain people in need of support also cannot be understood on the simple model of costs transference. Finally, emotional costs are also not directly transferable. Mustering the wherewithal to offer a defensive friend much-needed criticism can be unpleasant and awkward. If there are costs borne here, again, they do not involve transferrable costs.

So being supportive can involve taking on costs in a variety of ways, in providing the supported person with certain benefits or resources (care, concern, comfort, assistance, advice, guidance, and encouragement). Of course, this does not mean that the supportive intimate must always experience the cost-bearing *as cost-bearing*.⁴ Indeed, there is something about the idea of weighing up costs and benefits that seems antithetical to the spirit and phenomenology of friendship and loving relationships – at least when things are going well. Still, we can acknowledge that being supportive

often involves bearing costs, even if the supportive intimate needn't (sometimes shouldn't) experience their supportive behavior under the aspect of bearing costs.

Bringing these reflections together: the *practice* of being supportive involves the provision of certain benefits or resources in order to hold someone up, typically by means of bearing costs (in financial and non-financial resources, lost opportunities, time, physical and psychic energy, reputation and social-esteem, and compromise of ideals). The *stance* of being supportive – the disposition or attitudes that undergirds supportive behavior – involves a willingness to absorb costs on behalf of the supported intimate. To have such willingness is to have certain characteristic patterns of thought, feeling, and responses, including being disposed to treat certain kinds of considerations as supplying reasons for response and action.

The cost-bearing dimension of being supportive helps to explain our sense that being supportive (as a stance or disposition) is generally morally valuable. It can be hard to muster the will to hold someone up, taking on costs to do so, when we disapprove of, or see as misguided, the very aspect of their life with respect to which we are offering them support – as when we support an adult child's choice of career or choice of romantic partner, despite reservations about it. In this respect, the stance of being supportive is similar to the attitude of tolerance, understood as putting up with the behavior or activities one disapproves of. But the stance and practice of being supportive also goes beyond mere tolerance (understood as non-interference), since being supportive involves willingly shouldering costs on the other's behalf to hold them up.

2. *Support-relevant circumstances*

Let me make explicit what has so far only been implicit: that in being supportive of someone, we are usually supportive of them *in something* or *with respect to something* – some aspect or condition of their life. The stance and practice of being supportive is best understood as a three-place relation: A supports B in C, where the C term stands for some relevant circumstance, context, or domain of B's life.

This formulation needn't overlook the phenomenon of *simply* being supportive of another: being supportive of someone without apparent reference to any particular circumstance, context, or domain of that person's life. But since this generalized form of support can be understood as involving a willingness to bear costs to hold up the other in many (if not all) circumstances, contexts, and domains, the C term is still tacitly present in these cases.

In general, what makes someone a suitable candidate to receive another's support is that certain objective conditions obtain in that person's life that

generates the need to be supported. The objective conditions (which include psychological conditions like addiction, depression, and grief) are such that they bring, or can be expected to bring, stress, struggle, and adversity upon the person, so that the person stands to benefit from someone being there to hold them up in the face of those conditions.

In many instances, there will be things to be done to help make the supported person's life go better. The expression *making life go better* covers the range from getting someone closer to a minimally adequate level of welfare to getting them to flourish and realize themselves in a fuller sense. When I support you in the aftermath of your spouse's sudden death, my support may involve helping you make funeral arrangements or notifying relatives or looking after your children. In doing these things, I help you get 'back on your feet.' As your PhD supervisor, I may help you realize your dream of joining the scientific community, helping you to secure the kind of meaningful, fulfilling life you aspire to lead advancing human understanding.

We can distinguish between four general types of support-needed circumstances, tied respectively to: (1) unchosen misfortune, (2) self-inflicted misfortune, (3) self-expressive pursuit, and (4) valued (but non-self expressive) activity.

Examples of unchosen misfortunes: having one's home destroyed by a flood, losing one's spouse in a plane crash, and falling into a serious depression. In these cases, someone is in a bad way (thus in need of support) but it is not their fault that they confront the situation. The fact that they are in the situation is neither a result of their direct agency, nor something they could have reasonably anticipated or prevented. The agent is in an important sense *passive* to the situation's coming about, bearing no (special or particular) responsibility for it.

Examples of self-inflicted misfortunes: being justly imprisoned for committing a crime, failing out of university as a result of failing to take one's academic work seriously, and gambling away one's family savings at the casino. In these cases, someone is in a bad way (thus in need of support), but there is a sense in which it is their fault. The fact that they are in the situation is a result of their agency, or could have been reasonably foreseen and prevented. In these cases, the agent bears some significant responsibility for their situation.

Examples of self-expressive pursuits: starting a charter school for disadvantaged children, coming out as an openly transgendered public figure, adopting a child, and embarking on a committed romantic relationship. In these cases, the person in the support-relevant circumstance is pursuing an activity, engagement, project, or relationship central to their identity – their *sense of self*. In contrast to the first case (unchosen misfortunes), but like the second case (self-inflicted misfortunes), the agent is in an important sense *active* (as opposed to *passive*) with respect to their being in the

support-relevant circumstance: their agency (choice, decision, commitment, or reflective endorsement) is directly implicated in the situation. In that sense, the person bears some responsibility for being in a situation that calls for others to hold them up.

Having stressed that self-expressive pursuits are chosen or endorsed in distinguishing them from circumstances of misfortune, I want to be clear that as a matter of first-person phenomenology, self-expressive pursuits are sometimes experienced not as a matter of choice or decision but of necessity. We should not hold an overly voluntaristic conception of self-expressive pursuits, at least in describing our experience from the inside. Nevertheless, even if our self-expressive pursuits often have the force of practical necessity, self-pursuits are still things we can assume responsibility for.

I've said that self-expressive pursuits include activities, projects, and relationships that allow a person to express who they are and what they value in a fundamental sense associated with leading a meaningful and fulfilling life. In the modern Western industrialized context, they constitute answers or resolutions to practical questions like: what profession or career to pursue, what kinds of projects to engage in, what kinds of relationships and family arrangements to enter into, whether and when to have children and how many, what kind of friends and intimates to have, and where to live and what communities and associations and religious groups to join. When we are supportive of an intimate's self-expressive pursuit, we are willing to bear costs on their behalf to hold them up in a circumstance or context linked to their pursuit of an activity, project, or relationship central to their sense of self.

We should, of course, not over-generalize and assume that everyone in a modern Western industrialized context derives meaning and fulfillment through activities such as work. For many people, even what they call their career or professional life might be valued primarily as a means of securing material needs – food, clothing, and shelter for their family. So as not to over-valorize work (and perhaps even certain relationships), I distinguish a fourth type of support-needed circumstance, associated with *valued (but non-self expressive) activity*. For example: two co-workers who work the check-out lines at Walmart, supporting each other because both find their jobs unsatisfying and frustrating: commiserating with each other when their boss is unreasonable, covering shifts for each other when a sick child needs to be picked up from school, and so on.

Consideration of these four central (but not exhaustive) kinds of support-needed circumstances makes clear that one general reason why the practice of being supportive is valuable: it involves the provision of discrete benefits, and the other-regarding willingness to bear costs on behalf of the supported person to hold them up. While we should not underestimate the importance of this dimension of support – how much

it can matter, make a difference to have ‘a shoulder to lean on when the going gets tough’ – there are yet further important dimensions in which being supportive is a good. The remainder of the discussion will be concerned with bringing these to light, by focusing on the case of supporting an intimate in their self-expressive pursuit.

3. *The virtue of modally demanding support*

To develop the claim that there are further goods (distinct from the provision of care, concern, assistance, and guidance) that are realized or promoted in the case of supporting an intimate in their self-expressive pursuit, I begin by distinguishing between providing mere support, on the one hand, and exercising the virtue of being supportive, on the other. I shall understand the former as support that is highly contingent on features of the actual circumstance, and the latter as an instance of what Philip Pettit calls a *modally demanding value*.⁵ Modally demanding values are values the instantiation of which depends not only on what actually happens, but also on what would happen across a range of non-actual (or possible) circumstances. So to characterize the virtue of being supportive as a modally demanding value is to say that it requires not merely that the supportive intimate *actually* possess a willingness to shoulder burdens to hold up the supported intimate in the actual circumstance tied to their self-expressive pursuit, but also that the supportive intimate *would be* prepared to do so across a range of relevant non-actual circumstances.

In calling support that is modally demanding a *virtue*, I mean to suggest that possession of it requires good judgment in complex situations, and that it can be seen as a mean between extremes of excess and deficiency (support that is insufficiently conditional and overly conditional). Above all, I mean to stress the *evaluative difference* between providing mere support and exercising the virtue of being supportive. What the evaluative difference consists in will become apparent as the discussion unfolds, but it should be noted that instances of mere support might count as virtuous in the thin sense of having moral worth or value. What I’m particularly interested in developing, though, is the idea that there is something distinctly preferable, especially worthy about the kind of support that is modally demanding, insofar as it facilitates or realizes (in a way that mere support does not) certain important goods. But appreciating the evaluative difference is compatible with acknowledging that praise, gratitude, and admiration towards actual support that is highly contingent on features of a circumstance is sometimes appropriate.

Suppose you are my adult child, and you’ve been deliberating what to do with your life: what career or profession to pursue. After thinking it over,

you decide you want to pursue a career in medicine. Suppose that as a matter of fact, I'm quite willing to assume costs to hold you up in this pursuit: I offer to pay a substantial portion of your tuition, provide you lots of encouragement, cook you comforting, nutritious meals when you're stressed out, and so on. And that, as a matter of fact, a medical career is expected to be very lucrative, carries significant social prestige, allows you to live nearby, making me the envy of my friends. However, suppose that had a medical career not been expectedly lucrative, or did not involve social prestige, or prevented you from living nearby, or did not make me the envy of my friends, I would have been unwilling to assume costs to hold you up in your decision to pursue a medical career. Even if there is a sense in which I can be said to be supporting your decision, I am not exercising the virtue of being supportive with respect to your decision to pursue a medical career, if my willingness to bear costs to hold you up is conditional on these factors in this way. To exercise the virtue of being supportive of your decision to pursue a medical career (as opposed to merely supporting it), it must be the case that my willingness to bear costs to hold you up would continue to be realized across a range of non-actual circumstances, including those just mentioned.

I've been addressing the modally demanding requirements of the virtue of being supportive in the case of supporting someone's self-expressive *decision*. What about supporting someone in a self-expressive *domain*, like career or love or friendship or family arrangement? Here, the virtue of being supportive is modally demanding in a somewhat different way. Return to the case involving your deliberations about career pursuit. Suppose that had you not chosen to pursue a career in medicine but a different career instead, I would have been unwilling to bear costs to hold you up (in suitably relevant and comparable respects) in your pursuit of *that* career. I would not then be exercising the virtue of being supportive with respect to *the domain of your professional ambition* (the particular domain of career or professional choice), if my willingness to bear costs to hold you up is only conditional on your actually choosing to pursue medicine. To instantiate the virtue of being supportive of you in the domain of your professional ambition, it must be the case I would continue to be willing to bear costs to hold you up across a range of non-actual circumstances in which the profession you choose to pursue is not medicine, but something else (say, education, public service, law, academia, non-profit, performing art, and so on).⁶

In both cases of being supportive (of someone's self-expressive decision, and of someone's domain of self-expressive choice or commitment), it is not enough to count as exercising the virtue of being supportive to have a willingness to bear costs to hold the other up actually. To count as exercising the virtue of being supportive, it must also be the case that one would continue to have a willingness to bear costs to hold the other up across a range of non-actual circumstances. In supporting you in your self-expressive *decision*, it must be the case that I would continue to have

the willingness to bear costs to hold you up in a range of non-actual situations where the circumstances surrounding the same decision had played out differently in various respects. In supporting you in a self-expressive *domain*, it must be the case that I would continue to have the willingness to bear costs to hold you up in a range of non-actual situations where the content of your self-expressive pursuit (content of your decision) had been different. In both cases, then, the virtue of being supportive requires a robust degree of *unconditionality*.

Although the virtue of being supportive is modally demanding, it is not *infinitely* modally demanding: it does not require the willingness to bear costs to hold the other up across all possible circumstances. For example, exercising the virtue of being supportive with respect to one's adult child in the domain of their professional ambitions requires a willingness to shoulder costs to hold them up actually (say, when they choose to pursue a medical career) as well as a willingness to shoulder costs to hold them up across a range of non-actual situations involving variants on that choice (choosing to join a monastery or becoming a park ranger, etc.). But it does not require that one would continue to be willing to bear costs to hold them up, should they decide to join the Mafia or sell themselves into slavery.

The claim that there are limits to the modal demandingness of the virtue of being supportive raises the issue of delineating those limits: how are we to determine the relevant range of non-actual circumstances across which the person with the virtue would continue to take on costs to hold the other up? I believe the relevant range cannot be specified with exact precision, given some indeterminacy at the limits. Certainly, there is no easy epistemic criterion or mechanical decision procedure to simply settle decisively in every particular case whether someone in possession of the virtue would lend support. Still, many of us do have some intuitive appreciation of what it is (and how) to support our friends and loved ones well. And to have that appreciation, I argue, *just is*, in part, to have some grasp of the relevant range of circumstances wherein the reasons of support maintain their relevance and weight (relative to other considerations).

On the basis of this appreciation, then, we might register some general points about the alternative possible situations wherein the virtue of being supportive does not require one to assume costs to hold the other up. In some of these situations, the provision of support would be *excessively* costly – morally or prudentially – either to the person providing support or to third parties (or even to the recipient of support). Sometimes, the reasons of support are clearly outweighed or overridden by competing considerations of morality or self-interest. That X is a dear friend with an interest in *creating a life of her own* may provide one with a strong reason to support X's self-expressive pursuit, but those reasons may nonetheless be trumped by the consideration that X's chosen self-expressive pursuit has a strong likelihood of resulting in the death or wronging of many innocent

people. It may also be outweighed by the deep importance to the putative supporter of remaining true to their own core commitments or to central aspects of their self-conception (say, in the case where *X*'s self-expressive pursuit is to become the world's leading big-game hunter or a Navy SEAL and the putative supporter deeply identifies as an animal rights activist or pacifist).

So the limits of the modal demandingness of the virtue of being supportive are set in part by the situations wherein providing supportive would require the supporting party (or third parties) to assume excessive or undue costs. What counts as excessive or undue depends, among other things, on the nature and kind of relationship at issue (a friendship? a marriage?),⁷ the unique history between the parties, and their personal values and qualities: their cares, ideals, even idiosyncrasies. Like the more general expectations and demands that govern the relationship, it is through shared experiences and greater mutual understanding over time that appropriate norms for what counts as undue costs support-wise for oneself and one's intimate is worked out – sometimes explicitly, but more often tacitly.

In other situations, changes in the other's attitudes, motives, and dispositions toward one may entail that they no longer count as a friend or lover – at least not a *genuine* or *true* one. Or the relationship may have deteriorated to the point where one or both of the parties are unable to sustain even a minimal level of regard, affection, or empathy for the other. In these situations, the reasons and value of support no longer seem relevant, given alterations in the condition or status of the relationship. Consider the servile wife who is willing to bear costs to hold up her husband, even though her husband has become domineering, abusive, and neglectful. Steadfast support under these conditions is not simply demeaning to oneself, manifesting lack of self-respect. It also seems absurd and pointless. To require it would be *overly* modally demanding. So the virtue of being supportive does not require one to take on costs to hold the other up when the other party is clearly uninterested in conducting the relationship on terms that satisfy even a minimal degree of care, respect, and consideration. For when these conditions are not satisfied, the practice of being supportive begins to lose much of its point or relevance.

I've argued that the virtue of being supportive does not require one to take on costs to hold the other up in situations where the reasons of support are clearly outweighed by competing considerations, and in situations where the reasons of support lose their relevance or point. There are a few points to elaborate here. First, the (relative) weight of the reasons one has to lend support may depend partly on the value of the self-expressive pursuit. One's reasons to support an intimate's project to count blades of grass should not hold as much weight as the project to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. The virtue of being supportive does not require one to assume costs to hold the other up in cases where the self-expressive pursuit of one's

intimate fails to satisfy a minimal threshold of value, or crosses a certain threshold of moral disvalue. Indeed, and this is the second point, the virtue of being supportive is compatible with a willingness in certain circumstances to voice disagreement with the other's self-expressive pursuit – to offer the kind of critical perspective that intimates are often best positioned to provide. We want (should want) our friends and loved ones to be willing to offer us needed critical perspective, warning or advising us against seriously imprudent options.

Thirdly, the virtue of being supportive is also compatible with *drawing lines in the sand*, refusing to hold the other up in cases where doing so would conflict with one's deeply held personal, moral, or religious ideal, would impose unreasonably significant costs to one's own or others' welfare, or would convey endorsement of a decision one sees as gravely imprudent or immoral. Though the virtue of being supportive requires one to be willing to take on significant costs to hold the other up in a range of circumstances, it does not require one to do so in circumstances where it would be *overly* costly and unfair to oneself or others, or where support sustains one's powerlessness and abuse in a dominating or oppressive relationship.

4. *Autonomy and solidarity*

Having characterized the virtue of being supportive as a modally demanding value, I want to now argue that it furthers two important goods. The virtue (1) facilitates the supported person's autonomy, enabling a more meaningful exercise of agency in self-expressive domains, and (2) generates solidarity between the supporting and supported persons, strengthening the fabric of the relationship.

Let me begin with autonomy understood as the capacity to determine the shape of one's life, to be the author of it. Autonomy so understood admits of degrees and requires the ability to exercise one's agency and the opportunity to do so. By *agency*, I mean the capacities to canvass and weigh reasons, form intentions and plans, and carry them out. One has the *opportunity* to exercise one's agency, only if one is free from others' interference, coercion, manipulation, and other agency-undermining forms of influence. Moreover, the relevant notion of opportunity also depends on having what Joseph Raz calls 'an adequate range of options' (1986, ch. 14).⁸ What matters for 'adequacy' is not the number of options, but that there be a wide enough range of available significant options, conceived of as individually worthy but mutually incompatible alternatives.

How does the virtue of being supportive further autonomy thus understood? Suppose you are the young adult mentioned earlier, deliberating what to do with your life: you are deciding what career or profession to

pursue, and among the options you are considering is medicine. Why would it matter to know, not only that your parents would shoulder burdens to hold you up should you decide to pursue medicine, but that they too would shoulder burdens to hold you up across a range of *other* valuable options? What difference would it make to know that should you decide to pursue, say, philosophy or journalism or law (rather than medicine), that in these possibilities your parents would shoulder costs to hold you up as well?

I submit there is a difference in the character of your deliberations and self-expressive significance of your decision in the relevant alternatives: (1) the one where your parents would continue to be willing to bear costs to hold you up across a range of possibilities in addition to the one involving medicine, and (2) the one where they would not. The difference is due to the different range of options that are genuinely available to you in each case. Knowing that pursuing medicine is the only option where your parents would be willing to shoulder costs to hold you up transforms the character of your deliberations and choice. You will not feel *as free* to choose what you really want to do; your autonomy seems more diminished in situation (2) than (1). If you choose career X because it is the only way to have the support of your parents, there is a sense in which your choice is not really a distinct expression of who you are or what you yourself find worthwhile (as opposed to a mere reflection of what your parents want for you or the pressure you feel from them).

Your parent's preference regarding your choice is liable to exert pressure on your deliberations in a way that involves loss. Their willingness to bear costs to hold you up only if you make a particular choice makes it harder for you to deliberate more purely on the basis of the reasons most centrally relevant to the choiceworthiness of the various options for you. These include considerations tied to: your interests, talents, and temperament, and how well they suit the options before you; the distinctive goods associated with the various career options; the potential costs of pursuing each option in terms of employment prospects, future income, geographic location; and so on. Rather than focusing attention on *these* reasons, you overly focus on the consideration that your parents are only willing to shoulder burdens to hold you up in the case where you choose medicine. This shift in focus *distorts* your deliberations and decision in the domain of career choice.⁹

Suppose you choose medicine. The fact that your parents would only take on costs to hold you up in this case alters the self-expressive meaning of your decision. It is unclear whether your choice is driven primarily by the considerations most directly related to the choice-worthiness of pursuing medicine or by the more peripheral consideration that this is only path where your parents would shoulder costs to hold you up. Does your decision truly represent what you really want and care about, as opposed to what your parents want and prefer for you? There may be a residual sense that you have not chosen the profession that most matters to you, that expresses your true self. Of course, you may choose instead to pursue

(say) journalism over medicine. But here too there may be a sense of loss. For now it's unclear whether: (1) you chose journalism over medicine because journalism better expresses who you are and what you value; or (2) you chose journalism over medicine as a reaction against the fact that your parents would be willing to bear costs to hold you up only in case of choosing medicine – an act of defiance or self-assertion, which has its own costs.

A parent or friend or lover who is willing to bear costs to hold you up only as things actually go in your self-expressive pursuit X, but would have withdrawn their willingness to bear costs to hold you up, had the circumstances surrounding the choice of X played out differently in any way, or had you chosen any self-expressive pursuit other than X, may very well be motivated out of a concern for your interests (as they see it). Still, we can distinguish between (1) support offered in virtue of weighing the other's interests, where the supporting party has a view on those interests, and acts out of concern for those interests (so viewed), and (2) support offered in virtue of weighing the other's *own perspective* on their interests, where the supporting party responds out of concern and respect for what the supported person takes an interest in and sees as in their interest. While mere support of the kind that is highly conditional might satisfy the ideal represented by (1), the virtue of being supportive better satisfies the ideal represented by (2).

In his reflections on the ideal of autonomy, Raz says it is an ideal of individual life, but also 'in part a social ideal.'¹⁰ By this, Raz means that the realization of the ideal requires particular cultural contexts; the extent to which a person has significant options available depends on the society in which she lives.¹¹ Similarly, the realization of autonomy also depends on the character of one's more intimate relations. This is shown by the fact that having the modally-demanding support of intimates furthers our autonomy, by enabling us to enjoy a more adequate range of options in self-expressive domains and greater opportunity to engage more purely and directly with the reasons most centrally relevant in these domains. Friends and lovers who display the virtue of being supportive are sensitive to our interest in having our choices in self-expressive domains not be dictated by considerations of their own willingness to shoulder burdens on our behalf across different possibilities of choice. They take care not to let their position as potential supporters play an overly dominant role in influencing our self-expressive decisions and projects.

It is also worth registering that many of the activities, projects, and relationships that have self-expressive significance have a dimension of risk to them. The pursuit of activities, projects, and relationships that are meaningful often exposes us to dangers: depending on how the chips fall, one may be seriously harmed or worse off as a result of pursuing something genuinely worth pursuing. Enjoying the modally demanding support of one's intimates in a self-expressive domain can thus protect one against the vulnerability

that often goes with the pursuit of meaningful activities, projects, and relationships.¹² Such support provides one with the kind of assurance, peace of mind that accompanies the thought: 'Were things to go seriously wrong for me, I wouldn't be on my own to deal with it.' Knowing that a friend or lover is prepared to assume costs to hold me up under various contingencies thus provides a kind of security – some degree of freedom from anxiety that is a further condition of the meaningful exercise of autonomous agency.¹³ The willingness to bear costs to hold up one's intimate across a range of possible self-pursuits respects and enables autonomy, for it acknowledges that each of us should play the central part in making our own lives, and provides us with greater security.

While I have been emphasizing the point that the practice of being supportive can enhance the supported person's autonomy, it must also be acknowledged that there comes a point at which the practice can limit, even undermine, the supported person's autonomy.¹⁴ Consider the *trust-fund kid* whose family never allows him to experience failure; steadfast and eager are they to support him in one foolish, ill-advised scheme after another. Being overly supportive can sometime be to the detriment of the supported person, even limiting autonomy. For a person can only exercise their autonomy when they get a real chance to stand on their own two feet.

In the arena of architecture, the scaffolding enables a building to be successfully constructed, shaping it in the process. But the scaffolding is meant to ultimately come off, once the construction is completed. That's the whole point. Something has gone awry in the case where the scaffolding that shapes a building never comes off after its completion. The same holds true for the *agential* scaffolder (the supportive person) as well. As a supportive parent, I may influence my adult child in certain ways in raising him, but the influence should (ideally) have some kind of limit, at a given time and over time. There is such a thing as being overly supportive (the *helicopter parent* comes to mind) in a way that undermines autonomy, generating unhealthy forms of dependence.¹⁵

Such facts complicate but do not undercut my claim that the practice of being supportive provides an important way of furthering autonomy within the context of an intimate relationship. This claim is compatible with the fact that support may be practiced in ways that are *pathological*, creating new problems. One example is just the fact that sometimes being overly supportive can hinder, even disable, the development and exercise of the intimate's autonomy. But the complications posed by misapplication of a morally valuable form of practice are not unique to support. Other morally valuable forms of relating to another, such as love and tolerance, may also be misplaced. Beneficence too may be misdirected, giving rise to overbearing and patronizing intrusions. The better off may seek distortive and self-serving interpretations of the less well off, in ways that call forth the need to provide aid and service. But these possibilities do not mean that

beneficence cannot be a virtue, that duties of beneficence cannot serve important functions in our social relations. Likewise, the possibility of unhealthy forms of dependence generated by overreliance by the supported party on the supporting party does not serve to undermine the claim that the practice of being supportive can, when practiced well, play an important role in furthering the autonomy of the supported party.

Let me now turn to solidarity in a relationship. The practice of being supportive can also strengthen the fabric of intimate relationships (and this will be most true in cases where the parties to the relationship are *mutually* supporting of one another). By *relational solidarity*, I mean a sense of unity or oneness between members in a relationship. Relational solidarity has both affective and normative aspects: it involves attitudes and responses such as empathy, sympathy, and trust; and it involves certain reasons or obligations. When A is supportive of B, this generates solidarity between A and B in ways that involving both aspects, by: (1) encouraging cooperative feelings and emotional bonds between A and B, and (2) strengthening the normative fabric of the relationship, through the creation of reasons for A and B that each may not have otherwise in the absence of support.

When I exercise the virtue of being supportive with respect to your self-expressive pursuit, I display acceptance of your identity and agency in a way that will tend to generate fellow feelings between us. My willingness to have your back, to hold you up, across a range of possibilities, will likely generate affection, cooperative attitudes like trust, and other emotional bonds. This affection-generating dynamic is explained partly by our social nature: the fact that we are social creatures who care immensely about the attitudes others (especially those with whom we stand in close relations) take toward us, including their recognition of our self-conception and respect of our agency.¹⁶ Mark Alfano has observed that our emotions and practical responses often have an 'interactive' dimension, involving 'constructive feedback loops' that 'strengthen positive personal relationships' like friendship.¹⁷ He discusses the following example (drawn from the work of Robert Roberts):

... consider a sister who generously and in a spirit of friendship gives her brother her own tickets to a concert that he would like to attend. He feels the emotion of gratitude for this gift, which he expresses with a token of thanks. Satisfied that her generosity has hit its mark, she is 'gratified by his gratitude. [...] And he may in turn be gratified that she is gratified by his gratitude.' Despite the fact that this is a tiny schematic example, it plausibly contains a fourth-order emotion (he is gratified that she is gratified that he is gratified that she was generous) (2016, p. 137).¹⁸

The general idea is that emotions such as generosity and gratitude toward another in the interpersonal context often lead to their reciprocation on the

part of the recipient. There is a similar phenomenon in the case of trust and trustworthiness: when someone explicitly places their trust in you, this can be *self-reinforcing*, making it more likely that you will prove trustworthy.¹⁹ It may, moreover, invite you to reciprocate in turn – that is, trust the person who has entrusted you. Just as generosity, gratitude, and trust often give rise to their own reciprocation, so too does being supportive. Through the dynamic of reciprocation, support can strengthen the mutual affection and feelings of closeness and unity that partly constitute intimate relationships.²⁰

In addition to promoting mutual and reciprocated emotional bonds between us, the provision of support can *by itself* constitute a strengthening of the normative bonds of our relationship. Independent of what warm feelings are generated, my commitment to supporting you generates reasons for me to bear costs to hold you up, reasons that I may not otherwise have.²¹ That support is able to strengthen the normative fabric of a relationship through the creation of reasons is due to the processes of identification with, or commitment to, the other's projects that support often involves. Consider the connection between commitment and reasons: in committing myself to something (supporting you), I *create* reasons to follow through on my commitment. These additional reasons are suggested by the fact that failure to follow through on one's commitments will entail a loss of integrity. In supporting you, I put my agency behind you in a way that generates (additional) reasons for me to respond and act in ways to hold you up and assume costs on your behalf. You will in turn have reasons to respond and act in various ways toward me (for example, out of gratitude, reciprocity) in virtue of my actions and responses toward you in being supportive. Thus, the lives of friends, lovers, and family members become further normatively intertwined when they are supportive of one another. This deepening of normative interconnectedness is a second way in which the practice of being supportive generates unity or solidarity between the members of the relationship.

I have argued that autonomy and solidarity are better realized or promoted when the support one receives is modally demanding (rather than highly contingent on the actual circumstance). If I'm right, then these values help to clarify the evaluative difference between mere support and the virtue of being supportive. Moreover, if, in order to better realize or promote autonomy and solidarity, the kind of support one receives must be modally demanding, then considerations of autonomy and solidarity values also clarify limits on the modal demandingness of the virtue of being supportive. The scenarios in which the virtue of being supportive does not require the provision of support include those where the reasons of support are clearly outweighed by competing considerations (moral or non-moral), and those where the reasons of support are no longer relevant. In situations where the provision of support would detract from autonomy and solidarity, the

autonomy- and solidarity-based reasons of support can be seen as either irrelevant or outweighed by competing considerations.

5. *Reconciling self and other*

I want to now argue that the practice of being supportive plays an important role with regard to the familiar need to reconcile the demands of one's own projects with our responsibilities to intimates. I begin with a truism: in a close relationship, one's life is *entangled* with the life of one's intimate. One sense in which this is true is that participants in the relevant relationship are dependent on each other to various degrees, emotionally and practically. But this interdependence has a normative dimension as well. If a good friend has just broken up with his partner and is deeply depressed and needing a place to stay, I will sympathize and feel that I ought to offer him my couch to sleep on. If I end up unemployed, my brother may feel that he ought to help me out financially to hold me over. If my spouse wants to relocate to another part of the country for a great career opportunity, I may feel that I ought to move with her rather than insist that she forgo the opportunity or that the relationship be conducted on long-distance terms. In these ways, close relationships have important normative dimensions of interdependence.

Call the following *the normative interdependence of close relationships*: that a participant in a close relationship will have, and typically take himself or herself to have, certain reasons grounded in the needs, interest, and preferences of their intimates – reasons that they wouldn't have in the absence of the relationship, and that may vary depending on the kind of relationship at issue. The normative interdependence of close relationships is linked to the distinctive goods that participation in relationships like friendships, loving relationships, and parent–child relationships make available. These goods include care, affection, intimacy, mutual understanding, sense of connection, shared feelings and experiences, shared purposes, and joint activities. These goods in a life make it richer, more meaningful and textured.

But these relationship-goods are conditional on the participants' being sensitive (to a sufficient degree) to the reasons and demands of the relationship, reasons and demands that they would not have otherwise in the absence of the relationship. And since these relationship-based reasons and demands depend on the needs, interest, and preferences of the participants, this means that participation in a relationship can potentially have a constraining effect on one's autonomy. Being in a relationship can limit one's capacity and opportunity to freely determine the shape of one's own life in *other* self-expressive domains, for there will sometimes be reasons grounded in the needs, values, and preferences of one's intimate that conflict with or override the reasons of one's other self-expressive pursuits (to pursue certain projects or pursue them in certain ways). The reasons and demands of the relationship may then limit or alter the character of

one's engagement with the reasons and values of other self-expressive domains (other projects and relationships).

The presence of these conflicts between one's relationship-based reasons and the reasons of one's other projects can be strongly felt in cases of over-commitment. It is easy to feel the conflict in the reasons based in one's various relationships and projects when one has too many relationships and too many significant projects at once. But one needn't be overcommitted for one's autonomy in a self-expressive domain to be constrained by the reasons and demands of a relationship. This is because of the phenomenon of *relational normative transformation*: that many choices and decisions (in self-expressive domains) that would otherwise be (mostly) self-regarding can come to take on greater other-regarding normative significance when one is in a close relationship.

Suppose you're in the midst of a mid-life crisis, and so considering quitting your relatively high-paying job as a management consultant to pursue your life-long dream of teaching philosophy. If you're single, it will be you alone who will take on the costs and benefits of your decision: you will bear the full cost of the lost salary and the new educational expenses, but also enjoy the full benefit of doing something with your life that you find more personally rewarding. However, if you and I are married, with kids to put through college soon, it won't be you alone, but the kids and I as well, who must bear the costs of your decision. This is not to say that the kids and I can't also benefit from your change in career from consulting to philosophy. We can – perhaps there will have more interesting conversations at the dinner table and you will be less moody because you are more fulfilled in your work. The point is not to assess the overall justification of the decision, but to highlight the fact that participation in a close relationship alters the normative significance of one's decisions. In particular, many self-expressive decisions that would otherwise be (mostly) self-regarding in normative significance become (more) other-regarding in normative significance when participating in a close relationship. And this is explained by the fact that when one is in such a relationship, the benefits and burdens of one's decision no longer fall solely on oneself, but now fall partially on the intimate as well.

In a marriage or committed relationship, one's partner's needs, values, and preferences will play a significant role in determining decisions over questions such as whether and when one will have children, where one will take up residence, and whether and how to spend holidays. Being a participant in a close relationship means that choices and decisions that otherwise would have been purely (or mostly) self-regarding can no longer be treated as such. (To treat them as simply self-regarding is to be liable to moral criticism as being selfish, self-regarding in the pejorative sense.) The decision to spend every weekend at the office for six months straight to finish a book manuscript can no longer be thought of as a purely self-regarding decision,

once one is in a serious, committed romantic relationship. For being at the office every weekend for six months straight will place significant costs on one's partner, and not just oneself. One's partner may reasonably object to the prospect of one's unavailability on weekends, on the grounds that this requires them to take on a significantly larger share of the household chores and childcare duties or deprives them of opportunities for joint social outings. These reasons not to spend one's weekends for six months on end in the office to finish the book manuscript conflict with the reasons one might have to do so. This is just another instance of the potential conflict (at least practical conflict) between the relationship-based reasons of a given relationship and the reasons of one's other self-expressive projects and relationships.

Recall the close link between one's relationship-based reasons and the special goods that are made available to one through participation in a relationship. The special goods of the relationship are available only if the participants give those reasons weight and (in general) act on them. But because otherwise self-regarding decisions (in self-expressive domains) can have other-regarding normative significance when one is in a relationship, one's relationship-based reasons may conflict with the reasons based in one's (other) self-expressive pursuits, thereby constraining one's autonomy in relevant self-expressive domains. When such conflict arises, it appears one must choose between: (1) forgoing one's self-expressive pursuit (or a certain way of going about it) for the sake of the relationship, constraining one's autonomy in the relevant self-expressive domain; or (2) engaging in one's self-expressive pursuit (or a certain way of going about it), exercising autonomy at the risk of impairing the relationship.

In the above example, taking the first option involves attaching greater weight to the reasonable objections of one's partner than to the reasons of one's self-expressive pursuit. One gives up on the idea of spending six months hunkered down on weekends to finish one's book. Taking the second option involves giving greater weight to the reasons of one's self-expressive pursuit than to the reasonable objections of one's intimate. One chooses to spend six months hunkered down despite the reasonable objections of one's partner to one's doing so. In effect, the second option involves distancing oneself from the other's preferences and needs, loosening the strains of involvement.

It seems that we are stuck with two undesirable options, then: in the first, unity in the relationship is maintained at the cost of one's autonomy in a self-expressive domain; in the second, one's autonomy in a self-expressive domain is maintained at the cost of unity in the relationship. We might think there is yet a third option: engaging in the self-expressive pursuit in a way that does not impose costs on one's partner (so removing their reasonable objection). To adopt this *strategy of cost-internalization*, one engages in the self-expressive pursuit but in a way that involves assuming the full costs of one's doing so. Returning to our example, imagine working on the

weekends for six months on end to finish the manuscript on the condition that one takes on a greater share of the household chores or watches the children for longer stretches than usual during the six months. The idea is that whatever costs might be imposed on one's partner as a result of one's self-expressive pursuit, one balances them out by taking on extra costs in other areas of the relationship. In this way, one *internalizes the externalities* of one's self-expressive pursuit, bearing its full costs oneself.

Whether or not this is a reasonable and fair strategy, it is itself not without costs.²² Cost-extraction at every turn is petty and taxing. The kind of scorekeeping, tit-for-tat required will likely erode many of the goods of being in a relationship. The strategy will tend to diminish mutual trust, intimacy, affection, and the sense of unity between the members in the relationship. Another concern with *the cost-internalization strategy* is that it may chill or distort autonomous expression, by requiring a constant accounting and keeping tabs on the other. It may lead one to be *overly* consciousness of the potential costs on one's intimate of one's self-expressive pursuit. Being concerned with the burdens on others of one's self-expressive pursuit is a morally good thing. But being *overly* concerned detracts from meaningful engagement with the reasons and value of one's self-expressive pursuit. A bifurcated consciousness diminishes the richness and meaningfulness of the evaluative experience. So it is not clear that the strategy of cost-internalization provides a way out of our problem, since the approach may diminish both the goods of: (1) solidarity, by wearing away at the warmth, affection, and sense of unity between the parties; and (2) autonomy, by constraining and distorting one's engagement with the values and reasons that constitute self-expressive activity.

This is where the stance and practice of being supportive offers us a way of avoiding the trilemma. When our intimates are supportive, their willingness to bear costs enables us have a greater range of permissible and valuable options in self-expressive domains. They enable us to enjoy a freer experimental space, to engage with greater meaning and autonomy with the reasons and values in these domains. Supportive friends and lovers enable us a richer opportunity to engage these reasons and values more purely and directly, without being overly distracted by the potential external costs to them of our decisions. In this way, support facilitates autonomy by shielding the considerations of external costs from dominating and distorting one's experience of value.

While enhancing the supported agent's autonomy in other self-expressive domains, the practice of being supportive can, at the same time, generate a greater sense of unity in the relationship. As observed earlier, one way support can encourage solidarity is by generating affection, cooperative feelings, and emotional bonds between the participants of the relationship. A second way is by strengthening the normative fabric of the relationship through the creation of reasons for participants that they may not have

otherwise in the absence of their commitment to supporting one another. Some of these reasons might be reasons of gratitude. But the potential of support to strengthen the normative fabric of a relationship via the creation of reasons is also explained by the fact that support can involve processes of identification with, and commitment to, the other's projects. When we identify with or commit ourselves to something, this generates new reasons for us. When I support you in your projects, *your* projects become *our* projects through my *investment* in your projects.

When the members of a relationship are mutually supportive of one another, there is something distinctively valuable about the character of the relationship that is realized. T.M. Scanlon has argued that our reasons to value tolerance lie 'in the relation with one's fellow citizens that tolerance makes possible,' a relation of 'mutual respect' or 'mutual recognition.'²³ For Scanlon, toleration expresses 'a recognition of others' as entitled to live as they choose and 'to contribute to the definition of our society.' The intolerant alternative is to regard the standing of others as members of one's society as conditional on their sharing one's values, and this involves 'a form of alienation from one's citizens.'²⁴ Something similar holds for the practice of being supportive in close relationships. When one's willingness to bear costs to hold the other up in their self-expressive pursuit is overly conditional, this can lead to interpersonal alienation. It can convey that the other's standing in the relationship depends on their exercising agency in a way that is less than fully self-determining. Conversely, when one exercises virtuous support, when one's willingness to bear costs to hold the other up is sufficiently robust, the result is not alienation but closeness or unity between oneself and other. Just as toleration of others in a society expresses a recognition that they are entitled to live as they choose, to contribute to the definition of the society, so being supportive of an intimate expresses a recognition that they are owed an opportunity to engage meaningfully and with some degree of freedom in self-expressive domains, and that these self-expressive pursuits should be held up by the relationship. Thus, the support we provide each other in close relationships can be seen as a practice of recognizing one another as autonomous beings, united in the joint enterprise of leading meaningful, fulfilling lives.

But crucially, the possibility of the *joint* delivery of autonomy and solidarity that the stance and practice of being supportive enables depends on the support's being *mutual*. More generally, it depends on the relationship's being grounded in mutual respect and conducted on a footing of equality. An egalitarian relationship is one where the participants have a reciprocal commitment to regarding the other with consideration and respect, divide up or assign the responsibilities in a fair way, and have equal voice and authority in important decisions regarding the course of the relationship. Even if we accept that the value of equality has something of an accounting dimension to it (equality is, after all, a *comparative* notion), there is still a difference

between conducting a relationship on an equal footing and adopting the cost-internalization strategy. The former may indeed require a commitment to practices like regular discussions between partners or periodic family meetings to work out the division and assignment of responsibilities in a fair way, and to have preferences and interests voiced when there are important decisions to be made. The practice of mutual support will likely require communication and negotiation: in the best instances, respectful dialogue, imaginative co-deliberation, and reasonable compromise and concession.

Engaging in these practices of equality and mutuality needn't amount to adopting the cost-internalization approach, insofar as they needn't require tit-for-tat scorekeeping. For the practice of mutual support is not simply a matter of the participants in a relationship exchanging costs and benefits equally: it does not consist in keeping a tally, calculating whether the other has done enough (or will do enough) for one, and then on that basis deciding whether to lend support. What is essential to the practice of mutual support is that both parties equally possess robustly the willingness to take on costs and work things out for the sake of the other, and manifest it in decisions made within the context of the relationship.

To fully appreciate this last point, it is important not to give short shrift to the perspective and interests of the supporting party. The supporting party's autonomy, values, and self-expressive pursuits matter equally. From the inside, our self-expressive projects and commitments look all too valuable and virtuous; unreasonable demands for the support of intimates can appear reasonable. When we are overly focused on ourselves, we are prone to mistake our idiosyncrasies and obsessions for the valuable and virtuous, and underappreciate the significant costs imposed on intimates whose support we simply expect or demand. But valuing and respecting our intimate's (the supporting party's) autonomy means that we not see ourselves as simply entitled to their support across a range of different contexts that would significantly compromise *their* important values and self-expressive projects. We should thus feel a strong presumption against calling on our intimates to be supportive of our self-expressive pursuits in these scenarios, and be open to concede to their wishes on how they may best hold us up (if at all) given their own commitments. (Suppose one is in the final stages of opening a restaurant catering primarily to non-vegetarians. One's committed vegetarian friend may feel more comfortable offering support by babysitting one's child than by contributing to the start-up fund for the restaurant.)

Support, then, has the power to deliver the goods of autonomy and solidarity, but only if the practice is embedded in a broader context of equal regard and consideration between the members of the relationship. Of course, the practice of being supportive (even when it makes a positive difference) does not guarantee the successful negotiation of conflicts between self and special other. Such conflicts are generally easier to negotiate – and, indeed, the mutual commitment to an egalitarian relationship easier to

realize – when intimates already share their most important values. This is true at least for our most intimate relationships; sometimes the values between self and special other are just too divergent and conflicting. Like much else in life, whether intimates already share their most important values, and whether they can successfully negotiate differences, will depend not insignificantly on luck and circumstance.²⁵

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NOTES

¹ Cutrona, 1986; Pasch and Bradbury, 1998.

² On the value of accommodation practices, see Shiffrin, 2004.

³ On the related idea that the reasons of friendship may conflict and override moral considerations, see Cocking and Kennett, 2000.

⁴ In many cases, to experience one's support of an intimate under the description of bearing costs is to have, in the words of Bernard Williams, 'one thought too many.' See Williams, 1981.

⁵ The notion of a modally demanding value is presented by Philip Pettit in Pettit, 2016.

⁶ The relevant non-actual circumstances needn't be likely or highly probable.

⁷ I am open to the possibility that a parent may have somewhat weightier reasons to support their adult child's self-expressive project (e.g. career choice) despite objecting to it, than do friends and lovers in similar cases.

⁸ On Raz's conception of autonomy as 'an ideal of self-creation,' see Raz, 1986, ch. 14.

⁹ For discussion of the importance of having an opportunity to make significant decisions for the reasons most relevant to the choiceworthiness of self-expressive pursuits, see Tsai, 2014.

¹⁰ Raz, 1986, pp. 246, 265, 378.

¹¹ An important theme in the work of Charles Taylor is that autonomy can only be developed and exercised in a certain kind of social environment. See Taylor, 1985.

¹² On the idea that participation in valuable intimate relationships such as love and friendship involves vulnerability essentially, see Tsai, 2016. On the idea that valuing in general involves emotional vulnerability, see Scheffler, 2012.

¹³ On the broader phenomenon of the deep human need for a dependably supportive community and the social ills that arise when there is a lack of social capital, see Putnam, 2000.

¹⁴ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point and suggesting the example in the paragraph.

¹⁵ Robert Adams: 'Consider the case of parents who are "overprotective" though they know they shouldn't be. They could be paragons of physical, moral, and even financial courage, and yet lack something of what we might call the "vicarious courage" involved in dealing well with fears for persons one loves.' Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for directing me to Adams' notion of 'vicarious courage' (Adams, 2006, p. 182).

¹⁶ P.F. Strawson observed that we are the kinds of beings that care immensely about whether others display good (or ill) will towards us. See Strawson, 1974.

¹⁷ Alfano, 2016. For empirical work on feedback loops in close relationships, see Srivastava *et al.*, 2006.

¹⁸ Alfano, 2016. The example from the quoted passage is taken from Roberts, 2013, p. 137.

¹⁹ See Pettit, 1995; McGeer, 2008; Alfano, 2016. Pettit, McGeer, and Alfano each propose original accounts of the mechanism that explains how trust can be self-reinforcing.

²⁰ For relevant work in empirical psychology, see Srivastava *et al.*, 2006.

²¹ On the creation of reasons through commitment, see Chang, 2013. See also, Raz, 1986, ch. 14.

²² It is also doubtful that in every case where B's engagement in a self-expressive pursuit has costs for A, B can 'fully compensate' A for those costs.

²³ Scanlon, 1996, p. 230.

²⁴ Scanlon, 1996, p. 232.

²⁵ Earlier versions of this article were presented at the Australian National University and University of Melbourne. I would like to thank the participants at these events for their feedback. For further discussion or written comments, I am particularly grateful to Derek Baker, Laura Bearden, Brian Berkey, Stanley Chen, Al Prescott-Couch, Luara Ferracioli, Pablo Gilabert, Daniel Halliday, Victoria McGeer, Philip Pettit, and Nicholas Southwood. Thanks also to an anonymous reviewer for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for helpful criticisms and suggestions.

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