CHAPTER 5: CARING AND PARTIALITY

[A] micro-moment of love . . . literally changes your mind. It expands your awareness of your surroundings, even your sense of self. The boundaries between you and not-you—what lies beyond your skin—relax and become more permeable. While infused with love you see fewer distinctions between you and others. Indeed, your ability to see others—really see them, wholeheartedly—springs open. Love can even give you a palpable sense of oneness and connection, a transcendence that makes you feel part of something far larger than yourself.

-- Barbara Fredrickson, Love 2.0 (2013)

OUR CARING SENTIMENT consistently privileges family, friends, and others. Probably most people find this desirable as a matter of common sense. But an equally commonsensical, powerful ethical truth is that everyone matters, and no one matters more than anyone else. Reconciling these partial and impartial perspectives is the problem of partiality. The acutest conflict of these perspectives comes in dilemmas pitting the welfare of a friend or friendly member against the welfare of strangers. We face similar quandaries when, in deciding how to allocate time, energy, and financial resources, we must choose to favor either our special others or strangers. For a moral epistemology privileging caring, addressing this asymmetry is an important task.

This chapter focuses on Simon Keller’s recent (2013) position on reasons of partiality, which he calls the “Individuals View”, criticizing that view but then supplementing it. We will start by situating Keller’s view among its rivals and examining his arguments for it (§1). We will then argue that, although Keller’s view as presented is unconvincing, the foregoing chapters’ account of how caring enables moral apprehension can demystify and support his view. What we can call the Caring Account of reasons of partiality applies the caring-apprehension hypothesis to special relationships to explain why and how we might perceive reasons of partiality (§2). From this there emerges (§3) an informative, unified, plausible account of which reasons of partiality we do and do not have. Finally (§4), we will answer some key objections.

5.1 Views on Partiality

Intuitively, friends and family deserve our dedicated time, energy, finances, and assistance. That is, there seem to be ‘reasons of partiality’: considerations that count in favor of favoring/privileging certain special others. First, there are permissions to favor special others—e.g., it is permissible for me to skip a meeting I am required to attend in order to help my moderately sick child, but not just any sick child. Second, requirements to favor them—e.g., morality seems to require me to visit my parents, if I can, just after they have faced a serious house fire. Third, what it makes sense to do—e.g., it ‘makes sense’ to invite my friend to stay with me while his house is undergoing construction, because he is my friend rather than a stranger, although I am plausibly not morally required to do so.¹

‘Special others’ are those toward whom we (apparently) have reasons of partiality. (I give this definition in normative terms since it is contentious and difficult to specify just who counts as a ‘special other’ and why.) Special others include friends, family, and perhaps (e.g.) colleagues, fellow countrypersons, and those to whom we have made promises.

¹ These distinctions and examples are all from Keller (2013), Ch.1.
Reasons of partiality are puzzling. But objections are best raised only after we have an accurate, thorough account of the would-be nature and justification of reasons of partiality. So we will begin by comparing three positive accounts.

5.1.2 Three Views of Reasons of Partiality

Attempts to account for the shape and nature of reasons of partiality can be preliminarily grouped into three categories (Keller 2013). First, the Projects View holds that reasons of partiality arise from facts about an agent’s “ground projects”, or commitments that help constitute a person’s identity. On this view, reasons of partiality are derivable from commitments to favor special others. Second, the Relationships View holds that reasons of partiality arise from the brute fact that our relationships hold a certain kind of value. Finally, against these Keller offers the Individuals View, according to which reasons of partiality arise from facts about the ethical significance of the individuals with whom we share our special relationships.

Keller’s most compelling objections confront the Projects and Relationships views together. First, both kinds of view have trouble accommodating the agent-relativity of reasons of partiality: they cannot provide affirmative, informative answers these questions, respectively:

- Should I promote my own projects rather than other people’s projects? If so, why?
- Should I promote my own relationships rather than other people’s relationships? If so, why?

It looks like (on the Projects View) I should create or promulgate special projects for their own sakes, even at the expense of my own projects, or (on the Relationships View) I should create or promulgate special relationships for their own sakes, even at the expense of my own special relationships. This should strike us as absurd. My own special relationships, many think, cannot be traded off in such a way. The fact that a relationship is mine gives me reason to respond to the pertinent reasons of partiality; promoting other special relationships does not (normally, anyway) compensate for ignoring my own. At any rate, this apparent fact about reasons of partiality deserves an explanation that the Projects and Relationships views seem unable to give.

A second problem is that on the Projects and Relationships views, projects and relationships compete with individuals for the purposes of prioritization or resource allocation. Projects or relationships should be promoted in their own rights even if no individual is benefitted by their promotion. This also seems absurd. It is at least curious what reason there really could be for promoting, e.g., a totally failed marriage that is bad for both of its members.

Third, the Projects and Relationships views must advise people to promote projects or relationships for their own sakes, rather than for the sakes of the individuals whose projects or relationships they are. But this is exactly the reverse of how reasons of partiality present themselves. For example, when I learn my special other’s welfare is threatened—say, my spouse is about to drown—I fear for, and feel I have reason to rescue, not my marriage, not my personal project of having a healthy marriage, but my spouse herself. My mind’s alarm says not ‘my wife!’ or ‘my wife!’ but ‘Jordan!’ (assuming my wife’s name is Jordan).

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2 This matches Keller’s methodology (2013, p. 7).
3 Representative statements include Williams (1981), Wolf (1992), and Stroud (2010).
Finally, both the Projects and Relationships views cannot explain how reasons of partiality might have a requiring strength, rather than merely permissions not to act impartially. Nothing seems to require us to finish our projects; at best, our having projects seems to permit us to ignore the impersonal good in favor of our special relationships. Likewise, the Relationships view seems forced to simply announce that relationships themselves demand something of us. But such primitivism is at best unsatisfying and at worst question-begging. Can Keller do any better?

5.1.3 Keller’s Individuals View

The Individuals View says that the source of reasons of partiality is simply the value of the individuals with whom we share our special relationships. Initially, this may seem unable to surmount the problem of partiality: other individuals with whom I am not specially related are just as valuable as those with whom I am; so why should I treat my special others any differently from strangers? But Keller’s point is subtle: my special other’s value is the source of the reason; my being specially related to them simply enables his or her value to give me a reason. Any individual’s value would permit or require special treatment by (say) a sibling; Eric’s value permits or requires special treatment by me simply because I am his brother. Keller’s official statement—in the jargon of Jonathan Dancy (2004)—is that the fact that my friend or family member has value is a favoring reason (or favorer), while the fact that I am in a special relationship with that person is an enabling reason (or enabler). Let’s call this point the enablement thesis.

Notice how the view avoids the implausible implications we noticed with the Projects and Relationships Views. First, since I am in a reasons-enabling position with respect to certain particular special others, I have reasons to promote my own relationships rather than others’ relationships. Second, since the view doesn’t require us to attribute intrinsic value to projects or relationships (but only to individuals), it doesn’t recommend that we promote failed projects or relationships when it won’t do anyone any good. Third, it matches the phenomenology of partiality: we favor our special others for their sakes. Fourth, it can explain relationship-related requirements in terms of what we owe to individuals, getting at least one step beyond the Relationships View’s primitivism. So the view avoids the vices; but what are its virtues?

The Individuals View still suffers from an unsatisfying ‘just so’ story unless Keller can explain the enablement thesis. It’s not enough to merely claim that special relationships enable individuals’ value to give reasons; we need reasons to think this claim is true—preferably in the form of an explanation of how or why the enabling works. Fortunately, Keller attempts an account of the enabling relation; it has three (disjointed) aspects which are vaguely Kantian, consequentialist, and primitivist.

The vaguely Kantian point we can call a non-compensation thesis: from the point of view of someone in a special relationship, benefits to strangers do not compensate for harms to loved ones, even if the amount of good done for the strangers is, from an unaffiliated point of view, many times weightier. For example, if my child dies, it will be no compensation to me even if I could save the lives of several strangers. Keller says that in this sense the good of the loved one is incommensurable with that of the stranger’s, even though the respective utilities of each are clearly comparable from an unaffiliated point of view. Our being specially related to the other person involves gradually coming to have this perspective on the other permanently, viewing her as having “a dignity, not a price”. The relationship enables this lover’s perspective to be my own.
The vaguely consequentialist point we can call a *contextuality thesis*: facts about our social setting, as well as about human nature, make special relationships more relevant than they would be otherwise. For example, had our societies developed communal strategies for child-rearing, we would have fewer familial obligations to our children. And had we evolved without any dispositions to care about special others, we might have no reasons of partiality at all. But given our actual natures and practices, flouting our special duties to our children usually is harmful to those children and simply seems inappropriate. Our conventions and social contexts render special treatment of our special others socially appropriate. Our natures as beings with needs for affection make it so that, often, only we can fill certain of our special others’ needs.

Keller’s primitivist point is that the fact that special relationships enable individuals’ values to give rise to reasons is not derivable from other facts (even those mentioned in the previous two paragraphs). Suppose, for example, that a father could either spend significant money on his daughter’s very expensive, life-saving asthma treatments or instead could fund deworming treatments for needy children overseas (greatly helping them for cheap). The partialist answer says that the father has a reason—is permitted, perhaps even required—to favor his daughter here. The primitivist claim is that this is a brute fact. It does not derive from the fact that, as her father, he has a special view of her dignity. It does not derive from the fact that he fits into a social role wherein he can care for her well or is expected to care for her. Rather, he simply does have a reason to privilege her, and to see this, he simply needs to concentrate more intently on his daughter’s incommensurable value. “At some point”, Keller writes, “we need to say that certain moral standards of partiality simply do exist, and simply do have a certain structure and content, and that the only way to see them is to look more closely” (p. 151).

### 5.1.4 Objections

Keller’s view faces at least four *prima facie* glaring problems. I think all of them can be answered, we have room here for answering the first three. To sum up the first three problems: first, the view is still saddled with a primitivist claim that relationships ‘just do’ enable special others’ values to give rise to permissions and requirements. This is at best unsatisfying and at worst question-begging. Second, the view fails to notice the significance of the fact that we “see ourselves” as invested in our special others—see our interests as intertwined with theirs (more below in §5.2). Third, Keller’s three explanations of the enablement thesis are unsatisfyingly disunified.

My answer to these worries will be called the Caring Account of reasons of partiality. This is an extension of the Individuals View. In sum, the Caring Account suggests that we discover reasons of partiality by engaging our capacities for caring about our special others (in the typically intense, robust way that humans tend to). We “just do” see our special others’ values as making demands on our caring attention because caring in general is a way of discovering values and their practical imports. (That much should increase our satisfaction with Keller’s primitivism.) Caring emotional experiences attribute incommensurable value to the beloved, just as many emotional experiences attribute intrinsic value to the focusee of the emotion. But this only becomes noticeably robust enough to make a difference to our life plans once the special other becomes a locus of attachment for us and/or a part of our personal life projects. (In other words, our special others are incommensurably significant to us because we see them as *ours.*) But of course, it is contingent that we would possess caring capacities of this particular sort, as well as that we would apply them within the contingent social structures that organize our societies.
One problem I can only answer briefly is that reasons of partiality are vulnerable to evolutionary debunking arguments. These arguments contend that we should not take apparent reasons of partiality to be veridical, since our evolutionary heritage would have prepared our minds to expect this, and trusting those deliverances is a generally unreliable belief-forming process. I’ll suggest (in §4.1) that successful full responses should question why an utterly impartial perspective on morality should be privileged in the way that these two objections assume.

**5.2 How relationships are relevant**

On Keller’s view, being in a special relationship with someone “enables” his or her value to give me reasons to be partial. Why? Keller says that this is just a fact; to see that we ‘just do’ have reasons when in those relationships, we simply have to look more closely. But this leaves it unclear how he would convince a skeptic that real reasons are being overlooked.

A response might explain how ‘looking more closely’ works. Explaining how we come to see something can make it seem less odd that we see it. My account will suggest we come to apprehend reasons of partiality in much the same way as we apprehend the importance of any stranger. It will involve giving an account of “special” value-apprehensional experiences, arguing that these are at least as well-evidenced (phenomenologically and psychologically) as general value-apprehensional experiences, and showing how this unifies explanations of our discovery of primitive reasons of partiality and of their natures.

**5.2.1 Special value-apprehensional experiences**

This dissertation’s central caring-apprehension (c-a) hypothesis is, roughly, that caring emotionally about others enables us to see them as mattering (to have “value-apprehensional (v-a) experiences”). The hypothesis can easily be extended to the thesis that caring emotionally about special others enables us to see them as mattering—to have special v-a experiences. And these seem good candidates to include our apprehension of reasons of partiality.

Recall that seeing another as mattering involves seeing both the person’s value and some general (pro tanto) reasons to promote that value. For example, that my fellow airline passenger will take a biology course may give me reason to offer motivation, advice, or helpful information. This should make it less surprising that special v-a experiences also involve seeing reasons of partiality in the case of special others.

Special v-a experiences involve seeing both my welfare and my special other’s welfare, as well as our future interactions, as both mattering for each of us and mattering simpliciter. Let’s spell it out a bit more.

Special value-apprehensional experiences seem to have at least five layers (as I’ll now explain and then summarize in Figure 1). The first is seeing damages or enhancements to a thing as mattering for someone. Typically, these also matter to that person. Second, what we’ve called (general) value-apprehensional experiences involve seeing it as mattering (period) whether a creature is damaged or enhanced—construing creatures as mattering for their own sakes.

Third, a further step combines the first two steps: I might see someone both as mattering (for her own sake) and as mattering-for-someone. If someone is in some sense “mine” (perhaps he is the jockey riding my racehorse), I might see him as mattering for his own sake and as mattering-for-me (and, in most cases, -to-me). Fourth, a further layer comes when I myself need or want to maintain some stable set of long-term interactions with the person (i.e., a relationship—perhaps he is my butler or secretary). Versions of these involving relatively
intense wants or needs may start to count as ‘special’. And perhaps relatively intensely felt
wants and needs for interaction with the other person are near necessary for a relationship to
count as special.

A fifth layer is seeing it as mattering that these wants and needs for sustained interactions be
reciprocated. Typically, the reciprocation is seen as mattering both mattering-for-me and -
for-the-other, often in a way that is ineliminable to each of our welfares. In a relationship that
we might call “moderately” special, learning of harms and benefits to the other is pleasing and
emotionally engaging. Interacting with the other is particularly enjoyable, while parting ways or
learning you will be unable to interact may be saddening.

In “full blown” or “intense” special relationships, a greater degree of attachment comes to
convert these moderate interests into intense needs. Harms or benefits to the beloved count as
harms or benefits to oneself, with bliss or despair a consequence, sometimes much more than if
one is benefitted or harmed oneself. Each member needs to interact with the other, on pain of
withdrawal and longing.5

To sum up:

| “Layer” | Typical Example | What is apprehended? | Prerequisites: one must be able to attribute:
|----------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | experience of $S$ as mattering-to-someone | Seeing my sleek new bicycle’s bodily integrity as mattering-to-me | apprehend disvalue-for-$S'$ of damages to $S$ and/or value-for-$S'$ of enhancements to $S$ | 1) concepts of damageability or enhanceability to $S$
|          |                 |                      | 2) the concept of changes in $S$ mattering for someone $S'$ |
| 2        | v-a experience of $S$ | Seeing a stranger’s bodily integrity as mattering | apprehend value of benefits to $S$ and/or disvalue of harms to $S$ | 1-2) the two above concepts
|          |                 |                      | 3) interests to $S$ (the concept of damages and enhancements to $S$ mattering both simpliciter and for $S$) |
| 3        |                 | Seeing my taxi driver’s bodily integrity as mattering simpliciter + mattering-to-me. | apprehend value of benefits to $S$ and/or disvalue of harms to $S$, partly in virtue of own need for $S$ to fare well | 1-3) The three above concepts (where $S'$ is oneself)
|          |                 |                      | 4) to oneself the need for $S$ to fare well |
| 4        |                 | Seeing my butler’s bodily | apprehend value of benefits to $S$ and/or | 1-3) from above
|          |                 |                      | 4) to oneself the need for $S$ |

5 Those fond of deriving special obligations from commitments may wonder whether coming to have these needs for
the other will count as committing (implicitly) to the relationship. I’m inclined to think it does not count as a
commitment; it is at best only as an inner “commitment” of the heart. For we can imagine cases in which lovers-at-
first-sight are immediately separated, needing each other despite never much interacting, beyond initial contact, in a
way that would commit each to the other. Of course, coming to need the other’s welfare and interaction naturally
tends to lead to commitments or to forms of expression that are tantamount to commitments.
integrity as mattering + mattering-to-me.
disvalue of harms to $S$, partly in virtue of:
[i] own need for $S$ to fare well
[ii] own need to interact with $S$ in the future
to fare well
5) to oneself the need to interact with $S$ in the future

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|   | Seeing my best friend’s bodily integrity as mattering + mattering-to-me + mattering-for-us. | apprehend value of benefits to $S$ and/or disvalue of harms to $S$, in virtue of:
[i] own & $S$’s mutual needs for each other to fare well
[ii] own & $S$’s mutual needs to interact with each other on a regular basis |
|   | to oneself & to $S$ the need that the other fare well |
|   | 1-3) from above 4, 6) to oneself & to $S$ the need to interact with the other |

These attributions may or may not be made consciously.

If someone’s interest matters, this entails that it matters-for-him. But it does not entail that it matters-to-him. Likewise, if something matters matters-for-some set of people who are in a special relationship, this need not entail that it matters-to-all or any of the people in that relationship.

### 5.2.2 The unity of caring

It is very reasonable to think that the same caring capacity which enables, mediates, and enhances general v-a does the same for special v-a. Preliminary evidence for this comes from the similar, “warm” phenomenology attendant to both kinds of value-apprehension: for example, the combined feeling of cuteness and gladness felt at a preschool graduation, the despair at seeing a preschooler die, are similar but more intense the more connected that child is to one’s own life. At least, given that general v-a is enabled, mediated, and enhanced by caring (as we argued in Ch. 3), it seems plausible on phenomenological grounds that special v-a is enabled, mediated, and enhanced by our intense, localized cares. But in case phenomenology should prove insufficient, several scientific findings suggest that caring about or for strangers is, both developmentally and evolutionarily, an extension of caring for offspring, mates, and other close relatives. These would make it even less surprising that caring would enable, mediate, and enhance special v-a.

First and most importantly, the two dimensions of caring are (to my knowledge) never fully dissociated. That is, psychopathy is never observed to be restricted to (say) impaired caring and empathy toward strangers but perfectly normal caring and empathy toward special others, or vice versa. Second, the evolutionary origins of human fellow-feeling are on almost every account thought to trace back to the attachment bonds between kin—on many accounts, parent-child attachment.\(^6\) What we do know is that mammals (perhaps along with some social birds\(^7\)) exhibit behavioral tendencies, not found in other animals,\(^8\) of pronounced attachment and

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\(^7\) Churchland 2011, p. 209, note 1.

\(^8\) To be sure, there are numerous examples of complex sociality among non-mammals, most notably the complex social organization among numerous varieties of ants, bees, termites, and wasps. The point here is only that the
caregiving to offspring, as well as conspecifics other than their helpless offspring. These differences are subserved by unique neural architecture within which oxytocin (or mesotocin in the case of social birds) functions as a vehicle for “maternalizing” the mammalian brain, giving rise to attachments and the ‘tender emotion’ felt when nestling or cuddling loved ones (Batson 2011, pp. 50-3, Churchland 2011 pp. 31-2, Zak 2012). Third, all this matches the suggestion that something about the tendency to form attachment relationships—whether the caregiver’s tenderness for the child, the child’s attachment to its caregiver, or both—gets generalized over the course of development into empathy (Batson 2011) and caring (Churchland 2011) for strangers. For instance, healthy childhood attachment styles correlate with a tendency to be empathic toward peers during and after childhood. Fourth, a similar finding is that momentary face-to-face and voice-to-voice interactions between people tend to increase caring both toward that other person and also toward strangers. With the person with whom we share this “face time”, we come in those moments to share synchronous affect, biochemistry, and behaviors; this also tends to motivate both parties to invest in each other’s well-being (Fredrickson 2013).

5.2.3 Value-apprehensions par excellence

Even if the same mechanism produces the two kinds of value-apprehension, it needs to be shown that one or both varieties is not a deficient application. After all, mirages and clear visuals are products of the same visual capacity. An adequate response will run parallel to answers to objections about other kinds of appearances. When justifying a visual appearance, for example, [i] we check for consistency with other appearances delivered by the visual and other faculties, as perceived in different contexts and moments and from different angles; [ii] we examine the reliability and precision of the faculty which delivered the appearance; and [iii] we examine the clarity, distinctness, and other compellingness of what is presented.

Special v-a experiences seem to do well on these fronts. Consider, for example, the example of gazing at your own beautiful kindergartener onstage giving his first violin performance.

neural architecture subserving attachment and caring seems particularly mammalian (and in some cases, avian). The story behind the sociality of the hymenoptera is a more complicated one involving sterile sisters who share 75% of each other’s DNA.


[W]ith the evolution of parental care in birds and mammals came feeding, warming, cleaning, alleviation of distress, and grooming of the young, which in turn led to the development of infantile appeals to trigger these activities. Once tender exchanges between parent and offspring had evolved—with the one asking for and the other providing care—they could be extended to all sorts of other relationships, including those among unrelated adults. (De Waal 1996, p. 43)


12 Joireman et al. 2002.

13 This is all the more unsurprising given that intimate caring in human adults bears many of the same markings as attachment in infants (Feeney & Noller 1996)—separation anxiety, a strong drive to maintain proximity, use of the attachment figure as a safe haven from threats and as a secure base between bouts of exploration (Ainsworth et al. 1978).

performance, after you yourself taught him the basics, thereby bonding with him. Probably most parents the sense that this moment matters if anything does ([iii]); this is cradled within a cunning admixture of joy, fear, amusement, nostalgia, and pride. These emotional effects perdure ([ii]) when viewed retrospectively and even prospectively. The sense of enormity strikes us through multiple cognitive modalities—our attention is taken over, inwardly we sense our motivations higher than ever, we feel and see affect taking over our faces, bodies, voices, and body language, and propositions enter our consciousness (‘I am so fortunate to be here, seeing this, right now . . . ’). This sense of our relationships’ importance also perdures when viewed from different “angles”; notably, even when we consider the enormity of the evil and suffering in the universe, or how easily we could’ve prevented some of it by donating money, we still have no doubt that these shining, peak moments in our special relationships are counted among those, perhaps above any others, which make our own lives worth living. It would be extremely difficult to decontextualize and disembodied ourselves in such a way as to forget and transcend our special ties, especially the moments of their highest expression.

The caring disposition which produces these appearances seems reliable enough that the building and fading of loves and cares and concomitant value-apprehensions is seldom erratic ([iii]). It is accurate, at least to the extent that those we know matter the most for us tend to matter the most to us—or when they do not, we usually come to regret and feel guilty about it. It is precise enough that we seldom have no idea whom we really care about; and usually we can say whom we really care most about and in virtue of what.

Special v-a experiences, and the intense cares that subserve them, seem to be apprehensions par excellence of what is truly valuable. What we care about tells us, in general, a great deal about whom we value in a way that makes them irreplaceable to our welfare. Our cares seem morally important for this reason; but even if they were morally irrelevant they would plausibly bear greatly on how we (prudentially) ought to live. If general v-a experiences inform us about morally relevant values, we should expect special ones to do least as much.

5.2.4 Incommensurability

Why does it seem that harms and benefits to our special others cannot be compensated for by harms and benefits to strangers? The answer is that it is from the position of being in a special relationship that we apprehend the force and significance of those demands. This is made possible by the way that we thoroughly experience our interests as intertwined with our special others’ interests, experiencing them as ours and ourselves as theirs.

In elaborating the caring-apprehension hypothesis (in Ch. 3), we noticed that v-a experiences draw attention to how the other is faring (are welfare-highlighting), construe it as bad that the person suffer harm and good that they be benefitted (are welfare-congruent), and attribute intrinsic value to the other (are intrinsic-value-attributing). To explain these features, we appealed to the fact that caring emotions are (by definition) “other-focused” in the sense that they are framed toward the welfare of someone other than the emoter. We also said that “presuppose” the intrinsic importance of the well-being of the person on whom they focus, insofar as emotions direct the emoter’s attention to events relevant to the focusee’s welfare and prepare the emoter for actions that promote the focusee’s welfare. We concluded that this can help explain why the other is experienced as intrinsically valuable.

The “presupposition” is also part of the explanation of why special others are experienced as incommensurably valuable. The sense is often that the emotion’s focusee is valuable not just intrinsically, but unsurpassably. (Very similarly to cases where we feel an emotion—say, fear or gratitude—for our own lives.) We may even feel it worth investing infinite amounts of resources
into securing the focusee’s well-being, or at least that that would be worth doing if other unsurpassably important people did not also need the resources. When seeking life-saving medications, for example, we’d love to be able to say price is no object; in principle, protection of the patient’s interests is worth any cost. The fact that trade-offs are a ubiquitous feature of life—that resources must always be budgeted—is no reason to doubt that this experience is veridical. Our emotions reveal that even strangers have unsurpassable value.

Why, then, would my special others’ unsurpassable values make demands on me that strangers’ do not? The answer is that our special apprehensional experiences of their value are considerably more robust; not only do we see their unsurpassable value, but we see it as making demands specifically of us.

**Intertwining of interests.** The robustness of special v-a experiences owes not only to their intensity, but also to the fact that our interests intertwine: the interests most important to our special others’ lives become our own, and ours, theirs. In many cases, the special other’s physical well-being or goal-accomplishment is more important to us than our own. In most cases, this probably owes to at least one of three common aspects of special relationships: attachment, other-orientation, and identification.

[1] *Attachment* marks our closest, familial relationships: we undergo disproportionately profound feelings of delight, bonding, and union while in the presence of our attachment figures, and profound anxiety, despondency, and sadness when meaningfully separated from them. Similarly, we become [2] oriented toward the special other in the sense that we come to [i] attend habitually to the person’s well-being and [ii] include them in our life-plans.¹⁵ Relatedly, we tend to [iii] adopt projects with our special others, sometimes forming joint projects as partners and other times adopting each other’s projects either as fans or cheerleaders. We do these things in part because [iv] we care so intensely for them: our attention sticks long to their weal and woe, presence, and absence; and we are motivated to pursue their presence and well-being, sometimes at great expense relative to other pursuits. As a result, we often [3] identify with the other in the sense that we shift our self-concepts and self-labels toward the other (thinking of ourselves as ‘a mother’, ‘a husband’, ‘a Cherokee’, etc.). And of course all of these phenomena are nourished when and because both parties know that he attachment, orientation, and identification are mutual.

So whereas other-directed emotions “presuppose” the intrinsic value of strangers, we might say other-directed emotions are tokens of our “robust experience” of special others’ value. Given our attachment, orientation, and identification with our special others, we know and feel their value more deeply than perhaps anything else we know or feel.

**The full phenomenology.** These points help us improve the account of the phenomenology of partiality presented by Keller. He is right that the focus of caring (and the locus of reasons) in a special relationship is the individual beloved, not the relationship itself or our project of committing to it. But what he misses is that we see that individual’s value as presenting us with a reason in virtue of our special connection with the person. For example, when someone realizes her husband, Jordan, is drowning, she will worry for him (‘*Jordan!*’), not for her investment in the project of loving him (‘*my husband!*’) or the relationship category he falls in (‘*my husband!*’). But the special significance this holds for her cannot be captured in the same way for someone who had just met Jordan. The more adequate phrase is ‘*my dear Jordan!*’ (or ‘*my pookie!*’ or whatever other pet-name). And, of course, the dearness is cultivated through

¹⁵ It helps that once a friendship has developed significantly, we become so much more familiar with their interests’ nuances, and come to comprehend deeply and fully how their preferences, desires, and goals fit together.
the projects and habits that constitute the relationship.\footnote{In this way, the Projects and Relationships views get the phenomenology more right than Keller lets on.} And that is mostly because those, in turn, cultivate the attachment, other-orientation, and co-identification that allow us to see our dear ones’ value as demanding actions of us.

\textbf{Not reducing.} This explanation does not (necessarily) reduce the basis of reasons of partiality to mere commitment—let alone to anyone’s expectations, or to contingencies about who is well-placed to help whom. Our attachment, orientation, and other-identification are factors which explain how we see individuals’ welfares as making demands on us as special others. The fact that we have reasons of partiality is a brute fact enabled by our special relationship.

Our account of special v-a experiences makes this primitivism more satisfying. We need not stop at saying we simply intuit reasons of partiality or simply perceive people’s incommensurable value. The demystifying story says these intuitions are emotional phenomena; attributing incommensurable value is what emotions do; and making demands on those with intertwined interests is just what incommensurable values do, at least among human persons. Our deep cares for special others provide a “window” from which to view how important they are and how much they deserve.

\subsection{5.2.5 Unifying Keller’s Account}

Just as the Caring Account demystifies both Keller’s primitivism and his Kantian point (about incommensurable values), it can also explain his vaguely consequentialist point (about the context-sensitivity of reasons of partiality). It is a contingent fact about human nature that we would have these special cares and v-a experiences at all, let alone toward these specific folks, in these specific ways. E.g., we are inclined to have special v-a experiences of mates and offspring owes to because we are affectionate, high-male-parental-investment mammals in cultures featuring minimal alloparenting. (To extend the metaphor, the contingencies affect, as it were, the clarity, color, lighting, and viewing angle of our “windows” into our special others’ worlds through which we view our special others.) Whom we view specially does depend partly on conventions, which partly depend on whose needs are best fulfilled by whom; but the relevance is that the contingencies frame the characters of our special v-a experiences.

\subsection{5.3 Toward Reconciling Partiality and Impartiality}

We have sketched an informative account of our apprehension of reasons of partiality, but we have not yet shown how to reconcile these reasons with the impartial perspective which testifies that no one matters more than anyone else. This section explains what kinds of reasons of partiality follow (and do not follow) from the Caring Account, and it explains in what sense they can be reconciled with an impartial perspective.

\subsection{5.3.1 The Clash of Standpoints}

Little is more obvious than that everyone suffers equally. Other parents, for example, sympathize with their children just as I do with mine. A way of formalizing this insight is the following paraphrase of Sidgwick (1907, Bk. III, Ch. 13, §3):

\begin{quote}
SI The good of any one individual is of no more importance, from the point of view of the universe (so to speak), than the good of any other, unless there are special grounds for believing that more good is likely to be realized in the one case than in the other.
\end{quote}
Call this the Sidgwickian Intuition. This viewpoint is especially relevant when we realize that resources which we might share with our special others could often be as easily spent on others whose need is much greater. The question then becomes whether and how we could justify refusing to devote these resources to those who need them most.\textsuperscript{17}

There is probably no pithy, straightforward way of specifying our duties to special others, but the following claim seems to capture an important aspect of them:

\textbf{PI} \hspace{1em} We have a \textit{pro tanto} duty to our special others to pay them our caring attention (at intervals regular enough to be more than minimally satisfying to them\textsuperscript{18}).

Call this the Partiality Intuition. It seems to be a self-evident truth about the very most general kind of duty we have toward special others, as such.

Caring attention is, roughly, attention to another person that expresses one’s welfare-congruent, presence-seeking emotional attitudes for the other. We commonly express such emotions by engaging in relationship-characterizing and -furthering activities, such as mutual pastimes, conversation centered on one another’s experiences and personal narrative, and the offering of emotional support. These activities help increase bonds of affection. The resources devoted to caring interactions we will call \textit{resources of person}.

PI fits well with the Caring Account in two ways—not only because it is highly intuitive (though it is). First, the Caring Account is an explication of the Individuals View, according to which reasons of partiality derive from the needs and interests of individuals. Caring attention, of the sort only special others can provide, is a core human need. So it would make sense that this would be one of the most important things we owe to our special others. Second, the Caring Account posits an epistemic function for caring: that of revealing interests and their importance. Now, caring is an emotional process, and emotions serve important motivational and expressive functions. Expressing and acting on caring emotions is a natural outpouring of a caring-laden v-a experience.

SI and PI both seem intuitive enough to be worth trying to reconcile them rather than reject one outright (however, we will worry about this in §4 below).

\subsection*{5.3.2 Reasons in a Moderate Deontology}

SI is a claim about \textit{goodness}—similar goods are similarly good, no matter whose they are—whereas PI is a claim about a set of requirements (and so, \textit{reasons}, on the terminology introduced in §5.1 above). So they combine straightforwardly into a deontological theory on which duties to pay caring attention to special others are at least one kind of constraint on what sorts of impartial goods we are permitted or required to promote.

Tests for whether a theory incorporating reasons of partiality is deontological include the following kinds of partial-impartial quandaries; the deontological response will postulate some kind of constraint against impartial good-maximization. First, \textit{quandaries of caring attention} pit caring attention against other pursuits, including the promotion of strangers’ welfare. E.g.,

\textsuperscript{17} Since we are here debating whether the partiality of caring for special others is a bias, it would here be beside the point to insist that we somehow use caring emotions to discover or employ the Sidgwickian Intuition.

\textsuperscript{18} PI specifies an imperfect duty in that one may permissibly act at various times in ways that are not means of complying with the duty, yet one is required to comply with it as a general trend throughout one’s life. Explicating Kant, Marcia Baron (2013) construes imperfect duties as those which [i] “admit of exceptions in favor of inclination” yet [ii] are never fully dischargeable; rather than meeting some quota, the duty is “always with one”.

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perhaps my daughter’s wedding conflicts with the date of a mission I was going to take to perform numerous blindness-preventing surgeries in the developing world. Second, what we can call double sacrifice quandaries pit a large, irreversible change in a special other’s well-being against the like for a stranger’s well-being. (E.g., death, serious injury, or the accomplishment of a major life goal.) E.g., I have to choose between saving my drowning child and saving two drowning stranger children.

Third, quandaries of resource allocation involve the challenge of how to allocate resources to special others as opposed to non-special others. The relevant resources are not only financial (wealth, income, consumable goods, and productivity-related time), but also encompass resources of person (conversational attention, emotional support and comfort, relationship-characterizing pastimes) and mind (information, advice, instruction, engagement).

How does the Caring Account’s deontology answer these quandaries? As for quandaries of caring attention: since the crucial duty postulated by PI is the duty to devote caring attention, there is a crucial constraint against failing to devote caring attention to special others. We should suppose we owe our special others caring attention even if otherwise we could achieve a fairly impressively greater good. This is not the place to resolve the question of the limits to this constraint—whether I’m permitted or required ignore wife caring attention in order to prevent 10 million wife-ignorings, or 100, or 10.

As for double sacrifice quandaries: the Caring Account posits constraints against allowing harm to befall a special other to prevent an impartially greater good, at least insofar as allowing such harm would conflict with the kind of caring attention owed. Again, this is not the place to weigh in on the constraint’s limits—whether I’m permitted or required to kill my wife in order to prevent 10 million killings, or 100, or 10. But the notion that what we owe is caring attention suggests that the constraint will be weak, or cancellable, if there are ways of sacrificing the special other while still showing her caring attention. Notably, PI explains that, and why, it is relevant that obtaining the consent of the special other to be sacrificed affects the moral status of sacrificing him: the caring thing to do is to consider the interests put in place by his volitions.

With quandaries of resource allocation, the relevant constraint will be quite modest. The only required expenditures of non-personal resources on my special others are those necessary for expressing a reasonable degree of caring attention. (Of course, people owe their children various resources ranging from food to education, but these can actually be justified on the simple impartialist ground that otherwise the child would be highly disadvantaged.) This point is responsible for the first of four virtuous upshots of the view.

5.3.3 Two Appealing Implications

Two appealing consequences are worth noting. First, the Caring Account’s deontology need not include generic deontological constraints. This kind of constraint limits what actions I can permissibly do toward anyone even if they result in outcomes better than otherwise. The familiar example is that I should not kill one person myself, even if by doing so I could prevent two killings. If this intuition is somewhat appealing, it is anyway quite difficult to justify. (Why would refraining from using my own agency be so important that the body count should double?)

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19 In any case, one available response, as least to some quandaries in these categories, is that they are veritable moral dilemmas, where either decision is a wrongdoing.

20 Or perhaps I should say three more, since it seems appealing [1] that our deontology’s constraints are reasonably weak and [2] that the Caring Account, as a species of the Individuals View, says all reasons seem to derive from the welfares of individuals. Relationships themselves are morally important only to the extent that they conduce to the welfare of the individuals involved in them.
With the Caring Account, we can (if we like) avoid generic deontology but still countenance a particular kind of (overridable) constraint against failing to devote caring attention to special others. And we avoid mere foot-stamping since we have built up an explanation of how and why we should think our perception of these reasons is trustworthy.

The second appealing consequence is that the Caring Account gets us out of the distributive objection to reasons of partiality. The problem is one of distributive injustice: if people on the “inner circle” of a special relationship are united by permissions and requirements to favor one another, those outside this circle are at a relative disadvantage. The consequences might be egregious on a large scale, since it would seem that we have every reason to exclude those lacking such ties. The widowed and orphaned, for example, are threatened by such exclusionary mischiefs as preferential hiring or the passing down of ever-accumulating inheritance money through a privileged bloodline.

On the Caring Account’s deontology, the resources owed to special others are far more minimal than to lead to such unequal outcomes. We owe a reasonable degree of caring attention to our special others. But only relatively small amounts of financial resources seem necessary to facilitate or convey caring attention. The distributive objection pertains to the unequal opportunities that arise from unequal distribution of financial resources, educational resources, and other privileges that grant advantages to the “inner circle”. However, it is relatively easy to pay caring attention to a special other while also investing financial and educational resources—and even resources of person—into combating unequal opportunity in the world. For example, posthumous caring attention to my children may involve passing on certain minimal financial goods or family heirlooms, but doing so is compatible with embracing a considerably demanding duty to combat social injustice. Moreover, engaging in effective altruistic or social justice-oriented projects can itself be a fantastically healthy relationship-characterizing or -furthering activity.

5.3.4 Universalization and the Unaffiliated Carer

We still may wonder how even this modest deontology can be reconciled with the impartial perspective. Here I suggest that it can be reconciled with an unaffiliated caring perspective.

It may be thought that the Caring Account’s deontology, while putatively modest, still justifies ignoring the plight of the least advantaged in a world with a truly obscene amount of suffering. (Every year, hundreds of millions of people suffer from easily treatable, poverty-related illnesses and deaths, and billions of animals are killed for their flesh after brief torturous existences in factory farms. Etc.) Every last penny, hour, or ounce of advice spent on our special others might have done orders of magnitude more good put toward promoting or implementing cheap, easy, suffering-reducing solutions. From this viewpoint, adhering to PI—even (say) to buy minimal gifts for loved ones—seems to fail some of the foregoing criteria for universal acceptability. From the point of view of those in need, perhaps PI could be (say) reasonably rejected, ruled out from the original position, or could not be willed as a universal law (not, anyway, consistently with desire that my life-jeopardizing infections be treated as more important than, say, someone’s Christmas gift).

Surely the appropriate perspective from which to run universalization tests is a perspective from which key, life-completing human goods are appreciated. Special relationships are life-completing in the sense that they are among the key needs of the human experience;

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22 These tests owe, of course, to Scanlon (1998), Rawls (1971), and Kant (1785).
extremely few lives seem meaningful or fulfilling without them. As such, they are incommensurable with other similarly completing aspects of our lives (e.g., health, physical and psychological; pursuit of projects or goals; achievements.) All this would be crucial knowledge for parties deliberating on rules to govern interpersonal conduct of humans. And (as for Kant’s system) the desire to obtain some sort of special connection with other humans will be part of the motivational base of most any rational human.

As argued above, it is plausible we apprehend the value of these relational goods, as well as the generic goods of human welfare, by use of our caring sentiments. This is so crucial to universalization that it should be characterized as the adoption of a caring perspective. (I call it an unaffiliated caring perspective because asking whether PI can be universalized can be construed as asking whether we would endorse the adherence to PI of people with whom we have no affiliation.) The unaffiliated caring perspective recognizes not just incommensurable partial goods, but reasons to act in ways that show caring affection. It is familiar, for example, with the feeling of owing a loved one attendance and support in a time of crisis—the greater good be damned (within limits).

From the unaffiliated caring perspective we can appreciate how other people’s affiliations are incommensurably, perhaps even incomparably valuable when compared with others’ welfare, and how they give rise to corresponding reasons. The caring and affiliation that engender special relationships must be tokened by individual acts. And these individual acts involve some kind of economic or temporal trade-off in a world of limited resources (whether we like it or not). So although one $55 Christmas gift is plausibly not worth the aggregate year of healthy life that could be produced by deworming 55 children for the same amount, the maintenance and furtherance of a life-completing special relationship may be incommensurable with the hookworm-free health of a 10-year-old child—even from a completely impartial standpoint. (Consider a case where the $55 gift could prevent a tragic divorce. It’s not clear that the group of hookworm-infested children could reasonably demand the sacrifice.) At any rate, we should think we are at least permitted to occasionally commemorate our special others’ importance to us, even if is at some cost to the greater good.

5.4 Objections
5.4.1 Evolutionary Debunking
Evolutionary debunking arguments represent one important objection to the Caring Account’s deontology. They run as follows. We are inclined to have certain moral beliefs—such as PI—simply because being disposed to believe such things made our ancestors more likely to pass on their genes. But it would be a highly unlikely coincidence, the argument continues, for this disposition to also conduce to the detection of objective moral truths. So PI is probably not an objective moral truth.

23 Specifically, through the deployment or simulated deployment of caring emotions toward special relationships, whether in the particular or the somewhat-abstract.
24 One crucial question I do not have room here to address is what reasons we have [not] to come to have special others. Having (e.g.) a spouse or a child can impede production of impartial good. There may be room for a somewhat parallel argument—coming to have a special relationship is a life-completing good incommensurable with the healths of the people I could help by ignoring chances at such relationships, and which thus would be universally endorsed from an unaffiliated perspective. But this would also seem to depend on the success of arguments that it is permissible to pursue (some) intrinsically life-enhancing personal projects over impartial needs. For such an argument, see Cullity (2006).
This argument is most often run against all putative moral truths (Joyce 2006, Street 2006), and in that application would debunk SI as well as PI. Here we cannot consider responses to the global evolutionary debunking arguments (although I think good responses are available25). However (as we noted in a different context last chapter), some authors have contended that, while PI is a paradigmatic case of a debunkable intuition, abstract intuitions such as SI escape the debunking arguments unscathed.26 Being inclined to favor special others such as kin or allies was plausibly a selective trait. By contrast, the ability to grasp so general a truth as SI may be due to the capacity to reason. And some think the capacity to reason would tend to increase our reproductive success, since, after all, it involves “the ability to recognize and reject capricious or arbitrary grounds for drawing distinctions and to understand self-evident moral truths” (Singer & Lazari-Radek 2012, p. 16).

Unfortunately, it is just not clear that SI is a truth entirely discovered by the kind of ratiocinative reflection that is impervious to the debunking argument—any more than that PI is. It’s not clear why the following couldn’t be true:

SI* from the point view of the universe (so to speak), the fact that someone is (called) the king simply makes it true that his good is more important than everyone else’s.

This truth’s possibility shows that SI is not only not a necessary truth, but also that we should look for an explanation of why we tend to affirm SI rather than SI* (or any other competitor).

It’s puzzling what would explain SI’s appeal if not our awareness of our tendency to apprehend people’s value in virtue of certain qualities (sentience, planning agency, etc.). This tendency, we’ve argued, is mediated by caring sentiments. In turn, our having these has an evolutionary explanation, which might then factor into a debunking argument for SI. Whether or not the debunking argument succeeds, caring seems to play an important role in our apprehension even of a rule as abstract as SI.27

Our apprehension of PI seems to involve a similar admixture of ratiocination and sentimentality. Caring sentiments surely guide us in interpreting which special others are owed what when, but it takes a great deal of extrapolative reflection to recognize that, in general, we owe special others the caring attention for which they have a deep-seated human need, and that this amounts to a general duty. (Never mind that it has been passed down to many of us through lay moral codes; so, too, has the insight that no one matters more than anyone else.)

So it looks like PI stands and falls with SI in response to debunking arguments. If reasons of partiality get debunked, then so do impartial reasons. Much more can be said, but the foregoing comments should offer the seeds for a fuller discussion.

5.4.2 Partiality versus Biases

Ch. 4 began with the admission that caring sentiments admit of numerous problematic biases which distort the moral dimensions of the world. Yet in this chapter I have defended v-a

25 Some apt responses to Joyce include Finlay (2008, 2011) and Tresan (2010).
27 It’s also plausible that our capacity to care about others might be responsible for our very understanding that others have goods at all, or that something like ‘the point of view of the universe’ is more relevant to morality than any other arbitrary perspective—say, ‘the point of view of my buddies and I when we’re drinking whiskey’.
experiences colored by partiality as v-a experiences par excellence. How can I justify such a slanted attitude?

In short, partiality is essential to human caring, whereas the other biases—shifts in moral judgment due to conspicuousness, similarity, familiarity, and flux in attribution of moral status—are far from it. We argued above (§5.2.3) that the cares for special others which generate special v-a experiences are [i] consistent across times and circumstances, [ii] usually coherent in their onset and precise in their extent, [iii] compelling and clear in their personal importance, even [iv] as for how they shape our whole lives.

By contrast, the Ch. 4 biases have very few of these features. Consider the tendency for distance to bias intuitions about the duty to help. This intuitive pattern does not hold up ([i]) when we consider enough pairs of cases between which the only relevant variable is physical distance; the boundaries of initially intuitively relevant distance are imprecise ([iii]) and incoherent ([iii]), and aren’t revelatory of value in any context ([iv]). Similarly, the tendency of our empathy and momentary sympathy with people to be influenced by personal dislike, or status as enemy or foreigner breaks down when we consider the simple scenario in which we are not opposed to them. And while similarity and familiarity are often contributors to special relationships, they are a long way off. We must not conflate similarity or familiarity with the robust intertwining of interests—where we attach to and orient toward and identify with the other—that characterizes a special relationship and allows us to see reasons of partiality some of which stem from peculiar needs.

**Conclusion**

The Individuals View of reasons of partiality says that the basis for reasons of partiality is our individual special others themselves. Reasons and values of partiality are not derivable from anything, and are normative entities which we must simply ‘see’. Our Caring Account has helped make sense of this, suggesting that our apprehension of these reasons and values, via caring sentiments, is no more peculiar than our apprehension of more generic welfare-related values or reasons. The Caring Account straightforwardly implies a deontological constraint according to which we are pro tanto required to pay caring attention to our special others. This constraint is modest in that it can be reconciled with stringent duties to promote the welfare of anyone who most needs welfare promoted. The viewpoint from which this deontology is thus reconciled is best understood as the perspective of an unaffiliated carer: someone who is unaffiliated with any of a situation’s protagonists, but who does in general apprehend and comprehend the reasons and values that all carers ‘just see’.