TIES THAT BIND: RESPECT AND RELATIONSHIP-BASED RESPONSIBILITIES

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Nate William Olson, M.A.

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Nate William Olson, M.A.

Thesis Advisor: Henry S. Richardson, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

We commonly think we have special obligations to our friends and family members. For instance, if someone’s brother were to move to town, we would likely think that she ought to at least offer her help, though we would not expect her to extend the same offer to someone she did not know. Yet such intuitions have proven difficult to justify. Traditional, impartialist ethical theories allow for only two types of explanations of special obligations: transactional and derivative. That is, according to impartialists, all special obligations either stem from transactions, such as voluntarily receiving benefits, or derive from duties everyone possesses, such as a duty to maximize good. Neither type of explanation, however, fits with our intuitive understanding of many of our special obligations to our friends and family members, especially our ongoing, open-ended obligations to look after their welfare, what I refer to as our “special responsibilities” for them. In this dissertation, I provide a novel justification of the idea that these responsibilities are actually relationship-based, that is, stem from the relationships themselves.

The main portion of my argument consists in the development and defense of my Respect View of special responsibilities. Two claims form its core. First, we have a duty to respect the value of the relationships we share with our friends and family members. Second, satisfying our special responsibilities for them is required to fulfill this duty. I argue that the Respect View both sticks closer to our intuitions than traditional, impartialist views and, unlike other
relationship-based views, provides a compelling explanation of them. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I justify our commonsense belief that many of our relationships with our friends and family members are valuable by identifying three sources of value: mutually valuing a relationship, a relationship’s history, and social conventions. When combined with the Respect View, this chapter’s argument establishes the conclusion that many of us have relationship-based responsibilities for our friends and family members.
To my grandfather,
Eugene L. Fevold
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Chapter 1: Must I Be My Brother’s Keeper?

1.1: Introduction

Unlike Cain, who famously replies “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” when asked the whereabouts of his brother Abel,¹ many of us believe that we are our brothers’ keepers, in both senses of that phrase. First, as Peter Singer’s shallow-pond example illustrates,² we believe that we have some degree of responsibility to look after the welfare of our fellow human beings, our “brothers,” or, better, our “brothers and sisters.” Second, we believe that we have additional, more extensive responsibilities to look after our literal brothers and sisters. If, for instance, someone’s brother were to move to town, we would likely think that she ought to at least offer her help, though we would not expect her to extend the same offer to someone she did not know. Of course, we think that we have such relationship-based responsibilities for others too, including, most clearly, other family members and our close friends. We think that adult children ought to care for their aging parents and close friends should visit one another in the hospital.³

While relationship-based responsibilities occupy a central place in our everyday moral thinking, they have proven difficult to justify. Utilitarians and Kantians alike see impartiality as a cornerstone of ethical thinking and so look upon claims that we ought to favor friends and family members with suspicion. They have good reasons to harbor such misgivings. Looking after one’s own to the detriment of those who are much worse off is too common a practice in

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¹ Genesis 4:9 (NRSV). Cain, of course, has just killed Abel and so knows quite well where he is.
² Singer (1972).
³ The hospital example comes from Michael Stocker’s influential article “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” (Stocker (1976)).
our contemporary world, and philosophical arguments like Singer’s provide an important corrective to our usual practice. Moreover, arguments in support of partiality have a sordid history. They have often been used to prop up established systems of privilege or cloak racist or jingoistic sentiments. Such concerns are the root of what I will call “outsider objections” to arguments in support of relationship-based responsibilities. Outsider objections are made on behalf of those who are not participants in the relationship in question, those who are “outsiders,” so to speak. The basic idea is that to favor one’s friends and family members is to mistreat others.4

Nevertheless, a growing chorus of ethicists has argued that some limited forms of partiality are justified. Often, such ethicists argue that to be fully impartial to people like our friends and family members is too much to ask of an ordinary moral agent and so is not required, although it remains permissible.5 However, as we have already seen, commonsense morality is committed to a stronger position: when it comes to our friends and family members, morality does not merely allow room for partiality; it requires it. We think that we have relationship-based responsibilities. Or, put another way, it’s not just that we have permission to be our brothers’ keeper. We think that we must be.

In this dissertation, my aim is to justify our commonsense belief that we have relationship-based responsibilities. Our relationships with our friends and family members are the strongest candidates for being the source of such responsibilities, so I focus on these. However, the view I develop can potentially be extended to justify other sorts of relationship-based responsibilities as well. For example, as I briefly discuss in section 6.2a, my view helps

4 Samuel Scheffler has called this the “distributive objection” (Scheffler (2001), p. 56), but I prefer “outsider” since it is more inclusive. For instance, one might argue that one reason that it is wrong to favor one’s own over others is that doing so expresses a lack of respect for the others. It would be a stretch to classify failing to treat someone with respect as a distributive concern.

support the claim that individuals who share nothing else than suffering through the same type of mistreatment have relationship-based responsibilities for one another. So while I focus on friendships and familial relationships, it should be kept in mind that my view is a view of relationship-based responsibilities in general.

It’s also important to note that my aim is not to justify all commonsense intuitions about the partiality we ought to show our friends and family members. In fact, I believe the Singers of the world are correct to admonish us for showing our friends and family members as much favor as we often do. My aim simply is to support our commonsense view that we have some relationship-based responsibilities for our friends and family members.

This view is still controversial. In addition to raising outsider objections, philosophers also object to arguments in support of relationship-based responsibilities on behalf of those who are thought to bear such obligations. The most common “insider” objection is what Samuel Scheffler has called the “voluntarist objection.” The basic idea is that to saddle individuals with relationship-based responsibilities is to unjustifiably restrict their autonomy.

Instead, voluntarists hold to what has been the traditional view of special obligations, or obligations that not all individuals possess. According to the traditional view, only two types of special obligations exist. First, there are those special obligations that stem from voluntary actions, such as making promises or voluntarily receiving benefits. In the case of promising, making a promise gives one an obligation to keep it. This obligation is special because only the person who makes the promise has an obligation to keep it. I will refer to such special obligations as “transactional.” The distinguishing feature of a transactional obligation is that it is based on a transaction between agents. Notably, the transaction need not be voluntary. As I will discuss in the next section, some philosophers have argued that one needn’t voluntarily receive

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benefits in order to gain a special obligation to repay those benefits. In such a case, the special obligation remains transactional given that it stems from receiving benefits.

Second, there are those special obligations that stem from general obligations, or obligations that all individuals possess. In such cases, fulfilling the special obligation is required to fulfill a general obligation, such as an obligation to maximize the good. For instance, looking after one’s children may be how one can have the greatest positive impact on the amount of well-being in the world. I will follow others in calling such special obligations “derivative.”

Advocates of the traditional view—I will call them impartialists—therefore have at their disposal two different methods for explaining the basis of a special obligation to a friend or family member. They may argue that the obligation is transactional or that it derives from a general obligation. Those who raise the voluntarist objection tend to focus on transactional explanations. For instance, A. John Simmons, the most prominent defender of the voluntarist objection, argues that parental obligations are rooted in the voluntary act of creating the child and that filial obligations stem from receiving benefits from one’s parents. Those who instead focus on outsider objections tend to employ derivative explanations. More specifically, they tend to employ social good explanations, which explain special obligations by appealing to general obligations to promote social goods, such as the overall amount of welfare in the world. Some go so far as to argue that all special obligations derive from general obligations to promote social goods, a position I call the Social Good View (SGV). But other impartialists, including Simmons, allow for both transactional and derivative explanations.

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7 Scheffler’s use of this term has been particularly influential. See especially Scheffler (2001), chapters 6-7. See also Abizadeh and Gilabert (2008), Kolodny (2010a) and (2010b), Wallace (2012), and Owens (2012).
8 Simmons (1992), sections 4.2 and 4.3 (especially pp. 198-200).
9 See, for example, Goodin (1985) and Singer (2004), chapter 5. They both open their arguments by raising distributive concerns.
Despite their differences, impartialists are united in their opposition to relationship-based, also often called “associative,” obligations. Relationships themselves, they claim, cannot ground special obligations. In section 1.2 and Chapter 2, I build my case against this traditional, impartialist view. I focus on transactional explanations in section 1.2 and social good explanations in Chapter 2. (I do not consider other types of derivative explanations since all of the main going derivative explanations are social good explanations.) Like others who have defended relationship-based obligations, I make my case by pointing out the ways in which the traditional view conflicts with central features of our commonsense views about special obligations. For instance, transactional explanations conflict with our intuition that the extent of an individual’s special obligations to her friends and family members is not strictly proportional to how much they have done for her, and social good explanations fail to account for our sense that we ought to pay special attention to our own friends and family members even in some cases in which we can do as much as or more good for others.

In Chapter 3, I explain the features of relationship-based views (RBVs) that enable them to stick closer to our commonsense views. RBVs maintain that at least some of our special obligations to our friends and family members stem from the non-instrumental importance of our relationships with them. That is, they claim that at least some relationship-based obligations exist. However, as I explain in Chapters 3 and 4, existing RBVs either, like W. D. Ross’s intuitionist view, merely restate our intuitions without providing a justification of them or, like Michael Sandel’s identity-based view, Scheffler’s valuing-focused view, and Simon Keller’s special goods view, provide justifications that conflict with our intuitions about which obligations we have and why we have them. My argument against these other views lays the
foundation for my positive view. Most importantly, in Chapter 4, I show that a stronger RBV must both focus on the value of relationships, not valuing them, and incorporate agent-relativity.

From this foundation, in Chapter 5 I build what I call the Respect View. Two claims form its core. First, we have a duty to respect the non-instrumental value of the relationships we share with our friends and family members.\(^1\) (Hereafter, by “value,” I mean “non-instrumental value,” unless I indicate otherwise.) Second, taking a special interest in our friends and family members’ welfare is required to respect the value of our relationships with them. According to the Respect View, then, our relationship-based obligations to our friends and family members derive from our duty to respect them. This claim is importantly different from the impartialist’s claim that relationship-based obligations derive from general obligations. The obligation to respect one’s own friends and family members is agent-relative. \(A\ fortiori,\) it is a special, not general, obligation. Only you possess the obligation to respect your friends and family members. (Others must respect their friends and family members.) Therefore, for the Respect View, special obligations are fundamental.\(^2\)

As I argue in Chapter 5, the Respect View manages to both stick closer to our commonsense intuitions than the impartialist view and provide a compelling explanation of them. For instance, by holding that our special obligations to our friends and family members are agent-relative, the Respect View fits with commonsense morality. But, unlike agent-relative consequentialist views, the Respect View is also able to supply a convincing explanation of the

\(^1\) I use ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’ interchangeably.
\(^2\) This feature makes the Respect View fit the definition of what Niko Kolodny calls a “non-reductionist” view. Unlike an impartialist, a non-reductionist holds that principles that advocate partiality like ‘respect one’s own friends and family members’ are free-standing. They do not derive their normative force from general obligations. (Kolodny takes the term ‘non-reductionist’ from Scheffler, but his definition differs in important ways from Scheffler’s. See Kolodny (2010b), p. 172n, for a discussion of the differences. I follow Kolodny’s use.)
agent-relativity. This combination of intuitive plausibility and explanatory force makes the Respect View superior to its competitors: the impartialist view and other RBVs. Or so I argue.

My argument in favor of the Respect View in Chapter 5 both draws on recent work on respect and extends it in new directions. For instance, I employ Stephen Darwall’s concept of recognition respect, but argue that it is due to individuals not just as persons, but as friends and family members as well. Moreover, following Darwall, I argue that the respect we owe our friends and family members is interpersonal—or in Darwall’s terminology “second-personal”—but I work out some specifics of what it means for respect to be interpersonal that Darwall glosses over. Additionally, the Respect View provides further support for the claim, recently developed by, *inter alia*, T. M. Scanlon and Elizabeth Anderson, that in some cases we are required to respect, not promote, something of value. Finally, I utilize contemporary Kantian arguments about beneficence to show why we ought to regard looking after our friends and family members as a matter of respect.

However, the Respect View is not able on its own to establish the conclusion that we must be our brothers’ keepers. For while it holds that we must respect our valuable relationships, it does not specify which relationships are valuable. Therefore, to complete my argument, I identify in Chapter 6 three sources of value for relationships: mutually valuing a relationship, a relationship’s history, and social conventions. Given that many of our relationships with our friends and family members meet the criteria for obtaining value through at least one of these sources, this argument when combined with my argument in favor of the Respect View allows us to conclude that in many cases we do in fact have relationship-based obligations to our friends and family members. Often, we must be our brothers’ keepers.
Before moving into my argument against transactional explanations, I need to say a bit more about my subject matter, relationship-based responsibilities. I call them ‘relationship-based,’ rather than using the more common term ‘associative,’ for two reasons. First, ‘relationship-based’ more precisely describes the type of responsibility in question. As I have noted, their distinguishing feature is that the responsibility stems from the relationship itself. Second, the term ‘associative’ is usually used to refer to identity- or role-based views of political obligation.13 My view, however, is neither identity-based nor a view of political obligation. In fact, I argue against identity-based views and am generally quite skeptical of arguments in favor of associative political obligations. Moreover, I focus more on the significance of personal relationships than social roles. (The only place where social roles enter into my argument is in my discussion of social conventions in Chapter 6.) Therefore, I believe it’s best to call my view ‘relationship-based’ to avoid misunderstandings.

My use of the term ‘responsibility’ rather than ‘obligation’ also requires some explanation. Here, the issue is substantive, not semantic. For me, a responsibility is a particular sort of obligation. In particular, a responsibility is an obligation to look after (some aspect of) the welfare of one or more individuals or things.14 This use of ‘responsibility’ is widespread in ordinary discourse. We might say that it is someone’s responsibility to look after a potential client during her stay in town or his elderly mother as her health fails. However, as Henry

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13 This is understandable since Ronald Dworkin, who coined the term ‘associative obligations,’ defines them as "the special responsibilities social practice attaches to membership in some biological or social group, like the responsibilities of family or friends or neighbors" (Dworkin (1986), p. 196, as cited in Jeske (2008b)). He then goes on to defend an associative view of political obligation (Dworkin (1986), pp. 206-15).

14 Since my focus is on our special responsibilities for our friends and family members, I drop the ‘things’ aspect of the definition in my later formulations. But it’s clear that it’s conceptually possible to have a responsibility in this sense for a thing. One might, for example, be given a responsibility to look after a neighbor’s lawn or his house while he’s out of town.
Richardson points out, it’s quite uncommon in recent moral philosophy.\textsuperscript{15} When philosophers discuss responsibility, they typically have in mind responsibility for past deeds. But the sort of responsibility in question here is, in Richardson’s term, “forward-looking.”\textsuperscript{16} An individual with this sort of responsibility is required to look after someone or something’s welfare for a period of time extending into the future.

Moreover, forward-looking responsibilities have a different structure than many moral obligations. Unlike, say, an obligation to meet someone at an agreed upon time, these obligations are not, at root, obligations to perform a particular identifiable action. Instead, as I have noted, they require that individuals look after (some aspect of) an individual’s welfare for a period of time. This means that they are ongoing and open-ended. Even if a sister helps her brother move, this action does not alter her obligation to continue to take a special interest in his welfare in the future. Being ongoing, however, does not mean that they persist indefinitely. For instance, the individual’s responsibility to look after the potential client may extend only through the weekend. In cases involving friends and family members, we often think that the responsibility persists for the life of the relationship, but this is not essential to the concept of a forward-looking responsibility (hereafter, ‘responsibility’).

In saying that a responsibility is ‘open-ended,’ I mean that the actions they require an individual to perform cannot all be specified precisely in advance. This feature is due to two considerations. First, what looking after someone’s welfare requires varies widely depending on the circumstances. In one circumstance, it may require offering to help someone move; in another, it may require trying to console him after a loss. Second, we cannot predict exactly

\textsuperscript{15} Or, it’s quite uncommon in recent Anglo-American moral philosophy anyway. Richardson discusses Sartre’s use of the concept in Sartre (1956). One exception in Anglo-American moral philosophy is Gowans (1994). There, Gowans argues that conflicts between forward-looking moral responsibilities are the source of moral dilemmas. (See, especially, ch. 6.)

\textsuperscript{16} Richardson (1999), p. 218.
which circumstances will obtain. Therefore, we cannot specify all the actions a responsibility requires an individual to perform. An individual must be prepared to discern what actions her responsibility requires her to perform in any given circumstance.\footnote{To say that we cannot specify precisely the content of responsibilities is not to deny that we can articulate rules of thumb that individuals generally ought to follow. (This is why I say that not \textit{all} the actions they require can be specified precisely in advance.) Discernment is required to determine which rule (if any) applies or if one is in a situation in which the rules ought to be disregarded. For instance, Richardson enumerates several rules we expect babysitters to follow, such as, “Never leave the house with the children.” However, as he notes, if there is a fire, a babysitter’s responsibility requires him or her to break this rule (Richardson (1999), p. 221). Richardson in fact argues that it is a defining feature of responsibilities that they include “authorization, within some delimited range, to revise any preexisting moral rules” (223). This feature, he argues, distinguishes responsibilities from duties (221). I, however, employ a broader notion of duty. For me, the concepts of duty, obligation, and requirement are all equivalent and so, as I have noted, a responsibility qualifies as a type of duty/obligation. I treat responsibilities as a subset of obligations to connect my view more closely to the broader literature. Other theorists usually characterize their views as views of relationship-based (or associative) obligations. If they do refer to a responsibility, they usually use the term as a synonym for obligation. (Scheffler (2001) is an example of a theorist who uses them interchangeably. See e.g., p. 36.) I take no position on Richardson’s claim that responsibilities entail authorizations to revise existing moral rules.}

Responsibilities are often open-ended in an additional sense. Individuals often have many available means of fulfilling their responsibilities. For instance, often a large part of what looking after someone’s welfare requires is providing him or her with help.\footnote{I will focus on cases that involve helping others, but in some cases one can look after someone’s welfare simply by monitoring it. For instance, a sibling’s special responsibility for her little brother might involve making sure he’s not being picked on at school. So long as he’s not picked on, she does not need to come to his aid to fulfill her responsibility.} However, one often has latitude in choosing when she helps. In the case of the moving sibling, it may be that the sister can fulfill her special responsibility for her brother by either helping him move or helping him paint his new place the next weekend. She needn’t help him every chance she has in order to fulfill her responsibility. She need help him only sometimes. In this respect, responsibilities have the structure of Kantian wide imperfect duties. As Thomas Hill describes them, wide imperfect duties take the form, “Sometimes, to some extent, one ought to \( x \).”\footnote{Hill (1992), p. 156.} In Chapter 5, I provide an argument as to why they exhibit this structure, but here I simply want to note that it’s commonplace to think that responsibilities do take this form.
It seems to me that a good many of our relationship-based obligations are in fact responsibilities. Siblings, friends, parents and their children: we expect them all to take an ongoing interest in one another’s welfare in virtue of the kinds of relationships they share. In Chapter 5, I argue that the Respect View explains why such relationships give us responsibilities. Respecting the value that these relationships have in our lives requires us to take an ongoing interest in one another’s welfare. However, I also mention one type of relationship-based obligation that is not a responsibility: the obligation to give gifts or otherwise acknowledge someone on a special occasion. It would be odd to characterize an obligation of this type as part of a broader responsibility to look after someone’s welfare. One does not call one’s mother on Mother’s Day to look after her welfare. As I argue, the Respect View provides an explanation of these relationship-based obligations as well. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that the Respect View is a view of relationship-based obligations as a whole. However, by concentrating for the most part on responsibilities, I hope to call attention to this often overlooked, but quite important type of moral requirement.

Moreover, I focus on responsibilities because they pose the strongest challenge to the traditional, impartialist view of special obligations. While impartialists are well equipped to explain some special obligations we have for our friends and family members, such as an obligation to keep one’s promise to a friend, they struggle to explain our special responsibilities for them. As I will show in the next section and in Chapter 2, the impartialist’s claim that these special responsibilities either stem from transactions or are means to fulfilling general obligations clashes with our intuitions in several sorts of ways. I go on to argue in the remaining chapters that our special responsibilities for our friends and family members are typically at least in part relationship-based. (I do not argue that all special responsibilities are relationship-based.
Some, such as the employee’s responsibility to look after the potential client for the weekend, are quite clearly transactional.

In the next section, I show the limitations of the first of the two impartialist types of explanations, transactional ones.

1.2: Transactional Explanations

Many impartialists provide transactional explanations of our special obligations to our friends and family members. In this section, I briefly explain the main types of transactional explanations and show the ways in which they conflict with our commonsense beliefs about many of our special obligations to our friends and family members. As I will argue, the tension is particularly strong with our beliefs about our special responsibilities for our friends and family members. This argument is not intended to be a knock-down refutation of transactional explanations, much less a knock-down refutation of the impartialist view. Rather, it motivates my exploration of alternative explanations in the following chapters, including my discussion in Chapter 2 of derivative explanations, the other type of explanation that impartialists employ.

Theories ought to be assessed comparatively, so we will not be in position to conclude that we ought to reject the impartialist view until I have finished presenting my alternative in Chapter 6.

Before providing my criticisms of transactional explanations, I need to say more about what they are. Philosophers have developed several different types of transactional explanations of our special obligations to our friends and family members. I will group them into three categories: debt, gratitude, and voluntarist explanations. Debt explanations refer to the receipt of benefits or the commission of harm as the source of an individual’s special obligation. The idea is that through receiving the benefits or committing the harm, the individual acquires an
obligation to repay the benefits or make amends for the harm. For instance, one may argue that an individual has an obligation to repay his sister for her help with his move or compensate her for the damage he caused when swinging a golf club in her living room.

Like some debt explanations, gratitude explanations refer to the receipt of benefits as the source of an individual’s special obligation. However, the idea behind gratitude explanations is that one’s obligation is not to repay the benefit, but to express one’s appreciation for it.\(^{20}\) For instance, one may argue that an individual needn’t repay his sister for her help with his move, but must show his appreciation for her help by, for instance, taking her out to dinner. I will have more to say about the differences between these two types of explanation below.

The defining feature of a voluntarist explanation is that it refers to an individual’s voluntary action as the source of his or her special obligation. These actions might be agreements, as when I agree to look after my friend’s cat while he is out of town, but they might not be. For instance, Simmons argues that by having consensual sex an individual assumes responsibility for any child that is thereby conceived, whether or not the individual intends to conceive a child.\(^{21}\) More generally, he claims, “We bear moral responsibility even for the unintended or undesired consequences of our voluntary actions, provided these consequences are reasonably foreseeable.”\(^{22}\)

The third category of explanation cuts across the other two. Many debt and gratitude explanations also qualify as voluntarist, but some do not. For instance, Simmons claims that “the mere fact that the benefits parents provide are nonrefusible or not voluntarily accepted by
children is not sufficient to show that these benefits do not require a return.”

He then goes on to argue that in some cases children do owe their parents a return for the benefits they have received from them. Likewise, some voluntarist explanations qualify as debt or gratitude ones, but others, such as Simmons’s explanation of parental obligations, do not. (Parental obligations are not obligations to repay debts or show gratitude.)

With the main features of each of these types of explanations now in view, I can show why they are ill-suited to explain many of our special obligations to our friends and family members. I will discuss debt explanations first. For my purposes, the most important feature of paying debts is that there is a correlation between the amount of good one has received (or the harm that one has done) and the amount one must pay. If someone gives one a certain good, then to repay her one must give her a good of similar value. Some of our special obligations to our friends and family members do fit this structure. For example, if I watch my friend’s cat for a week, then he ought to agree to my request to return the favor when I leave on a week-long vacation. But he could turn me down if I asked him to watch my cat for a month.

However, as Jane English has pointed out, many of our special obligations to our friends and family members do not fit this structure. To use English’s example, if two siblings’ parents need assistance in their old age, we do not think that the extent of the siblings’ filial obligations closely correlates to how much their parents did for them. Say that one sibling received a full scholarship to college and moved out for good right after graduating, while the other one relied on their parents to pay full tuition and lived with them off and on for a decade after graduating. Even though the latter sibling required much more help to succeed than the former, we would think that they have fairly similar filial obligations, other things being equal.

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23 Ibid., p. 190.  
24 Ibid., pp. 190-2.  
Moreover, we think that some of our special obligations to our friends and family members persist even if we have repaid the benefits we have received. For instance, if two siblings are both “paid up in full”—i.e., they have each generously benefited the other and to exactly the same extent—we would still think that they maintain special responsibilities for one another. For example, one still ought to offer to help the other move. Debt explanations, then, are particularly unsuited to explaining our special responsibilities for our friends and family members. Even if we have some special obligations to our friends and family members that are proportionate to what they have done for us, like the obligation to repay a friend for watching one’s cat, our ongoing, open-ended special obligations to look after their welfare—i.e., our special responsibilities for them—do not have this structure.26

English also notes that we tend to think that the content of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members is sensitive to things like the state of our relationships and our ability to help our friends and family members. For instance, other things being equal, we think that children who are estranged from their parents have weaker filial obligations than those who are not, and a wealthy lawyer who lives nearby her parents has an obligation to contribute more toward her parents’ care than her struggling artist sibling who lives far away.27 Duties to repay debts, however, are not nearly as sensitive to such things. One must pay one’s debt in full

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26 This is not to deny that special responsibilities are somewhat sensitive to how much individuals have done for each other. If you do vastly more for a friend than he or she does for you, then the relationship becomes more one of servility than friendship, as English notes (English (1985), p. 463) and Aristotle much earlier recognized (Nicomachean Ethics VIII.7). Likewise, being a negligent parent transforms the nature of one’s relationship with his or her child and so affects the extent of the child’s filial responsibilities. (See my discussion of how the history of a relationship affects its value in section 6.2a.) However, in both of these cases, the extent of what one individual has done for the other is important only insofar as it affects the nature of the relationship. These cases therefore provide support for my argument that special responsibilities are not transactional. Indeed, they provide further support for my later argument that special responsibilities are relationship-based.

whether one loves or loathes one’s creditor and whether paying the debt is burdensome or effortless.  

Several other objections to debt explanations of special obligations to friends and family members exist as well. For instance, unless one is willing to be quite revisionary to our beliefs about the extent of our filial obligations, one must allow that individuals can accrue debts for benefits they did not voluntarily receive. For many of the most important benefits we receive from our parents, such as our physical and mental development, are ones we could not refuse. Some object, however, that individuals do not accrue debts through receiving benefits they are incapable of refusing. They hold that one accrues a debt only when one voluntarily receives a benefit. Whatever the merit of this objection, one must admit that allowing that debts can be incurred non-voluntarily undercuts one main reason for giving a transactional explanation, namely, avoiding the voluntarist objection. So, if a defender of debt explanations does make this allowance—as he must if he wishes to explain commonsense morality—he must make his case for his view on other grounds.

I could go on, but I don’t want to beat a dead horse. While debt explanations might work well for cases like repaying one’s friend for watching one’s cat, we should clearly look for a different type of explanation for many of our other special obligations to our friends and family members, especially our special responsibilities for them.

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28 I say not nearly as sensitive since in some cases in which repaying a debt would be a severe hardship, it seems that the creditor ought to forgive the debt and, if he or she does not, it’s permissible for the debtor not to repay it. This sort of case, however, is the exception to the rule. Thanks to Judy Lichtenberg for pressing me on this point.

29 E.g., parents make their children eat their broccoli, share with others, and attend school even when they would rather watch TV. Moreover, if children try to escape this “tyranny” by running away, the state will coercively return them to their homes. It seems quite clear, then, that these benefits are non-refusables.


31 Two other objections in particular have been quite common in the literature on filial obligations. First, some argue that children do not incur debts to their parents by receiving benefits from them since the parents have a duty to help them (and we don’t incur debts for receiving what others are duty-bound to give). Blustein (1982), p. 182, makes this objection, and Simmons (1992), p. 191, endorses a qualified form of it. Second, some argue that seeing filial obligations as debts is contrary to the motivation children ought to have to help their parents. They ought to help them out of love for them. English (1985), p. 463, makes this objection.
For filial obligations, several philosophers have instead given gratitude explanations.\textsuperscript{32} As I noted above, a duty of gratitude is a duty to express appreciation for a benefit received; it’s not a duty to repay it. Gratitude explanations therefore are able to avoid some of the problems that plague debt ones. For instance, what it takes to fulfill a duty of gratitude does depend on one’s current situation. A child who lives near her parents needs to visit them more frequently to show the same amount of gratitude as a child who lives quite far away. Moreover, since they do not require strict repayment, duties of gratitude allow for more looseness between the level of benefit received and the level of response.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the level of response should still be proportionate to the level of benefit. Saying ‘thank you’ is a sufficient response to someone who holds the door for you, but not to a friend who looks after your children for a week while you are in the hospital. Therefore, gratitude explanations still conflict with the structure we take our special responsibilities for our friends and family members to have. They cannot account for our intuition in the case of the less and more needy siblings. More generally, they cannot account for our intuition that we maintain special responsibilities for our friends and family members for the duration of our relationships. If these responsibilities were gratitude-based, then we would expect that those of us who have filial responsibilities—which excludes, for instance, those whose parents were horrifically abusive—could at some point get out from under them. In fact, however, we think that some degree of filial responsibility remains so long as our parents are alive.

How gratitude explanations depart from our commonsense beliefs is even more apparent when we consider a case like the one in which siblings have helped each other equally. If the

\textsuperscript{32} See, e.g., Blustein (1982), pp. 184-5, and Locke (1980), §68. Simmons (1992) defends the idea that some children have “debts of gratitude” to their parents, but given that he emphasizes reciprocation (pp. 190-2), his view seems to be more debt- than gratitude-based. See Keller (2007), pp. 102-3n, for a list of contemporary philosophers who defend gratitude explanations of filial obligations.

\textsuperscript{33} I take the ways in which gratitude explanations improve on debt ones from Keller (2007), p. 102.
siblings’ obligations were all gratitude-based, then they would have no special obligations to one another in such a situation. But this again is counterintuitive.

Moreover, like debt explanations, gratitude ones must allow that we can have duties of gratitude for receiving benefits involuntarily, yet as before, this allowance cedes the voluntarist’s high ground. The case for giving a gratitude explanation must be made in other ways. Therefore, while gratitude explanations improve on debt ones in some respects, we still have reason to search for a different type of explanation for our special responsibilities for our friends and family members.

Finally, philosophers have given voluntarist explanations of some of our special obligations to our friends and family members. Most commonly, philosophers give voluntarist explanations of the special obligations parents have for their children and friends have for one another.\footnote{For examples of voluntarist explanations of parental obligations, see Simmons (1992), pp. 199-200, and Blustein (1982), p. 145. For an example of a voluntarist explanation of friends’ special obligations, see Blustein (1982), p. 188.} A voluntarist explanation of filial obligations, of course, would not be plausible since, as I have noted, children cannot refuse most of the most important benefits they receive from their parents. Therefore, even if voluntarist explanations of parents’ and friends’ special obligations were bulletproof, we would still have reason to look for a non-transactional explanation of filial obligations, given the shortcomings of debt and gratitude explanations.

However, voluntarist explanations of parents’ and friends’ special obligations are far from bulletproof. Most importantly, they conflict with our intuitions about the source of many of these obligations. Rather than referring to an agreement or voluntary action that caused one to become someone’s parent or friend, we often refer to the relationship itself as the source of our special obligations. This is particularly true when it comes to special responsibilities. It is common to think that one ought to look after another’s welfare because he or she is one’s child
or friend. For instance, we might say that it is because a person is a child’s mother that she ought to help her with her homework, or that a person ought to stick up for someone because he is his friend. Our commonsense reasoning differs markedly in paradigmatic cases of consent-based special obligations, like promissory or contractual ones, and ones based on voluntary actions, like an obligation to make amends for damages caused. In these cases, we would be apt to say that the individual ought to fulfill her special obligation because she said she would or because of what she did.

Intuitively, then, even though individuals often voluntarily enter into their relationships with their children and friends, their special obligations stem from their relationships, not the actions they took into enter them. As a variation on this point, we also often refer to our history with a friend or family member as the source of our special responsibilities for him or her. “After all we’ve been through,” we might say, “it’s the least I can do.” In this kind of case, we once again do not regard an agreement or other voluntary action as the source of the special obligation. Indeed, we may think the experiences we have shared with someone give us special responsibilities for one another even when having these experiences was outside our control. We do not choose our siblings, our childhood friends, or often even our co-workers or neighbors. Yet we frequently develop histories with these individuals that we regard as morally important. For instance, if one’s next-door neighbor of fifty years were to be in a severe car accident, it would be wrong not to at least in some way express sympathy for his plight. (I will return to the topic of the moral importance of histories in section 6.2.)

All three types of transactional explanations therefore fall short in the same way: they conflict with aspects of our commonsense beliefs about many of our special obligations to our friends and family members. While they do not conflict with our understanding of all such
obligations—it’s intuitive to think that debt, gratitude, and voluntarist explanations do show us the source of some of our special obligations to those near and dear to us—they do conflict with our understanding of many of them. Most importantly for my purposes, I have argued that they conflict with our understanding of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members.

The fact that a type of explanation conflicts with our commonsense beliefs is not reason enough to reject it, but it is reason enough to search for a better alternative. Before I can argue that we ought to look beyond the traditional, impartialist view for such an alternative, I need to show that the other type of explanation impartialists employ, derivative ones, also conflicts with our commonsense beliefs. Indeed, an impartialist might agree with all I have said so far. He or she might concur with my assessment that some, but only some, of our special obligations to our friends and family members are transactional, but assert that all the rest, including our special responsibilities, derive from general obligations. In the next chapter, I focus on the main sort of derivative explanation that impartialists employ, social good explanations, to show why general obligation explanations also clash with our intuitions about our special responsibilities for our friends and family members.
Chapter 2: Social Conventions and Social Good Explanations

In this chapter, I consider and reject several attempts to explain a puzzling feature of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members: even though many aspects of them seem to be conventional, we often still think that we are bound to fulfill them. I, first, in section 2.1, briefly argue against two initial attempts to justify our intuition that we sometimes need to fulfill conventional responsibilities: first, claiming that all such responsibilities are actually transactional and, second, simply asserting that “this is the way we do things here.” In the bulk of the chapter (section 2.2), I then critique the most common method of justifying conventional responsibilities: employing social good explanations. I highlight the ways in which social good explanations conflict with our intuitive understanding of which special responsibilities we have and why we have them, and conclude that it seems our familial responsibilities are based on considerations internal to our familial relationships (and not on promoting social good).

This conclusion in fact tells against all social good explanations of special responsibilities since social good explanations always ground special responsibilities on factors external to a relationship, whether or not they rely on claims about the utility of following conventions. Moreover, since the main existing derivative explanations of special responsibilities are all social good explanations, this argument provides my full critique of derivative explanations. Therefore, in combination with my argument in section 1.2 against the other type of explanation that impartialists employ, transactional ones, my argument in this chapter motivates my investigation of alternatives to the impartialist view in Chapter 3.
2.1: Conventional, Yet Still Moral Responsibilities

Several types of special responsibilities that occupy a central place in commonsense morality seem to be conventional in nature. For instance, we commonly feel that we have special responsibilities for our family members, yet it seems that our intuitions about which family members these special responsibilities extend to are conventional. Do I have any special responsibilities for a second cousin whom I have never met? Also, how deep do familial responsibilities go? Do my special responsibilities for my sister include helping her find a job? If I had grown up in a different culture, I very well may have had different intuitions about the depth and distribution of my familial responsibilities. And, crucially, in many of these cases, on reflection it seems that it would be morally acceptable to divide up familial responsibilities in a different way. For example, thinking that maternal uncles have the responsibilities to care for a child that Western culture assigns to the child’s father, as individuals in the Akan society in West Africa did a hundred years ago,\(^1\) seems perfectly acceptable. Given the existence of the morally acceptable alternative, my own society’s division of familial responsibilities seems merely conventional.

When thought of in this way, these special responsibilities may start to lose their grip on us. If it’s morally acceptable to divide up familial responsibilities in a different way, why then should I think that I am obligated to carry out the responsibilities my society assigns to me? Yet for many of us, the sense that many of our familial responsibilities genuinely bind us survives the recognition of their conventionality. Even when we know how widely divergent different societies’ views are about the extent of fathers’ responsibilities for their children, it still seems wrong for a father in contemporary U.S. culture to skip out on his child’s band concert to listen to more accomplished musicians.

For theorists who wish to argue that it is wrong to violate conventional norms such as this one, several options are available. As with other special responsibilities, one option is to try to give them a transactional explanation. As we saw in section 1.2, A. John Simmons argues that parental obligations stem from the act of conceiving a child when this act is voluntary, whether or not the conception is intentional.\(^2\) This kind of explanation, however, is particularly problematic for conventional responsibilities. To see why, it will help to break the intentional and unintentional cases apart.

First, Simmons claims that in intentional cases, “parental duties most clearly resemble those resulting from other voluntary undertakings of obligations.”\(^3\) Even if one ignores the other shortcomings of this type of explanation\(^4\) and grants that many of a father’s special responsibilities for his child(ren) are based on his agreeing to take on these responsibilities, it seems highly implausible to claim that his agreement includes consenting to follow all his society’s conventions about what a father’s responsibilities are. Why think that when a father agrees to care for his child, he agrees to care for his child in the particular way that his society’s conventional norms dictate he should? This seems to be an awful lot to build into an agreement that, if it exists at all, very rarely has its terms clearly spelled out.

Agreements between parents or between father and child—he may have promised his spouse or his child that he would attend the child’s band concert, for example—certainly can be the basis for some of a father’s special obligations, but the intuition that he has conventional special obligations remains even when no such agreements exist. In the case of the band concert, he should still attend even if his spouse or child didn’t directly ask him to.

\(^2\) See Simmons (1992), pp. 198-200. He notes that they can also stem from voluntary decisions “to assume responsibility for the care of a child—as with step-parents, adoptive and foster parents, or guardians” (p. 199).
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 199.
\(^4\) See section 1.2 where I detail the shortcomings of this kind of “voluntarist” explanation.
Second, Simmons claims that in cases of unintentional conception, parental duties still stem from the sexual act that conceived the child if this act is voluntary. In this kind of case, a father does not agree to assume parental responsibilities, but he nevertheless, according to Simmons, takes them on. Here too Simmons’s explanation is particularly implausible for conventional responsibilities. Why does the same type of voluntary action result in quite different responsibilities in different cultures? To answer this question, Simmons must appeal to other considerations than the existence of the voluntary action itself. But if he does so, those considerations will do the work of explaining the conventional responsibility, not the voluntary action. Therefore, in at least some cases, we ought to appeal to non-transactional reasons to explain why it would be wrong to violate a conventional norm.

One alternative is to say that violating a conventional norm is wrong simply because it is contrary to the rules of the game. If pressed by an interlocutor to explain why a father who snubs his child’s band concert for the local jazz club is acting wrongly, we can imagine an advocate of this option replying, “That just isn’t the way we do things here.” In other words, one must follow the convention just because it is the convention; no further justification is needed.

Individuals do sometimes utter statements like this one when expressing disapproval for someone who bucks a conventional norm, but regarding the mere existence of a conventional norm as our reason to follow it is not our ordinary practice. If our interlocutor retorted “So what?” to the statement, “That just isn’t the way we do things here,” we usually do have more to

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5 Ibid., p. 200.
6 My consideration of this possibility was spurred by Nicholas Southwood’s recent article “The Moral/Conventional Distinction.” Southwood argues that it is the distinguishing feature of a conventional normative judgment that one regards a social practice as having a non-derivative role in the justification of the judgment (Southwood (2011), pp. 774-9). He also indicates that he believes social practices can in fact play this non-derivative role (pp. 789-90). However, his ultimate position is not the one I describe in the main text since he suggests that social practices gain their non-derivative significance only through their connection to one’s identity (pp. 789-90). Given this view, one’s true reason to follow a convention is not because it is the convention, but because doing so affirms one’s identity.
say, even if we cannot always articulate our reasons on the spot. In this case, for example, a person could refer to how important it is to the child for her father to be there.

However, even if it were our practice to simply cite the violation of the social norm as the reason why it would be wrong to skip the concert, this practice would not stand up to philosophical reflection. The question, “Why must I follow a convention?” demands an answer (unlike, or so some think, “Why must I be moral?”). Just because something has always been done doesn’t mean that it should be. Therefore, the idea that conventions inherently must be followed seems seriously wrong-headed.

A proponent of this idea may yet cling to a weakened version of it by granting that immoral conventions, such as those that supported the institution of slavery, should not be followed but insisting that conventions still carry with them the presumption to be followed. The view could be that the presumption is overturned only when a convention is found to violate morality. However, it seems to me that even a presumption in favor of following conventions needs justification. One could support it, as political conservatives have, by noting the disutility of upsetting the apple cart, arguing for the reliability of received wisdom, or adducing other considerations. Indeed, I will give my own reasons for supporting such a presumption in some cases in section 6.3. Yet, crucially, without normative buttresses of some kind, the bare claim that it is wrong to violate a convention provides no reason against doing so.

Most philosophers who write about the normative importance of conventions do trace it to something other than the existence of the convention itself. The most common approach is to locate their normative importance in their social utility. The tradition of analyzing social conventions in this way dates back at least to Hume’s *Treatise*, but much of the contemporary literature focuses on David Lewis’s development of Hume’s basic idea in his seminal work

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I use the terms “conventions” and “social conventions” interchangeably.
Convention. In it Lewis famously analyzes the concept of a convention in terms of what he calls “coordination problems.” For example, in order to minimize accidents and get to their destinations more efficiently, drivers need to coordinate the side of the road they will drive on. Which side of the road is settled on does not matter, just so long as one side is settled on. In the U.S., the convention of driving on the right-hand side of the road solves this problem. In the U.K., the convention of driving on the left solves it just as well. In Lewis’s analysis, all conventions serve this same socially useful role: they are solutions to coordination problems. In the literature on special responsibilities, a number of philosophers, including Robert Goodin, Philip Pettit, Peter Singer, and Leif Wenar, have taken up this tradition by arguing that social conventions can perform the socially useful function of dividing up our normative labor. In short, the idea is that we all will be better off if we are assigned special responsibilities for others who are related to us in certain socially designated ways.

Despite the pedigree and common acceptance of this approach, I believe that it, like the transactional approach, has its limitations. While many social conventions undoubtedly are socially useful and this social utility is a plausible basis for some reasons to follow them, I believe that the focus on their social utility has obscured other reasons we have for complying with them. In the next section of this chapter, I more fully describe the type of explanation that Goodin, et al., employ, i.e., social good explanations, and delineate the ways in which social good explanations clash with our intuitive understanding of one of the central types of special responsibilities: familial ones. I argue that social good explanations conflict with our intuitions about which familial responsibilities we have and why we have them. While I do not presume that their failure to match our intuitions provides a conclusive case against those who defend social good explanations, I argue in the next section that this failure is a cost for their argument.
By presenting this cost, my aim is to motivate my exploration of relationship-based explanations in Chapter 3.

2.2: Social Good Explanations

In order to see the limitations of social good explanations, we first need to have a more complete picture of what they are. As I have said, Goodin, Pettit, Singer, Wenar, and others have argued that conventions perform a socially useful division of labor function. The idea is that if individuals are assigned to have special responsibilities for others who are related to them in certain socially specified ways, then collective ends, such as maximizing welfare, will be more fully met than if each person tried to pursue the collective end without coordinating his or her efforts with others. These theorists then claim that individuals’ special responsibilities “derive from” their general obligation to promote the collective end in question. As I mentioned in the first chapter, I call such special responsibilities “derivative.”

According to one prominent view, what I call the “Social Good View” or “SGV,” all special obligations are derivative, including seemingly transactional ones. For example, proponents of the SGV argue that promises are morally significant only insofar as they affect how one can advance collective ends. Since making a promise often causes others to rely on

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8 See Pettit and Goodin (1986), Goodin (1985), Singer (2004), and Wenar (2007). See also Luban (1988). The general idea that society will be better off if individuals focus on those near and dear to them is a very old one. For example, in De officiis, Cicero writes that “society and human fellowship will be best served if we confer the most kindness on those with whom we are most closely associated” (De officiis 1.50, quoted in Appiah (2006), p. xviii. The translation is Appiah’s).

9 Saying that individuals “are assigned” responsibilities suggests that the claim is that there is some individual or entity passing out responsibilities in the way that a commander hands out marching orders. However, this terminology should be understood loosely. In particular, defenders of social good explanations are not committed to thinking that a society actually “assigns” individuals their special responsibilities in any sense of the term that implies that it has the authority to do so. The idea is simply that the presence of social conventions changes the causal landscape and so affects how individuals can meet their duties to advance collective goods. For social good explanations, the only “authority” that a society need have is the ability to causally alter the balance of reasons. (That is, a society’s conventions change the causal facts and so alter individuals’ reasons.)

10 See, for example, Goodin’s explanation of the significance of promises (Goodin (1985), pp. 42-52).
the promisor to keep his or her word, keeping a promise is often how one maximizes welfare. Contra those who defend transactional explanations, proponents of the SGV hold that we have no other reason to keep promises.

However, it’s important to note that theorists can employ social good explanations of some special obligations without going whole hog. Indeed, of the theorists I address in this section, only Singer, Goodin, and Pettit commit themselves to the SGV. Wenar focuses on only a subset of special obligations—special responsibilities to avert threats to basic well-being—and Simmons explicitly rejects the SGV. As I noted in Chapter 1, he endorses a view in which some special obligations are transactional and others are derivative.

Here, as I have indicated, I will focus most closely on social good explanations of conventional familial responsibilities, but at the end of the chapter I will discuss my argument’s implications for social good explanations of special responsibilities for our friends and family members more generally.

I have already described the basic idea of social good explanations of special obligations, but it will help to have a more formal definition:

*Social Good Explanation:* An agent A has a special obligation SO because fulfilling SO is the only means of fulfilling A’s general obligation to promote some social good SG.

For example, fulfilling his special responsibility to look after his children’s welfare might be a father’s only means of fulfilling his general obligation to maximize the amount of welfare in the world (the social good). To use a social good explanation, it is not enough for a special responsibility to be simply a means to promoting social good. It must be a means to fulfilling one’s *obligation* to promote some social good. These obligations can take various forms. They
can vary both with respect to what the social good is—it could be general welfare or something more specific, such as avoiding threats to basic well-being—and the degree to which one is required to promote it. All the explanations I discuss in this chapter focus on an obligation to maximize some social good, but satisficing social good explanations, for example, could also exist.

Moreover, fulfilling the special responsibility must be the only means to fulfilling the general obligation in order to distinguish permissions from responsibilities. For example, if a father could do as much good if he left his children to their own devices and devoted his attention to the welfare of someone else’s children, then he would not have a responsibility to look after his own children. He would be permitted to choose.

One can provide a social good explanation of a conventional responsibility by pointing out how the coordinating function of a convention makes it the case that an individual can meet her duty to promote a certain social good only by satisfying her conventional responsibility. For instance, one can argue that fathers ought to follow their societies’ conventional norms about parental responsibilities since doing so allows them to coordinate their actions with others in their societies and so ensure that all children are cared for.

This example illustrates one merit of social good explanations: they provide empirically sound justification for a number of our intuitively felt special responsibilities. A social good explanation can explain our sense that biological parents have special responsibilities for their children (unless, for example, they turn these responsibilities over to adoptive parents) because it is socially useful to have designated individuals take care of these particularly vulnerable individuals.\textsuperscript{11} And they can supply an explanation for our intuitively felt special responsibilities

for our elderly relatives because it *is* socially useful for families to take care of their progenitors. (These special responsibilities seem to be at least in part conventional in nature since it seems that other societies could legitimately assign them to other individuals. For parental responsibilities, recall the example of the Akan society in West Africa.)

However, though following conventional norms is often socially useful, social good explanations still often conflict with our intuitions about which special responsibilities we have and why we have them. I will begin by explaining how they conflict with our intuitions about why we have special responsibilities. Consider, for example, our reasons for thinking that we have special responsibilities for our family members. We do not usually feel that we have special responsibilities for our biological children or our parents for the reason that it would be socially useful if we fulfilled these responsibilities. Our feelings of responsibility likely have nothing to do with their utility for achieving collective aims. Instead, what we presumably hope to accomplish by fulfilling our responsibilities is that the welfare of a particular individual, namely, our child or parent, is taken care of. Our reasons for thinking that we should be concerned with this particular person’s welfare likely are connected to a sense that there is something significant about our relationship itself. That is, our special responsibilities for our family members seem to stem from the non-instrumental importance of our relationships with them. For example, if someone were to ask why one feels that one needs to care for one’s elderly mother even when it has become a burden to do so, it would be common to reply by asserting, “Because she’s my mother.” We think that both that there is something normatively important about our relationships with our mothers and that this importance is the source of our responsibilities to care for them in their old age.

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12 The Akan society of a hundred years ago is just one example of an “avuncular” society. Others include the ancient Chamorros and some modern Kazakh and Kyrgyz communities. (These other examples come from a talk Michael Wolf gave in the Philosophy Department at Georgetown University on 11/19/10.)
There is nothing stopping a defender of a social good explanation from endorsing the first of these two ideas—that the relationship in question is non-instrumentally important—and, in fact, many defenders of social good explanations, such as Singer, agree that close relationships such as those shared between family members can bring much happiness in and of themselves.\textsuperscript{13} However, to employ a social good explanation, one must deny the second idea. In a social good explanation, a person’s special responsibility stems from its efficacy for achieving collective aims, not the non-instrumental importance of the relationship. For the above example, this means that a defender of a social good explanation may grant that the child’s relationship with his or her mother is non-instrumentally important because it, say, is a source of non-instrumental happiness for both of them. But such a theorist would argue that the child’s special responsibility to care for his or her mother stems from the fact that fulfilling it is the only means to fulfill his or her duty to promote a collective aim, such as maximizing overall happiness.\textsuperscript{14} Since this explanation runs counter to our intuitions—as I have said, it seems that our special responsibilities stem from the non-instrumental importance of our particular relationships—and this example seems representative of our intuitions about many of our familial responsibilities, social good explanations fail to provide an intuitively satisfactory explanation of our familial responsibilities.

Social good explanations also fail to capture one other aspect of our normal understanding of the structure of our familial responsibilities. Phenomenologically, it seems that familial responsibilities such as those of children for parents not only stem from the significance

\textsuperscript{13} See Singer (2004), p. 162. I will explain the concept of non-instrumental value in more detail in section 3.2a. It is important to note here, though, that I do not mean that the fact that a person gets happiness from a relationship necessarily makes the relationship non-instrumentally important for him or her. It could be that the relationship is just a means to happiness. However, if the point is that having good familial relationships is a part, or constituent, of having a happy life, then this is a type of non-instrumental value.

\textsuperscript{14} See, again, Singer (2004). He argues that the existence of bonds between particular parents and children makes it the case that children are better cared for overall. If these bonds did not tend to improve overall welfare, then he would not think that they carry any normative weight (pp. 160-7).
of the particular relationships but also take the shape of what are commonly called “directed” duties.¹⁵ That is, children can be said to owe it to their parents to look after them, and if they do not, they wrong them, rather than merely act wrongly.

This manner of speaking seems to fit our phenomenological understanding of the responsibilities that are present in the parent/child sorts of cases and our familial responsibilities more generally. In the previous example of the child with the burdensome mother, we would be apt to think that the child owes it to his mother to take care of her and that he would be wronging her in some way if he did not do so. His responsibility does seem directed toward his mother and, importantly, does not seem to derive its significance from considerations external to their particular relationship. This point also seems to hold for other familial responsibilities. For instance, it’s intuitive to think that the father in my earlier example owes it to his child to attend her band concert and that his directed duty does not depend on society-wide considerations.

Since, as we have seen, social good explanations ultimately rest on society-wide considerations, using them to explain directed duties would conflict with our felt experience. Consequently, if we wish to find a more intuitively plausible explanation of the directedness of familial responsibilities, we must look to elsewhere than social good explanations.

This is not to say that an explanation of directed duties must be based on something other than promoting goods to avoid this criticism; it must simply be based on something other than promoting society-wide goods. In particular, a view that followed the lead of Joseph Raz and explained directed duties by referring to how a particular individual’s interests are promoted or protected through the fulfillment of the duty would not be subject to this criticism since it would

¹⁵ See, e.g., Sreenivasan (2010).
not ground the duty on society-wide considerations. Simon Keller’s explanation of filial duties takes this form, and it could be adapted to give an explanation of directedness of filial duties. This sort of view, therefore, is not my target here (although I do raise other objections to it in chapters 4 and 5). I have my sights set on those theories, like the SGV, which explain directed duties by appealing to society-wide considerations.

A defender of social good explanations of our familial responsibilities can, of course, dig in his heels and simply assert that our intuitive understanding of the source and shape of our familial responsibilities is mistaken. He can claim that our intuitions about the sources of our special responsibilities are wrong and that any explanation of directed obligations that does not appeal to society-wide considerations is also mistaken. He may even develop a more sophisticated version of this response by arguing that his view is what Derek Parfit has called a “self-effacing” theory. The argument would be that it is good that we have the intuitions we do about the source and directedness of our familial responsibilities since these intuitions make us more likely to fulfill the responsibilities. His view would then be self-effacing in that it would be...

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16 Raz’s view is that duties are owed to a person “when their justification turns on the fact that they protect or promote an interest of the person to whom they are owed, and this also means that that person has a right, a right which is protected by these duties” (Raz (2010), p. 291). Raz explains this view more fully in chapter 7 of The Morality of Freedom (Raz (1986)).

17 See Keller (2006). Keller puts his view in terms of the “special goods” that a child can provide to a parent rather than putting it in terms of the parent’s interests, but I take it that I am not misrepresenting his view by characterizing it as an interest view. It is not a pure interest view, though, since Keller also adds the condition that a parent must have provided his or her child with special goods in order for the child to have filial duties (p. 268). Neither the reciprocity condition nor the special goods condition appeal to society-wide considerations (see pp. 268-74), so it is clear that Keller’s view avoids my criticism of social good explanations.

18 A rough stab at using Keller’s theory to explain directed filial duties is that such duties are directed to one’s parent because (1) the fulfillment of the duty provides him or her with special goods and (2) one has received special goods from him or her in the past.

19 Parfit (1987), p. 24. Henry Sidgwick first developed this type of theory, although Sidgwick’s version is “esoteric,” rather than self-effacing. See Sidgwick (1981), pp. 489-90. See also Hare’s “indirect” utilitarianism (Hare (1981)). Singer, in fact, appeals to Hare’s “two-level” moral theory to support his reflections on special responsibilities. See Singer (2004), p. 160. Hare’s view differs from Sidgwick’s in that he does not confine utilitarian ethical thinking to a few elites. See Williams (2007), p. 291, for a convincing takedown of Sidgwick’s view as elitist “Government House Utilitarianism.” All three versions of this approach—self-effacing, esoteric, and indirect—have the same cost that I detail in the main body of the text: they are committed to the claim that our intuitions are ultimately mistaken.
better if people did not believe the theory were true (i.e., that familial responsibilities are ultimately justified by societal considerations) since if people did not believe it, then the aim of the theory (more social good) would be more likely to be realized.

However, making these claims comes with a high cost for the defender of social good explanations because it means that his view is committed to a revisionary account of many of our intuitions about, at least, our familial responsibilities. In addition to our parents, we think that many of our special responsibilities for, inter alia, our children, siblings, and grandparents stem from the non-instrumental importance of our particular relationships with them. As with the mother/child example, it’s commonplace to assert that one ought to help one’s brother “because he’s my brother” or one’s daughter “because she’s my daughter.” And even though a self-effacing view may prize our phenomenology for its usefulness, for such a view it remains a useful fiction. Our intuitive sense that our familial responsibilities are not ultimately grounded on society-wide considerations, while useful, is ultimately wrong. It seems clear that we have similar intuitions about the sources of special responsibilities for some non-family members, such as our friends, but I won’t go into those examples here. The cost of giving a counterintuitive explanation of many of our familial responsibilities ought to be enough to at least motivate considering whether a more intuitively satisfying kind of explanation is available.

Yet an objector may not be willing to concede even this point if she regards these as merely unreflective intuitions. She may argue we ought them to ignore them in favor of the conclusions we reach when critically reflecting “in a cool hour.” However, it does not seem to me that this objection is well founded. I do not believe that we, even after critically thinking about the matter, would readily concede that our familial responsibilities are based on furthering

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20 I have theorists like Hare in mind here. Hare argues that we ought to privilege our reflections at the critical level, the kind we conduct during “a cool hour,” over those at the intuitive level. (For the “cool hour” reference, see Hare (1981), p. 52.)
collective welfare. Therefore, these are not unreflective intuitions but what Rawls calls “considered judgments.”

Moreover, I believe that any theorist who measures his or her view by the standard of reflective equilibrium, as I do, ought to see our considered judgments about what the sources and shape of our responsibilities are as important pieces of evidence, just as he or she regards our considered judgments about which responsibilities we have. Therefore, any view that does not fit with our considered judgments about the sources and shape of our responsibilities bears a burden that we ought to look to shed.

Before moving on to my next criticism of social good explanations, I want to call attention to an important distinction within the reasons we give for thinking we have special responsibilities for our family members. As I have noted, it would be commonplace for a child to say that he ought to look after his mother “because she is my mother.” However, it would also be natural to reply, “Because I care about her.” The son’s reason in the first case shows that he is thinking that he has a special responsibility for his mother because she occupies the social role of being his mother. (As I will discuss in Chapter 5, his special responsibility depends on how he is related to her social role—she is his mother.) In this kind of case, I will say that we think the social role is included in the content of our reason for our special responsibility. In the second case, the son’s reason (that he cares about her) does not include the fact that she occupies this social role in its content. It likely is true that her role as mother had something to do with him coming to care about her (although not necessarily so—think of Oedipus), but the content of his reason for thinking that he has a special responsibility for her includes his caring about her, not her status as his mother.

22 One can inhabit the social role of “mother” without being a biological mother. One can, for example, acquire this status through adopting a child.
Both of these cases pose problems for social good explanations of special responsibilities. However, I will focus my attention on the case involving the social role since my primary focus in this chapter is on the topic of conventional responsibilities, which includes how conventional social roles affect which special responsibilities we have. It is clear how a defender of a social good explanation would explain this kind of case: her being his mother underwrites his special responsibility because it is socially useful to have the social roles of mother and son with their attendant special responsibilities. However, as I have said, this type of explanation runs counter to our intuitive sense that the justification of this kind of special responsibility does not reach the social level. This case therefore illustrates how social good explanations conflict with our commonsense understanding of why we have conventional familial responsibilities.

I will now shift my focus to cases in which social good explanations clash with our intuitions about which familial responsibilities we have. First, there are cases in which our commonsense division of responsibilities is socially useful, but not optimally so. All of the social good explanations that I have mentioned have an optimizing component to them: special responsibilities are a means to maximizing welfare (Singer), “maximis[ing] the production of desirable outcomes” (Pettit and Goodin), ensuring that all serious threats to well-being are protected against at the least possible cost (Wenar), or maximizing justice and happiness.

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23 See footnote 14 in this chapter. There, I briefly summarize Singer’s view, which takes this structure.
26 Wenar (2007). Wenar writes, “What is crucial for all serious threats is that there be some system in place that meets the threat, and that this system is not obviously worse than some other feasible system would be” (p. 263). His main point in this article is that responsibilities for avoiding serious threats should be assigned to the individual who can avoid the threat at the “least cost” (see, e.g., p. 258), so it is clear that he means a worse system would be one in which there are higher total costs to its participants than some other feasible alternative. He does, however, put a few constraints on this optimizing aim, including that special responsibilities do not impose “excessive burdens” on any individuals (section 2) (since bearing excessive burdens is “unfair” (p. 259)) and that some individuals have special responsibilities for others because of the need to compensate for harming them even when others could bear the responsibilities at lower cost (section 6). See footnote 32 in this chapter for a discussion of whether these constraints allow Wenar’s view to sidestep the two counterexamples I raise in the main text.
So in cases in which more good would be accomplished by ignoring our commonsense beliefs, these theorists would argue that we should do so. (Or, more precisely, they would argue that we should do so if they believe the case is one in which a social good explanation is called for. As I have noted, Simmons gives transactional explanations of some cases.)

To see that such cases exist, consider again the example of the son who ought to care for his elderly mother. Suppose that the mother has advanced Alzheimer’s and so is not aware of who cares for her. She lives in a nursing home, and almost all of her needs are capably taken care of by the nursing home staff. Any other need she has, like managing her finances, is being taken care of by her trustworthy long-time next door neighbor, who is much more adept at managing finances than her son. Moreover, her son, unlike her neighbor, lives across the country from her. Yet despite the fact that we have no reason to think that his visits make his mother any better off, it’s still intuitive to think that it would be wrong of him to never visit her again.

Since there surely are other ways in which the son could spend his time and money that would do more good—he could, for example, give a comparable amount of money and devote a comparable amount of time to a charity like Oxfam—these types of social good explanations would hold that he ought not visit her. In fact, since Singer, Pettit, and Goodin are all proponents of the SGV—the view that all special obligations stem from general obligation to promote social

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27 “[W]e are morally required to perform the ‘obligations’ attached to our institutionally assigned roles only if (a) we have performed morally obligating voluntary acts… or (b) the way that we can most fully discharge a natural moral duty is by acting in some institutional capacity” (Simmons (1996), p. 30). This statement suggests we have an obligation to discharge our natural moral duties as fully as we can. He mentions “promoting justice or equality or happiness, making charitable donations or otherwise assisting others” as examples of such duties (p. 30). However, Simmons is just sketching a view of when we are obligated to follow the prescriptions of our institutionally assigned roles. I believe that he would be uncomfortable with the maximizing consequences of his view that I mention here. That said, I believe that his view as he presents it in Simmons (1996) does have these maximizing consequences.

28 See Kolodny (2010a), p. 41, for an example of the same type.
goods—they would likely say that the son has no special responsibilities for his mother in this case. She is being taken care of perfectly well without his help. However, we would be apt to say that he would be shirking his filial responsibilities if he completely cut his mother out of his life—if he did not, for instance, even check in with the neighbor—and devoted his full attention to those who are more in need. This isn’t then an unreflective intuition that easily gives way when confronted with the theoretical observation that more good could be done elsewhere. Just as in the cases I discussed involving our intuitions about the sources of our special responsibilities, it seems that this intuition about whom we have special responsibilities for has the stability of a considered judgment, rather than an unreflective, unexplored intuition. Therefore, we ought, once again, to regard the admonition to ignore this considered judgment as a cost we should look to avoid.

This mother/son example is a case in which the optimizing type of social good explanation does not fit with our intuitions about the scope of our special responsibilities, i.e., which individuals our special responsibilities extend to. There are other examples in which optimizing explanations fail to accord with our intuitions about the depth of our special responsibilities for particular individuals. Consider again the case from Chapter 1 in which an individual’s sibling is moving across town. While the individual knows that his sibling has other people whom she could call to help her move who are more physically fit and more efficient movers than he is—he is, in fact, notorious for his clumsiness when carrying large objects—we would think that he still ought to at least call and offer his services for the move. She may (rightly) turn him down or assign him another task, like showing up with refreshments at the end of the day, but we would think that he should at least offer to help with the actual moving. And if she for some reason takes him up on the offer, we would think that he is obliged to help,
despite the fact that more social good would be done if the other, more adept individuals took his place.

A defender of a social good explanation may argue that it is socially beneficial for siblings to have at least some special responsibilities for each other (and so should be included within the scope of each other’s special responsibilities), but a defender of an optimizing social good explanation presumably would say that his special responsibilities for his sister do not extend to helping her move in this case, particularly if we know that the more adept individuals would be more than willing to serve in his stead. Again, though, this judgment runs counter to our intuitions. We do not believe that the depth of our special responsibilities is fully determined by what would create the most social good. In cases like this one, it’s intuitive to believe that we have a special responsibility even when others are willing and more able to take the responsibility on. And, again, it seems that this intuition stands up in the face of the realization that more good would be accomplished if we ignored our intuition. Even if we know that calling his sister to offer his help means that there is a chance she will take him up on the offer and thus make the move less efficient than it otherwise would be, we would still think that he ought to call. Therefore, cases exist in which the optimizing forms of social good explanations clash with our considered judgments about both the scope and depth of our familial responsibilities.

Defenders of social good explanations, however, may not be so easily convinced. One objection that some would raise to my two counterexamples is that special responsibilities should be determined by looking to the utility of the general role that an individual inhabits, rather than the consequences of taking particular actions. If one wishes to defend a pure maximizing social good explanation, this objection would be based on the idea that more good can be accomplished if we divvy up responsibilities at the level of roles, rather than particular actions. If one’s
favored social good explanation includes constraints on maximization, as Wenar’s does, one may also have other reasons for restricting evaluation to the role. Wenar, for instance, argues that applying his least-cost principle (that the individual who can avert the threat at the least cost has the responsibility to do so) to particular actions within roles “would often be either counterproductive or simply wrong.” He uses a firefighter example to illustrate both points. He claims that it would be counterproductive to argue that it is the “most skilled, most energetic, and most enthusiastic firefighters that have the responsibility to respond” to a fire, since “[w]e would lose much of the efficiency that we gained by setting up a fire service if firemen had to determine for each call who within the group could most easily go.” It would also be wrong because “always sending the most skilled and willing firemen to fight the fire might just be unfair” (presumably because the same firefighters would always be sent). The proper place to apply least-cost reasoning, then, is to the general role of being a firefighter.

Therefore, Wenar may argue that the roles are what ought to be evaluated in my two counterexamples as well. When we apply least-cost reasoning to these roles, he may claim, we would find that in most cases it would be better if a son is given the special responsibility to look after his elderly mother and if a sibling is given the special responsibility to help his sister move. Using this reasoning, then, these two cases do not turn out to be counterexamples after all. When we assess them as we should, we find that social good explanations actually align with our considered judgments.

However, I do not think that the defender of social good explanations has good reasons for evaluating these cases at the level of the general role. While I agree with Wenar that it can be both counterproductive and unfair to assign special responsibilities based on particular situations

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29 Wenar (2007), p. 268
30 Ibid., p. 268.
31 Ibid., p. 268.
rather than roles (and that these are reasons to sometimes refrain from doing so), the two counterexamples I have offered can sidestep these charges. First, while it may be helpful in general to have social conventions that indicate that sons should look after their elderly mothers and that siblings should help each other move, why shouldn’t we think that more good will come about in the cases I have identified if the conventions were broken? I see no reason to think that it would be counterproductive if the neighbor, rather than the son, looked after the mother, or if the more able individuals, rather than her brother, helped the sister move. Sure, the individuals in these situations would incur some planning and coordination costs by not simply blindly following what the conventions may specify, but these costs seem very small in comparison to the benefits that can be gained by determining whether it is advantageous to follow the conventions.

As to Wenar’s fairness point, we can see how it could apply in the moving example. It would be unfair if the more able people always were being asked to help others move. (That this does happen is evident from the bumper sticker that reads, “Yes, this is my pickup. No, I will not help you move.”) However, we need not assume that this is the case in the counterexample. We can stipulate that the more able people have not helped others move more frequently than the brother has. Indeed, it may be that he has become notorious for his ineptness at moving precisely because he has frequently helped others move in the past.

The fairness point also need not apply in the mother/son case. If, for example, we assume that the neighbor’s parents died when they were quite young and that he never needed to provide this type of care for them, then it does not seem that he is being burdened with an unfair amount of responsibility. Moreover, if we assume that he is perfectly happy to look after the mother’s needs and has volunteered to do so, then an objection that the unfairness comes through
how he is given this responsibility also seems inapt. Therefore, I see no reason to think that we ought to assess these special responsibilities at the level of general roles, rather than particular actions.32

In sum, then, I have argued that social good explanations fail to fit with our intuitions about both the sources and shape of our familial responsibilities and, in some cases, which familial responsibilities we have. While my focus has been on conventional familial responsibilities in particular, the objections I have raised apply to social good explanations of familial responsibilities more generally. As I earlier noted, in some cases, we appeal to conventional social roles to explain our familial responsibilities, but in others we refer to particular features of a given relationship, such as the fact that a son cares about his mother or the fact that two siblings have a particularly close relationship. I will discuss cases in which we refer to particular features of a relationship in much more detail in the upcoming chapters, but here we can note that in these cases too we think our special responsibilities are directed and stem from the relationships themselves, rather than a general obligation to advance a social good.

For instance, if the siblings in the moving example have had a particularly close relationship, we would think that the brother owes it to his sister to offer to help her out and that his directed obligation stems from the type of relationship they share. Moreover, our intuition that he ought to offer to help is, if anything, even stronger when we focus on the particularities of their relationship, rather than social roles. Siblings may have some responsibilities to one another in virtue of inhabiting their social roles, but it’s much more compelling to claim that siblings who are particularly close have special responsibilities for one another. Therefore, the arguments I

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32 As I mentioned in footnote 26 of this chapter, Wenar also includes other constraints on his least-cost principle, including that no person be excessively burdened and that some responsibilities are assigned on the basis of needing to compensate for harming others. These constraints do not apply in my two counterexamples, since I do not believe that the special responsibilities I discuss would excessively burden any individual and we need not assume that any of the individuals has a need to compensate others for a past harm.
have advanced against social good explanations of familial responsibilities apply whether these responsibilities are conventional or not.

Although my main conclusion is negative, my aim in this chapter has also been partially constructive. Through seeing where social good explanations fall short, we have also made strides toward understanding what a more intuitively satisfactory alternative would look like. As I have argued, our familial responsibilities seem to stem from the normative importance of our familial relationships or at least seem to be based on something internal to our relationships. This basic idea—that features internal to a relationship ground special responsibilities—forms the core of what I call “relationship-based explanations” of special responsibilities. In the next chapter, I more precisely define such explanations and consider some examples of existing relationship-based explanations. As we will see, despite their intuitive advantages, existing relationship-based explanations have problems of their own.
Chapter 3: Relationship-Based Views

3.1: Introduction

In order to present an explanation of our special responsibilities that hews closer to our intuitive understanding of them, many philosophers have argued that special responsibilities are not merely means to realizing social ends. Instead, these philosophers ground special responsibilities on either the non-instrumental importance of the relationship itself or its non-instrumental importance for the participants in the relationship. For example, such a theorist may argue that the non-instrumental importance of a child’s relationship with his elderly mother grounds his responsibility to care for her. Or, alternatively, such a theorist may argue that the child’s special responsibility stems from the special goods, like the joy his mother gets from continuing to be part of her child’s life, that he alone is able to provide for her.¹

Importantly, for these theorists, the grounds of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members do not include considerations from outside our relationships, such as how fulfilling the responsibility allows one to further some social good. I therefore call this kind of view “relationship-based” to highlight this defining feature. As I have already indicated, there are two types of relationship-based views (RBVs). According to the first type, our special responsibilities for our friends and family members stem from the non-instrumental importance of our relationships with them. According to the second, these special responsibilities stem from the non-instrumental good(s) that the relationships provide to their participants. Theories of the first type hark back at least to W. D. Ross’s presentation of the rudiments of such a view in The

¹ Simon Keller mentions this kind of joy as one of the special goods that children can provide to their parents (Keller (2006), p. 267).
Right and the Good,\textsuperscript{2} and the identity-based views that philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel developed in the 1980s are the most influential theories of the second type.\textsuperscript{3} Recently, notable new versions of both types of RBV have emerged, including Samuel Scheffler and Niko Kolodny’s views (both of the first type) and Simon Keller’s “special goods” view (the second type).\textsuperscript{4}

Since a primary aim of many proponents of RBVs is to provide support for our commonsense intuitions about special responsibilities,\textsuperscript{5} it is no surprise that many of their views do stick more closely to our intuitions than those which employ social good explanations, like the SGV. In section 3.2, I provide a more detailed explanation of RBVs, and then, in section 3.3, use the example of the Rossian intuitionist view to explain how RBVs can do a better job than social good explanations of adhering to our commonsense understanding both of which special responsibilities we have and what the sources and shape of these responsibilities are. However, since the intuitionist view cannot provide any explanation of our intuitions, we have reason to look for a RBV that both sticks to our intuitions and provides a compelling explanation of them. In section 3.4, I argue that no identity-based view succeeds in achieving both of these aims. Some versions deviate from our intuitions about the directedness of special responsibilities and those that do stick to our intuitions fail to produce a compelling explanation of them. My overall objective in this chapter is to sketch some of the main features a successful RBV must have to achieve the dual aims of capturing our intuitions and explaining them. In chapters 4 and 5, I develop the specifics of an RBV that contains these features.

\textsuperscript{2} Ross (2002), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{4} See Scheffler (2001), esp. ch. 6, and (2010b) (which is also included in Scheffler (2010a)); Kolodny (2010a) and (2010b); and Keller (2006) and (2007), ch. 6.
\textsuperscript{5} I have Scheffler, Kolodny, and intuitionists like Ross in mind. (See, e.g., Scheffler (2001), p. 110, and Kolodny (2010a), pp. 37-42. All of Ross’s work in ethics, of course, was based on the idea that our commonsense intuitions are of central importance.)
Again, I will use examples of familial responsibilities to point out both the strengths and limitations of RBVs, but, also as before, my belief is that these strengths and criticisms can be generalized to include other types of special responsibilities. Moreover, I once again focus on special responsibilities, rather than special obligations more generally, but it should be kept in mind that relationship-based explanations can also be given for special obligations that are not responsibilities.

3.2: The Main Features of Relationship-Based Views

Before evaluating existing relationship-based views, I need to say more about what exactly a relationship-based view is. So far, I have provided merely the rather rough characterization that a RBV grounds special obligations on either the non-instrumental importance of the relationship itself or the non-instrumental goods the relationship provides to its participants. A first step to providing a more precise definition is to note that for a view to qualify as relationship-based, it need claim only that at least one special obligation is relationship-based. My reason for characterizing RBVs in this way is purely historical: they developed as responses to the shortcomings of the traditional, impartialist view of special obligations, which, as I explained in Chapter 1, allows for only two types of explanations, transactional and derivative. Therefore, a theory that defends an alternative type of explanation, even if for only one special obligation, constitutes a new kind of view. So, we can state the defining commitment of a relationship-based view rather simplistically as follows:

(RBV) There exists at least one relationship-based obligation.
Of course, we then need a definition of what a relationship-based obligation is. A relationship-based obligation is one that is justified by a relationship-based explanation, where a relationship-based explanation is as follows:

(RBE) An agent A’s special obligation to another agent B stems from either the non-instrumental importance of the relationship itself or its non-instrumental importance for A and/or B.

This definition is meant to distinguish relationship-based explanations from social good ones, which ground special obligations on society-wide considerations. One might object, though, that it does not succeed in this aim since in some social good explanations the obligation stems in part from the non-instrumental importance of the relationship (as I noted in section 2.2). For example, a defender of a social good explanation may claim a daughter’s special responsibility for her father stems in part from the happiness she receives from the relationship (a way in which a relationship has non-instrumental importance, as I will explain below). This happiness, after all, forms part of the collective good that grounds her responsibility. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that by claiming that an obligation stems from the non-instrumental importance of the relationship or its non-instrumental importance for its participant(s), I mean to say that the relationship supports the obligation on its own, not as a means to or as part of some other good.

It’s also worth mentioning how this definition distinguishes relationship-based explanations from a couple of other types of explanation. First, it distinguishes relationship-based explanations from ones that appeal to benefits to third parties. Consider, once again, the case of a child’s special responsibility for his elderly mother. A theorist could claim that the child’s responsibility stems from the fact that visiting his mother will make his sister happy. This explanation, though, appeals to benefits to an agent who is not one of the participants in the
relationship, and so is not relationship-based. Second, this definition excludes any type of explanation that grounds an obligation on the instrumental benefits of the relationship, even if these benefits accrue to one or both of its participants. For example, the son may benefit from keeping his sister happy—perhaps he is destitute and she is allowing him to sleep in her basement—but since this is an instrumental benefit of maintaining his relationship with his mother, it cannot factor into a relationship-based explanation.

This definition, however, does allow theorists to appeal to one particular type of benefit, namely, those benefits that are included in the idea of a relationship having non-instrumental importance for one or both of its participants. What distinguishes this kind of benefit from the instrumental kind is that the content of these benefits must refer to the relationship, whereas instrumental benefits need not. Understanding what is good about being able to stay in his sister’s basement does not require that we refer to the son’s relationship with his mother. Its goodness is, as I will put it, completely independent of their relationship. This case differs from, for example, one in which a mother takes joy in her relationship with her son. Since her joy is joy in her relationship with her son, we cannot understand its content without referring to their relationship. Its goodness is not completely independent of their relationship. Therefore, since the joy the mother receives from the relationship is a non-instrumental good for her (or so I am assuming) and their relationship is included in the content of this good, the relationship also has non-instrumental importance for her.

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6 Cf. section 2.2 where I discuss how social roles can also be included in the content of reasons for special responsibilities.

7 I set aside cases in which the benefit is based on a false belief about the nature of the relationship, as when a mother takes joy in her relationship with her son because she believes that he is a loving son, when in fact he is not. In this kind of case, the content of the benefits would refer to her false beliefs about their relationship, not the relationship itself. These benefits therefore would not be relationship-based. Thanks to Judy Lichtenberg for prompting me to consider this variation of the example.
Moreover, if her son’s special responsibility for her stems from the joy she takes in her relationship with her son, then it stems from something that contains the relationship in its content. In this case, that something is the joy the mother takes in the relationship, but it may also be the case that it stems from the joy they both take in the relationship. As the definition stipulates, a relationship-based explanation can appeal to the non-instrumental importance of a relationship for one or both of its participants, as well as the non-instrumental importance of a relationship itself. (I will have more to say about the last possibility below. For now, it suffices to note that if a special responsibility stems from the non-instrumental importance of a relationship itself, it clearly stems from something that contains the relationship in its content.)

One example of an RBV that focuses on benefits to one or both of the participants in a relationship is Keller’s “special goods” view. In his explanation of his view, Keller provides examples of a few such benefits, including the “good of having your child, the one you raised, love and care about, make an effort to keep in touch.”

It is clear that the content of this good includes reference to the parent’s relationship with his or her child. His view is also the source of the example of a parent getting joy from her relationship with her child. He writes, “There is a kind of joy…that comes from a close involvement with the development of a person from birth through childhood and beyond,” which seems to be another way of saying that there is a special type of joy that includes a relationship in its content.

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8 Keller (2006), p. 266. On the same page, he defines special goods in the context of the parent/child relationship as those “which the parent can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the child, or the child can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the parent.” He contrasts these to “generic goods,” which “could in principle be received from anyone.” This distinction is close to, but differs slightly from, my distinction between goods that contain one’s relationships in their content and those that do not. Goods that do not contain one’s relationships in their content could in principle be received from anyone (and so are generic). But goods that do contain (at least) one of an agent’s relationships in their content must stem from that particular relationship (or those particular relationships). Therefore, the only other person that the agent could be said to receive the good from is the other participant in the relationship. Keller’s “or almost no one” else hedge does not apply. See also Keller (2007), pp. 124-7.

9 Ibid., p. 267.
One may not be so easily convinced, though, that taking joy from a relationship is in fact a way in which a relationship can have non-instrumental importance. Instead, it may still seem that the relationship is simply the means for her to get joy. To support this view, an objector may point to the fact that we may stop regarding the relationship as important if it no longer gave her joy. (In the case of parent/children relationships, it seems that we would still want to say that they remain important even if they no longer are a source of joy, but we may say that these relationships lose their importance under more extreme circumstances, such as in cases of severe abuse. I will return to this point in Chapter 6.)

However, this objection is based on an overly narrow definition of non-instrumental importance. First, as Christine Korsgaard argues in “Two distinctions in goodness,” a thing can be non-instrumentally good even if it would not be good in all circumstances, such as when someone no longer takes joy in it.\(^\text{10}\) While Korsgaard’s argument is one about non-instrumental goodness or value and my definition of RBVs refers to the broader category of non-instrumental importance,\(^\text{11}\) her point applies to the broader category as well. By definition, what makes something non-instrumentally important is that it is important not simply as a means to some other good, not that it is important in all circumstances.\(^\text{12}\) So, there seems to be no conceptual reason to think that non-instrumentally important things must be important in all circumstances.

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\(^{10}\) Korsgaard (1996a), pp. 251-2.

\(^{11}\) I focus on the broader category of non-instrumental importance to allow for the possibility that special responsibilities can stem from relationships that are non-instrumentally important but not non-instrumentally good. See, for instance, Kolodny’s discussion of “negative relationships” in section 4.2 of Kolodny (2010b) (pp. 186-8).

\(^{12}\) Korsgaard actually contrasts instrumental goods to final ones (or means to ends) (see, e.g., p. 250), and so even her definition of non-instrumental goods would be narrower than mine. However, Korsgaard herself notes other types of non-instrumental goods on p. 252, including C. I. Lewis’s “inherent value” and the idea of “contributive” value, which, I believe, is just the Aristotelian idea of constituent value that I describe in the main text. (Lewis’s idea is that objects of intrinsically good experiences (such as paintings) have “inherent value.” This idea provides perhaps an even better illustration of the type of value that exists in the mother/son example than my discussion of Aristotelian constituent value.)
As Korsgaard explains, it seems natural to think that non-instrumental goods will be good in every circumstance only because instrumental goods are commonly contrasted to *intrinsic* ones. Intrinsic goodness is the value a thing has in itself, and so intrinsically good things must be good in all circumstances. But, as Korsgaard argues, the appropriate contrast to intrinsic goodness is not instrumental but “extrinsic goodness,” or “the value a thing gets from some other source.”13 Since extrinsic goods are good only when this other source obtains, they need not be good in all circumstances. Disentangling these two often-conflated distinctions in goodness (intrinsic/extrinsic and instrumental/non-instrumental) therefore allows for the possibility of extrinsic, yet non-instrumental goods, including the possibility that a relationship can be non-instrumentally important even if it would not be important in all circumstances. And Korsgaard, in fact, employs Kant’s notion of “conditional goods” to argue that goods in this category exist.14

If a thing is extrinsically important, not only is it important only *when* another condition obtains, it is important only *because* the other condition obtains. For the mother/son example, this would mean that the relationship is important only because the mother takes joy from it. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes another way in which something can be non-instrumentally important and yet be important only because another condition obtains. In Book I, Aristotle claims that all human goods are good because of their contribution to eudaimonia, either as means to or constituents of it.15 Those goods that are constituents of eudaimonia—like

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13 Ibid., p. 250. See also Elizabeth Anderson’s discussion of this distinction in Anderson (1993), pp. 19-20.
14 As Korsgaard explains, Kant thinks that goods like happiness are “conditional” in that they would not be good unless they are accompanied by a good will (the only unconditionally good thing). Some conditional goods, like happiness, though, are “objectively” good when their conditions are met, and so not instrumentally good. She explains Kant’s view in section IV of Korsgaard (1996a) (pp. 256-62). In sections V and VI (pp. 262-73), she details the merits of Kant’s view (over, in particular, G. E. Moore’s view).
15 For Aristotle’s definition of human good in terms of eudaimonia, see, especially, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*, Book I, Chapter 7. For the idea that goods, or ends, can be either means or constituents, see 1094a4-6: “the ends [that are sought] appear to differ; some are activities, and others are actions apart from the activities.”
“complete friendships,” as opposed to those based on utility or pleasure\(^\text{16}\)—are not merely means to eudaimonia and so are non-instrumentally good, even though they are only good through their contribution to eudaimonia. For example, spending time with one’s friends is a constituent part of living a eudaimonic life and so is non-instrumentally important, even though it is important only because it is a constituent of eudaimonia.

The idea of constituent goods therefore provides another reason to think that something may be non-instrumentally important even though it is important only because another condition obtains. However, in my example, it is not the case that the relationship is a constituent of joy. Instead, the relationship falls under the broader category of being included in the joy’s content. Being a constituent is just one way in which something can be included in something else’s content.

The identity-based versions of the RBV make use of the constituent idea, but before turning to them, I should return to the objection I have been addressing. In light of my argument, the objector may concede that non-instrumentally important things need not be important in all circumstances. Yet he or she may nevertheless have the lingering sense that, in the mother/son example, their relationship is best described as important merely as a means to receiving joy. The claim may be that we can see that the relationship is being used as an instrument to get joy without relying on the mistaken belief that anything that is not important in all circumstances must be instrumentally important.

I believe, however, that this description needlessly stretches our ordinary concept of a means. When something is included in the content of a non-instrumental good, the connection between them is tighter than in a typical means/ends case. For example, if the son looks after his mother only to make his sister happy, his aim of making his sister happy can be understood

\(^\text{16}\) NE, Book VIII, Chapter 3.
without referring to the relationship at all. He may be able to accomplish this aim by doing something else, like devoting all his time to looking for a job that would enable him to move out of her basement. In this case, he really is treating his relationship with his mother as merely a means. On the other hand, if he takes joy from his relationship with his mother, the joy he receives is joy in the relationship itself. One cannot understand the character of this joy without referring to the relationship. Therefore, I believe being included in the content of a non-instrumental good is sufficiently different from the typical means/end relationship that it ought to be regarded as a way in which something can be non-instrumentally important.

In the end, though, what is most important here is not how we decide to define non-instrumental importance. I have discussed it at some length because I believe it is the best way to specify the driving idea of relationship-based views more precisely: that there is something to our intuitions that, first, relationships such as those between family members are important in themselves. And, second, this importance, not considerations external to relationships, is in fact the source of some of our responsibilities. Being included in the content of a non-instrumental good seems to be a way in which a relationship is important in itself, and so a view like Keller’s which sees relationships as sources of “special goods” is logically grouped with the other relationship-based views I discuss here, whether or not we agree about what counts as non-instrumental importance.

With this objection, I hope, successfully addressed, we can return to considering the character of RBVs. As I have indicated, Keller’s view is not the only one that argues that special responsibilities stem from the non-instrumental importance of a relationship for one or both of its participants. Identity-based views, such as those of MacIntyre and Sandel, argue that special responsibilities stem from those relationships that are central to one’s identity. For them, the

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17 See Chapter 2 for my argument that our intuitions do in fact take this shape.
relationships are non-instrumentally important in that they form part of one’s identity. That is, they are constituents of one’s identity. Sandel, for example, argues that an individual’s relationships give her “commitments” that are “constitutive” of her identity.\textsuperscript{18} I will discuss these views in more detail in section 3.4.

Both identity-based views and Keller’s special goods view are opposed to the first type of RBV, which shifts the focus from the relationship’s importance for its participants to its importance itself. A proponent of this first type of theory could argue that the earlier claim that the mother’s relationship with her son is important only because it provides her with joy gets the order of explanation backward. Instead, this proponent may insist that their relationship can provide her with joy, delight, or even anguish only because it, i.e., the relationship, is important.

W. D. Ross was a notable early advocate of the first type of RBV. In \textit{The Right and the Good}, he claims that many relationships, including those “of wife to husband, of child to parent, of friend to friend, [and] of fellow countryman to fellow countryman,” are “morally significant” and that “each of these relations is the foundation of a \textit{prima facie} duty.”\textsuperscript{19} Diane Jeske has interpreted Ross’s view of the connection between the importance of the relationships and the duties themselves as one of supervenience,\textsuperscript{20} but Ross’s claim that each relation is a “foundation” of a duty suggests a stronger connection than this. His view seems to be that the moral importance of one’s relationships explains one’s special duties. Or as I have also put it, one’s special responsibilities stem from the importance of the relationship itself.

\textsuperscript{18} Sandel (1998), pp. 178-83.
\textsuperscript{19} Ross (2002), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{20} She writes, “The difficulties with the consequentialist account of special obligations arise from its only granting instrumental significance to special relationships, i.e. special relationships provide unique opportunities for promoting intrinsic value. But commonsense seems to accord moral significance to special relationships considered for their own sake, not in virtue of the opportunities that they afford. One could then argue that reasons of special obligation supervene upon relationships between friends, between promisor and promisee, etc. So there is no deeper account of special obligations: truths about reasons and the relationships upon which they supervene are self-evident. This was the intuitionist line adopted by W. D. Ross” (Jeske (2008b), section 7).
What I mean by relationship-based explanations, therefore, ought to be clearer. Whether a given RBV is of the first or second type, it should also be evident that they stick closer to our intuitions than social good explanations in one way: they fit with our sense that some special responsibilities stem from the non-instrumental importance of our relationships. In fact, by definition, a RBV must fit with this intuition. However, for the other two problems with social good explanations that I described in Chapter 2—their failure to fit with our intuitions about the directedness of special responsibilities and, in some cases, which responsibilities we have—some RBVs fare better than others. In the next section, I show how a RBV can successfully avoid these two problems by focusing on the example of the Rossian intuitionist view. In section 3.4, I argue that identity-based views do not avoid them.\(^{21}\)

### 3.3: The Intuitionist View

As I explain in this section, the Rossian intuitionist view is able to track our intuitions about both the directedness of special responsibilities and which special responsibilities we have. The intuitionist view therefore provides an example of how a RBV can achieve my first main objective: creating a more intuitively satisfactory theory of special responsibilities. However, I go on to show that it does not achieve my other main objective: providing an explanation of these intuitions. I close the section by providing reasons for seeking such an explanation.

\(^{21}\) The way in which I have defined relationship-based views in this section may seem to differ from how they are most commonly characterized in the literature, where they are called “non-reductionist” views or said to involve “underived” special responsibilities. As far as I can tell, these terms stem from Scheffler. He uses these terms to distinguish his kind of view from those, like the SGV, that hold that all special responsibilities are derived from, or can be reduced to, general responsibilities. See Scheffler (2001), chs. 6 and 7. However, my discussion of relationship-based explanations in fact simply provides a more detailed account of what it means for a special responsibility to be “underived” than Scheffler provides. (See also Kolodny (2010a), especially pp. 39-41, for another detailed discussion of what it means for a special obligation to be underived. His discussion has influenced my own.)
First, we can see that the intuitionist view meets the minimal standard I set in Chapter 2 for explaining the directedness of duties. As I there discussed, intuitively, it seems that the reasons my special responsibilities for my friends and family members are directed to them are not based on society-wide considerations. For example, it seems that a child has a responsibility to his elderly mother to look after her because of some feature or features internal to their relationship, not because of some external effect it has on society, such as advancing overall well-being.

An intuitionist explanation of directed special duties would avoid this problem since we can expect that it would not appeal to society-wide considerations. Since the intuitionist view of special duties generally is that they stem from the moral significance, or moral importance,22 of one’s relationship with another, it seems natural to believe that this sort of view would explain directed special duties in this same way. For the mother/child case, the intuitionist would likely say that their relationship’s moral significance explains the child’s responsibility to his mother. More specifically, the intuitionist could say that since the moral significance attaches to the relationship that extends between them and this moral significance undergirds the special duty, the special duty also extends between them by being directed from the child to the mother.

It is true that a defender of a social good explanation will also claim that the relationship between mother and son is morally important—because it is a means of realizing social ends (and also may be a source of instrumental and/or non-instrumental goods for the mother and son)23—but the linchpin of the intuitionist’s explanation, the feature that allows it to fit with our intuitive understanding in a way that social good explanations cannot, is that the directed responsibility stems from the non-instrumental importance of the relationship.

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22 I use these terms interchangeably.
23 See section 2.2.
To better illustrate the advantage of the intuitionist view, it will help to separate the question of whether the responsibility stems from the importance of the relationship from the question of what type of importance the relationship has—instrumental or not—since these pinpoint two different locations where considerations external to the relationship could seep in. The defender of a social good explanation argues that external considerations enter at the first location. As I noted above, he or she claims that the directed duty does not stem from the importance of the relationship; rather, the duty depends on external considerations, namely, whether it is a means to advancing a societal end.

Another theorist could claim that the directed duty stems from the importance of the relationship but argue that this importance is only instrumental. To use the example I mentioned before, maintaining a relationship with his mother may enable him to keep his sister happy, and, our imagined theorist would claim, his responsibility to look after her stems from this end. By basing the child’s responsibility on a consideration external to their relationship, this theorist too would fail to provide an intuitive explanation of why the child’s responsibility is directed to his mother. Given that his responsibility rests on his reasons for keeping his sister happy, it seems that if he owes it to anyone to look after his mother, it would be his sister.

The intuitionist, like all proponents of RBVs, rejects both of these types of explanation. For him or her, the directed responsibility flows from the importance of the relationship, and this importance is non-instrumental. We can say therefore that the intuitionist explanation of the directedness of one’s responsibility rests on a feature internal to the relationship, namely, its non-instrumental importance. This claim allows the intuitionist to provide a more intuitive explanation of the directedness of special responsibilities than either of the explanations I discussed in the last two paragraphs. My claim is not that the intuitionist’s explanation is the
best possible one. Indeed, as I make plain below, it clearly is not. My claim is simply that the
tuitionist view fits with our sense that the explanation of why we owe it to someone to act in a
particular way ought to refer to something internal to our relationship to him or her. Other kinds
of explanations, including social good ones, do not.²⁴

We have seen, then, that an RBV can successfully avoid one of the two problems with
social good explanations under consideration here (i.e., the directedness problem). The last
problem is that in some cases maximizing social good explanations do not fit with our intuitive
understanding of which special responsibilities we have. For instance, it may better serve the
social end of maximizing welfare if the mother’s neighbor looked after her rather than her son.
Nevertheless, our intuition still seems to be that her son is the one who shoulders the
responsibility.²⁵ The intuitionist view, of course, avoids this problem since it simply stipulates
that the special responsibilities we have are those that match our intuitions.

It therefore successfully sidesteps this problem, but at the cost of failing to explain why
we should accept our intuitions or providing guidance in cases in which different persons’ (or
even one’s own) intuitions clash. Since there are many disputed cases—for instance, is the
relationship between adopted children and their biological parents non-instrumentally
important?—this deficiency seems big enough on its own to make this view an option only of
last resort. But even when we share the intuition that a particular relationship gives its
participants special responsibilities, we still have reason to search for a justification of the
intuition. We have reason to search for justifications of all our moral intuitions, but our reasons
here are especially strong. Absent justification, our intuitions that we ought to pay particular
attention to our own friends and family members look like sheer bias.

²⁴ Thanks to Mark Murphy for pressing me to clarify my position here.
²⁵ See section 2.2 for a fuller discussion of this example.
However, in this section we have seen that although otherwise flawed, the intuitionist view does show us how an RBV can avoid the phenomenological problems of social good explanations.

3.4: Identity-Based Views

Other RBVs adopt various strategies for improving on the explanatory limitations of the intuitionist view. Some of these explanatory improvements, though, come at the cost of taking on the phenomenological problems that the intuitionist avoids. In this section, I argue that identity-based views face a dilemma: either they take on these phenomenological problems or they fail to improve on the explanatory limitations of the intuitionist view.

First, we can see that like social good explanations, some versions of identity-based views struggle to explain the directedness of special responsibilities. Sandel’s earlier-mentioned view that an individual’s relationships give her “commitments” that are “constitutive” of her identity is a prime example of this sort of approach. Other philosophers who have developed rich versions of this type of view include MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, and Charles Taylor. While the particulars of their views differ, they all agree with Sandel that, first, some relationships are non-instrumentally important because of their connection to one’s identity and, second, at least some of one’s special responsibilities, or “commitments” in Sandel’s parlance, flow from this connection to one’s identity.

This strategy for explaining special responsibilities seems to offer some promise for improving on the intuitionist’s effort since the relationships that seem to support special responsibilities, such as those between parents and children, also often are integral to one’s

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27 See MacIntyre (1984a), especially ch. 15, and (1984b); Taylor (1989), especially ch. 2; and Williams (1981).
identity. And relationships that intuitively do not seem to support special responsibilities, such as those between fourth cousins,\textsuperscript{28} often are not.

However, despite this promise, this sort of approach, at least on one plausible interpretation of it, falls short when it comes to explaining the directedness of special responsibilities. If our own identity is the ultimate source of our special responsibilities, it is hard to see how we could be said to owe it to others to perform these responsibilities. A closer examination of Sandel’s view demonstrates why one interpretation of it is vulnerable to this kind of objection.

We can get a better sense of how Sandel links special responsibilities and identity by paying attention to his statement that one’s “allegiances” to, for example, his or her family or community
go beyond the obligations I voluntarily incur and the ‘natural duties’ I owe to human beings as such. They allow that to some I owe more than justice requires or even permits, not by reason of agreements I have made but instead in virtue of those more or less enduring attachments and commitments which taken together partly define the person I am.\textsuperscript{29}

His statement that an individual “owe[s] more” to those with whom she shares relationships “in virtue of” the attachments and commitments that partly constitute her identity is Sandel’s general statement of his explanation of special responsibilities. Understood in one way, this view would be perfectly acceptable to the intuitionist. In fact, if the idea is simply that our special

\textsuperscript{28} I am assuming that most readers will share this intuition. However, some individuals certainly may not. An individual may regard her membership in a broader family structure, such as being part of a “clan,” as being central to her identity, and her fourth cousins may also be part of this clan. In this case, I think the general point would likely still apply: if she thinks she has special responsibilities to her fellow family clan members, she likely thinks of her family clan membership as part of her identity.

\textsuperscript{29} Sandel (1998), p. 179.
responsibilities stem from our attachments and commitments, this could be understood to be identical to the intuitionist position. The intuitionist’s claim is that our special responsibilities stem from certain relationships we have, namely, those that are non-instrumentally important, and she may be happy to characterize those relationships as being one’s “attachments and commitments.” Given this interpretation, then, Sandel’s view would be just another way of asserting the same intuitionist position.

Of course, Sandel may object that this reading omits the crucial aspect of his view: the connection to one’s identity. However, this too can be fit into the framework of an intuitionist explanation. Our intuitionist may be happy to say that since these attachments and commitments are non-instrumentally important, they “taken together partly define the person I am.” This claim fits into the intuitionist framework because the non-instrumental importance of a relationship remains the ultimate ground of a special responsibility. The relationship’s importance explains why it is part of one’s identity. What the intuitionist must deny, if she is to stick to her position as I have characterized it, is that the explanation runs in the opposite direction: that being part of one’s identity explains why a relationship is non-instrumentally important. Or, in other words, she must deny that my attachments and commitments are non-instrumentally important because they “partly define the person I am.”

If we adopt the intuitionist explanation, saying that a certain relationship is part of one’s identity would be simply a handy signifier that the relationship is especially important for an individual. For example, given this interpretation, saying that being my mother’s son is part of my identity would signify that this relationship is particularly important to me. Or saying that
being a citizen of the United States is part of my identity would signify the importance of my relationship to other U.S. citizens.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Prima facie}, this seems to me to be a perfectly plausible explanation of our intuition that special responsibilities stem from relationships, such as those between mothers and sons, that are part of one’s identity, and do not from those relationships, such as those between fourth cousins, that are not. Moreover, this kind of interpretation of Sandel’s view would allow it to retain all of the intuitive advantages of the intuitionist view, including its ability to provide an explanation of the directedness of special responsibilities that fits with our phenomenology.

However, interpreted along these lines, Sandel’s view does not bear the fruit that we hoped it would, i.e., explanatory power beyond that of the intuitionist view. In fact, as I have said, interpreted in this way, Sandel’s view is simply one more way of articulating the intuitionist view. We are still left hoping for a view that can explain why particular relationships are non-instrumentally important.

One option an identity-based view could take to provide such an explanation would be to assert that the relationships in question are non-instrumentally important because they are part of one’s identity, and leave it at that. For this kind of view, being a part of one’s identity explains why the relationship is non-instrumentally important, rather than vice versa; and no further feature explains why being a part of one’s identity makes something non-instrumentally important. For this view, then, being a part of one’s identity is \textit{intrinsically} important. (If its non-instrumental importance were explained by something else, it would be extrinsically important, as I explained earlier.)

\textsuperscript{30} See footnote 7 in Chapter 4 for an explanation of the sense in which it can be said that I have a “relationship” to other U.S. citizens.
However, being a part of one’s identity cannot on its own make something non-instrumentally important because something need not be non-instrumentally important to be part of one’s identity. For example, being a procrastinator may be a feature of a person’s identity, but being a procrastinator is not non-instrumentally important (or not for most people anyway). It may make a difference for what a procrastinator has reason to do—he may, for example, have reason to consult his friends for tips about how to avoid procrastinating—but this does not make it *non-instrumentally* important. In this case, it may be that the person seeks out tips to avoid procrastinating because he values his job and, due to his procrastinating, is in danger of losing it. Recognizing his status as a procrastinator is only a means to achieving the independent end of retaining his job. Since cases like this one exist, it cannot be the case that being part of one’s identity is sufficient to make something intrinsically important. (As I explained earlier, intrinsically important things, unlike extrinsically important ones, must carry their non-instrumental importance in all circumstances.) Therefore, a successful identity-based theory must provide reasons for thinking that being a part of one’s identity can make something non-instrumentally important.

Without exception, the main identity-based theories do. After the earlier cited quotation about our attachments and commitments “partly defin[ing] the person I am,” Sandel begins to explain his reasons for thinking identity important. He claims that a person’s commitments and attachments give him or her a character and argues that “[t]his makes a difference for agency and self-knowledge.” Having a character makes a difference for our agency because it allows our

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31 Thanks to Henry Richardson for this example.
32 I specify that the end is independent in order to distinguish it from the kind of cases I considered in section 3.2 in which something is non-instrumentally important in virtue of being included in the content of something else. (E.g., a complete friendship for Aristotle is non-instrumentally important in virtue of being a constituent of eudaimonia.) In this case, the content of the end (retaining one’s job) is fully independent from the means (recognizing one’s identity as a procrastinator). Therefore, the means is only instrumentally important.
33 Ibid., p. 179.
choices to be more than an arbitrary selection among a set of preferences that are in no way connected to our identity,\textsuperscript{34} and it clearly makes a difference for self-knowledge because without a character “no person is left for \textit{self-}reflection on.”\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, Sandel’s position is that being a part of one’s identity neither merely signifies that a relationship is an important one nor completely explains why a relationship is important. Instead, being a part of one’s identity makes a relationship important because acting in accordance with one’s identity enables meaningful agency and self-knowledge.

Whether or not one agrees with Sandel on these points, they show that his view is not equivalent to the intuitionist’s. He does not baldly assert that certain relationships support special responsibilities; he has a method for explaining why they do so. In response, intuitionists may object that Sandel has simply changed the locus of the bald assertion: they baldly assert that some relationships are non-instrumentally important; Sandel baldly asserts that some relationships are partly constitutive of one’s identity. However, I believe this objection mischaracterizes Sandel’s view. He and others who propound identity-based views, such as MacIntyre and Taylor, have provided detailed accounts of why certain commitments make up one’s identity.\textsuperscript{36}

This analysis does show us, though, why this interpretation of Sandel’s view is unable to provide a satisfying explanation of the directedness of special responsibilities. If one’s special responsibilities are founded on the opportunities they give oneself for self-understanding and non-arbitrary agency, then our intuition that we owe many of our special responsibilities to others seems unsupported. If a child’s responsibility to look after his elderly mother stems from

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 180.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 179.
\textsuperscript{36} See, for instance, MacIntyre’s discussion of the kind of commitments that situate someone inside a tradition in chapter 15 of MacIntyre (1984a), especially pp. 221-5, and his discussion of the importance of patriotism in MacIntyre (1984b).
the benefits it gives him, then, if anything, it seems that he would owe it to himself to look after
her. And this, of course, seems backwards. If we are to discover a plausible explanation of why
the responsibility is actually owed to her, we must instead find its source in a way in which its
fulfillment is important to her: either how it affects her welfare or their relationship.37 (In the
latter case, the responsibility could be said to be owed to her in virtue of the fact that she is a
participant in the relationship.) In fact, while I cannot argue for this broader claim here, it seems
to me that for any obligation an agent A owes to another agent B, the obligation cannot be based
on a consideration(s) centered on A.38 Instead, it must be based on a consideration(s) centered
on B and/or the relationship between A and B. Therefore, as with a social good explanation’s
appeal to society-wide considerations, focusing on one’s own identity seems to have the wrong
structure to explain a responsibility that stretches between the mother and child.

The option is open for Sandel, just as it was for the defender of social good explanations,
to claim that our intuitive understanding of the direction of these responsibilities is unsupported.
However, in this case, I think this option carries the cost not only of discounting our intuitions
but also of endorsing a solipsistic moral view. In a critique of a communitarian view like
Sandel’s, David Luban has argued that this type of explanation reduces the moral significance of
special responsibilities to Polonius’s parting advice to his son Laertes: “To thine own self be
ture.”39 While this may be a bit strong, to focus on one’s own identity is to miss relevant moral
considerations that extend beyond oneself. To say that a child’s responsibility to help care for

37 Patti Lenard and Margaret Moore, following Seth Lazar (unpublished work), similarly claim that “it is clear that
the basis of an associative duty cannot straightforwardly, or indeed exclusively, be cached [sic] out in terms of its
contribution to the wellbeing of the duty-bearer” (Lenard and Moore (2009), p. 401, note 9). As they mention on p.
402 (note 10), Lazar, however, makes the point by appealing to a different feature of our commonsense
understanding of associative duties: the fact that duty-bearers cannot waive them and beneficiaries can.
38 Although others may disagree, it seems to me that this claim is actually just common sense. I think it is telling,
for example, that in the course of considering several different kinds of explanations of directed duties, Sreenivasan
(2010) does not mention one that grounds directed duties on features of their bearers.
39 Luban (1995), p. 406. Luban’s specific target is George Fletcher’s view as expressed in Fletcher (1993), but this
comes in the course of a critique of communitarian views, including Sandel’s, more generally.
his elderly mother stems from the opportunities for self-knowledge it affords him demonstrates a kind of moral myopia that fails to perceive the mother’s importance.

If interpreted in this way, identity-based views like Sandel’s therefore fail to provide a satisfactory explanation of the directedness of special responsibilities. This is not the only problem this kind of view faces. For one thing, even if, for example, your relationship with your parents has shaped your identity in a positive way, why think that this fact gives you a responsibility to look after them in the future? Even if we admit that you will receive less self-knowledge and your agency will be diminished in some way if you fully renounce your relationship with your parents (points which are disputable in themselves), why think you must pursue this self-knowledge and heightened agency?

In response, one might claim that it would not be possible to function as an agent if one fully rejected such a commitment. (Neither Sandel or MacIntyre go so far as to make such a claim, but some have interpreted them as doing so.40) But surely it is possible for individuals who have cut off contact with their parents to continue to function as agents. The commitment to one’s parents is not special is this regard. Transcendental arguments about the conditions of agency fail to establish that an individual must accept any given commitment to another individual or group. For the purposes of my argument here, I am willing to concede that we cannot function as agents unless we are committed to some individuals and/or groups and that being so committed involves seeing ourselves as having special responsibilities for them.41

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41 See, though, my discussion in section 4.2a of Scheffler’s argument that non-instrumentally valuing a relationship involves seeing it as a source of special responsibilities.
However, it seems clear that it is always possible to reject any particular commitment to an individual or group, such as one to one’s parents, and still function as an agent.\footnote{Hardimon mentions that, in The Philosophy of Right (§5), Hegel defends the idea that it is possible to renounce any particular attachment; Hardimon also defends it himself (Hardimon (1994), p. 345).}

While MacIntyre does not claim that one must accept any particular commitment to function as an agent, he does indicate that he believes that it would be more difficult to be a moral agent if one rejected one’s commitments to one’s community. He suggests that if one is not committed to one’s community, one is “unlikely to flourish as a moral agent” since, among other things, one is “characteristically brought into being and maintained as a moral agent only through the particular kinds of moral sustenance afforded by [one’s] community.”\footnote{MacIntyre (1984b), section III. MacIntyre does not actually endorse this idea at this point in the article—he frames it as a conditional—but I say that he suggests the idea because he goes on in the article to mount an argument in support of this general idea. (See section IV.)}

However, this argument, like the earlier one, does not establish that one must be committed to any particular community. If one is unlikely to flourish as a moral agent if one is not part of a community, this simply means that one has reason to be part of a community, not any particular one. So long as an individual who leaves one reasonably moral community joins another reasonably moral one, we do not have reason to think that she is unlikely to flourish as a moral agent. We could have reason to question her morality based on her decision to leave—perhaps by leaving she demonstrates that she is insufficiently gracious for all the community has done for her or is selfishly committed to getting her way at all costs—but in this case the argument would not be that leaving makes her less likely to flourish as a moral agent. It would be that she has demonstrated that she already is not flourishing. In Chapter 5, I will argue that this kind of argument I have sketched here provides a more plausible account of why we are wrong to reject certain commitments. As I argue there, rejecting certain commitments shows that one fails to recognize the value of the relationships one shares with others.
Therefore, arguments that rejecting particular commitments undercuts one’s agency are not convincing. Arguments like Sandel’s perhaps show why it would be good for one to fulfill a commitment, but this does not show why one must do so. Thus, we are still looking for an explanation of why we have responsibilities for our friends and family members.

Before moving on, it should be said that both Sandel and Polonius could rightfully object that my solipsism argument overlooks the interpersonal aspects of their claims. As Charles Guignon points out,44 in the rarely quoted subsequent lines of Polonius’s valediction, he makes it clear that he means one ought to be true to himself so that he can be true to others:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it doth follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.45

Likewise, Sandel claims that through coming to understand ourselves, we realize how we are connected to others. As he puts it, we come to recognize “a commonality of shared self-understanding.”46 He might argue, then, that there is a more interpersonal basis for relationship-based responsibilities: they stem from an individual’s shared identity with the other participants in the relationship. For example, a son may have a relationship-based responsibility for his mother since they share an identity as members of a family.

Focusing on shared identities does provide an avenue for identity-based views to avoid the solipsism worry and better explain the directedness of special responsibilities since it shifts the focus from oneself to how one is connected to others. Its explanation of directed responsibilities would, then, look just like the intuitionist view’s: special responsibilities stem

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45 Hamlet I.3.78-80. Perhaps it should also be noted that with Polonius being the windbag that he is, Shakespeare may have intended his readers to take his words with a healthy grain of salt.
from relationships which extend between individuals, so the responsibilities extend between them as well. It may even be thought to represent an improvement over the intuitionist view since it has something to say about why particular relationships are morally important, namely, they constitute individuals’ shared identities. However, as we saw earlier, the fact that a relationship is a part of one’s identity is not sufficient to explain why it is non-instrumentally important. One may share an identity as a procrastinator with someone else, but this does not make one’s relationship with him or her non-instrumentally important. Therefore, a shared identity view must also provide an explanation of why being the basis of a shared identity makes a relationship non-instrumentally important. If this explanation appeals to benefits to me, this view faces the same solipsism problem as the individual identity view.

The explanation could, of course, take many other forms, some of which can escape this problem. It could, for example, follow Keller in pointing to the “special goods” that certain relationships enable people to supply to each other. Of course, the overall success of the explanation would then depend on the success of the other view, and, as I will argue, each of the other main existing RBVs, including Keller’s, face their own problems. Therefore, focusing on shared identity is not a silver bullet. The importance of shared identity needs to be explained, and we seem to have the same options for explanation that we have for explaining why a relationship is non-instrumentally important more generally.47

In sum, in this section we have seen that all identity-based views, to be plausible, must provide an explanation of why being a part of one’s identity makes certain relationships non-

47 In this way, identity-based views are in the same boat as Hardimon’s view that “noncontractual role obligations are not morally binding unless the roles to which they attach are reflectively acceptable” (Hardimon (1994), p. 350). Just as the success of identity-based views depends on the quality of their explanations of why identity is important, Hardimon’s view is only as good as his view of reflective acceptability, as Simmons (1996) forcefully argues. Simmons in fact argues that Hardimon’s view is subject to the same goods to responsibilities problem I mentioned above in reference to Sandel’s view (Simmons (1996), pp. 34-5).
instrumentally important. If this explanation focuses on the benefits to oneself, it faces the solipsism problem as well as the problem of explaining how one gets from goods to responsibilities. If it instead opts for a different type of explanation, it can duck the solipsism problem but takes on the other problems with the type of explanation it chooses. Thus, while identity-based views do provide more explanatory power than the intuitionist view, none of their explanations are fully satisfactory, and some lose the ability to provide an intuitive explanation of the directedness of special responsibilities.

More generally in this chapter, we have seen that RBVs have the capability of correcting for the main flaws of social good explanations. They are able to stick more closely to our intuitions about both which special responsibilities we have and what the structure of these responsibilities is. Not all existing RBVs, though, manage to achieve both of these aims, and one that does, the intuitionist view, does nothing more than summarize our intuitions. We are left looking for an RBV that both captures our phenomenological experience and gives us theoretical tools to evaluate it. In the next chapter, I will argue that in order for a RBV to meet these dual aims, it must base special responsibilities on the value of relationships, not the fact that individuals value them, pace Scheffler, and also hold that our special responsibilities are agent-relative, pace Keller.
Chapter 4: Value, Agent-Relativity, and Relationship-Based Responsibilities

4.1: Introduction

In the last chapter, I explained the main features of relationship-based views (RBVs) of special responsibilities and argued that it is possible for this sort of view to realize its aim of sticking closer to our intuitions than the traditional, impartialist view. However, I also argued that not all existing RBVs succeed in this aim and one that does, the Rossian intuitionist view, fails to provide a compelling explanation of our intuitions. My argument in this chapter continues along the same lines: I fill in more details of what a successful RBV looks like by pointing out the limitations of other existing RBVs. I focus on two prominent RBVs in particular, those defended by Samuel Scheffler and Simon Keller. In section 4.2, I defend the idea that a RBV ought to base special responsibilities on the value of relationships against Samuel Scheffler’s claim that they stem from valuing relationships. I also detail other limitations of Scheffler’s influential view. In section 4.3, I argue that a RBV ought to employ the concepts of agent-relative value and duty in order to adhere to our intuitions. I make my case in part by showing the deficiencies of Keller’s agent-neutral special goods view. Looked at as a whole, then, this chapter argues that a successful RBV will incorporate the ideas of the value of relationships and agent-relativity. This sets the stage for my argument in favor of my value-based, agent-relative Respect View in Chapter 5.
4.2: Scheffler

4.2a: Value v. Valuing

As I have noted, Scheffler’s view of relationship-based responsibilities places valuing, rather than value, at its center. More specifically, his basic claim is that valuing a relationship involves seeing it as a source of special responsibilities. For instance, if I value my relationship with a friend, then I will see myself as having special responsibilities for that friend. However, as we will see, Scheffler’s view turns out to be more complicated than this basic claim would suggest. In this section, I show why both this basic idea and Scheffler’s fuller development of it fail. I argue that valuing a relationship is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to be the source of special responsibilities. My argument, however, is not merely critical. Its primary aim is to provide further support for my view that relationship-based responsibilities depend on the value of relationships. As we will see, it also has the secondary benefit of illustrating two important features of relationship-based responsibilities: first, how they can stem from relationships with voluntary origins, like friendships, and, second, why they are genuinely responsibilities (and not merely optional).

In order to see what the shortcomings of Scheffler’s valuing view are, we first need a clearer picture of what it is. While he has continued to defend a view built around the concept of valuing, the way in which Scheffler characterizes his view has evolved. In his article “Relationships and Responsibilities” (RR), he focuses on the connection between valuing and responsibilities: “I cannot value my relationships (non-instrumentally) without seeing them as sources of special responsibilities.”¹ In his latest work on this topic, “Morality and Reasonable Partiality” (MRP), he casts his view in terms of “relationship-dependent reasons”: non-instrumentally valuing a relationship involves seeing “myself both as having reasons to do things

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on your behalf that I have no comparable reason to do for others, and as having reason to give your interests priority over theirs in at least some cases of conflict.”

He goes on to claim that “many of our relationship-dependent reasons are reasons on which we are required or obligated to act.” The general picture, though, remains the same. Since I am concerned with Scheffler’s view insofar as it presents a view of special responsibilities, I will take his claim that valuing a relationship involves seeing it as a source of special responsibilities as my target here.

However, I will also address his more recent work whenever it departs from his earlier article.

In many cases, valuing and special responsibilities do seem to go hand-in-hand. Valuing my relationship with a friend does seem to involve seeing myself as having special responsibilities for him, e.g., to console him when one of his family members dies or to read a draft of one of his papers rather than someone else’s. If I never acted as though I were partial to him, one could rightfully question whether I in fact value our relationship. However, one may doubt that every form or degree of valuing a relationship requires that one see oneself as having special responsibilities. Perhaps I could value my relationship with my neighbor down the block to such a small degree that I need not see myself as having any special responsibilities for her.

Whether or not one accepts Scheffler’s claim will depend, in part, on how one defines ‘relationship.’ Scheffler, following Niko Kolodny, stipulates that a relationship involves “ongoing bonds between individuals who have a shared history that usually includes patterns of engagement and forms of mutual familiarity, attachment, and regard developed over time.” The “usually” qualification is crucial since it seems that if individuals in a relationship have “mutual

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4 Scheffler, however, uses the term ‘special responsibility’ interchangeably with ‘special obligation’ in Scheffler (2001)—see, e.g., p. 36—and so his definition is broader than my own. No part of my critique of his view, though, turns on this difference.
5 I follow Scheffler in using ‘valuing’ to refer to non-instrumental valuing, unless I indicate otherwise.
familiarity, attachment, and regard,” they also will see themselves as having special responsibilities. For instance, having special regard for my friend seems to involve seeing myself as having a responsibility to give his interests priority over others in at least some cases. (For example, I should read his draft, rather than someone else’s.) The qualification is crucial, then, since if having special regard were a requirement for having a relationship, Scheffler would undercut the importance he wishes to attribute to valuing. His central claim is that valuing a relationship involves seeing it as a source of special responsibilities. If simply being in a relationship involves seeing it as a source of special responsibilities, then his central claim is trivially true.  

This definition may either allay or reinforce one’s doubts about Scheffler’s central claim, but I will not spend further time addressing it here since even if valuing a relationship necessarily involves seeing oneself as having special responsibilities, this does not mean that one actually has them. Scheffler readily acknowledges this point. In MRP, he notes, “We may on occasion value things that shouldn’t be valued, and so we may on occasion see ourselves as having reasons that we do not have.” For example, as he claims in RR, a wife may value her relationship with her abusive husband and so see herself as having special responsibilities that

7 I in fact prefer a broader definition of ‘relationship’ in which one need not even share a history with another person to be in a relationship with her. My broader definition may more closely resemble our ordinary concept of ‘relation’ rather than ‘relationship,’ but I use it because I am concerned with relationships simply as sites of relationship-based responsibilities and it seems that both relationships that involve a shared history and those that do not can be the sites of relationship-based responsibilities. For instance, it seems possible that members of broad social groups such as racial and ethnic groups could have relationship-based responsibilities for one another. See Kolodny (2010b), section 4.3 (pp. 188-91), for one discussion of the topic of racial groups and partiality.

8 It seems to me that Scheffler’s definition actually reinforces these doubts. Once we grant that things like mutual regard and attachment are not required to be in a relationship, it seems that it’s plausible to think that I could have relationships that I value to such a small degree that I do not see myself as having special responsibilities. For instance, I could be in a relationship with my neighbor in the sense that we share an ongoing bond that includes a shared history of (merely) seeing one another at annual block parties. It seems that I could think that I value our relationship—for example, I enjoy our annual chats about the state of the baseball season—but to a sufficiently low degree that I see myself as having no special responsibilities to act on her behalf or give her interests priority. We simply enjoy chatting about baseball.

she does not have. Therefore, Scheffler himself does not wish to assert that special responsibilities exist whenever one values a relationship. Stopping short of making such a claim makes Scheffler’s view more plausible than it otherwise would have been. As the abused wife example shows, placing this restriction on valuing allows Scheffler’s view to avoid a pernicious type of bootstrapping. If valuing a relationship were sufficient for creating special responsibilities, then valuing a morally problematic relationship could bootstrap morally suspect special responsibilities into existence.

Circumscribing the role that valuing can play, though, doesn’t mean that it isn’t still a leading one. Indeed, after noting that we sometimes value things that we should not, Scheffler writes,

But to say that we are fallible is not to say that we are systematically misguided. Absent any reason for repudiating our valuation of projects and relationships as a class, there is no basis for denying that we have project-dependent and relationship-dependent reasons at all. Contrapositively, scepticism about such reasons is tantamount to the rejection of fundamental categories of human valuing.

This statement indicates that for Scheffler valuing a relationship does not simply involve seeing oneself as having relationship-dependent reasons, it can also give one reasons that one would not otherwise have had. (I will set aside the fact that he claims the same point holds true for valuing personal projects since these are not my focus here.)

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11 Michael Bratman influentially raised the bootstrapping objection to the view that intending to Φ gives one a reason to Φ (Bratman (1987), pp. 24-7). The version I am referring to could be stated as: if valuing a relationship creates special responsibilities, then valuing a morally problematic relationship could create morally suspect special responsibilities. The version of the bootstrapping objection I consider here is therefore a limited one. It objects to the idea that one can will morally suspect special responsibilities into existence, not to the general idea that one can will special responsibilities into existence. I consider the more general objection below.
Scheffler does not pursue this idea further, but a logical way of developing it (and recasting it in terms of responsibilities) would be to say that while valuing a relationship does not result in special responsibilities in every case, it does create them if the relationship is one that the individual is permitted to value. Or, otherwise put, valuing is a normative power that creates special responsibilities, and the fact that a relationship is one that an individual is permitted to value enables the act of valuing to create them. For example, valuing my relationship with my friend creates special responsibilities since it is a relationship I am permitted to value. On this view, valuing a relationship would be what Gary Watson has called a “constrained normative power,” a power to will practical requirements into existence that is circumscribed in some way.13 In a full development of the view, we would need to say what makes a relationship one that an individual is or is not permitted to value, but it seems to me that such an explanation can be given.

However, three other considerations tell against this kind of view. First, even though it avoids one version of the bootstrapping objection, the basic objection still persists: why think simply valuing a relationship creates special responsibilities? If, sitting here in my desk chair, I decide to value my relationships with my mail carrier, my dentist, and a Facebook friend I have not seen in ten years, it does not seem that I have thereby given myself special responsibilities for these individuals. Granted, this is a rather implausible scenario since, as Scheffler argues,14 we do not usually just decide to value relationships. But however we come to value relationships, this kind of scenario helpfully highlights the fact that it seems strange to think that we can unilaterally create special responsibilities.

13 Watson (2009). Watson defends a constrained normative power view of promising. The general idea is that promissory powers are “checked by the moral standing of others” (p. 167). This allows Watson, like Scheffler, to avoid being committed to the idea that individuals can will morally suspect practical requirements into existence.
Adding some details to the Facebook example reinforces this point. Imagine that I am “friends” with this person only in the Facebook sense. That is, at one time, one of us accepted the other’s “friend request,” an action that does not necessarily signify that one regards the other as an actual friend. In this case, we can assume that my Facebook friend accepted my request only because he wanted to read my online profile. In actuality, we are not friends but only acquaintances, and acquaintances who have not seen each other in ten years at that. However, since we are Facebook friends, I have the privilege of reading whatever information he posts on the website. Now, imagine that this acquaintance frequently posts updates on his life, and I read these posts with increasing interest over time. On reflection, I realize that this connection to him has become very important to me. He, on the other hand, never thinks twice about me and is completely unaware of my investment in his life.

Since I am not doing anything wrong by valuing this relationship, it is one that I am permitted to value. Therefore, I meet all of the constrained normative power view’s conditions for possessing special responsibilities for him: I have a relationship with him, value it, and am permitted to value it. In fact, if all my special responsibilities stem from my valuing, there may be no way to distinguish the special responsibilities I have in this case from those in normal cases of friendship, where both participants value the relationship and this fact is mutually known. If I were to value my relationship with one of these genuine friends in exactly the same way that I value my relationship with the Facebook friend, it seems that, according to the constrained normative power view, I would have exactly the same sorts of special responsibilities for both of them.

15 It seems to me that this is a genuine possibility. For example, if the Facebook friend and I exchange several messages over time that state that we have been enjoying each other’s posts, then I think we may have entered into the realm of genuine friendship. However, exchanging these messages may not change the characteristics of my valuing. It may, for example, retain the same intensity.
But this seems wrong. For instance, if my genuine friend’s father dies, my special responsibility for him may require that I call him to offer my condolences. However, if I find out that my Facebook friend’s father has died, he would likely find it quite odd and probably even inappropriate if I called him to offer my condolences (after ten years of not communicating with him). It does not seem that my unilateral valuing of the relationship is sufficient to give me a special responsibility for him. Something more interpersonal, namely, a genuine friendship, is needed.

The second consideration is closely related: attributing this power to valuing runs contrary to our commonsense understanding of the source and character of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members. Rather than appealing to one’s unilateral valuing of a relationship, we commonly refer to the relationship itself as the source of such special responsibilities.\(^{16}\) For example, it is natural to claim that it is our friendship that gives me a special responsibility to check in on my genuine friend’s welfare, and our lack of such a relationship that prevents me from having such a responsibility for my Facebook “friend.” Alternatively, I might assert that it is the fact that we are friends that gives me this special responsibility, but this seems to be just another way of articulating the idea that I have the responsibility because of the fact that we are linked in a normatively important way. That is, rather than isolating valuing, our intuitions often seem to identify the value or, more broadly, importance of relationships as the source of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) I discussed this claim in both chapters 2 and 3 as well. See sections 2.2 and 3.2.

\(^{17}\) As I indicated in Chapter 3, I use the broader term ‘importance’ to allow for the possibility that negative relationships such as the one between an abusive husband and battered wife may be the source of special obligations (such as an obligation to stay out of the battered wife’s life) even though they are not relationships with value. (We could say that they have negative value or disvalue, but this seems contrary to our ordinary use of ‘value.’) (See also Kolodny’s discussion of “negative relationships” in section 4.2 of Kolodny (2010b) (pp. 186-8).)
Focusing on value also allows us to better explain the character we take our special responsibilities for our friends and family members to have. For one thing, if special responsibilities stemmed from unilaterally valuing a relationship, then presumably as soon as one stopped valuing a relationship one would drop one’s special responsibilities as well. But often this is not how we think such responsibilities work. In many cases, we think these responsibilities must be, as I will put it, *unwound*, rather than instantaneously dropped. For example, if a wife realizes she no longer values her relationship with her husband, we may not think that she immediately loses all of her special responsibilities for him, particularly if their marriage has been a reasonably happy one and he did not commit some unforgivable act that caused it to rupture. Even if they agree to a divorce—we can stipulate that they agree to this after a relatively amicable discussion—it seems, for instance, that she should meet his request to “keep up appearances” for a short time (over the weekend, say) until he is more emotionally prepared for her to go public with the news. Moreover, it seems that she should meet this request because of the relationship they have had. We may say something like, “After all they’ve been through, she ought to do that much for him.” Conceiving of her responsibility in this way would show that we see it as a relationship-based one. We would see him as having standing to make such a request and her as having an obligation to meet it because of their relationship. In such a case, though, we would likely think that as time passes he loses this standing and she is released from most of her special responsibilities for him. She need not, for instance, be so specially concerned about his emotional welfare. Her special responsibility, then, may be said to “unwind” in the sense that the degree and scope of her special concern for his welfare can gradually diminish over time.\(^\text{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) One might object that even if she no longer wishes to continue their relationship, she may still value the memories of their past relationship and that this valuing is the source of her ongoing responsibilities. However, this objection
A view that focuses instead on the value of their relationship is better equipped to explain the intuition that responsibilities can unwind in this way. Even though she no longer values their relationship, they still do have a relationship, and, as the previous paragraph shows, it seems plausible to claim that their relationship retains some value. The ongoing value of their relationship therefore could explain her ongoing special responsibilities. Moreover, it offers a way to explain the intuition that some of these responsibilities unwind over time, for it also seems plausible that her relationship with him would have less value as time went on. If her responsibilities are based on the value of her relationship, then, as the relationship diminished in value, we would expect that her responsibilities would diminish as well. Much more would need to be said to fully defend such a view—and I do say more in section 6.2a—but here I simply want to point out that this sort of view has the potential to explain these intuitions, while it seems that a view based on valuing a relationship does not.

The second relevant aspect of the character of our special responsibilities for our friends and family members is their directedness. As I have discussed in the last two chapters, we often take individuals’ special responsibilities for their friends and family members to be directed to them. We might say, for example, that the wife owes it to her husband to keep up appearances. Even if she did still value their relationship to some degree, how could this obligation to her husband stem from the fact that she values their relationship? Intuitively, the grounds of this obligation should appeal to some way in which keeping up appearances would affect him, not a

is subject to the other arguments that I adduce against valuing views. Moreover, it’s possible that she does not value even the memories of their relationship. She may want to forget that it ever happened. Even though such a response seems quite unlikely in this kind of case, if she did respond in this sort of way, it seems that she would be morally criticizable for ignoring his rather modest request. Indeed, if, as I have stipulated, the marriage was a reasonably happy one, it may be that she shouldn’t just forget the relationship (although, of course, the psychological situation here is quite complicated). As I would put it, she ought to recognize both that their relationship still maintains some value despite its rupture and that this value provides her with some ongoing special responsibilities. Thanks to Henry Richardson for prompting me to consider this objection.
fact about her.\textsuperscript{19} Bringing in any such fact about him, e.g., the fact that he expected she would continue to value their relationship, would mean including something other than her valuing in the justification of her obligation.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, the valuing view conflicts with at least three aspects of our intuitive understanding of special responsibilities for our friends and family members: they stem from relationships, are directed, and cannot be immediately thrown off by their possessors.

The last consideration is not necessarily\textsuperscript{21} a criticism of valuing views, but a limitation of them: people not only value relationships they should not, they also do not value relationships they should. Scheffler does not address this point in MRP, but he does in his earlier article, RR, where he writes, “We may think, for example, that a neglectful father has reason to value his relations to the children he ignores.”\textsuperscript{22} In RR, Scheffler’s basic idea is that individuals have relationship-based responsibilities when they are in relationships that they have “reason to value.”\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, he’s here admitting that individuals can have relationship-based responsibilities even when they do not value a relationship. (In MRP, Scheffler drops the reason to value claim and does not address this particular idea.)

Setting aside for the moment the question of how well this admission fits with his statements about the importance of valuing, we can see that the derelict father example is far from unique. It is part of commonsense morality to think that children have special

\textsuperscript{19} In Chapter 3, I develop the details of this sort of argument more fully and employ it against identity-based views of special responsibilities. See section 3.4. I also use this sort of argument against social good explanations in section 2.2.

\textsuperscript{20} A proponent of the valuing view could produce an explanation of our intuition in this case that does not involve grounding the obligation on something other than her valuing. He or she could, for instance, argue that it is useful to believe that something about the husband’s welfare grounds her obligation, but maintain that her valuing of their relationship in fact grounds it. As I argue more fully in Chapter 2, though, it is a cost for a view to believe our intuitions are useful fictions.

\textsuperscript{21} It does not tell against views that claim that valuing a relationship is one way relationship-based responsibilities are created, but it does tell against views that claim that this is the only way that such responsibilities are created.

\textsuperscript{22} Scheffler (2001), p. 103.

\textsuperscript{23} He writes, “[O]ne’s relationships to other people give rise to special responsibilities to those people when they are relationships one has reason to value” (Scheffler (2001), p. 101).
responsibilities for their parents whether or not they actually value their relationships with them. As novelists and screenwriters well know, a son who ignores the needs of his elderly parents while he lavishes money on hedonistic pursuits is sure to be (and ought to be) the target of moral condemnation, as is a brother who pursues fame and fortune while ignoring pleas for help from a needy sibling. (We may criticize such individuals simply for the pursuits they have chosen, but the fact that they pursue them while ignoring needy family members singles them out for a special sort of disdain.) While grounding these responsibilities on the act of valuing is a non-starter, a proponent of the view that responsibilities stem from the value of a relationship can plausibly claim that these relationships have value although the son and brother do not recognize it.

Therefore, it seems that valuing a relationship is neither necessary nor sufficient for it to be a source of relationship-based responsibilities. Relationships can support relationship-based responsibilities when individuals do not value them, and they may not support relationship-based responsibilities when individuals do value them. As I have pointed out, Scheffler himself seems to accept this conclusion. In fact, in MRP, he endorses the idea that relationship-dependent reasons stem from the value of relationships:

[i]n so far as we are correct to value our relationships—insofar as our relationships are valuable—they are indeed sources of reasons. So if we ask why the needs, interests, and desires of people with whom we have valuable relationships give us reasons for action, the answer lies in the fact that we have those relationships with them.24

24 Scheffler (2010b), p. 110, italics in original. Note that this claim makes Scheffler’s view fit the definition of a relationship-based view since the reasons in question stem from the non-instrumental importance of relationships. (See section 3.2 for the full definition of RBVs.)
This claim is not necessarily inconsistent with Scheffler’s other remarks about the importance of valuing.\textsuperscript{25} He might argue, for example, that valuing is how relationships get their value (so long as we are “correct to value” the relationships).\textsuperscript{26} However, we have already seen why we ought to reject this sort of constrained normative power view. Moreover, we have seen through examples like Scheffler’s derelict father one that valuing is not required for a relationship to have value.

Given all of these considerations, we ought to conclude that when it comes to relationship-based responsibilities, the crucial concept is not valuing, but value. Whether one values a relationship or not, the relationship needs to be one that has value in order to be a source of relationship-based responsibilities.\textsuperscript{27} Accepting this conclusion does not mean that we must believe that valuing plays no role whatsoever in the creation of relationship-based responsibilities. It seems that two individuals can give their relationship value if they mutually value it.\textsuperscript{28} However, even in this kind of case, the value itself is the source of the responsibilities, not the valuing.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, my argument in favor of a value-based view has the side benefit of illustrating two specific features of relationship-based responsibilities. First, the friendship and marriage examples differ from those I have utilized in the last two

\textsuperscript{25} In addition to the passage I quoted earlier (see p. 75), Scheffler also describes his aim in MRP as: “What I shall try to do is to extend a line of argument I have developed elsewhere that bears on some of these issues [of the relation between morality and partiality]. The general aim of this line of thought is to establish that what I call ‘reasons of partiality’ are inevitable concomitants of certain of the most basic forms of human valuing” (Scheffler (2010b), p. 100).

\textsuperscript{26} Here, as elsewhere, I am indebted to Henry Richardson for helping refine my understanding of Scheffler’s view.

\textsuperscript{27} The same argument applies, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to a view that holds that relationship-dependent reasons stem from \textit{identifying} with a relationship. See section 3.4 for my discussion of identity-based views.

\textsuperscript{28} Valuing therefore may be a type of \textit{joint} normative power in that both individuals need to value the relationship in order for it to garner value. This would allow us to deny that I have relationship-based responsibilities in the Facebook example since I alone valuing the relationship would not be sufficient. Moreover, this type of normative power view would differ from the one I describe in the main text in that the act of valuing does not create relationship-based responsibilities, but valuable relationships. The relationships, then, ground the relationship-based responsibilities. See section 6.1 for a fuller development of this idea.
chapters in that they involve relationships that are voluntarily entered into. Nevertheless, they involve relationship-based responsibilities since the responsibilities in question stem from the relationship itself rather than one’s decision to enter it.29 While examples involving relationships with non-voluntary origins present the clearest route to showing that commonsense morality acknowledges the existence of relationship-based responsibilities, I believe that many more of the relationship-based responsibilities we commonly recognize stem from relationships with a voluntary start.30 As I said before, it is common to cite one’s friendship as the source of one’s reasons to look out for a friend. One likely has transactional as well as relationship-based obligations to one’s friends—e.g., you ought to return the favor if a friend has fed your cat while you were on vacation—but it is characteristic of friendships that not all one’s special obligations can be discerned by poring over a ledger of past transactions. Instead, many of the special obligations friends have for each other stem from the relationship they share. Likewise, many of the special responsibilities that we commonly take people to have for, inter alia, their significant others, children, and co-workers seem to be relationship-based as well. Therefore, recognizing that a relationship can have a voluntary start and still be the source of relationship-based responsibilities allows us to see just how prevalent these responsibilities are in our ordinary moral thinking.

Second, these examples highlight why relationship-based responsibilities are genuinely responsibilities: their possessors cannot shed them at will. If a person could simply drop a responsibility whenever he felt like it, we would wonder in what sense it was a responsibility at

29 See Chapter 1 for more on the distinction between relationship-based and transactional responsibilities.
30 Diane Jeske goes so far as to argue that all special obligations stem from voluntary relationships. See Jeske (2008a), pp. 63-4 and ch. 7. Since she argues that all of the special obligations she countenances stem from relationships (see pp. 63-4), her view includes only relationship-based obligations (and no transactional or derivative ones). While I disagree with her view, it provides a clear demonstration of the fact that the question of the source of special obligations (either relationship, transaction, or general obligation) is distinct from the question of how one enters into them (voluntarily or non-voluntarily).
all. Consequently, if relationship-based responsibilities could be shed in this way, we would have strong reason to think that they were not bona fide responsibilities. But as I illustrated with the divorce example, we do not think relationship-based responsibilities can be summarily dropped by their possessors. Instead, they must often be unwound. In cases where they must be unwound, we can say that certain “exit conditions” must be met in order for their possessors to be rid of them. If we use the value of a relationship to ground relationship-based responsibilities, then these exit conditions can be tied to the waning (or otherwise changing) value of the relationship. As the divorced couple’s relationship wanes in value, for example, the exit conditions for some of their special responsibilities are met. Of course, the details here too would need to be fleshed out, but this sketch should suffice to see why it is apt to class this normative phenomenon as a type of moral requirement.

4.2b: Normative Expectations

In the previous section, we saw that a relationship-based view ought to ground special responsibilities on the value of relationships, not the fact that individuals value them. However, as I noted in the last chapter, we want a relationship-based view to do more than merely state, as the intuitionist does, that special responsibilities stem from the value of relationships. We want them to provide an explanation of why valuable relationships give their participants special responsibilities. Since Scheffler has indicated that he prefers a value-based view, he too must provide such an explanation if he wishes to go beyond the explanatory inertness of the

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31 This point, though, does not apply to normative requirements more generally. John Broome, for instance, discusses cases in which one’s normative requirement to Φ depends on one’s intention to Φ. If one dropped the intention, one would drop the requirement. (See, e.g., Broome (2004).) We could use Kantian terminology and call such cases instances of “hypothetical imperatives.” However, for Kant, morality, of course, is distinguished by its categorical nature. Likewise, it seems right to think that these are not moral responsibilities if they can be simply dropped by their possessor.
intuitionist view. In his latest article, Scheffler does present an explanation, based around the concept of normative expectations, but I will argue in this section that it amounts to no more than the intuitionist response.

In MRP, Scheffler begins his explanation by describing a difference between project- and relationship-dependent reasons. He claims that, unlike our project-dependent reasons, “many of our relationship-dependent reasons are reasons on which we are required or obligated to act.” He attributes this discrepancy to the fact that one or more people, namely, the other participant(s) in the relationship, are “entitled to complain” if one does not act on one’s relationship-dependent reasons, while no one is entitled to complain if one does not on one’s project-dependent reasons. He then explains why they would be entitled to complain by appealing to the idea of “normative expectations,” an idea he takes from R. Jay Wallace’s view of responsibility. Scheffler writes,

A valuable relationship transforms the needs and desires of the participants into reasons for each to act on behalf of the other in suitable contexts. At the same time, it gives each of them reasons to form certain normative expectations of the other, and to complain if these expectations are not met. In particular, it gives each of them reason to expect that the other will act on his or her behalf in suitable contexts. These two sets of reasons—reasons for action on the one hand and reasons to form normative expectations on the other—are two sides of the same coin. They are constitutively linked and jointly generated by the relationship.

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33 Ibid., p. 109.
34 See Wallace (1994).
That is, a valuable relationship gives its participants both relationship-dependent reasons and normative expectations that the other participant in the relationship act on her relationship-dependent reasons. If one participant does not act on his relationship-dependent reasons, the other party in the relationship is entitled to complain that her normative expectations were not met.

As Wallace makes clear in *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, expectations in this sense are not expectations that are based on the probability that the other person will act on his or her relationship-dependent reasons. Instead, they are expectations in “the sense in which, as we might say, we ‘hold someone to an expectation,’ or in which we demand of people that they act as we expect them to.” Wallace uses the example of the expectations he has of his students to illustrate the idea. He expects that his students will not “lie, cheat, attempt to blackmail me or their fellow students, and so on.” While he “often believe[s] that the expectations will be fulfilled,” this sort of belief does not capture what is centrally involved in holding a person to an expectation, or in making a demand of the person. The crucial element, I would suggest, is attitudinal: to hold someone to an expectation is essentially to be susceptible to a certain range of emotions in the case that the expectation is not fulfilled, or to believe that the violation of the expectation would make it appropriate for one to be subject to those emotions.

We needn’t get into the particulars of Wallace’s explanation of how the emotions in question, which he goes on to note are the reactive attitudes, are linked to these expectations to see that these are clearly different than probabilistic expectations. One would not think that it is

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37 Ibid., p. 21.
appropriate to feel resentment (to take one example of a reactive attitude) when a student cheated if one simply had a probabilistic expectation that he would not do so. Instead, the reaction would be more one of surprise. To get the type of normative rebuke to which resentment is a reaction, one must add something like a sense that he is disobeying a demand one has made of him. Wallace’s language, then, of “holding someone to” an expectation or “making demands” helps identify a normative phenomenon genuinely different than probabilistic expectations.

However, it’s not clear how normative expectations help us explain the link between the value of a relationship and the existence of a normative requirement. As Scheffler explains the idea of normative expectations, it’s not just that a participant in a valuable relationship could form these expectations of her associate, she is “entitle[d] to expect”\textsuperscript{38} and entitled to complain if her expectations are not met. Once it’s clear, though, that Scheffler’s normative expectations are a type of entitlement, it seems that his explanation amounts to no more than the idea that valuable relationships generate for their participants both relationship-dependent obligations and entitlements that the other fulfill his or her obligations. But this makes it plain that, like the intuitionist view, his view provides no answer to the challenge of explaining why relationships and obligations are yoked together in this way. As we saw in Chapter 3, Ross held that many relationships, including those “of wife to husband, of child to parent, of friend to friend, [and] of fellow countryman to fellow countryman,” are “morally significant” and that “each of these relations is the foundation of a prima facie duty,”\textsuperscript{39} and gives no further explanation of how the moral significance is related to the duty than this. Similarly, Scheffler’s appeal to normative expectations amounts to the claim that relationship-dependent obligations stem from valuable

\textsuperscript{38} Scheffler (2010b), p. 111, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{39} Ross (2002), p. 19.
relationships without any further explanation of how and why the value of relationships produces moral requirements.

Absent such an explanation, we are left to wonder why the other participant in one of your relationships is “entitled to complain” if you do not act on your relationship-dependent reasons. Is it because not acting on these reasons would negatively impact her welfare in some way? If so, we should wonder why we should give her interests priority over those of others—why shouldn’t we instead aim to maximize overall good as the proponent of the social good view (SGV) maintains?\(^\text{40}\) Even if we can provide some explanation of why we ought to give some priority to promoting the welfare of certain people, as Simon Keller tries to do, we still have the question of why we are required to promote their welfare. In some cases, it seems that the ability to promote someone’s welfare does not give one a responsibility to do so.\(^\text{41}\) And in other cases, we think we have special responsibilities for selected individuals even when others could attend to their welfare just as well.\(^\text{42}\) As we have now seen (in section 4.2a), the solution is not to shift from focusing on the value of relationships to the act of valuing them. Instead, a different approach is called for.

**4.3: Agent-Relativity**

So far in this chapter, I have established that to fit with our intuitions about our special responsibilities for our friends and family members, a theory ought to hold that these special responsibilities stem from the value of our relationships, not valuing them. Before I take on the task of providing an explanation of our intuitions, in this section I detail one more feature of them. I show that it is part of commonsense morality to hold that both our special

\(^\text{40}\) See section 2.2.
\(^\text{41}\) See section 3.4 and my upcoming argument in section 4.3b.
\(^\text{42}\) See section 2.2 and my upcoming argument in section 4.3b.
responsibilities and the value of the relationships from which they stem are agent-relative. In the first part of the section, I explain the concepts of agent-relative reason and value. In the second, I discuss Simon Keller’s agent-neutral “special goods” view to illustrate why theories of special responsibilities need to incorporate agent-relativity to fit with our intuitions.

4.3a: Definitions

The basic ideas of agent-neutrality and relativity are straightforward but unhelpful. Agent-relative reasons and values are those that are relativized to particular agents; agent-neutral reasons and values are those that are not. Of course, the question is what it means for a reason or value to be relativized to an agent. A precise answer to this question, however, is notoriously elusive. We can see this by starting with the contrast between agent-neutral and relative reasons. The problem is that, as Derek Parfit (who coined the term ‘agent-relative’) and others have noted,⁴³ there is a sense in which every reason is relativized to an agent, since which reasons we have depend on which situations we are in and we are all in different situations. I have a reason to save the child drowning in the shallow pond if I happen to be the one walking by, but I have no such reason if I am three thousand miles away and have no means of pulling off the rescue. (I am assuming that one does not have reason to do impossible things.) This reason, though, seems like it should be counted as agent-neutral since the whole idea of the example is that anyone who found him- or herself in such a situation would have a reason to rescue the child. But if we try to correct for this problem, we run the danger of counting paradigmatically agent-relative reasons, like my reason to watch my favorite team, the Minnesota Twins, on TV, as agent-neutral. After all, it’s true that anyone whose favorite team is the Twins has a reason to watch them on TV.

One method that theorists, including Parfit and Diane Jeske,⁴⁴ use to solve this puzzle is to appeal to the idea of a *causal*, as opposed to normative, situation or position. Roughly, the idea is that an agent’s causal position refers to her physical ability to cause future state of affairs to obtain. This ability is affected both by an agent’s physical features, such as her ability to lift the child out of the pond, and those of her environment, such as the distance between her and the child and the means available to traverse this distance. Normative facts, like the fact that she made a promise to look after the child or that the child is her own, affect an agent’s causal position only insofar as they affect her physical ability to cause states of affairs to obtain. (For instance, the child being the potential rescuer’s own would affect her causal position if this fact made the child less likely to struggle with her if she tried to save him.) We can then define agent-neutral and relative reasons as:

**Agent-neutral reason:** An agent A’s reason to Φ or realize a state of affairs x is agent-neutral if and only if any other agent B would have the same reason to Φ or realize x if B were in the same causal position as A. All other reasons are agent-relative.

Using this definition, we can say that the potential rescuer’s reason to save the drowning child is agent-neutral since if any other person were in her causal position he or she would have the same reason to rescue him. On the other hand, my reason to watch the Twins is agent-relative since it is not the case that every other agent would have the same reason to watch them if they were in my causal position. If you, like me, were sitting in front of the TV with the remote within reach

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⁴⁴ See Parfit (1984), p. 143, and Jeske (2008a), pp. 8-11. See Kukla and Lance (2009), pp. 16-29, for an example of how this same method can be used to distinguish between agent-neutral and agent-relative speech acts. Another common approach is to define agent-relative reasons in terms of those that include an essential reference to their bearer. See Ridge (2008) for a helpful overview of different ways of drawing the distinction.
but, unlike me, had no interest in watching baseball, you would not share my interest-based reason.

One might object to my characterization of this example, though, by arguing that my causal position includes the fact that I can watch my favorite team by turning on the TV. Given this interpretation, if you were in my position, i.e., the position to watch one’s favorite team on TV, you would have the same reason to turn it on, namely, that you can watch your favorite team by doing so. Therefore, my definition would, counterintuitively, class this reason as agent-neutral since any agent who is in a causal position to watch his or her favorite team on TV would share my reason to do so.

What I think this objection points out is how important our description of the action Φ or state of affairs x in question is. If we are talking about my reason to watch the Twins on TV, then this reason still counts as agent-relative according to my definition since not every person would share my reason to watch the Twins even if they had the same physical ability as me to do so. However, if we are talking about my reason to watch my favorite team on TV, then I agree that my definition counts this reason as agent-neutral. On this latter interpretation, if any person were in my causal position, which, in this case, refers to one’s ability to watch one’s own favorite team on TV, then he or she would share my reason. But this seems just as it should be. When we think of my reason to watch the Twins as agent-relative, I take it that we mean it is relative to my particular interests. If we instead describe my action as watching my favorite team, then we build the relativity into the description of the action and remove it from my reason. My definition, in fact, then, provides exactly the right kind of analysis in this case.

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45 Thanks to Henry Richardson for raising this objection.
46 Thanks to Richard Fry and Luke Maring for helping me think through this reply.
Before moving on, I ought to note that although my definition bears some similarities to Jeske’s (and has been influenced by reading her work), it includes a couple of significant differences as well. One main difference is that I specify that the reason must be the same reason, while she does not. A variant of the drowning child case shows why this is an important stipulation. Assume that I am in a causal position to save the child and, moreover, that it is my child who is drowning. In this case, it may be thought that I have two reasons to save the child: one based on being in a causal position to do so and an additional one based on being the child’s father. If I do have a reason in virtue of being her father, then surely this reason is an agent-relative one. After all, I have this reason only because I am her father. However, if we define an agent-neutral reason, as Jeske does, as one such that if any other agent were in my causal situation he or she would also have a reason to Φ, then this reason would be classed as agent-neutral.

Stipulating that the reason must be the same one allows me to distinguish between the two types of reason I have in this case. According to my definition, my reason that is based on simply being in a causal position to save my child is agent-neutral since every other agent would have the same reason if he or she were in my causal position. My reason that is based on being her father, however, would count as being agent-relative since other agents in my causal position would not have this reason.

47 Jeske’s definition: “Agent-Neutral Reason: S’s reason to do or promote p is an agent-neutral reason if and only if, necessarily, for any Q, Q would also have a reason to do or promote p if Q were in a causal position to do or promote p. All other reasons are agent-relative” (Jeske (2008a), p. 10).

48 Another related difference is that I specify that the causal position must be the same one, while she does not.

49 While I think appealing to the idea of a causal position does help us distinguish between agent-neutral and relative reasons, it may need some qualification. For instance, say that A has a reason to help some other agent B that is based simply on being in a causal position to help B. Intuitively, it seems like this reason ought to be counted as agent-neutral. However, say that some other agent C has such a horrible history with B that if C were in A’s causal position he would have no reason to help B. Since there is some agent who wouldn’t have a reason to Φ if he were in A’s causal position, my definition would, counterintuitively, count A’s reason to Φ as agent-relative. One thing that might save me here is that we might say that the proper analysis of the scenario is that C would have a reason to
Agent-neutral and relative value can be defined in a similar fashion. Here the basic idea is that agent-neutral values are those that are shared by all agents. (They are, consequently, sometimes called ‘impersonal’ values.) More specifically, we can say that an agent-neutral value is one such that any agent who is in a causal position to realize it has the same reason to do so. In the drowning child example, the value of saving the child therefore would be agent-neutral since any individual who is in a causal position to save the child has the same reason to do so.

Ethical egoism provides a clear example of what an agent-relative value looks like. If one is an ethical egoist, i.e., believes that each person ought to act in his or her own self-interest and no other (non-instrumental) moral reasons exist, then one believes that there are no values that are shared by all agents. Each agent has a different end, namely, promoting his or her own welfare. Even if another agent were in a causal position to promote your welfare, he or she would not have any reason to do so.

This definition of agent-neutral value, however, needs to be broadened a bit since it refers only to reasons to promote the value. This is not a problem for those who believe that promotion is the only type of response to value we have reason to take, a view that I, following T. M. Scanlon, call the “teleological” view.50 (I discuss this view in more detail in Chapter 5.) But if we want to countenance the possibility that we have reason to respond to value in other ways (as I do), the definition needs to make room for this possibility. Therefore, here is my final, broader definition:

\[\text{help B if he were in A’s causal position. It would simply be outweighed by his reasons not to help B. In any case, I will set this worry to the side since I believe that the definition in the main text is sufficiently precise for my purposes.} \]

Agent-neutral value: a value which each agent would have the same reason to respond to in a particular way, e.g., promote, respect, or honor, if he or she were in a causal position to so respond. All other values are agent-relative.

In classical utilitarianism, happiness is an agent-neutral value, then, since each agent has the same reason to promote it. Given one type of interpretation, humanity also functions as an agent-neutral value for Kant since each agent has the same reason to respect it.\(^5\)

One essential feature of my definitions of both agent-relative value and reason is that they allow space for relationship-based values and reasons. This is notable since theorists often think of agent-relative values and reasons as being those that are based on an individual’s personal projects or interests, like my reason to watch the Twins.\(^6\) In fact, Christine Korsgaard objects to the agent-neutral/relative dichotomy because she thinks it leaves no place for “intersubjective” reasons.\(^7\) However, if we adopt my more capacious definition of agent-relative reasons, then agent-relative reasons can be based on interpersonal as well as personal considerations. For instance, a sister’s relationship with her brother can give her an agent-relative reason to help him move. This would be the case, by my definition of agent-relative reasons, if not every agent would have the same reason to help him move if he or she were in the sister’s causal position.

This kind of agent-relative reason seems to be just the type that Korsgaard has in mind when she says that intersubjective reasons “supervene on the relationships of people who interact with

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\(^5\) Barbara Herman, among others, has argued for this type of interpretation. See Herman (1993), ch. 10.

\(^6\) See, for example, Scheffler’s discussion of “agent-centred prerogatives” in *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Scheffler (1994), especially p. 14).

\(^7\) More specifically, she objects to Nagel’s description of deontological reasons as agent-relative since deontological reasons are always shared reasons. They cannot be the personal property of individual agents. Instead, they supervene on the relationships of people who interact with one another. They are intersubjective reasons. (Korsgaard (1996b), p. 298) She goes on to note that she believes that the category of agent-neutral reasons also fails to capture the nature of these reasons, so she thinks that we should drop the distinction altogether (pp. 275-6 and 300-1).
each other.”54 But, more importantly, it is the type of agent-relative, relationship-based reason that I will argue a theory ought to appeal to if it is to capture our intuitive understanding of relationship-based responsibilities.

4.3b: An Agent-Relative View of Relationship-Based Responsibilities

In this section, I sketch the basic features of an agent-relative view of relationship-based responsibilities before using Keller’s agent-neutral “special goods” to illustrate why an agent-relative view matches our intuitions more closely.

The basic idea of an agent-relative view of relationship-based responsibilities is that both our special responsibilities for our friends and family members and the value of the relationships from which they stem are agent-relative. In the last section, I provided a definition of agent-relative reasons, not responsibilities, but agent-relative responsibilities have the same form. If a parent has a responsibility to look after his child that other individuals would not share even if they were equally capable of doing so, then his responsibility is agent-relative. Different types of explanation of this responsibility are possible. In the next chapter, I argue that fulfilling such responsibilities is required to respect the value of one’s relationships. A teleologist, i.e., one who believes that we have reason only to promote value, would argue that one ought to fulfill such responsibilities to promote the value of one’s relationships. In either case, though, the value of the relationship would be agent-relative since not every agent would have a responsibility to respond to its value in the prescribed way, even if they were causally positioned to do so.

Since it is part of commonsense morality to hold that we have special responsibilities for our friends and family members that we do not have for others, it may seem obvious that a theory needs to incorporate agent-relativity to explain this feature. However, Keller’s special

54 Ibid., p. 298.
goods view of filial duties offers a clever way of explaining this feature that does not rely on the concept of agent-relativity. I will argue that his view is ultimately counterintuitive, but looking at it more closely will allow us to better understand exactly why agent-relative views are preferable.

As I have said, Keller’s main idea is that there are certain “special goods” “which the parent can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the child, or the child can receive from no one (or almost no one) but the parent.” In the last chapter, I mentioned that one example he gives of such a good is the “good of having your child, the one you raised, love and care about, make an effort to stay in touch.” Since only the parent’s child is able to provide this good, Keller can claim that any agent who is in a causal position to provide this good has a duty to do so but still maintain that only the child in fact has a duty to provide it. Therefore, Keller can interpret these special goods as agent-neutral and still be able to explain why only children possess certain types of special responsibilities. Moreover, if Keller were to adopt this analysis of the example, the child’s duty to provide the special good would also count as agent-neutral. It would be based simply on the privileged causal position she inhabits. If another person were in this position, he or she would have the same duty.

So far, then, both agent-neutral and agent-relative views are on equal footing. However, the advantage of incorporating agent-relativity into one’s theory becomes clear when we tease apart one’s ability to provide another with a special good from the fact that one shares a relationship with her. Most of the cases that Keller mentions lump these two features together. As in the above example, they are cases in which we can provide another with a special good in virtue of the relationship we share with her. We can provide our parents with the good of having

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56 Ibid., p. 266.
someone whom they raised stay in touch with them only because we have a prior relationship with them. In these cases, it’s not immediately clear what role the relationship is playing. Is it merely causal—it puts the child in a privileged causal position to provide her parent with this good? Or is it normative—it gives the child a duty to provide this good that is not based merely on her causal position? If it’s the former, Keller can stick to an agent-neutral view. Anyone who inhabited the daughter’s causal position would share her reasons. But if it’s the latter, then we’re committed to an agent-relative view. The daughter’s reasons to provide the good meet the criteria for agent-relativity.

To see which of these analyses is preferable, then, it will help to look at cases in which the ability to provide another with special goods and the existence of a relationship with her come apart. There are two relevant possibilities: first, one can provide another with a special good but does not share a relationship with her and, second, one can provide another with a generic (non-special) good and shares a relationship with her.

Keller himself provides an example of the first sort, a case in which only one person has the skills to cure a malady, and claims that the person does not have a responsibility to cure each sufferer. This claim seems to be right, especially if the malady is a relatively benign one like male pattern baldness. Moreover, it seems that other cases of this sort yield the same intuition. For instance, say that a rock star can provide thousands of people with the good of having their favorite rock star personally call them. While I grant that she has reasons to call each one of them (and not just self-interested ones like those based on drumming up more album sales), it seems clear that she doesn’t have duties to do so. This intuition seems to hold up even if we

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57 I take the term ‘generic’ good from Keller (ibid., p. 266).
shrink the size of the tasks in the examples. Does it seem that she has a duty to call just a few of her fans, here and there, when she has the time? It seems to me that the answer is still ‘no.’

These cases, then, tell against the idea that relationships play a merely causal role in the explanation of relationship-based responsibilities. Indeed, Keller himself uses this sort of example to show why being able to provide someone with a special good is not sufficient to possess a special duty. He adds that the individuals must also be in a reciprocal relationship.59

We can now see that to admit that this sort of criterion is needed is to admit that a view of relationship-based responsibilities needs to incorporate agent-relativity.

Cases of the other sort reinforce this conclusion. That is, in several cases it seems that we ought to provide our friends and family members with goods even when they are generic. For example, a child may feel as if she ought to get her homebound father’s groceries for him, even though others are also able to his shopping. Or, to return to an earlier example, if one’s sibling is moving across town, one may think that he ought to offer to help her move, even if he knows that much better movers are willing to help. One could make a case that special goods exist even in these sorts of examples—for instance, only his daughter can provide the father with the good of having his daughter buy his groceries for him—but it seems to me that these claims will start to seem more forced as we consider a broader range of examples. What if, as in my earlier example, the father has Alzheimer’s and doesn’t know who is buying his groceries?

59 Keller states that it seems “likely...that there is a general moral principle, combining considerations of the provision of special goods with considerations of reciprocity, under which the special goods theory can be drawn.” (Keller (2006), p. 273). For his case of filial duties, this means that the facts that a child can provide his or her parents with special goods and has already received goods from them together justify his or her filial duty. This claim seems rather appealing because these facts do seem relevant to the existence of filial duties. For example, the facts that my mother has done so much for me and that I can make her happy by staying in touch seem to be good reasons to think I have a duty to stay in touch with her. However, this view is ultimately unconvincing. As I argued in Chapter 1, appealing to reciprocity on its own is not a successful strategy because our filial responsibilities differ in structure than transactionally based ones. As Keller himself argues in the same article, transactional obligations like showing gratitude vary according to the size of what one has received or the extent of the other’s sacrifice. Yet “[y]our duty to look after your father in his old age is not mitigated by his having found parenting so much fun” (Keller (2006), p. 260). I do not see, then, why combining these two problematic explanations creates one unproblematic one. At minimum, we have reason to investigate whether another, stronger explanation exists.
In any case, it seems that when we combine these examples with those of the other type, we have at least some reason to believe that relationships play more than merely causal roles in the explanation of relationship-based responsibilities. The examples show that an agent-relative view can more closely match our intuitions about which responsibilities we have and which we do not. In the first kind of case, an agent-neutral view would hold that we have responsibilities when we think we do not, and in the second it would hold that we do not have them when we think we do.

One final strength of agent-relative views is that they open up a promising route for explaining our sense that in some cases we ought to fulfill our special responsibilities even when we can do more good elsewhere. As I explained in Chapter 2, the elderly parent example seems to be a case of this sort. For instance, we might think that a child ought to visit his elderly parent even if for the same price he could instead buy tickets for three other children to visit their parents. Adopting an agent-relative view enables us to justify this intuition without implausibly claiming that the child’s relationship with his parent has more agent-neutral value than the others. We can say that although each of the relationships has an equal amount of agent-neutral value, the child’s relationship with his parent has agent-relative value for him, while the other children’s relationships with their parents do not. (And this agent-relative value is the source of his special responsibility.) On the other hand, if one appeals to only agent-neutral value, as the SGV does, this sort of intuition becomes hard to justify. Therefore, this kind of example, which seems to be fairly prevalent in commonsense morality, shows another area in which we have reason to think agent-relative views will match our intuitions more closely.

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60 See section 2.2.
61 See my criticism of the SGV on this score in section 2.2.
Therefore, we have several reasons to adopt a theory of relationship-based responsibilities that involves agent-relativity. However, these reasons do not tell us which kind of agent-relative view to adopt. Although those who defend teleological views of morality often reject the idea of agent-relativity, they need not. In fact, several contemporary teleologists, including Amartya Sen and Douglas Portmore,62 defend views that include agent-relativity. As we saw earlier in this section, a teleologist could, for instance, justify the child’s special responsibility in the above example by arguing that the agent-relative value of his relationship with his parent gives him an agent-relative responsibility to promote her welfare.

This sort of view would stick closer to our commonsense understanding of special obligations than agent-neutral teleological views do. However, as I argue in the next chapter, agent-relative teleological views cannot provide a plausible explanation of why our relationship-based responsibilities are agent-relative. My Respect View can.

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62 See Sen (1982) and (1983), and Portmore (2001) and (2005). In chapter 1 of Weighing Goods, John Broome provides a clear description of how teleological views can accommodate the idea of agent-relativity, but he does not state that he subscribes to such a view (Broome (1991)).
**Chapter 5: Recognition Respect and Relationship-Based Responsibilities**

The idea that in some cases we ought to respect, rather than promote, value has recently been developed by non-consequentialists of many stripes, including T. M. Scanlon, Elizabeth Anderson, and Timothy Chappell.\(^1\) While the idea of respecting value has gotten a fair bit of attention more generally, it’s been largely overlooked in the literature on relationship-based responsibilities. Instead, as we have seen, proponents of relationship-based views either rely on the idea of promotion (Keller), identity (e.g., Sandel), or valuing (Scheffler, on one interpretation) to explain the link between the value of a relationship and a responsibility, or provide no explanation at all (Ross and Scheffler, on the other interpretation).\(^2\) In this chapter, I argue that understanding relationship-based responsibilities as means of respecting the value of relationships provides the best way of explaining this link. More particularly, I argue that fulfilling our special responsibilities for our friends and family members is often required to fulfill our duty to have a particular type of respect for them, what Stephen Darwall has termed ‘recognition respect.’

This argument builds on previous chapters in several ways. Most importantly, since I argued in favor of an agent-relative, value-based view in the last chapter, I restrict my focus in

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\(^1\) See Scanlon (1998), ch. 2, Anderson (1993), ch. 1, and Chappell (2004). They each use the idea in the course of defending their different types of non-consequentialism: Scanlon’s contractualism, Anderson’s neo-Kantianism, and Chappell’s natural law theory.

\(^2\) Exceptions do exist. I discuss one exception, Niko Kolodny’s “resonance” view, in Chapter 6. Another is Seth Lazar’s recent work. Lazar’s “Appropriate Response” view of relationship-based duties, like mine, draws on Scanlon and Anderson’s ideas. However, like Scanlon, Anderson, and Chappell, he appeals to several different appropriate responses, while I focus on respect. I restrict my focus to respect since, as will become clear, respect has features that make it particularly well suited to explaining special responsibilities. If it were shown that other responses also contain these features, they would also be able to explain special responsibilities. But in that case they would count as types of respect, as I am understanding the concept. Moreover, Lazar concentrates on applying his view to the topic of war and one’s duties to his or her compatriots, while my focus is on personal relationships. See Lazar (forthcoming).
this chapter to showing the advantages of my view over other agent-relative, value-based ones. Moreover, although intuitionist and identity-based views meet these two criteria, I do not focus on them here since I have already shown what their weaknesses are in Chapter 3. (However, I do briefly indicate why we should think my view superior to them in the conclusion to the chapter.) Instead, I take an agent-relative teleological view as my main opponent. As I noted at the end of the last chapter, I have not yet shown that my view is superior to such a view, and since the dominant view in ethics is that we ought to respond to value by promoting it, the agent-relative teleological view deserves close attention.

My argument proceeds in three stages. First, in section 5.1, I explain and distinguish the concepts of promotion and recognition respect. Next, in section 5.2a, I explain what the main features of my Respect View are. Finally, in section 5.2b, I argue that my view is both more intuitive and provides a better explanation of agent-relativity than an agent-relative teleological view.

5.1: Promotion and Recognition Respect, in Relief

To see why the Respect View is superior to agent-relative teleological views, we first need a more precise accounting of the differences between promoting and respecting value. In section 5.1a, I briefly describe the concept of promotion. In section 5.1b, I provide a more detailed description of recognition respect. My description of recognition respect focuses on those features that make it better equipped than promotion to explain special responsibilities.
5.1a: Promotion

As I indicated in the last chapter, I call views that hold that promotion is the only appropriate response to value ‘teleological’ and those who espouse such views ‘teleologists.’ (The ‘only appropriate response to value’ is a more economical way of saying ‘the only response to value we ever have reason to take.’) Philip Pettit has argued that this claim in fact defines consequentialism, but since even some self-described non-consequentialists, like Thomas Nagel, accept it, I opt for the other term that theorists, including Pettit, sometimes use to refer to views of this sort.

The moniker ‘teleological’ also seems fitting since the concept of promotion is connected to that of an end. The basic idea of promoting a value is that to promote a value is to try to realize it. Promoting a friend’s happiness, for example, involves trying to make it the case that she is happy. The concept of promotion is connected to that of an end since if one adopts an end, such as his friend’s happiness, then he promotes it. (However, one can promote a value without adopting it as an end; one can promote a value simply as a means.)

In addition to these basic features, theorists often attribute others to promotion. For instance, theorists sometimes equate promoting a value with trying to increase it in some way or other, perhaps its intensity, frequency, or duration. However, this feature is not essential to the concept. It seems that a person would still be promoting his friend’s happiness if he tried to help her simply maintain her level of happiness in the face of difficult circumstances, such as being turned down for a job promotion. To promote a value in some circumstances, then, one can

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3 “Consequentialism is the view that whatever values an individual or institutional agent adopts, the proper response to those values is to promote them” (Pettit (1991), p. 231). See also Pettit (1997).
5 Pettit (1991), p. 230. See also Scanlon (1998), especially pp. 79-87. However, others, most notably Rawls, characterize teleological views in a somewhat different manner. See Rawls (1999), pp. 21-4. (Rawls notes on p. 22 that he in fact takes his definition of teleological theories from W. K. Frankena’s Ethics (Frankena (1963), p. 13).)
merely contribute to stopping the value from decreasing. (Equating promoting a value with trying to realize it is not problematic in the same way. Although the individual in this example has not tried to increase his friend’s happiness, he has tried to help realize a certain level of happiness.)

Additionally, teleologists may argue that promoting a value means agent-neutrally promoting it, but, as we saw in the last chapter, the concept of agent-neutrality can also be shorn from the concept of promotion. For instance, it’s conceptually possible to have a duty to promote one’s own parents’ welfare. Likewise, although many regard promotion as involving maximization, maximization too is not essential to promotion. For example, if a person is considering buying two different gifts for his friend and he expects that one will make her happier, then he can promote her happiness by buying either gift but he can maximally promote her happiness only by buying the gift that will make her happier.

I will therefore resist the urge to attribute additional features to promotion and take the basic definition as the complete one. That is, as I will use the term, to promote a value is to try to realize it, full stop. With this definition in hand, we can now better understand the definitive feature of teleological views: the claim that the only appropriate response to (non-instrumental) value is to promote it.

5.1b: Recognition Respect

Although commonsense morality seems to recognize several alternatives to promotion, including love, honor, care, and respect, I will focus my attention on respect since I believe it is the key to finding a more compelling view of relationship-based responsibilities. Even more

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specifically, I believe that a certain type of respect, what Stephen Darwall has called “recognition respect,” is the crucial concept. Therefore, in this section, I delineate the features of recognition respect that are most important for my view of relationship-based responsibilities. First, I distinguish recognition respect from promotion by appealing to the different intentions agents have when they respect and promote values. Then, I detail three ways in which recognition respect can be interpersonal.

The idea that we can be required to respect certain types of value has its roots in Kant’s *Groundwork*, where he argues that “humanity” has dignity, which is “above all price,” and so must be treated with respect. Contemporary Kantians like Barbara Herman have argued that claims like these show that value plays a central role in Kant’s ethical theory, and other contemporary theorists have picked up on and further developed the idea that respect, rather than promotion, is sometimes the appropriate response to certain values. Scanlon, for example, argues that teleological views overlook other appropriate responses to values, including respect.

However, the term ‘respect’ can mean different things to different people, so it’s important to be clear about what I mean by it. We can begin to get a handle on the distinctive features of the concept I have in mind by focusing on the nature of the value of humanity, the value that theorists still refer to most often when they are discussing respect. Unlike a person’s happiness, his or her humanity, as it is often, and I think rightly, understood, cannot be diminished or increased by anything (or virtually anything) that he or she does. On the Kantian view, individuals have humanity simply in virtue of being rational beings, which is a status that

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7 *Groundwork* 434-5. (All references to the *Groundwork* include the Prussian Akademie pagination and use the Ellington translation). See also Kant’s discussion at *Groundwork* 393-5 where he describes a good will as having “absolute value” which he famously argues would “like a jewel, still shine by its own light as something which has full value in itself” even if it does not achieve its purposes.


9 Scanlon (1998), ch. 2.
is neither earned by performing rational acts nor lost by performing irrational ones. Indeed, one does not even become more or less of a rational being by performing rational or irrational acts. In short, it’s not a status that’s merited by particular things we do. Instead, we possess the status in virtue of our nature as rational beings.

Consequently, when Kantians say that we ought to respect someone’s humanity, they clearly have something different in mind than promoting it. For instance, telling the truth to someone is one of Kant’s examples of respecting someone’s humanity, but it is a mistake to interpret Kant as saying that telling someone the truth promotes his humanity in any way. Telling someone the truth neither makes him more of a rational being nor serves to protect him from threats to his status as a rational being. For Kant, we remain rational beings no matter how many times we are lied to. Therefore, on this common understanding of respect, respecting and promoting value obviously differ.

We can more precisely characterize the difference by considering Darwall’s concept of recognition respect. Unlike “appraisal respect,” recognition respect is not earned through one’s actions. Instead, it involves recognition of an individual’s status and the type of treatment he or she is due in virtue of that status. More specifically, in “Two Types of Respect,” Darwall writes that recognition respect “consists, most generally, in a disposition to weigh appropriately in one’s deliberations some feature of the thing in question and to act accordingly.”

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10 Others would argue that individuals have humanity in virtue of being human beings, not rational beings, but I will stick to Kant’s well-known correlation of humanity with rationality when explaining the idea. I don’t mean to endorse the Kantian view over any other.

11 I won’t go further than this in interpreting what Kant means by humanity, but contemporary Kantians do have much more to say about what is required to possess humanity. See, for example, Tamar Schapiro’s “What is a Child?” (Schapiro (1999)).

12 Darwall (1977), p. 38. In fact, Darwall would say that the type of respect moral theorists refer is the narrower concept of moral recognition respect. I have provided Darwall’s most general definition in the main text for the sake of simplicity. As Darwall explains, moral recognition respect is the appropriate response to a more limited set of features: “some fact or feature is an appropriate object of [moral recognition] respect if inappropriate consideration or weighing of that fact or feature would result in behavior that is morally wrong” (ibid., p. 40).
in question is someone’s status as a person, i.e., her humanity, then having recognition respect for her requires weighing her status as a person appropriately in one’s deliberations and acting accordingly.

It’s important to note that in order weigh appropriately an individual’s status as a person in one’s deliberations, one must perceive not only that she is a person, but also how this feature ought to impact one’s deliberations. One does not have recognition respect for another as a person if one, for example, thinks that one ought to kill her simply because she is a person. One way of dealing with this issue is to specify that having recognition respect involves perceiving not only that someone or something has a particular feature but also what the value of this feature is. Having recognition respect for someone as a person, then, would involve recognizing that she is a person and that being a person has value “above all price.” Recognizing these facts is incompatible with thinking that one ought to kill her in virtue of her status as a person.\(^\text{13}\) Since I am focused on recognition respect as a response to value, I will adopt this understanding of recognition respect.

The “acting accordingly” aspect of Darwall’s definition could also use some spelling out. I will discuss some of the specifics of what “acting accordingly” involves in different situations below, but we can already see what the general idea is. Since, as Darwall also puts it, “this kind of respect consists in giving appropriate consideration or recognition to some feature of its object"

\(^{13}\) Robin Dillon, however, disagrees. She writes, “[I]t is not sufficient simply to gloss recognition respect as recognizing the value of the object, for one can recognize the value of something and yet not value it, as an insurance appraiser does, or take the value of something, say, a person’s child, into account in deliberating about how best to revenge oneself on that person.” Instead, she argues, “Respect for some categories of objects is not just a matter of taking the object’s value into consideration but of valuing the object, and valuing it intrinsically” (Dillon (2010), section 1.2). However, it seems to me that one has not actually perceived a person’s value if one views her as an insurance appraiser does or sees her as a means for exacting revenge. In both cases, I would say that one recognizes the value that other people place on her, but does not actually see her as having this value. Carving things up in this way allows me to handle cases, like the divorce one I mentioned in section 4.2a, in which one ought to respect the value of a relationship even though one does not actually value the relationship.
in deliberating about what to do,”¹⁴ we can say that, most basically, “acting accordingly” involves acting in a way that reflects that one has in fact given appropriate consideration to the feature in one’s deliberations, where for me the feature includes the feature’s value. Or, as I will more commonly put it, to act accordingly is to act in a way that reflects that one has recognized someone or something’s value.¹⁵ If, as I have claimed, attempting to kill someone shows that one has not in fact accurately recognized her value as a person, then attempting to kill her is not “acting accordingly.”

While these basic features of recognition respect are important pieces of the concept, they do not distinguish it from promotion, for promotion also involves recognizing a particular feature’s value and acting accordingly. For example, one could recognize that another person is rather unhappy and that therefore one should try to cheer him up. In this case, one recognizes a particular feature (his level of happiness) and its current value (rather low), and acts accordingly (tries to increase it).

Instead, to determine whether an agent is promoting or respecting a value, we need to look to his or her intention in acting. As we have seen, to promote a value is to try to realize it. Therefore, when promoting a value, an agent intends to realize it. When respecting a value, however, one need not intend to increase the value or even protect it. As with the value of humanity, one might think that the thing’s value will remain the same just about whatever one does. Rather, one’s intention is to act in a way that befits the thing’s value, where, in keeping with my definition of “acting accordingly,” to act in a way that befits a thing’s value is to act in a way that reflects that one recognizes its value. To further illustrate the contrast, we might say that when we respect a value we take it as a fixed point in our deliberations. The question is:

¹⁵ I believe that these formulations are equivalent since I believe that accurately recognizing someone or something’s value includes knowing how it ought to impact one’s deliberations.
how ought I to act in light of this value? On the other hand, when we promote a value, we view it as dynamic. The question then is: how can I make it more valuable or prevent it from becoming less valuable?

While these two attitudes are theoretically distinct, they are often closely entwined in practice. For instance, if one sees that promoting someone’s welfare is a means of respecting her—as in the panhandler example I describe below—then one can intend to promote someone’s welfare in virtue of intending to respect her. Yet, in this kind of case, one intends to promote her welfare only as a means of respecting her. Another possibility is that one foresees that respecting someone will also increase her welfare, e.g., make her happier, but does not intend to increase her welfare. In this case, one would not be promoting her welfare since promotion requires trying to realize a value.

However, it’s also possible to have both of these intentions when performing one action, without either intention being merely a means for achieving the other. For example, when we help someone in need, we may have distinct aims. We may both wish to help the needy individual and express that we recognize his worth as a person or, as I will argue in section 5.2a, my brother, father, or friend. For instance, I once had a panhandler shout “I’m a person too!” at me and a crowd of fellow passers-by. In this exclamation we see, first and foremost, a desire to be recognized as a fellow person. However, it was also certainly a plea for help. In fact, his calling attention to his status as a fellow person may simply have been his strategy to elicit the most donations possible. That is, it might have been merely a strategy to direct our attention to his destitute condition. But it needn’t have been. He may indeed have wanted to receive two different things from passers-by: recognition as a fellow person and the money itself. By giving
him money, we could have had either or both of these intentions as well. That is, we could have aimed to either respect him, promote his welfare, or both.

Of course, the clearest way to distinguish respect from promotion is to focus on cases in which these attitudes prompt one to perform different actions. For example, one might think that one can promote someone’s welfare by helping her find a job, but refrain from doing so out of respect for her (especially if she indicates that she does not want one’s help). However, it seems to me that in many cases, especially ones involving relationship-based obligations, respecting a value requires us to increase or protect it. Therefore, it’s important to see how these attitudes remain distinct even in such cases.

In addition to showing that a complete definition of recognition respect needs to include reference to an agent’s intention, the panhandler example also demonstrates that one more component is missing from Darwall’s definition of recognition respect in “Two Kinds of Respect.” As Darwall himself has noted in his more recent work, his earlier definition omits the interpersonal component of respect.\(^{16}\) I have argued that one of the main deficiencies of existing theories of special responsibilities is their inability to provide a compelling explanation of the directed nature of these responsibilities,\(^ {17}\) so identifying just how respect is interpersonal is central to my project. We can start to get a grasp on what this interpersonal component is by noting that the panhandler’s desire to be recognized as a fellow person by us passers-by is not merely a desire that we accurately perceive his value as a person and modify our actions in light

\(^{16}\) Darwall (2006), pp. 130-1. Darwall actually calls this component “second-personal,” rather than “interpersonal.” I opt for “interpersonal” since “second-personal” is a term of art for Darwall that is laden with his theoretical commitments, some of which I wish to avoid. For example, Darwall links the second-personal component of respect to accountability: “To respect someone as a person is not just to regulate one’s conduct by the fact that one is accountable to him, or even just to acknowledge the truth of this fact to him; it is also to make oneself or be accountable to him, and this is impossible outside of a second-personal relation” (Darwall (2006), p. 142). However, I want to leave open the possibility that respect can have an interpersonal component even when the other person is not someone one can be accountable to, like, perhaps, someone in a persistent vegetative state.

\(^{17}\) See sections 2.2, 3.4, and 4.2a.
of it. The panhandler wants us to do more than adopt a particular attitude. Importantly, he also wants us to express this attitude to him. Or, we can also say, he believes that having respect for him involves not just seeing him as a fellow person but acknowledging that he is one. Unlike merely recognizing someone or something’s value, acknowledging someone’s value requires addressing one’s attitude to him or her. Importantly, addressing one’s attitude to another does not require that one succeed in communicating this attitude to him or her. For example, one can address a homeowner with respect by walking around, rather than through, his well-tended garden even though he is not around to witness one’s action. In fact, one can address him with respect by sidestepping his garden even if one knows that he is not around to witness one’s action. As Darwall writes, “I take it that, unlike recognition, acknowledgment is always to someone, if only implicitly and if only to oneself.”\(^\text{18}\)

Sarah Buss’s distinction between indirect and direct acknowledgment helps characterize the interpersonal features of acknowledgement more precisely. In her article “Appearing Respectful: The Moral Significance of Manners,” she writes, “Very roughly: we indirectly acknowledge a person as respectworthy whenever we treat his interests and goals as constraints on our own most basic aims.”\(^\text{19}\) This is the type of acknowledgment at work in cases like the garden one in which we have no expectation of communicating to the other individual that we recognize his or her status. Direct acknowledgment, however, requires at least an intention to communicate to the other that one recognizes his or her status. Buss writes, “There is…more to treating someone with respect than accommodating our ends to his. It is also essential that we more \textit{directly} acknowledge that he is worthy of this accommodation; and in order to satisfy this

\(\text{19}\) Buss (1999), p. 802.
requirement, we must treat him *politely.*”\(^{20}\) She goes on to note that when we directly acknowledge someone, it is as if we are saying to her, “You are worthy of respect.”\(^{21}\) That is, one communicates to the other that one recognizes her value as a person.

In the above quotation, Buss states that it is “essential” to directly acknowledge someone in order to treat her with respect. While I believe this claim is mistaken, since it seems that there are cases like the garden one in which one can treat another perfectly respectfully while only indirectly acknowledging her, I think Buss is right that direct acknowledgment is required to treat others respectfully in some cases. For example, saying ‘please’ at the dinner table can be required to treat one’s fellow diners with respect. Or, it seems to me that in certain contexts one would treat a panhandler with disrespect if one just ignored his request for money. At least offering a polite refusal may be required to treat him respectfully. In these cases, anyway, Buss’s central conclusion that “appearing to respect people is essential to *really* respecting them”\(^{22}\) is right on.

However, Buss’s claim that being polite is the only way of directly acknowledging others\(^{23}\) overlooks at least one other method. As we saw in the panhandler example, we can also express that we recognize someone’s value as a person by helping him or her, a point that will be crucial for my explanation of relationship-based responsibilities. As I argued, giving the panhandler money could serve dual purposes: it could both help him advance his welfare and signify to him that one sees him as a fellow person, someone worthy of help. Indeed, we might see this fact as one of the main insights of the Kantian idea that respecting others requires

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 802.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 802.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 805.
\(^{23}\) “When we treat one another politely, we are directly expressing respect for one another in the only way possible” (ibid., p. 802).
making their ends our own. To do so expresses that one regards them as beings with a value “above all price.” This discussion has established two conclusions about direct acknowledgment that I will return to in the next section: first, directly acknowledging others is required to treat them respectfully in some but not all cases and, second, we can directly acknowledge others in at least two ways, being polite to them and helping them.

Expressing to another that one recognizes her status through directly acknowledging her is one way in which the attitude of respect can be directed to another individual. However, even in cases involving only indirect acknowledgment, like the garden example, one’s attitude of respect is still directed to the other person. We might say that one is “showing him respect” even if he is not around to witness the act. In my terminology, one is expressing to him that one recognizes his value as a person. Because one expresses this attitude to him, it qualifies as directed. One does not express only that one recognizes his value as a person, though. One also expresses how one sees one’s relationship with him, namely, as one of moral equality (in at least one sense). One expresses that one sees him as having the same value as oneself. The desire for this type of equality was implicit in how the panhandler I encountered framed his request for recognition, “I’m a person too!” Therefore, not only is one’s attitude directed to the other individual but the content of one’s attitude expresses an acknowledgment of the character of the interpersonal relationship between the two individuals. In both of these ways, one’s respect for him has an interpersonal character even though it does not require direct acknowledgment.

We have seen, then, that recognition respect can be interpersonal in three different ways: the attitude can be directed, the content of the attitude can acknowledge the character of one’s

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24 See, e.g., *Groundwork* 430.
25 Contrast, for example, my exasperation with the current heat wave. While I am exasperated *with* the heat wave, my exasperation is not addressed *to* the heat wave. It is a non-directed attitude.
interpersonal relationship, and one can directly express to another that one recognizes his or her status. Others may wish to argue that recognition respect is essentially interpersonal in one or more of these ways. (Darwall, in fact, denies this claim. He believes that some forms of recognition respect are not second-personal.\textsuperscript{26}) However, such an argument would take me away from my main purpose here. What is important for me is to capture the features of recognition respect that make it a particularly good candidate to serve as a foundation for relationship-based responsibilities. Therefore, if I show, first, that recognition respect has these interpersonal features in cases involving relationship-based responsibilities and, second, that they help explain the responsibilities, my job is done. The features that recognition respect has in other cases are outside my purview.

I take up these tasks in the next section and, moreover, argue that the features of recognition respect in Darwall’s initial definition—appropriately weighing something’s value in one’s deliberations and acting accordingly—also help us explain relationship-based responsibilities. Before moving on, though, I want to close this section by returning to the contrast between recognition respect and promotion. Earlier I argued that having recognition respect for someone or something requires intending to act in a way that befits its value. We can now see that in some (but not all) cases, acting in this way requires directly expressing to someone that one has recognized her value. How this particular intention distinguishes recognition respect from promotion is borne out most clearly when we consider a value like humanity that is not well-suited to being promoted. But even when promoting and respecting a particular value requires us to do some of the same things—as I mentioned above, they can both involve not destroying a value, protecting it, and helping it go well—we can still distinguish the two attitudes by looking to an agent’s intention. If she is respecting the value, her intention is to

\textsuperscript{26} Darwall (2006), p. 123. His example is recognizing someone as an epistemic authority.
act in a way that befits it; if she is promoting the value, her intention is to further and/or protect it. It ought to be clear then that these two responses are distinct and so cannot be shoehorned into the same conceptual category.

However, the real point of dispute with the teleologist is substantive, not conceptual. A teleologist may be perfectly happy to admit that when Kantians say that we should respect humanity, they have something much different than promotion in mind. What the teleologist would deny is that respect is ever the morally appropriate response to value. I will challenge this claim in the next section by presenting a view of relationship-based responsibilities based around the idea that we are required to respect the value of certain types of relationships.

5.2: Recognition Respect and Relationship-Based Responsibilities

When theorists discuss the moral requirement to respect others, they almost always have the requirement to respect others as fellow persons in mind. However, Darwall in his initial definition of recognition respect leaves open the possibility that we may owe respect to others in virtue of other features too. After mentioning Erving Goffman’s idea that individuals present various selves to others, he writes, “To fail to take seriously the person as the presented self in one’s responses to the person is to fail to give the person recognition respect as that presented self or in that role.”27 He goes on to give Rodney Dangerfield’s complaint that he “can’t get no respect” as a father or husband as an example. If we allow that we can be required to respect individuals in virtue of their having other valuable features like these, then recognition respect can form the backbone of a new type of view of relationship-based responsibilities. In section 5.2a, I explain the main features of just such a view, my own Respect View. Then, in sections 5.2b and 5.2c, I argue that my view is superior to agent-relative teleological views as well as

27 Darwall (1977), p. 38. He cites Goffman (1959) as the source of the “presented self” idea.
love- and care-based views. At the end of the section, I summarize the reasons for accepting my view over these views and others I have already considered.

5.2a: The Main Features of the Respect View

To begin to see how my view connects relationship-based responsibilities to recognition respect, consider once again the case of the child and his elderly mother. As I have argued, it seems that the child’s responsibility to look after his mother’s needs stems from the value or importance of his relationship with her. This way of putting the point focuses our attention on the importance of their relationship, but it also seems to fit with our commonsense understanding of the case to say that his mother has special importance for him. Or, although it sounds awkward, we could say that she has special value for him. That is, in addition to the value she has as a person, she has special value as her son’s mother. In Chapter 6, I defend the claim that being a participant in a relationship like this one does in fact make one specially valuable to the other participant(s) in the relationship, but for now it’s enough to note that this idea is part of our commonsense understanding of this kind of case. It does seem that parents have special value to their children and vice versa. Likewise, in any case in which we think that a relationship carries special value, it seems to capture our commonsense understanding equally well to say that the participants in the relationship have special value to each other.

When we characterize this sort of case in this way, the relevance of the idea of respecting value becomes clear. Respecting his mother might require the son to respect her both as a person and, as in the Rodney Dangerfield example, as a parent. However, if the mother’s special value is to play a role in justifying our commonsense understanding of relationship-based responsibilities, what the son must respect cannot simply be her status as a mother. If her status

28 See, for example, section 4.2a.
as a mother were the object of respect, then it seems that the respect that he ought to have for her would be no different than the respect he ought to have for any mother. But as we saw in section 4.3, part of our commonsense understanding of special responsibilities is that they are agent-relative. Children have special responsibilities for their own parents that they do not have for others’ parents. While the status of being a mother might have moral importance too—it seems appropriate, for example, to publicly recognize mothers on Mother’s Day—being one’s own mother seems to carry a special importance. For instance, I needn’t acknowledge every mother in the country on Mother’s Day (even if I could), but I ought to acknowledge my own. Therefore, unlike the values of being a mother or a person, the values that are relevant for special responsibilities are agent-relative, such as the value a person has as his mother, his sibling, or his friend.

With this general picture of what the kind of value involved in special responsibilities is like, we can now examine what having respect for it entails. As we saw in the last section, recognition respect, at its most basic level, involves accurately recognizing someone or something’s value and acting accordingly, that is, acting in a way that reflects that one has recognized its value. In the case of the son’s respect for his mother, that means accurately recognizing her value as his mother and acting in a way that reflects that he accurately recognizes her. In my subsequent discussion, I argued both that “acting accordingly” sometimes requires directly acknowledging that one recognizes the individual’s value and that helping someone can be a means of directly acknowledging him or her. Through helping the panhandler, for example, one can express to him that one sees him as a being with a value “above all price.” But there’s no reason to think that helping someone is restricted to expressing that one recognizes his or her value as a person. Indeed, it seems obvious that helping one person rather
than others can express that one sees the one person as more important than the others.\(^{29}\)

Looking after your own mother rather than others can express that she has special importance to you. Or taking the time out of your weekend to help your brother move, when you would not do so for just anyone, can express that he has special importance to you. Since these, of course, are cases that I have used as examples of relationship-based responsibilities that are recognized by commonsense morality, this argument shows that fulfilling relationship-based responsibilities can be a means of expressing that one recognizes a person’s special importance.

Moreover, since it is part of commonsense morality that individuals are right to think that their parents and siblings have special importance for them (and, as I have said, I am taking these commonsense intuitions at face value for now\(^{30}\)), we can say that in these cases you accurately recognize your mother and sibling’s special importance. Therefore, you meet both of the basic conditions for treating your mother and sibling with recognition respect: accurately perceiving their values and acting in a way that reflects that you recognize their value. This argument shows, then, that fulfilling relationship-based responsibilities can be a means of treating someone respectfully.

However, if we are to use this argument as a justification of relationship-based responsibilities, it is not sufficient to argue that helping someone can be a means of treating her respectfully. If an individual truly has a responsibility to help another, it needs to be the case that helping her is a necessary means of treating her respectfully.\(^{31}\) Otherwise, helping her would be

\(^{29}\) This claim is closely related to Scheffler’s idea that non-instrumentally valuing one’s relationship with someone involves seeing oneself as having reasons to show him or her partiality (Scheffler (2010b), p. 104). If, as I claimed in section 4.2, Scheffler’s basic idea is right, then we would expect that actually showing him or her partiality would express that one values the relationship.

\(^{30}\) As I said earlier, I defend the claim that these kinds of relationships do in fact have special value in Chapter 6.

\(^{31}\) I state that it must be a necessary means, rather than the only means, because it may be the case that fulfilling the responsibility is necessary but not sufficient for treating the other person respectfully. If, for example, one was rude to the other person while fulfilling the responsibility, one might not treat him or her respectfully. Cf. Stohr (2011), pp. 61-2.
merely optional. The individual would be free to choose this or any other means of treating her respectfully.

The general idea that helping someone can be required to treat her respectfully seems uncontroversial. It seems that, as Herman argues, respecting others requires us to help them in cases of easy rescue,\(^{32}\) like Peter Singer’s drowning child example. Given the facts that the child is drowning and that you can help him with very little sacrifice, it would be highly implausible for you to claim that you have acted in a way that reflects that you see him as a moral equal if you stood idly by. However, the cases I have focused on, like helping one’s sibling move, are not easy rescue ones. In these cases, it is more difficult to establish that helping the other person is required to treat him in a way that reflects that one recognizes his value. After all, it seems that there are many actions one can take to express to one’s family members that one sees them as having special importance.

The difficulty here parallels that of using Kant’s imperfect duty of beneficence to justify a duty to help someone in a particular case.\(^{33}\) In his influential article “Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation,” Thomas Hill argues that Kant’s wide imperfect duties, like beneficence, imply principles of action of the form, “Sometimes, to some extent, one ought to \(x\).” They therefore leave individuals latitude to choose when to perform the type of act in question: helping others, in the case of beneficence.\(^{34}\) Given this type of structure, it becomes difficult to see how individuals could be required to perform any particular helping action.

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\(^{32}\) See Herman, “Mutual Aid and Respect for Persons,” in Herman (1993). The duty of mutual aid that Herman defends actually requires us to help others in a broader range of cases than just easy rescue ones. She writes, “The needs for which a person may make a claim under the duty of mutual aid are those that cannot be left unmet if he is to continue in his activity as a rational agent. Thus we may refrain from helping only if such action would place our own rational activity in jeopardy” (67).

\(^{33}\) This part of my argument, but by no means only this part, is highly indebted to Karen Stohr, both through her article “Kantian Beneficence and the Problem of Obligatory Aid” (Stohr (2011)) and more generally as my teacher of Kantian ethics.

\(^{34}\) Hill (1992), pp. 156-7.
The key to overcoming this difficulty is to look past the structure of this principle of action to the underlying rationale for the principle of beneficence. As Hill makes clear in the same article, the structure of the duty of beneficence is due to the fact that at root it is a duty to adopt a maxim, not a duty to act in particular ways. Unlike perfect duties, like the duty not to lie, which enjoin us to “always (or never) act in certain ways,” imperfect duties require that we adopt maxims like “make the ends of others one’s own.” Adopting such a maxim can lead one to perform certain actions—making someone’s end your own can, for example, lead you to help her reach this end—but the duty itself is not a duty to perform (or abstain from) certain actions.

Instead, adopting the maxim in question here—making others’ ends one’s own—involves seeing others in a particular way, namely, as ends in themselves. This interpretation is supported by Kant’s remark in the *Groundwork* that “the ends of any subject who is an end in himself must as far as possible to be my ends also, if that conception of an end in itself is to have its full effect in me.” As I would put it, the idea of a person as an end in herself has had “its full effect in me” if and only if I have fully, i.e., accurately, recognized her value. And part of accurately recognizing a person’s value is recognizing that her ends have value too.

Conceiving of the duty of beneficence in this way allows us to see how it can require us to help others in specific situations. In particular, it requires us to help others in any case in which not helping them would express that one does not accurately recognize them as ends in themselves. As I earlier noted, it’s very plausible that easy rescue scenarios are such cases. But Karen Stohr convincingly argues that the duty of beneficence also requires individuals to help others in less dramatic scenarios. She gives the example of a person who can enable a group of elderly people to all board an elevator by simply pressing the button that holds the door open.

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36 Ibid., p. 156.
37 *G* 430.
She argues that if the person did not push the button, he would express an attitude of indifference to the group of elderly people and that this attitude is disallowed by Kant’s duty of beneficence. We can put her point in the terms I have used by saying that if he did not push the button, he would express that he does not accurately recognize them as ends in themselves.

Likewise, one can be required to help one’s parents and siblings in certain situations because not helping them would express that one does not accurately recognize their agent-relative value. If, for example, you are an accountant and your mother calls you with a simple question about her taxes, refusing to answer unless she pays your usual fee would express a lack of regard for her as your mother. More commonly, however, our special obligations to help our friends and family members are not obligations to perform any one particular action. Instead, we often have latitude to choose how we help. For example, if two siblings’ mother is physically disabled and they did not help her in any way, their failure to act would express that they did not recognize the value of their relationships with her. But even if we assume that they must make sure certain tasks are performed in order to acknowledge the value of their relationships with her, they could divvy up these tasks in several ways. They may agree that one will clean her apartment while the other buys her groceries or vice versa. Or they may agree that they will hire people to perform these tasks and instead spend more time simply visiting with her.

Indeed, I focus on special responsibilities, rather than the broader category of special obligations, just because, as I explained in Chapter 1, it seems that many of our special obligations to our friends and family members exhibit this particular type of structure. As I defined the term, a special responsibility is an obligation to look after (some aspect of) someone’s welfare that not every person possesses. A special responsibility therefore is not an

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39 See section 1.1.
obligation to perform an action. Instead, like the siblings’ obligations to their mother, a special responsibility requires an individual to pay special heed to someone’s welfare. We can now see that the duty of respect is well suited to explain special responsibilities. Showing respect for the value of our relationships with our friends and family members can require us to look after their welfare in the ongoing and rather indeterminate way characteristic of special responsibilities. Since, as I explained in more detail in section 1.1, commonsense morality holds that many of our special obligations to our friends and family members have this structure, it is an important strength of my view that it offers a natural explanation of why they exhibit this structure.

Before moving on, it will help to recap what the main features of the Respect View are. As we have seen, the main idea of the Respect View is that our relationship-based responsibilities for our friends and family members are based on our duty to respect the value of our relationships with them. Unlike the value of humanity, the values in question, e.g., the value someone has as *my* friend, are agent-relative. But like our duty to respect humanity, respecting the value someone has as my friend requires most basically that I recognize this value and take actions that reflect that I recognize the value. Acting in a way that reflects that I recognize the value of our relationship requires me to take an ongoing and rather open-ended interest in my friend’s welfare. And to be required to take an ongoing and rather open-ended interest in someone’s welfare just is to have a special responsibility for him or her. Moreover, as we have seen, the Respect View can also explain special obligations to perform particular actions. According to the Respect View, a person has a special obligation to perform an action if performing the action is required to express our respect for a friend or family member.
5.2b: The Case for the Respect View

Now that we have seen what the main features of the Respect View are, we are in position to see why it is superior to teleological views. I ended the last section by noting that one strength of my view is that it provides a compelling explanation of why special responsibilities are ongoing and open-ended. While this does give my view an advantage over some of its competitors, this is not one of the advantages it has over teleological views. As Keller shows, teleological views have at least one method for explaining why relationship-based responsibilities have this structure. As he argues, since many of the special goods that form the foundation of special obligations “depend on the existence of a continuing relationship,” his view “makes it easy to see why filial duties are ongoing and open-ended.”40 Rather, the Respect View is superior to Keller’s type of teleological view for two other reasons. First, as I argue in this section, the Respect View fits more closely with our intuitions about why we have relationship-based responsibilities. In the course of making my argument for this claim, I also show why the Respect View is preferable to love- and care-based views. Second, as I argue in section 5.2c, even if a teleological view holds that relationship-based responsibilities are agent-relative (and so avoids the problems with agent-neutral views that I delineate in section 4.3), the Respect View provides a much more compelling explanation of why they are agent-relative. Although some teleological views provide explanations of relationship-based responsibilities that are as intuitive as mine in several respects, I argue that my view provides a stronger explanation of the agent-relativity of these responsibilities than all teleological views.

When we reflect on cases in which we think we should look after our friends and family members’ welfare, it seems clear that in many cases we think we should do so because it expresses to them that we have special regard for them. As we saw in the homeless person

example, one’s intention when helping someone may be not only to promote his or her welfare but also to act in a way that expresses that one recognizes his or her importance. Many times when we do something for or give something to our friends and family members we act for both of these kinds of reasons, and in some cases it seems that the expression of respect is the primary reason for the action. Gift-giving is a case in point. When giving one’s mother a Mother’s Day present, it is, as the cliché goes, the thought that counts. Parents do not cherish their children’s rudimentary arts and crafts projects for their aesthetic value, but for what they say about how their children see them. While it is true that one ought to pick out a gift that one expects the other will enjoy, the point of doing so in the practice of gift-giving is to express one’s regard for the gift recipient. One shows one’s regard for the recipient by attending to his or her interests and tastes. I believe the concept of recognition respect captures what is going on in such cases. Through giving a friend or family member a gift and, what’s more, taking the time to choose a gift that he or she will like, one expresses that one recognizes the value of one’s relationship with him or her. One both accurately recognizes the relationship’s value and acts accordingly, that is, buys an appropriate gift.

Likewise, in cases in which we are inclined to say that someone has a duty to give another a gift, the duty seems to be to express that he recognizes the value of his relationship with the other individual. For example, we might admonish someone for his indifference if he forgot to get something for his mother for Mother’s Day. Unlike in Stohr’s elevator example, the indifference here is not a failure to recognize a person’s value as an end in herself. Instead, it’s a failure to recognize her value as his mother. We would criticize a parent for the same reason if she did not get her child a gift for his birthday. Indeed, the desire to show that they have the
appropriate level of regard for their children can lead parents down the dark road of “keeping up with Joneses” when it comes to birthday presents and parties.\footnote{For a detailed look at relational reasons to consume such as this one and their ethical ramifications, see Judith Lichtenberg’s article, “Consuming Because Others Consume” (Lichtenberg (1996)), and her book, \textit{Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology, and the Alleviation of Global Poverty} (forthcoming).}

One might understandably object to the claim that it is recognition \textit{respect} that is called for in such cases. After all, it is common parlance to call a gift a token of \textit{affection}, but it would be quite odd to call one’s gift to one’s child a token of \textit{respect}. One might think, then, that we ought to accept R. Jay Wallace’s recent claim that these are actually duties of love. In support of his view, Wallace appeals to the intuitive plausibility of the idea that there are \textit{reasons} of love. He refers to Niko Kolodny’s article “Love as Valuing a Relationship,” where Kolodny argues that being in certain kinds of relationships with others gives one “reasons for love,” i.e., reasons to love them,\footnote{Kolodny (2003), pp. 146-50. Wallace also mentions Harry Frankfurt as someone who defends the existence of reasons of love, but Wallace indicates that he prefers Kolodny’s view (Wallace (2012), p. 187). See Frankfurt (2004).} and that loving someone consists in part in believing that one has a reason to act in that person’s interest.\footnote{Kolodny (2003), p. 151. On this point, Kolodny agrees with Frankfurt. Frankfurt writes, “Loving someone or something essentially \textit{means or consists in}, among other things, taking its interests as reasons for acting to serve those reasons. It creates the reasons by which his acts of loving concern and devotion are inspired” (Frankfurt (2004), p. 37). Since Frankfurt argues that these reasons come from actually loving someone, his view is subject to the same objections I raise against Scheffler’s valuing view in section 4.2a. As I there argue, it seems that individuals can have relationship-based obligations even when they do not value the relationships in question.} While Kolodny stops short of claiming that being in a relationship of the requisite type actually gives one reasons to act in the other’s interest,\footnote{Kolodny (2003), p. 180. Wallace, however, mistakenly cites Kolodny’s article as supporting this claim (Wallace (2012), p. 187).} Wallace does make this claim. Moreover, he argues that once we accept the idea that we have reasons of love, we have no good reason to reject the idea that we have \textit{duties} of love.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 187-92. Wallace also gives two other reasons to support the idea that we have duties of love, both having to do with the intuitive plausibility of the idea (ibid., pp. 184-7).}

I resist adopting a love-based view for two reasons. First, although I admit that using the term ‘respect’ can seem odd in some of the cases in question, the term ‘love’ seems equally out
of place in others. We tend to use ‘love’ in the context of only quite close relationships, like those between parents and children and best friends. But, as David Owens notes, we are apt to think that relationship-based obligations are present in a much wider range of relationships. Owens plausibly claims that even if someone is merely an acquaintance, one “mustn’t forget his name or fail to recognize him in a public place.” Consider also the divorce case I raised in section 4.2a. As I characterized the case, the couple is getting divorced because one spouse no longer loves the other, or, as I there put it, no longer values her relationship with him. Nevertheless, as I argued, she might still have relationship-based obligations to him. It would be highly counterintuitive to class these as duties of love (since lack of love is the motivation for the divorce), but considering them to be duties of respect seems appropriate. They ought to have a special type of respect for one another in light of their history together. Consequently, it seems to me that our ordinary usage of the terms ‘love’ and ‘respect’ provides no reason to call these duties of love, rather than respect.

The consideration that tips the scales in favor of respect is that respect can be demanded of someone while love, as commonly understood, cannot. Both popularly and philosophically, love is regarded as an emotion that is not, or not fully, subject to rational control. One cannot simply decide to love someone. While one can decide to try to cultivate love for someone by, for example, consciously focusing on her positive features, at minimum love is not something that can be immediately willed into existence. For those of us who believe in the principle of ‘ought’ implies ‘can,’ love’s non-voluntary origin means that, unless we’re talking about duties

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47 Sad love songs are go-tos for expressions of support for this view. Consider Bonnie Raitt’s lament: “I can’t make you love me if you don’t/You can’t make your heart feel something it won’t.”
to try to cultivate love, duties of love are off the table. For instance, in the *Groundwork* Kant accepts the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor only because he interprets it as requiring “practical” and not “pathological” love. The distinguishing feature is that pathological love is a type of inclination, whereas practical love is not. Kant equates practical love with beneficence, which for him, of course, is at root a form of respect, not love.

My definition of recognition respect follows Kant in that it too does not involve an affective component. It simply requires that one recognize something’s value and intend to act in a way that reflects that one has recognizes it. Since these are things that can be demanded of competent moral agents, duties of recognition respect do fall within the strictures of ‘ought’ implies ‘can.’

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48 *Reasons* of love are a different story. As Kolodny argues, “[O]ne should not be blamed for loving or failing to love. This much follows from the fact that one cannot decide to love at all. Love is nonvoluntary. But it does not follow that there cannot be normative reasons for love, that love cannot be assessed as appropriate or inappropriate to its object” (Kolodny (2003), p. 138). Wallace fails to consider the ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ objection when he argues that if one accepts that reasons of love exist, one ought to also accept that duties of love exist (Wallace (2012), pp. 187-9). At times, it seems as though Wallace’s argument is that duties of love obtain only when one actually loves someone. If this is his view, it avoids the ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ objection, but then, like Frankfurt’s view, it falls prey to my objections in section 4.2a.

49 “For love as an inclination cannot be commanded; but beneficence from duty, when no inclination impels us and even when a natural and unconquerable aversion opposes such beneficence, is practical, and not pathological love. Such love resides in the will and not in the propensities of feeling, in principles of action and not in tender sympathy; and only this practical love can be commanded” (*G* 399). Notably, Kant does think we have a duty to cultivate sympathetic feelings for others (*Metaphysics of Morals* 457).

50 More precisely, one can demand that a competent moral agent *exercise her ability* to recognize a thing’s value. As Mark Murphy has pointed out to me, one cannot demand that someone actually recognize a thing’s value since recognizing a thing’s value involves a belief that the thing in fact has the value and beliefs are not voluntary. However, even though one cannot directly demand that a competent moral agent recognize a thing’s value, one can *indirectly* demand it. For so long as the case is clear enough—it’s not one in which reasonable moral disagreement exists, for instance—and the competent moral agent is currently functioning as a competent moral agent—she is not asleep or intoxicated, for instance—a competent moral agent is able to recognize a thing’s value (or so it seems to me). Therefore, in such cases, if a competent moral agent exercises her ability to recognize a thing’s value, she will actually do so. In such cases, then, by demanding that a competent moral agent exercise her ability to recognize a thing’s value, one indirectly demands that she actually do so. (In contrast, one cannot demand that an agent exercise her ability to love or care for someone. Exercising these abilities is not fully under one’s voluntary control.)
For the same reason, the Respect View is preferable to care-based views, where ‘care’ means care about someone.\textsuperscript{51} This is the sense of care we employ when we say that giving someone a gift “shows that you care.” Care, in this sense, is a disposition, and, like love, it is commonly thought not to be fully under one’s voluntary control. Harry Frankfurt, for example, argues that sometimes caring (or not caring) about something is a “volitional necessity.” In these cases, caring is not within our voluntary control.\textsuperscript{52} ‘Ought’ implies ‘can’ therefore impels me to reject duties of care along with duties of love. However, ideally, caring about someone accompanies having recognition respect for the relationship one shares with him or her. While children ought to have recognition respect for their parents, it is certainly better if they also care about them. In fact, it seems to me that children have a duty to try to develop the disposition of caring about their parents if they find that they lack it. The two concepts are also closely connected in other ways. Recognizing the value of one’s relationship to another may spur one to care about her, and it seems to me that caring about someone can make a relationship valuable so long as the care is mutual.\textsuperscript{53}

One final consideration in favor of the Respect View over love- and care-based views is that the Respect View provides a unified explanation of relationship-based obligations and the obligation we have to respect others simply as fellow persons. As I have argued, the features of recognition respect, including, most basically, recognizing the value of some feature and acting in a way that reflects that one has done so, are present whether the feature in question is

\textsuperscript{51} By a duty of care, one might also mean a duty to care for someone, i.e., look after his or her welfare. Given this understanding, a duty of care matches my definition for a responsibility, and so is the explanans for which my Respect View is the explanandum.

\textsuperscript{52} Frankfurt (1998), pp. 85-8.

\textsuperscript{53} In this respect, caring is similar to valuing. As I indicated in section 4.2a, it seems to me that one way that relationships gain value is through their participants mutually valuing them. Exactly how valuing and caring are related is a topic for another occasion, but see Kolodny’s argument in “Love as Valuing a Relationship” (Kolodny (2003)), where as the title suggests, he argues that loving someone is equal to valuing one’s relationship with him or her. His definition of love (see p. 151) may actually come closer to what we commonly regard as care.
someone’s status as a rational being, a family member, or a friend. If we restrict the category of respect to respect for someone’s autonomy, as ethical theorists often do, these commonalities are obscured.

Admittedly, respect for someone’s autonomy has a different tenor than respect for someone as a friend or family member. We tend to think of respect for autonomy as requiring us to allow others space to make decisions on their own, whereas the obligations I focus on here require us to help others out. One might then be tempted to follow the division Kant makes in the Metaphysics of Morals when he writes, “The principle of mutual love admonishes [rational beings] to come closer to one another; that of the respect they owe one another, to keep themselves at a distance from one another.” However, I believe the commonalities are strong enough, and overlooked often enough, to warrant classing both the respect and “practical love” principles Kant refers to here as types of respect. I am happy to allow that there are different types of respect, and it may be useful to call the type of respect I refer to here as “practical love” to highlight its differences from respect for autonomy. But it seems to me that Kant was right to assert in the Groundwork that this practical love remains at root a type of respect.

To summarize, the Respect View is superior to both love- and care-based views since only the Respect View, first, abides by the principle of ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ and, second, unites the explanation of relationship-based responsibilities with the duty to respect others as persons. We ought to prefer a unified explanation because, as I have shown, the duty we have to respect others as persons shares certain commonalities with the duties we have to others in virtue of their

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54 MM 449. See also Darwall’s division between respect and care in The Second-Person Standpoint (Darwall (2006), pp. 126-30).
55 My argument here also gives us reason enough to deny that respect always is agent-neutral or “subject universalizable,” as Kolodny claims (Kolodny (2003), p. 182). That is, if one individual has a reason to respect someone or something, everyone else does too. On my view, people have reasons to respect their friends and family members that others do not have.
status as friends and family members. This argument has also provided support for the first of my two claims against agent-relative teleological views, namely, that the Respect View provides a more intuitively compelling explanation of why we have relationship-based obligations. My gift-giving example illustrated the point that it seems that relationship-based responsibilities are based on the duty to show others respect as our friends or family members.

5.2c: Against the Consequentializer

However, this argument does not show that the Respect View provides a more intuitively compelling explanation of relationship-based responsibilities than all agent-relative teleological views. For a teleologist can concede that respect is what’s required in cases like the gift-giving one, but “consequentialize” the duty of respect by, for example, arguing that showing someone respect is required because it makes him or her happy. More generally, such a teleologist—I will call him or her a “consequentializer”—might argue that one ought to respect someone in order to promote his or her welfare. Indeed, a consequentializer might argue, à la Keller, that receiving respect from one’s friends and family members is a special good that only they can provide. In this section, I argue that the Respect View is superior to views that consequentialize the duty of respect and, indeed, all teleological views, because it provides a much more compelling explanation of why relationship-based responsibilities are agent-relative.

Before beginning this argument, however, I should note that the consequentializer’s concession that relationship-based responsibilities are based on showing others respect is a

56 It seems to me that this consequentializing strategy is the most natural one to take here. For instance, it fits with Joseph Raz’s method for explaining directed duties like this one. (Raz’s view is that duties are owed to a person “when their justification turns on the fact that they protect or promote an interest of the person to whom they are owed” (Raz (2010), p. 291). See my mention of Raz’s view in a different context in section 2.2.) However, this strategy is certainly not the only one available to a consequentializer. I consider a different consequentializing strategy below.
significant one. If this point is conceded, I have already accomplished quite a lot, whether or not
one consequentializes this duty. The consequentializer’s concession amounts to a rejection of
other extant relationship-based views in favor of the basic idea of the Respect View, that our
relationship-based responsibilities stem from a duty to show others respect. With that said, I do
believe that consequentializing arguments fail.

To see the problems with welfare-focused consequentializing arguments, i.e., arguments
that we ought to respect others to promote their welfare, we need to return to the idea of indirect
acknowledgment. As I argued in section 5.1b, in some cases, respecting others requires only that
we indirectly acknowledgment them. In these cases, one ought to respect someone else, but one
need not, cannot, or should not communicate one’s respect to him or her. My earlier example
involved walking around a neighbor’s garden when he is not around to witness one’s act. But for
a case that more clearly involves a relationship-based responsibility, imagine that the elderly
mother in my earlier example can no longer recognize her son due to advanced Alzheimer’s
disease or some other condition. In such a case, the intuition persists that the son ought to help
ensure his mother’s needs are attended to, even though he cannot actually communicate his
respect to her. However, we cannot explain the moral importance of his respect for her in terms
of its effect on her happiness because it has no such effect. More generally, it seems implausible
to claim that his respect for her impacts her welfare.

Other cases that require only indirect acknowledgment reinforce this point. For instance,
we cannot explain the intuition that we ought to maintain respect for deceased friends and family
members by referencing how respect positively affects their welfare (unless, that is, we adopt
Aristotle’s counterintuitive view that the actions of one’s friends and family members can affect
one’s welfare after one dies\textsuperscript{57}). Or, we might think that a person’s duty to respect her friend requires that she help her without allowing her to know that she has been helped, if we have reason to think that revealing the help’s existence would undercut its effectiveness. But it’s hard to see why receiving respect from her friend would have a positive effect on her welfare if she never learns that her friend has shown her respect. (In this case, the help \textit{qua} help would improve her welfare. What I am denying is that the help \textit{qua} expression of respect improves her welfare.)

Since the duty to respect our friends and family members seems to remain intact even when the respect itself provides no welfare benefits, we have reason to think welfare-focused consequentializing arguments are wrong: our duties to respect our friends and family members are based on something other than the welfare benefits of receiving respect. Moreover, given that I have already argued in the previous section that, intuitively, relationship-based responsibilities are based on a duty to respect friends and family members, this argument establishes that the Respect View has one advantage over welfare-focused teleological views in general: it provides a more intuitively compelling explanation of relationship-based responsibilities. Intuitively, the duty of respect is the foundation of our relationship-based responsibilities, and this duty is not based on the welfare benefits of showing our friends and family members respect.

However, the consequentializer needn’t argue that respect is good because of its welfare benefits. Instead, she might claim that treating people with respect is in itself good.\textsuperscript{58} Given this

\textsuperscript{57} See \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Book I, Chapter 11.

\textsuperscript{58} In his recent article “The Value of Duty” (Owens (2012), David Owens defends a consequentializing argument similar in some respects to this one. He argues that “relationship obligations” are based on the fact that possessing such obligations promotes an individual’s interests. For example, he claims that having an obligation to help a friend move is non-instrumentally good for an individual (pp. 205-6). He doesn’t specifically mention obligations to respect others, but if we apply his view to respect, we get the idea that we ought to respect our friends because having an obligation to respect them is in itself good (given that having an obligation to respect them is non-
view, even when someone does not realize that he is being treated with respect, his being treated with respect is still good. This consequentializing argument therefore can explain why we ought to treat people with respect even in indirect acknowledgment cases. In fact, I grant that by making this move the consequentializer would be able to develop a teleological view that provides an explanation of why we have relationship-based responsibilities that is just as intuitive as mine. Both explanations would track our intuition that relationship-based responsibilities are based on the special regard we owe our friends and family members. They would differ, however, in how they understand the duty to respect others. For the consequentializer, this duty would be a duty to promote the good of respecting one’s friends and family members. For the Respect View, the duty simply is to respect one’s friends and family members.

Notably, both of these duties are agent-relative. They are duties that agents have to their own friends and family members. The reason that the Respect View still is preferable to this kind of consequentializing view is that the Respect View can provide a stronger explanation of why these duties are agent-relative. Indeed, I believe that the Respect View’s explanation of agent-relativity is stronger than that of all teleological views. (Therefore, this is the second advantage it has over welfare-focused teleological views like Keller’s.)

I will begin with the more modest claim that the Respect View provides a stronger explanation of agent-relativity than welfare-focused teleological views. Indirectly, Owens’s view faces two other problems. First, by focusing on how one’s obligation promotes one’s own interests, his view is subject to the solipsism objection that I pressed against identity-based views in section 3.4. Intuitively, one’s obligations to one’s friends are based on how one’s actions affect them, not oneself. Second, Owens’s claim that our obligations to our friends are valuable in themselves is unconvincing. While it’s plausible to claim that helping one’s friends is in itself valuable, I do not see why we ought to accept Owens’s claim that being obliged to help one’s friends is in itself valuable. Rather, as I have argued, such obligations stem from the value of our relationships, but are not (necessarily) valuable in themselves. Owens claims that if we do not accept the idea that such obligations are valuable in themselves, we are “missing something” (p. 206); however, I see no reason to think he’s right.
acknowledgment cases once again help us see why this is the case. As I argued in section 4.3, we think that we ought to look after our own parents rather than someone else’s, even if we do no more good by focusing on our own. If we focus on indirect acknowledgment cases—for instance, say that two individuals both have parents who have such severe Alzheimer’s that they no longer recognize their children—then it’s easier to imagine how this situation could obtain. (Of course, other factors are relevant too. For example, a person’s own child is likely to have better knowledge of his wishes than someone else’s child. But, for the case in question, we can assume that these other factors even out. Perhaps the other person’s child has some prior experience working with Alzheimer’s patients, and his own child does not.) On my view, the child ought to look after her own parent since by doing so she fulfills her duty to act in a way that reflects the value of their relationship. Since the child’s relationship with the other parent carries no such value, my view picks out a morally relevant difference that can explain why she ought to look after her own parent. In contrast, the addition of agent-relativity to a welfare-focused teleological view is bound to be ad hoc. If there is no recognizable welfare benefit from having a parent’s own child look after him, then I can see no reason to think that she has an agent-relative obligation to promote his welfare.

To fill in the details of how the Respect View explains agent-relativity, consider again the three interpersonal features of recognition respect. The first interpersonal feature, direct acknowledgment, i.e., communicating that one recognizes another’s value, is not present in this case (since by stipulation the child is unable to communicate with her parent). But, as I argued, even without direct acknowledgment, the attitude of recognition respect can still be directed to the other person, and its content can acknowledge the character of one’s interpersonal relationship. In this case, both of these features seem to be present. The child’s attitude of
respect is directed to her parent. She is, as we would say, “showing him respect” by looking after him. Secondly, the content of what she expresses is that she recognizes the value of their relationship. (Contrast this to a case in which a child expresses to her parent frustration with a co-worker. This attitude is directed to the parent, but its content does not reference the child’s relationship to the parent.) Consequently, the content of the respect that she must show him is something that only she can express. Even if another person could provide the same welfare benefits to her father—in fact, even if another person were in her same exact causal position\(^59\)—he or she would not be able to express this particular type of respect to him. If, as I have argued, her special responsibility to look after her father is based on a duty to show him this particular form of respect, then we have an explanation of why her special responsibility is agent-relative.

When we bring this explanation of agent-relativity to bear on cases involving direct acknowledgment, we can see why it is preferable to those of both of the consequentializing views I have considered. If the consequentializer is right, then we ought to directly acknowledge our friends and family members because respecting them is either good in itself or improves their welfare. However, it seems quite possible that we could be faced with the choice of either directly acknowledging our own friends or family members or enabling others to directly acknowledge their friends or family members. Perhaps an individual, Alfred, works for an organization whose mission is to promote the amount of time families spend with one another. Say that Alfred is so committed to his job that he hardly sees his own family. Moreover, say that by focusing on families other than his own, Alfred is able to cause more instances of direct acknowledgment to occur.

Intuitively, it seems that Alfred is doing something wrong. It seems that he is leaving his agent-relative duty to his own family unfulfilled. However, what basis does the

\(^{59}\) See my discussion of agent-relativity in section 4.3.
consequentializer have for claiming that such an agent-relative duty exists? If Alfred’s duty is to promote the welfare benefits of receiving respect, then he has no reason to prefer his own family to any other. If his duty is to promote the inherent good of respecting someone, then once again he has no reason to prefer that it is his own family who is respected. Of course, the consequentializer is free to simply assert that his duty is to promote his own family’s welfare or ensure that they are the ones respected, but this is no explanation of the agent-relativity. Instead, the agent-relative feature of the teleological view once again seems ad hoc. But unlike the first issue with agent-relativity, this problem infects more than just welfare-focused teleological views. It is present even if the consequentializer claims that respecting someone is good in itself.

To avoid this problem, the consequentializer could simply bite the bullet and say that Alfred is not doing anything wrong. That is, the consequentializer can deny that his special responsibility is in fact agent-relative. However, to do so would strip the consequentializer’s argument of some of its intuitive force.

The Respect View provides a much better option. According to the Respect View, Alfred’s duty to respect his family members is a duty to show them how he sees their relationship. As I have said, the content of what he owes them is interpersonal. His duty is to express to them that he sees them in a specific way, namely, as fellow members of a valuable relationship. Since the content of his duty to his daughter Olive is that he express to her how he sees her, the Respect View can explain why his duty is agent-relative. Even if he can make it the case that several other daughters receive respect from their fathers, he leaves his duty that he express to Olive how he sees her unfulfilled unless he actually respects her.

When one’s duty to someone else is to promote a good, its content is not interpersonal in this strong sense. For example, if the consequentializer stipulates that Alfred has a duty to his
daughter to make sure that she receives the good of having her father respect her, then the
content of what he owes her does not essentially refer to their own relationship. The good in
question, having a daughter’s father respect her, is something that he could cause someone else’s
daughter to receive. In the above example, this is in fact what happens. Olive does not receive
the good of having her father respect her, but Alfred does cause several other individuals to
receive this good (that is, each one receives the good of having her father respect her) by causing
other fathers to respect their daughters. (The good refers to different fathers depending on who
the child is, but it is still the same good.) The question remains, then, as to how the
consequentializer can explain why Alfred’s duty is to his daughter Olive. I can see no reason to
think that he has a duty to his own daughter if the good he is to promote is something that he can
cause other individuals to have.

In reply, the consequentializer might argue that the good that he owes to his daughter is
properly described as ‘Alfred respects Olive.’ That is, the good is particular to their relationship.
If this were the case, the consequentializer would avoid the problem I have described. However,
it seems to me implausible that the good in question is particular to their relationship. If it were,
then the good that Olive receives from having her father respect her would be different than the
good another person, Alice, receives from having her father, Otto, respect her. But this is
implausible. It seems that both Olive and Alice receive the same good, the good of having her
father respect her (where, again, the good refers to different fathers depending on who the child
is). The way in which Keller describes his special goods is consonant with this claim. For
example, he describes the special good of “having your child, the one you raised, love and care
about, make an effort to stay in touch.”60 This is a good that anyone who has a child that he or
she raised, loves, and cares about can receive. It is not radically particular like the good ‘Alfred

respects Olive’ or the good ‘Alice stays in touch with Otto’ (both of which always refer to the same individuals). This point applies to both consequentializing arguments I have considered. That is, it’s implausible to claim that goods like ‘Alfred respects Olive’ exist whether the claim is they are good in virtue of their effect on individuals’ welfare or good in themselves.

My Respect View therefore provides a superior explanation of relationship-based responsibilities than either consequentializing view. Moreover, it seems to me that the Respect View’s explanation is superior to any that a teleologist can proffer. For any good that plausibly can form the basis of relationship-based responsibilities, it seems to me that it will be possible in some situations to enable other people’s friends and family members to receive this good rather than give it to one’s own. The teleologist lacks the resources to explain why, then, we ought to provide the goods to our own friends and family members. Moreover, as I showed earlier in the section, the Respect View possesses an additional advantage over welfare-focused teleological views: it better captures our understanding of why we have such responsibilities. Therefore, I conclude that at least when it comes to relationship-based responsibilities, the proper response to a value is to respect, not promote, it.

This is not to say, though, that my view provides the best explanation of all the special obligations that friends and family members have for one another. Some such obligations are certainly transactional, as I noted in section 1.2, and there very well may be others that derive at least part of their force from general obligations. However, for many of our special obligations to our friends and family members, and especially our special responsibilities for them, the Respect View provides the explanation that most fully realizes the dual aims I set in Chapter 1: capturing our intuitions and providing a compelling explanation of them. Like some other relationship-based views, the Respect View provides an explanation that is more intuitively
satisfying than either transactional or social good ones. But better than any other relationship-based view, it combines intuitive plausibility with theoretical merit. By focusing on the value of relationships, it avoids the problems of Scheffler’s valuing view. By incorporating agent-relativity, it sticks closer to our commonsense understanding of relationship-based responsibilities than agent-neutral views. And through its use of the duty of respect, it successfully answers the challenge I laid at the feet of relationship-based views in Chapter 3. That is, how can they explain how the value of one’s relationship provides one with a duty? As we saw in Chapter 3, the intuitionist view provides no answer to this challenge, and, as I argued, identity-based views and the most recent version of Scheffler’s view offer no more of an answer than the intuitionist. But through its claim that we have a duty to respect the value of our relationships, the Respect View is able to provide an answer. Indeed, as we have now seen, it’s an answer that’s more compelling than any a teleological view can provide.

However, before being able to conclude that the Respect View has vanquished its competitors, I have one more task to accomplish. As I have noted, my argument has relied on the assumption that our relationships with our friends and family members do have the value that commonsense morality ascribes to them. In the next chapter, I discharge this assumption by explaining three different ways in which relationships can gain value.

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61 See my discussion of identity-based views in section 3.4 and my discussion of the most recent version of Scheffler’s view in section 4.2b.
Chapter 6: The Sources of Value

To this point, I have been taking at face value our commonsense intuitions that certain relationships between friends and family members are valuable. My argument that we have relationship-based responsibilities for these individuals depends on the truth of this assumption. If, as I have argued, our relationship-based responsibilities are based on an obligation to respect the value of our relationships, then for such responsibilities to exist, the relationships need to actually be valuable. In this chapter, I discharge this assumption by arguing that relationships can acquire value in several different ways. I argue for three sources of value in particular: mutually valuing a relationship, a relationship’s history, and social conventions. This argument both provides support for many of our commonsense intuitions about which relationships have value and is critical of other views of relationship-based responsibilities, which often acknowledge only one source of value for relationships. As I argue, a view of relationship-based responsibilities must acknowledge all of these sources of value in order to recognize the full panoply of valuable relationships in our lives.

I proceed by considering each of the three sources of value in turn. For each one, I begin by explaining why regarding it as a source of value fits with commonsense morality. Since it is counterintuitive to think that all histories, all conventions, or all instances of mutually valuing give relationships value, I also in each section articulate the conditions that must obtain for the source to provide a relationship with value. Finally, in each section I provide an argument in support of our intuition that the source, when thus circumscribed, gives a relationship value.
6.1: Mutually Valuing a Relationship

My treatment of the first source of value can be brief since we have already seen that it fits with our commonsense thinking to hold that mutually valuing a relationship gives it value. In section 4.2a, I reached this conclusion after considering Samuel Scheffler’s view, which holds that unilaterally valuing a relationship can give it value. As I there argued, unilateral valuing is not sufficient. For example, if an individual has come to deeply value her relationship with another individual without his knowledge—through, say, assiduously following his Facebook posts—she does not thereby make their relationship valuable. However, I noted that if two individuals mutually value their relationship, that is, they each value it and this fact is mutually known, then it does seem that their relationship thereby becomes valuable. Or, rather, it is part of commonsense moral thinking to hold that mutually valuing a relationship makes it valuable so long as two additional conditions obtain. First, the relationship is one that the individuals are permitted to value (which rules out cases like Scheffler’s abused wife one (see section 4.2a)), and, second, the individuals do not value the relationship for morally impermissible reasons (such as their shared racist beliefs).¹ When both of these conditions obtain, we think that individuals who mutually value their relationship give their relationship value (and so have special responsibilities for one another).

Before moving into my argument in support of these commonsense intuitions, a word about the kind of value in question here is in order. The kind of value that is relevant for relationship-based responsibilities is the value a relationship has for both of its participants. This value is agent-relative since the relationship does not have this value for everyone,² but

¹ To see how these conditions differ, consider that two individuals might be in a relationship they are permitted to value but nevertheless value it for impermissible reasons.
² See my discussion of agent-relativity in section 4.3a. More precisely, this value is agent-relative since not every agent would have the same reason to respond to it in a particular way, such as respect it, even if they were in a
importantly, unlike some other agent-relative values, this value is not unique to one individual’s perspective. The relationship has this value from both of its participants’ perspectives. If a relationship has value from one participant’s perspective but not the other—as in, perhaps, the Facebook example—then the relationship does not have the sort of value that is required in order to ground relationship-based responsibilities. We might say, then, that the kind of value that is relevant for relationship-based responsibilities is both agent-relative and intersubjective. When I refer in this chapter to a relationship’s value, I have intersubjective agent-relative value in mind, unless I indicate otherwise.

With that said, I can proceed to the task of providing an argument in support of our commonsense view that mutually valuing a relationship gives it value. To begin, it will help to re-introduce a bit of terminology from my discussion in Chapter 4. There I described Scheffler’s view that valuing can give a relationship value only if certain conditions are met as a “constrained normative power” view. A normative power is a power to will normative phenomena, such as values or reasons, into existence, so a “constrained normative power,” a term that comes from Gary Watson, is a normative power that is bounded in some way. Now we can see that according to commonsense morality, mutual valuing is a constrained normative power. It’s constrained by the two conditions I mentioned above. One cannot make relationships valuable that one is not permitted to value, and one cannot make relationships valuable if one values them for impermissible reasons. But mutual valuing also has another distinguishing feature, namely, it’s a joint normative power. Both participants must value a

causal position to so respond. In this kind of case, both participants have reasons to respect the value of the relationship that others would not have if they were in the participants’ causal positions.

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3 I take the ‘intersubjective’ term from Korsgaard (1996b). As I explained in section 4.3a, Korsgaard in that article attacks the agent-neutral/agent-relative distinction since she believes it leaves out intersubjective reasons. However, as I there explained, my more capacious definition of agent-relativity allows room for such reasons (and values).

4 See Watson (2009).
relationship to imbue it with intersubjective value. In this way, mutual valuing differs, for instance, from the power to make a personal commitment, a power that an individual can exercise on his or her own.\(^5\) As I will put it, mutual valuing is a “constrained joint normative power.”

With this piece of terminology in hand, we are in a better position to see why our commonsense view that we possess this power is justified. The first thing to note is that, like the power to alter one’s moral situation through making promises or personal commitments, this power seems to be an important component of personal autonomy. By being able to have some say in which relationships in one’s life have value (and, consequently, some say in which special responsibilities one has), individuals gain an important measure of control over the normative shape of their lives. They are able to make joint decisions about which relationships matter morally for them. Spouses, for instance, can give their relationships value and so take on special responsibilities that perdure so long as they continue to value their marriages. Or, individuals can create valuable friendships that commit them to coming to one another’s aid in sometimes demanding ways. Therefore, it seems clear that possessing this power gives individuals a significant measure of autonomy. Granted, the fact that this power is both joint and constrained places a limit on this measure of autonomy, but it nevertheless seems clear that this measure remains significant.

The next thing to note is that in addition to being joint and constrained, this power is limited in another way as well: individuals are not free to give their relationships \textit{as much} value as they choose. Even though smitten lovers sometimes might believe otherwise, no individual’s relationship with another is so important as to make all others inconsequential. Indeed, we often

\(^5\) Other joint normative powers also seem to exist. For instance, it seems to me that the power to make promises is joint since making a promise requires uptake by another.
see our relationships with our friends and family members as more important than they in fact are and so blind ourselves to the extent of our responsibilities to strangers. The existence of this limit, like the existence of the other two, makes it more plausible to hold that individuals possess this power. Without a restriction on the amount of value individuals can give their relationships, distributive concerns would quash any argument in support of the power to create valuable relationships. (Recall the distributive objection to special responsibilities from Chapter 1.) However—and here’s my conclusion—when this power is suitably delimited, its importance to living an autonomous life trumps the importance of remaining strictly impartial.

I won’t here attempt to justify the general claim that autonomy can trump impartiality (in some cases and to some degree). But it’s worth noting that even those who are inclined toward the voluntarist position have reason to accept this claim. As we saw in Chapter 1, resistance to the idea that special responsibilities can be foisted onto an individual without his having any say in the matter is the genesis of the voluntarist objection to relationship-based responsibilities. This objection is built on the assumption that individuals have a high degree of control over their moral lives. A voluntarist, then, should have no trouble accepting my argument that two individuals have the power to jointly decide to make their relationship valuable. Therefore, of the three sources of value I will argue in favor of in this chapter, this one should be the least controversial. It does not violate the voluntarist objection to relationship-based responsibilities. In fact, it illustrates how relationship-based responsibilities can come from relationships with a voluntary start.⁶

My autonomy-based argument therefore provides support for our commonsense intuition that individuals can imbue their relationships with value through mutually valuing them. Given my prior argument in Chapter 5 that relationship-based responsibilities are means of respecting

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⁶ See also my discussion of this point in section 4.2a.
the value of relationships, this conclusion means that individuals have relationship-based responsibilities for one another when they mutually value their relationship. So long as they are permitted to value their relationship and they value it for permissible reasons, individuals who mutually value their relationship should in fact take a special interest in one another’s welfare.

Notably, appealing to autonomy explains only cases in which individuals currently value their relationship. If autonomy were all that mattered, then we would expect that when two individuals stop valuing their relationship, as in my divorce example, the relationship would lose its value (and the participants would thereby lose their relationship-based responsibilities for one another). 7 For to hold that a relationship retains its value even when its participants no longer value it is to place a limitation on our power to choose which relationships have value.

While we do think that individuals often have the freedom to end valuable relationships, we have also seen (in section 4.2a) that commonsense morality is committed to the idea that a relationship can be the source of special responsibilities even if its participants do not currently value it. Individuals may retain some relationship-based responsibilities when they stop valuing their relationship, as in the divorce example, or they may have relationship-based responsibilities even when they never did value a relationship, as in the traveler example I explain in the next section. Therefore, in order to provide support for these commonsense intuitions, we ought to appeal to other moral considerations than the value of autonomy. In the next section, I identify a couple such considerations by detailing the sorts of histories that give a relationship value.

7 We would therefore also expect that the participants would lose their relationship-based responsibilities for one another. Given this sort of view, relationship-based responsibilities would simply be, in Scheffler’s words, concomitants of valuing a relationship.
6.2: Historical Accounts of Value

In section 6.2a, I first explain why it is intuitive to believe that a relationship’s history can give it value, and then argue that the histories that give friendships and familial relationships value include those that involve a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters. In section 6.2b, I defend my view against Niko Kolodny’s alternative account.

6.2a: The Histories that Matter

It’s clear that past interactions between individuals can be the source of current special obligations. If you lent your friend your copy of *The Communist Manifesto*, he has a special obligation to return it. (I’m looking at you, Andy.) Or if you promised a student that you would meet with her this afternoon, then you have a special obligation to do so. Of course, the special obligation in each of these cases is transactional, i.e., based on a particular past transaction. The challenge is to establish that past interactions between individuals can also ground relationship-based obligations. To see why we ought to accept this claim, consider the following example from Niko Kolodny:

Imagine a lone traveler, of a bygone age, making his way west. Along the way, he helps and is helped by the people dwelling in the places he passes through, creating and incurring various debts. Contrast him with a different traveler who helps and is helped in the same ways, but by one and the same companion throughout…The companionless traveler has accumulated a series of debts that he might repay and then move on. But things are not like that for the companioned traveler. He has reason for a concern for his friend’s interests that is open-ended:
that keeps no ledger and that asks only that like concern be reciprocated. Further, he has reason not to move on, but instead to sustain his friendship going forward.\(^8\)

While Kolodny argues merely that the companioned traveler has a *reason* to look after his friend’s welfare, it seems that this case supports a stronger conclusion, namely, that he has a *special responsibility* to look after him. Although Kolodny’s claim that “[t]heir history together roots an expansive loyalty” overstates things,\(^9\) it seems that he has a special obligation to take *some* measure of interest in his friend’s welfare. For instance, if soon after their journey together he—let’s call him Bill—were to see his friend—let’s call him Ted—struggling to carry several large boxes into a building, Bill ought to offer Ted his help.

Moreover, it seems that Kolodny is right that Bill’s obligation is based on the history of his relationship with Ted. Two points support this conclusion. First, it seems that Bill’s obligation is more extensive than the obligation he would have were he to notice a stranger struggling to carry large boxes into a building. The norms in play here certainly vary depending on the social context one is in, but if the norms are like those that exist on busy streets in Washington, D.C., Bill probably would not need to offer *any* help were he to see a stranger struggling to carry several large boxes into a building. At most, he might be required to hold the door open if he happened to be entering or exiting the building at the same time that the stranger was struggling to enter. Given Bill and Ted’s relationship, though, Bill’s obligation is more extensive than this. If he does not have an urgent need to get somewhere else, he ought to offer to carry something. Second, it seems that his obligation is neither transactional nor based on mutually valuing the relationship. To see this, we can make a couple of stipulations. One, assume that both Bill and Ted made it a point to “pull their weight” on their journey and so were

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\(^8\) Kolodny (2010a), pp. 50-1.  
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 51.
conscientious about, for example, trading off who cooked meals. Neither one therefore has an
outstanding debt or needs to show gratitude to the other. Two, assume that Bill never really
cared for Ted and so is not anxious to spend more time with him. Their relationship was never
acrimonious; Bill simply does not think he shares much in common with Ted. Indeed, Bill does
not have fond memories of their journey. While he was glad to receive Ted’s help, the journey
was still quite arduous (as all journeys west were in those days). He had undertaken it only
because of the promise of a better life.

Given these two stipulations, it seems implausible to claim that Bill’s obligation to help
Ted is either transactional or based on mutually valuing the relationship. Bill does not have any
debts to Ted to repay or gratitude he needs to show him, and he does not value his relationship
with him. He neither wishes for the relationship to continue nor values his memories of it.
Indeed, he might wish that he could forget about the time that they spent together.

Yet, even given these stipulations, it still seems that Bill ought to help Ted. After
spending so much time together, Ted would be entitled to be upset if Bill were to act as if he did
not know him as soon as they reached their destination. While they needn’t be the best of
friends, Bill ought to at least offer to carry one of Ted’s boxes if he can do so without much cost
to himself. Moreover, it seems that this obligation is part of a broader special responsibility Bill
has for Ted. For at least a period of time, Bill ought to have a somewhat higher degree of
concern for Ted’s welfare than he does for a stranger. For instance, in addition to helping Ted
carry a box, Bill’s special responsibility might require him to ask Ted whether he had found the
sibling he was hoping to locate when they reached their destination.

Importantly, I am not claiming that their relationship’s history provides Bill with a
special responsibility that will be with him till the end of his days. In fact, it seems to me that,
like the divorcing couple’s special responsibilities I discussed in Chapter 4, Bill’s special responsibility for Ted would “unwind” over time if Bill does not in fact value their relationship. For instance, if it’s been a couple of years since their journey when he sees Ted struggling with the boxes, we likely would not expect Bill to go as far out of his way to help him. We might think that he’s done enough if he simply holds the door for him. Later in this section, I will provide a couple of reasons in support of the claim that responsibilities like Bill’s do unwind. I bring the idea up here simply to clarify how limited I take Bill’s special responsibility to be. It’s limited both in how long it persists and in how much it requires of Bill (not an “expansive loyalty,” as Kolodny claims).

Once we acknowledge how limited Bill’s special responsibility might be, it seems to me quite intuitive to claim that Bill does have some such responsibility. Moreover, given the details of the example, it seems that his responsibility is not transactional. Instead, it seems that their history together gives their relationship some measure of enduring moral value and that this value is the source of his responsibility. That is, it seems that his responsibility is relationship-based. Therefore, this example shows that it’s intuitively plausible to think the particular history of a relationship is a second way in which relationships can accrue value.

Returning to my divorce example from section 4.2 helps bolster this intuition. As I explained the case, a woman decides that she wants to divorce her husband after realizing that she no longer values her relationship with him. I tried to cast the divorce as being as uncontentious as one can be: their marriage has been reasonably happy, the split is not due to one spouse betraying the other, and they agree to the divorce after an amicable discussion. I can also add that during their discussion the husband reveals that he has also recently realized that he no
longer values their relationship. The divorce is both amicable and fully mutual.\textsuperscript{10} My claim was that it is intuitive to believe that they continue to have special responsibilities for one another even though they no longer value their relationship. For instance, she ought to wait a few days before going public with the news of their divorce if he requests that she do so. Moreover, these responsibilities are due to the history of their relationship. She ought to delay her announcement because of, as we might say, all that they have been through together. This case then provides additional intuitive support for the claim that a relationship’s history can provide it with value.\textsuperscript{11}

However, as I have noted, my main goal in this chapter is to provide arguments in support of our intuitions about which relationships have value. These two examples show us that it fits with commonsense morality to hold that a relationship’s history can provide it with value, but I have not yet provided an argument in support of this aspect of commonsense morality. One reason to look for such an argument is to provide a principled basis for sorting the kinds of histories that make relationships valuable from those that do not. For example, being a fellow traveler on a three-month journey seems to make a relationship valuable, while being a fellow participant in a three-month spinning (i.e., stationary bike) class at the local gym does not. Or a history of working together to eradicate discrimination seems to make a relationship valuable, while a history of working together in support of racist causes does not. In each of these two contrasts, what is it about the former history that distinguishes it from the latter?

\textsuperscript{10} Perhaps think of the Al and Tipper Gore divorce or, at least, how it was portrayed in the media.
\textsuperscript{11} As I noted in a footnote to my initial description of the case, an objector might point out that the couple may still value the memories of their time together even though they no longer wish for their relationship to continue. Their valuing of their relationship’s history, then, could be the source of their special responsibilities for each other, rather than the history itself. However, as I argued in my earlier footnote, it seems that the history itself does the work since valuing arguments are subject to several problems I detail in section 4.2 and the responsibility seems to exist even if the couple does not value the memories of their relationship. Even if they wish to forget the history of their relationship (just as Bill wishes to forget his journey with Ted), they still ought to take some degree of interest in one another’s welfare.
Thomas Hurka’s view points us in the direction of an answer. In *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, Hurka argues that the relationships with agent-relative value are those with histories of “jointly doing good, either to each other or to outsiders, or of jointly suffering evil.” In his article “The Justification of National Partiality,” he gives examples of each of the three kinds of histories: spouses who jointly do good to each other “by help[ing] each other through difficult times and also shar[ing] good times,” teachers at the same school who jointly do good to their students, and barracks-mates in a Nazi labor camp who jointly suffer evil. While this view is quite intuitive—it does seem that these sorts of histories give relationships agent-relative value—it also excludes at least one kind of history that it should not. As Kolodny points out, “parents need not do good together, or suffer evil together, with their young children.” Yet it seems that parents and even quite young children have histories with agent-relative value.

I do not think the correct reply to this counterexample is to abandon Hurka’s approach altogether. Instead, we ought to broaden it to having a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters. To see the merits of this approach, several features require explanation. First, the mutuality condition is necessary, as it was in the case of valuing, in order to avoid counterintuitive results in cases in which a history between two individuals is beneficial or meaningful for one individual but not the other. For instance, perhaps in their only encounter Eileen unknowingly and unintentionally provides significant help to Carl. This encounter is beneficial to Carl but not Eileen. It would be quite counterintuitive to claim that unknowingly and unintentionally helping Carl on one occasion gives Eileen a special obligation to continue to

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12 Hurka (2001), p. 202. See also Hurka (1997), p. 152, as cited in Kolodny (2010b), p. 188n. Hurka actually says that such histories give the states of the relationship’s participants agent-relative value, not the relationship itself (Hurka (2001), p. 201). However, as I have explained before, I believe that the claim that an individual has agent-relative value is equivalent to the claim that one’s relationship with him or her has agent-relative value. See section 5.2a.


14 Kolodny (2010b), p. 188n.
help Carl in the future. It’s even implausible to claim that their encounter gives Carl a relationship-based responsibility for Eileen. Carl would certainly have a transactional obligation of gratitude, but it’s implausible to claim that he now has an ongoing obligation to look after Eileen’s welfare. In fact, if Carl did attempt to look after her welfare in an ongoing way, we may regard his actions as unjustified intrusions on her life. On the other hand, if their encounter were mutually beneficial or meaningful, continuing to look after one another’s welfare to some degree would likely seem appropriate. To have the sort of value, then, that is relevant for relationship-based responsibilities, i.e., intersubjective agent-relative value, the set of encounters must be mutually beneficial or meaningful.\(^\text{15}\)

Additionally, it’s important that what’s mutually beneficial or meaningful is a set of encounters. An encounter, unlike a common experience, requires some type of direct interaction with another. Therefore, this aspect of my view allows me to sort cases like Bill and Ted’s three-month journey from those like being fellow participants in a three-month spinning class. Being fellow participants in a spinning class may give two individuals a common experience that is mutually beneficial. For example, they may both become healthier through partaking in the class. But having such a common experience does not mean that they have had a mutually beneficial (or meaningful) set of encounters. In fact, they may have gone the whole three months in their spinning class without having a single encounter with one another, much less a mutually

\(^{15}\)Cf. Hurka (2001), pp. 203-4. Hurka argues that “[i]f one person has significantly and continuously benefited another who has not been able to reciprocate…[Hurka’s view] can say that the first person’s states have greater value from the second person’s point of view but not vice versa” (203). This value then grounds an open-ended virtue of gratitude, which “gives a continuing special concern to those who have provided continuing benefits” (204). This open-ended virtue then seems to fit my definition of a special responsibility. However, even if Hurka is right that a unilaterally valuable history can give an individual a gratitude-based special responsibility, this responsibility is still transactional, not relationship-based. It is based on repaying benefits, not the value of the relationship. Therefore, even if it is sound, Hurka’s argument does not give us reason to think that a unilaterally valuable history makes a relationship valuable. For a fuller discussion of the problems with gratitude-based explanations of relationship-based responsibilities, see section 1.2.
beneficial one. (Perhaps they ride bikes on opposite ends of the room.) If this were the case, they would have a mutually beneficial experience but not encounter.

On the other hand, during their three-month journey, Bill and Ted help one another out repeatedly. Even if no one of these encounters is mutually beneficial or meaningful—the ones that are beneficial or meaningful for Bill are not for Ted and vice versa—the set of encounters certainly is. The assistance they give one another helps them reach their destination. Therefore, the set of their encounters is beneficial for each of them.

There’s a clear explanation for why having a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters makes a relationship valuable while having a mutually beneficial or meaningful experience does not. As I am understanding the concept of a relationship, one’s encounters with another individual make up part of one’s relationship with him or her. When the set of these encounters is beneficial or meaningful, the idea is that this part of the relationship confers value on the whole. On the other hand, what’s beneficial or meaningful about one’s shared experience with another may be completely unrelated to one’s relationship with him or her. For instance, as I described the case, what’s beneficial about the common experience of participating in the spinning class is its positive impact on the participants’ health. The fact that they have this experience in common is only incidental to the benefit. Therefore, it makes sense that in such cases the common experience would not confer value on their relationship.

There is one kind of case in which a common experience seems sufficient to give a relationship value: cases in which individuals have a common experience of enduring

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16 A relationship also includes the metaphysical relation two individuals stand in to one another. In fact, on my definition, all individuals have relationships with each other since standing in a metaphysical relation to another is sufficient to have a relationship with him or her. As I noted in section 4.2a, this definition is more expansive than the one Kolodny gives in Kolodny (2003) (and which Scheffler adopts). I opt for this definition because it allows for the possibility that individuals can have relationship-based responsibilities for others they have never met. I mention just such a possibility in the next paragraph. (Kolodny himself in a later article (Kolodny (2010b)) argues that members of racial groups have reasons to show partiality to each other that do not depend on having encounters with one another.)
mistreatment for a characteristic they share, such as their race, ethnicity, or gender. In these cases, the history that gives their relationship value is the common history they share as members of the affected group, rather than a history with one another. Notably, in such cases, the fact that the affected individuals have the experience in common is not merely incidental: they share the experience because they share a race, ethnicity, or race. However, since my focus has been on the responsibilities we have in virtue of our personal relationships, not those we have *qua* fellow group members, I will set such cases to the side. For our personal relationships, like those we share with our friends and family members, I stand by my claim that the histories that matter are those that involve mutually beneficial or meaningful sets of encounters.

Next, I ought to say a bit more about what I mean by a set of encounters being beneficial or meaningful. As the Bill and Ted example illustrates, one way a set of encounters can be beneficial to its participants is if it is *instrumentally* valuable to them. The assistance Bill and Ted provide for one another is a means for them to reach their end, quite literally. But a set of encounters is also beneficial to its participants if it is *non-instrumentally* valuable for them. For example, if, contrary to my earlier stipulation, Bill and Ted both delighted in their time together, their set of encounters might be non-instrumentally valuable to them. All that is required for a set of encounters to be mutually beneficial is for it to positively impact each participant’s welfare in some way. However, a set of encounters, such as those between partners in a failed business venture, can be meaningful even if not beneficial.

Focusing on beneficial and meaningful histories allows those of us who accept objective theories of well-being and meaningfulness to distinguish between a history of working together to eradicate discrimination and a history of working together to support racist causes. Although individuals with a history of working together to support racist causes may think their history is
mutually beneficial or meaningful, it is not. On the other hand, a history of working together to eradicate discrimination is at least mutually meaningful, even if after becoming disillusioned by the ineffectiveness of their efforts, its participants think it is not. Although their efforts may not make them happier, spending time with another person in the pursuit of a worthy cause seems to me to be a meaningful experience.\(^{17}\) (Remember that it must be their encounters with one another that are mutually beneficial or meaningful. It’s not enough for them both to work to advance a particular worthy cause and not have any interactions with one another.) To make this claim is not to deny that in some cases what makes the set of encounters meaningful is that its participants see it as meaningful. But it is to claim that seeing a history as meaningful is not the only way that histories can gain meaning.

However, the truth of my main argument here does not depend on my particular intuitions about what kinds of encounters are meaningful or beneficial. One can accept my argument that the histories that give relationships value are those that include a set of mutually beneficial or meaningful encounters and disagree with me about which histories fit that description. In fact, it seems to me likely that if one does not share my intuition that the disillusioned do-gooders have a mutually meaningful history, one will also deny that they have history-based special responsibilities for each other. If their history is not meaningful or beneficial to them, then there seems to be no reason to think that their history is the source of special responsibilities. This sort of disagreement, then, would actually help bolster my claim that a history including a set of mutually valuable encounters makes a relationship valuable. It

\(^{17}\) My view here differs from Susan Wolf’s view of meaningfulness. Wolf claims that “meaning arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way” (Wolf (2010), p. 8). Meaning for her requires both subjective and objective components—as she puts it, “meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness” (9)—but I am here claiming that meaning can exist without a subjective component. I have followed Wolf in regarding meaningfulness as a category of value distinct from well-being. See Wolf (2010), pp. 1-7.
would show that even individuals who disagree about which histories include mutually beneficial or meaningful sets of encounters are apt to agree that a history that fits that description makes a relationship valuable.

The divorce example provides another illustration of my view. Couples who have been together for any significant period of time likely have, in Hurka’s words, “helped each other through difficult times and also shared good times.” Therefore, their history together likely includes a mutually beneficial and meaningful set of encounters and so gives their relationship value. This value in turn provides them with special responsibilities for one another. My view therefore provides an explanation of our intuition that they retain special responsibilities for one another even when they no longer value their relationship.

However, as I have noted, these special responsibilities seem to unwind over time. That is, the degree and/or scope of concern that one spouse must take in the other’s welfare seems to diminish over time. How can this be so if their responsibilities are based on their history together, which does not change? I believe the answer is that while their history does not change, its value to them can. For instance, as two high-school friends lose touch over the years, their history together may start to lose some of its meaning for their lives. They may think about the time they spent together less frequently, forget more of the history’s details, and even look upon what they do remember in a less favorable light. The impact that a history has on an individual’s welfare can also decrease over time. For instance, the help that Bill receives from Ted on their three-month journey likely comes to have less effect on his current welfare as time goes on. Perhaps he has since moved back east, and little connection remains between his current life and the journey west they undertook all those years ago.

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Both of these cases illustrate that the value that matters for my purposes is how beneficial and meaningful a history is for an individual at the current time. A history’s current value is what imbues one’s current relationships with value, and it is the current value of one’s relationships that grounds one’s current relationship-based responsibilities. For instance, while the high school friends’ relationship carried more value when they were in high school, any relationship-based responsibilities that they maintain for one another are based on the value that their relationship has now.

The changing value of a relationship’s history is only one reason why a relationship’s value can fluctuate. As I have argued, mutually valuing a relationship can imbue it with value, so if individuals stop valuing their relationship, as in the divorce case, their relationship loses this source of value. Any value that it maintains must come from some other source, such as the history they have together. (The fact that they both valued their relationship for a long period of time may be part of what makes their history together meaningful.) Therefore, we have seen that there are at least two reasons why a relationship’s value can diminish over time: its history loses value and its participants stop valuing it. This argument provides at least a partial explanation of the intuition that relationship-based responsibilities can unwind in cases like the divorce one. While more could be said, working out all the details of how special responsibilities unwind would take me away from my primary objective in this chapter, namely, providing arguments in support of our commonsense intuitions about which relationships have value. The point of the foregoing argument is simply to establish that the two sources of value I have identified so far are capable of explaining the intuition that special responsibilities can lose their force over time.

Overall, then, we have seen that by focusing on histories with mutually beneficial or meaningful sets of encounters, my view closely fits our intuitions about which relationships have
value and which do not. As a final blow to drive home this point, we can see that my view can successfully deal with Kolodny’s counterexample to Hurka’s argument. As Kolodny noted, parents may not “jointly do good” with their young children. However, they likely have had a mutually beneficial and/or meaningful set of encounters. For the parent, the experience of raising a young child likely enhances his well-being and/or adds meaning to his life. For the child, the experience of being cared for by her parent likely enhances her welfare in several ways. In addition to the immediate welfare benefits of the care, she also likely receives the long-term benefit of feeling loved and cared for. And if they have not had a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters—perhaps the parent is abusive or completely absent from the child’s life—my view still provides an intuitive result, for these are just the sorts of cases in which we would deny that a parent and child have special responsibilities for one another.\textsuperscript{19}

It’s clear, then, that my view more closely fits our intuitions about which relationships have value than Hurka’s. Moreover, as I have shown, it provides a compelling explanation of why those relationships have value and why they may lose value over time. We therefore ought to reject Hurka’s claim that histories of jointly doing good give relationships value in favor of my broader view.

6.2b: Against Kolodny’s Resonance View

I began my argument in the previous section by utilizing Kolodny’s three-month journey example. Kolodny, however, uses it to support a different view of which kinds of histories matter, a view based around the idea of “resonance.” In this section, I will show why my view of which histories matter is superior to Kolodny’s. This argument has the added benefit of showing

\textsuperscript{19} Or, minimally, we would deny that they have special responsibilities that stem from their history together.
why the Respect View of relationship-based responsibilities is preferable to Kolodny’s resonance view.

In two companion articles, Kolodny argues that we ought to employ the notion of resonance to explain why certain types of partiality are justified and others are not. Kolodny’s basic idea is that some normative claims are explained by others via a certain type of similarity between the claims, what he calls “resonance.” We can get a better handle on the concept by looking at how he employs it to justify certain partiality principles. The traveler example illustrates one type of resonance, what Kolodny calls “resonance of histories of encounter.” As I mentioned earlier, Kolodny begins his description of this example by asking us to imagine a lone traveler who is helped by various people over the course of his journey and thereby accrues discrete debts to these various individuals. He then contrasts this lone traveler to the two travelers (Bill and Ted, in my description of the example) who help each other out repeatedly over the course of their joint journey. Kolodny’s claim is that the way in which Bill and Ted ought to respond to their history together (namely, by showing each other partiality) resonates with the responses a lone traveler ought to have toward those who helped him. Kolodny states the general principle as follows:

Resonance of histories of encounter: one has reason to respond to a history of encounter in a way that is similar to the way that one has reason to respond to the discrete encounters of which it is composed, but that reflects the distinctive importance of a history shared with another person.\(^{20}\)

Since one has reason to respond to a discrete encounter of receiving help by showing gratitude and reciprocating when one can, one has reason to respond to a history of receiving help from another in a similar way but which reflects the importance of sharing a history with him or her.

Kolodny believes showing the other individual partiality fits this description. Showing partiality is similar to reciprocating in that both aim to help the other individual, but unlike a discrete debt, the partiality Kolodny has in mind is “open-ended” and “keeps no ledger.” In this way, one’s partiality reflects the distinctive importance of the history the two individuals share.\(^{21}\)

Kolodny’s view calls our attention to the interesting fact that, as in the traveler example, an individual’s reason to respond to a discrete encounter and her reason to respond to a history of similar encounters are similar yet different. The differences he points out help us see exactly what is problematic about attempts to reduce responses to relationships to responses to particular transactions.\(^{22}\) And the similarities he identifies do seem to be present in many cases. But, importantly, Kolodny’s conclusion is stronger than the claim that a response to a discrete encounter and a response to a history of such encounters are similar. He claims that the first response *explains* the second. Bill has reason to show Ted partiality because Bill has reason to respond to a particular experience of receiving help from another by showing gratitude and reciprocating if he can. As I will argue below, giving resonance this explanatory role is implausible.

However, first, we need to re-cast Kolodny’s view so that it applies to the topic of special responsibilities, rather than reasons of partiality. To do so, we need only shift his focus from reasons to duties, since special responsibilities are simply a specific sort of duties of partiality. So, rather than referring to *reasons* to respond to encounters and histories of encounters, this altered view would focus on *duties* to respond to encounters and histories of encounters. The rest of the view would remain the same. When we re-cast Kolodny’s view in this way, we are in position to see the two main reasons why my Respect View is superior.

\(^{21}\) See ibid., p. 51.
\(^{22}\) Indeed, I am indebted to Kolodny’s work for helping me better understand the problems with so-called “reductionist” explanations, a term that Kolodny takes from Scheffler. See Scheffler (2001), chs. 6 and 7.
First, *prima facie*, it seems implausible to claim that one’s duty to respond in a particular way to some thing or state of affairs, X, is explained by one’s duty to respond in a particular way to some *other* thing or state of affairs, Y. The more intuitive claim is that one’s duty to respond in a particular way to X is explained by features of X. For instance, if I have a duty to respond to a suffering pet with compassion, my duty is explained by features of the pet, such as the facts that she is suffering and is my pet. While this response may resonate with, for example, the compassionate response I ought to have to a suffering child, this other response does not explain the response I ought to take to my suffering pet. Rather, the two responses are similar since the two individuals have similar features. (Most importantly, both individuals are suffering.)

Kolodny seems mistaken, then, that one’s duty to respond to discrete encounters (Y) by reciprocating if one can explains one’s duty to respond to a *history* of encounters (X) by showing partiality. Intuitively, features of the history itself explain why one ought to respond to it by showing partiality. The Respect View provides an example of this more intuitive sort of explanation. It bases one’s duty to respond to the history with respect on the history’s *value*. While, as before, this response may resonate with other responses, in my view resonance does not do the explanatory work. Instead, the fact that responses to X and Y resonate seems to merely indicate that X and Y are similar. Therefore, *prima facie*, the Respect View’s method for explaining one’s duty is superior to Kolodny’s.

Other considerations bolster this prima facie impression. As Kolodny himself notes, the ways in which one ought to respond to discrete encounters and a history of encounters are significantly different. If one has a history of being helped by the same person, then one’s response should be open-ended and keep no ledger, while one’s response to a discrete encounter of being helped does not have these features. What explains why one’s response to a history of
encounters ought to be open-ended and keep no ledger, then, must be the history itself. As Kolodny puts it, one’s response to the history differs from a response to a discrete encounter since it “reflects the distinctive importance of a history shared with another person.”

Therefore, even Kolodny admits that the history itself plays a partial role in explaining one’s response.

When this role is given to the history, it’s not clear why we need to also accord an explanatory role to resonance. For Kolodny, resonance allows him to distinguish between histories that give individuals reasons for partiality and those that do not. For example, he notes that since one has no reason to respond to a trivial encounter in any particular way, by his resonance principle, one also has no reason to respond to a history of trivial encounters in any particular way. However, my argument in the previous section shows that we can distinguish between histories that matter and those that do not without appealing to resonance. As I argued, the histories that matter are those that involve either a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters. Given that we can successfully sort histories without making the counterintuitive claim that resonance does explanatory work, we have strong reason to reject Kolodny’s view in favor of my own. We have strong reason to prefer my way of distinguishing the histories that matter from those that do not, and, more generally, we have strong reason to prefer the Respect View of relationship-based responsibilities to a resonance view.

Setting aside the question of which view provides the better method for identifying the right sort of histories, we have an additional reason to prefer the Respect View to Kolodny’s resonance view: unlike the resonance view, the Respect View provides a unified explanation of all types of relationship-based responsibilities. The resonance view cannot provide a unified

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23 Ibid, p. 51.
24 Ibid, p. 53.
explanation since relationships can gain value from other sources than their histories. In section 6.1, I argued that mutually valuing a relationship gives it value, but it seems that an additional source of value exists as well. For instance, commonsense morality holds that parents have special responsibilities for their children that are not due to either mutually valuing the relationship or the relationship’s history. These special responsibilities exist before the child is capable of valuing anything (and so before the relationship can be mutually valued) and also do not seem to depend only on the type of history that exists between the parents and children. If history were the only factor, then we would expect that the relationship between the value of the history and the extent of the responsibility would be linear. As the history’s value accumulates, the extent of the responsibility would grow. However, in fact, parents’ responsibilities for their children diminish as the years go by and the meaningful experiences pile up. So, clearly, history is not the only factor.

Kolodny’s resonance view cannot account for this intuition since it explains partiality by appealing to a relationship’s history.25 Kolodny himself acknowledges that his resonance view does not explain all the responsibilities parents have for their children. He grants that “[w]e have a collective responsibility to care for those unable to care for themselves, such as the very young and the very old” and that “we need a practice to assign shares of this collective responsibility in a fair and efficient way.”26 He goes on to claim that giving genetic and adoptive parents responsibilities to look after their children may be just such a practice.27

25 Kolodny does leave an opening for resonance to provide a non-historical explanation. In addition to “resonance of histories of encounter,” Kolodny employs one other resonance principle to explain reasons of partiality: “resonance of common personal history or situation” (ibid, p. 52). Resonance based on a common personal situation, then, would be a non-historical form of resonance. Kolodny does not give an example of what he means by a common personal situation, so what he has in mind is not fully clear. But I see no reason to think that appealing to a common personal situation will help him explain the basis of a parent’s responsibility for his or her newborn child.
26 Ibid, pp. 55-6.
27 Ibid, p. 56.
The Respect View, however, is not so limited. If, as I argue in the next section, social conventions are another source of value for relationships, then the Respect View can explain these responsibilities in the same way that it explains the others I have considered. That is, one’s responsibility stems from the requirement to respect the value of one’s relationship.

To sum up: in this section, we have seen that there are two main reasons to prefer the Respect View to Kolodny’s resonance view. First, it provides a more compelling account of how a relationship’s history can produce a duty of partiality. We have good reason to think that, as the Respect View holds, features of the history itself explain one’s duty to respond to it in a particular way. Second, the Respect View is more general. While Kolodny’s view can explain relationship-based responsibilities with historical sources, the Respect View can also explain the other sorts of responsibilities that are present in commonsense morality, such as parents’ responsibilities for their newborn children.

6.3: Social Conventions

Before we consider my argument for the claim that social conventions are a third source of value for relationships, we can see that this claim fits with commonsense morality. As I argued in Chapter 2, commonsense morality acknowledges the existence of many special responsibilities that, upon reflection, seem to be merely conventional. Much of my discussion focused on the fact that the extent of fathers’ special responsibilities for their children have been thought to vary widely across time and cultures. For instance, in some cultures, the special responsibilities of maternal uncles and fathers are roughly the inverse of what they are in U.S. culture.\(^{28}\) And even within U.S. culture, societal expectations of fathers (and mothers too) have changed drastically over time. While at one time it may have been socially acceptable for a

parent to skip his or her child’s band concert in favor of spending the evening out with his or her friends, doing so today would likely be cause for criticism.\(^\text{29}\) Upon reflection, some (but by no means all) of these alternative arrangements seem perfectly acceptable, and so we are faced with the seeming conventionality of our own views. Nevertheless, it still seems that some conventional special responsibilities are morally binding. We think that fathers in our society do bear rather extensive special responsibilities for their children.

The bulk of my argument in Chapter 2 was devoted to showing that it’s counterintuitive to hold, as the Social Good View does, that the only foundation for conventional responsibilities is their social usefulness. Instead, I argued, it fits with our commonsense thinking to hold that conventional responsibilities stem at least in part from the non-instrumental value of relationships. Therefore, I have already shown that in cases involving conventional responsibilities, the claim that the relationships in question have (non-instrumental) value fits with commonsense morality.

However, this argument does not yet establish that commonsense morality treats the convention as the source of the relationship’s value in such cases. One might hold that the differences in responsibilities across cultures and time are due to individuals valuing different relationships or having different kinds of histories in different times and cultures. That is, one might believe that we can account for the force of conventional responsibilities by appealing to one of the other two sources of value I have considered in this chapter, and so hold that we needn’t introduce a third distinct source of value. For instance, the thought may go, uncles have much more extensive histories with their nieces and nephews in the cultures in which they shoulder more extensive responsibilities.

\(^{29}\) Recent research has shown that both mothers and fathers today spend considerably more time with their children than they did in the 1960s. See, e.g., http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/surprisingly-family-time-has-grown/
While this approach certainly can explain some of the discrepancies at issue, it does not account for all of them. For instance, fathers in different societies can have starkly different responsibilities for their newborn children even when their histories are quite similar. Say that a father in our culture and a father in another both have very limited histories with their children at the time of their births. It’s hard to say quite what it means for a father to have a history with a child who has just been born (beyond the obvious), but we can say that both fathers have very limited interactions with the mothers during their pregnancies. Nevertheless, despite the similarities between the histories, the different cultures may expect the fathers to fulfill much different responsibilities, and, as I earlier argued, both cultural views might seem perfectly acceptable upon reflection. In such a case, then, our commonsense moral thinking treats the conventions themselves as the sources of the relationships’ value.

On the basis of my argument in the previous paragraph and my arguments in Chapter 2, I will take it as established that commonsense morality acknowledges that conventions represent a distinct source of value for relationships. I devote the rest of this section to providing a defense of this feature of commonsense morality. While I will not be able to work out all of the details of my defense here, I will explain its main features.

The first thing to note is that, clearly, we do not want to say that all conventions imbue relationships with value. As we did with the first two sources of value, we need to exclude those cases that violate objective moral norms. Conventional allocations of responsibilities that are sexist, racist, or otherwise bigoted are not morally binding. For familial responsibilities, the prohibition against sexism is particularly important. For instance, many of the conventions that have existed in our own society about the nature of fathers’ responsibilities for their children
embody sexist norms.\textsuperscript{30} We might explain this restriction, as G. A. Cohen does in his defense of a type of conservatism about value, by noting that immoral conventions are not valuable. He writes, “I do not have conservative views about matters of justice. Conservatives like me want to conserve that which has intrinsic value, and injustice lacks intrinsic value—and has, indeed, intrinsic disvalue.”\textsuperscript{31} Whether or not we agree with the specifics of Cohen’s explanation—for instance, some would argue that the wrongness of injustice is not due to its disvalue—it’s clear that immoral conventions do not imbue relationships with value.

For those conventions that do not violate objective moral norms, the question remains as to why we ought to think they can give relationships value. As I explained in Chapter 2, it’s commonly accepted that conventions can give relationships \textit{instrumental} value. Through attending to one’s relationships with one’s friends and family members, one promotes overall well-being. But the claim under consideration here is that conventions can give relationships \textit{non-instrumental} value. And unlike instrumental value, there’s no commonly accepted account of how conventions can have this function.

As I also argued in Chapter 2, simply appealing to the fact that “this is the way we do things here” is not convincing. The bare fact that something is the conventional thing to do gives us no reason to do it.\textsuperscript{32} We need to be given reasons to believe that the relationship between a father and his child, for instance, has the value our culture attributes to it. It seems to me that one such reason does exist in cases, like the father/child one, in which one of the participants cannot yet consent to value their relationship. This reason is related to the fact that in some of these cases, the convention makes it the case that we have reason to expect that the child will

\textsuperscript{30} For instance, Michael Chabon has written about how he is routinely lauded by strangers for performing even such modest tasks as taking his young child to the grocery store without his wife: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=113719470
\textsuperscript{31} Cohen (2011), p. 204.
\textsuperscript{32} See my argument in section 2.2.
value the relationship when he or she is a competent adult even if he or she does not currently do so, whether this is because he or she currently lacks the capacity to value their relationship or simply does not currently do so. We have such reason due to the general fact that social conventions often affect which relationships we value and how we value them. We usually understand our relationships in culturally defined terms, so when we value our relationships, the ways in which we value them usually are shaped by our cultural norms. For instance, in U.S. culture, being an aunt involves things like giving birthday presents and being willing to occasionally look after one’s niece or nephew. An American aunt, then, likely understands her relationship with her niece or nephew through this cultural lens, and she might value taking part in her niece or nephew’s life in just these ways. If there were significant differences in how a different culture conceived of the role of an aunt, then we would expect that these differences would turn up in how aunts in that culture valued their relationships with their nieces and nephews as well.

This is not to say that one’s culture must determine how one values one’s relationships. Relationships certainly can depart from cultural norms in all sorts of ways. For instance, we might say that an aunt and her niece are particularly close, where we mean that they have a closer relationship than the typical aunt and niece in our culture. However, it seems clear that cultural conventions do commonly affect which relationships individuals value and how they value them.

For cases in which the participants in a relationship are both competent adults, it seems to me that a convention, on its own, does not give the relationship value. Rather, the value of the relationship is due to one or both of the other sources I have discussed, mutually valuing the relationship or the relationship’s history. For instance, while a convention might affect how two
individuals value their relationship, it is their mutually valuing of the relationship that imbues it with value. The conventions, on their own, do not give relationships value in such cases since autonomous agents have the freedom to decide whether or not they want to follow their societal conventions.\(^{33}\) I think voluntarists, like Simmons, who challenge the normative force of local practice have this much right anyway.\(^{34}\)

However, in cases in which one of the participants is not yet a competent adult, it seems that conventions do provide an independent source of value. In my view, they set the relationship’s value (and so the extent of one’s special responsibilities) at a default level. Once both individuals have the moral standing to consent to their participation in the relationship, the convention no longer carries moral weight. So, for instance, in U.S. culture, the societal convention that the relationship between fathers and their newborn children is quite important in fact makes such relationships quite important. Once the child becomes an autonomous agent, the convention ceases to give the relationship value. Any value that it has comes from its history or the fact that the father and child mutually value it. (It’s important to keep the history point in mind since by the time that the child becomes an autonomous agent, much of the relationship’s value will likely depend on the kind of history they have had together.)

One reason to think that conventions give parent/child relationships a default level of value is that, as I earlier noted, we expect that the child will value the relationship when he or she is a competent adult even if he or she does not currently do so. As I have now argued, conventions often affect which relationships people value and how they value them. So, we should expect that an American child will come to value her relationships with her parents,

\(^{33}\) Compare Richardson’s “participant conception” of the authority of rules, as explained in Richardson (1999), section IV. In the same article, Richardson applies his participant conception to the topic of the division of moral responsibilities. His view has greatly influenced my own.

\(^{34}\) See, e.g., Simmons (1996).
absent reason to think otherwise. This expectation makes a normative difference because it gives a parent reason to expect that she will be following her child’s wishes if she looks after him or her. This expectation of what the child will wish in the future serves as a proxy for what he or she wishes now. My first conclusion therefore is that even though the parent and child cannot currently give their relationship value through mutually valuing it, it does have the value that their society’s conventions attribute to it if the parent endorses these conventions and we have reason to expect the child would also do so were he or she a competent adult. And, as I have argued, in many cases, we do have reason to expect that children will endorse their societal conventions.

However, it seems that relationships between parents and children have non-instrumental value even when the parents do not endorse their societal conventions. That is, it seems that the situation is different for children than for competent adults. As I have argued, for relationships between competent adults, valuing gives the relationship value only if it is mutual. But a relationship between a parent and child seems to have value even if the parent does not value it. Rather, for the relationship to have value, we need only expect that the child will value it as a competent adult. What justifies this intuition, it seems to me, is that the type of relationship is quite different in the two types of cases. It would violate a person’s autonomy if other competent adults could saddle her with special responsibilities simply by valuing their relationships with her. However, relationships with children are not built around mutual autonomy. The fact that children are not autonomous blocks them from having the standing to give a relationship value through mutually valuing it, but it also means that their relationships have value if we simply have reason to expect they will value them as competent adults. No mutuality is required. Therefore, my more general conclusion is that a relationship between a competent adult and a
child has the value their convention attributes to it if we have reason to expect that the child will endorse the convention as a competent adult. Overall, then, my discussion here has isolated a limited role for conventions: in cases involving children, they can serve as a default setting for a relationship’s value. It gives the relationship a level of value that later can be overturned.  

Other considerations can also overturn the default value that a convention provides. Importantly, in the case of parents and their children, it seems clear that parents can turn over their special responsibilities to willing recipients, as in cases of adoption. Moreover, it seems that a child’s parents have some authority to overturn conventions about the roles that other individuals, such as aunts and uncles, play in their children’s lives. For instance, if a mother is estranged from her sister, then it seems to me that she has the authority to block her from playing as large a role in her child’s life as an aunt normally would. The default force of conventions, then, is rather weak; many sorts of considerations can overturn it. Nevertheless, my argument that conventions can imbue relationships with even a default level of value is a rebuke to those, like Simmons, who unqualifiedly challenge the normative force of local practice. It opens our eyes to a third source of value for relationships.

Before concluding my argument, I ought to note one other important role conventions play in my theory. While some of the differences in relationship-based responsibilities across time and places can be accounted for by looking to the different values that relationships have in these times and locales, some of the disparities are also due to differences in how we express that

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35 The coordinating function that conventions serve certainly also plays a role in justifying the special responsibilities a father in our culture has at the time of his child’s birth; but, as I have noted, this function does not give the relationship non-instrumental value.

36 Although this claim probably is more controversial, it seems to me that biological parents still retain some special obligations to their children even after they give them up for adoption. For instance, it may be that, other things being equal, they ought not outright ignore their biological children if they attempt to contact them when they are adults.

37 See Scheffler’s article “The Normativity of Tradition” (in Scheffler (2010a)) and Cohen’s article “Rescuing Conservatism” (Cohen (2011)) for thoughtful discussions of further reasons we have to follow our society’s traditional practices.
a relationship has a certain value. It may be that parents in the 1960s could spend much less time with their children than today’s average parents and still express that they have the same level of regard for them, due to shifting societal norms. Or, to use another example, it’s much easier to buy presents for your children that show that you care about them when you don’t live next to the spendthrift Joneses. For a view like mine which holds that fulfilling a relationship-based responsibility is a means of expressing that one respects the value of a relationship, the way that conventions affect what we express through our actions is crucially important.

Here again the convention need not fully determine what one expresses through a word or action. Participants in a relationship may agree that they will employ other means of expressing their regard for one another than their society’s trite, syrupy tropes. But when we encounter people who we do not know or do not know well, the meanings that our society ascribes to our words and actions are usually determinative. And even with our close friends and family members, it’s hard—perhaps impossible—to completely avoid the conventional meanings of words and actions. (Ask anyone who has ever requested that guests refrain from giving gifts at a celebration.)

Overall, in this section, we have seen that conventions have two important effects on relationship-based responsibilities. First, as I have just explained, they affect how one can signify that a relationship has a given level of value. Second, in cases involving children, they can give relationships a default level of value. This second point shows that conventions represent a third way in which relationships can gain value. To summarize, a relationship has (non-instrumental) value if at least one of these conditions obtains:

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38 See footnote 29 in this chapter.
39 I do not claim that these three sources are exhaustive (and so this claim is not a biconditional).
1. Its participants mutually value it (and they are permitted to value it and do not value it for impermissible reasons).

2. Its history includes a mutually beneficial or meaningful set of encounters.

3. One of the participants is not yet a competent adult; one or more conventions in the participants’ society state that the relationship is valuable; there is reason to expect that the participant will endorse the relevant convention(s) when he or she is a competent adult; the relevant convention(s) does not violate an objective moral norm; and this convention’s normative force has not been overturned by other moral considerations.

Or, much more concisely, I have argued that three sources of value for relationships exist: mutually valuing a relationship, a relationship’s history, and social conventions.

Throughout the chapter, I have given examples that show that these sources of value provide support for our commonsense intuitions about which relationships with our friends and family members are valuable. I do not claim that this argument justifies all such intuitions—indeed, it likely gives us reason to reject some of them—but I believe it provides support for many of them. Definitively establishing just how many would require a precise accounting of the places where my argument supports our commonsense intuitions and where it departs from them, a task which is, thankfully, outside the scope of my project (and likely not all that philosophically interesting). However, I do take my argument to have successfully vindicated the more general intuition that some of the most central relationships in our lives, those with our friends and family members, can have non-instrumental value and, therefore, can serve as the foundation of relationship-based responsibilities.
My argument in previous chapters established that my Respect View provides the most compelling account of why being in valuable relationships gives individuals special responsibilities for one another. Now we have seen why we ought to think that our relationships with our friends and family members are valuable. Bringing these two pieces together, we can conclude we do have special responsibilities for our friends and family members. Taking a special interest in their welfare is required to respect the special value they have in our lives, a value that can come from the fact that we mutually value our relationship, our history together, or our society’s norms. So, to finally answer the question I posed at the outset, “must I be my brother’s keeper?,” we can see that the answer for many of us is ‘yes.’
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