

# Partiality, Asymmetries, and Morality's Harmonious Propensity

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## Abstract

We argue for asymmetries between positive and negative partiality. Specifically, we defend four claims: *i*) there are forms of negative partiality that do not have positive counterparts; *ii*) the directionality of personal relationships has distinct effects on positive and negative partiality; *iii*) the extent of the interactions within a relationship affects positive and negative partiality differently; and *iv*) positive and negative partiality have different scope restrictions. We argue that these asymmetries point to a more fundamental moral principle, which we call *Morality's Harmonious Propensity*. According to this principle, morality has a propensity toward *preserving* positive relationships and *dissolving* negative ones.

## KEYWORDS

Negative Partiality, Positive Partiality, Permissible Partiality, Required Partiality, Asymmetries, Personal Relationships, Structure of Personal Relationships, Friendship, Enmity

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Partiality is a central part of morality.<sup>1</sup> The realm of positive partiality includes moral options and associative duties to prioritise the interests of intimates (or oneself), which *permit* and/or *require* one to deviate from what one owes to others *qua* moral agent—e.g. to depart from a consequentialist duty to maximize the good impartially or to go beyond one's *general* duties to others.<sup>2,3</sup>

The realm of negative partiality, by contrast, has hitherto gone virtually unnoticed.<sup>4</sup> To recognise its existence, suppose that you conceive of yourself and your personal relationships as existing in a kind of moral space.<sup>5</sup> You are closest to yourself.<sup>6</sup> The moral distance between you and someone else is a function of your personal relationship, which in turn is constituted by histories of various forms of morally significant positive encounters: intimates are closer to you than (and hence you can prioritise their interests more than you can those of) loosely associated colleagues, who are in turn closer to you than strangers.<sup>7</sup> Strangers represent how you may act independent of any special personal relationship. We can think of the stranger relation as setting a baseline characterisation of morality (or moral midpoint), relative to which you may be more or less partial depending on your positive or negative personal relationships. If intimates are closer to you in moral space and strangers represent a moral midpoint, then there may also be people who are more distant than strangers. These people are your *adversaries* by virtue of a negative personal relationship with them, a relationship that is constituted by

<sup>1</sup> The importance of favouring people with whom we stand in some special relationship is a pervasive theme in much of modern moral philosophy. Evidence for this claim can be found in Hume (1777), p. 146; Ross (1930), p. 21; Nagel (1970), pp. 129–130, (1980), pp. 119–126, and (1995); Williams (1973), p. 110, and (1981), Ch. 2; Walzer (1970), Ch. 1; Wasserstrom (1975), p. 4; Mackie (1977), pp. 157–158; and Parfit (1983), pp. 35–36, and (1984), pp. 95, 485. Lange (2022) provides an overview of the ethics of partiality.

<sup>2</sup> For defences of permissible partiality (though this list is by no means exhaustive), see Scheffler (1982), Portmore (2003), Stroud (2010), and Bader (2020). For required partiality see, for example, Goodin (1985) and Scheffler (2001). An example of a defence of permissible *and* required partiality is Shubert and Hurka (2012). For a comprehensive overview of the ethics of partiality, see Keller (2013). For an extensive critique of options and, *a fortiori*, associative duties, see Kagan (1989).

<sup>3</sup> We follow Kagan (1989), pp. 6–10, in understanding 'interests' here broadly as opposed to narrowly in terms of pure self-concern. Fletcher (2016) gives a helpful overview of different accounts of well-being.

<sup>4</sup> See Brandt (2020; forthcoming), Lange (2020), and Lange and Brandt (forthcoming) for an analysis and defence of negative partiality. See Eskens (2022) for a critique.

<sup>5</sup> Broad (1942), p. 55, and Feinberg (1980), p. 202, have alluded to closeness facts in the context of associative duties, and Nozick (1974), p. 57, has written about moral space in the context of moral rights. Bader (2020) provides an account of moral space in the context of defending moral options.

<sup>6</sup> There are some questions surrounding moral space that we do not engage in here: For example, characterising the moral distance to oneself is complicated by the fact that we might think there are options to promote and to discount one's own interests (as well as the possibility of special duties of self-respect). Moreover, it is not clear that the 'distance' between one and oneself is a function of relationship facts. Some independent support for this premise, however, can be found in Aristotle (1894), Bks III.5 and IX.4; see also Bennett (1981), p. 78, who talks about *identity* as being the 'most special relation'. Beyond this, there is a question as to whether moral space is best understood one-dimensionally or in a multi-dimensional fashion that allows for relationships of mixed friendship and enmity.

<sup>7</sup> We here bracket the parent–child relationship from the discussion as it is a structurally distinctive relationship. Instead, we focus on 'thick' personal relationships involving friends, acquaintances, strangers, competitors, perpetrators and victims, and enemies. These relationships share the feature of involving agents who have sufficiently developed capacities for full moral responsibility (and in this respect can engage with each other on equal terms).

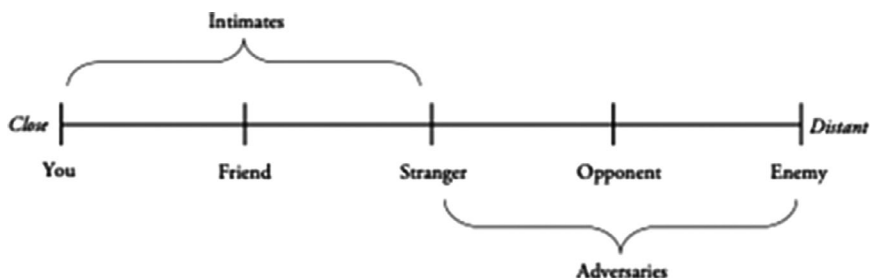


ILLUSTRATION 1 Distance in moral space

normatively significant interactions, such as hindering, violating trust, being ungrateful, or failing to cooperate.

What is the relationship between positive and negative partiality? A natural answer might be that the two mirror each other: friends confer benefits on each other, and enemies confer harms. If it is required to favour a good friend’s interests by *X* over a stranger’s, it seems natural that an established enemy’s interests should be discounted by *X* over a stranger’s.

We think that this symmetrical picture is incorrect. In what follows we argue for asymmetries between positive and negative partiality. We advance four main claims:

1. **Normative Asymmetry:** There are forms of negative partiality that do not have positive counterparts.
2. **Directional Asymmetry:** The directionality of personal relationships has different effects on positive and negative partiality.
3. **Additivity Asymmetry:** The constitutive interactions of positive and negative personal relationships aggregate differently and consequently affect positive and negative partiality differently.
4. **Scope Asymmetry:** Positive and negative partiality have different scopes.

We explore and defend these asymmetries in the next section. We then argue in Section 3 that these asymmetries support a further thesis that we term the *harmonious propensity* of morality: a fundamental feature of morality that encourages the existence of positive personal relationships and limits negative ones. Section 4 concludes.

## 2 | FOUR ASYMMETRIES

Is negative partiality the mirror image of positive partiality to your intimates?

### 2.1 | Asymmetry 1: forms of positive and negative partiality

The domains of positive and negative partiality can include both options and requirements. But is there conceptual symmetry between them? We think that some forms of negative partiality have no positive conceptual counterparts.

In what follows we reflect on intuitions about stylised cases, so a few clarificatory remarks are in order. We focus on outcomes and make simplifying assumptions about the means by which

one might help or burden people. We consider cases involving moderate partiality as the baseline to rule out confounding factors related to the allocation of small goods, such as permissions to allocate small goods arbitrarily. We assume that prospective benefits and burdens are not owed, and we set aside issues pertaining to details of the causal structure of the provision of the benefits and burdens in question. Finally, we assume that the benefits in question concern happiness.

Imagine that in

**Stranger vs. Intimate**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 5 units or
2. Benefit your intimate by 1.

Given the choice between giving a moderate benefit to a stranger or a small benefit to an intimate, you may be permitted or indeed required to give the benefit to your intimate—depending on the closeness of your personal relationship with your intimate.

You might have an

**Other-Favouring Option:** A permission to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome because it favours your intimates' interests.

or an

**Other-Favouring Duty:** A requirement to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome because it favours your intimates' interests.

The difference between the two is that it is discretionary to act on other-favouring options, whereas you are required to act on other-favouring duties.

Both other-favouring options and other-favouring duties have negative counterparts. Suppose that in

**Stranger vs. Adversary**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 1 unit or
2. Benefit your adversary by 5.

If you have a choice between giving a small benefit to a stranger or a slightly greater benefit to your adversary, you may—or might even be required to—benefit the stranger instead by virtue of the morally negative personal relationship that you have with your adversary.<sup>8</sup>

The above suggests that you might have an

**Other-Sacrificing Option:** A permission to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome by making a choice that discounts your adversaries' interests.

or an

**Other-Sacrificing Duty:** A requirement to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome by making a choice that discounts your adversaries' interests.

<sup>8</sup> We provide defences for the claim that the responses of negative partiality are distinctively agent-relative as opposed to agent-neutral in Lange (2020), p. 616, and Brandt (forthcoming).

At this stage, positive and negative partiality can be represented as symmetrical phenomena. However, there might be forms of negative partiality that have *no* positive counterparts. These are *inversions* of positive forms.<sup>9</sup> Consider the following pair of cases.

Suppose that in

**Ignoring an Arch-Enemy**, you can either

1. Do nothing; or
2. Benefit your arch-enemy by 5 units.

If you have a choice between doing nothing and providing a moderate benefit to a very distant adversary—and the moral distance between you and the adversary is sufficiently large—you might be permitted or required to do *nothing*.

To support this point, consider

**Spouse's Rival:** Ann is a disrespectful colleague who has publicly (and unfittingly) disparaged the work of your spouse. Ann is now in need of assistance in procuring a marketing expert for her latest project. You could easily provide a connection but decide to refrain from doing so.

Ann's position with respect to your spouse may mandate this extreme normative change. Her having publicly disparaged your spouse's work may allow you not to help Ann at all and may even render it impermissible for you to do so.

An inverted case of positive partiality can also take the form of countenancing the manifestation of burdens in your adversary's life. Consider

**Burdening an Arch-Enemy.**<sup>10</sup> You can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 1 unit or
2. Burden your arch-enemy by 5.

If you have a choice between providing a small benefit to a stranger and countenancing a moderate burden to a very distant adversary, it seems that it can become permissible or required to *burden* your adversary instead of benefiting the stranger. For the adversary's interests are *transvalued* so that the manifestation of a burden in their life is, from your agent-relative perspective, beneficial.

Consider the following modified case:

**Spouse's Rival, Modified:** This time your choices are to advance the minor good of a stranger in a way that is neutral with respect to your spouse's rival or to avoid providing the benefit and act so as to thwart the rival's interests. Suppose, for example, that you can devote space and time on your influential blog to promoting the work of a random scholar (with whom you have no relation) or similar time and space to promoting critics of your spouse's rival. You decide to devote space to the latter.

<sup>9</sup>Note that it does not follow that any framework that aims to model these options and/or requirements of negative partiality must include both the negative response of discounting and that of inversion. Inversions do not follow from discounting.

<sup>10</sup>The 'benefit' and 'burden' terminology is intended to be neutral between making and allowing. When a course of action results in a burden for person X, this does not imply that X is being actively interfered with or harmed.

As before, the fact that the rival has been disrespectful may mandate a more extreme normative change and indeed allow you to choose to make it the case that a burden manifests in their life instead of bringing about a benefit to a random stranger.

Insofar as the above considerations are correct, it therefore seems that negative partiality may encompass an

***Inverted Other-Favouring Option:*** A permission to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome because it inverts the favouring of your adversaries' interests.

Negative partiality may even encompass what we might refer to as an

***Inverted Other-Favouring Duty:*** A requirement to bring about an impartially suboptimal outcome because it inverts the favouring of your adversaries' interests.

Inverted forms of negative partiality are more controversial than other-sacrificing options or requirements since they allow or require something intrinsically bad to happen to your adversary. The above hence suggests a

***Normative Asymmetry:*** Positive partiality encompasses other-favouring options and duties, which have negative counterparts in the form of other-sacrificing options and other-sacrificing duties. However, there may also exist inverted other-favouring options and duties, which have no positive counterpart.

Why do some forms of negative partiality lack positive counterparts? We submit that the reason is that inverted options or duties must be understood by reference to some existing duty such as a duty to maximize the overall good. Such duties can invert only because they give morality a *baseline structure*. By contrast, if we imagined a moral system without a requirement to maximize the good, there would be symmetry between positive and negative partiality. Partiality could manifest in the duty of beneficence being acquired among members of special relationships, while negative partiality could manifest in the acquisition of a duty to avoid benefiting another.

To illustrate the above idea, imagine a moral system where our baseline duties involved duties that were contrary to the interests of an individual. This would be a system with a baseline duty to *harm* others. In such a system, positive partiality would be capable of 'inverting' our baseline duties (the inverted duty to harm would be a duty to benefit), while negative partiality would be unable to do so.

### 2.1.1 | The normative asymmetry and supererogation

The *Normative Asymmetry* has implications for debates about the imposition of harms and about issues pertaining to supererogation. This subsection illustrates these implications.

Suppose that in

**Helping an Intimate**, you can either

1. Benefit your intimate by 1 unit or
2. Benefit the same intimate by 5.

It seems uncontroversial that you should always give a greater benefit to the same intimate if offered a choice to do so.

Should you make an analogous choice for your adversary? Suppose that in

**Helping an Adversary**, you can either

1. Benefit your adversary by 1 unit or
2. Benefit the same adversary by 5.

If you have a choice between giving the same adversary a greater or a lesser benefit, it is less clear that you are not *at least* permitted to provide the smaller benefit.

To lend some more credibility to this judgment, consider

***Flu Medicine Advice.*** Valerie's bully of a neighbour is ill and needs advice about medication. Valerie can recommend the most cost-effective or a somewhat less cost-effective medicine to her neighbour.

There is some intuitive pull to say that it is permissible for Valerie to give her bullying neighbour the lesser benefit. We might think that this is not a response arising from spite but rather an attenuation of benevolence that is proportional to the morally negative personal relationship that Valerie has with the neighbour.

If true, this would show that it can be permissible to disfavour your adversaries, which would amount to a permission to inflict a harm on your adversary on *some* accounts of harm.<sup>11</sup>

Matters are complicated by the account of harm that we endorse. For example, according to the

***Comparative View***, you harm an agent if you make them worse off in some respect than they otherwise would have been.<sup>12</sup>

Since the permission defended here includes the choice of benefiting the same person either more or less, it therefore follows that the provision of a lesser benefit makes your adversary worse off in some respect—worse off insofar as they receive a lesser benefit than they would otherwise have received.

According to the

***Non-comparative View***, you harm an agent if you make it the case that they are in a bad state in absolute terms with respect to their overall well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Since you improve your adversary's position in absolute terms, it does not follow on this account that you have harmed them.

The possibility of other-disfavouring negative responses has further implications for the domain of beneficence. Suppose that in

**Helping an Intimate at Cost to Yourself**, you can either

1. Do nothing or
2. Benefit an intimate by 5 units at cost C to yourself.

<sup>11</sup> We can understand 'harm' broadly as events that set back an agent's interests. The fact that there can be a permission to harm an individual is no reason for concern and has long been accepted in debates on the ethics of defensive harm. Even in less extreme cases, there need not be a special prohibition against the permission defended here since such a prohibition does not apply to any kind of harm.

<sup>12</sup> Thomson (2011) defends one variant of this view, a counterfactual account of harm.

<sup>13</sup> A prominent version is defended by Shiffrin (1999; 2012).

Given a sufficiently large cost to yourself, you are not required to benefit your intimate. Benefiting your friend is good but not required and is therefore supererogatory.

Suppose next that in

**Supererogation for an Intimate**, you can either

1. Do nothing;
2. Benefit your intimate by 1 unit at cost C to yourself; or
3. Benefit the same intimate by 5 units at the same cost C to yourself.

Many think that, although it is permissible to do nothing so as to avoid incurring a cost to yourself, if you do decide to benefit your intimate, it is impermissible to give the lesser benefit.<sup>14</sup> You must give them the greatest benefit that is possible *all else equal*.

Suppose now that in

**Supererogation for an Adversary**, you can either

1. Do nothing;
2. Benefit your adversary by 1 unit at cost C to yourself; or
3. Benefit the same adversary by 4 units at the same cost C to yourself.

This case is similar to the previous one, except that you now have the prospect of providing a lesser or a greater benefit to your adversary with no change to the cost. Intuitively, we might think that it is now permissible to provide your adversary with the lesser as opposed to the greater benefit if you decide to help.

We can illustrate the permissibility of suboptimal beneficence to your adversaries by appeal to a justification that is absent in the previous case. In *Supererogation for an Intimate*, your positive personal relationship with your friend gives you reason to bring about a greater benefit for her rather than a lesser one. We might imagine the friend complaining if you were to provide the lesser benefit: ‘I understand that you didn’t have to help me, but if the cost to you is the same, why would you help me, your friend, less as opposed to more?’

By contrast, in *Supererogation for an Adversary*, your negative personal relationship with your adversary gives you reason to bring about a lesser benefit for her rather than a greater one. Here we can provide the following justification to an adversary who complains along lines similar to the above: ‘Though the cost of helping you to a greater or lesser extent is the same, I choose to help you only a little bit because you have always behaved like such a jerk to me!’

In short: If the cost to you remains the same and you decide to help, you should help your friend as much as possible but not your enemy.

## 2.2 | Asymmetry 2: directionality of personal relationship

Partiality arises from personal relationships, which can have two forms of *directionality*: *one-directional* or *reciprocal*.<sup>15</sup> For example, a benefactor–beneficiary relationship is one-directional

<sup>14</sup> For an influential defence of this claim, see Pummer (2016). For a dissenting view, see McMahan (2017).

<sup>15</sup> This distinction is an imperfect proxy insofar as personal relationships are rarely exclusively one-directional. By drawing this distinction, we aim to emphasise tendencies of personal relationships.



insofar as it involves a benefactor who confers a benefit on a beneficiary who does not reciprocate. By contrast, a friendship is reciprocal insofar as it involves two individuals who mutually cooperate, confide in, and benefit each other.<sup>16</sup>

Imagine that in

**Stranger vs. Intimate**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 5 units or
2. Benefit your intimate by 1.

Faced with the choice of giving a moderate benefit to a stranger or a small benefit to an intimate, you may be permitted or indeed required to give the benefit to your intimate—depending on the closeness of your personal relationship with your intimate.

Insofar as the prospective benefit to the stranger remains constant, it seems that whether you are permitted to benefit your intimate depends on the directionality of your personal relationship with her, *all else equal*. We might think that your option to prefer her interests is *weaker* if you share a *one-directional* personal relationship with her than if your relationship is *reciprocal*. In other words, the option

**(2a) Benefit your intimate by 1 unit (*One-directional positive personal relationship*)**

may be impermissible. For benefiting your intimate by 1 unit to be permissible, the prospective benefit to the stranger would have to be less than 5. By contrast, the option to

**(2b) Benefit your intimate by 1 unit (*Reciprocal positive personal relationship*)**

may be permissible (all else being equal between the cases).

If this assessment is correct, then reciprocal positive personal relationships allow for stronger positive partiality than one-directional positive personal relationships. What explains this difference in the justification for a positive response? We submit that reciprocal positive relationships are *more* morally significant than one-directional relationships. While the former may include *thick* personal relationships such as genuine friendships or spousal relationships, the latter are restricted to *thinner* relationships such as those between a benefactor and a beneficiary.

To reinforce the plausibility of this explanation, consider the following two vignettes:

**Music Tutor:** Chloe has volunteered as a music tutor for Daisy for the past ten years, teaching her to play the drums.

**Band-Mates:** Emma and Fran have been members of a collaborative ensemble for the past 10 years. Throughout this time, they have relied on each other for help in working through their respective creative musical challenges.

While we can imagine in *Music Tutor* that a personal relationship develops over time between Chloe and Daisy that gives Chloe, as the benefactor, for example, a strengthened duty of

<sup>16</sup> This is not to deny that relationships, in reality, consist of a plurality of different kinds of interactions of various degrees.

benevolence toward Daisy, this duty seems to be clearly weaker than the duties that Emma and Fran have toward each other. Insofar as Emma and Fran's mutual relationship is reciprocal, it therefore gives rise to stronger positive responses for them than Chloe and Daisy's one-directional personal relationship.<sup>17</sup>

Let's now consider negative partiality. Does it mirror its positive counterpart? Imagine that in **Stranger vs. Adversary**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 1 unit or
2. Benefit your adversary by 5.

Given the choice to give a small benefit to a stranger or a moderately greater benefit to an adversary, we might think that you are permitted or indeed required to benefit the stranger.

This view, however, is also too simplistic. As in the case of positive partiality, whether your negative personal relationships are one-directional or reciprocal affects permitted and required negative partiality. Reciprocal negative relationships involve mutual morally negative interactions, whereas one-directional relationships do not. This affects your justified negative responses.

For example, if an adversary bullies an *innocent* victim, that victim is permitted or may even be required to discount the bully's interests.<sup>18</sup> That is, though the option not to

**(2a)** Benefit your adversary by 5 units (***One-directional negative relationship***)

is permissible given that you are innocent, the option not to

**(2b)** Benefit your adversary by 5 units (***Reciprocal negative relationship***)

may be impermissible. Accordingly, one-directional negative personal relationships increase the extent of permitted other-sacrificing relative to reciprocal negative relationships.

To illustrate these considerations, consider the following two cases.

**School Bully:** James, a college freshman, is ridiculed for his appearance without justification by Justin on the first day of class.

**Toxic Colleagues:** Ina and Jane are each starting their new job on the same day. They get off on the wrong foot, and matters culminate in a passive-aggressive verbal exchange.

Intuitively, James is permitted to discount the interests of Justin comparatively further because he has not reciprocated any wrongdoing. Insofar as Ina and Jane's incipient negative personal relationship is reciprocal, it justifies weaker negative responses.

<sup>17</sup> It seems that reasons of friendship do not arise in the context of a duty of gratitude and that there is a limit to what is owed on the basis of simply receiving benefits. This is plausibly because a 'one-sided' relationship is self-limiting in some sense.

<sup>18</sup> What does it mean to be 'innocent' in the relevant respect here? It means that the individual in question has not engaged in negative interactions with the perpetrator or, on some stricter accounts, has not done anything wrong.

If these remarks are correct, then this gives us

***Directional Asymmetry (Preliminary, partial version)***: Reciprocal positive personal relationships *increase* justifiable positive partiality toward intimates relative to one-directional positive personal relationships, whereas reciprocal negative personal relationships *decrease* justifiable negative partiality toward adversaries relative to one-directional negative personal relationships. One-directional positive personal relationships *decrease* justifiable positive partiality in the benefactor toward intimates relative to reciprocal positive relationships, whereas one-directional negative personal relationships *increase* justifiable negative partiality in the victim relative to reciprocal negative personal relationships.

A natural question now arises: do reciprocal personal relationships (whether positive or negative) affect positive and negative partiality by the same amount as one-directional personal relationships?

Intuitively, it seems that this is not the case. Reciprocal personal relationships are constituted by interactions that are in and of themselves more morally significant than the interactions that constitute one-directional personal relationships. Reciprocal personal relationships therefore have a greater impact on positive and negative partiality.

This suggests that

***Reciprocal Personal Relationship*** increases justified positive partiality toward intimates and decreases justified negative partiality toward adversaries relative to negative one-directional personal relationships by factor  $\alpha$ , whereas

***One-Directional Personal Relationship*** increases justified positive partiality toward intimates and negative partiality toward adversaries by factor  $\beta$  (where  $\alpha > \beta$ , and  $\alpha, \beta > 0$ ).

Accordingly, you might be permitted in *Stranger vs. Intimate* to benefit your intimate by 1 instead of a stranger by 5 if the positive personal relationship between you and your intimate is reciprocal. By contrast, if the relationship between you and your intimate is one-directional, then you might be permitted to give them benefits of the same size only if the prospective benefit to the stranger is capped at, say, 4. To illustrate this, suppose that the one-directional relationship involves someone who has volunteered to provide one-to-one tutoring at a writing centre. They have a history of providing this service to a student, and now they must decide whether to confer some additional benefit (e.g. a spot in a special writing seminar) on their student or on a much needier student with whom they have no relationship. Intuitively, they may be required here to provide the spot to the needier student.

By the same token, you might be permitted in *Stranger vs. Adversary* to benefit the stranger by 1 instead of your adversary by 5 if the personal relationship between you and your adversary is one-directional (and your adversary is the aggressor). However, if your relationship with your adversary is reciprocal, then you may give the stranger a benefit of 1 only if the prospective benefit to your adversary is capped at 4.

We can say more. In addition to the general idea that positive and negative partiality are directionally asymmetrical, we may consider whether negative one-directional personal relationships

justify negative responses that are analogous to the responses justified by reciprocal positive personal relationships.

This would split the above pair into the following quadruplet:

**Positive Reciprocal Personal Relationship:** Increases justified positive partiality toward intimates by factor  $\alpha$ .

**Positive One-Directional Personal Relationship:** Increases justified positive partiality toward intimates by factor  $\beta$  (where  $\alpha > \beta$ , and  $\alpha, \beta > 0$ ).

**Negative Reciprocal Personal Relationship:** Increases justified negative partiality toward adversaries by factor  $\gamma$ .

**Negative One-Directional Personal Relationship:** Increases justified negative partiality toward adversaries by factor  $\delta$  (where  $\delta > \gamma$ , and  $\gamma, \delta > 0$ , and  $\gamma < \alpha$  and  $\delta < \beta$ ).

This allows for the most nuanced view. For example, this view makes possible the idea that negative reciprocal personal relationships decrease permitted negative partiality (relative to the case of one-directional negative relationships) to a point at which it becomes negligibly small. Some may find this very plausible (i.e. where two individuals have wronged each other over a period of time, each virtually loses the prerogative to discount the well-being of the other).

The above is quite densely presented, so let us illustrate it with the cases that we have considered so far. Recall the following four cases:

**Music Tutor:** Chloe volunteers as a music tutor for Daisy, whom she has been teaching to play the drums for the past ten years.

**Band-Mates:** Emma and Fran have been members of a collaborative ensemble for the past 10 years. Throughout this time, they have relied on each other for help in working through their respective creative musical challenges.

**School Bully:** James, a college freshman, is ridiculed for his appearance without justification by Justin on the first day of class.

**Toxic Colleagues:** Ina and Jane are each starting their new job on the same day. They get off on the wrong foot, and matters culminate in a passive-aggressive verbal exchange.

According to the above, whatever justifiable positive partiality Chloe shows Daisy in *Music Tutor* would be relatively greater than whatever justifiable negative partiality James might show

Justin in *School Bully*. Likewise, whatever justifiable positive partiality Emma and Fran might display toward each other in *Best Friends* would be comparatively greater than whatever justifiable negative partiality Ina and Jane might display toward each other in *Toxic Colleagues*.<sup>19</sup>

The above considerations about how the nature and polarity of your personal relationships influence your justifiable positive and negative partiality can be summarised as the

**Directional Asymmetry:** Reciprocal positive personal relationships *increase* justifiable positive partiality toward intimates relative to one-directional positive personal relationships, whereas reciprocal negative personal relationships *decrease* justifiable negative partiality toward adversaries relative to one-directional negative personal relationships. One-directional positive personal relationships *decrease* justifiable positive partiality in the benefactor toward intimates relative to reciprocal positive relationships, whereas one-directional negative personal relationships *increase* justifiable negative partiality in the victim relative to reciprocal negative personal relationships. Positive reciprocal and one-directional personal relationships increase justifiable positive partiality toward intimates to a relatively greater degree than negative reciprocal and one-directional personal relationships increase justifiable negative partiality toward adversaries.

### 2.3 | Asymmetry 3: additivity of relationship interactions

Partiality arises from histories of morally significant relationship interactions. But do the interactions that justify positive partiality aggregate in the same way that interactions that justify negative partiality do?

Let's begin with a single interaction. Recall that in

**Stranger vs. Intimate**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 5 units or
2. Benefit your intimate by 1.

We think that a *single* positive interaction is insufficient to generate any justification for positive partiality at all. That is, the option

**(2a)** Benefit your intimate by 1 (**A single interaction of moral significance X**)

is unlikely to be permissible, whereas the option

**(2b)** Benefit your intimate by 1 (**More than one interaction of moral significance X**)

can (in the right context) be permitted.

<sup>19</sup> In this context, 'greater' is to be understood with reference to the impartial weighting that would typically be given to a person's interests.

While an intimate might be marginally closer to you in moral space than a stranger, a single interaction is insufficient to ground any noticeable response that could justify providing the smaller benefit to her instead of the greater benefit to the stranger.

To see this, consider

**Lost Glasses:** On her way home from the train station, Karen helps another commuter, Leyla, whom she has never met previously, to find her glasses after they fall on the ground.

While Leyla may owe Karen gratitude for finding her glasses, it seems implausible that the relationship between the two now warrants any justified response of partiality. The interaction between the two may even be ‘resolved’ entirely through an appropriate expression of gratitude by Leyla. A single positive interaction therefore does not create a personal relationship warranting noticeable positive responses of partiality.

This does not mean that, after their interaction, Leyla has no reason for preferential treatment toward Karen. After Karen helps Leyla find her glasses, Leyla may be required to prefer Karen’s interests over those of a stranger for some period of time. However, we believe that this will be as part of her requirement to discharge a duty of gratitude, an obligation that can be distinguished from partiality proper. A feature of the duty of gratitude is that it can be fully discharged. Once gratitude is sufficiently expressed, this obligation ceases to require an ongoing relationship of preferential treatment. Fundamental duties of partiality – including those of friendship and family – are unlike these discrete kinds of obligations in that fulfilling a requirement of friendship and family never fully executes the duties of the relationship in question. In part, what makes partiality distinctive as a normative phenomenon is that it involves a persistent, ongoing, and open-ended change in the structure of obligations. Accordingly, we believe that while Leyla has a duty to assist her benefactor, and this duty involves prioritizing the interests of the benefactor, this duty does not amount to a fundamental duty of partiality.<sup>20</sup>

Now consider negative partiality.

Recall that in

**Stranger vs. Adversary**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 1 unit or
2. Benefit your adversary by 5.

Here it seems that justified negative partiality is *easier* to generate and that a single sufficiently negative interaction could ground a relationship of justified negative partiality that involves an ongoing basis for discounting the new adversary’s interests. That is, the option

**(2a) Benefit your adversary by 5 (A single interaction of moral significance X)**

<sup>20</sup> See also Kolodny (2010), pp. 182-3, for a similar point. Kolodny contrasts two travellers: the first is assisted by many strangers on the course of a journey, and a second is assisted by one other traveller over the course of a journey. While the first traveller incurs a duty of gratitude to each stranger who assists them, the second pair of travellers enter into a special kind of relationship where what is owed goes beyond the mere addition of the discrete encounters that constitutes their history of interactions. This new obligation that goes above and beyond the discrete obligations is how we think of positive partiality in part because the new duty has an ongoing structure. By contrast, even if the discrete duties of gratitude incurred by the solo traveller were added up, they would never amount to an obligation that is as significant as the duty of partiality. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for encouraging us to make this point more explicit.

may be permissible, given a sufficiently significant negative interaction, as well as option

(2b) Benefit your adversary by 5 (***More than one interaction of moral significance X***),

which might even warrant a greater discounting response toward your adversary. Consider the following case:

***A Bad First Impression:*** While socialising at a function, Mara tells Nora that all the people who work in advertising are social parasites: they do not contribute to the production of valuable goods and are simply part of a mechanistic force that contributes to ‘late capitalism’. Nora absorbs this haranguing for some time before she finally interrupts to say that *she* is in marketing. Though somewhat embarrassed by this revelation, Mara goes on to insist all the more strongly on the worthlessness of this enterprise.

Suppose that Mara and Nora’s happenstance interaction is the foundation of their personal relationship and is never rectified in their subsequent encounters. How may Nora now relate to Mara? Although this initial sequence of events represents a single interaction rather than an ongoing relationship, she does now seem to *be* in a kind of ongoing relationship. A bad impression can leave a justified sense of dislike. This ‘one-off’ encounter produces an ongoing structure despite being only a single encounter.

Why does the negative counterpart of positive one-off encounters function differently? The asymmetry cannot be resolved by appeal to the directional asymmetry developed in the previous section. For example, we might initially think that a *one-off* encounter involving wrongdoing is in itself more morally significant than a *one-off* encounter involving a benefit because they are both one-directional and, as noted above, one-directional positive personal relationships *decrease* justifiable positive partiality toward intimates relative to reciprocal positive relationships, whereas one-directional negative personal relationships *increase* justifiable negative partiality relative to negative reciprocal personal relationships.

We can see that this explanation fails by considering one-off *reciprocal* positive personal relationships. In a one-off case of reciprocal positive personal relationship involving mutual beneficence, two individuals reciprocally confer benefits on each other. But in such a case, the reciprocation may also result in the cessation of the relationship. Consider

***Sharing Philosophy Exam Notes:*** Suppose Ofra and Petra reciprocate note-sharing for a philosophy exam at college.

The interaction is not without significance, but it hardly seems that their exchange gives rise to any new permissions or duties of positive partiality on their part.

However, even the one-off interaction in *A Bad First Impression* may colour subsequent interactions between the two individuals: it can provide reasons for one participant to exclude the other from future social interactions or otherwise distance herself from the other.

Moreover, recall

**Toxic Colleagues:** Ina and Jane are each starting their new job on the same day. They get off on the wrong foot, and matters culminate in a passive-aggressive verbal exchange.

Insofar as Ina and Jane interaction is a single encounter, both may also have justified negative responses. Similarly, we might even think that in a modified version of *A Bad First Impression*, in which Nora verbally retaliates against Mara's doubling down on the worthlessness of Nora's profession, Nora would still have reason to respond negatively in a future encounter.

This gives us:

**Additivity Asymmetry (Preliminary, partial version):** One-off positive personal interactions do not ground positive partiality responses, whereas one-off negative personal relationship interactions can ground negative partiality.

We can now ask: as a person interacts more with an intimate and more with an adversary, do the permitted and required positive and negative responses of partiality behave in the same way?

Intuitively, it seems that they do not. Suppose that in

**Stranger vs. Close Intimate**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 7 units or
2. Benefit your intimate by 1.

Given the choice between conferring a significant benefit on a stranger and conferring a small benefit on a very close intimate, you may be permitted or indeed required to give the benefit to your very close intimate insofar as the personal relationship consists of a series or pattern of positive personal interactions. It seems hardly worth saying that the option to prefer the interests of an intimate is *weaker* when the personal relationship has included fewer interactions than when it has included more.

This suggests

**Increasing Positive Response:** A series or pattern of positive interactions grounds increasingly stronger responses of positive partiality.

But what about negative partiality? Suppose that in

**Stranger vs. Distant Adversary**, you can either

1. Benefit a stranger by 7 units or
2. Benefit your adversary by 1.

Given the choice between giving a significant benefit to a stranger and giving a small benefit to a distant adversary, you may be permitted or perhaps required to give the benefit to the stranger insofar as the personal relationship consists of a series or pattern of negative personal interactions.

This similarly suggests the following principle:

**Increasing Negative Response:** A series or pattern of negative interactions grounds increasingly stronger responses of negative partiality.



However, there is a more complex view. We might think that *Increasing Positive Response* and *Increasing Negative Response* do not develop symmetrically as positive and negative interactions with an intimate and an adversary respectively increase. Instead, we might think that all else being equal, the increase to the permitted or required response of negative partiality is smaller than the increase to the permitted or required response of positive partiality toward an intimate.

Consider the following two cases:

**Best Friends:** Sarah and Tamara have been friends for ten years, spending most of their time together in shared activities.

**Mutual Nemeses:** Ursula and Valery have been enemies for ten years, spending most of their time trying to hinder each other from succeeding in life.

In so far as we imagine that the two cases feature an equal number of interactions, we might still think that Ursula and Valery's justifiable negative responses to each other are weaker than Sarah and Tamara's justifiable positive responses to each other.

We might even go further and think that as you interact more and more with your adversary, your justifiable responses of negative partiality begin to stagnate or decrease. That is, in *Stranger* vs. *Distant Adversary*, option

(2a) Benefit your adversary by 1 unit (***A moderate number of historical interactions of moral significance X***)

may be permissible, whereas option

(2b) Benefit your adversary by 1 unit (***A great number of historical interactions of moral significance X***)

may become impermissible. Consider

**Lifelong Friends:** Wendy and Xenia have been friends for their entire lives, spending most of their time together in shared activities.

**Mutual Arch-Nemeses:** Yasmin and Zoe have been enemies for their entire lives, spending most of their time trying to hinder each other from succeeding in life.

While it does not seem implausible to suppose that Wendy and Xenia have extremely strong reasons for positive partiality toward each other, Yasmin and Zoe's justified negative responses might not be stronger than those of Ursula and Valery in *Mutual Nemeses*.

What explains the stagnation of justifiable negative partiality responses in extreme adversarial relationships? One candidate explanation is the following: In two-way cases of negative partiality, each individual has a duty of reparations toward their adversary. In two-way cases of positive partiality, there is no corresponding duty to undermine the relationship.

In sum, we end up with an

**Additivity Asymmetry:** One-off positive personal relationships cannot ground positive partiality, whereas one-off negative personal interactions can ground negative partiality. As you interact more with your intimate, permitted and required positive partiality toward your intimate become stronger. However, while more interactions with adversaries lead to stronger permitted and required negative responses to some degree, at some point, permitted and required responses of negative partiality stagnate and eventually decrease.

We suggest that this asymmetry is best explained by the more fundamental difference between exceeding a moral standard and ‘falling below’ a moral standard: positive partiality is grounded in the former and negative partiality in the latter. It is common for people to meet and, in many circumstances, exceed the moral minimum—small favours or acts of kindness are examples of former, and they may generate little to no ongoing obligation (gratitude being a minor obligation in the grand moral scheme). While such actions are perhaps the hallmark of virtue, they are much less morally important than actions that ‘fall below’ the moral threshold, even if the actions that fall below the threshold do so in a *minor* respect.

To illustrate this, consider a morally trivial *slight* in the form of refusing to greet someone when they greet you, skipping someone in line, or spitting on the ground when someone approaches. Such failures to meet the moral minimum are of great moral significance because they fail to show respect for persons. In this sense, the realm of positive partiality is grounded in less important actions than those that ground negative partiality: positive partiality concerns the realm of actions that tend to have gone above and beyond the minimum. But giving or ‘exceeding’ respect is not on par with falling below the threshold for respect. For this reason, even saving someone’s life heroically does not tend to generate a duty of friendship. Indeed, in many cases, saving a life is *required* by the minimum standards of respect for persons.

## 2.4 | Asymmetry 4: differences in scope

The final claim of asymmetry we defend is that the scope of negative partiality is narrower than the scope of positive partiality.<sup>21</sup> We define scope as follows:

**Scope:** The dimensions of an agent’s well-being that are subjected to partial treatment.

To illustrate, consider a view according to which membership in a union generates a prerogative to pursue collective action, but the union does not especially allow for members to benefit each other in other contexts. Relationships similar to that between union members plausibly exist between colleagues and between mentors and students. These relationships are *scope-restricted* insofar as they are naturally subject to limitations on how preferential treatment is to be expressed.

By contrast, friendships are unrestricted in this regard. Friends should typically care in an unqualified way about each other’s well-being. Friendships ground positive responses to promote another’s interests when significant well-being is at stake. Rescue scenarios illustrate this phenomenon. Imagine that in

**Drowning Friend,** you can either

<sup>21</sup> For a recent discussion of scope restrictions and partiality, see Davis (2021).

1. Save the life of a stranger or
2. Save the life of your friend.

Given the choice of saving the life of a stranger or that of an intimate, such as your long-time friend, it seems that you should save your intimate rather than a stranger (even if the stranger stands to benefit more). Indeed, it has been argued that it would be impermissible even to deliberate about such a decision.<sup>22</sup>

However, now suppose that in

**Drowning Adversary**, you can either

1. Save the life of a stranger or
2. Save the life of your adversary.

Given the choice of saving the life of a stranger or that of an adversary, even a longtime adversary, it may not be clear that on this basis you are required or even permitted to save the stranger. The negative mirror image of friendship does not therefore seem to justify a comparable negative response.

To reinforce this claim, consider:

**Office Enemy:** Amber is an office jerk who fails to work collaboratively and steals credit for her co-worker's assignment.

Is it plausible to suppose that this past relationship may be used as the basis for choosing to save the stranger in a rescue scenario? Such a moral inference seems implausible. This is not to say that no personal relationship could serve as the basis for preferring to save one person over another, but rather that the paradigm case of a negative mirror image does not. In other words: positive partiality in rescue scenarios does not require the most elevated forms of friendship, but negative partiality in a rescue scenario does seem to require a relationship that is significantly baser.

Could this asymmetry be debunked by the *Directional Asymmetry* and *Additivity Asymmetry* that we have examined previously? We don't think so. Consider

**Rivalry:** Two colleagues have wronged each other by engaging in a rivalry that is inconsistent with accepted professional norms: Barbara provides a mean-spirited and scathing review of Cecilia's work, and Cecilia disparages Barbara's professional pedigree in front of faculty and students.

First, consider the *Directional Asymmetry*. We might believe that any scope restrictions on the negative partiality between Barbara and Cecilia are explained by the fact that their relationship is one of mutual wrongdoing. However, directionality does not seem to do all the explanatory work here: if we suppose that Cecilia (alone) has a long history of disparaging Barbara's professional pedigree, should we then conclude that Barbara may now favour the interests of a stranger over Cecilia in a rescue scenario? Such a conclusion still seems unintuitive.

Regarding the *Additivity Asymmetry*, we can contrast cases of positive and negative partiality with similar degrees of additivity to show that the scope restriction remains: even if Cecilia has disparaged colleague Barbara's professional pedigree as an ongoing joke to the student body for

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Williams's (1981) 'one thought too many' objection.

the past decade, it still seems implausible to say that Barbara may now favour a stranger's interests over Cecelia's in a rescue scenario. While this moderate relationship justifies negative partiality, it is simply insufficiently extreme to justify discounting in such a scenario.

This gives us a

**Scope Asymmetry:** Some positive personal relationships tend to generate unrestricted positive partiality, but their negative counterparts in the form of negative relationships involving mutual wrongdoing do not necessarily generate unrestricted negative partiality.

While friends may typically prefer each other's interests in a rescue scenario, enemies may not typically discount each other's interests in rescue scenarios. Unrestricted negative partiality emerges only in the most extreme instances of negative relationships.

What explains why positive partiality can, on the basis of interactions of moderate significance, provide reasons to prefer our intimate's interests over those of a stranger, yet being wronged does not likewise generate a reason to discount our adversary's interests?

It seems that scope restrictions are, in fact, peculiar to positive partiality. The reason that a union or orchestra member may not prefer the interests of another member in a rescue scenario is that the scope of partiality justified by the relationship is restricted to a particular domain (e.g. the domain of the activity that connects the two). By contrast, the reason that two bitter enemies may not prefer the interests of a stranger in a rescue scenario is not that the domain of 'rescue' is of any particular significance with respect to their relationship. Rather, it seems clear that the restriction in this case is based on the stakes of the decision—enmity does not ground reason to prefer interests in a rescue scenario because of the degree of welfare at stake.

Enmity and friendship might be contrasted as follows: while friendship strengthens the general duty of beneficence or provides further reason to promote the interests of one's friend in general, the reasons enmity provides to discount another's interests are partly dependent on the nature of the impact on the other's welfare.

An explanation of this phenomenon is still required. Perhaps an answer is to be found in the distinction between choosing to save someone and choosing to avoid saving someone. While the decision to save one person rather than another has the same effect on the second person as the decision to avoid saving that person, the rationales for the two decisions differ, and it is possible that this distinction has moral significance. Imagine, for example, rescue scenarios where morally trivial reasons determine the rescuers' choices. In one example, the rescuer comes across several people in peril and chooses to save the one whose ashen hair makes an impression. In another, the rescuer chooses not to save someone because of the odd shape of their eyebrows. Even if these decision procedures are both flawed in some respect, it seems worse to avoid saving someone for a morally trivial reason than to choose to save someone for a morally trivial reason. However, this phenomenon does not in fact seem limited to cases where a high degree of welfare is at stake. We can imagine, for example, that a graduate supervisor is choosing from among several students. Suppose a love of surfing sways the supervisor to select one candidate over another. Here, the wrong of avoiding a student on this basis seems more serious than that of selecting for a student on this basis.

We have given an account of the scope asymmetry in terms of the distinction between choosing to assist and choosing to avoid assisting. This explanation might seem inadequate to solve the problem as initially set up since the asymmetry identified is between the scope restrictions that apply in the context of enmity and those that apply in the context of friendship. However, the

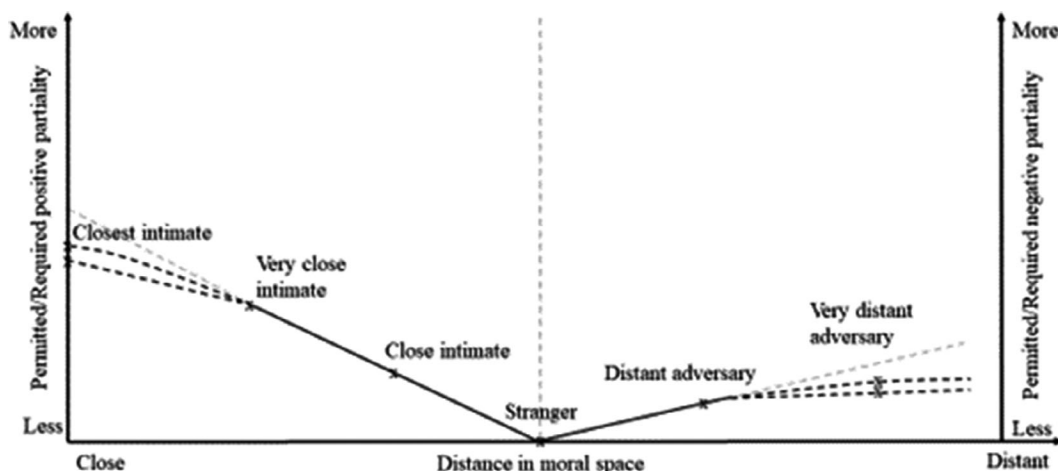


ILLUSTRATION 2 Asymmetries between positive and negative partiality

thought here is that the permissions *to avoid* saving someone require more justification than the permissions *to save* someone. These are *prima facie* considerations that can, of course, be overridden by adequate justification. We should expect there to be an asymmetry in the sense of its taking a much more serious wrongdoing to override the principle that a person’s welfare should not be intentionally discounted. While there is such a justification in the case of moderate discounting for moderate wrongdoing, we should not necessarily expect moderate wrongdoing to justify discounting in more serious cases.

### 3 | MORALITY’S HARMONIOUS PROPENSITY

Let us take stock. We have argued that there are four asymmetries between positive and negative partiality. We have further argued throughout that these asymmetries are *fundamental*. They cannot be reduced further to each other or to more basic asymmetries.

According to the *Normative Asymmetry*, some forms of justified negative partiality do not have positive counterparts. According to the *Directional Asymmetry*, reciprocal positive relationships *increase* justifiable positive partiality while one-way relationships *decrease* justifiable positive partiality in the benefactor. By contrast, reciprocal negative relationships tend to *decrease* justifiable negative partiality while one-way negative relationships *increase* justifiable negative partiality in the victim. According to the *Additivity Asymmetry*, negative partiality is justified in cases that involve little to no additivity (e.g. a single wrongdoing of moderate significance) while positive partiality typically becomes justified only through relationships that develop over a longer period. And according to the *Scope Asymmetry*, some positive personal relationships tend to generate unrestricted justified positive partiality, but their negative counterparts in the form of negative relationships involving mutual wrongdoing do not necessarily generate unrestricted justified negative partiality.

All these asymmetries have in common that justified negative partiality responses are weaker than justified positive ones. If we were to illustrate this, it would look something like this:

In attempting to understand the asymmetries between negative and positive partiality, we are pushed to examine the structure of morality itself. As we suggested previously, the fact

that *falling below* a moral threshold is of greater moral significance than *meeting* or exceeding the standards of morality captures the idea that negative partiality is *easier* to justify than positive partiality: being disrespectful engenders responses in ways that being respectful does not.

But we think that a deeper principle is at play here. One explanation might be that morality displays a greater concern with actions that depart from moral ideals in ways that tend to undermine welfare. Consider, for example, a judge who *lowers* a fine for a morally arbitrary reason. Sometimes we call this *mercy*—the judge is entitled to give out a greater punishment but refrains from doing so. All else being equal, does a departure from justice that results in a *less* severe punishment involve a less severe wrongdoing than a departure from justice that involves a *more* severe punishment? Plausibly, the answer is yes.

At the same time, a *shift* in morality occurs when we acquire reasons of positive partiality. This shift is inherently *pro-social* and extends further into what we are obliged or permitted to do in the *promotion* of another person's interests. As paradoxical as this may seem, it is reflected in impartial phenomena. To see this, consider that giving out *prize* money has no obvious limit—for example, the Nobel prize is worth close to a million dollars, and nobody would object to its being worth more, other things equal—but punishment *does* admit of strict limits, which are carefully debated and analysed. While rewards are seldom limited or scrutinised morally, they are also generally harder to generate (meeting the minimum standard will not do, nor will exceeding it in many contexts).

We can call this tendency of morality its

***Harmonious Propensity:*** Morality has a propensity toward the preservation of positive personal relationships.

Another reflection of morality's having a structure that tends to preserve positive relationships can be observed from norms that surround positive and negative relationships.

Wrongdoing may be acknowledged and addressed through apologies, reparations, reconciliation, and forgiveness. But how are friendships to be terminated? This is an awkward arena of morality: the norms surrounding the termination of friendship are much weaker. People can 'drift' apart, but there is little else that can sever a relationship in a clearly permissible fashion. The idea here, again, is that the structure of norms surrounding wrongdoing has built-in mechanisms for rectification and normalisation, whereas positive relations need no analogous norms for termination. In the impartial sphere, *erving* time is meant to allow a person to re-enter society on roughly equal terms with others, but there is no structure that attempts to *normalise* excellence (in the sense of neutralising a person's positive moral contributions to society). Within this explanation, we can again see why the case of 'bitter enemies' does not parallel that of 'best friendships'. While bitter enemies have reasons for reparations and reconciliation that tend to undermine the reasons for negative partiality, friendships have no such limiting structure (i.e. there are no inherent reasons for a justified friendship to dissolve).

Morality's harmonious propensity is further reflected and perhaps confirmed as an important part of the explanation of the moral assessment of negative partiality if we examine the *Normative Asymmetry*. It has long been affirmed that the justification of positive partiality and the *motivations* behind partial actions may come apart: while the value of a relationship may provide the *reasons* for partiality, the motive for a partial act of beneficence may permissibly simply be some unrelated subjective attitude (e.g. simply loving or liking a person). However, even if we are justified in being negatively partial, the permissibility of discounting a person's well-being for reasons

of dislike does not mirror that of favouring someone for subjective reasons. Although it might indeed be permissible to discount a person's well-being because we dislike them (so long as we are disposed to treat the people we dislike worse only when there is independent justification for doing so), it does seem worse to act from this motive than from the motive that we have been wronged. The pro-social bias seems again at play here: while both attitudes depart from justice, it is only the attitude that seems liable to victimise another that is considered problematic.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

In sum, we have argued for various forms of asymmetry between positive and negative partiality and suggested that these asymmetries are explained by the harmonious propensity of morality, according to which morality encompasses a *pro-social* bias towards encouraging positive personal relationships and limiting negative ones.

The results of this investigation have at least three implications. First, justificatory frameworks that aim to provide a first-order account of positive and negative partiality should be sensitive to these asymmetries. This means that, for example, some theories of our associative duties and options towards our intimates need to be expanded and may indeed imply the existence of associative duties to harm our adversaries. Others may not.

Second, our work prompts a need for more research into what distinguishes legitimate negative partiality from negative personal relationships that do not ground *legitimate* negative partiality responses. Specifically, it prompts a need to explore more carefully the features of those personal relationships (positive or negative) that give rise to the asymmetries that we have sought to articulate here.

Third, analysing the relationship between positive and negative personal relationships provides a fruitful avenue for future research into dynamic human relations and their corresponding normative implications. For example, it may help us to better understand the transition of positive personal relationships to negative ones or vice versa, as in the case of failed romantic relationships or friendships that arise from previous rivalries.

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