

In "Practice of Partiality," Friedman wrote in three sections; this is a comment on the first.

In the first section, Friedman pointed out that partial relationships vary in their moral worth: "The quality of a particular relationship is profoundly important in determining the moral worth of any partiality which is necessary to sustaining that relationship" (820.) In order to understand what might be morally wrong with a relationship, we need a way of evaluating what may be morally right about a relationship (822.) To that end she proposed four levels at which a partial relationship may be understood: the generic relationship at its most basic (marriage, friendship, etc.); the specific cultural formation of a given relationship; the informal practices of such relationships; and the individual idiosyncrasies of an individual relationship.

She then elaborated an argument by Robert Godwin that partiality is a moral requirement of close, partial relationships in which there are vulnerable persons to protect. She concluded that moral duties in partial relationships are partly based on the vulnerability of some persons and partly based on the social conventions that assign responsibilities of care for the vulnerable to some who are in close relationship with them, though she recognized that an analysis of such conventions may have its difficulties. (825.)

While I agree what Friedman wrote, her focus on Godwin's work on vulnerable parties seems too narrowly focused on asymmetric relationships in which some are vulnerable and some are not. Doubtlessly in some partial relationships that is the case, particularly in families. And, some moral duties may arise from the need of a friend; there seems to be a moral aspect in Aristotle's observation that "if it is more characteristic of a friend to do well by another than to be well done by, ... the good man will need people to do well by" (NE, 1169b, ~11-13.)

However, there are many partial peer relationships that may have moral duties, or obligations, that are not based on the vulnerability of some of the parties. Focusing on the social structures misses an important dimension of virtue ethics for the flourishing of those in partial relationships. It seems to me that Friedman recognized this dimension, writing that "To the extent that personal relationships are necessary for integrity and fulfillment in life, ... partiality is instrumentally required as a means to achieving those morally valuable ends" (820,) but she then focused primarily on the social structures of relationships. It seems to me that there is much more to be said about the role of the virtues as moral goods in partial peer relationships, such as loyalty between friends.

Friedman, Marilyn. (1991.) "The Practice of Partiality." *Ethics*, Vol 101, No. 4 (Jul., 1991,) pp. 818-835.

*This is adapted from a series of responses I wrote for an independent study in analytic ethics of partiality and consequentialism.*

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