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How Do Personal Relationships Make a Moral Difference?

The personal relationships in which we stand certainly seem to affect our moral duties. For example, I would be remiss if I did not attend my friend's funeral, even though I have no duty to attend funerals in general. Consequentialists of the familiar agent-neutral variety deny, however, that things are as they seem. They maintain that personal relationships do not in fact make a moral difference: that any variation in our duties which seems to correlate with the relationships in which we stand is ultimately derived from other, non-relational factors. Those of us dissatisfied with that answer have the burden of explaining *how*—that is, *in what way*—personal relationships make a moral difference. I consider how C. D. Broad and W. D. Ross model the moral significance of personal relationships before introducing a further possibility. Personal relationships, I propose, can impact our moral duties simply by altering the types of action we are in a position to perform. More precisely, they can *activate* duties which are absolutely general in scope but which come into force for a person only on satisfaction of distinctively relational preconditions. In contrast to Broad and Ross, then, this approach locates the moral significance of personal relationships primarily in the philosophy of action.