Course Description: Modern moral philosophy tends to acknowledge the moral equality of persons—the idea that fundamentally, no one matters more than anyone else. Yet in our personal lives we treat our friends, our family members, ourselves, with greater concern than we treat others. In this course we will explore this apparent tension between the impartial perspective that characterizes the moral point of view and the partiality that characterizes many of our most significant personal relationships. Can this tension be resolved? Or must we admit that there will often be conflicts between, e.g., being a good friend or parent and doing the right thing? We will examine the problem as it arises for specific moral theories, such as utilitarianism and Kantianism, and consider how proponents of those philosophies have tried to make room for special relationships and attachments. We will also approach the issue more directly, asking how we should understand the distinctive norms and obligations associated with special relationships of various kinds. For instance, what reason do we have to give special treatment to our friends and family members? Do we have special obligations to our fellow citizens as such? Is patriotism a virtue, or a vice? And what does consideration of these personal relations and commitments tell us about the nature of morality more generally?

T/Th 2:00 - 3:20pm          Prof. Stephen White