

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF REASON: KANT AND CARE

by

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Abstract

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I argue that care, as a moral value and a practice of moral significance, should have a place in Kantian ethics. There is neither an ethic of care nor an ethic of justice as such but rather simply ethics, which includes care and justice, as well as other values. Kantian ethics has been criticized in the care literature for allegedly devaluing emotion, exalting abstraction over attention to context, and offering a flawed conception of persons. I argue that a close reading of Kant's texts reveals these objections to be unsuccessful. I show how care can be understood in a Kantian theoretical framework. Finally, I examine care as a political value and the caring society as a model of social, political, and economic organization.

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My father did not live to see this dissertation completed and I wish I could have shared it with him; it was mostly from our dinner-table conversations that I got my taste for argument. This dissertation is dedicated to his memory.

For my father, David Noel O'Dowd

In loving memory

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Introduction.

Philosophers working on Kantian ethics and philosophers working on care and care ethics have been assumed to have little common ground; indeed, for many, they represent fundamentally opposed camps in moral theory. On the one hand, Kantian ethics has struck the care “camp” as a dry, cold, rigid, inhuman theory, removed from the realities of life and insensitive to the most recognizable human moral experiences. On the other hand, care ethics, and more generally the philosophical literature on care, has seemed to the Kantian “camp” politically regressive, dangerously blithe about injustice and assaults on rights, and lacking the theoretical structure and clarity necessary to provide genuine moral guidance.

As is well known, one of the foundational texts in the care literature was Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice. Gilligan's study suggested that in ignoring women, psychology (and moral philosophy) had failed to discover a distinct approach to moral life that women especially exemplified. The care “voice” focused on context, responsibility for others, feelings, meeting needs, and maintaining relationships, while the justice “voice” focused on rules, reason, fairness, and independence. Feminist philosophers, especially, soon engaged with the questions Gilligan's work had raised: was morality gendered? If not, was care to be recommended for all? Was care a new moral theory (an ethic of care), a framework in uneasy coexistence with justice in some comprehensive moral theory, or simply a virtue and value to be understood within existing moral theories? Was care a value for face-to-face relationships only, or did it apply to social relations and structures too?

Many of those working on care made serious criticisms of what they styled “justice ethics”-- a

designation that included at least Kantianism and utilitarianism, and any other supposedly justice-based ethics. Kantian ethics was a particularly frequent target of these criticisms, and was widely considered inhospitable to the sorts of emotional engagement, connectedness, and attention to particularities that were associated with care.

I first began serious study of Kantian ethics around the same time that I first began serious study of care. I encountered each field at an interesting stage of its development: scholarship in Kantian ethics had been transformed by a generation of “post-Rawlsians” who were bringing the theory closer to human experience and steering it away from its rather grim standard versions, while the literature of care was growing in sophistication and away from earlier, more extreme interpretations. Thus, it increasingly struck me that it might no longer be so obvious that Kant and care were incompatible. That intuition was the starting point for this project.

In this dissertation, I aim to show that care has a central place in Kantian ethics. I do not defend an “ethic of care,” that is, a distinct ethical theory based on care as its primary value. Neither care nor justice is “the primary value” in ethics; both are important. I shall not, then, argue for the priority of one or the other. Rather, I shall defend an interpretation of Kantian ethics that includes care as a moral value, a virtue to be striven for by moral agents, and a practice that is morally significant in several ways.

The aim of Chapter One is to examine the concept of care, to develop my own account of what care is, and to outline why ethicists should pay attention to care and what elements of the care literature I consider defensible. I begin (1.1) with a brief examination of the terms “care,” “justice,” “justice ethics (ethics of justice)” and “care ethics (ethics of care)” and distinguish care from care ethics (or the ethics of care) and justice from justice ethics (or the ethics of justice).

This is important because I shall question the categories of “care ethics” and “justice ethics” and argue, rather, that care and justice are (equally) part of ethics *simpliciter*, which is neither “care ethics” nor “justice ethics.” Following a summary of the historical background of the care debate (1.2), I proceed to the examination of several main themes of the care literature (1.3), for example, the focus on practice, care's conception of persons, and the relationship of care and justice. In doing so, I identify the elements of the care literature that I think should be included in any adequate moral theory. I conclude the chapter with my own working definition of care.

Chapter Two defends Kantian ethics against three main sorts of objection that have recurred in the care literature. First, I address methodological critiques of abstraction, universalization, and principle. Second, I address objections concerning the role of reason and emotion in ethics. Finally, I address objections to Kant's conception of persons and the place of autonomy in ethics. I aim to show that Kantian ethics allows for attention to context as well as (appropriate) abstraction; that it is neither “rationalistic” nor hostile to emotions; that the role of autonomy in Kantian ethics has been misunderstood; and that Kant offers a balanced and rich conception of persons.

Chapter Three, building on the work of the previous chapters, considers the role of care- specifically, the conception of care I have defended- in Kantian ethics. I begin with a review of contemporary Kantians' engagements with the care literature. I ask why these writers have tended to respond by finding care-based concerns either unwarranted or already sufficiently dealt with in Kant's theory. I then examine the relationship of care to various similar concepts in Kantian ethics, including practical love and sympathy. I argue that care itself should be explicitly included in Kantian ethics. The following two sections show how autonomy and responsiveness can be

treated in a care-inclusive Kantian ethics.

Finally, in Chapter Four, the social and political aspects and applications of care are investigated. I begin with an overview of attempts to outline a “political care.” The good society is characterized by care as well as justice: neither is dispensable. I do not, here, add to the already voluminous literature on what constitutes a just society; rather, I concentrate on what constitutes a caring society. First, it will be a society in which practices of care are supported and prioritized (and in which care work is justly distributed). Second, it will be a society guided by the value of care, and specifically, by the aim of supporting the political agency of its members. All of this, in my view, suggests a critique of capitalism. Many political theories of care have contained implicit critiques of “marketization” and capitalism; I aim to draw out more explicitly the care critique and I shall argue that care is at least in tension with both. Finally, I shall consider whether Kantians can accept a commitment to political care as I have envisaged it. I argue that the basic Kantian framework, but not all of Kant's political philosophy, is compatible with political care.

Chapter One

The Importance of Care.

1.1 Introduction

Philosophical work on care since the early 1980s has tended to be framed in terms of an opposition between “justice” and “care.” Some early work, such as that of Nel Noddings's, came down on the side of care and presented a moral theory based on care alone (and critical of “justice”).¹ However, a consensus has developed since then among those thinking about care: justice need not—indeed, cannot—be discarded. Thus, the exact relationship of care and justice, and their place in any overall moral theory, has become one of the crucial questions in this debate.

Although “justice” and “justice ethics” are presented as indicating broad tendencies across mainstream or canonical Western moral theory, Kantian ethics has been a particular target of care-based criticism, supposedly exemplifying many of the flaws of “justice ethics.” While I agree that care is an important and heretofore overlooked moral value, I do not consider care-based critiques of Kantian ethics to be decisive. In some cases, these critiques lead us to read Kant in a different light, but none of them is fatal to the theory in general, as I will argue in this dissertation. Both care and justice, in my view, have a place in a satisfactory reading of Kantian ethics. My aim is thus to clear the ground for a fruitful dialogue between Kantian ethics and care, moving beyond assumptions of their incompatibility to a more comprehensive understanding of morality and justice. It is worth noting that just as the care debate has evolved, Kantian scholarship has also evolved, often in ways that accommodate many concerns raised by care theorists, such as the role of emotions and relationships in

¹ Nel Noddings. Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984.)

moral life.²

To begin, some brief preliminary remarks about the terms “care,” “justice,” “care ethics” (or “ethics of care”) and “justice ethics” (or “ethics of justice”) are in order. Justice and care are moral values as well as virtues. Neither, unsurprisingly, has a unanimously agreed upon definition, but a rough characterization may be given, to fix ideas. Justice has been understood in the western tradition in terms of fairness and of everyone getting “her due”; thus it includes non-arbitrariness, equality, freedom, a balance between equality and freedom, and the like. The word “justice” is used in other senses too, notably in the sense of a circumstance in which the demands of the value of justice have been satisfied. The word “justice” does not denote a specific activity or practice, although of course many activities and practices are associated with it in various ways (not just criminal justice systems, but any activity in which justice might be aimed at or appealed to).

Care has two main senses, which might be placed under the headings of “concern” and of “looking after.” The English word “care” captures the meanings of both the German word “Pflege,” meaning “care for” in the sense of looking after or tending, and that of “Sorge,” meaning concern, worry, or “care” in the sense of being “burdened with cares.”³ These two senses are related in interesting ways: looking after someone will usually involve some level of concern, and the word “care” denotes specific activities, as this suggests. Perhaps most immediately, it denotes “caring for” or “care-giving”: in the sense of looking after, tending, or meeting needs.⁴ This is the “care” in childcare, community care, hospital care, and so on, and it is the meaning most central to recent philosophical accounts of

2 Especially the work of Marcia Baron, Onora O'Neill, Barbara Herman, and Christine Korsgaard.

3 Sibyl Schwarzenbach notes that “pflegen” shares its Old German root with *Pflicht*, meaning “duty.” Sibyl Schwarzenbach, “Rawls and Ownership: The Forgotten Category of Reproductive Labor.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supl. 13 (1987): 139-167.

4 In the English spoken in Ireland, to *mind* someone means to look after her or care for her. This captures nicely, I think, the connection between concern or attention and the meeting of needs. It is also a reminder of the rational component of the activity of caregiving, and the centrality of responsibility to care. If I agree to 'mind your dog or child while you are gone, I assume responsibility for that dog or child. I must *bear in mind* that dog or child in a particularly strong way while you are gone.

care as an activity. We may also care about things or people, “take care” of a problem, take care while driving, or (less commonly these days) care for persons or things in the sense of liking or approving of them (as in “I just don’t care for him”). These bear different relations to care as a “looking after” or as the meeting of needs: “caring about” someone involves a concern for their well-being, which is the most obvious and general aim of caring in the sense of meeting needs; to “take care of a problem” is to take on the responsibility of dealing with it, just as caring in the sense of “looking after” involves (at least to some extent) taking responsibility for (an aspect of) someone's well-being; “taking care” while driving involves attentiveness, carefulness, and again taking responsibility (and being responsible) for and in one's driving.⁵

An important question for philosophers examining care is the extent to which it is morally normative. There are some activities that might be described in the language of “care” that do not seem to offer any moral standards at all but rather nonmoral normative standards (e.g. caring about money, taking care of a computer problem, taking good care of one's guitar). We need to be more specific about what it is about care that can offer a moral standard. Let me briefly mention some possible strategies. It will be useful to think about the end(s) of care. For Tronto it is the maintenance of the world “so that we can live in it as well as possible”;⁶ for Held, it is the maintenance of caring relations themselves. My own view is, roughly, that care —as a moral practice and value— aims to nurture the capacity for agency of others (to whatever varying extents they may have such), given their vulnerabilities and needs.

We might consider some paradigmatic practices of care, although we should be wary of narrowing our scope to one or a few paradigmatic cases (such as to “mothering”). We might consider, too, the

5 See Tronto's analysis of the “four phases” of the “process” of care: caring about, taking care of, caregiving, and receiving care, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for Care. (New York and London: Routledge 1993) 105-108; also Virginia Held's analysis of the various uses of the word care, The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, Global. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 29-31.

6 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 103.

meanings of the adjectival form “caring.” A judgment that someone is a caring person, after all, is a moral judgment. When we, for example, adopt a resolution of being more caring, how do we put it into action? We might make more of an effort to reach out and help others, we might try to be more considerate of those around us, or we might pay more attention to the needs and sensitivities of others. These efforts are not, of course, limited to paradigmatic “care” contexts such as raising children or nursing the sick, but these practices may often provide good examples.

While “care” and “justice” refer to moral values that may or may not be combined in an overall, comprehensive moral theory, the “ethics of care” (or “care ethics”) and an “ethics of justice” have, in the literature, referred to distinct moral “frameworks,” “orientations,” or simply theories, each based on the respective “primary value” of care or justice. There are, of course, various versions of the ethics of care (as of justice), but there are some commonly-occurring themes: e.g. the importance of relationships, “connection,” and the interdependence of persons, responsiveness to need, and the role of emotion and context in moral judgment. In the care literature, the “ethics of justice,” by contrast, refers to canonical Western moral theories that are deemed to have in common a commitment to justice as their most basic value, or at least a strong emphasis on justice. Deontological and utilitarian ethics are usually cited as paradigm cases (with Ross and Sidgwick often mentioned),⁷ and with Kant being, as we shall see below, a particular focus. By contrast, not a few theorists of care have appealed to Humean and Aristotelian ideas.⁸

“Justice ethics,” as construed in the care literature, can also be understood in terms of some common themes: the stressing of independence and autonomy, of equality, rights and respect, of the

⁷ See Walker, Margaret Urban. Moral Contexts. (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 76 on Sidgwick.

⁸ Although she does not argue for an “ethic of care” as such, Annette Baier has helped to bring Hume into the care debate. See her Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also Tronto, Moral Boundaries, Michael Slote, The Ethics of Care and Empathy (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), Schwarzenbach, Sibyl. On Civic Friendship: Including Women in the State (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) for Humean and Aristotelian ideas in the context of care.

primacy of reason over emotion in moral judgment, or a reliance on universal rules and principles.

Although the care literature contains important critiques of traditional moral theory (critiques I will examine in this chapter), I will also argue that the characterizations it offers of “justice ethics” are less clear than they might be; the notion of justice and a “justice ethics” remains obscure, and much of the analysis of it is vague and over-generalized. Simply casting “justice ethics” as rule-bound, individualistic, rationalistic, and so on, without carefully examining these issues in the context of the specific moral theories categorized under this name, risks setting up “straw men.”

There is also some ambiguity in the literature about the terms “orientation” and “framework” as applied to “justice ethics” and “care ethics”: is a framework or orientation a moral theory, or the basis of one? Do advocates of an *ethic of care* offer an alternative to Kantian, utilitarian, or virtue ethics, or do they contend that the ethic of justice and the ethic of care are two “frameworks” or “orientations” that can somehow coexist within moral theory as a whole? Feminists take different positions on these issues.⁹ In my view, if it is the former—if care ethics is conceived as an alternative to traditional views—it fails to provide a superior alternative theory to at least Kantian ethics, as I shall argue in the following chapters. If the latter – if care ethics and justice ethics are separate frameworks somehow coexisting within a comprehensive ethics—it is an incoherent vision, offering unclearly-related, irreducible frameworks (two moralities in one) instead of what moral theory should offer in order to deserve the name, that is, guidance in what we ought to do.

In what follows, I defend care, but not an “ethic of care.” My view is that there is not an “ethic(s) of care” as such, any more than there is an “ethic(s) of justice.” Care and justice, as I argue in the chapters that follow, are both important values and central to morality. In the canon of philosophical

9 For the latter position, see Grace Clement, *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and the Ethics of Care* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); for the former, see Noddings, *Caring*, Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*. Tronto and Held seem to favor the former, but are less than clear about whether justice has the role of a value within an overall care-based ethic (along with other values like honesty and courage, let us say), or whether the “ethics of justice” exists as some sort of sub-framework.

ethics, however, far too little attention has been paid to care or anything like it.¹⁰ It is therefore welcome that scholarly attention has been focused on correcting this of late. We have much to learn from recent work on care, even if we do not abandon all existing theoretical frameworks and subscribe to an “ethics of care.” Care can, and *does* I think, lead us to read those theories differently and to ask different things of them.

In the present chapter, my focus is on care and why it is important for ethical theory. In particular, I examine the care critique of justice and of a “justice ethics,” and consider what is right about this critique. I begin by describing the early moments of the care debate, focusing on the work of Carol Gilligan, Sara Ruddick, and Nel Noddings. Noddings, in particular, took the care position to its furthest point by proposing an ethic of care that seemed to discount justice altogether (although her later work refines this view somewhat). In section 3, I go on to consider more recent developments in the care debate, principally the consensus that both care and justice must be accommodated (even if in an “ethics of care”). My aim here will be to make as clear as possible what challenges the Kantian faces from the care theorists; some of their criticisms, as I shall argue in the following chapters, will be met by rejecting a number of their claims, but others will be met by showing how care theorists' concerns can in fact be accommodated within a Kantian framework. Finally (in 1.4), I shall provide my own working definition of care.

1.2 Historical background of the care debate.

The debate on care and the ethics of care has its roots in a broad-based radical feminist critique that analyzed and challenged the exclusion of women from academic and other disciplines and discourses.

¹⁰ Joan Tronto, in Chapter Two of Moral Boundaries, explores eighteenth-century anticipations, for example in Hume. Connections between Hume and care ethics have also been made by Annette Baier, in “Hume, the Women's Moral Theorist?” (Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also Sibyl Schwarzenbach, On Civic Friendship for an Aristotelian influence.

Just as feminist consciousness changed literature, literary criticism, politics, and art (at least to some degree!), it seemed possible that it could change philosophy too, especially in ethics and political theory. Among the foundational texts in the care debate are Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice, Nel Noddings's Caring, and Sara Ruddick's Maternal Thinking.¹¹ Each of these texts addressed the implications for moral theory of attending to what was seen as “women’s experience”—that is, their historical role as primary caregivers. The analyses of this experience yielded accounts of moral life centered on values such as empathy, attentiveness, responsiveness to need, the ability to connect and co-operate—values associated with the “private” sphere and women—rather than values such as autonomy, impartiality, and fairness—values associated with the “public” sphere and men.

One of the important effects of this kind of critique was that it disturbed the prevailing assumption that the necessary labor of looking after people's physical and emotional needs was simply “natural” to women, instinctive, and therefore not morally significant; the effect of such feminist criticism was that this labor could no longer remain “out of sight” in the private sphere, ignored by philosophers. Activities such as raising children were now acknowledged to be full of moral questions. Furthermore, the social and political context in which such caring occurred was now opened up to philosophical criticism, and the moral qualities to be seen in the best instances of caring had to be taken seriously.

Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice inspired a great deal of thinking about care among feminist philosophers and, in many respects, set the agenda for their debates, although Sara Ruddick's ground breaking essay “Maternal Thinking” is sometimes cited as the first foundational text in this regard.¹² Gilligan's study in the psychology of moral development began as a response to previous work, especially by Lawrence Kohlberg, who set out a six-stage schema of moral development.¹³ In Kohlberg's thought, moral stages are differentiated by the kind of reasons given by subjects for moral

11 Gilligan In a Different Voice, Noddings Caring; Sara Ruddick, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

12 Held The Ethics of Care, 26.

judgments. The first stages were labeled ‘preconventional,’ where subjects judge the right thing to do by egoistic reasons purely; the second stages were conventional, where a desire to cultivate good social and personal relationships grounded moral choices; the final, and highest, stages were postconventional and culminated in the adoption of universal principles as reasons for action. Kohlberg's original research used only male subjects, however, and the later inclusion of women revealed a gender difference. Women appeared to be, in general, “stuck” at the middle levels on the Kohlberg scale, while men far more often reached the highest stage, in which morality was conceptualized in terms of abstract principles applicable universally given sufficiently similar circumstances. The question was whether this indicated a deficiency of women or of the theory underlying the research.

Gilligan’s subsequent research detected two “different voices” in moral deliberation; she found that many women tended to take what was labeled a “care” approach, while men tended to take what was labeled a “justice” approach, to moral problems. The centerpiece of this research was the now-famous Heinz dilemma. Subjects were presented with the following: “[A] man named Heinz considers whether or not to steal a drug which he cannot afford to buy in order to save the life of his wife.”¹⁴ The subjects were asked whether they think Heinz should steal the drug, and were asked to explain their reasons for thinking so. What comes to be labeled the justice approach— taken by virtually all the men and by some of the women— was to determine which principles were at stake in a given situation, and to apply them impartially; personal independence and individual rights were prioritized. By contrast, many of the women— and virtually no men— tended to construe moral problems in terms of responsibility, responsiveness to need, the preservation of relationships, and with great attention to

13 Lawrence Kohlberg. The Development of Modes of Thinking and Choices in Years 10 to 16 (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958) and The Philosophy of Moral Development. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

14 Gilligan In a Different Voice, 25.

context and particularity, eschewing a “merely” rational and rule-or-principle-based approach.

Women’s use of this other “voice” could be interpreted, Gilligan argued, not as a failure to reach the highest stage of moral maturity, but as the exemplification of a different, yet certainly no less valid, moral framework. On this view, shared by many who took up Gilligan's themes, care could provide the basis of a critique of justice or of “justice ethics.” At the very least, traditional moral theory's focus on justice would need to be complemented by considerations arising from care; at most, justice would be displaced by care. To put it the other way around, either care would be fitted in to moral theory or a new moral theory based on care would be proposed.

To a considerable extent, the major themes of Gilligan's work on the “care approach” have remained the major themes of philosophical work on care in the ensuing quarter century. Gilligan, however, does not focus a great deal on the practice of care— especially on the care-giving work historically performed by women. The philosophical debate on the “ethic of care” has drawn on work such as Ruddick's Maternal Thinking to make the connection between a care “orientation” and care work. Ruddick's focus is on creating a philosophical account of the practice of mothering in particular. A central argument of hers is that the practice of mothering has its own distinctive way of thinking. Mothering, Ruddick points out, is one form of care work; she would neither subsume mothering under the general category of “care” (since it has unique features worthy of specialized attention) nor reduce care to mothering (since this would ignore other practices of care, such as teaching or nursing). Ruddick is not, then, offering a “maternalist ethic” in the sense of privileging mother-child relations as a paradigm of caring relations. Rather, her focus is on a detailed philosophical analysis of maternal thinking. Nevertheless, the suggestion that practices of care— not limited to mothering— could have associated with them a particular way of thinking and a particular set of values was highly influential. The first book-length attempt to articulate an “ethic of care” was Nel Noddings's Caring. Although it

has been criticized as somewhat extreme, it is an important text for two reasons: first, it showed what the limits of a care-based theory are, and second, a great deal of writing about care in the ensuing two decades responded to Noddings as well as to Gilligan.

1.3 Main themes and issues in philosophical accounts of care

These earlier texts on care raised issues and expounded on themes that set the agenda for subsequent treatments. Many of these themes have remained central to subsequent accounts, right up to the present. In this section, I shall consider a number of the issues and themes and arguments that will be important for Kantians to consider when examining the care debate as a whole. In section 1.4, I will indicate some important points of disagreement and development between earlier and later texts.

Women and care.

If care as value and practice arose chiefly out of women's historical experiences as primary caregivers, then it would be pertinent to ask whether care is a “woman's virtue” or grounds a “feminine ethic,” or is even a kind of slave morality or ideology of exploitation.¹⁵ It is true that those particular historical experiences were produced by an oppressive patriarchal order, but I do not think there is any reason to deny that genuine moral values can emerge from the experiences of the oppressed. What is worthy of condemnation from a feminist point of view is not the value of care itself but its unfair social distribution and its part in a gender ideology harmful to women. Even early theorists of care were quick to point out that care was to be recommended as a value for everyone to live by; indeed, the idea that care should be practiced by all was (and remains) one of the most politically radical

15 See Claudia Card, "Gender and Moral Luck" in *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* Virginia Held, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Diemut Bübeck, *Care, Gender and Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), passim. For an ancestor of these views, see chapters two and three of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Hints* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

implications of the debate. It should be noted, in any case, that there has been some criticism to the effect that the “different voice” cuts not according to gender lines, but according to privilege more generally (class, race, ethnicity, and so on).¹⁶ Those who are less privileged may be more likely to speak in a “different voice.” This is hardly surprising since, in general, the more privileged one is, the less care work one has to do. This enlarged “different voice” hypothesis raises some good questions about the political contexts in which morality is thought and talked about; less clear are the consequences it has for moral theory itself. Kantian ethics might be considered especially vulnerable if only the privileged could approach moral issues with a focus on reason, principles, and abstraction. However, (1) this gives a rather reductive view of Kantian ethics (as we shall see in 2.2 below) and (2) it has not been shown that those who use the “different voice” really do eschew principles, reason, abstraction, and so on.

The philosophically interesting question, it seems to me, is whether both care and justice are necessary parts of morality— for everyone—and what the implications are for moral theory. I believe that a positive answer has some quite radical political implications, as we shall see in our final chapter. Among these is the problematization of the division between public and private sphere. The sort of moral division of labor that characterizes patriarchal gender role ideology springs to mind here: the good woman is gentle and selfless and worthy of praise and kindness; the good man fair and honorable and worthy of respect.¹⁷

By making care visible as work and as moral value (rather than invisible in the realm of the private and “natural”), theorists of care have exposed the oppressive way in which the boundary has been drawn. It is one thing to problematize boundaries, however, but quite another to eliminate them altogether; it is surely necessary to maintain some sort of public-private sphere distinction, just not an

¹⁶ See Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 112.

¹⁷ Marilyn Friedman comments on this “moral division of labor” in “Beyond Caring: Demoralizing the Genders” in Held, ed. Justice and Care, 64..

oppressive one.¹⁸

Even if we agree that both men and women should care (or be caring), there remains the question of whether care itself— especially as the basis of an “ethic of care”— could nevertheless be exploitative, oppressive, or a “slave morality.” In the view presented here, care without justice runs precisely this sort of risk. For example, the “good master” may care for his slaves or servants, treating them gently and providing them with good food, shelter, and so on; the archetypal “good husband” may care for his wife, providing her with every material comfort and treating her with kindness; the “good carer” may selflessly devote her energies to meeting the needs of others, ignoring her own exploitation. Finally, the “good parent” may focus only on his own children's well-being, ignoring the effects of his family's privileged lifestyle on other children and families. In all of these cases, it may be argued that this would not be true, genuine, “good caring”— but I think this is difficult to argue without at least covertly reaching for the language of justice to describe the moral limits on caring that make these less than ideal examples of it. In other words, good caring in one way or another appeals to normative principles of justice, respect, fairness, freedom, and so on. It seems to me better to acknowledge such moral concerns directly and from the start. If this is done, the progressive and liberatory potential of care becomes clearer.

Care as practice and value

Some care theorists (Bübeck, Bowden) focus primarily on care as a practice (e.g. on activities such as nursing, friendship, child care), while others (e.g. Slote) focus primarily on care as a value applying to all activities (and less on any specific sort of activity that is characterized as “care”). Many, such as Held and Noddings, see it as important that we keep the “dual” nature of care as practice and value in

¹⁸ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, p.10.

mind. This raises questions as well as possibilities. What does it mean to say that something is both practice and value? Is justice a practice and value, too? Is care a virtue?

For Noddings, the value of care arises from one's vision of oneself as “one-caring,” which in turn arises from our experience of the practice of care (caring and being cared for). All of moral life, according to Noddings, is construed in terms of the practice of care, understood as meeting as “one-caring” (i.e. as one prepared to meet the needs of) whomever one encounters. Noddings, in Caring, does not seem to see a role for justice at all (let alone “justice ethics”) in moral theory, so the question of whether justice is also a practice and value does not arise for her. Held claims that justice, as well as care, is both practice and value, in the sense that there are practices of justice, and the value of justice is the primary one (but not the only one) used to evaluate them. Similarly, she argues, there are practices of care, and the value of care is the primary one (but not the only one) used to evaluate them.¹⁹

Some brief remarks about the terms used seem to be in order. A practice is an activity governed by norms that define it, that are in some sense constitutive of the practice, and that lend the activity or set of activities coherence. The norms that govern and constitute a practice are social and shared in some sense; an individual cannot simply invent practices in isolation. A practice will have standards of “success” or appropriateness internal to it and the activities that constitute it are best judged in the context of that framework. This does not mean that, for example, my acts of caring for someone are immune from judgment other than whether or to what extent it conforms to socially-accepted norms of caring; those norms-- i.e. the practice itself-- can be assessed morally, as indeed can individual actions undertaken as part of that practice, as long as they are understood in that larger context that makes them the particular actions they are.²⁰

19 Held, The Ethics of Care, 37.

20 See MacIntyre, Alasdair, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (3rd edition) (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187-188; Held, The Ethics of Care, 19-20 and 36-38; Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, 13-14, 17-18, 25-26; Rawls, “Two

A virtue may be understood (more narrowly) as an admirable aspect of character or an admirable disposition or (more broadly) as an excellence. The narrower meaning suggests an application to persons, whereas the broader meaning suggests an application not only to persons but possibly to things of various sorts: relationships, societies, guitars, someone's prose style. A value is something close to the broader meaning of virtue as excellence; it is a standard, a good, a conception of a certain sort of worth.

Care is a value, a virtue, and a practice. Care is a moral value, as is justice. Care is a virtue, as justice is; persons—and societies, if one uses “virtue” somewhat broadly—can be (more or less) just or caring. Care is a practice, or a type of practice (childcare and healthcare, for example). It may sound a little less obvious that justice is a practice, but there are certainly practices of justice—that is, practices primarily aimed at and governed by justice (the legal system is the clearest example). Much of human life, however, does not fall neatly into one or other category and is not primarily governed by or directed at any one value over any other. Justice and care will presumably be equally important (along with other values). In other words, justice is morally relevant in situations other than practices of justice and care is morally relevant in situations other than practices of care. It is also worth noting that, even in practices of care, justice will still be morally relevant (albeit not primary) and even in practices of justice, care will still be morally relevant (albeit not primary). Denoting a practice as a practice of care or justice does not license participants to be unjust or uncaring. This may sound ‘ad-hoc’: will non-primary values (there are, of course, many more than care and justice!) be mere afterthoughts? Here it may help to think about the scope of practices of justice or care: they are reasonably clearly limited. (It is understood, for example, that the court system is but one part of society, is set up for a specific purpose beyond which it should not stray, and places participants in certain well-defined roles.) A practice of justice or care may be effective (in terms of its particular

purpose) if it fulfills requirements of justice or care (respectively), even while failing in terms of other values; however, it is not morally adequate.

Some writers include among practices of care activities beyond the familiar examples of childcare, healthcare, and eldercare, such as citizenship and teaching.²¹ If we understand something's being a practice of *x* to mean that it is primarily directed at and governed by *x*, this seems something of a stretch. Care is no doubt an important value in citizenship and teaching, but I am not sure it is the primary one (over and above the other values that might be relevant). We might understand “citizenship as a practice of care” or “teaching as a practice of care” to mean that we can usefully examine citizenship or teaching insofar as they are practices aimed at and governed by care, or to put it another way, that viewing them as practices of care is one way of viewing them (with the implication that they can also be viewed as practices of something else).²² On this understanding, teaching and citizenship (among other things) would be practices of care in a weaker sense than childcare or healthcare.

What then is the advantage, if any, of using this language of practice and value? I see two main aspects: first, practices of care are significant and often instructive morally. Second, because care is more explicitly associated with (various) *particular* practices, a commitment to care as a moral value has a particularly strong connotation of committing oneself to concrete action, of “getting one's hands dirty,” so to speak, as one reaches out to care for others. One can respect others by leaving them alone — that is, by not doing anything to them— but it is a lot harder to care for others by not doing: one must (at least at some point) engage in positive acts of caring.²³ Often, but not always, such acts of care will involve physical engagement. Ruddick, for example, emphasizes the concrete and the physical in

21 For example Peta Bowden, Caring: Gender-Sensitive Ethics (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) and Noddings, Caring.

22 Compare Rawls's remarks on “justice as fairness” in A Theory of Justice (2nd. ed., Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999), 11.

23 One can respect others by commission as well as omission, of course; my point is only that care is rather more likely to demand commission.

practices of care such as that of mothering. She writes, “Caretakers are immersed in the materials of the physical world. The physical phenomena of human and other bodies must be interpreted in relation to the demands of caretaking.”²⁴

Since care as a value is related to the meeting of needs, and many needs are physical, such physically engaged caring would seem to be morally demanded (or at least recommended), again, if we assume that care is a moral value. Because male philosophers, at least in the past, could and did ignore these needs and assume that—naturally!—they would be met by wives, household staff, daughters, mothers, slaves, etc., the question of the moral importance of meeting them for the most part did not arise.^{25, 26} This is hardly surprising. The moral imperative of sharing in the more physical forms of caring is an imperative of justice as well as of caring itself. There is a distinctive care-based claim to be made, to the effect that such physically immersed caring is not just a burden that must be equitably shared, but may well be part of a morally complete life. That is, a life that did not involve doing it may be morally less than it could be.²⁷

Does this mean that, in order to be a caring person, to enact the value of care in one's life, one must have a certain competence? In one sense, yes: in order to meet a newborn baby's needs, one will have to know certain things and do them properly (what to feed her, or how to hold her). One would not be taking good care of the newborn if one fed her rack of lamb or held her without supporting her neck. It would be a moral failure in such cases to be caring if one's ignorance of these things were culpable; that is, unless age,

24 Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 130

25 Especially in modern and contemporary philosophy.

26 Most philosophers have been and still are not only male, but white and relatively privileged economically. This allows them to have basic needs—household maintenance, food, laundry, childcare, and so on—met by domestic workers who are less economically privileged. In the United States especially, these workers are disproportionately people of color and very often immigrants. Note, too, that professional academics have many of their more concrete needs met by less privileged workers who clean their offices, cater their colloquia, and xerox materials for them. Note, though, that there is a hierarchy within the ranks of academic workers; adjunct lecturers will often lack some of the support services and facilities enjoyed by those on tenure track; they may not even have office space.

27 A life that did not involve *receiving* such physically immersed caring would be miserable indeed; it would also be an impediment to optimal moral development of the person so deprived.

cognitive incapacity, or other circumstances meant that one could not reasonably be expected to know or find out, or know that one ought to know, these things. To take good care of someone, I will need to know at least something about her and take steps to ensure that my actions will indeed meet her needs; this may involve research, reflection, or simply asking her or being attentive to how she communicates her needs, preferences, and so on. But is this unique to care? Arguably, similar issues of competence may arise when we are trying to enact other values: imagine a parent whose child has done something wrong figuring out what disciplinary measure would be both just and effective. The parent will need to know something about children generally, but also about her child's particular character. "Grounding" the child might be more or less appropriate, for example, depending on whether the child's idea of a good time is drawing or reading in a quiet corner or being out playing with friends; the difference in character affects the severity of the punishment, which matters in terms of both effectiveness and justice.

Responsiveness and responsibility

Early discussions of Gilligan's "different voice" often referred to responsibility as well as care in describing the alternative voice's central concerns or themes. In Gilligan's "ethic of care," taking responsibility for others is a major moral imperative: disavowing responsibility, walking away from someone in need of care, is a major moral failure—perhaps the most serious.²⁸ Gilligan draws a contrast between the focus of justice ethics on competing rights, and the focus of care ethics on conflicting responsibilities.²⁹ Interestingly, in Gilligan's account, this sense of responsibility extends not only to oneself, but also far beyond those with whom one has personal relations: it "stems from an awareness of interconnection... The stranger is still another person belonging to that group, people you are connected to

28 See, for example, the reference to "indifference and unconcern." Gilligan associates this with a "morality of rights and noninterference." *In a Different Voice*, 22. If, as seems to be the case, this is a reference to "justice ethics" such as Kantianism, it is a misfired criticism, as I hope to show in chapter two. Nevertheless, the point that indifference and unconcern are significant moral failings stands.

29 *Ibid.*, 54, 98-100.

by virtue of being another person.”³⁰ The suggestion is that we have some form of moral responsibility toward all other persons simply because they are persons.

Virginia Held writes that “the central focus of the ethics of care is on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility.”³¹ For whom do we properly take responsibility? Are we morally free to choose? This sort of question leads us from responsibility to the notion of responsiveness, which many writers on care see as an aspect of responsibility.³²

In Gilligan's view, the central moral question of the care “perspective” is “How to respond?”³³ This involves responsiveness or attentiveness as well as taking responsibility. After all, the decision to respond to someone's need requires a prior apprehension of the reality and salience of that need. The term “responsiveness” in the literature does not have a rigid designation, however; it is sometimes used to refer to the propensity to respond (once one has apprehended the need), sometimes to the capacity to attend to or recognize needs in the first place (otherwise often referred to as attentiveness), and in Joan Tronto's work, to the care receiver's response to being cared for.³⁴ I prefer to use the term “responsiveness” to refer in an overarching way to *both* attentiveness and the propensity to respond or take responsibility. I do so for two main reasons: first, I think it captures the nuances of common uses of the term and second, it brings into focus the important and close relationship between attentiveness, propensity to respond, and the various aspects of taking responsibility and being responsible— all of which are central to the value of care.

While I do not think that it is absent in any satisfactory reading of Kantian ethics, care's centrality to moral life may not be immediately apparent to readers of Kant or Kant scholarship. Using the language of

30 Ibid., 57.

31 Held, The Ethics of Care, 10.

32 Card, p.88

33 Gilligan (1987), 23.

34 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 134.

responsiveness thus brings care (rightly) to prominence and should prompt us to read Kant with this in mind. I return to this project in the chapters that follow.

Responsiveness as attentiveness has been a central theme in the care literature. In Ruddick's account of maternal practice, mothers strive to practice “attentive love,”³⁵ which “represents a kind of knowing that takes truthfulness as its aim but makes truth serve lovingly the person known.”³⁶ In attentive love, one listens and tries to understand the other and what she is going through on her own terms (without trying to find *yourself* in her, as Ruddick points out).³⁷ Joan Tronto gives a somewhat similar account of attentiveness, which she relates to “caring about”— the first phase of what she sees as the process of care:

We have an unparalleled capacity to know about others in complex modern societies. Yet the temptation to ignore others, to shut others out, and to focus our concerns solely upon ourselves, seem almost irresistible. Attentiveness, simply recognizing the needs of those around us, is a difficult task, and indeed, a moral achievement.³⁸

It is also a moral achievement that has been underappreciated in much of traditional moral theory, certainly, at least, in the ways it has been presented and taught. Paying attention plays a crucial role in moral life, and ignorance/ignoring is a potentially serious and often complex moral failing. Tronto finds her understanding of attentiveness shares much with Simone Weil's notion of attention, “passivity,” and “absence of will” in receiving the reality of the other (in particular, her needs).³⁹ While receptivity is indeed important, I do not think it should be passive; it is not a matter of simply absorbing “reality” somehow directly or unfiltered— an impossible task— but of being prepared to pay attention to, and look out for, certain things. To put it another way, it is not a matter of

35 Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 119-123.

36 Ibid., 120.

37 Ibid., 121.

38 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 127.

39 Noddings stresses the importance of this sort of receptivity. Noddings, *Caring*, passim.

just ‘seeing’ needs, but seeing needs *as morally compelling*. This frame of mind cannot be passive. A certain self-consciousness and awareness of one's limited powers of perception and understanding of others, combined with a willingness to find ways to apprehend what the other is going through on her own terms (as far as possible— it will be an asymptotic venture, of necessity) for example, through dialogue, are important aids to responsiveness.

Drawing on Hannah Arendt's analysis of the banality of evil as exemplified by Eichmann, Tronto argues that

[E]vil can arise out of ignorance, either wilful or established habits of ignorance. If people in the first world fail to notice everyday that the activities spurred by a global capitalist system result in the starvation of thousands, or in sexual slavery in Thailand, are they inattentive? Is this a moral failing?⁴⁰

Taking care seriously will prompt us to answer ‘yes’. The nature of the moral failure involved in such ignorance is difficult to tease out. After all, as Tronto herself points out, “ignorance is built into social structures.” It is thus deeply embedded in our social lives, and it is not simply a matter of individual moral fault. Examples proliferate, but race and racism in societies such as the United States is a particularly interesting and challenging case:

Some would argue that one of the consequences of racism, for example, is that Whites do not know, and do not think they need to know, anything about the lives of Blacks, except for the self-serving myths that they have told themselves.⁴¹

This claim deserves some amplification. We might note here Charles Mills's work on the epistemology of ignorance, which, he argues, is an aspect of the “Racial Contract”— a hardly-spoken agreement among privileged white men (but beneficial to all white people to some degree) forged alongside the

40 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 128.

41 *Ibid.*, 129

Social Contracts of early modernity, which designated white people as the only full persons.⁴² The contract included, according to Mills, an agreement to ignore any piece of knowledge that threatened white supremacy. The epistemology of ignorance is “particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are socially and psychologically functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.”⁴³ The suggestion here, which has been taken up by various philosophers, is that ignorance is more than not-knowing, it may be a *refusal to know*— a refusal made in order to avoid questioning one's own privilege. Ignorance of this kind is a construction, an “active production,”⁴⁴ and a particularly delicate one, at that.⁴⁵ Responsiveness can be fatal to ignorance, although we should note that social institutions can maintain the ignorance and make it hard for individuals to break free; walking away or looking away from human need and suffering is one of the chief mechanisms by which we successfully keep ignorant about the oppressive structures we live within and from which we often benefit.

Now, this raises the question: for whom are we responsible? Some of Gilligan's subjects felt a responsibility to all persons;⁴⁶ Noddings suggests that we ought to be prepared to respond to anyone whose needs confront us face to face;⁴⁷ Held's focus is on responsibility for those with whom we find ourselves in caring relations— but note that she thinks that these can be wider than face to face relationships, encompassing global relations of care. On any of these interpretations, a moral agent's

42 Mills, Charles. *The Racial Contract*. (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1997). See also Tronto's discussion of privileged irresponsibility” in *Moral Boundaries*, 120-122; See also the essays in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds..(Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

43 Mills, *The Racial Contract*, p.18.

44 Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1993), p.118, Tuana, Nancy. "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance" *Hypatia*, Vol. 19 No.1 (Winter 2004): p. 195.

45 As Oscar Wilde remarked, “Ignorance is like a delicate fruit: touch it, and the bloom is gone.”

46 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 21, 54; see also 94, for the development of a sense of responsibility to self.

47 Noddings, *Caring*, 49-50.

burden of responsibilities may be overwhelming. What are the limits of responsibility? There are a number of ways to approach this problem. First, we must consider our responsibility to care for ourselves. Noddings allows that we ought to care for ourselves, but only insofar as this will allow us to continue as carers.⁴⁸ I think this is insufficient; while it is true that maintaining oneself as carer, or moral agent generally, does provide some moral reason for caring for ourselves, this is not the only moral reason for it. Surely, we would also want to say that carers *deserve* a certain level of care for their own sake, that it is only *fair*. To make such a claim directly requires the language of justice and rights, and this recognition has gained acceptance among many later theorists of care and care ethics. Second, we must consider the institutional context: while our moral responsibilities do indeed extend to all persons (at least), there is only so much direct responsibility any one moral agent can bear for the needs of specific distant (and not-so-distant) others. This has the look of an impossible bind until we examine the institutional context. What institutions can we create (or change) to reach those to whom we are morally connected but whom we cannot directly help as individuals? Third, we consider the question of supererogation. I think a Kantian approach in terms of (necessarily unspecifiable, but nonetheless real and binding) *imperfect* obligations instead of the simple distinction between required and supererogatory is correct; I defer a discussion of this point until chapter three.

Finally, Noddings argues that care is essentially nonrational, a feeling of obligation stirred by apprehending need.⁴⁹ I will take a different view: to be responsive in the fullest sense— apprehending needs as morally compelling, taking responsibility, and responding— is the *preserve* of rational beings. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of rational beings is the capacity to be (held) responsible, and to take responsibility.

48 Ibid., 100.

49 The position bears some resemblance to Rousseau's in the Discourse on Inequality: he argues that reason allows us to ignore feelings of compassion and rationalize inaction. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Discourse on Inequality, (London: Penguin, 1984), 101.

Persons and relations

Proponents of an ethic of care have emphasized its alternative conception of persons—as relational, embedded, (inter)dependent—and contrasted it with justice ethics' supposed conception of persons as independent, autonomous, self-sufficient. Grace Clement, describing what she calls the “ideal types” of justice and care, as they have been constructed in the care debate, writes that “the ethic of justice begins with an assumption of human separateness, while the ethic of care begins with an assumption of human connectedness.”⁵⁰ Similarly, Held writes that “[t]he ethics of care usually works with a conception of persons as relational, rather than as the self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories.”⁵¹ Arguably, this is one respect in which such critics have constructed justice ethics out of straw; I will argue in the following that a satisfactory reading of Kantian ethics commits one to a comprehensive view of persons that incorporates *both* relationality and individuality, autonomy and vulnerability, independence and (inter)dependence. In any case, I am not defending an ethic of care, but care as a critical value within ethics overall. Am I thereby committed to a particular view of persons? Does care as a value and a practice (in the absence of an ethic of care) offer any particular insights with respect to our conception of persons?

I believe that it does. Stressing the value of care highlights—as the canon of moral theory has not to any great extent done—the vulnerability and interdependence of persons. Ruddick, for example, sees the apprehension of vulnerability as an important element of maternal practice.⁵² Gilligan's “different voice” starts from an assumption that persons are interdependent, capable of cooperation, and deeply invested in their relations with others.⁵³ This does not mean, of course, that persons are not

50 Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, 11.

51 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 13.

52 Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, 18.

53 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 20, 55, 74.

also characterized by capacities for autonomy (of some sort) and for individuality. My own view is that persons are best characterized by a *tension* between their dependence, vulnerability, and embeddedness in relationships and their autonomy, independence, and individuality. I will expand on this point in chapter two.

If we are vulnerable and interdependent beings, then the sort of liberalism that emphasizes "rugged individualism" will be patently inadequate.⁵⁴ Not all of what is usually placed in the liberal tradition satisfies this description, but a certain strain, derived from thinkers like Hobbes and nurtured by contemporary proponents of laissez-faire capitalism, "small government," and the like, does, and it has been highly influential. Appreciating the significance of care as practice and value provides a deep challenge to the worldview on which such political views depend. As this sort of "rugged individualism" has permeated Western culture, it has arguably led to an over-emphasis on rights-to-be-left-alone and a marked under-appreciation of persons' wider obligations to one another. It has also influenced the development of political and economic structures that allow the powerful to ignore others' needs for (or, in some sense, rights to) care and the consequences both of inadequate care, and the burdens of care shouldered by actual caregivers. The familiar claims of the right that our self-centered, individualistic, un-cooperative "human nature" renders any non-capitalist economic and political arrangements impossible or doomed to failure through corruption, "inefficiency," authoritarianism, and so on, seem rather problematic once we see the side of human nature that care brings to our attention.⁵⁵ Merely recalling the care work done by women (especially) throughout history undermines many right-wing denials that people are capable of acting cooperatively to meet the needs of their community. To the extent that women have lived up to the role ascribed to them by patriarchy's

54 See Rita Manning's remarks on the sexism of the "rugged individualism" of the "frontier picture" of persons in U.S. culture. Rita Manning, Speaking from the Heart: A Feminist Perspective on Ethics (Lanham, MD.:Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 3-4

55 The implication that "human nature" is somehow immune to change is also, of course, open to question.

gendered division of labor— caring, cooperative, attentiveness to the needs of others— they have undermined such claims. If we attend to the (historical) experiences of all persons— not just to privileged men— we see that “human nature” does not rule out social arrangements based on cooperation and the prioritization of human need over property or profit.⁵⁶

Care theorists, of course, are not unique in questioning the supposedly individualistic, unembedded conception of persons prevalent in moral and social theory: Michael Sandel's communitarian critique of liberalism's “unencumbered self” is one example of this trend.⁵⁷ What may distinguish the care conception of persons from other varieties of this sort of critique is (1) the explicitly feminist perspective, (2) its association with care as a social practice, and (3) the connection made with the importance of caring relations in shaping individual persons. Many theorists of care have placed particular emphasis on caring relations in the context of moral theory. While I do not agree with the more radical versions of this sort of claim— that caring relations are morally prior to individual persons— for reasons I shall present in the following chapter, I find it useful and appropriate to acknowledge the importance of caring relations in moral life. This is not, of course, an insight unique to care theorists (think of the importance of friendship in Aristotle's ethics, for example) but it is correct and it has not been given enough attention in moral theory. The focus on caring relations thus offers a satisfying explanation of certain moral phenomena that may seem rather puzzling in the context of other moral theories. For example, drawing on the work of Annette Baier, Held argues that the ethics of care is particularly accommodating to the moral importance of trust, since it is “a relation between persons, not a value achievable by persons in isolation.”⁵⁸

56 Chapter four will extend these political arguments.

57 Sandel, Michael. Liberalism and its Critics. (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

58 Held, The Ethics of Care, 56.

Methodological concerns

Many care theorists were struck by the dissatisfaction Gilligan's subjects expressed with the form of the Heinz dilemma.⁵⁹ When confronted with the dilemma, subjects using a justice approach attempted to identify the moral principles involved, and prioritized them on a rational basis. Thinking about a moral dilemma was like “a math problem with humans.” Those using a care approach, however, typically asked for more information or tried to resist the formulation of the problem as a conflict between two principles; instead they explored solutions in which the conflict was dissolved and relationships were not severed. Gilligan draws the contrast thus:

Hypothetical dilemmas, in the abstraction of their presentation, divest moral actors from the history and psychology of their individual lives and separate the moral problem from the social contingencies of its possible occurrence. In doing so, these dilemmas are useful for the distillation and refinement of objective principles of justice and for measuring the formal logic of equality and reciprocity. However, the reconstruction of the dilemma in its contextual particularity allows the understanding of cause and consequence which engages the compassion and tolerance repeatedly noted to distinguish the moral judgments of women. Only when substance is given to the skeletal lives of hypothetical people is it possible to consider the social injustice that their moral problems may reflect and to imagine the individual suffering their occurrence may signify or their resolution engender.⁶⁰

This has inspired several sorts of related critique about the scope and methods of ethics as conceived in "justice ethics": (1) a justice ethics misses the political dimension of moral problems, (2) it fails to see the limits of dilemmatic formulations as models of moral judgment, and (3) it relies on abstraction and principle, which are both problematic. Although I do not share the view that these points fatally

⁵⁹ See 2.2 below.

⁶⁰ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 100.

undermine Kantian ethics, they do indicate some areas where our attention might usefully be directed. Let us consider them briefly here in turn.

The Heinz dilemma as presented in A Different Voice conjures up a stark picture of a world in which someone could have so few options and so little social support that stealing a drug is the only way of avoiding the death of a loved one. It is unsurprising, I think, that many have found that the Heinz story resonates strongly with their concerns about a social, political, and economic order in which people are left without access to the care they need. Readers in countries where access to healthcare is based on purchasing power rather than need have particular reason to find a political problem under the surface of the Heinz story. Hence reactions such as Marilyn Friedman's:

The significance of the real justice problem in the Heinz dilemma has been missed or ignored by Kohlberg, whose construction of the dilemma as a problem in moral reasoning forces a choice between two alternatives that, in fact, are identical in at least one respect: neither of them threatens the institutional status quo in which the situation occurs... In the Heinz situation, there are broad issues of social justice at stake in the delivery of health care.⁶¹

As Joan Tronto argues, moral problems experienced by individuals in their lives never occur outside of a political context.⁶² I agree, but I think this sort of response to the Heinz dilemma—that it misses the real moral issue because it is constructed to omit the political context—is a powerful critique of over-reliance on dilemmas in teaching and practicing moral theory generally rather than of "justice ethics" in particular. There is no reason why Kantian ethics cannot accommodate this point. Gilligan herself suggests that dilemmas are of limited (but not of no) use. They may be useful in making narrow points but they do not model moral judgment in general; such constructed dilemmas should not be taken as

61 Marilyn Friedman, "Care and Context in Moral Reasoning" in Women and Moral Theory, Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds. (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), p.202.

62 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 5 and passim.

accurate representations of how moral judgment proceeds. We do not usually experience our moral lives as a series of “either-or” dilemmas already presented to us.

The debate about the Heinz dilemma suggests a broader caution about prevailing methods in ethics; indeed, many care theorists have critiqued abstraction and principles as such. While I do not share this more radical view (for reasons explained in detail in chapters two and three), a milder form of the critique is worth bearing in mind. This milder form urges caution and judiciousness in how abstraction in thinking about ethics is done. Abstraction poorly done risks “bleaching out” morally relevant considerations or importing distortions and even outright falsehoods into the general concepts we use in making moral decisions.⁶³ The politically efficacious ignorance of the powerful discussed above provides instructive examples; if the category “person” was implicitly only reserved for economically privileged white men, then enslaving black Africans or confining women to subservient roles would not be seen to violate human rights, which could be proudly espoused by the beneficiaries of patriarchy and racism. (Hence the power of the classic feminist slogan, “Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.”)

Care and emotions

Taking care seriously brings the role of emotions in moral life to prominence. Although, of course, care's focus on emotion is not unprecedented in ethics (think of Aristotle, Hume, or Smith, for example), the practice and value of care seems to have a special association with feeling. To care for someone, does one have to care about them and feel a particular way? What is the role of emotion in being a caring person? Does an appeal to care lessen the importance of reason in morality?

To care for someone, to act to meet her needs, requires the sort of responsiveness discussed above;

63 Onora O'Neill makes a similar point, distinguishing abstraction from idealization. Onora O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 143-167.

we must notice her need and also see it as morally compelling, as requiring action. There is an emotional component to this: first, it seems to depend on some “moral feeling”—a feeling of wanting to do what is right, a feeling of caring about our moral responsibilities. (This applies to moral life generally.) Second, feelings of compassion and sympathy certainly “open us up” to noticing need and seeing it as morally compelling, but seeing its moral relevance and recognizing the demand it makes for action on our part are acts of reasoning.

Many instances of persons caring for others do involve emotional attachment; no doubt, if all other things are equal, a baby will be better cared for if there is an emotional attachment between carer and cared-for. (If all other things are not equal— if, for example, the carer loves the baby very much but lacks competence, the baby might be better cared for by someone who doesn't love her but is competent.) I do not think this means that care must involve love or similar emotions. It is not surprising that people feel particularly well cared-for by those who they feel love them. It is not surprising, either, that we wish that those with whom we have close personal relationships should not merely mechanically meet our needs, but should do so lovingly. These considerations reflect our need for love and our association of close relationships with love. It does not follow, however, that I must love or even like a person in order to care for them. Of course, it would hardly constitute caring behavior to meet someone's needs while exhibiting dislike, disdain, impatience, anger, or hatred; indeed, it would hardly constitute meeting their needs because it ignores human needs for things like social interaction, emotional comfort, or dignity. I can be sensitive to all of these things without loving or liking the person but I do have to feel and think that the person is entitled to be treated with respect and compassion for the very reasons that prompted me to respond to her need in the first place. The same holds true for public applications of care.

1.4 New directions in the care debate

I want to highlight three issues where there has been significant movement in the care debate: (1) the role of justice, (2) the relation between care and autonomy, and (3) social and political applications of care.

The role of justice

If some earlier treatments of care had suggested a conflict between care and justice, and care ethics and justice ethics, more recent work (especially from the early 1990s onwards) tends to stress that justice should not be discarded, even within an “ethic of care.” Nel Noddings's original ethic of care seems to leave no room for justice, although in a preface to the second edition of *Caring*, she acknowledges that “we need to use justice when it is logistically impossible to exercise caring-for.”⁶⁴ The question of how justice and care are related has remained a particularly difficult one and there remain various approaches.

In a 1993 preface to *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan acknowledges that the question of whether the care and justice approaches were in “counterpoint”—that is, somehow complementary— or represented incompatible moral frameworks, remains unresolved in the earlier book.⁶⁵ Gilligan points to the possibility of a “postconventional ethical understanding” in which care and justice concerns are integrated.⁶⁶ It is not clear, however, how this integration would take place and whether it is envisioned in the context of an integrated moral *theory* or in that of a capacity of individuals to integrate pre-theoretically the two different voices. In subsequent work, Gilligan has suggested that justice and care are two orientations or standpoints, neither reducible to the other, and both important,

64 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, xvi.

65 Ibid., xxvi, also see p69: “the reconciliation of these two modes, however, is not clear.”

66 Ibid., 100

but which one cannot adopt at the same time, much as one cannot see the famous Gestalt image as both duck and rabbit at the same time.⁶⁷

Grace Clement's Care, Autonomy, and Justice reflects an "integrationist" approach in the literature, somewhat similar to Gilligan's, in that *care ethics* and *justice ethics* — not just care and justice— are retained. Justice ethics and care ethics should be seen as distinct, but should interact, ideally in ways that will help each ethic correct deficiencies in the other. Some argue that either care ethics or justice ethics have priority, others that care and justice "remain independent orientations on any given situation,"⁶⁸ while others hold (as I will argue) that justice and care converge in a single, comprehensive ethic. Clement's position is that, "despite the fact that the best versions of the ethics often converge in the sense that they reach the same or compatible conclusions, they remain distinct ethics, each with its own ontology, method, and priorities."⁶⁹ However, they do not represent two alternative frameworks between which moral agents can simply choose; rather, "they should both be used in any moral situation."⁷⁰ They remain "irreducible" to one another;⁷¹ they do not, in Clement's view, converge in a single ethic because "they draw our attention to different dimensions of any given situation—the ethic of justice to hierarchies among individuals, the ethic of care to the sense of connection among individuals."⁷² In particular, Clement warns that the convergence strategy often, in effect, assimilates care into justice ethics and ignores "the distinctive features of care."⁷³ This is a risk, but I think the conclusion is unwarranted. We may say that justice and care are different *values* within a

67 Gilligan, "Moral Orientation and Moral Development" in Women and Moral Theory, Kittay and Meyers, eds., passim.

68 Clement, Care, Autonomy, and Justice, 114

69 Ibid., 100.

70 Ibid., 110.

71 Ibid., 119.

72 Ibid., 119.

73 Ibid., 119.

single ethic, each pointing to different aspects of moral concern.

It is problematic, in my view, to allow that there are two *ethics*. A comprehensive ethic would require, in Clement's view, the discovery of a "more basic dimension of human relationships which incorporates, without compromising, all of the features of the first two"⁷⁴ (namely justice and care) and this seems unlikely. As I shall argue in greater detail in the following chapters, Kantian ideas about the moral agent can help us to approach this problem; to have a comprehensive ethic (that includes justice and care) does not require a *more basic dimension* of human relationships, but rather, a *comprehensive conception* of humans and their relationships as characterized by a *tension* between the "justice" and "care" dimensions.

Another approach is to advocate an ethic of care, with justice seen as part of it. This has been attempted in a number of ways. Būbeck, for example, sees justice as *part* of the ethics of care but denies that the ethic of care is a "general, all-embracing moral outlook, perspective, or *Weltanschauung*."⁷⁵ Rather, the ethics of care is "a system of concepts, values, and ideas, arising from the practice of care as an organic part of this practice and responding to its material requirements, notably the meeting of needs."⁷⁶ This use of the term "ethics of care" seems closer to the meaning of "business ethics" (ethics as applied to issues in business) or "medical ethics" (ethics as applied to issues in medicine) than to the more common use of the term, as a moral theory rivaling Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and so on.

Like Būbeck, Michael Slote argues that justice considerations arise from care, but in a rather different way. Slote argues for the ethics of care as a freestanding, comprehensive moral theory that appeals to empathic caring as the primary source of moral standards. He rejects "traditional justice" in

74 Ibid.,120.

75 Būbeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 252

76 Ibid., 11

favor of care, but will include a care-based understanding of justice, autonomy, and so on.⁷⁷ Slote attempts to provide an account of social justice within the ethics of care based on finding analogies between individual ethical caring and the “actions” of institutions. Thus, “institutions and laws, as well as social customs and practices, are just if they reflect empathically caring motivation on the part of (enough of) those responsible for originating and maintaining them.”⁷⁸

Held also argues for a care-based ethics that includes justice. Held’s position is that both justice and care are necessary in moral theory.⁷⁹ Either justice or care will have priority in different domains: in one domain, say one’s relationship with one’s child—care will be the primary moral value, but justice will have to be considered too.⁸⁰ However, care is ultimately the most fundamental moral value.⁸¹ Care ethics, she holds, is a distinct type of moral theory, which cannot be assimilated into other frameworks, such as Kantian ethics.

Thus Held argues that care is the most fundamental moral value, and provides the broader framework into which other values, including justice, fit.⁸² Care is “the most basic moral value”; there can be care without justice, but there cannot be justice without care, since persons, families, communities, and even societies, cannot survive and develop without care.⁸³ Care, she continues, is “not simply causally primary, it is more inclusive as a value. Within a network of caring, we can and should demand justice, but justice should not then push care to the margins, imagining justice’s political embodiment as the model of morality, which is what has been done.”⁸⁴ The argument here

77 Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, 2 and passim.

78 Ibid., 95

79 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 16.

80 Ibid., 17.

81 Ibid., 17, 72.

82 Ibid., 71-72, 134.

83 Ibid., 72, 134, 86.

84 Ibid., 72.

seems to be that care can be claimed to have *normative priority*, on the whole, over justice because we can advocate justice in the context of caring relations but we cannot advocate care in the context of justice because ethical thought has until now tended to privilege justice and ignore care. As it stands, the argument seems incomplete. Held would have to tell us why justice could not *in principle* accommodate care as care can accommodate justice, or indeed, why one might accommodate the other at all. She elaborates the position thus:

Care seems to me to be the most basic of moral values. Without care as an empirically describable practice, we cannot have life at all since human beings cannot survive without it. Without some level of caring concern for other human beings, we cannot have any morality. These requirements are not just empirical givens. In every context of care, moral evaluations are needed. Then, without some level of caring moral concern for all other human beings, we cannot have a satisfactory moral theory.⁸⁵

Held comes close, in the first two sentences above, to claiming that care's normative priority (as value) comes out of its being empirically necessary for human survival, which would be a problematic position, in my view (how to make the leap between empirical and normative here?), but the succeeding sentences offer some qualification. If, “in every context of care, moral evaluations are needed,” and if care (even simply as labor) is necessary to the survival of any and all persons, moral evaluation is needed in the very activities without which no-one would live to become a moral agent. However, moral evaluation is “needed” only from a normative, specifically a moral, perspective; is it necessarily the case that such evaluation be primarily in terms of the value of care? Again, I think more needs to be said here. Perhaps a case for the normative priority of care could more easily be made by saying that the moral agent must care, in at least some sense, or perhaps have been in a caring relation,

85 Ibid., 73.

in order to develop a sense of justice. This seems to me a plausible claim in itself (and I shall say more about this in chapter four below), but I doubt, still, that it shows the normative priority of care.

Held is right, in my view, that caring moral concern is a necessary condition for any moral theory. Care (as practice and value), more specifically, may be a necessary condition for justice, but does that show that it is normatively prior? I am not sure. Held pursues this line of argument seemingly because of the difficulties involved in claiming that neither justice nor care is reducible to the other nor normatively prior to the other; the thought here appears to be that if one cannot be “included” in the other, one will need to be a “tie-breaker,” as it were.. The problem, of course, is what to do when justice recommends one course of action and care another incompatible one. I think we ought to resist such a construction of the “problem.” First, such conflicts seem possible in many contexts— for example, how can I be both honest and kind when my friend asks me my opinion on her latest, very bad, poem? Or how can I be loyal to my friend X and my friend Y, who have had a serious falling out? — but that should not force us to say that honesty or kindness is normatively prior to the other, or that it is more morally important to be loyal to X or to Y. Second, we might perhaps construe moral deliberation in terms of trying to enact simultaneously several (or as many as possible) principles or values, rather than as picking out one “winning” principle or value and enacting it.⁸⁶

Held, as we have seen, argues that care is the most basic moral value. Values other than care are not, however, reducible to care in her view. They may even have priority in limited domains; for example, justice may be the primary value in certain contexts.⁸⁷ In this regard, she takes the same position as in her earlier Feminist Morality (but in that book, she had not yet concluded that care was the most basic moral value). Assuming— as she does— that Kantianism and utilitarianism are both “justice ethics,” she allows that Kantian ethics may apply in some legal contexts and utilitarianism in some public

⁸⁶ Onora O'Neill, “Applied Ethics: Naturalism, Normativity, and Public Policy” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 26 No.3, 2009.

⁸⁷ Held, The Ethics of Care, 73.

policy contexts, but denies that either should have priority generally, for example in family and friendship contexts.⁸⁸ The relationship between justice and care, instead of being one of reduction, will best be described with new kinds of metaphor:

In the case of the ethics of care, instead of the metaphor of reduction through logical relation or conceptual analysis, perhaps we should think of a painting or tapestry or a glass sculpture.

There is an overall design within which are salient and less salient components. The overall design of feminist moral theory, I believe, will be one of caring relations. But within that overall design there will be a number of salient components organized around the values of justice and utility. And there will be many detailed and interesting elements concerning the virtues. The whole should be harmonious, but that does not mean that the components cannot differ significantly.⁸⁹

The resistance to reductionism about justice and care is correct in my view, and welcome, but the tapestry analogy is open to the objection that it insufficiently accounts for the importance of bringing our various moral commitments, principles, or values into alignment, enabling us to enact these values or principles together as far as possible. It may suggest that it is more important to be caring than to be just (except in narrow exceptional contexts), and this strikes me as problematic. Held would obviously agree that we should be both just and caring, but in exploring new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between justice and care, it is important to prioritize this aim. In fairness, we should acknowledge the difficulties that arise in any such radical departures from conventional conceptual models; it is to be expected that much further clarification will be necessary in such a project.

Held not only questions reductionism about justice and care, but about moral theory generally:

⁸⁸ Ibid., 73

⁸⁹ Ibid., 75.

At this level the various theories embedded in various practices might more appropriately be thought to be features of an overall design for living good lives in caring relationships with others, rather than as abstract formulations logically reducible to simpler ones.⁹⁰

Arguably, if there is to be an “overall design,” it must in some way appeal to a conception of what a good life in caring relationships is and why that is of primary importance— unless the “design” is just “however things fall together.” Presumably the elements of the design cannot be inconsistent with the overall design and must indeed be part of the overall design.

Care and autonomy

In 1993, describing general features of the care debate, Clement could write that “while the ethic of justice is understood to take the concept of autonomy as central, the ethic of care is understood to be opposed to the concept of autonomy on the grounds that it is excessively individualistic.”⁹¹ Recent developments in the debate, including Clement's own response to this earlier claim, have attempted to accommodate care and autonomy (whether or not one subscribes to an “ethic of care”). Autonomy, Clement writes, is a difficult topic for care ethicists, since it is thought to be based on “individualistic assumptions,”⁹² which can be associated with the “ideal type” of justice. Clement argues for a conception of autonomy that does not rest on such assumptions, but rather fits with the view that persons are at least partly socially constituted, and for a conception of care that incorporates the value of autonomy.

Autonomy “has a negative component, that one’s choices not be coerced, and a positive component, that one critically evaluates one’s choices.”⁹³ It involves a requirement that my choices be in a deep

⁹⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁹¹ Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, 15

⁹² Ibid., 21

⁹³ Ibid., 23.

sense my own, but if the (critically reflecting) self is socially constituted, this may be impossible. This problem can be solved, in Clement's view: her strategy is to examine what distinguishes those we consider autonomous from those we consider nonautonomous. Chief among these distinguishing factors is a social network in which we learn how to be autonomous. In particular, the positive element of critical reflection is something that cannot be developed without relationships with others, who care for us and teach us. As she puts it, "relationships with others teach us to be ourselves."⁹⁴ She also points out that social conditions may impede both elements of autonomy, that is, uncoerced choice and critical reflection.

Can an ethic of care accommodate these concerns and yet avoid the problems of care theories that are skeptical of autonomy? Clement's own response is that in this case the ethic of care must be supplemented by the ethic of justice. Her conception of autonomy explicitly draws upon Gilligan's discussions of responsibility as a central component of an ethic of care:

Care requires that one attend to the needs of both self and other, not one to the exclusion of the other. In attending to one's own needs, one is honest to oneself and thus able to take responsibility for one's decisions. In taking responsibility for one's decisions, one is autonomous.⁹⁵

This, for Clement, must include the capacity to critically reflect upon, and end if necessary, one's relationships.⁹⁶ She contrasts her position with Gilligan and Noddings in particular, for whom the ending of a relationship is always a failure of care in some sense.

94 Ibid., 24.

95 Ibid., 35.

96 Ibid., 37.

Continuing this trend, Held argues that the caring person can and should be autonomous, although “autonomy” should be understood in relational terms. Held, like many other feminist philosophers,⁹⁷ points out that “we learn to be autonomous through our interactions with others”;⁹⁸ we also exercise autonomy with respect to our relationships—questioning, changing, or sometimes leaving them— from a position of embeddedness in relationships. Autonomy is important for persons; however, autonomy should not aim at “the splendid independence, self-sufficiency, and easy isolation of the traditional liberal ideal of the autonomous rational agent,”⁹⁹ but for “better and often more caring relations.”¹⁰⁰ As I have suggested in 1.3 above, this is arguably not an accurate reflection of the conception of persons to be found in all of what is called “justice ethics”; the acknowledgment of care's compatibility with autonomy is welcome. There is no reason that persons cannot be considered both autonomous and relational. Part of the problem is with the term “autonomy”; as I shall argue in chapter two, autonomy in Kant does not have the connotation of persons' being self-sufficient or independent.

Social and political applications

Early works on care, such as Noddings's, seemed to limit care's application to the private sphere of face to face relationships; increasingly, however, there has been a focus on care's relevance to the social and political. It is worth recalling that the women whose “different voice” Gilligan documented often spoke in terms of feeling responsibility to the whole world or the human community and that Ruddick immediately saw the power of women's experiences of caregiving in political contexts,

97 For example, Clement and the contributors to the volume Relational Autonomy. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds. Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

98 Held, The Ethics of Care, 42

99 Held, The Ethics of Care, 49.

100 Ibid., 49.

especially with respect to peace and war. Thus, the potential for “public sphere” applications of care has been present in the literature from the beginning, although not to the same extent as has been the case from the 1990s. Since then, many writers have examined the political aspects of care: Tronto's Moral Boundaries offered a “political theory of care”; Bubeck focused on the principles of justice suggested by the practice of care and the questions of social justice raised by the unequal and exploitative distribution of the burden of care work; Fiona Robinson examined international relations from a care perspective; Peta Bowden examined citizenship as a practice of care; Held's ethic of care extends to global social, political, and economic relations. In chapter four, I shall discuss these arguments in greater detail and outline the main features of my own conception of political care based on an idea of political agency.

1.5 Summary and working definition of care

In this chapter I have presented the elements of the care debate that I think are worth serious philosophical attention. I have distinguished care (as practice and value) from the ethics of care, and justice from the ethics of justice; care and justice are two fundamental moral values, and care is a practice of great moral significance but in my view there is neither an “ethic of care” nor an “ethic of justice,” but simply ethics, incorporating both justice and care (among other values).

A) Care is a value applicable to all, even if it largely originates in the historical experience of women. The human needs to which the practice of care responds should not be seen as the responsibility only of women or, in general, the less privileged.

B) The particular association of care (as value) and care as practice reminds us of the moral importance of “hands-on,” engaged caring for others. Relatedly, this and the care literature generally reminds us to be cautious when engaging in abstraction: we must also be mindful of context and of the

dangers of idealization, false generalizations, and self-serving ignorance. Care, as other traditions in moral theory have done, highlights the role of emotions in moral life.

C) To be caring is to be responsive, in a broad sense: when we care, we apprehend need and its moral significance, and we respond, that is, we take responsibility for those needs to at least some extent. Care is a challenge to inattentiveness, inaction, and “epistemologies of ignorance.”

D) The value and practice of care reminds us that human persons are not merely individual, autonomous beings but also vulnerable and relational beings. We all require care of various sorts throughout our lives: this is an important but underacknowledged fact and one which provides a challenge to certain liberal conceptions of persons.

E) The care debate has thus seen significant movement on three issues in particular: first, it is now acknowledged that, even in an ethic of care, justice must be included; second, care is applicable in social and political contexts; third, autonomy need not be rejected, but can be understood in ways that are compatible with a commitment to care (whether in terms of an ethic of care or not).

With these issues in mind, I can now offer my working definition of care. Care, as practice and as value, is responsiveness to need with the aim of the cared-for's welfare; its moral significance lies in the apprehension of any given person's need for care in order to be and continue as a person, as a moral agent (and the morally compelling nature of this need), and in the act of taking responsibility for doing what one can (and what is appropriate given the context, including other values) to meet that need. (There may well be analogous senses of the practice of care with respect to animals and the environment but these require separate elucidation.) To be a caring person is to be responsive in just these ways: being open to, and noticing, the needs of others (both near and distant), apprehending their morally compelling nature (insofar as they help nurture that person's agency), and having a propensity to respond, to take responsibility for meeting that need (again, as appropriate).

Chapter Two

Care-based critiques of Kant

2.1 Introduction

As we have seen in chapter one, the care debates of the last quarter century have tended to pitch “care ethics” and “justice ethics” as alternative, possibly incompatible moral frameworks or theories, with “justice ethics” taken to refer to any canonical Western moral theory based on universal rules or principles and committed to the central value of justice. Kantian ethics and utilitarianism are usually presented as two paradigm cases of “justice ethics.” As we have also seen (1.3), there are numerous problems with this portrait of the philosophical terrain. Arguably, “justice ethics” is a misleading label to apply to Kantian ethics, which does not claim that justice is the primary value; in many other ways, too, Kantian ethics fails to live up to the images drawn in the care debate of “justice ethics.”¹ More generally, I have argued that there are no “justice ethics” and “care ethics,” but rather simply ethics, which includes care and justice as two important values among many other values. On the basis of this position, I wish to investigate the place of care in ethics more generally. First, however, questions about the best conception of ethics as a whole must be dealt with. In particular, since I am setting out to defend the basic features of Kant's ethics, critiques of Kantianism from writers on care must be considered and answered.

One difficult aspect of this task is that critiques of “justice ethics” as such presumably apply to Kantian ethics, since the latter is always considered an example of a “justice ethic” par

¹ It may not apply to other forms of “justice ethics” such as utilitarianism either, but that issue is beyond the scope of the present work.

excellence (whatever other theories may be so considered), but critiques of “justice ethics” are, at the same time, pitched at a more general level, since they hinge on seeing Kantianism and utilitarianism as similar (in ways perhaps more important than the ways in which they are different). Not surprisingly, then, care critiques of “justice ethics” eschew detailed textual engagement with Kant (or Mill, or other purveyors of “justice ethics”) and, thus, the Kantian replying to such critiques will have to engage in some reconstruction and “filling in” to show the exact lines of disagreement as well as to refute objections.

In this chapter, therefore, my project is more or less “defensive.” I aim to show how Kantians can answer three important care-based objections. These objections concern (1) the role of abstraction, universality and principles; (2) the relation of reason to emotion; and (3) the proper conception of the person. In the following chapter, I shall move to more “constructive” or positive terrain, examining how the surviving structure of Kantian ethics fits with the care-based considerations I have claimed, in chapter one, are important to include in any moral theory.

2.2 Context, principles, and abstraction²

The major methodological feature of care theories has been an emphasis on context and particularity and a suspicion (at least) of abstraction, principles, and universalism in ethics. In my view, a commitment to care as an important value entails neither a commitment to “care ethics” nor to a particularist methodology of the kind often associated with care. Nevertheless, the writings of care theorists on these topics raise some significant questions for Kantians. Although I defend Kant here, care-based critiques do offer legitimate cautions, as I have suggested in

² An earlier version of part of this section is to be published as “Care and Abstract Principles” in Hypatia (forthcoming at time of writing).

chapter one.

Care-based critiques of “justice ethics” on methodological grounds run the gamut of critiquing principle, abstraction, universal rules, to stressing context particularity, and so forth. It can be difficult to disentangle the various aspects of this sort of critique, so the first task here is to clarify the nature of the challenge faced by Kantians by sketching a typology of these claims and answering them one by one.

An essential preliminary to this is an examination of the terms used; in much of the care literature, terms such as “abstraction,” “rules,” “principles,” “abstract principles,” “universal principles,” “universalizability” and the like often appear without precise definition, and sometimes are used interchangeably (especially “rules” and “principles”). This makes for some confusion in any encounter between these critiques and Kantian ethics; for one thing, Kantian ethics is certainly principle-based, but, depending on what is meant by the term “rule,” it may be more complicated to claim that it is rule-based. What is the difference between these terms?

Since there is a dearth of definitions in the care literature, it seems reasonable to suppose that the terms “rule” and “principle” are used in ways close to ordinary language. In ordinary language, while the terms are similar in meaning, “rule” connotes a more specific sort of guideline than “principle,” which connotes something more general and foundational. Some examples may help here. Imagine two textbooks, one entitled “Rules of Mathematics” and the other entitled “Principles of Mathematics”; one might reasonably expect the former to offer more detailed, specific, and fixed procedures (multiplication tables and the like) and the latter to offer more general material about the foundations of mathematics. To take another example, most of us would probably describe a sign saying “No talking in the library” as announcing a rule (rather

than a principle) and many, if not most, would find someone's commitment to living an honest life better described as a principle than a rule. The suggestion is that with “principle” there is more space or necessity for judgment in order to apply the principle (which is usually fairly general), whereas rules are rather more likely to be directly applicable without (a great deal of) judgment required. In this sort of usage, a principle is more akin to a foundational or basic background commitment that informs specific day-to-day decisions about what to do. The etymology of the words supports this difference in nuance: “rule” is derived from the Latin *regula*, meaning a straight stick, while “principle” is derived from the Latin *principium*, meaning source.

The connotations of the term “rule-based” when applied to Kantian ethics is potentially misleading, since it may well suggest narrow, specific regulations meant to be applied mechanically. Saying of someone that she lives a highly rule-following life is not nearly so great a compliment as saying that she lives a very principled one. The former is more likely to conjure up an image of a conformist, someone reluctant to question authority, while the latter is more likely to conjure up an image of a thoughtful person who does what she sincerely thinks is right (irrespective of the views given by authority). Kantian ethics does not recommend conformism and blind rule-following, but acting on principle and giving (moral) law to oneself.

Ordinary language connotations of the words aside, Onora O'Neill gives an account from within a Kantian philosophical framework of the difference between “principle” and “rule”:

Those principles which formulate requirements (prohibitions, obligations, permissions, exceptions etc.) can quite naturally be thought of as rules; those which formulate

recommendations or warnings cannot.³

On this view, there is no problem characterizing Kantianism as a rule-based ethic: clearly, there is a lot about things one may not do, things one may do, things one must (morally) do, and so on.⁴

Note, though, that O'Neill contests the understanding of “rule” as meaning something like a rigid, specific regulation. In her sense, moral rules are “indeterminate rather than algorithmic” and set limits or constraints on actions rather than specifying one single action that must be done (or not done).⁵

Genuinely moral principles (and hence, on this understanding of terms, rules) are also self-imposed.⁶ If I adhere to a moral rule— e.g. refrain from murder— only or primarily because someone in authority has commanded me to, mine is not a genuine moral commitment; it is not morally worthy, on Kant's view. This characteristic of moral rules takes us some distance from the ordinary-language understanding of “rule-following,” which usually connotes following rules set by someone else (principle-following does not carry the same ordinary-language connotation). For clarity's sake, I shall use the term “principle” rather than rule in what follows.

Critiques of principles often use phrases such as “abstract principles” or “universal (moral) principles” without precise definition. Often such critiques are closely linked to critiques of universalism or universalizability. Strictly speaking, “universal,” “abstract,” and “principle” are

3 Onora O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

4 Other sorts of principles— recommendations and warnings— have their place, too; one might place many principles about the formation of character into this category.

5 O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice*, 53.

6 This point will be further discussed in the context of Kantian autonomy, of which the imposition of laws on oneself is a crucial component (see 2.3 below).

distinct (although this distinction may not seem to carry that much weight in the present context since Kantian moral principles are in addition both universal and abstract). All principles are abstract to some degree by necessity, although some are more abstract than others.⁷ Thus, it is hard to distinguish critiques of abstraction and of principle in ethics. There are, strictly speaking, no such things as non-abstract principles. One might wonder here about the use of the phrase “abstract principles” (rather than just “principles”) in the care literature: is it mere rhetoric, trading on the rather unappealing reputation of “abstraction”?

The extent to which any principle is really “universal” will, of course, depend on the domain of application (e.g. if “refrain from blackmail” applies to all persons but not to mice, or if “parents ought to do their best to care well for their children” applies to all persons who are parents; note, however, that the rule does apply to all persons in the hypothetical sense made clear by reformulating the rule as “For all persons, if x is a parent, x ought to do his or her best to care well for his or her children”). As we shall see below, there are critiques of universal principles that leave room for principles that apply differently depending on, say, someone's moral self-conception.

The first objection to principles I consider is that they do not ground morality because people act morally without thinking of themselves as acting on abstract principles. In particular, Noddings claims that while a principle such as “act always to establish, maintain, or enhance caring relations” may be descriptive of someone's caring actions, it is not *prescriptive* because it is not what motivates her to do the caring action.⁸ This is an initially intuitive critique of Kant,

⁷ A principle of honesty is more abstract than a principle of accurate tax filing. All principles are, of course, abstract nonetheless: abstract, indeed, to the extent that they *are* principles.

⁸ Nel Noddings. Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and

since it can be hard to recognize one's own moral life in his descriptions of morally worthy actions. We can probably all think of people we consider morally good or even exemplary who might not think of themselves as guided by abstract principles of any kind, let alone such formulae as the Categorical Imperative or the Greatest Happiness Principle, but this does not mean that they are not in fact implicitly guided by principles of one sort or another.⁹ It should come as no surprise that people do not have a “God's eye” view of their own processes of moral judgment or what precisely makes a good moral judgment a good moral judgment. As Onora O'Neill points out, every day we enact a great many principles without thinking about it: we refrain from murder, blackmail, assault, and so on.¹⁰ Most of us, happily, have internalized these principles as basic “background” commitments that set broad constraints on how we live.

Many of my own moral exemplars at least seemed to approach life with a remarkable capacity for spontaneous caring and compassion; is this because they are not guided by principles? I think not. The relationship between the sort of “homespun” moral example and instruction many of us remember from childhood and the sorts of moral principles some of us discuss when we grow up and become philosophers is easy to overstate. What may seem like simple, spontaneous,

principle-free, sympathy-led goodness can be shown to rest on basic moral principles when

London: University of California Press, 1984), 85.

9 Kant acknowledges this point in the Groundwork: “Considering the moral knowledge of common human reason, we have arrived at its principle, a principle it admittedly does not think about abstractly in such a universal formulation; but which really does always have in view and employs as its standard for judging.” The task of the moral philosopher is “to make reason attend, as Socrates did, to its own principle.” Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, Arnulf, Zweig, transl. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.205 (4:403-404). The “supreme principle of morality,” which Kant devoted the Groundwork to discovering and explaining, is, to put it very simply, what makes right things right (and wrong things wrong). All Kant references will be in the following format: translation page number, (Akademie Ausgabe page number), with the exception of the Lectures on Ethics, for which references are to the Infield translation..

10 Onora O'Neill, “Applied Ethics: Naturalism, Normativity, and Public Policy” Journal of Applied Philosophy, Vol. 26 No.3, (2009), 226.

carefully examined. Let me give a brief example. The best moral teaching I think I have ever received was from my father, who reminded my sister and me, as children, simply to “be kind.”¹¹ Like most children, we often found it difficult to be kind. We said mean things about each other and about other people. We complained and pouted when taken to visit this or that elderly person whose house didn't smell so good. We wouldn't offer to help with the housework. When my father told us to “be kind,” it made us think as well as feel. Gradually, we were able to internalize this injunction, to return to it when faced with a decision to act. We thought hard about what kindness demanded of us: it asked us to consider the effects of the mean things we say; it asked us to consider the life circumstances of that elderly person and their need for companionship and community; it asked us to consider the hard work our parents put in to our household and their need for help and co-operation. It did not necessarily make us “kind people,” with the implication that such a quality of character would “carry us through” difficult moments of deliberation. Rather, I think, it offered us a standard, a principle to reflect upon and to demand our own adherence to, even if we did not feel particularly kind, even if our characters had not firmly taken on the virtue of kindness. Even if they had, I see this as happening *because* we acknowledged the normative power of the principle “be kind.” Thinking of this simple principle (“be kind”) stopped us in our tracks, so to speak, and helped us toward clearer moral deliberation. It did so because thinking in terms of principles directs us to the fundamental reality and meaning of morality as such.

Usually, the role of principles in our own moral judgments becomes especially vivid in

¹¹ He was more than capable of expressing his moral beliefs in more philosophical language, as it happens, but the injunction to “be kind” stayed with us in a way that our more philosophical discussions, in spite of their interest didn't.

moments of serious temptation, uncertainty, or conflict. It is quite natural that, at such moments, principles may, as it were, be brought out from our foundation of “background” commitments and placed in the foreground of our thoughts. Indeed, what else do we have to appeal to in situations where our feelings are conflicted or where we are tempted to moral failure?¹²

Perhaps the most common kind of objection to principles found in the care literature is that their use in moral deliberation may result in morally relevant aspects of the situation being overlooked. If this is so, principles may distort more than they illuminate or guide. Many versions of this argument refer to Gilligan's famous Heinz dilemma as a paradigm of the “justice approach” to moral judgment. Although, as I argued in 1.3 above, some legitimate concerns arise from care critiques of Heinz-type dilemmas, I think this sort of argument misses the mark if treated as an objection to Kantian ethics or to principles in general. First, as was also argued in the previous chapter, “justice ethics” is a problematic term, and points to a reductive reading of Kant's ethics, which is in fact concerned with much more than justice (although, of course, it is deeply concerned with that too). Second, a Kantian account of how moral judgment generally proceeds looks rather different than the impression given by Heinz-type examples. I will return to this point below. First, let us examine the Heinz dilemma as it has been used in these “morally relevant facts” objections.¹³

The dilemma as presented to the research subjects was simply this: “[A] man named Heinz

¹² It is true that many people might reach for some moral exemplar as a model for behavior—“what would x have done?”—but even where this is the case, presumably that exemplar is chosen as a model because he or she reliably exemplifies good moral principles. If that is not the case, one is open to the charge of arbitrariness.

¹³ While I think it is problematic to place too much philosophical weight on a particular reading of a particular psychological study, the importance Gilligan's research has assumed in the philosophical literature makes it worthy of careful re-examination.

considers whether or not to steal a drug which he cannot afford to buy in order to save the life of his wife.”¹⁴ The subjects were asked whether they think Heinz should steal the drug, and were asked to explain their reasons for thinking so.¹⁵ While those who took what Gilligan called a “justice” approach proceeded by identifying the basic principles at issue (here, property rights and the right to life) and determining which had the stronger claim, those who took what she called a “care” approach tended to find the formulation insufficiently contextualized to yield a definitive answer. Frequently, these latter subjects would ask for more information, or suggest “dissolving” the dilemma in ways that would preserve relationships, for example through negotiation or seeking an alternative source of help. Gilligan interprets this as a dissatisfaction with abstract, universal principles as bases for moral judgments.

Philosophers working on care have interpreted these data quite similarly. Grace Clement thinks this case is a good illustration of the distinction between “care” and “justice” as approaches to morality, in particular to the question of abstraction and principle.¹⁶ It is worth quoting her account at length, since it captures many aspects of the reaction to the Heinz dilemma in the care literature:

First, however, it is important to note that as it is written the dilemma already abstracts from most of the particular features of its characters, and in this way it is biased toward the ethic of justice. For instance, the dilemma does not reveal anything about the

¹⁴ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 25.

¹⁵ It is the subjects' reasons rather than their conclusions that are importance here.

¹⁶ She is here presenting “ideal types,” and does not hold that anyone holds exactly the view identified as an “ideal type” on either side; nevertheless, the main features of each type of approach are distilled here. Her own position is that “[c]ontextuality alone is no better than abstraction alone.” Grace Clement, *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and the Ethics of Care*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 112.

relationship between Heinz and his wife, or about the druggist's motivations in charging Heinz so much for the drug, or about Heinz's wife's wishes. From the justice perspective, it can be argued that these sorts of details are unnecessary: We can tell from the limited information presented that this dilemma presents a conflict between the right to life and the right to property. As one respondent in Gilligan's study put it, the situation can be understood as "a math problem with humans"(Gilligan 1982, 26). Those who approach this dilemma from the justice perspective reach differing conclusions about whether Heinz is justified in stealing the drug, but they are likely to accept the dilemma as presented and to resolve it by fitting the situation under a general rule.

In contrast, those who approach the Heinz dilemma using an ethic of care are generally frustrated by its lack of detail. They are likely to resist the dilemma's attempt to close off all options for getting the drug short of stealing it. Surely, they insist, Heinz could reason with the druggist about the situation. Or he could find a way to borrow more money from friends and family. Or he could hold a bake sale to raise money. Those approaching the dilemma from a care perspective are also more likely to worry about whether Heinz will be imprisoned for stealing the drug, thereby abandoning his wife when she needs him most, or whether the drug will really work, or whether Heinz's wife really wants to go on living. From a justice perspective such questions would reveal an inability to identify the real moral issue in the Heinz dilemma but from a care perspective such questions are essential to understanding the situation, and thus to resolving it.¹⁷

17 Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, 12-13.

It is indeed true that the dilemma as presented “already abstracts from the most of the particular features of its characters”; it is, like all hypothetical dilemmas, highly artificial and therefore of limited use in telling us about moral judgment as we experience it in ordinary life. Situations in which we face a difficult decision about what we ought to do rarely, if ever, look or feel like the Heinz dilemma. In real life, we confront the situation in its full context (and then have to distill what is relevant), whereas here, it is implied (or at least conversationally implicated) that we have all the relevant facts: they are neatly laid out before us, and the conflicting principles lie very clearly just below the surface of the story. It is thus relatively easy to pick them out and then order them. Real life is different. Moral judgment is not a matter of choosing from a pre-set pair of alternative principles; rather, we start with the situation we find ourselves in, and we try to decide what we ought to do from a menu of options that is not limited until we start picking out what is morally relevant (in fact, it may seem as though we have an almost unlimited number of choices about what we might do). What principles are at stake? How can I best act on (acceptable) moral principles? If I decide to act on x maxim, is that morally acceptable? What about if I act on maxim y? If we follow the convention of including Kantian ethics in “justice ethics,” it is not clear that the Heinz dilemma is an easy paradigm case for it. Kantians recognize the difficulty of determining which principles are relevant in a given situation. No moral theory can avoid this problem. Many versions of care ethics— those that approach abstraction in the way that Clement describes— face a corresponding difficulty: “the context” of a situation may consist of an infinite number of facts, and the moral agent will have to find a way to determine which of those facts are morally relevant if she is to make a decision about what to do. How this can be done without abstracting from some particulars and without

appealing to some principles is hard to say.

Clement claims that, “[f]rom the justice perspective, it can be argued that these sorts of details are unnecessary.” Again, that is not straightforwardly true of Kantian ethics. Some details, if revealed, will change the moral situation entirely. Suppose that Heinz “could reason with the druggist about the situation.” In that case, there would no longer be a dilemma. Similarly, different facts about the alternatives available to Heinz or the efficacy of the drug will yield quite another moral situation, and therefore different principles will be relevant.¹⁸ Suppose Heinz could raise enough money to buy the drug by holding a bake sale. To exclude that fact from the presentation of the problem would not be abstraction, but outright distortion. In that case, there is no conflict between rights to property and life. The relevant choice facing Heinz, assuming the drug works, is really necessary, is desired by the wife, etc., is whether he should steal the drug, do nothing, or hold the bake sale. Who would not agree that Heinz should start baking?

Clement characterizes the justice approach as attempting to resolve moral problems “by fitting the situation under a general rule.” This sounds like a reductive approach. However, for Kantians, there is much more to be said. As Onora O’Neill argues,¹⁹ in any given situation, we enact, and are concerned to enact, many principles, not just one. The difficulty we face is that it is not always easy jointly to enact all of them. Of course, we will eventually need to decide what to do, so that we can act. But we will also need to appeal to some principle or principles (implicitly or explicitly) to guide our action. Although, as I have argued above, it is difficult to pick out a guiding principle, it is harder still to act morally without any guidance.²⁰

¹⁸ Moreover, aspects of the context will direct judgment in applying principles to the situation.

¹⁹ O’Neill, “Applied Ethics: Naturalism, Normativity, and Public Policy,” 26.

²⁰ Certainly in one’s life as a whole. We all act without thinking at times, but sooner or later, if we are trying to be

Even if we agree that Heinz dilemmas do not reflect accurately what Kantians think moral judgment is like, we must still deal with the objection to principles in “real life.” One argument is that abstract principles, because they leave out particulars, cannot guide action with enough specificity.²¹ It is true that principles do not tell us what to do in each given situation, but that is not their role in Kantian moral theory: judgment is needed to enact principles in particular contexts.²² For example, what it will take to enact the familiar Kantian principle of respecting persons in any given situation will depend on the particulars of that situation; is the person two or forty-two? Is she the sort of person who would feel affronted by direct offers of help? What is the nature of our relationship? What specific sort of action am I contemplating? How will it affect other persons, and myself? And so on. It seems to me that the process involves going back and forth between principle and context we do not simply apprehend the principles involved and then consider the context as we seek to apply them. Realizing something morally relevant about the context may mean that a different action would better enact this or that principle, or indeed that we need to focus on another principle altogether. (It is not that some of our principles don't apply in this situation— if we hold moral principles, they always “apply” in the sense that they remain moral principles, i.e. moral standards of action— but that one or another might be thrown into greater relief, or might be at stake in a particular way). None of this should be taken to mean that moral principles are grounded in particulars about any situation; the point I am making is about

morally good, we will seek some sort of guidance.

21 Onora O'Neill points out that this is incompatible with another criticism of principles, namely, that they are too rigid. Onora O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 54.

22 Onora O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 167. I follow her interpretation in this paragraph.

the process of moral judgment and the interplay of context and abstract principle in deciding what to do.

A forceful objection to abstract principle is that distortion will result when the wrong things are abstracted from or when a universal principle is based on a false generalization. As we saw in 1.3 and earlier in this chapter, morally culpable failures of response are often traceable to morally culpable ignorance, and some of the most notorious examples of this are the refusal of so many early champions of human rights to count African women and men and women of any race as human (since this would, inconveniently, mean that these groups of people had similar rights to white men). The abstract principle of respecting human rights was deeply distorted by this. Are abstract principles as such to be treated with suspicion philosophically, then?

Onora O'Neill replies to these objections by distinguishing between *abstraction*—which we must do to talk about anything at all, since we cannot literally speak in specifics all the time—and *idealization*—where distortion “leaks” into abstract claims.²³ Joan Tronto, however, doubts that we can reliably tell one from the other; philosophers may well miss idealizations in their own thinking because they “are likely to see their own perspectives as true rather than idealizations.”²⁴ Where can moral standards be found, then? Tronto believes that an ethic of care, focused on attending to the concrete details of human lives, will lead us to make “good political judgments.”²⁵

First, it is unclear how the concrete details of human lives can themselves guide judgment;

23 O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 150-152. See also O'Neill, Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38-44.

24 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 144.

25 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 141

they lack normative force. Facts themselves are mute on the question of what we *ought* to do, and this is why principles are needed to give some standard of assessment. Tronto herself even offers a care-based standard: “[P]eople are entitled to what they need because they need it.”²⁶ This looks to me exactly like an abstract principle; it certainly does not read as a concrete fact about some particular person's experience. Now, it may be objected that the appeal is simply to the fact of human need as itself obligation-producing, but note that either (1) some further principle is required to establish why that need is the basis of an entitlement (should all needs be met?), or (2) the moral priority of human need is being espoused as a general principle (no particular persons or instances of need are specified). In order really to be the normative statement Tronto's claim appears to be, it either is an abstract principle itself or it requires the support of an abstract principle.

Second, Tronto's pessimism about our ability to distinguish idealization and abstraction may be unwarranted. It is almost certain that we will not succeed completely—it will be an asymptotic venture, and our failures will no doubt be clearer to our successors than to us—but it is our duty to try and our moral theory will be all the better for such honest attempts. We can never be certain that we are getting it right, but we can find ways to scrutinize our moral thinking for traces of idealization. First, communicating one's moral ideas with others helps a great deal, especially, of course, if those others do not share the same deficiencies of judgment or gaps in experience or knowledge. (Think of the emergence of care ethics as philosophy began to open up to women.) We can also try to engage in self-examination in this respect, thinking hard about what epistemologies of ignorance might be distorting our moral compass. In this process, I

²⁶ Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 141

believe a rigorous application of universalizability criteria— as long as it is accompanied by an awareness of the dangers of self-serving “ignorance” or idealization— is valuable and indeed necessary. If there are no such requirements of consistency, we are more likely to idealize and distort. A particularist ethic of care, appealing directly to particulars about human lives, runs precisely this risk: how can we be sure that everyone's experience is properly taken into account? Which facts (out of the countless facts about any given situation) should guide action, and on what basis? How would we ensure fairness?

In fact, I think the disagreement may be overdrawn. Tronto takes as an example of her approach the insight that “while the condition of needing care is universal, standards of care will vary by culture.”²⁷ Again, this is not necessarily an objection to the Kantian position, according to which there are many specific actions through which any given principle can be enacted. If there is a general moral obligation to take good care of one's child, for example, there are certainly many different ways in which different people could enact it, depending on the context. Tronto indeed may have modified her position on principles somewhat; in Moral Boundaries, she acknowledges that care cannot stand alone but requires a democratic context, thus (perhaps) implicitly recognizing a background of democratic principles. More explicitly, in a 1996 paper, she repeats her critique of “the modern notion of formal abstract equality” but allows that care does not require the rejection of principle.²⁸

Some critics focus on moral principles' (supposed) universalizability. Universalizability means that, all other things being equal, if I ought to do x in a certain situation, anyone in a

²⁷ Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 141.

²⁸ Tronto, “Care as a political concept” in Feminists Revisioning the Political Nancy Hirschmann and Christine di Stefano, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

relevantly similar situation ought to do x. Denials of universalizability depend on the claim that each situation is morally unique. That is, each situation is so irreducibly complex, with so many potentially morally relevant features, that it cannot be safely said to be relevantly similar to another; thus, principles cannot be applied to new situations based on relevant similarities.²⁹

If all situations were really morally unique, we would face a grave problem: we could not carry moral lessons from our previous experiences into our current moral decision-making. (The only thing we could carry with us, as it were, would be our characters; we could hope that our caring disposition, for example, would make us more likely to make the right choices— but on the basis of what standards?) Surely opponents of universal principles do not mean to deny that we can learn moral lessons from what has happened before, but that appears to be a corollary of this sort of claim.

Now, no one thinks that it is easy to determine which aspects of a situation are relevant and in what ways an aspect of one situation might be morally relevant to another; there are never any guarantees in this respect. The difficulty of correctly grasping the moral relevance of one situation to another, however, does not support the claim that there are no such relevances. There are always unique features of any situation, of course (if even that event A took place on a Tuesday and event B took place on a Friday), but to deny that many situations are of a similar sort to past situations seems to me quite implausible. Very often, human experience offers us quite familiar stories: betrayal of friendship for personal gain, kindness shown to a stranger in need, a stigmatized minority uniting to fight for rights and recognition, and so on. Literature and

²⁹ Peta Bowden, *Caring: Gender-Sensitive Ethics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 3; Noddings, *Caring*, 85.

storytelling would not touch us if we could not recognize these familiar themes. The basic idea of Romeo and Juliet, for example, has resonated with audiences in many re-workings, the central theme remaining the same despite differing contexts (e.g. 15th-century Verona, 1950s New York). Similarly, while Jane Austen's Emma reflected a specific social context (early nineteenth-century England), its basic plot-line proved rather easily adaptable to late twentieth-century Beverley Hills in Clueless. I do not think it is generally impossible to pick out the morally relevant features of a given situation. Human lives are not so unlike that *basic* moral principles could not be applicable in morally relevant situations. Of course, as we shall see in more detail below, the specific *sort* of action that would best fulfill a moral requirement will differ according to context. Respecting someone's right to freedom of movement will generally require different actions depending on whether that person is a toddler or a teenager, for example.

A variation of the objection under discussion allows that there may be similar sorts of situation, but that one moral agent could have moral reason to do something different than another moral agent because of their differing moral self-conceptions or the caring relations they are in. (Or, to put it another way, specific sorts of difference among situations— pertaining to the moral self-conception of the agent who is deciding what to do, or the caring relations she is in— make a difference to what ought to be done, even if the situations are similar in every other respect.)³⁰ The major problem here is that one's moral self-conception or the perceived demands of one's relationships can provide arbitrary grounds for action. Why should such features count as moral reasons for you and not for me, unless by covert appeal to universal principles? What else

³⁰ See Margaret Walker, Moral Contexts, (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 3-4.

could make them moral reasons? If it is part of my moral (or cultural) self-conception to be courageous but not gentle, and it is part of yours to be gentle but not courageous, does that really determine the moral status of our actions? How? I do not see that this gets me off the hook if I fail to be gentle or gets you off the hook if you fail to be courageous. I may have a special gift, so to speak, for courage, but I see no reason why this would reduce the demands of gentleness on me. Why would it not mean that I ought to try particularly hard to be gentle?³¹

Similar problems arise with respect to the caring relations argument, associated with Virginia Held. Care ethics, Held claims, “does not rely on dubious claims about universal norms of reason to which we must give priority in all questions of morality.”³² One of Held’s main claims is that principles prescribed by reason should not necessarily have priority over partial concerns grounded in caring relations. There are two closely related aspects to this argument. First, impartiality and abstraction should be (at least) questioned and de-prioritized as standards for moral deliberation. Second, attending to the needs of those with whom one is in (often, with whom one finds oneself in) a caring relationship, for whom one takes responsibility, and who may be dependent on one’s care, should be a central moral concern (rather than, say, a preference one has) and may trump other moral considerations. Care “starts with the moral claims of particular others, for instance of one’s child, whose claims can be compelling regardless of

31 Some versions of virtue ethics might take a more permissive view here—looking to exemplary characters in a given culture to set standards—but I think this is a deficiency of such theories because it risks arbitrariness and forestalls moral criticism of the culture. Now, there may be appeals to “my culture” that survive these objections, but only insofar as these appeals fall within bounds of permissibility set according to other (non culturally dependent) standards.

32 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 3.

universal principles.”³³ Here, Held is arguing not only for the priority of partiality (that is, a partial action) in some situations, but the priority of partialist *reasons*. Held contrasts this with the views of Brian Barry and Marcia Baron, both of whom allow for partial loyalties to be prioritized as long as they are justifiable on impartial grounds. Barry claims that partiality can be allowed by impartial rules, but only by impartial rules, while Baron claims that partiality at the level of individual actions is permissible as long as we are guided by impartiality at the level of general principle.³⁴ For example, giving special kinds of care and attention to one's own children is perfectly justified, and indeed obligatory, on the grounds such as that it is a duty, from an impartial point of view, to fulfill our obligations to those for whom we are responsible (especially in societies where it is assumed that particular children's welfare is primarily entrusted to particular adults, namely, their guardians)³⁵. It is this claim, that partiality in individual actions must be justified by impartial rules or principles, with which Held takes issue. We need not appeal to general principles at all to justify our giving special attention to our children, the argument runs; the reasons for so doing will arise from the particulars of the relationship in question. But one might object that the particulars of the relationship will only attain normative force in guiding our actions if they point out some principle or other.³⁶ Held examines

33 Ibid., 10

34 In Held's view, this collapses into the priority of reasons claim. Kant himself says that, although I ought to have a maxim of equal benevolence toward all, the actions I perform according to this maxim may be directed more to my loved ones than to others. Metaphysics of Morals, p.200-201, (6:451-452).

35 See Friedman, “Beyond Caring: The De-Moralization of Gender,” 44-45.

36 One might cite a “one thought too many”-type objection here— that is, Bernard Williams's claim that appealing to moral principle to justify, say, saving one's drowning wife rather than the drowning stranger next to her is “one thought too many,” (Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality” Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17-18) or indeed something like Michael Stocker's claim that the hospital visitor who tells the patient that he is only there out of duty lacks moral merit (Michael Stocker,

impartialist and partialist accounts of why one ought to honor one's father:

To the impartialist the answer would be some form of: because all persons ought always to honor their fathers, *ceteris paribus*. For the partialist it might be something like: you probably ought to honor this particular person who is your father because over many years he helped bring you up. It would be the particular persons involved and the relation between them, rather than the general principle, that would be the source of the honoring.³⁷

This raises some questions. How can particular persons and relations be the source of obligations without reference to some principle – or reason — that explains why? To deny this and say simply that this person and my relationship with him or her gives rise to a probable obligation leaves us with no reason at all for it, other than a subjective, ad-hoc choice to, say, honor one's father. The particular persons and relationship involved will not be irrelevant to the impartialist, since this determines to what extent *ceteris* really is *paribus*. Other things will have to be taken

“The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 73, No. 14, (1976), 462). The idea seems to be that the appeal to moral reasons or justification in matters of love or friendship somehow besmirches it and misses its value. But I think that it is no insult to love or friendship to say that one would not act immorally for its sake; one should not, for example, administer a kicking to the schoolyard bully who calls one's child names (even though the impulse arguably shows something admirable, i.e. that one cares about one's child). It seems to me that most people acknowledge that there are some things one just would not do for love (because they would be wrong) and that this does not mean that love is not one of the most important things in one's life. (The limiting condition—duty— does not have to be the thing that one thinks matters most in one's life— see Herman, The Practice of Moral Judgment, 31.) Turning to the Williams and Stocker examples, I think that (1) the priority of duty, as in Kant, need not (and usually does not) mean literally having to stop and think about something like whether to save the stranger or one's wife; it is to be hoped that adults would have already internalized moral principles as part of the background of their lives. Second, contemporary Kantians conceive of the priority of duty in terms of a limiting condition, meaning that other incentives, such as love, may be present (see my discussion in the following section). Third, we might also note that there are in fact compelling moral reasons for saving one's wife rather than a stranger; for example, her legitimate expectation that you would give her special help in such situations given the special relationship you have. Regarding the Stocker example, Smith, the hospital visitor who admits that he is only visiting out of duty, does indeed lack merit. He has been insensitive and even cruel but not because he is only acting out of duty. If Smith thinks his duty is to cheer the patient up, he has certainly acted in such a way that this duty cannot possibly be accomplished, for who could possibly think that such a speech would cheer someone up?

37 Held, The Ethics of Care, 79-80.

into consideration, including other principles that may be relevant (for example, principles of self-respect— some forms of honoring may clash with my self-respect, or honesty— honesty about our unhappy relationship may conflict with any obligation to honor him). Thus, without knowing any particulars of the situation, the impartialist would have to say, too, that you *probably* ought to honor your father, unless there are reasons that count against it. The crucial thing is that we must have reasons that explain why we ought to act in this or that way when we are deciding how to act, and relying on the particulars of situation X alone to provide reasons to act in situation X gets us nowhere, it seems to me, in deciding what we ought to do. In short, *we need principles to give us reasons to act*. If you probably ought to honor your father “because over many years he helped bring you up,” either you are appealing to that fact arbitrarily, or you are invoking a general principle, that helping to bring someone up is an activity that warrants gratitude or honoring. Why should my father's having helped to bring me up be a reason to justify my honoring him, and your father's having helped to bring you up not be a reason to justify your honoring him? Of course, other reasons, as I have argued, may count against either one of us honoring our fathers, but that is another matter: impartialists do not advocate applying principles without concern for context (which includes other principles that we ought to enact in a given situation).

According to Held, if there is a conflict between the demands of partiality and the demands of moral principle, we would have moral grounds for rejecting the moral principle. She notes that she is not arguing for the antecedent (which could be challenged by attempts to “dissolve” such conflicts³⁸) so much as for the conditional. She gives an example to illustrate: a father of a young

38 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 98.

child is deciding whether to spend more time with his child or more time on his job as a teacher, where he is skilled at helping troubled students.³⁹ Suppose it turns out that universal, impartial principles indicate that he ought to spend more time with his students, but, considering the perspective of care, he feels he ought to spend more time with his child.⁴⁰ Doesn't that show that he has moral reasons for choosing partial loyalty over impartial principle? In my view, no. If moral principles — not just one moral principle, but all relevant ones, assuming *per impossibile* that we could deliberate as such—really do indicate that we must do p (unambiguously, for the sake of argument), then we ought to do p, even if partial considerations favor \sim p. Partial considerations would have normative force only when they can be connected to some principle or other. There is no reason to deny that there are principled reasons for me to spend more time with my child, given x, y, and z particular features of our relationship, circumstances, and so on. This is why I can "bite the bullet", as it were, and deny Held's conditional.

I do not think there should be a presumption of conflict between caring relations and universal moral principles. On the contrary, such relations are surely enhanced if the people in them are committed to acting in a principled manner. It seems to me wise to work for a life in which one's relationships and principles align in a mutually supportive way. Of course, this is not always possible; sometimes the demands of moral principles and of caring relations are in tension. I see no reason why we should not be prepared to subject our particular relationships to critical scrutiny on grounds of moral principle. This process would, one hopes, only rarely result in the termination of the relationship, but it does seem to me reasonable to suppose that this could

39 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 97-99.

40 Note that the teacher evidently cares for his students as well as for his child.

sometimes be justified. Imagine, for instance, a victim of domestic violence deciding to sever the abusive relationship in order to preserve her safety and self-respect. More often than not, principled evaluation of a relationship might affirm its value and reinforce one's commitment to it.⁴¹

Another theme in care theorists' treatment of principles and abstraction is the effect of acting on principles on agents' characters. One variation— expounded by Nel Noddings— is that living according to principles may make us self-righteous and more interested in “obtaining credit” than in acting morally.⁴² Specifically, Noddings imagines self-righteousness arising “when we perceive ourselves as holding a precious principle not held by the other. The other may be devalued and treated 'differently.’”⁴³ Noddings points to a genuine moral failing: those with a sense of moral superiority all too often treat those whom they consider moral inferiors with disrespect and even cruelty.⁴⁴ This, however, is hardly an objection to principle as such. The core of the failing is the sense of one's own moral superiority to others. Notice the emphasis on one's own perception of oneself as holding a principle. What matters morally is surely whether or not I really do hold the principle in question (irrespective of my own perception), as well as the content of the principle (since one can hold wicked principles). While there is no way of knowing that someone holds a principle for sure, our actions often provide reasonably good evidence to

41 For an opposing view, see Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, 70.

42 Noddings, *Caring*, 5, 51.

43 *Ibid.*, 5.

44 A chilling case in point is the practice, in early- to mid-twentieth-century Ireland, of incarcerating “fallen women” in Magdalen Laundries run by Catholic nuns. Inmates in these prison-like institutions endured poor conditions and ill-treatment; some were unmarried mothers, some were suspected of promiscuity or social “deviance,” and some were simply deemed to be “at risk” spiritually.

support the claim (or not). Of course, the proof is not always in the pudding, since my having done the action does not guarantee my having sincerely held this or that principle. For example, my having volunteered to help someone carry a stroller up the subway steps may reflect my sincere commitment to helping others, but it may reflect a desire to impress the person I am with. We cannot sort out these questions (even about ourselves) in real time, and probably not ever. The best we can do is act as our (permissible) principles would dictate.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, what we actually do often provides good evidence. For example, I am hardly entitled to think of myself as holding a principle of honesty if I am a regular and enthusiastic practitioner of tax fraud. It is difficult (probably impossible, indeed) to have a clear idea of whether we do or do not really act on any given principles (and acting on principles is the best test of whether we really hold them).⁴⁶ ⁴⁷Given this, it would seem to be enormously foolhardy, epistemically, to shout too loudly about which ones we hold. We can do two things: we can discuss a principle on its own merits, and we can try to enact moral principles in our lives. In either case, there is no call for self-righteousness. Self-righteousness or conceit is not confined to those who think of themselves as holding principles; I see no reason why someone could not be equally self-righteous on the basis of an ideal of herself as “one-caring.” We might also say that avoiding self-righteousness seems a sound moral principle.

Kant addresses similar issues in the Lectures on Ethics, arguing that we should be humbled

45 Not all principles are morally permissible, of course—they will have to meet a certain standard—but that is another issue.

46 One could, I suppose, “hold” a moral principle in the dishonest sense of thinking it was applicable to others and not to oneself, but there is something suspicious, to my ears, about such a claim.

47 It is easier to doubt a claim to be acting on a particular principle than to support it. (This is not surprising, since it tends to be easier to falsify than to verify.)

when comparing ourselves with the moral law (the appropriate measure of our moral standing), but maintain a healthy self-esteem when comparing ourselves with other persons.⁴⁸ Considering oneself morally superior to others is easy and often satisfying— we can always find some villain to whom we are morally superior— but quite beside the point; this self-conceit is rightly deflated when we make the relevant comparison, namely, with the demands of the moral law itself. Nor, Kant cautions, should we cultivate a low opinion of ourselves in comparison with others, for two main reasons: first, as persons we have as much innate worth as anyone else, and second, if we think ourselves hopelessly bad, we may become discouraged and, in despair, give up trying to be good.

Another aspect of the moral failing of self-righteousness is that we may narrow our moral vision and lose out on the perspective of others who may help us to make the right judgment and do the right thing. Many feminist ethicists have emphasized the importance of listening and communication in moral deliberation, and this is quite right. We all have deficiencies of insight and judgment and often the best way to remedy them is to listen to someone else. Another person may rebuke us for being selfish, or help us to understand an opposing perspective that had previously been obscure to us, or point out a fact that is morally relevant but that we had not noticed or taken into account. None of this, however, supports a rejection of principle. There is no conflict between trying to act on moral principles and trying to correct one's deficiencies in moral judgment. The importance of avoiding moral conceit or self-righteousness can readily be agreed upon by friends and critics of principle alike; it does not provide any grounds for rejecting principles.

⁴⁸ Kant, Lectures on Ethics, Louis Infield, transl. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1963), 126-129. See also the Critique of Practical Reason, 99 (5:75-76), on similar themes.

Abstraction, or more specifically, the appeal to abstract principles, is also sometimes criticized on the grounds that it may hinder responsiveness and, indeed, be used as an excuse for self-serving actions. This view is often implicit in care theorists' writings, a distinct but not often articulated thread expressed in various remarks.⁴⁹ I have engaged in some reconstruction to see what the most plausible explicit arguments underlying such remarks might be. As I have reconstructed it, there are three levels to this criticism: first, time spent thinking about a moral problem in an abstract way (by considering how moral principles would apply or which principles are at stake) might *delay* necessary action. One might imagine someone pausing to consider the relative weight of one's own right to preserve one's safety against one's obligation to help the small child who is drowning in the river; taking too long to think will have disastrous consequences for the child. Second, devoting too much time and energy to abstract moral thought may distract one from the real moral questions which surround one in daily life. One might think here of the star academic who is so busy writing about ethical theory that she doesn't notice the exploitation of adjuncts and support staff who work in her university. Third, someone may use the language of abstract principle to rationalize moral failures. One might think here of the many abuses by politicians of the term "freedom" in the pursuit of rather more base objectives.

Each of these points to genuine moral failure, of varying degrees of severity, but the failure lies not in abstraction as such, but in its misuse. In the first scenario, we should note that an attempt to act on principles (by their nature abstract) is not necessarily a time-consuming

49 Joan Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care" in Larrabee, Mary Jeanne, ed. An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 1993), 249; Margaret Urban Walker Moral Contexts, (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003) 14; Alison Jaggar "Caring as a Feminist Practice of Moral Reason" in Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics, Virginia Held, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 188; Annette Baier "The Need for More than Justice" in Held, ed., Justice and Care, 53; Gilligan, In a Different Voice, 21, 104-5, 155; Noddings, Caring, 2, 29, 36, 42, 43, 80, 98, 101.

exercise. We do not usually have to look up our most basic guiding principles in a book before acting on them; it is to be hoped that we might have internalized them and made them part of the “background” to our everyday lives. To be sure, some situations seem less clear than others, but this is surely the case whether or not one thinks abstract principles should be a part of moral theory. Particularists, after all, have to pause to take in the entire context, unfiltered by universal, abstract principles: surely a potentially lengthy process. In many, if not most, situations, a consideration of what the moral principles at stake are will be clear in a short time. In addition, delaying action will be, in situations like the (fairly standard) one described above, highly morally relevant. In other words, sitting down by the riverbank to stroke one's chin and ruminate on a particularly thought-provoking passage from the Metaphysics of Morals is hardly justifiable on grounds of principle, since the very problem at issue is the urgent need of the drowning child.

The second scenario reflects the sort of moral failure discussed in 1.3 above, namely, ignorance and failure of responsiveness. The problem here is the sort of abstraction being done: we must think about the moral challenges that really do confront us (which necessarily involves abstraction). Merely thinking about some abstract principles or other—irrespective of whether they are the ones being violated in one's own workplace, for example—is not good enough. Abstraction done for its own sake is not necessarily a morally good thing, especially if it prevents one from seeing morally relevant things. Abstraction is merely a necessary component of principle-based moral thinking. None of this exempts us from confronting the moral issues arising in our own lives. Abstraction is a way of helping us to determine how to apply moral principles in the situations that confront us as we live; we try to determine what is relevant from our past experiences and what moral principles are at stake in any given (new) situation. Indeed,

it is hard to see how we can engage in moral deliberation without abstracting.

The final scenario is the worst variety of moral failure connected to abstraction: where someone hypocritically uses abstract moral principles to rationalize culpable inaction or self-serving action. But that person, to the extent that she is deliberately rationalizing, is not really acting on principle at all, so it is a grave misuse of abstraction.⁵⁰ The gravity increases with deliberateness: sometimes people do this without deliberate hypocrisy, but nevertheless, a commitment to principle simply does not give license to ignore morally relevant considerations, as would be true in this sort of case.

In sum, none of the care-based objections to abstract universal principles is decisive against Kantian ethics. While abstraction and universalization can be done badly, leading to moral failures of various kinds, they are not inherently problematic — provided we are careful to avoid self-righteousness, idealization, and distortion. A commitment to principle does not mean a rejection of context-sensitivity; it is the role of moral judgment to help us live and realize our principles in concrete situations, and our life experience, including our communications with others, are of paramount importance in developing this capacity. Principles are the moral standards to which we can appeal, and which can and do help us to make sense of the particular situations we encounter; friends of care and context need not eschew them.

2.1 Reason and emotion

The role and relative importance in ethics of reason and emotion would seem, at first glance,

⁵⁰ By this I mean that it is a case of abstraction, but done badly and for the wrong reasons (i.e. using it to rationalize less than admirable behavior). The position I am challenging in this section is that abstraction as such is bad or at least dangerous; the contrary of that position is not necessarily that abstraction as such is (invariably) good or risk-free. It is needed, but there are caveats.

to be an area of stark contrast between Kantian ethics and its critics in the care tradition.

However, a careful reading of each produces a different view: care need not be as anti-rationalist as many would suppose, and Kantian ethics is not nearly so hostile to emotion as many would suppose. In this section, I attempt to clear up some misreadings of Kant on reason and emotion.

Many proponents of an “ethic of care” and care more generally assume a split between care and moral reasoning. For example, in the introduction to the important care anthology Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics, Virginia Held writes:

In contrast with the view that moral understanding is largely a matter of knowledge arrived at rationally and impartially, feminist moral theorists have often seen caring as having an important place in our methods of arriving at progressively better moral theory and moral practice.⁵¹

In one sense, nobody could disagree that caring has an important place (of some kind) in improving moral theory and practice (depending on what that place was), but that claim is not necessarily in contrast to a view that holds moral theory to be based on reason. As I have claimed in chapter one above, care need not be opposed to reason; human care involves reason (in several ways, as we shall see). When the care debate deals with Kant, however, we find a similar split assumed. For example, Joan Tronto writes:

Since the eighteenth century, most philosophers have accepted Immanuel Kant's view of what a moral theory should be: it should arise out of the requirements of reason. Moral theory, above all, must be from “the moral point of view,” which means from a standpoint of disinterested and disengaged moral actors.

⁵¹ Held, Justice and Care, 2. For a more extreme view, see Noddings, Caring, 1.

She continues:

Several consequences follow from this notion of what constitutes morality. In the first place, morality becomes a realm beyond the world of emotions and feelings, and thus part of reason only.⁵²

The claim that moral theory “should arise out of the requirements of reason” could be understood in a couple of different ways. Most intuitively, it would mean that, in doing moral theory, the prevailing standards for the enterprise are those of reason. If meant thus, it is hard to make sense of an objection to it; after all, theory is quite simply an activity based on reason. Perhaps, though, the claim is meant to be something like this: moral theory assumes *morality* to arise out of the requirements of reason. This is a more substantive claim. In other words, what grounds morality — what makes right actions right and wrong actions wrong, what we would point to in order to support moral judgments— is not reason, but something else: perhaps emotions. However, even this claim— problematic as it is— does not imply the centrality to the moral theory of a moral point of view “from a standpoint of disinterested and disengaged moral actors.” Kant never assumes that moral agents are disengaged or disinterested; on the contrary, he assumes that we are embodied rational beings with desires and relationships as well as the capacity to assess them and be responsible for them (given that we have the capacity to reason). That we can reflect on our relationships and our feelings hardly means that we are disengaged. In fact, it means we are actively *engaged* with our feelings and relationships in a particularly strong way: we think about them, we want to make sense of them. That we are far from disinterested is one of the reasons that morality is so complicated for human moral agents.

⁵² Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 9.

To put my point another way: the reason why it might sometimes be a good idea to try to think from a third person point of view— which only means asking “what might I think of what I’m doing if I were someone else, or if it was someone else doing what I’m doing?” and using that question to help us think through our situations— is precisely that we are so enmeshed in relationships and feelings. This capacity to step back and reflect on our own emotions is sometimes represented as stepping back from engagement with others, but on the contrary, reason is a shared enterprise, and reasons are by definition things that must be shareable with others.⁵³

Tronto attributes to Kant and his followers the view that morality is in a “a realm beyond the world of emotions and feelings, and thus part of reason only.” In one sense, this is straightforwardly true, but in another, it is misleading. Kant holds morality to be in a realm “beyond” the world of emotions and feelings in two ways: first, morality as such only exists at all from the practical standpoint, not the theoretical, since it is only by taking this standpoint that human moral agents can be seen to be morally responsible for their actions.⁵⁴ Second, the wills of morally responsible being are not *determined* by feelings, which just means that, when a moral agent acts on a given feeling, she is responsible for doing so; she can justly be reproached for claiming that “I had no choice because I felt like doing it.” Someone may claim that “I did it because I felt sorry for her.” This is rather different, however: essentially, the claim here is that I judged that my feeling sorry for her *warranted* the action, that is, was a good reason for doing

53 Allen Wood, Kantian Ethics, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18. See also O’Neill, Constructions of Reason, chapter one, passim.

54 Kant, Groundwork, p.246-247 (4:447-448).

it.⁵⁵ As Allen Wood suggests, to accept that one ought to act for good reasons is to accept that one ought to act rationally, from reason.⁵⁶ Crucially, the feeling sorry was acknowledged to be a reason for acting; if something is a reason for acting, it has been rationally assessed.

If the claim is that Kant holds morality to be beyond the world of emotions and feelings in the sense of denying them or condemning them, the picture becomes more complicated. This is a common misconception about Kant's ethics. Annette Baier writes:

The fourth feature of the Gilligan challenge to liberal orthodoxy is a challenge to its typical rationalism and intellectualism, to its assumption that we need not worry what passions persons have, as long as their rational wills control them.⁵⁷

In a similar vein, Virginia Held writes:

The rationalism of many traditional moral theories, both the pure rationalism of Kantian ethics and the calculating rationalism of utilitarian approaches, is suspect in its denigration of emotion, in its advocacy of morality as involving a suppression of the emotions or a distancing of the self from feelings that may cloud what a rational man would do or what an ideal observer would judge.⁵⁸

It is a familiar portrait of Kant's position: it is not important to cultivate any particular emotions, but whatever emotions you do have, you must “suppress” and control them, and distance yourself

⁵⁵ Perhaps someone might object that the person is simply claiming that the feeling sorry directly caused her to do it, but imagine the incoherence and indeed bad faith of that claim if its implications are fully spelled out: “My feeling sorry caused me to do the action, but I had no reason for doing it.”

⁵⁶ Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 12, 19. See also *ibid.* 16-17 for a succinct explanation of what reason is in Kantian terms. The key part is that reason is the “capacity to think and act according to norms.”

⁵⁷ Annette Baier, *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics* (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 57.

⁵⁸ Held, *Justice and Care*, 156.

from them. This is hardly an appealing theory. It is not, however, Kant's theory. Now, it is easy to see how this impression might be formed after reading the Groundwork; there, we find little to suggest that Kant recommends the cultivation of any emotions. On the contrary, much of the work seems to suggest the opposite, although, as we shall see later in this section, that impression may be misguided.⁵⁹ In his later work, in fact, Kant explicitly tells us that we ought to cultivate certain emotions.⁶⁰

Moreover, the claim that Kant believed that we ought to control, suppress, and distance ourselves from our feelings is misleading if unelaborated. Kant does think that we are capable of controlling our emotions in the sense of being able to act in defiance of them, as it were, and of not being controlled by them; we should not automatically act on them, our wills are not determined by them, and we can choose to act differently than our feelings would suggest we do. We can also control our emotions in the sense of cultivating some and trying to discourage, in ourselves, others; we reflect on our emotions and, albeit often with difficulty, modify them, if we think there is good reason to do so.⁶¹

Does this amount to *suppressing* our emotions? If meant as a statement of general policy about human emotions, then it is not true of Kant. If meant to apply to some emotions in some situations, then it seems just a normal part of the human capacity to control emotions, and Kant

59 See, for example, the following passage in the Groundwork, 229 (4:428): “All the objects of inclination have only a conditional worth; for if these inclinations and the needs based on them did not exist, their object would be worthless. But inclinations themselves, as sources of needs, are so far from having absolute value to make them desirable for their own sake that it must rather be the universal wish of every rational being to be wholly free of them.” Kant's main point here is the familiar one that inclinations are not and cannot be the ground of morality, but the rhetorical flourish of the second sentence does seem very strong.

60 Notably in the Metaphysics of Morals, 206 (6:456-458). See below for more discussion of this issue.

61 See the example on the following page.

would, like most of us I suspect, accept this picture. All of this is the case, of course, simply because we are reasoning beings. We all control our emotions regularly in these ways. Does Kant suggest that we ought to distance ourselves from “feelings that may cloud what a rational man would do?” What is rational to do is not necessarily to ignore or suppress emotions; on the contrary, we may have very good reasons to take seriously, cultivate, or even celebrate certain particular emotions. Thus, the implied division between rationality and feelings is potentially misleading.

Let's say my friend is auditioning for a part in a play that I would love to have myself. It would be quite normal to have mixed emotions about this situation. I am pleased for my friend, since I know how excited she is about the play and how hard she has worked to hone her craft as an actor, but I am also envious at the prospect of her getting the part, since I want it for myself. The former emotion might prompt me to encourage her and wish her the best; I might at least take care to act scrupulously so that the process is as fair and respectful of everyone's feelings as possible, but if I am feeling generous as well as sympathetic to my friend's aims, I might even decide to give the audition a miss. On the other hand, the latter emotion might prompt me to cool my friendship with my “rival,” or even to sabotage her audition (dramatically, by pelting her with eggs as she takes the stage, or more underhandedly, by planting seeds of doubt in her mind about her talent, her chances of success, or the value to her career of the production in question). I can only hope that, in this sort of situation, I would be able to “step back” from my emotions and reflect on them before doing anything as base as undermining my friend's acting career for the sake of my own ambition and fears. More than that, I think I should be morally expected to make a good-faith effort to do so. How would this reflection proceed? Well, presumably, I would try to

figure out what I have the best reasons for doing. I might conclude that I have good reasons for distancing myself from the sorts of bitter, envious feelings described above, and that if I were to be reasonable, I wouldn't want to ruin the friendship or cruelly trample on my friend's dreams. Indeed, I might think, "I really want to move away from being the sort of person who would do such a thing out of envy."

In short, I would try to distance myself from feelings that would "cloud" what a rational person would do, especially given that it would be perfectly rational in my situation to take account of my feelings, for example of friendship and sympathy for my friend. Note, here, that for Kant, practical reason includes the capacity to assess ends according to rational standards; instrumental reason, of course, is about assessing the means to given ends.⁶² The idea of what a rational and reasonable person would do, for the Kantian, includes an assessment of the person's *ends*, not just the best means to achieve some arbitrary preference. If the *rational in what a rational person would do* is read as instrumental, it may be easier to paint a picture of that person as distancing their gentler, sympathetic side (their feelings) from their coolly calculating, self-interested side (their rationality).⁶³ But as we have seen, it is not a picture that accords with Kant's views.

I think a good deal of misinterpretation of Kantian ethics has stemmed from the excessive focus of critics on the Groundwork to the exclusion of his later, more substantive ethical writings. I also think that many critics misinterpret the Groundwork on its own terms, and I shall

⁶² Kant, Groundwork, 216-222 (4:415-421).

⁶³ Wood makes a similar point about rational choice theory: "Such theories... often give the distinct impression that their proponents think of the ideally rational person as a sociopath with a gambling addiction. It is crucial in understanding the rationalism of Kantian ethics that we not import into it such notions of reason." Wood, Kantian Ethics, 19.

say more about this below. But first I want to say a little about the purpose and place of the Groundwork in Kant's ethics. The work was written as “a prelude to a metaphysics of morals”⁶⁴; Kant thought that certain foundational questions had to be resolved before engaging in this larger project.⁶⁵ The Groundwork, then, “aims only to seek out and establish *the supreme principle of morality*.”⁶⁶ Building a moral theory on the basis of this principle is left until the later writings, especially to the Metaphysics of Morals. What is the role of the “supreme principle of morality” in a moral theory? It is certainly essential to it, but it is hardly the whole story. Morality must be based on an appeal to something; something or other must ultimately warrant a judgment that we ought to do or refrain from this or that action. One might think of it as getting to the essence or the core of morality.

Kant has become notorious for claiming that only actions done from duty, not from inclination, have moral worth (G 4:398). The claim, and the well-known examples that accompany it, are in a section of chapter one devoted to explaining the concept of moral duty. Kant is here trying to isolate moral duty, or perhaps what distinguishes *moral* duty, not making recommendations for how people should live their lives, and he is trying to isolate it from things that merely accompany it and that are not essential to it. His is a conceptual exercise. An action that has moral worth has a non-contingent relationship to moral duty. If we can isolate something

64 193 (4: 391)

65 Kant distinguishes empirical and pure philosophy, the latter being based on a priori principles. Pure philosophy can be formal (logic) or “limited to specific objects of the understanding” (metaphysics). Metaphysics, in turn, comprises the metaphysics of nature (examining what *is*) and the metaphysics of morals (examining what *ought to be*). The metaphysics of morals is the non-empirical, or “rational part” of ethics; the empirical part is “practical anthropology.” (Physics, Kant says, also has both empirical and non-empirical parts). Kant, Groundwork, 190 (4:388).

66 193 (4: 391)

that has a non-contingent relationship to moral duty, we have made considerable progress in investigating what morality as such really is. Mixing that with things that have a merely contingent relationship with moral duty— such as inclinations— makes this conceptual task more difficult.

Kant has been roundly criticized for claiming that actions done out of inclinations— even love or compassion— have no moral worth. He certainly presents this claim in uncompromising language. He uses the example of a humanitarian who helps others out of compassion. These actions have “no moral worth” and are not worthy of “esteem.”⁶⁷ If the humanitarian loses that feeling of compassion, and acts to help others anyway, out of duty, those actions now have moral worth. Kant, on the face of it, seems to be saying something very harsh indeed: that inclinations are worthless and we should extirpate them, leaving reason alone to guide us. But the real story is a good deal more complicated than this.

First, although helpful actions done out of compassion lack “genuine moral worth,”⁶⁸ they are also “dutiful and kind.” Kant remarks that many inclinations, if they are aimed at something morally good, “deserve praise and encouragement, but not esteem.” Esteem is reserved for what has non-contingent worth. There is nothing wrong with an inclination that has contingent worth (unless of course it is put to evil ends) but it does not attain to this special status. Compassionate feeling directed at morally good ends is to be praised and encouraged. But there is something unreliable about basing one's whole moral life on such feelings, since they are only as good as what they are aimed at or what they are deployed in the service of. Since they have only a

67 Kant, Groundwork, 199 (4: 398)

68 Kant, Groundwork, 200 (4: 398)

contingent relation with morality as such, one only does the right thing out of a sort of moral luck — that one's inclinations happen to coincide with what is right. That contingency is the real point here. We cannot rely on our inclinations to tell us what our moral duty *is*, because even generally admirable ones do not *of necessity* coincide with it.⁶⁹

Another way of looking at this issue is that what matters here is not the absence of inclination, but the presence of duty. Kant can be seen as using the examples to “peel away” the emotions and ask what is left to impel one to do the right thing if the emotions are not there? Since, as he holds, emotions are unreliable (in two senses: they do not reliably point to one's moral duty, and we do not reliably have them at the moments when they might be “required” to push us to do our duty), and since morality must be based on something reliable and non-contingent, only rational commitment to duty itself can do the job. Even if we do not have the requisite emotions, we still ought to do our duty, surely; it would be a strange morality that let one off the hook, as it were, in the event that one did not feel like doing the right thing.⁷⁰ On the contrary, it is precisely the likelihood that we will often not feel like doing the right thing (think of the aspiring actor I mentioned above) that makes understanding the rational basis of our moral duty so important. Presenting the examples so that the protagonists lack the emotions that would motivate them to do their duty dramatizes the point that it is not emotions, but a rational commitment to duty itself, that really underlies moral duty. Kant probably *overdramatized* the point, since critics have drawn

69 Allen Wood points to another important reason for Kant's “mistrust” of inclinations: they are shaped by social forces, and among those social forces is *amour propre* (Rousseau), social unsociability (Kant) or self-conceit (Kant) — the toxic mixture of ambition, envy, status-consciousness, competitiveness, and pride that is produced by “civilization.” For Wood, this locates Kant squarely in a “radical tradition of social criticism of modernity” that starts with Rousseau and continues with Fichte and Marx. Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 4.

70 Kant suggests this interpretation in the *Lectures on Ethics*, writing that “a man may act kindly towards his wife from love, but if his inclination has evaporated he ought to do so from obligation.” Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 192.

more extreme conclusions from this passage than I think are warranted.

Following this line of thought, Barbara Herman and Marcia Baron both interpret Kant as saying that, in order for an action to have moral worth, duty must be sufficient to make the agent act, whether or not the agent's emotions also direct her toward the action.⁷¹ That is, the agent would do her duty *even if* there were no motivating emotion present, but only a commitment to duty itself. This does not entail that emotion has to be absent, but it does have to be subordinated to the commitment to duty itself in the agent's motivational structure. Duty, in other words, is the trump card in moral judgment, and should have absolute priority.⁷² They take Kant to be making a substantive point about moral life (and not merely a conceptual one). Herman acknowledges that perhaps too much attention is given to the idea of moral worth in the overall context of Kant's ethics, but says that nevertheless, what he does say about it is quite clear and must be dealt with head-on, as it were.⁷³

In order to make sense of Kant's claim that only actions done from duty have moral worth, Herman contrasts Kant's theory of action with empiricist accounts (which, she suggests, may be distorting the critics' view of what Kant is really saying about action). For Kant, inclinations and interests are incentives (*Triebfedern*), not motives. Motives reflect an agent's *reasons* for acting.⁷⁴ Many different kinds of incentives might be, as it were, pushing me toward doing an

71 Barbara Herman *The Practice of Moral Judgment*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) 18-19; Marcia Baron *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) 148-149

72 Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 14; Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology*, 199-205

73 Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 1.

74 *Ibid.*, 11.

action, but my motive is whatever I take to be my reason for acting.⁷⁵ On Herman's reading, Kant's position is that, "when an action has moral worth, nonmoral incentives may be present, but they may not be the agent's motives in acting."⁷⁶ In Herman's view, this resolves the overdetermination problem, that is, the question of whether an action done both out of duty and out of inclination (e.g. sympathy) has moral worth. Since the inclination is not (cannot be) a motive if it is done out of duty, but only an incentive, then the action cannot be overdetermined. The crucial question becomes "what determines the will here? Upon what maxim is the agent acting?" The position regarding morally permissible acts is that they may have a nonmoral motive (sympathy, self-promotion, pleasure) but duty must be present as a *limiting condition*; in other words, there must be a commitment on the part of the agent to act on that nonmoral motive *only if* it does not violate the demands of duty.⁷⁷ Merely morally permissible acts, then, cannot have moral worth— but of course, this does not mean that there is anything *wrong* with them.⁷⁸

Marcia Baron gives a slightly different (if similar in spirit) interpretation of Kant's views on this issue. Like Herman, Baron sees the famous examples in chapter one of the Groundwork as showing moral worth to be linked to the presence of duty, not the absence of inclination.⁷⁹ She begins the consideration of the overdetermination question by arguing that one can "act solely

75 Obviously, then, emotions as such cannot be motives unless they are reasons; that is, if I have rationally assessed them.

76 Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 12.

77 Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 14-16.

78 Neither does it mean that they might not have nonmoral value.

79 Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology*, 149.

from duty, even while being inclined to the action in question.”⁸⁰ What matters is what determines one's will, what was decisive, what the ground for one's action was. Ultimately, Baron concludes, overdetermined actions are “unintelligible”; if duty was not *decisive*, then one did not really act from duty at all. Acting from duty— acting with duty as one's primary motive, as she puts it— applies only to perfect duties (what is either required or forbidden with no “latitude”). Imperfect duties— what we ought to do at least sometimes, or more correctly, what we may not have a policy of omitting— cannot be overdetermined because they cannot be done from duty (from the primary motive of duty) at all. Rather, they are done out of some inclination (e.g. sympathy) and duty comes in as a secondary motive, i.e. a limiting condition. For this reason, such actions cannot have moral worth.

Baron casts some doubt on the importance to Kant's ethics of acting from duty (i.e. from duty as a primary motive); she thinks what is more important than the moral worth of actions is “governing one's conduct by a commitment to morality, that is, ...duty operating as a secondary motive.”⁸¹ Part of the problem with debates about these matters, Baron writes in an Interlude, is that the debate often takes place within the framework of an empiricist theory of action. Like Herman (and also, notably, O'Neill), Baron sees this as a source of deep misunderstanding of Kant's ethics (and indeed it is). Baron sees the terminology of “motive” as problematic, since it “suggests causation, as if the motive of duty or a desire to help another were a force within us

80 Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology*, 152.

81 Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology*, 177. Kant introduces the distinction between practical love and pathological love in the *Groundwork*: Practical love “resides in the will and not in the partiality of feeling, in principles of action and not in melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone that can be commanded.” Kant, *Groundwork*, 201 (4:399).

that causes us to act accordingly.”⁸² This is not at all Kant's view; instead, rational beings act according to maxims, and only take motives (duty or inclination or interest) into their maxims if they decide that they have good reason to do so. A maxim differs from a motive in that a maxim is more a general policy or principle; partly for this reason, according to Baron, “thinking in terms of motives may contribute to the misconception that Kant's focus is on individual actions.”⁸³ Rather, the focus is on conduct, and specifically, on the general policies we form as guides to our actions.

Two major questions remain regarding Kant, and the role of reason and emotion: first, his treatment of “moral feeling,” and second, the positive role, if any, played by emotions such as sympathy in his ethics. (The second question connects with Held's claim that emotions have a role in telling us what we ought to do, not just in helping us to do what we ought.)

Moral feeling, for Kant, is the subjective effect that the moral law has on us (rational beings with inclinations).⁸⁴ No feeling— including moral feeling— can be the ground of morality; rather, moral feeling is the respect we feel for the moral law itself as the only objective determining basis of the will. This feeling prompts us to (try to) change our motivational structure so that inclinations are subordinated to the authority of the moral law (which, of course, we impose on ourselves). Later, in the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant gives an expanded account: here, the subjective aspect of human response to the moral law is four-fold, comprising the

82 Baron, Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology, 189. As we have seen above, Herman's strategy here is to define “motive” as she deploys it, as excluding these characteristics.

83 Baron, Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology, 190.

84 Groundwork 259(4:459), 203 (4:402); Critique of Practical Reason 97-100 (5:73-76); Metaphysics of Morals 15 (6:221).

capacity for moral feeling, conscience, love of humanity (*Menschenliebe*), and self-respect.⁸⁵

These he describes as predispositions to respond to the moral law, and he thinks they are present in every person: anyone who lacked them would be, as he puts it, “morally dead.”⁸⁶ For Kant, it is obvious that we care about doing the right thing.

This may not quite satisfy Kant's critics, many of whom take it to be obvious that morality must have some positive role for emotions. For such critics, it is not a matter of moral indifference that a moral agent could be without such emotions as sympathy. Neither is it for Kant. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he discusses the importance of cultivating practical love⁸⁷ and its three elements, beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy.⁸⁸ There he is talking about “free” or practical sympathy (a sharing in others' joys and sorrows that is governed by the will and directed toward action) rather than “communicable” or aesthetic sympathy (an inclination that is not governed by the will and which one may simply feel without being impelled toward action). Cultivating aesthetic sympathy is an indirect duty, and hence, he argues, we should not avoid places and situations where we are likely to encounter suffering.⁸⁹

There is no particular value in simply *feeling* sympathy (and there may even be negative value if the object of one's sympathy is morally bad), for Kant, especially if we then do nothing; it is tempting to congratulate ourselves simply for having felt sympathy for others, but if that is all, if

85 159 (6:399)

86 160 (6:400)

87 199 (6:450)

88 204-206 (6:456-458)

89 “It is therefore a duty not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun sickrooms or debtors' prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings that one may not be able to resist.” 205 (6:457)

we then do nothing on foot of this to help those persons, our sympathy is cheap indeed.

Sympathy has a positive role in Kant's ethics in pointing out imperfect duties. An imperfect duty, such as that of helping others attain their permissible ends does not require or forbid any specific action. Rather, we may not have a maxim of not helping others; if we really do not have a maxim of *not* helping others, we must act to help others on at least some occasions, but the choice of occasion is up to the agent. There is no “magic number” of actions guided by this maxim; it is a matter of judgment.

Now, there is a temptation to get ourselves “off the hook” in the case of imperfect duties by saying of each possible helpful action, “I don't have to do this particular helpful action”— but if we constantly do this, we have in effect adopted a maxim of not helping others. There is also the temptation to stay ignorant about the needs of others— we have seen the moral failure involved in such ignorance (1.3), and Kant explicitly warns against it. To avoid these two failures, we will need to be attentive and responsive to the needs of others. If we have cultivated sympathy, we will see when our help is needed and we will be disposed to act appropriately. Here, the maxim is not enough, since it does not tell us precisely *which* actions to perform; sympathy is needed. This is germane to Virginia Held's claim that care ethics, unlike “justice ethics,” allows that emotions may point out our duties to us. This is an example of precisely that. Emotions, though, do not *ground* morality or moral duties— it is not clear whether Held holds this stronger view, but in any case, it is not Kant's. Held does say that “raw emotion” should not be a “guide to morality”: rather, “feelings need to be reflected upon and educated” and “subjected to moral scrutiny and evaluated”— all activities of reason. Given this, it seems that Held has overestimated her disagreements with Kantians on the role of emotions; she criticizes moral theories that reject or

disregard emotions in deciding what to do or that “rely entirely on reason and rationalistic deductions or calculations.”⁹⁰ But these descriptions, as we have seen, do not fit Kant's theory.

2.4 Persons and autonomy

Another source of disagreement and, I think, misunderstanding about Kant's ethics regards his view of persons and, in particular, the central role of autonomy in his ethical theory. There are two aspects to this latter issue: first, the conception of persons and second, autonomy as a value to be respected, promoted, or cultivated by moral agents. The care literature contains critiques of both of these understandings of autonomy. I believe that this autonomy debate has suffered from a lack of clarity about what exactly is meant by the term (indeed, philosophical debates in general about this topic have had similar problems). In particular, care-based critics of Kantian autonomy could, I think, dig somewhat deeper into the theory to see whether it really plays the role they ascribe to it. In this last section, I shall argue that such critics have less to be wary of than might at first be supposed; Kantian autonomy need not, and on a correct interpretation does not, carry with it the “atomistic” view of persons and the unappealing ideal of aloofness from human relationship with which it is often associated.

I see four main aspects to care critiques of Kant relating to persons, relations, and autonomy: (1) Kant offers a false (and damaging) picture of what persons are like (independent, rational, autonomous, self-sufficient, equal, isolated, and so on); (2) Kant offers a flawed ideal of what persons should try to be like (independent, detached, rational, autonomous, equal, self-sufficient, isolated, and so on) and of what is of value about persons; (3) Kant falsely claims that individuals

⁹⁰ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 10, 24.

are morally prior to their relations (some care theorists claim that relationships are morally prior); and (4) Kant's ethics has no place for the positive value of caring relationships. As I have acknowledged in 1.3 above, care theorists' conception of persons and their concerns about the place of caring relations in moral life are worth taking seriously, for two main reasons. First, they correct a tendency in certain strands of liberal thought to over-emphasize “rugged individualism” and ignore persons' vulnerabilities and connections to one another. Second, they remind us that caring relations play a positive role in moral life, and ought to be cultivated. Both insights, I believe, can be accommodated in a Kantian framework and therefore objections (1) through (4) ultimately fail. For instance, (3) is based on a claim about normative priority that I think is untenable, while (1), (2), and (4) are based on misreadings of Kant. Let us consider each of them in turn.

First, critics argue that Kant offers an inadequate conception of persons. The picture he allegedly paints is of self-sufficient, independent, detached, autonomous, atomistic, rational, equal, isolated individuals.⁹¹ If Kant really held this view, there would be grounds for serious criticism; many aspects of this picture seem both unappealing and utterly at odds with what most of us probably experience of ourselves and of others. Two terms often included in the strings of critical descriptions of “Kantian persons” (and more generally the persons of “justice ethics”) are rational and equal; I do not see any good reason to object to these. Of course, persons are rational (they could not care in a distinctively moral way if they were not). To say that they are rational means that they have the capacity to reason, not that they are always perfectly rational. Plainly,

⁹¹ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 13, 46, 49; Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 135; Margaret McLaren, “Feminist Ethics: Care as Virtue” in *Feminists Doing Ethics*. Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) 103.

we are all irrational at times, but this hardly means that we become at those moments non-rational beings. Kant's ascription of rationality to persons is meant in just this way; note that if we were perfectly and unerringly rational, then in Kant's system, we would not need the constraints of morality at all. This point is rarely if ever argued for by care theorists, but the inclusion of the term in these critical lists of descriptors seems to be doing some (at least) rhetorical work.⁹²

More explicitly disputed is the ascription of equality to persons, usually on the grounds that it ignores the many ways in which persons are unequal to one another.⁹³ We need to be careful about what sense of the term “equal” we are using. Kant thinks all persons are of equal (and absolute) moral value and dignity: all equally have a “worth beyond price.”⁹⁴ I cannot imagine that this is in serious dispute. Surely care theorists agree that we are all equal in that respect; from it flows the important principle that every person is entitled to equal moral consideration (in ethics and in politics). Every person matters, and matters just as much as any other person.

The objection to the ascription of equality must, I assume, come from some other worry.

92 Noddings says of the “Enlightenment self” that she associates with liberalism (including Kant) that “it is always characterized by autonomy (an essential freedom), equality, rationality, and unity. All of these characteristics can be challenged. Perhaps selves ... are guided by a rationality (or something bigger than rationality) that goes beyond making “self”-interested or even disinterested choices.” It is unclear what she means by “disinterested choices”; if it refers to non-instrumental conceptions of reason, and given that self-interested choices refer to instrumental conceptions of reason, what other conception of rationality is “beyond” these two? Does her parenthetical remark mean that she thinks persons are not guided by reason but by something else (perhaps feeling)? They sometimes are, to be sure, but the ascription of rationality to persons is a matter of capacity to be rational (not of living up to its standards all the time). See also her objections to the Rawlsian idea that persons can be assumed to have a rational life-plan, Nel Noddings, Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 92.

93 For examples see Fiona Robinson, Globalizing Care: Feminist Theory, Ethics and International Relations. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999) 61 and Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 135. Noddings echoes a familiar theme in criticizing “equality construed as sameness” in social policy (88), and writes that “[p]erhaps selves...are equal in only tenuously established ways.” Noddings, Starting at Home, 92.

94 Kant, Groundwork 235 (4:434-435).

What these critics seem to have in mind is an assumption that all persons are equally strong, healthy, self-sufficient, capable, and so on. It is true that many societies create policy without regard to material inequalities of these sorts: think of healthcare provision in the United States, for example, which is premised on ignoring the fact that not everyone has the money to “freely choose” among different health plans, or building access, which is all too often designed as though no-one used a wheelchair or had any sort of difficulty with steps. But the critique does not, I believe, apply to Kant's ethics —nothing in the latter depends on assuming any of these sorts of equality. Perhaps critics have in mind inequalities in rational capacity with the implication that, since for Kant the special moral status of persons comes from their rational nature, the less rational capacity one has, the less dignity one has. Note that for Kant, the ascription of “rational nature” to persons is not to be identified with high-level intellectual ability, and it is not something one can “maximize” or have different amounts of. It is not a matter of being more intelligent or capable of sophisticated conceptual thought.

Let us turn to the rest of the description of persons imputed to Kant (and “justice ethics”) by care theorists: isolated, autonomous, detached, self-sufficient, independent, atomistic. “Isolated” and “atomistic” we are certainly not, on Kant's view. We are constantly engaging in various ways with other people and this is where moral life tends to “happen,” as it were. Deceit and coercion — to use favorite Kantian examples— are moral failures that lie squarely in the context of human interaction and relationship. If we were really atomistic or isolated, we would not be as vulnerable as we are to deceit and coercion and presumably Kant would not have worried about them much.

Neither does Kant think human persons are self-sufficient. In chapter two of the Groundwork,

among the four examples of moral duty given, is the duty not to adopt a maxim of no mutual aid — in other words, we have an imperfect duty of helping others with their (permissible) ends. Kant says explicitly that the man in his example cannot rationally will that a maxim of no mutual aid be a universal law “since many situations might arise in which the man needs love and sympathy from others, and in which, by such a law of nature generated by his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the help he wants.”⁹⁵

Independence is a more complicated term in this debate. Kant does think we are independent, but in one special respect: our rational wills are independent of determination by alien causes.⁹⁶ This is the negative freedom of the will that is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for autonomy of the will.⁹⁷ Moreover, our wills are only thus independent from the practical standpoint. Nothing follows from this regarding our independence as embodied human agents; my will's being independent of determination by alien causes does not mean I might not be dependent on others for all sorts of things, including care.

Kantian persons are often also portrayed by Kant's critics as detached, while care ethicists claim their conception of persons *differ* in portraying them as “deeply affected by, and involved in, relations to others” and possibly “at least partly constituted by their social ties.”⁹⁸ I think the contrast is much overstated. Kantians can, indeed must agree — given the features of Kantian ethics— that persons' relationships shape their lives and are of central importance in them..

95 224 (4: 423)

96 Kant, Groundwork 46 (4:446).

97 O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 42-43.

98 Held, The Ethics of Care, 46.

Kantian ethics is all about relationships: helping others, communicating honestly, avoiding coercion, respecting others. None of these concerns makes any sense outside of a relational context. These worries may arise from a misreading of the Kantian claim that persons can reflect on their emotions, interests, desires, and relationships; their wills are not determined by any of these. One might say that, in a sense, *for deliberative purposes*, one can detach oneself from one's relationship in order to reflect on it. We must not over-interpret this claim, however; it is quite an ordinary fact about persons, and it does not mean that the Kantian must deny that relationships play a role in making us the particular persons we are.

In Kant's work we can readily find support for a conception of persons as characterized by a tension between relatedness (or “connectedness” or embeddedness) and individuality (separateness, independence). Kant remarks, for instance, that human relations are marked by a tension between love and respect: love brings them together and respect creates distance between them. The tension has its own equilibrium, and disrupting the balance between the two will, Kant thinks, fatally undermine morality.⁹⁹ Human beings are social yet unsocial¹⁰⁰; they need care, love, closeness, attentiveness— but they also demand justice, respect, space, privacy. Emphasizing one aspect at the expense of the other is indeed morally dangerous, as many care theorists have noted.

Finally, Kant does think we are autonomous, but not in the sense that many of his critics suppose. The debate about autonomy in the care literature lacks clarity about how this concept is understood. Some critiques of Kantian or “justice ethics-based” autonomy seem to work from a

⁹⁹ Kant, Metaphysics of Morals 198 (6:449)

¹⁰⁰ Kant, Metaphysics of Morals 216 (6:471)

rather different view of autonomy than Kant held. Many understandings of autonomy center around the idea of self-governance, and rightly so, since this reflects the origin of the word. Kant shares this view. However, what this means and to what it is ascribed are far more complex questions in Kantian moral theory. Strictly speaking, Kant does not think *persons* are autonomous; he does think that, from the practical standpoint, *rational wills* are autonomous. The will governs itself, or, to put it in more Kantian terms, it gives law to itself.¹⁰¹ This self-legislating has two elements. First, the will is negatively free; it is not determined by “alien causes.” Second, the will is positively free, which means it imposes laws on itself: this is, properly, autonomy.¹⁰²

As Onora O'Neill points out, this position combines two major strands of thought about autonomy: independence from “outside” forces, and coherence or rationality (which implies law-likeness). All of this is only possible from the practical standpoint; it cannot be understood in terms of an empiricist theory of action.¹⁰³ Indeed, from within an empiricist theory of action, such claims look quite fanciful. What exactly is the Kantian alternative? On an empiricist theory of action, as we have seen, desires cause actions and only means, not ends, are subject to rational assessment (i.e. it assumes instrumental reason only). Both of these claims are rejected on the alternative Kantian view. As rational beings, we act for reasons, that is, we act on maxims. We are capable of assessing our desires (and interests, emotions, beliefs, principles, etc.) rationally.

101 “Autonomy of the will is the property the will has of being a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition.” Kant, Groundwork, 240 (4:440).

102 Kant, Groundwork 246 (4:446)

103 O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, “Agency and Autonomy” passim.; Herman, The Practice of Moral Judgment, 194, 201 for similar thoughts.

Where the empiricist would say a given desire causes the agent to act, the Kantian says that the desire is incorporated by the agent into her maxim for acting; that is, she considers it a reason for acting and is responsible for that. This rational capacity of the agent is autonomy; the demand for reasons for acting is a standard of lawlikeness, and it is a standard imposed by the agent on herself.¹⁰⁴ This picture can seem metaphysically extravagant, as O'Neill recognizes:

[T]he heart of the notion of 'self-imposed law' is not an appeal to a transcendent self that does the imposing, or to some other panicky metaphysics, but a modal, reflexive constraint. Kant is interested in the *capacity* to adopt principles that could be self-imposed by all: principles that could be adopted by a plurality must have 'the form of law.'¹⁰⁵

So, too, the idea of the will being free from determination by “alien causes” (including other people but also the agent's own feelings) seems odd indeed from within an empiricist theory of action. But must we then accept Kant's entire metaphysics? Is there really the much-ridiculed noumenal self, controlling one's will from its ghostly perch in a separate world beyond one's experience? As it turns out, accepting the metaphysical framework that makes sense of these claims about autonomy does not require that we swallow this implausible-sounding story. Rather, as O'Neill also argues, Kant is talking about standpoints, not “worlds.”¹⁰⁶ Kant's view is that in order to understand our world, ourselves and our actions, we must take up two standpoints: the theoretical and the practical. From the theoretical standpoint, our actions are

¹⁰⁴ See Groundwork, 233 (4:432-433) and 236 (4:436).

¹⁰⁵ O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 45-48. I draw on O'Neill's interpretation throughout this paragraph.

fully causally determined, just as all events are, according to the laws of nature. The theoretical standpoint enables us to have theoretical knowledge— that is, scientific knowledge about how things are. From the practical standpoint, however, our wills and therefore our actions are free. The practical standpoint enables us to talk about what ought to happen. It is only from the practical standpoint that we can consider ourselves responsible and act accordingly. There can be no theoretical proof that this is the correct model; the best we can do is a critique of pure reason that offers reasons to accept this view.¹⁰⁷

It should be clear from the foregoing that Kantian autonomy is not the same as the autonomy that care theorists often criticize. The latter is usually some sort of quality or capacity of persons; it is rarely enough defined in the literature, but it seems to carry a range of connotations from self-government to agency to freedom to self-sufficiency. Clement offers her definition, which has some similarity with the Kantian idea. She says autonomy “has a negative component, that one's choices be uncoerced, and a positive component, that one critically evaluate one's choices.”¹⁰⁸ The “uncoerced choices” requirement has parallels with the negative side of Kantian autonomy (freedom of the will from determination by alien causes), and the self-evaluation requirement has parallels with its positive side (imposing moral law on oneself). However, Clement's definition lacks a metaphysical basis that can explain how uncoerced choices and critical self-evaluation of those choices are possible in a world in which (she seems to hold) moral agents are subject to social and “natural” forces and significantly shaped by them. It is unclear what sort of thing she holds autonomy to *be*. Engagement with these underlying

¹⁰⁷ Kant, Groundwork 245 (4:445)

¹⁰⁸ Clement, Care, Autonomy, and Justice, 23.

metaphysical questions would considerably advance the autonomy debate among care theorists and between Kantians and care theorists.¹⁰⁹

Herman addresses care critiques of autonomy and finds that Kantians and care theorists are at cross-purposes:

In effect, much of the critique of the Kantian conception of autonomy confuses autonomy and agency. Autonomy is the condition of the will that makes agency possible. If we were not rational beings, we would not have wills that could be interfered with. But *agency* is not completely described by identifying a will as rational. As human agents we are not distinct from our contingent ends, our culture, our history, our history, or our actual or possible relations to others. Agency is situated. The empirical and contingent conditions of effective agency set the terms of permissibility because it is through effective agency that autonomy is expressed (made real).¹¹⁰

On this view, agents act in the world, in relationships, communities, bodies; autonomous wills do not act. Thus, critics of Kant should not take his theory to be saying that moral agents are “autonomous” or that persons, as they act in the world, float free of the stuff of their lives.

Herman continues:

If agency is situated, the conditions of agency will not be uniform. Certain features will remain constant: that we have vulnerable bodies, are mortal, are capable of acquiring new

¹⁰⁹ Feminist philosophers working on autonomy have done much interesting work since the first phase of the care debate, moving beyond rejection or suspicion of autonomy to various sorts of reconceptualization, notably in the volume Relational Autonomy. However, I think they run into the same sort of problem that Clement does: unlike Kant, they do not engage satisfactorily with the question of autonomy's metaphysical basis. Mackenzie, Catriona and Natalie Stoljar, eds. Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹¹⁰ Herman, The Practice of Moral Judgment, 205

skills, that we are deceivable and vulnerable to duress. Other features will be a function of the social world in which a person acts. Matters of institutional subordination, dependency, questions of gender, class, and race, will need to be taken into account.¹¹¹

O'Neill has also argued, along similar lines, that indifference to other human beings' needs undercuts their agency; human beings cannot become or remain agents unless they are cared for.¹¹² This is a set of concerns that proponents of care can certainly share.

All of this will yield clues for our second question, namely, how and why autonomy is morally important and valuable. Once it is established that Kantian autonomy does not mean self-sufficiency, independence, or even agency, many care-based objections to the value placed on autonomy fall away. We are not being asked to value isolation or detachment, self-sufficiency or independence. Rather, Kantian autonomy is valuable because it is just the capacity to be moral. One way of looking at it is that autonomy is really the capacity to take responsibility (as we saw in chapter one, an important part of the moral power of care, sec. 1.3).

Some care theorists claim that caring relations are morally prior to individual persons. Kantian ethics cannot accommodate this. Nel Noddings suggests that “the greatest contribution of care theory as it is developed here is its emphasis on the caring relation. Relations, not individuals, are ontologically basic.”¹¹³ This means, she continues, “that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact about human existence.”¹¹⁴ What exactly is being claimed

111 Ibid.

112 O'Neill, Constructions of Reason, 230.

113 Noddings, Caring, xiii..

114 Ibid.,4.

here? It is not at all controversial to claim that relation is a “basic fact of human experience” (it is quite another matter how it affects one's moral theory, of course), but it certainly is controversial to argue that “[r]elations, *not individuals*, are ontologically basic” (my italics), which seems to mean that relations are more basic than individuals. If relation is ontologically basic and the caring relation ethically basic (2), then we arrive at the conclusion that the caring relation has normative priority over the individual as rights-bearing and so on. This is puzzling. Is Noddings saying that we have obligations to relationships rather than to persons? What could this mean? Is she saying that we ought to prioritize the maintenance of a caring relation above respecting the rights of the people in them? What would this look like? What reason is there to accept this priority claim?

Virginia Held's work suggests something like this. She says the focus of the ethics of care is on caring relations, not just caring persons and that moral adequacy (of someone's life, one supposes) is to be judged primarily on the basis of caring relations, rather than on whether the person is a caring person.¹¹⁵ She writes:

I now think that caring relations should form the wider moral framework into which justice should be fitted.¹¹⁶

This is not directly a claim that caring relations are morally prior to individuals, but it does seem to come close. Held is certainly arguing for the priority of care over justice, and it is telling that she uses the term caring relations rather than simply “care”; since she has argued that caring relations are more central to the ethics of care than caring dispositions, and since justice is

¹¹⁵ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 52.

¹¹⁶ Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 71.

concerned with protecting the rights of individuals (not only of individuals, of course), the implication is that caring relations will trump the claims of individuals in her version of an ethic of care. The reason for this claim seems to be that without care, there can be neither human survival nor morality.¹¹⁷ This is problematic if, as seems to be the case, Held is claiming that normative priority comes out of empirical necessity. How does empirical necessity yield morality? We could readily grant that one cannot develop a sense of moral agency or justice or any of the virtues without having experienced care, but even this—the necessity of care for moral life—does not show anything about the nature of morality or the moral priority of care (or any other value).

It is also unclear what will happen to moral responsibility if Held is really claiming moral priority for relationships over persons. Assessing relations is certainly morally relevant, and caring (or uncaring) relations are, in large part, what shapes the overall moral “climate,” but crucially, relationships do not act—persons do. Moral responsibility has its home and grounding in the individual moral agent and in this central, practical, sense individuals must have priority in moral theory.

Finally, critics of Kant in the care literature often object to the supposed lack of a positive role for caring relationships in morality. Being in caring relations will naturally present more opportunities for fulfilling our imperfect duties to others; we cannot help others to pursue their morally permissible ends without relating to them. Neither can we learn how to be good without being in caring relations. In an early work, On Education, Kant writes that children should be encouraged to be sociable and make friends at school; friendship, he continues, is “the sweetest

¹¹⁷ Held, The Ethics of Care, 73.

pleasure of life.”¹¹⁸ Kant writes in the Metaphysics of Morals that “[i]t is a duty to oneself as well as to others not to isolate oneself but to use one's moral perfections in social intercourse.”¹¹⁹ Cultivating “social virtues” such as courtesy and affability is a moral duty, since these “cultivate a disposition of reciprocity— agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love and respect” and “promote the feeling for virtue itself.”¹²⁰ Friendship is also a duty; it is “the union of two persons in equal mutual love and respect.”¹²¹ Friends ought to point out each others' moral failings and ought to be ready to help the other out of benevolence— but difficulties can arise in these situations, as Kant observes, since in the first case, friends rarely take moral criticism well, and in the second case, friends may take advantage of each other and may lose respect if they are put under obligation to the other. Thus, Kant says, friendship is an ideal to be striven for rather than a reality.¹²² Kant is rather too pessimistic here, even if his warnings are not far fetched. Friends, more often than one might think from Kant's discussion, find ways to negotiate these challenges with tact and gentleness and in doing so, may greatly enrich their moral lives and characters.

2.5 Conclusion

I have tried to show that Kantian ethics survives the major care-based critiques ranged against it. Many of the objections discussed have arisen from misunderstandings of Kant; the real

118 Kant, On Education, 92 (9:485).

119 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 218 (6:473)

120 Ibid. See also Kant, Lectures on Ethics, 236.

121 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 215 (4:469).

122 Ibid., 215-216 (6:470-471)

disagreements are fewer and less intractable than might first be supposed. (Nevertheless, some claims by some care theorists, as we have seen, cannot be reconciled with Kantianism.) The value of care, and many insights of the care debate, should be *included* in moral theory; this was the major conclusion of chapter one. In this chapter, I have shown that Kantian moral theory need not be rejected by those who think care is an important value and, further, that Kantian ethics has notable advantages over an “ethics of care.” It is the task of the next chapter to examine further how care (as defended in chapter one) and Kantian ethics (as defended here) fit together.

Chapter Three

Care's place in Kantian ethics

3.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I defended care as an important value and as a practice with moral significance.¹ I also argued that, while there is no separate “ethics of care,” the debate regarding it has yielded insights that ought to be included in any comprehensive moral theory, for example the danger of ignoring context in moral judgment and the interdependence of human persons. In chapter two, I defended Kantian ethics against three main types of objection— relating to principles and abstraction, reason and emotion, and autonomy— found in the care literature. These conclusions lead quite naturally to the following question: how can care (as I have defended it) be fitted into Kantian ethics? I address this question in three parts.

First, I shall examine responses to care by contemporary Kantians. Onora O'Neill and Barbara Herman, most notably, have addressed care-based criticisms and have found them unwarranted. However, it is significant that both writers take on earlier versions of care, by Gilligan and Noddings; later work on care may well escape some of the criticisms leveled against it, especially by O'Neill. Neither incorporates care as such into Kantian ethics. O'Neill explicitly mentions care and concern at one point in her work, but it is evident that she does not associate it with care as understood in the post-Gilligan tradition and does not think Kantian ethics requires any significant change because of a commitment to care as a value. Rather, Kantian ethics is said to

¹ Care is responsiveness to needs; its moral relevance emerges with respect to needs for maintaining agency.

already contain what is required in moral theory to assuage most care-based worries. Although practical love, love of humanity, moral feeling, sympathy, and charity might capture some of what care theorists are talking about, I will argue that Kantians should incorporate, in addition, the concept of care into ethics, and should use the language of care; care has distinct connotations, for example of “hands-on” acts of caring, importance of caring relationships as well as more fleeting acts of caring, and the social, political, and economic aspects of caring practices.

Second, I shall attempt to reconcile a Kantian account of autonomy with care's emphasis on the relational, embedded nature of persons. Finally, I shall examine the role of responsiveness—one of the most morally important aspects of care—in Kantian ethics: I shall try to show that a Kantian framework can make sense of responsiveness (and its appropriate limits) more effectively than can an “ethic of care.”

3.2 Contemporary Kantians on Care : Herman and O'Neill

Some contemporary Kantians have responded directly to the care debates, defending Kant by setting out an interpretation of his ethical theory that takes account of care-based concerns. These defenses tend to focus on the earliest and most radical versions of care or the ethics of care; I shall consider to what extent such defenses might or should have been different had they addressed later developments in the care literature. Then I shall ask whether, as these defenses tend to claim, Kantian ethics can do without the concept and language of care while satisfactorily responding to care-based concerns. Is something (sufficiently) like care already to be found in Kantian ethics or do Kantians need to start talking about care? What, then, does “Kantian care”

look like?

Barbara Herman's "Agency, Attachment, and Difference" is a response to "a cluster of criticisms of Kantian ethics associated with impartiality" in the work of Bernard Williams, Michael Stocker, Lawrence Blum, and Carol Gilligan. Gilligan is cited as the representative of critics of "the so-called justice perspective," who find impartiality to be not so much a moral value to aspire to as a "lack or limit or defect of moral sensibility."² Herman's reply to such critics is that the Kantian moral agent should be understood as combining a commitment to moral duty and other commitments, such as to loved ones, on a "deliberative field" where such commitments are "normalized" to one another as the agent attempts to build a good life. The substance of that argument is not of central importance here; rather, her basic claim is that Kantian ethics, with the addition of a concept such as the deliberative field to model how agents negotiate these different commitments, already has the resources to address criticisms based on concerns about impartiality. Herman does not explicitly address other aspects of the care literature, such as the practice of care or care as a moral value or virtue. However, her interpretation of Kant's ethics takes seriously many of the insights of the care literature, from the interdependence of persons to the centrality of caring relations in their lives, and there seems to be nothing in her approach to preclude introducing useful new concepts (e.g. the "deliberative field") into Kant interpretation.

Onora O'Neill has engaged more substantially with the care literature. Her book Towards Justice and Virtue is devoted to rebutting claims that Kant's ethics devalues virtue and with it many important aspects of human life. She does not say a great deal about care ethics; her

2 Herman, The Practice of Moral Judgment, 184.

approach is focused rather on what she sees as a broad tendency in much contemporary philosophy to view justice and virtue as antagonistic and indeed incompatible.³ Care ethics is a part of this, in her view, but it is examined for the most part in conjunction with various communitarian, neo-Aristotelian, Wittgensteinian, and other positions. Various “friends of the virtues,” including feminists like Carol Gilligan, “hope to anchor the claims of virtue in judgments about the shared particularities of tradition, practice, and community.”⁴ In a discussion of objections to principles, a footnote gives a brief direct response to care:

Feminist views often draw on the work of Carol Gilligan, who contrasts the 'male' ethics of justice, which appeals to universal principles and is blind to the significant differences between people, with the 'female' ethics of care, which is expressed not in universal principles but in virtues such as care, love, patience, and responsibility for and sensitivity to self and others.⁵

O'Neill sharply criticizes “some contemporary friends of virtue” who, in her view, manifest simple hostility to human rights, who offer no serious discussion of justice or of its borders, who dismiss justice as an ethically inadequate, 'male' concern, or who ignore the import and importance of the institutions of the public domain (state, economy, society) in favour of celebrating the caring virtues of domesticity and intimacy. These are disastrous limitations in any ethical vision that aspires to relevance in the contemporary world. So too is the diminished vision of virtue which confines it to specific roles and

3 O'Neill, Towards Justice and Virtue, 9-23.

4 Ibid. 17

5 Ibid. 74

traditions.⁶

This is more applicable to early discussions of care that suggested the possibility of gendered morality, downplayed or criticized justice, or confined the scope of their moral concern to the realm of face-to-face care. However, the care literature quickly moved on from such extremes, as we have seen (see chapter one). There is widespread agreement that care is a moral value for which everyone should strive; few writers on care today dismiss justice or deny that it is important, although the question of the relationship between justice and care has not been resolved and some writers, perhaps, do not pay enough attention to questions of justice; few writers, even those who espouse an ethic of care, confine the moral scope of care to the realm of face-to-face care— rather, there is an increasing engagement with the question of care in wider social contexts.

O'Neill also sees problems with approaches that focus on the moral salience of particular sorts of relationship (perhaps, for example, mother-child relations as paradigms of care):

[W]hile it is true that certain relationships (e.g. those between relatives or friends) provide special opportunities for trust, kindness, and care, and others (e.g. those of commerce and collegiality) for honesty and fairness that go beyond strict entitlement, these virtues are important beyond their characteristic contexts. In addition, it is notorious that many special relationships also provide special opportunities for unkindness and neglect, for deceit and betrayal. If the very relationships that provide preferred contexts for various virtues also provide fertile fields for contrasting vices, these contexts cannot be constitutive of those social virtues.⁷

6 O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 141.

7 O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 149-150

She engages the care literature directly, but again quite briefly, in several of the essays in Bounds of Justice. This engagement focuses mainly on early works such as Gilligan's, although by the time Bounds of Justice was published in 2000, a considerable diversity had emerged in the care literature, and arguably not all of it was equally vulnerable to O'Neill's criticisms.

First, O'Neill remarks that the care literature “is relentlessly critical of autonomy, but not very clear about that which it criticizes.”⁸ In this I think she is correct, as I have indicated in 2.4 above. Even recent advances— the present consensus that autonomy need not be jettisoned, but reworked in relational terms— still fail, by and large, to give a satisfactory account of what autonomy is and what its metaphysical underpinnings are.

Second, she returns to the charge that the ethics of care advocates a gendered understanding of morality, according to which men and women have different ethical “voices” and hence (perhaps) different ethical claims; moreover, the care “voice” is recommended over the justice “voice”:

An increasing amount of radical feminist writing of the 1980s and 1990s criticized concern with justice, and hence with rights, as an abstract, adversarial, 'male' concern, and put forward conceptions of ethical life that centre on certain 'female' virtues of care and concern, of responsibility and affiliation.⁹

By the turn of the century, however, it had become a commonplace of the care literature that care was not to replace justice, but to be recognized alongside it as a moral value, and that care and justice were not men's or women's virtues, but applicable to everyone. While care might have been most recognizable in women's historical experiences as primary caregivers, it was not now

8 O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 30n.

9 O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 107.

held to be the exclusive preserve of women. Philosophers interested in care moved on rather quickly from claims that care was a woman's virtue to the more interesting one that care was something that every life should exemplify.¹⁰

Third, O'Neill attributes to “some” care ethicists the view that justice and care are antagonistic.¹¹ This is true— some care ethicists have indeed suggested this— but it is not a matter of consensus: indeed, much recent work on care is focused on giving an account of how justice and care fit together. I do not think these accounts have been altogether convincing— some insist that care and justice are two different frameworks that must somehow be reconciled even if they may recommend different things— but the debate is more sophisticated than O'Neill's portrayal may suggest.

Fourth, O'Neill suggests that care ethics confines itself, and confines ethical theory, to face-to-face personal relationships:

In a world in which women, like men, act and are acted on by the multiple complex institutions and systems of institutions, and by many distant strangers, a pretence that their significant ethical relations are entirely face-to-face, entirely a matter of virtuous relationships, of personal attachment and commitments, of care and concern, and never a matter of required action, of obligation or of rights, is both illusory and dangerous.¹²

This is in my view a cogent critique of some versions of care, such as Noddings's, which propose a care-only ethics, and a view of care that is confined to face-to-face relations. In the subsequent literature, this sort of theory of care has been much disputed; in fact, much work is now being

¹⁰ See Tronto, “Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care”; Friedman, “Demoralizing the Genders”

¹¹ O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 107, 148, 153.

¹² Ibid.,108.

done on political and global care.

Fifth, O'Neill suggests that care ethics may end up serving reactionary, anti-feminist agendas:

Some downgrade justice so emphatically that they endorse rather than challenge social and economic structures that marginalize women and confine them to a separate sphere. Separatism at the level of ethical theory can march with acceptance of the powers and traditions that be. A stress on caring and relationships to the exclusion of abstract justice may endorse relegation to to the nursery and the kitchen, to purdah and to poverty.¹³

Early works in care ethics sometimes downgraded justice— especially Nel Noddings's Caring— and some of that literature still relegates justice to a lower level of moral importance than care (in various ways). O'Neill's criticism certainly applies to such work; care without justice is dangerous and may justify or at least leave us without the concepts to address serious moral and political problems. Many, however, see justice and care as equally important, and no contemporary work on care, to my knowledge, claims that justice should not be valued and pursued.

It is also worth remembering that the care literature, and feminist scholarship more generally, has questioned the devaluation for the work done in the nursery and the kitchen and the entire set of social institutions built around the gendered division of labor. Nobody should be forced to remain in the kitchen or nursery— that is, women should have the right to devote their lives to pursuits other than care work. But the more radical feminist point is that the way in which domestic labor has been structured— gendered, devalued, not seen as “work” deserving compensation, and so on— must be challenged. For those who engage in it willingly, is not the

¹³ O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 147.

work of nursery and kitchen honorable and important? Shouldn't men be encouraged to participate in it, too?

In my view, the problem is not that care theorists think care is gendered, or morality is gendered, or that care ethics is parochial, or that it rejects autonomy, or that it casts care and justice as antagonists: it is that the care debate lacks clarity on many of these issues. It lacks a clear account of what autonomy is (other than that it is a good thing, as long as it is understood relationally); it lacks a clear account of how “global care” or “political care” are to be understood and how these fit in with theories of justice; it lacks a clear account of how justice and care are related and how they fit into ethics as such. While considerable progress has been made in the short time since care entered the philosophical vocabulary, much work remains to be done in clarifying these matters.

O'Neill does not entirely dismiss care as a value or, indeed, many of the themes considered important by care ethics. She shares with care theorists the view that justice is not enough; principles of justice concern avoiding injury but “[e]ven when no injury is inflicted, capacities and capabilities for action can still be undermined and eroded in many different ways.”¹⁴ This is because human persons are characterized by deep vulnerabilities that can threaten their agency. Moreover, the connections that each human has with others are always specific and thus create specific vulnerabilities. Since principles of “indifference or neglect” cannot be universalized—i.e. agents may not (morally) have a maxim of indifference towards or neglect of others (in general)—there is an obligation for agents to act on principles of care and concern for some

14 O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 191

others.¹⁵

3.3 Care, Practical love, Menschenliebe, Charity?

One strategy for those wishing to reconcile a commitment to Kantian ethics with an appreciation of the value of care and many of the insights of the debate about the “ethics of care” might be to argue that care “really is” what Kant calls practical love, or sympathy, or love of humanity, or even charity. An advantage of this strategy is that it leaves the structure of Kantian moral theory wholly undisturbed. However, the cost is, I think, too great: reducing care to any of these other concepts extirpates too much. Care contains more, although it bears a close relation to each of them. I do not think it should be too surprising or problematic to allow that moral theory should contain very closely related, partly overlapping, concepts.¹⁶

Kant introduces the idea of practical love in the Groundwork. He describes it as follows:

For love as inclination cannot be commanded; but kindness done out of duty— although no inclination impels us, and even although natural and unconquerable aversion stands in our way— is practical love, not pathological love. It resides in the will and not in the partiality of feeling, in principles of action and not in melting compassion; and it is this practical love alone that can be commanded.¹⁷

Practical love, so described, has some similarities with care; since care is a practice as well as a virtue, practical love might be thought of as a practice. Specifically, care and practical love are

¹⁵ Ibid., 193-195.

¹⁶ One might think here, for example, of honesty and integrity, which are distinct yet overlapping concepts.

¹⁷ Kant, Groundwork, 201 (4:399).

practices focused on meeting needs. In the passage quoted above, Kant merely refers to “kindness,” (in the original *Wohltun*, or “doing good”) which is not explicitly tied to need, although many acts of kindness or doing good are acts of meeting needs. Acts of kindness and helpfulness are important in Kantian ethics insofar as they reflect agents' policies or maxims of treating others as persons (in the fullest sense). As Onora O'Neill notes,¹⁸ treating others as persons (as ends in themselves, that is) involves not merely refraining from deceiving or coercing them and giving them “space,” but also encouraging and helping them to achieve their (permissible) ends, since (human) persons are vulnerable and needy. On a wider reading of needs, then, acts of kindness or practical love are need-meeting; they meet human needs for help, concern, warmth, encouragement, and so on. Kindness should not, perhaps, be seen as an extra nicety. Practical love depends not on inclination but on will— specifically, adopting “principles of action.”¹⁹ A good test for whether one has adopted a principle of action is whether one has actually carried out at least some such actions; thus, while such a principle, insofar as it is a principle, is abstract, it demands concrete, if unspecifiable, action. Similarly, we would be hard pressed to describe someone as caring, or someone who cares, if she never engaged in acts of caring. Practical love in action will often be an act of “taking care of” or “caring for,” to use Tronto's terminology— not merely of “caring about.”

Is care, then, practical love? Kant does not say enough about practical love to make a

18 O'Neill *Constructions of Reason*, 115-16.

19 Practical love— *praktische Liebe*— lies in *Grundsätzen der Handlung* (in the principles of action) *und nicht schmelzender Teilnehmung* (and not melting compassion, or literally, participation or taking part; Allen Wood (Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 176-177), translates it as “sympathetic participation”— see below for further discussion of this concept); *jene aber allein kann geboten werden* (only the former can be a duty; as we will see below, *Teilnehmung* is an indirect duty). *Groundwork* 4:399.

confident judgment possible. However, we can draw out what he does say, and consider the interpretations of Kant scholars. Whereas care and the sort of love that Kant describes as “pathological” have often been identified with one another, especially in early work influenced by Gilligan, care as practical love is distinct from “pathological love.” But care— as virtue, value, emotion, and practice— is not the same as love and does not require love, although care often accompanies love; we usually care about what and whom we love, and care for the people we love, but I can care for someone and indeed care about her, without loving her. Does practical love have any emotional component? Kant says it is a matter of principle and will, not of “partiality of feeling” or “melting compassion.” Practical love can be (and is) morally required of us even if we do not have the inclination to act on it. But one's devotion to a principle, one's act of will, can surely have a subjective aspect; it does not necessarily “leave us cold.”²⁰

Although one might interpret Kant's practical love as being just about acting to help others, I think it more accurate to see it in terms of the commitment one makes in adopting it as a principle. The commitment is made insofar as one considers it morally important to have a policy of helping others and showing them kindness. It matters to one; one cares about it.

All of this brings care and practical love into close alignment, but I think care is a more capacious concept. (One might think of practical love as part of care; specifically, “caring for.”) Using the language of care brings out some important things that “practical love” leaves in the background: the subjective aspect (caring about), the virtue of care (being a caring person), the relational aspect of care, the importance not only of fleeting instances of kindness (e.g. helping a

²⁰ See Kant's discussion in the first book of Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, p.22-23, in the Metaphysics of Morals 6:399, and in the Groundwork, 4:401f.

stranger carry their stroller up the subway steps) but of ongoing relationships of care that would not be considered “kindnesses” (e.g. tending to one's sick child), and the social, political, and economic aspects of care practices (what do we do about child-care, elder-care? What kinds of care count as work? What is a caring society?).²¹ From a more rhetorical standpoint, I think it is appropriate to keep the language of care because it highlights women's experiences and their underappreciated acts of “practical love” as well as feminists' struggles on these issues.

In the Doctrine of Virtue,²² Kant discusses duties of love and divides them into three categories: duties of beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy. Beneficence and sympathy, in Kant's interpretation, have a complex relationship. (They presuppose “love of human beings”, *Menschenliebe*, one of the four subjective predispositions or moral feelings he introduces at 6:399) Love, he writes, should “be thought of as the maxim of benevolence (practical love), which results in beneficence.”²³ Benevolence (*Wohlwollen*— literally, well-wishing or goodwill) is altogether easier than beneficence (*Wohltun*— literally, doing good), since “nothing need be done with it.”²⁴ Similarly, it is easy to say and even genuinely think that one cares about x, but harder to act on the basis of this caring-about. Of course, one cannot really be said to care about x if one fails to take up opportunities for putting the caring-about into action. In Kant's view, it is a duty to make others' (permissible) ends one's own.²⁵ At other points in the text, Kant puts it

21 For further discussion of these issues, see chapter four below.

22 The first part of the Metaphysics of Morals.

23 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 199 (6:449)

24 *Ibid.*, 155 (6:393).

25 *Ibid.*, 151 (6:388).

differently (“the happiness of others” is a morally compulsory end;²⁶ the “will to make others our ends” is morally compulsory²⁷). If we really adopt this end, we commit ourselves to acting on it. However, it is an imperfect duty; that is, the precise action(s) required to fulfill it cannot be specified. Here, we must act beneficently at least sometimes, to at least some others: enough to warrant a claim that we actually do have this maxim, policy, or principle. What number, type, etc of actions might meet this standard is impossible to pin down. It is easier to see when it is not being met, when someone could not make a credible claim to have a principle or maxim of helping others.

Kant addresses the affective aspect of duties of love in several passages on sympathy. It is a duty to cultivate sympathy; Kant says this is “the duty of humanity.” Of this there are two aspects: (1) practical; *humanitas practica*, which is free, a matter of will, and “based on practical feeling” (this is a matter of direct obligation); (2) aesthetic; *humanitas aesthetica*, communicable, receptivity to which is naturally in us, (this is a matter of indirect obligation).²⁸ There is direct obligation to will *humanitas practica* i.e. practical or active sympathy or practical humanity; it is not sympathy that we “can't help feeling,” it is sympathy that comes from the will, from practical reason. Allen Wood points out that the German verb Kant uses for *humanitas practica* is *Teilnehmen*, to share or participate. This “sympathetic participation,” as Wood terms it, “is the active sharing in the situation of others, seeing things from their point of view, that will then usually give rise to compassionate feelings and to beneficent actions that are both informed by

26 Ibid., 150 (6:385), 201 (6:452).

27 Ibid., 155-156 (6:393).

28 Ibid., 204-205 (6:456-7)

the active sharing in the others' situation and undertaken from a standpoint aligned with theirs, so that it is not a standpoint of cool detachment or condescending superiority.”²⁹

There cannot be a *direct* obligation to feel “communicable” or aesthetic sympathy or humanity (*humanitas aesthetica*), since such feelings do not come from the will and thus cannot be commanded. The receptivity to these feelings are simply already there in human persons, naturally. Kant thinks any human being who lacked moral feeling would be “morally dead”; it seems reasonable to suppose that this extends to the other predispositions discussed alongside it.³⁰ However, it is an indirect duty to cultivate *humanitas aesthetica*, since it may support the development of *humanitas practica*:

But while it is not in itself a duty to share the sufferings (as well as the joys) of others, it is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate; and to this end it is therefore an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the feeling appropriate to them.- It is therefore a duty not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun sickrooms or debtors' prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings one may not be able to resist. For this is still one of the impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish.³¹

29 Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 176-177.

30 Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 160 (6:400).

31 Ibid., 205 (6:457). Kant uses “Teilnehmung” where above we read “sympathize actively” and later “sympathy” (based on moral principles). The relevant sentence reads: „Obzwar aber Mitleid und so auch Mitfreude mit anderen zu haben, an sich selbst nicht Pflicht ist, so ist es doch tätige Teilnehmung an ihrem Schicksal, und zu dem Ende also indirekte Pflicht, die mitleidigen natuerlichen (aesthetischen) Gefuehle in uns zu kultivieren und sie als so viele Mittel zur Teilnehmung aus moralischen Grundsuetzen und dem ihnen gemaessen Gefuehl zu benutzen.“

The “feelings one may not be able to resist” are feelings of *humanitas aesthetica* or communicable sympathy; we must not avoid situations that prompt them but rather cultivate them. These “compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us” can be “so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the feeling appropriate to them”; they are “impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish.” That is, they may be necessary to make us responsive to the morally pressing needs of others. We may need to feel the aesthetic sympathy before feeling the practical sympathy that will guide action and which is a direct duty. (And feel is the right word here with regard to practical sympathy, as Wood points out, since it is a moral feeling, a feeling produced by reason—discussing moral feelings and the rationality of moral feelings, he argues against “the crude error that opposes “reason” to “emotion” and assumes they must be mutually exclusive.”³²)

There are similarities between both aspects of sympathy and aspects of care. Care as emotion and as virtue has elements of sympathy: to care about someone is an emotional state (sometimes we spontaneously care about things or people, analogously to *humanitas aesthetica*), but the moral duty (see 1.3 above) to be responsive means that we cannot rely on our spontaneous “aesthetic” feelings to “care about” all that we ought to care about. Sometimes we come to care about things through making efforts to be responsive to them; we realize that we have a relation of moral obligation with a person, e.g. I think about the exploitation of workers who made the shoes I am wearing. In a caring relation (whether face to face or not), we may say there is a sense of “sympathetic participation” (*Teilnehmung*) in what the cared-for is experiencing.

32 Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 34.

Often, as Kant suggests with the relationship between *humanitas aesthetica* and *humanitas practica*, spontaneous feelings of caring (about) help cultivate more reason-based, “moral feelings” of caring (about). Of course, the spontaneous or aesthetic feelings (1) cannot be relied upon to lead us in the right moral direction, (2) need not be present for the moral or practical feelings to emerge, and (3) do not ground our moral obligations. Over time, insofar as we develop not only spontaneous or aesthetic feelings of caring but practical (i.e. moral, rational, principled) feelings (or orientations) of caring and act on them, we develop the virtue of being caring. Kant defines virtue as “the capacity and considered resolve to withstand... what opposes the moral disposition within us”³³ and later as “the strength of a human being's maxims in fulfilling his duty.”³⁴

Much of what constitutes care— as value, virtue, practice, and emotion— can be found scattered across several Kantian concepts, as we have seen: practical love (beneficence, charity, helping), love of human beings (*Menschenliebe*), and sympathy (both aesthetic and practical). Many of these Kant places under the category of “duties of love” (as distinct from duties of respect), but he is evidently dissatisfied with the term “love” in this context (see, for example, the passage explaining *Menschenliebe* in the Metaphysics of Morals³⁵). The term *care* carries better

33 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 146 (6:380)

34 Ibid., 156 (6:394).

35 Ibid., 161-1626:401-402 „*Liebe* ist eine Sache der *Empfindung*, nicht des *Wollens*, und ich kann nicht lieben weil ich *will*, noch weniger aber weil ich *soll* (zur *Liebe* genötigt werden); mithin ist eine *Pflicht zu lieben* ein *Unding*. *Wohlwollen* (*amor benevolentiae*) aber kann, als ein *Tun*, einem *Pflichtgesetz* unterworfen sein. Man nennt aber oftmals ein uneigennütziges *Wohlwollen* gegen Menschen auch (obzwar sehr uneigentlich) *Liebe*: ja, wo es nicht um des andern *Glückseligkeit*, sondern die *gänzliche* und *freie* *Ergebung* aller seiner *Zwecke* in die *Zwecke* eines anderen (selbst eines *übermenschlichen*) *Wesens* zu *tun* ist, spricht man von *Liebe*, die zugleich für uns *Pflicht* sei. Aber alle *Pflicht* ist *Nötigung*, ein *Zwang*, wenn er auch ein *Selbstzwang* nach einem *Gesetz* sein sollte. Was man aber aus *Zwang* tut, das geschieht nicht aus *Liebe*.... *Wohltun* ist *Pflicht*. Wer diese oft ausübt und es gelingt ihm mit seiner *wohltätigen* *Absicht*, kommt endlich wohl gar dahin, den, welchem er wohl getan hat, wirklich zu lieben. Wenn es also heißt: du sollst deinen *Nächsten* *lieben* als dich selbst, so heißt das nicht: du sollst

the multiple connotations of responsiveness, action (to help others), and the cultivation of feelings and character supportive of such actions, while specifying that they are important because human persons are needy and interdependent (and thus cannot pursue their ends without help).³⁶ It is a better term than charity, which Onora O'Neill uses to cover the same sorts of obligations as Kant's "duties of love"; she means by charity "concern for the needs of others,"³⁷ which is of course close to care. However, charity has accumulated problematic meanings (pity, disrespect, random and discretionary philanthropy, as well as its historical association with Christianity) and it lacks care's rich connections between practice, virtue, value, and emotion. Care also highlights the relational aspect of meeting needs, while charity does not.

3.4 Kantian autonomy and relational autonomy.

In 2.4 above, I argued that many care-based criticisms of Kantian autonomy arise from misinterpretation and thus the often-presupposed conflict between Kantian autonomy and care's view of persons as socially embedded and interdependent may have been overstated. As we have seen, Kant's theory of autonomy does not claim that persons are independent or self-sufficient; indeed, persons as such are not autonomous, rather, they can, from a certain standpoint (the practical standpoint), be said to have autonomous wills. Only by taking this practical standpoint can we understand ourselves to be morally responsible beings; otherwise, taking the theoretical

unmittelbar (zuerst) lieben und vermittelst dieser Liebe (nachher) wohltun, sondern: *tue* deinem Nebenmenschen *wohl*, und dieses Wohltun wird Menschenliebe (als Fertigkeit der Neigung zum Wohltun überhaupt) in dir bewirken!“

36 See O'Neill, Constructions of Reason, 203.

37 Ibid., 230.

standpoint, we can only understand ourselves as cogs in the wheel, as it were, of natural laws—that is, we can only talk about “what is” and not “what ought to be.” The autonomous will can thus be thought of as a technical requirement (that allows us to think of ourselves as morally responsible beings) rather than as a full portrait of human persons. Human persons with autonomous wills can only live and act— can only, thus, be moral agents— through and in their mortal, vulnerable, desiring bodies. When thinking about the complexities of human moral agency, therefore, we must address the many factors that might undermine or nurture it, from the damaging effects of structural racism, say, to the role of good friends in moral improvement.

As we have seen in chapters one and two (1.4 and 2.4), many care theorists, especially those espousing an ethic of care, accept a relational account of autonomy.³⁸ This has become particularly common in recent years as the care literature has tended to move away from more radical critiques of autonomy. A conception of relational autonomy allows one to keep the claim that persons are or can be self-governing (in some sense) while at the same time emphasizing their socially constituted and socially embedded nature. At first glance, relational autonomy may seem difficult to reconcile with Kantian autonomy but I shall argue that if we understand exactly what each “camp” means by autonomy, the task may not be so difficult.

In what follows, I shall pay a great deal of attention to questions of terminology. I therefore begin with a short overview of the main terms involved. Relational autonomy is a conception of autonomy emphasizing (1) the social, relational nature of persons and (2) the role of social and personal relations in creating or maintaining autonomy. Many writers distinguish between personal and moral autonomy. Personal autonomy (as opposed to moral autonomy) is a matter of

38 See, for example, Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, 21-42; Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 48-49.

a person being in control of their lives, in particular in the sense of being able to make choices (not necessarily of being free of all external constraints). Moral autonomy, on the other hand, is a matter of a person being morally responsible (i.e. having the capacity to be— and be held— morally responsible).³⁹ The distinction between agency and autonomy is also important, as we shall see in this section. Agency, most simply, is the capacity to act, specifically, to do things voluntarily.

There is no agreed-upon definition of relational autonomy; rather, the term is used to denote a family of approaches to autonomy (or agency) foregrounding the role of social relations in autonomous agency in various ways. Proponents of relational autonomy agree that persons are socially embedded and at least partly socially constituted and that this has a bearing on how we understand autonomy. Some writers focus on the need for social relations in order to become an autonomous agent, while others focus on the social character of autonomy itself (e.g. that to be autonomous in this sense is to be in relations with others). Most of these writers agree, too, that autonomy is not self-sufficiency or substantive independence, as it has been caricatured.⁴⁰ Many are interested in the ways in which oppressive social relations and structures impede the development and exercise of autonomy (or autonomous agency). There is disagreement, however, about what exactly autonomy is (indeed, the general literature on autonomy is marked by a lack of consensus on this point).

39 Kant, in his later writings, explicitly contrasts *Willkühr* (the capacity to make choices, or negative freedom) and *Wille* (autonomy, positive freedom, the capacity to give law to oneself); the contrast is similar to that between personal and moral autonomy here. See the Doctrine of Right in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, 13 (6:213-214); for further discussion, see John Rawls *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 294-298 and O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 67, 76-77.

40 Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

Clement preliminarily defines autonomy as “self determination.”⁴¹ This incorporates freedom from coercion (in making choices) and a capacity for critical reflection. Agreeing that persons are socially constituted, she says this “reveals that autonomy is not merely an internal or psychological characteristic, but also an external or social characteristic.”⁴² In her view, autonomy is a matter of degree; while no-one can “elude his or her socialization,”⁴³ we can at least say that “some people are more autonomous—i.e. in control of their lives— than others.” The factors influencing the extent to which a person is autonomous are both psychological and social; our “autonomy is nurtured through the care of others.”⁴⁴ Social factors influence both choice-generation and critical reflection on choices.

Held echoes many of Clement's points; in her view, autonomy should be understood in relational terms. This means (1) that “we learn to be autonomous through our interactions with others”⁴⁵ and (2) that we exercise our autonomy with respect to our relationships (which may include ending them) from a position of embeddedness in relationships. Autonomy, she argues, should not aim for “the splendid independence, self-sufficiency, and easy isolation of the traditional liberal ideal of the autonomous rational agent” but rather for “better and more caring relationships.”⁴⁶

41 Clement, Care, Autonomy, and Justice, 22.

42 Ibid., 22.

43 Ibid., 23.

44 Ibid., 24.

45 Held, The Ethics of Care, 48.

46 Ibid., 49.

Clement and Held may be really talking about personal autonomy or agency here. It is true that some people are more in control of their lives than others; it is true that people learn how to (try to) be in control of their lives, and it is true that their relationships and social location matter a great deal in doing so. If we agree that personal autonomy is important, it surely cannot be aimed at in “easy isolation.” Surely, too, no moral theory should work against our developing caring relations; Kantian ethics does not have this implication.

In her contribution to the influential anthology Relational Autonomy, Linda Barclay raises the conflict between determinism and autonomy:

Determinism is only a global threat to the possibility of autonomy on the assumption that agency is only genuinely autonomous if it is uncaused, or determined by no reasons whatsoever. However, that one is autonomous does *not* mean that one's choices are uninfluenced or uncaused, for it is doubtful that such a notion is even coherent.

Autonomous agency does not imply that one mysteriously escapes altogether from social influence but rather that one is able to fashion a certain response to it.⁴⁷

This addresses precisely the difficulty to which Kant's distinction between practical and theoretical standpoints is a response. The incoherence of choices being autonomous and yet caused leads Barclay to claim that autonomous agency requires only that one is able to respond to social influence. The same incoherence led Kant to claim that we can only understand ourselves to be autonomous (i.e., in his sense, morally responsible) from the practical standpoint; our actions are, from the theoretical standpoint, totally explained and determined by natural laws, that is, they are in a causal chain that has no “room” for agency. Barclay's response to the

47 Linda Barclay, “Autonomy and the Social Self,” Relational Autonomy, 54.

incoherence only pushes the problem back a level: any given response by me to social influence is an act like any other, another natural phenomenon like any other and thus determined by the same natural laws. There is no way out of this bind unless we take another perspective. Hence Kant's positing a practical standpoint, which is a point of view we adopt in order to understand ourselves as moral agents; adopting it is the only way we can coherently talk about what ought to be the case. From the theoretical standpoint, we talk about what is the case; it is “full up” of causes and has no space for the “ought.” Note that Kant's position here does not imply a dualism about human persons. They are not “split in two” and they do not straddle “two worlds” (the sensible and the intelligible). Kant's later writings make this especially clear; each human being naturally has three predispositions— to animality, to humanity, and to personality— all of which are good in themselves. Moral evil emerges not from any of the predispositions themselves but from the agent's choosing to order them wrongly (i.e. to subordinate personality to either of the others).⁴⁸

What then is Kantian autonomy and how does it differ from what the proponents of relational autonomy discuss? In chapter two, (2.4) we recalled that it is something of an oversimplification to say that Kant thinks persons are autonomous. He thinks that, from the practical standpoint, persons have autonomous wills. This means that the will is negatively free (not determined by

48 John Rawls identifies a development in Kant's moral psychology from an earlier “Manichean” tendency (suggesting a “good self” with only a predisposition to respect the moral law and a “bad self” with only a predisposition to self-love) to a later “Augustinian” tendency (suggesting one self with the three above-mentioned predispositions). Rawls makes clear that these are not explicitly argued-for claims in Kant; rather, Rawls is offering an interpretation of a change in tone or emphasis. I think there is a tendency toward a Manichean view in some of Kant's remarks, say, in the Groundwork, but there are also other tendencies in tension with it. For Rawls's view, see “The Moral Psychology of the Religion” in Lectures on the History of Philosophy. For Kant's later view, see the Religion, Book 1, especially p.21-23 (6:27-28) on the three predispositions and p.31 (6:36-37) on their ordering.

alien causes)⁴⁹ and positively free (it imposes law on itself).⁵⁰ It is the only way we can understand ourselves to be morally responsible.

Persons, of course, are more than their wills. In 2.4 above, we discussed Barbara Herman's argument that many critiques of autonomy in Kant's ethics confuse autonomy and agency; she suggests that many such critics are really talking about agency, the capacity to act in the world (205).⁵¹ Given the relative dearth of definitions in the care literature of autonomy and agency, it is hard to judge this claim. It seems at least partly right, since many of the worries discussed in the care-based literature on autonomy do seem related to the effects of social factors, for example, on agents' capacities to live their lives. However, such worries also apply to personal autonomy or Kant's *Willkühr* (not to moral autonomy or *Wille*).⁵² As moral agents—that is, beings capable of carrying out actions for which we can be held morally responsible—we are influenced and shaped by our personal and social relations, by institutions, by history and geography. We can only *act* through our vulnerable, mortal, desiring bodies; we can only act in particular places, at particular times, in particular social, political, cultural, and economic contexts. Autonomy of the will is what enables us to be moral agents at all, but the kind of moral agents we are (given that we are human, have these desires, this body, live in this social context, and so on) depends on many concrete particulars about the world and hence understanding what we ought to do as moral agents requires attention to these particulars.⁵³

49 *Willkühr*

50 *Wille*

51 Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 205.

52 See following paragraph below.

53 See 2.4; O'Neill *Constructions of Reason*, 230; Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 205.

Moral agency requires not only an autonomous will and material enabling conditions (e.g. enough to eat) but just the sorts of personal autonomy that relational autonomy theorists discuss, which includes capacities for critical reflection, self-trust, self-knowledge, self-respect, and so on.⁵⁴ Circumstances of injustice and oppression can seriously distort moral agency because they tend to undermine such capacities (in members of oppressed and oppressor groups alike).⁵⁵ Kantians can readily accept that the material conditions in which moral agents act affect their agency.⁵⁶ For Kant, these material conditions are (as phenomena that we experience) objects of theoretical knowledge; we talk about them from the theoretical standpoint (we talk about what is the case); we can talk about their effects on moral agency from a “third person” point of view (e.g. how deeply ingrained structural racism damages moral agents). Strictly speaking, this sort of “third person” discussion of morality might best be categorized as practical anthropology.⁵⁷ All of this is very important. But when we take the practical standpoint, there is only one topic for discussion: what ought I do? Practical reason is focused on first-person, real-time action guiding.⁵⁸ That is not the only thing worth discussing about moral life, but it is arguably the primary one. It can only be broached from the practical standpoint. Many care theorists and many

54 See Relational Autonomy 17, 21

55 See, for example, Lisa Tessman “Critical Virtue Ethics: Understanding Oppression as Morally Damaging” Feminists Doing Ethics, DesAutels and Waugh, eds. (Lanham,MD:Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

56 A simple example of this sort of thing is Kant's remark that seeking some prosperity may be an indirect duty, since poverty may introduce temptations to do wrong. Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 152 (6:388).

57 In the Groundwork Kant distinguishes practical anthropology, the “empirical part” of ethics, from moral philosophy, the “rational part.” Kant, Groundwork, 190 (4:388). For further discussion along these lines, see Christine Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 202-205.

58 See Korsgaard, Creating the Kingdom of Ends, 189.

feminist philosophers working on autonomy and related issues do not take this first-person “what ought I do?” to be the central topic of discussion; they are largely focused on these “third-person” questions of what circumstances of life affect moral agency and how.

The Kantian two-standpoint view provides a way to understand how agents are affected by circumstances (privilege, oppression, experiences of care or lack thereof) and yet are moral agents, that is, beings who act and are morally responsible when they act, beings who must decide at any given juncture what they will do. If we do not take the practical standpoint, we can only see ourselves as passive parts of a larger web of causes determined by laws of nature; we would see ourselves as wholly determined by these same circumstances. If we can take both, we see ourselves and our actions from one standpoint as wholly determined by natural causes and from the other as free.

3.13.5 Kant and responsiveness

3.2 Responsiveness, as I have used the term, refers both to the propensity to apprehend need or attentiveness, and to the propensity to respond or take responsibility. In chapter one, I defined care as responsiveness to need. Care becomes morally significant when it is directed at meeting the needs of vulnerable moral agents (i.e. human persons); derivative forms of morally-significant care may be enumerated for animals, nature, etc. but it is beyond the scope of the present work to undertake that project.

3.3 Gilligan refers to the “ethic of care” and the “ethic of responsibility” interchangeably and much of the focus of her examination of the “different voice” is on the idea of responsibility. Gilligan contrasts this ethic of care or responsibility with the supposed focus of “justice ethics”

on rights (and not, it is implied, responsibility).⁵⁹ At several points, Gilligan suggests that “justice ethics” is primarily about rights to non-interference (that is, about not having things done to one) and that “care ethics” or the “ethic of responsibility” is primarily about fulfilling responsibilities to persons (that is, about doing things for others, principally meeting their needs).

3.4 But Kantian ethics does not, as we have seen, require merely that we refrain from interfering with others' rights. It is not merely an ethic of “leaving-alone.” Obligations— which include obligations to refrain from deceit, coercion, etc but also obligations to offer help to (at least some) others (at least at some times) and to support some others' permissible ends— are more fundamental than rights in Kantian ethics.⁶⁰ Obligations outrun rights; that is, there are obligations without counterpart rights.⁶¹ Indeed, O'Neill suggests that our thinking on many moral and political questions would be enhanced if we began from the consideration of obligations rather than rights.

3.5 Is Kantian ethics thus an 'ethic of responsibility' as much as of rights?⁶² Some care theorists might say that care is unique in foregrounding the importance of moral agents being responsible for and to specific others with whom they are in caring relations (of a more or less personal character). This is sometimes the case (e.g. special obligations), but even Gilligan's subjects cast their net of moral concern wider, acknowledging a sense of responsibility to the world or to all

59 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 19, 21, 100, 132, 164.

60 O'Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 225.

61 For example, I do not have a right to be encouraged or helped in achieving my dreams of rock stardom, but doing so may well (all things considered!) count as one type of thing others could do to (help) meet their imperfect obligation of beneficence.

62 It certainly is in the sense of depending on agents' taking responsibility for what they take to be reasons for action.

persons.⁶³

Is this another, arguably more appealing, way of saying that moral agents have obligations to all persons? It certainly is striking that the care literature seems to prefer *responsibility* to *obligation* (let alone *duty*), in contrast to the literature of Kantian ethics. Responsibility may be thought to have a stronger relational connotation than obligation or duty (although of course we speak of having obligations or duties to other people). However, Kant scholars point out that the German word for obligation, *Verbindlichkeit*, may suggest not only being *bound* in the sense of required or constrained, but *bound* in the sense of being joined to other people.⁶⁴

Responsibility demands at least two sorts of responses: responding to others (e.g. responding to their needs by acting to meet them) and being responsible in the sense of being answerable to others for actions done by oneself or groups of which one is part. This is quite distinctive and one important reason for speaking explicitly about responsibility. Being answerable in this sense means first, obviously, being a moral agent (a rational agent) but secondly also being bound to respond or give an answer or account, especially in the aftermath of events and actions; this may involve explaining, apologizing, making amends, expressing regret or shame, and so on.

Taking responsibility in any of these senses may seem more “active” than taking oneself to be under obligation to do (or refrain from) x; there is something more appealing and attractive about the former, a sense that one is choosing to take on a burden rather than recognizing a burden one already has. Certainly, there is a value in acknowledging that we make choices in our moral lives and have an active role in shaping our moral lives, but in choosing to take responsibility

63 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 21.

64 Baron, *Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology*, 51.

appropriately, we are (often) recognizing what we are (already) under moral obligation to do. There is some scope for “picking and choosing”— e.g. in fulfilling imperfect obligations— but only in the way in which one fulfills one's obligations (i.e. in the specific actions through which one will enact a maxim). However, thinking in terms of taking responsibility may bring home an important aspect of imperfect obligations, namely, that we cannot simply “do the minimum” or live by simple rules that make choice and judgment unnecessary. Rather, we must use our judgment to figure out how we will enact our principles in the contexts in which we find ourselves.

It seems, then, that responsibility and obligation cannot be reduced to one another, for responsibility has wider connotations than does obligation. However, there is considerable overlap in meaning. In interpreting Kantian ethics, we can certainly say that it is an ethic of responsibility. Kantians can accommodate the importance of responsiveness with ease; for example, we must be responsive to others' needs if we are to fulfill imperfect duties, and we have special obligations or responsibilities to those with whom we are in many kinds of caring relationship.

One problem for a moral theory that prioritizes responsiveness is avoiding an overload of individual responsibility. One cannot personally take responsibility for everything, and yet, the reach of one's moral concern must surely be universal. Moreover, in a global capitalist system, our apparently simplest consumer choices have effects on many distant others (e.g. the worker in China who made my shoe) and while capitalism has always been global at least in its ambitions, its reach and the speed and volume of transnational economic activities has greatly increased in recent decades, sharpening these questions. Perhaps our tendency to avoid responsibility is

morally more dangerous, but there is also reason to worry about a moral agent's being paralyzed by a (perceived) overwhelming burden of responsibilities.

How, then, do we understand responsibility so as to avoid these extremes? I believe Kant's idea of perfect and imperfect duties provides the best framework. Perfect duties specify *acts* that must be carried out or refrained from; our responsibility is simply to do x or refrain from y. Onora O'Neill⁶⁵ points out that perfect obligations have counterpart rights, while imperfect obligations do not. Imperfect obligations are obligations to adopt certain ends and hence the exact course of action through which we will strive to fulfill these obligations cannot be specified and is a matter of judgment.⁶⁶ For example, we may not have a maxim of no mutual aid; positively, we must have a maxim of helping some others at some times (at least). No set number of types of helpful actions will amount to our having fulfilled this obligation; regularly spurning opportunities to help, or deliberately avoiding occasions where they might arise, indicate that we are not fulfilling it. We do not have to help everyone every time we have the opportunity but we do have to do enough to be able to say, truthfully, that we do not have a maxim of no mutual aid.

Some obligations, both perfect and imperfect, are best met through institutions or movements rather than individuals alone; for example, I might be discouraged by the fact that my low-carbon lifestyle is making essentially no contribution to the fight against climate disruption and realize that even many low-carbon lifestyles will have the same effect unless there is some sort of mass movement pressing for meaningful institutional action on a global scale.

As we have seen, we must cultivate sympathy (both practical and “aesthetic”) so that we can

65 O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 152.

66 Judgment is of course also required for the fulfillment of perfect duties.

be responsive when opportunities to fulfill imperfect obligations (e.g. to help others) arise. There are many barriers to responsiveness, including ignorance, indifference, lack of sympathy, lack of imagination, even lack of what one may term moral self-confidence (a belief that one can be a better person).⁶⁷

Marcia Baron argues that we should interpret Kant as primarily concerned with conduct (that is, character and action) rather than character alone.⁶⁸ She cites copious textual evidence to show that Kant considers us not passive with respect to our feelings but on the contrary responsible for harboring them (or failing to) and for taking them to be reasons for acting (or not), that is, taking them into our maxims for acting (or not).⁶⁹ It is not, thus, too much of a stretch to suggest that cultivating our own capacity for responsiveness is important, morally obligatory work we must do on ourselves.

This may seem to be a controversial claim on Kant's behalf. After all, it does not sit well with the familiar image of Kant's ethics as cold, narrowly focused on rules and reason, and dismissive of any role for emotion in moral life. In a book on shared responsibility, Larry May gives the following assessment of contemporary moral theory's failure to engage with such issues:

In contemporary moral philosophy, both of the dominant theoretical traditions, utilitarian and deontological ethics, are concerned with the assessment of actions that have been produced by a rational, intentional act of will. Since a person's attitudes are not normally chosen after rational deliberation, it is thought that attitudes lie outside the proper domain

⁶⁷ Recall Kant's assertion in the Lectures on Ethics (128) that dejection, as well as self-conceit, is morally dangerous.

⁶⁸ Baron, Kantian Ethics (Almost) Without Apology, 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 196-199.

of moral assessment. Both types of ethical theory follow Immanuel Kant in viewing attitudes as too greatly influenced by instinct and inclination for the individual person to be able to exercise the kind of control that constitutes moral agency.⁷⁰

We have seen that there is reason to find this characterization wanting as it applies to Kant. We may not have complete control over everything we feel— as we shall see, particular difficulties arise from the fact that we may not be aware of some of them, e.g. implicit bias— but we can be held responsible for what we take to be reasons for action, and we are responsible for the kind of character we develop or fail to develop.⁷¹ Insofar as our attitudes are apparent to us— and often it is reasonable to suppose we know, or should know, something about them— we are responsible for their cultivation. This is certainly one instance in which friends or others who care about us may help our moral development. Nonetheless, our incomplete awareness of our own attitudes and characters presents problems; it is hard to become more responsive if we do not fully understand our shortcomings.

70 Larry May, Sharing Responsibility (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5.

71 Recall from the previous section the Kantian distinction between moral philosophy (the non-empirical part of ethics) and practical anthropology (the empirical part). In the former, we exercise practical reason, and the fundamental question is the first-person “what ought I do?” For Kant, questions about how material conditions affect moral agency would be part of practical anthropology. Care theorists tend to include both types of question in moral philosophy. There are often situations in which one might attribute diminished moral responsibility for moral failure to an agent based on certain material conditions. Korsgaard (Creating the Kingdom of Ends, 204-205) argues that the agent herself may not, in deciding what to do, bring forth such conditions as reasons for her action (or inaction); she must take herself to be able to act in freedom from such material conditions. Only others can explain her actions in terms of such conditions (and in this case these others are taking the theoretical standpoint, not the practical)— Korsgaard writes that a social scientist may do this; or a friend may express to the agent, in the second person, a judgment about whether the friend takes the agent to be responsible for her action, material conditions notwithstanding. There is more to be said here, I think; the agent may have good moral reasons to take the theoretical standpoint regarding herself and think about how these material conditions may be turning her in less-than-morally-desirable directions. Attending to third-person accounts, e.g. of the social scientist, or to second-person accounts of friends or therapists, would be part of this process. This seems especially important when dealing with ignorance, implicit bias, and so on, as we shall see.

Barbara Herman discusses the importance of self-knowledge in Kantian ethics; self-deception of various sorts may conceal from us the real maxim we are acting on, which may be morally unacceptable:

We could imagine a role, then, for a Kantian moral therapist, whose task would be to increase the sensitivity of agents to the true determining grounds of their actions.

Although one might never be able to know one's deepest motives— the opacity of motives affects more than the motive of duty— there is room for improvement in self-awareness. Where there are unexpected patterns, a careful agent looks for a cause.⁷²

This is certainly useful in the sorts of cases she examines, for example when my unacknowledged anger toward someone expresses itself in “untoward actions (and willings)” while I sincerely believe myself not to have morally unacceptable maxims.⁷³ Even standard forms of psychotherapy can help uncover such phenomena and thus help the agent take responsibility for her (actual) maxims. This could easily extend to failures of responsiveness, which might stem from fear, prejudice, anxiety, low self-esteem, resentments, and so on. For example, I might be puzzled at my failure to reach out to others in need and figure out, perhaps with this sort of help, that my failure stems from social anxiety or from subtle prejudices against those persons. Responsiveness in general is not just a matter of attending to, and then acting to meet, others' needs by helping them in various ways; it might also be a matter of being sensitive enough to avoid hurting or failing to respect others in ways that the less responsive or sensitive might easily do.⁷⁴

⁷² Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 108.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See below, on microaggressions.

However, something more needs to be said about more systemic failures of responsiveness. A great deal of philosophical work has been done recently on the concept of ignorance. We discussed this briefly in chapter one; as we have seen, ignorance is often not simply a lack of knowledge, but an active refusal to know, made more or less consciously.⁷⁵ In particular, a privileged group's ignorance of its own privilege is one important means for the maintenance of that privilege. Although ignorance is not always deliberate— indeed, it is challenging just because it is so often not apparent to the ignorant— it is a moral failing in many cases, but perhaps the focal point of our moral critique must be not (or not exclusively) individual moral agents, but the cultures and systems of which they are part and which perpetuate ignorance of various sorts in various ways. Nevertheless, ignorance does pose a moral problem for individual moral agents (especially the relatively privileged).

It may seem strange to classify ignorance as a moral failing, but as Marilyn Frye has suggested, this becomes clearer if we “hear the active verb 'to ignore' in the word 'ignorance.’”⁷⁶ It may be a variety of the sort of “pervasive and chronic” self-deception Herman thinks raises the question of whether the agent is “normal (from the practical point of view).”⁷⁷ Where ignorance is pervasive across a social group or a society, one might diagnose a kind of wide-ranging societal moral dysfunction.

The most often discussed example of this kind of ignorance is white ignorance about race and

75 Nancy Tuana and Shannon Sullivan, Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1; Frye, The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983) 118.

76 Frye, The Politics of Reality, 119.

77 Herman, The Practice of Moral Judgment, 109.

racism.⁷⁸ White ignorance now appears more intractable than may have seemed the case twenty years ago; recent research on implicit biases and microaggressions illustrate how complex racism and race privilege are.⁷⁹ “Racism” is no longer limited to the overt, conscious white supremacist, but encompassing the well-meaning, consciously anti-racist white person who nevertheless commits microaggressions regularly without knowing it and whose implicit racist biases have harmful effects even when not apparent to (and not consciously endorsed by) the agent.

In a recent book on the subject, Derald Wing Sue describes microaggressions thus:

Microaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group. Perpetrators are usually unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient of the communication.⁸⁰

Examples might include jokes, gestures, ignorant questions, misuse of pronouns (e.g. insisting on referring to an FTM transman using female pronouns), misuse of terms—(e.g. “colored person” not “person of color”, “girl” instead of “woman” when referring to an adult female), stares, “not noticing” someone in a line if they are a person of color, praising an Asian-American’s grasp of English, assuming an African-American is a great dancer, questioning someone’s right to use a bathroom on the basis of gender assumptions, and so on. While such events, taken singly, may seem minor or even trivial, the *cumulative* effects of microaggressions

78 For an introduction, see chapter one of Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*.

79 For an overview of the literature on implicit bias, see Jost et al, (2009). “The existence of implicit bias is beyond reasonable doubt: A refutation of ideological and methodological objections and executive summary of ten studies that no manager should ignore.” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 29, 39-69

80 Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 5.

can be devastating, creating a climate where hate crimes and deep structural inequalities continue and even thrive, and eroding persons' and communities' sense of safety, self-confidence, and self-respect. Indeed, according to Sue, microaggressions “assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and healthcare.”⁸¹

Moreover, Sue reports, research suggests that “perpetrators are likely to develop a warped sense of reality, callousness, anxiety, guilt, and other damaging effects.”⁸²

It appears likely that most of us— including members of oppressed or marginalized groups— are perpetrators of microaggressions. If this is so, how can we really be responsive? Are we responsible for the microaggressions we perpetrate and for taking steps to minimize them? If ignorance is a central enabling factor in microaggressions (ignorance both at the specific level of, for instance, not paying attention to your female employee's repeated requests that you call her by her full name and not an abbreviation, and then at the level of not being aware that you have implicit biases and ignorance that are causing you to perpetrate microaggressions), how can we begin to stop the cycle and what are the moral imperatives involved?

For the Kantian, the moral agent acts for reasons. While I may not be responsible for having an attitude or feeling, I can be held responsible for harboring or cultivating it,⁸³ and I can be held responsible for considering it a reason for action (i.e. for incorporating it into my maxim). But as

81 Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, 6.

82 *Ibid.*, xviii.

83 See above; see also May, 1 and *passim*.

we have seen above with Herman's discussion of self-deception about one's real maxim, ignorance of what reasons one really is acting on causes problems. Some of the same considerations Herman introduces may also help: “moral therapy,” moral education. Larry May also suggests some remedies: psychotherapy, consciousness-raising, reflection.⁸⁴ It may be a matter of moral luck that one gets an opportunity to learn about one's own implicit biases and one's own instances of committing microaggressions— for what if you genuinely never are exposed to any voice other than a racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic one?—but within the limits, one has the choice to, say, take up that opportunity for learning.

It is surely a moral duty to be ready for opportunities for moral self-improvement, for expanding one's perceptions and knowledge of what life is like for others, for seeking out opportunities to act better toward others.⁸⁵ This means confronting the less savory side of our characters, including the implicit biases and ignorance that we inevitably inherit from society, family, and culture.⁸⁶ May discusses the responsibility of persons to cultivate sensitivity, which, in his usage, is similar to responsiveness.⁸⁷ May claims that “a person is responsible for a character trait (or its consequences) if either: (a) the person was instrumental in developing the trait; or (b) the person was aware of the trait and what could be done to change it (or minimize its harmful consequences), but did not try to to change it (or to minimize its harmful

84 May, Sharing Responsibility, 5.

85 See Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 6:386-387 on the obligatory end of self-perfection.

86 See Kant, Lectures on Ethics, p.140 on the necessity of confronting prejudices.

87 According to May, the concept has “four overlapping components: perceptiveness, caring, critical appreciation, and strong motivation (56).” He also compares sensitivity to Murdoch's “attentiveness.” May, Sharing Responsibility, 57.

consequences).”⁸⁸

There seems to be a moral imperative to challenge our own ignorance (and societal ignorance); ignorance impedes responsiveness, and responsiveness impedes ignorance. For white people, for example, this means first of all acknowledging that one is white, and thus part of an oppressor group that benefits from unwarranted privilege every day in many different ways. Just by being in a “white” social location, one is constantly, as it were, receiving stolen goods. Little wonder, then, that whites are often defensive when confronted with evidence of their society's (let alone their own) racism. Is there any value in “owning up” to one's privilege? It would seem to be a start but it can risk being a cheap gesture, since of course this will not prevent one from accruing the benefits of one's white privilege. Such gestures will never be enough to counter this, but on the other hand, it is morally dangerous to simply “give in” and conclude that to be white is to be fatally morally compromised— such despair may lead to reduced efforts at challenging racism and white privilege, a withdrawal from struggle (or even from social interaction), and perhaps resentment and frustration.⁸⁹ Allowing oneself to be paralyzed by “white guilt” is counterproductive and even self-indulgent.⁹⁰ It is important to focus on taking responsibility rather than accumulating guilt and to give up on the fantasy of individually “fixing” racism, sexism, homophobia, and the like. Any individual's efforts will run into limits given the systemic nature of these phenomena. At the same time, individuals do perpetuate racism, homophobia, and

88 Ibid., 67.

89 For further discussion of the moral responsibilities of white people in this respect, see Linda Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?” *Hypatia*, Vol. 13 No.3, August 1998.

90 It may nonetheless be appropriate for white people to acknowledge and share in a sense of regret or moral taint at being (unavoidably) part of an oppressor group (see May, *Sharing Responsibility*, 1, 16). This is not the same as feeling guilty or apportioning personal blame to oneself.

sexism, and have a duty to make good-faith efforts against them. Cultivating responsiveness is the first step in doing so.

Kantians do not (cannot) take the view that our desires, attitudes, and prejudices are simply brute facts about us, not subject to education or remediation. On the contrary, desires, attitudes, and prejudices have to be taken as reasons for action⁹¹ before we can be said to act on them. As we have seen, it is not always transparently clear to us what maxim we are acting on, but we have a moral duty to make investigative efforts where it is likely there are serious problems; we are responsible for our self-cultivation as moral agents, and dealing with such barriers to responsiveness is morally important. At the same time, the Kantian distinction between perfect and imperfect duties offers, as we have seen, a reasonable way to understand our responsibilities to be neither conveniently limited to near and dear nor so overwhelming as to lead us assuredly to moral dejection.

3.6 Conclusion

Care is a moral value, a virtue, an emotion, and a practice of moral significance. While there is nonmoral care (for example, taking care of one's guitar by keeping it in tune, polishing it, etc.), moral care is, as I have defined it, responsiveness to others' needs with a view to maintaining their agency. I have argued that care, thus understood, should be a part of any complete moral theory. I have argued against a freestanding "ethic of care" (chapter one); instead, I claim, care should be a part of Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics, as we have seen in chapter two and in this chapter, is not a narrow "ethic of justice" and is not, as has often assumed to be the case,

⁹¹ By us, from the practical standpoint.

incompatible with concern for care. Rather, in Kantian ethics, justice and care should both be regarded as important values along with many other values.

My aim in this chapter has been to show that there is a place for care in Kantian ethics, properly understood. While Kantians such as O'Neill have criticized the work of early care theorists, I have argued that recent developments in the literature have rendered it less vulnerable to such criticism and more worthy of notice by Kantians. Care as responsiveness to need with a view to maintaining agency should be regarded as an important part of Kantian ethics; while sharing elements of familiar Kantian concepts such as practical love and sympathy, care is more capacious and connotes hands-on caring practice. Kant's account of autonomy can be reconciled with the main concerns of care theorists, many of whom support a relational account, once the concepts of autonomy of the will, personal autonomy, and agency are clearly distinguished. Finally, I have sketched an account of responsiveness and associated difficulties (chiefly, the problem of ignorance) from a broadly Kantian perspective.

Chapter four.

Political Care.

4.1 Introduction.

As the philosophical debate about care has developed, it has become a widely-held view that care is not and should not be limited to the private sphere. Indeed, as I pointed out in chapter one, there are many suggestions in early works in the care literature that care is relevant beyond face-to-face interactions. As I shall try to show, the political relevance of care is not merely to questions of how to organize childcare, healthcare, and eldercare but also to wider questions of social, political, and economic organization.

In this chapter, I address each of these questions, building on the foundations set out in the first three chapters. In chapter one (p.41), I gave my definition of care, which will be the basis of the discussion in the present chapter:

Care, as practice and as value, is responsiveness to need with the aim of the cared-for's welfare; its moral significance lies in the apprehension of any given person's need for care in order to be and continue as a person, as a moral agent (and the morally compelling nature of this need), and in the act of taking responsibility for doing what one can (and what is appropriate given the context, including other values) to meet that need.

I begin this chapter with a critical overview of attempts to outline a “political care.” I shall then briefly outline my own view. The good society, in my view, is characterized by care as well as justice: neither is dispensable. I shall not, here, add to the already

voluminous literature on justice; my focus will instead be on political care. My discussion will adapt my definition of care for the political context, taking the agency to be maintained through care to mean not just moral agency but political agency.

Many political theories of care have contained implicit critiques of “marketization” and, often, capitalism; I aim to draw out more explicitly the care critique. I shall argue that there is at least a serious tension between care and marketization and between care and capitalism. To achieve a caring society as I understand it— one that ensures that everyone can develop and maintain political agency— will require rethinking markets and “marketization” and deep reform (and perhaps even replacement) of capitalism.

Finally, I consider how this conception of the caring society might fit with the Kantian commitments of the preceding chapters. I shall argue that Kant's basic principles, on my interpretation, demand the inclusion of caring as a social and political value. However, there is some conflict with elements of Kant's political thought. I shall argue that some of Kant's political claims— for example, that economic and social inequality does not undermine formal legal and political equality— are mistaken. I briefly consider whether there is room in a Kantian framework for the kind of critique of capitalism I have argued for in the chapter.

4.2 Political care in the care literature

As we have seen (1.4), many of those thought of by Carol Gilligan as displaying the “different voice” of care had a strong sense of moral responsibility beyond their personal

relationships. Although Gilligan did not outline a political theory of care, we cannot say that the “different voice” is necessarily confined to the private sphere. In Maternal Thinking, Sara Ruddick applied insights gleaned from her philosophical analysis of mothering to issues of war and peace. Since the 1990s in particular, there has been increased interest in “political care” understood in various ways and a consensus that care is relevant beyond the realm of face to face relationships. Even Nel Noddings, who had, in Caring, insisted that care had to take place “face to face,” went on to develop an account of how care— exemplified in the “best homes”— could influence social policy.¹ In this section I give a critical overview of notable efforts to construe care in political terms, identifying major themes.

(i) Care and justice

As we have seen in chapter one above, the relationship between care and justice has been a central topic of discussion as the care literature has developed, with a variety of views ranging from Noddings's seeming exclusion of justice in her early work on care to Tronto's insistence that care may be dangerous if unconnected to a theory of justice. The consensus at present is that justice is necessary and important, but there is no such consensus on the precise nature of the relationship. Tronto claims that “only in a just, pluralistic, democratic society can care flourish.”² This framework is the only guarantee, she argues, that the dangers of parochialism (caring only for one's own) or

1 Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

2 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 162.

paternalism/maternalism (imposing one's view of the cared-for's good on him or her) can be avoided.³ At one point Tronto suggests that democratic values would emerge from within care⁴ but in general her view seems to be that care on its own is insufficient.

Bübeck claims that two principles of justice— the harm minimization and equality principles— arise from within the practice of care but she does not claim that her ethic of care is an overarching, complete moral or political theory; there is room for justice outside its purview. Clement argues for another possibility: care and justice are the two main moral frameworks, each irreducible to the other (and sometimes, perhaps, incompatible).

Held acknowledges the “great importance” of justice and rights but claims that care is both normatively and empirically prior to justice:

Care and its related concerns of trust and mutual consideration seem to me to form and to uphold the wider network of relations within which issues of rights and justice, utility, and the virtues should be raised.⁵

In Held's view, this normative priority follows from the empirical priority of care, as she observes:

The members of the society must care enough about one another and trust each other sufficiently to recognize them as also members of the same society.⁶

I argued in chapter one that normative priority does not follow from empirical priority and thus that this argument does not show that care is more central a value than justice.

3 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 170-171.

4 Ibid., 171.

5 Held, The Ethics of Care, 136.

6 Ibid., 135.

Nevertheless, the empirical priority claim itself deserves more consideration. Liberal theories have often reached for fear and insecurity in explaining the foundation of states; but what holds the citizens of these states together afterwards, when their fears are (apparently) defused? Patriotism in the context of the nation-state model is one possible answer, albeit an unsatisfactory one; Rawlsians can point to shared concern for justice.⁷

But as Held argues,

[F]or rights to be respected in any actual legal system or for principles of justice to be reflected in any actual constitution, there must be social relations of a fairly substantial kind connecting the members of the actual group of persons having this legal system and constitution.⁸

Similarly, Sibyl Schwarzenbach writes that a political or civic version of *philia*— broadly as Aristotle thought of it— is

an essential factor unifying even the just modern state... because political friendship emerges as a necessary condition for genuine justice.⁹

Schwarzenbach goes on to argue that civic friendship should be thought to include the sorts of care work (or “ethical reproductive activity”) historically done by women and that the ubiquity of this activity undermines arguments that society cannot be organized, at least to a far greater extent, on a co-operative basis (e.g. according to a form of democratic socialism). Like Held, Schwarzenbach thinks that people must have social bonds among

7 See Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship: Including Women in the State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 4; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Revised edition) (Cambridge, Mass.:Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1999), 415, 417, 435-6; the stability of a just society is aided by a public conception of justice and the trust and friendship this engenders.

8 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 129.

9 Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship*, 5.

themselves in order to live as citizens in a just society. However, Schwarzenbach does not share Held's view that this implies the normative priority of care (or civic friendship).

From a slightly different angle, Daniel Engster writes of care as an important part of justice; care theory is “central to any adequate theory of justice” and care can be described as “the heart of justice” because the practice of care is “necessary to sustain and foster human life and society.”¹⁰

There are two main strands here: first, human beings need care to stay alive and functioning and thus, most obviously, the practice of care is a prerequisite for any society to continue in existence. Second, caring relations (above and beyond face-to-face meeting of basic needs) provide a necessary foundation for society, and in particular for just societies. Why? As Held points out, people must care about one another in order to recognize each other as rights-bearers, as also part of society.¹¹ There are two main aspects to this, as I see it: a motivational aspect and an epistemic aspect. First, my being (and feeling) bound to my fellow members of society motivates me (or should) to play my part in ensuring that they are treated justly and that society as a whole is maintained and perhaps improved. Second, this *recognition* of others as part of society and as bound to me by social ties means (or should mean) that I cannot ignore those others, their needs, their varying circumstances, or the character of our social relations (which may be structurally oppressive, for example).

10 Daniel Engster, *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

11 They would care about each other in a non-personal sense.

(ii) Political conception of persons and citizens

A second major theme in political treatments of care is the rejection of the traditional liberal ideal of the citizen as independent, self-interested, and so forth. Paying attention to the historical experiences of women, it is argued, reveals the truth about this picture: these citizens have in fact always depended on women to perform care work, thereby freeing them to devote their time and energies to political activity in the public sphere. The citizen is not, and need not be thought of as, independent. However, I shall argue, we should tread carefully in rejecting the connection between citizenship and independence because dependence can, under some circumstances, undermine capacities for participating fully as a citizen. I shall say more about this below.

Virginia Held, in Feminist Morality, criticizes the dominant liberal conception of liberty as primarily concerning rights to be left alone and the conception of the person (and thus citizen) as being self-sufficient that accompanied it:

Women were missing from this picture. A woman could not be the free and independent citizen provided by this conception of liberty, since she was not thought of as able in any comparable sense to fend for herself, and was not permitted, except in rare cases, to be other than dependent.¹²

This picture masked the truth of human interdependence:

Behind this picture of free and equal self-sufficient citizens governing themselves have been actual families from whom these citizens received care and replenishment¹³.

¹² Virginia Held, Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society and Politics. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 162.

¹³ Ibid., 162-163.

Second, she argues that the dominance of contract as a model for social relations has had a distorting effect on our political thinking and has served to mask the unsound moral basis of actually existing societies.¹⁴ Held proposes, as a way of re-imagining society, viewing the mother-child relationship as primary but qualifies this by doubting “that we should take any one relation as paradigmatic for all the others.”¹⁵ Held goes on to argue that it may be fruitful to take the “postpatriarchal family” as a model for society, especially given the contrasts this would make clear with the social contract model. Tronto takes a similar line on dependency:

[R]ather than viewing dependency as a natural part of the human experience, political theorists emphasize dependence as the character-destroying condition. For them, to be dependent is to be without autonomy. To become dependent is to learn how to act on behalf of others, not on behalf of the self. Dependent people lose the ability to make judgments for themselves, and end up at the mercy of others on whom they are dependent.. if some citizens become too dependent then they cannot participate as citizens.¹⁶

In Tronto's view, care provides a corrective to this liberal narrative:

In order to make these claims, political theorists must ignore the reality that all humans are born into a condition of dependency, but manage to learn to become autonomous.

..The threat of dependence has been greatly exaggerated by thinkers who have not really considered its nature.¹⁷

14 Held, Feminist Morality, 194.

15 Ibid., 196

16 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 163.

17 Ibid., 163.

By “autonomy” here, Tronto does not have in mind what Kant thinks of as autonomy, as we have seen in chapter three above. Tronto's use is closer to material independence or even self-sufficiency than Kantian “autonomy of the will.”¹⁸ However, the picture is complicated as we move to Kant's political philosophy from his ethics because there he does indeed base claims to “active citizenship” on material independence, as we shall see below. Tronto is right that political theory has conveniently ignored the care work done by (mostly) women that has served men's needs and freed them to devote their time and energy to “public sphere” activities. This has allowed the fiction of the independent, self-sufficient citizen to dominate and arguably distort political theory and practice. As Eva Kittay points out, “the deeper dependencies of infancy and early childhood, frail old age, disease and disability, do not vanish in a revolution”;¹⁹ they are ineliminable, if sometimes ameliorable, features of human life and thus cannot reasonably be ignored in political thought.

However, I do not think it follows that some sorts of dependence are not a threat to one's capacity to be a citizen. Everyone depends on others in some ways, but some kinds of dependence also disempower in subtle and not-so-subtle ways because of the relationship between the dependent person and the person or entity on whom he or she is dependent; it depends on power. My dependence on you (or compared to you) often means that I am at a disadvantage in terms of power, influence, education, self-confidence, self-respect, etc and you are at an unfair advantage. Moreover, in unequal societies, the better-

18 We should note that not all humans learn to become “autonomous” in this sense.

19 Eva Feder Kittay, Kittay, Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.

off are often able to offset some of the ill-effects of dependence (e.g. frail old age, disability, and so on) in ways that the less well-off cannot. Although Tronto does not say so, this gives further support to her point that genuine care requires a just democratic order.²⁰

(iii) Can there be caring political relations?

It has been thought that caring relations can only exist “face to face,” as it were, and hence that the idea of political or global caring relations was incoherent. For example, Nel Noddings describes care as a one-to-one relation between carer and cared-for; although her book on social policy, Starting at Home, emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of caring relations as an aim in social policy, it seems clear from her proposals that this is meant largely at the level of policies supporting face-to-face caring relations. Bubeck defines care in narrow terms as “the meeting of the needs of one person by another person where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself.”²¹ Her main recommendations for political applications of her theory are at the level of ensuring access to face-to-face care for all.²² Many care theorists,

20 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 163, 171. Although Tronto criticizes much equality-talk, she sees equality as a political goal; thus, her conception of a just democratic order would presumably be egalitarian in some sense. See Moral Boundaries 134, 164-5. See also Tronto, “Care as a political concept” in Feminists Revisioning the Political Nancy Hirschmann and Christine di Stefano, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) 149-151 and Tronto, “Vicious and Virtuous Circles of Care: When Decent Caring Privileges Social Irresponsibility” Socializing Care, ed. M. Hamington and D. Miller (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) 3-21.

21 Bubeck, Care, Gender and Justice, 129.

22 Ibid., 244.

however, assert that caring relations can exist not only among people personally known to one another, but at community, state, and even global levels. I broadly agree.

Virginia Held argues for caring relations at the personal, political and global level, claiming a role for them as the center of morality:

The ethics of care provides grounds for arguing that that we should care about one another as fellow members of communities, including gradually of the global community on which the future health of our mutual environments depends.²³

She continues, suggesting global caring relations could shape more morally acceptable political policies and perhaps²⁴ institutions:

A globalization of caring relations would help enable people of different states and cultures to live in peace, to respect each other's rights, to care together for their environments, and to improve the lives of their children.²⁵

Indeed, the suggestion is that, conversely, political institutions or policies may have a role in maintaining caring relations in these wider senses:

A caring society would attend to the health of the social relations between its members.²⁶

Taking a similar relational approach, Fiona Robinson focuses on care at the global level:

An era of global interdependence demands a *relational* ethics which places the

23 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 119.

24 She does not frame the issue in terms of institutions but presumably one major way a society as such could so attend would be through institutions. Individuals can make their societies more caring, to be sure, but the point here is that *society* as such can promote caring relations.

25 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 168.

26 *Ibid.*, 136.

highest value on the promotion, restoration, or creation of good social and personal relations and gives priority to the needs and concerns of 'concrete' rather than 'generalizable' others.²⁷

The reference to relational ethics rather than institutions or politics gives a somewhat unclear impression. Is the cultivation of good social relations (as demanded by global interdependence) a moral obligation of individuals or is it political? Given Robinson's larger project— a rethinking of international relations theory using a care perspective— I assume that it is at least partly the latter. Contrasting her views with the liberal, justice-focused theories she sees as dominant in international relations theory, she continues:

A relational approach to care ethics is able to address moral problems of human suffering first, by recognizing that an understanding of the nature and patterns of personal and social relationships must be the starting point for any serious moral enquiry. Second, although this approach places a high moral value on the existence and maintenance of relationships characterized by continuous attention, responsiveness, and care, it also recognizes that there exists, within all relationships, the potential for exploitation and coercion. Thus, the approach is committed to the promotion of healthy, caring relations among individuals and groups, not through the application of some minimal, abstract principles of what justice demands, but according to the demands of the given situation, where real social relations among concrete persons need to be created or restored.²⁸

27 Fiona Robinson, Globalizing Care: Feminist Theory, Ethics and International Relations. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999) 46.

28 Robinson, Globalizing Care, 132.

While I do not agree with Robinson's rejection of principle and her focus *instead* on attention to the quality of relationships, as will be clear from the foregoing chapters, I think she is right that caring social relations are possible, morally desirable, and should be taken more seriously in political thought; further, like Held, she is right to suggest that much as caring relations support better policies and institutions, likewise better policies and institutions support caring relations (at the personal, political, and global levels). In my view, global poverty is fundamentally a problem of (massive) injustice; however, caring relations at the global-political level are necessary to address it.²⁹ Caring relations centrally involve responsiveness to the needs of others as moral and political agents but this should not be understood merely as an injunction to, say, donate food aid to communities where malnutrition is a problem if the malnutrition is caused by injustice—indeed, this would hardly be *relational* at all.³⁰ Rather, genuine (political-global) responsiveness should involve asking why these problems have arisen and, if (as many believe) they are caused by structural injustices, addressing those injustices (for example, structural adjustment programs' immiserating effects in the name of “helping” countries pay back highly morally questionable “debts”). Taking caring about global poverty, to require only, say, donating cash to charity, is inadequate in the same way as it would be inadequate caring to tend to a child's grazed knee while ignoring the schoolyard bullying that caused it insofar as there is at least some reason to believe that the problem is deeper

29 That is not to say that there could not be genuinely “natural disasters” not caused by injustice to which caring global-political relations would respond.

30 In a caring relationship of any kind, one should not simply decide on one's own what is the more convenient (to oneself) way to help the other person in the relationship and do that unilaterally; rather, one listens, one tries to understand, and to help the other as required in a context of respect, understanding, and good communication.

and might better be resolved through institutional or policy change. For example, if structural adjustment policies worsen poverty, then there is a case for changing the institutions that impose them (e.g. the IMF). Obviously the “person in the street” cannot be *individually* responsible for changing the IMF but *citizens* can advocate for such policy changes in various ways.

As the above should suggest, caring relations at the non-personal (i.e. political, global) level will inevitably differ in some ways from those at the personal level. Obviously, I cannot phone all my fellow-citizens or fellow human beings to see how they are doing, or in general respond to their individual needs as moral and political agents. There must be some large-scale analogues. Schwarzenbach suggests that they include

recognized standards concerning the treatment of persons, say, in a knowledge of the nature of the constitution, its quality, of its general level of support among different elements of the population, in what is publicly expected of persons, what is due them, and so on. Such public norms of regard and habitual civic behavior are the normal way citizens now “know” of each other's reciprocal goodwill. Civic friendship—in contrast to personal friendship— works via the public processes of the state's social and political, legal, and educative institutions.³¹

There are many challenges in this process, for example, the temptation to assume that others are more like us than they really are, or problems of ignorance, implicit bias, or other obstacles to understanding one's fellow members of society. More concrete problems include levels of access to these educative processes; this is another reason to believe that

31 Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship*, 54.

caring relations and justice are mutually supporting, since unequal access to education and media undermine the development of caring social relations, and lack of caring social relations make such unjust arrangements more likely.

Tronto emphasizes the potential of care to make us better citizens, presumably in the context of caring social relations:

If through the practices of giving and receiving care we were to become adept at caring, I suggest that not only would we have become more caring and more moral people, but we would also have become better citizens in a democracy.³²

This could be read as meaning that instances of face-to-face caring would make us better citizens, without a strong sense that this would involve social caring relations,³³ but given her overall project, I think a more natural reading is that both/either personal or social caring relations might make us better citizens, which would include having caring social relations. This is suggested by another statement of Tronto's theme:

In all, to include the value of caring in addition to commitments to other liberal values (such as a commitment to people's rights, to due process, to obeying laws and following agreed-upon political procedures) makes citizens more thoughtful, more attentive to the needs of others, and therefore better democratic citizens.³⁴

Schwarzenbach suggests that formal training might be needed in the “emotional and perceptual competence” necessary for the practice of civic friendship, proposing

³² Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 167.

³³ This reading might be suggested by this passage: “The qualities of attentiveness, of responsibility, of competence, or responsiveness, need not be restricted to the immediate objects of our care, but can also inform our practices as citizens” Ibid., 167-168.

³⁴ Ibid., 169.

mandatory civil service (along the lines of military service) for young citizens.³⁵

Note that having the capacity for *personal* caring relations does not necessarily mean having the capacity for *political* caring relations; one can be adept at one and not the other.

There are several ways in which this might be true. Of particular importance for our purposes here might be the inhibiting effects of various sorts of privilege (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability) on the development of political caring relations in particular (although it probably would impede personal caring relations too if these were across lines of privilege).

(iv) Care, theory, and action

There are some suggestions that care offers a bridge, so to speak, from political theory to political action. In ethics, as we saw in chapter one, care arguably does highlight the importance of “hands-on,” positive action in moral life; perhaps there is an analogous point to be made here, although I believe some theorists may overstate the differences. Tronto argues against what she calls a “morality-first” approach, in which we “simply posit care as a moral value that should inform politics” because “[b]y itself, outside of any transformed context, care is not a sufficiently broad moral idea to solve the problems of distance, inequality, and privilege...”³⁶ She also claims that advocates of care as virtue “have been unable to show a convincing way of turning these virtues into a realistic

35 Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship*, 231-233.

36 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 158.

approach to the kinds of problems that caring will confront in the real world.”³⁷ Instead, she claims that her concept of care is both a moral and a political one. Tronto suggests that care offers a “way to include as political actors women and others who have been traditionally excluded”³⁸ in that it is “a way of framing political issues that makes their impact, and concern with human lives, direct and immediate.”³⁹ As I reconstruct it, the argument runs: (i) lack of political involvement on the part of marginalized groups is a major cause of the fact that a convincing way has not been found to apply care in the “real world”, (ii) redescribing social issues in terms of care— in particular, using the question “who cares for whom?” as a prism through which to view society— is likely to make members of those marginalized groups feel more connected to social issues and possibly more empowered to do something about them, given that most care work is done by members of marginalized groups, thus (iii) we are more likely to find a way to apply care in the “real world” if care is used as a prism through which to view society.⁴⁰

Held suggests that justice approaches to global inequality and poverty founder on questions of application and enforcement and that care could do better:

The policies that permit and promote the prosperity of the developed countries and impoverishing of the “developing” countries can be attacked on grounds of justice.

But the mechanisms to enforce anything remotely like global economic justice are

37 Ibid., 161.

38 Ibid., 175.

39 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 177.

40 “Care as a political concept requires that we recognize how care— especially the question ‘who cares for whom?’— marks relations of power in our society and marks the intersection of gender, race, and class with care-giving that we noted earlier.” Ibid., 168-169.

almost entirely absent. Persuasive efforts such as those presently taking place to reduce the subsidies that governments in the richest countries provide their agribusinesses, rendering farmers in poor countries unable to compete, have made little progress. Arguments based on considerations of care and promoted through institutional and personal interconnections would be no more utopian and might be more effective. The ethics of care is more suited than the ethics of justice for understanding the particularities of different situations, groups, and cultures, to see what really will improve the lives of children, women, and men.⁴¹

Similarly, Robinson's main objection to obligation-based Kantian responses to global poverty is that they are

concerned only with whether people *should* act morally, not with whether they *will*. Also under consideration is the view that we, as moral theorists, can be responsible only for providing justifications of moral action— that is answering the question 'Is this act morally justified?' rather than the questions 'What will motivate people to act morally?' and 'What form should our moral responses take?' or quite simply 'How can I help?' An approach to ethics which is concerned only with the construction of an elegant and rigorous theoretical test for whether principles 'count' as 'moral' may deserve our intellectual respect, but it does not help us to get any closer to the deeply social and political problems surrounding the human suffering and privation brought on by world poverty.⁴²

41 Held, The Ethics of Care, 164.

42 Robinson, Globalizing Care, 152-153.

It is true, I think, that attempts to gain support for policies that will ameliorate the situation of poorer countries have largely failed, and that more caring societies would surely do better; however, we risk obscuring the grave injustice at the root of global poverty and inequality if we seek to replace justice with care in these debates. It would be better to say that more care will help us deal with these pressing injustices by making genuine responsiveness a moral and political priority.

Moreover, criticizing moral and political philosophy for concentrating on problems of justification, principle, and so on instead of getting people to act in more caring ways is problematic. First, surely we need both, for it hardly makes sense to advocate certain standards of behavior if we cannot give convincing reasons for them; second, getting people to act more morally is not just a matter for moral and political philosophers but also for practitioners of other disciplines such as psychology or sociology (and perhaps philosophers in other areas such as epistemology, for example, those working on problems of systematic ignorance or credibility of testimony, which have implications for these issues).

(v) Needs

Perhaps the clearest political implication of care is that it emphasizes needs (often with the added suggestion that too much attention has been paid to rights relative to needs).⁴³

An explicit statement occurs in Tronto's work.⁴⁴ Tronto writes that care “posits meeting

43 See, for example, Bubeck, Care, Gender, and Justice, 129; Held, The Ethics of Care, 135; Noddings, Starting at Home, 227.

44 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 169, 171, 175; see also Tronto, “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments.”

needs for care, rather than the pursuit of profit, as the highest social goal.”⁴⁵ A crucial question here is *which sorts of needs?* If we are to take Tronto's definition of care as pointing to which needs might be prioritized, the picture is quite broad: any kind of “maintenance” or “repair” might fit.⁴⁶ This is of course a difficult problem; the boundary between what I need and what I want is unclear, especially unless we can specify “what I need in order to x.” Tronto's definition of care would suggest “what I need in order to live in the world as well as possible”— still very broad, and possibly quite extravagant. Tronto notes:

Needs are culturally determined; if some people in society seem to have disproportionate needs, that is a matter for the individuals in the society to evaluate and perhaps to change.⁴⁷

More must be said here. In capitalist societies, it is no accident that some people develop more lavish “needs” than others: two main causes are (1) deeply-ingrained class differences with correspondingly different life expectations and (2) a consumer mentality honed through propaganda and advertising. It matters a great deal what the class structure of a given society is when we try to examine “needs” critically and it certainly seems very difficult for individuals to change their needs in this kind of context precisely because they are “culturally determined.”

Engster offers a more limited view, focusing on individuals' basic needs, which he

45 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 175.

46 For the full definition, see Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 103.

47 Tronto, Moral Boundaries, 171.

takes to mean what they need in order to function in their society.⁴⁸ What it means to “function in society” or fail to do so is a matter of interpretation but Engster tends toward a conservative reading, cautious of introducing potentially contentious wider requirements (he contrasts his view with the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum). What an individual needs will, he points out, vary according to social context: for example, having a telephone number might be a requirement for social functioning in one country and not in another.

I propose a slightly more specific criterion for needs relevant to care as a political idea, namely, what a person needs in order to maintain what I call political agency. This will include what a person needs to develop and continue as an agent *simpliciter* (e.g. nutrition, shelter, some form of basic education, some form of emotional nurturing especially during childhood, etc.) but will add certain requirements for political agency. These will no doubt vary according to social context; for example, one would be excluded from a great deal of public political discourse in contemporary Europe or the United States if one did not have regular Internet access, but rather less so in many poorer countries. Political agency is the capacity, or set of capacities, that enables a person to act politically. This is wider than citizenship, for one can be politically active in a state of which one is not a citizen. However, the relative failure, thus far, of political theory and practice to engage meaningfully with the reality of vastly increased flows of migration and consequent pressures on the idea of citizenship does pose a problem; lacking citizenship rights, or a path to citizenship, in a state where one lives and works obviously places severe

48 Engster, Heart of Justice, 27-29.

constraints on one's political agency.

Concrete examples of political agency might include engaging in debate through conventional and social media, public meetings, private conversations, academic activity, etc; labor organizing; participation in activist groups or political parties; attending protests, rallies, or teach-ins. What might a person need in order to do these things, beyond the requirements for agency *simpliciter* mentioned above? A preliminary list might include language skills; access to and training in technology (e.g. Internet access and the skills to use it); sufficient education to participate in political debate, to understand the workings of the state, and to understand relevant historical context (admittedly a controversial requirement to cash out); and some perhaps less tangible (but significant) factors such as free time, self-confidence, self-respect, some sense of connection to others with whom one will engage in debate or activism— that is, some caring social relations to bring people together in such activity, to embed the process in mutual respect and engender the reasonable expectation on each agent's part that it is safe to engage in such activities— this will certainly include physical safety, but arguably also freedom from harassment, freedom from atmospheres of serious hostility, disrespect, belittlement, shaming, and so on.

Now, it may be problematic to legislate for someone's self-respect, but often one can legislate for its social basis.⁴⁹ One way of framing these issues might be to identify systemic problems, e.g. a widespread social phenomenon of low(er) self-respect among women in a given society, and considering whether, all things considered, state action is

⁴⁹ Compare Rawls on the social bases of self-respect; he argues that the two principles of justice chosen in the original position will support people's self-respect. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (2nd ed.), 155-157 and 477-479.

warranted (for example, special programs for public schools designed to promote healthy self-respect, or state funding for research on the topic). In some cases it may be that state action is inappropriate (because intrusive, likely ineffective, expensive, or unjust) to deal with the problem.

(vi) The tension between care, markets, and capitalism

The final theme I shall address is the extent to which care is the basis for systemic political change or, more modestly, policy reform (especially in areas such as social welfare and childcare).⁵⁰ I begin with a brief survey of care theorists' views on these matters; then, via a discussion of texts by Virginia Held and Daniel Engster, I examine the tension between care, markets, and capitalism.

Noddings rejects the idea of formulating “utopias” and thus does not give any systemic arguments; rather, she favors investigating what “the best homes” are like and using these insights to guide social policy.⁵¹ She offers fairly detailed proposals on issues such as homelessness; the central concern underlying such proposals is to “establish, maintain, and enhance caring relations”.⁵²

Bübeck, as we have seen in 1.3 above, thinks principles of justice arise from the practice of care. These principles, she claims, can be applied “not only to private and

50 A good deal of work outside of philosophy has been done in recent years on the reorganization of care work, especially childcare; for example, Mona Harrington's *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics*, Joan Williams's *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What to Do About It*, and Nancy Folbre's *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*.

51 Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 227.

52 *Ibid.*, 301-302.

public care, but also to considerations of social justice more generally.”⁵³ At the very least, they would support “welfare state type public institutions”⁵⁴ to even out inequalities in access to care. More tentatively, Bubeck proposes mandatory care service (along the lines of military service) as an obligation of citizens.⁵⁵

Clement argues that care is relevant in the public sphere as justice is in the private sphere (and, of course, vice versa). The process of bringing care into the public sphere will change the way we think about justice, for example emphasizing the importance of positive rights.⁵⁶ This leaves some room for a more radical political care but Clement's focus is on policy reform:

If a policy takes a contextual approach, is based on a social conception of the self, and prioritizes maintaining relationships and meeting individual needs, then I will call it a version of the ethic of care, regardless of what its advocates call it.⁵⁷

On this basis, Clement claims that what Ruddick calls “contextual pacifism” and “at their best, social welfare programs”⁵⁸ are what she calls public versions of the ethic of care.

Tronto thinks that care “is probably ultimately anti-capitalistic because it posits meeting needs for care, rather than the pursuit of profit, as the highest social goal.”⁵⁹

53 Bubeck, *Care, Gender and Justice*, 243.

54 *Ibid.*, 244.

55 *Ibid.*, 259-260.

56 Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice*, 81.

57 *Ibid.*, 90.

58 *Ibid.*, 90.

59 Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 175.

However, she does not pursue the thought explicitly elsewhere. It is certainly clear that she thinks care, when combined with a commitment to liberal democratic values, will be transformative but whether this amounts to systemic change, specifically with regard to capitalism, is not completely clear.

Much of Virginia Held's work on political and global care suggests radical political change. Already in Feminist Morality she was redefining concepts such as liberty in feminist, care-based ways, criticizing the prevalent view of liberty as “absence of interference” since it “sharply limits the freedom of those not favored by existing economic, social, political, and legal arrangements.”⁶⁰ She continues:

Without the means to acquire what we need, noninterference does not amount to freedom. Anyone lacking what she needs to stay alive, and lacking what she needs to act at all, is of course not able to act freely.⁶¹

At the very least, this is a basis for arguing for a strong welfare state (but arguably more than that, if freedom includes access to decent jobs):

We must be enabled to live and to act freely through having access to decent jobs, minimum incomes, adequate care for our children, and affordable housing and medical care.⁶²

Held explicitly expresses caution about the welfare state as the answer when she remarks on “the degree to which the welfare state substituted dependence on the state for dependence on husbands rather than offering women, at even minimal levels, liberty and

⁶⁰ Held, Feminist Morality, 163.

⁶¹ Held, Feminist Morality, 163.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 164.

equality.”⁶³ Perhaps this could be remedied by reforming welfare states in ways more empowering of women; perhaps the idea of the welfare state itself requires rethinking or replacement. It is not precisely clear from Held's remark, but there seems to be room for the latter, at least.

In her later work, Held argues that caring relations, rather than “promoting” self-interest, should be at the center of political and ethical thought, with “attending to the needs of every child” a priority.⁶⁴ The general direction of this re-centering has radical potential but it is not clear exactly what changes would, in Held's view, be required to achieve it. Would it require more progressive policies, or more substantial reform of institutions, or even systemic change? Held's discussion of the limits of markets provides further hints of her approach. She argues that the ethics of care provides grounds for establishing which activities should be “marketized”— i.e. governed by market norms⁶⁵— focusing on the cases of health care and education, in which there has been a striking increase in “marketization” in recent decades, especially in the United States. Indeed, it is now not thought unusual to speak of “the healthcare industry” or the “education industry.”

The health and level of education of the populace seems to have been displaced as the

63 Ibid., 164.

64 Held, The Ethics of Care, 136.

65 Market principles or norms are, for Held, those of maximizing economic gain. (Held, The Ethics of Care, 110.) We might flesh out this understanding by including also norms of (formally) free exchange of commodities, competition, individual consumer choices driving price setting and production decisions, property rights, contract, and so on. See Robert Kuttner Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4 and David Beetham, “Market Economy and Democratic Polity” in Civil Society in Democratization, Peter Burnell and Peter Calvert, eds. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 79. Market economies can be of different kinds since these norms can be fleshed out differently and the way the legal and political system regulates these areas may also differ. Opposition to the “marketization” of, say, healthcare and education, usually focuses on the unacceptability of treating them as commodities to be valued only or primarily in terms of the price they can command in the market and distributed according to purchasing power and not need or entitlement.

major criteria for judging the effectiveness of healthcare and education, odd as it may be.

Held argues that “liberal individualism” does not provide a basis for determining which activities should be marketized; instead, the ethics of care is said to provide such a basis—the moral value of caring relations:

In practices such as those involved in education, child care, health care, culture, and protecting the environment, market norms limited only by rights should not prevail, even if the market is fair and efficient, because markets are unable to express and promote many values important to these practices, such as mutually shared caring concern.⁶⁶

Arguing against the marketization of even these activities (and not others) presents a fairly radical prospect: education, child care, health care, culture, and environmental protection together cover a lot of social life. However, questions arise. First, what does it mean to demarketize environmental protection? If it is narrowly construed, it would leave the activities of industries that cause environmental problems in the market, but if it is widely construed, it would mean radical changes in how industry is regulated and presumably a significant increase in democratic control over it. Second, what of “peripherals” that promote educational inequalities, such as extra tutoring and other services for the children of the rich, or the need of poorer college students to work while they study (unless “demarketizing education” means also ensuring subsistence for all students)? Third, what of the social and economic factors that aggravate inequalities in health, such as the poorer access of poorer people to healthy food, or perhaps less tangible factors such as the stress

66 Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 120.

produced by racism, homophobia, etc? It is true that activities governed by markets can be regulated, but if they are regulated strongly enough to address the sorts of concerns I have mentioned, this takes us far from the “ideal type” of the “free” capitalist market because the deeper social, economic, and political background— what Rawls calls the basic structure of society— also undergoes change.

Another way to ground this type of argument about limiting marketization— and one that might help clarify some of the questions posed above— is in terms of my conception of political care as responsiveness to those needs that are relevant to political agency. Our question with respect to marketization will thus be *does marketization support or undermine the conditions for the development and maintenance of political agency for all persons?*

The qualification “for all persons” is one worth highlighting. If the relationship between care and equality is sometimes unclear, especially in “care ethics,” it is not so on my understanding of care, since I set it within the framework of Kantian ethics (see chapters two and three above), in which the equal moral worth of all persons is a central principle.⁶⁷

Let us recall some conditions for political agency introduced in subsection (v) above: basic needs for agency *simpliciter* (e.g. food, shelter, basic education, some form of emotional nurturing especially during childhood, etc.) and additions for political agency

⁶⁷ There are persons who, because of cognitive disabilities, may have limited capacities for political agency— in extreme cases, perhaps little or no such capacity. What can my understanding of political care say of them? First, whatever capacity to participate politically they have should be supported even where it does not rise to the level necessary for, say, qualifying to vote in elections. There is more to political agency than the exercise of formal citizenship rights. Second, political care hardly exhausts the category of moral and political duties toward people with cognitive disabilities.

such as access to fora of public debate (e.g. Internet access and skills, transport), sufficient education to engage in political debate, sufficient free time to act politically, self-confidence and self-respect, and some level of caring social relations (sufficient to bring people together in political activities in an atmosphere of reasonable safety, mutual respect, and so on).

On my account, these conditions must be available to every person equally. Now our question is *can markets ensure this?* First, absent equality of resources— which would require separate justification— basing access to healthcare, education, Internet access, and so on purchasing power will mean unequal access. Second, allowing healthcare, education, communications, and transport, among other things, to be run only or primarily on the basis of market norms will tend to distort and undermine much of what is valuable in them and will tend to result in lower quality of healthcare, education, transport and so on, especially for those with less purchasing power. It is also worth noting that practices of care are not, generally, highly valued in market terms. Where practices of care are in the wage labor market, they are often poorly paid and poorly regarded (as “unskilled,” unproductive, inefficient, etc); where they are outside the wage labor market, they are considered not valuable at all (consider people's reactions to maternity leave!) and are poorly-regarded, although lip-service is paid to the value of mothers' efforts.⁶⁸ Markets just cannot comprehend, as it were, the value of these caring practices (their use value, as opposed to exchange value, one might say). As Schwarzenbach points out, the rise of the

⁶⁸ If we take healthcare as an example of a caring practice, it is certainly true that there are very highly-paid workers in that field. However, the highest paid workers in healthcare are not those whose work most closely approximates caring directly for others; hospital administrators and doctors are better paid than, say, the nurses and nurses' aides who spend far more time with patients, helping them, meeting their physical and often emotional needs, and so on.

market brought with it a “veneration of production” and an accompanying devaluation of what she terms reproductive praxis (which is similar to the idea of care as practice).⁶⁹

A caring society, then, will limit the marketization of goods necessary for the development and maintenance of political agency for all. Presumably this will involve some kind of state provision of healthcare, education, transport, communication networks, and so on but there are many ways of doing so and non-state provision is not necessarily rejected (for example, non-profit community healthcare centers or a local childcare co-operative, neither of which would be marketized). These are open questions; the central point is that such necessities for political agency cannot be left to the market if political agency is to be for all persons.

Some conditions for the development and maintenance of political agency do not admit of such a (relatively) straightforward account: I have in mind here free time, self-confidence, self-respect, and caring social relations. Finding a way to organize society so that everyone has access to these conditions is not a matter of public provision of goods such as healthcare and education, which is a familiar enough policy position, but may involve more radical change.⁷⁰

Ensuring that everyone has sufficient free time to be a political agent is not a matter of deciding whether something should or should not be marketized; rather, the question is reform of work. First, of course, we would have to determine how much free time is necessary for the development, maintenance, and exercise of political agency; this is a

⁶⁹ Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship*, 64.

⁷⁰ Preserving conditions of self-respect for all, and indeed preserving the conditions for caring social relations, would (more modestly) require that any welfare state-type provision be carried out in ways that avoid stigmatizing or humiliating recipients.

huge topic in itself and much beyond the scope of the present work. What seems clear is that many people, in all classes, do not find themselves with a lot of time to devote to public affairs; this seems especially true in capitalist societies of a more “laissez-faire” character, such as the United States.⁷¹ Assuming that in such societies, a reduction in work-time would be needed to ensure everyone had sufficient free time to develop, maintain, and exercise political agency, the change required would be effective legislation limiting work-time. Obviously there is a precedent in the long struggle of labor unions for weekends, the 8-hour day, and so on; what I am proposing is a revival of that struggle as well as an additional consideration in favor of its goals.

To develop, maintain, and exercise one's political agency fully requires some less tangible conditions: self-confidence, self respect, having one's voice listened to and respected, and safety from violence, harassment, and microaggressions. Various kinds of oppression—including racism, sexism, and homophobia—undermine these conditions in ways both simple and complex, from the straightforward silencing effect of intimidation and violence to the long-term psychological effects of internalized stigmatization, insult, and stereotype. The divisive effects of large income and wealth inequalities can impede the development of caring social relations.⁷² As I have noted, some of these conditions are easier to legislate for than others, but there are many ways in which state action can help secure these conditions, for example through hate crimes legislation, funding research,

71 For a detailed account, documenting the decline of free time in the United States between the 1970s and 1990s, see Juliet Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

72 See Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), especially chapter four.

funding various types of agencies, engaging in public education programs, and (more ambitiously) reducing income inequality. Nevertheless, there will surely be limits on such interventions based on other considerations (e.g. of justice).

It may well be that deeper change would be required to meet these conditions; perhaps capitalism and my version of political care are in unsustainable tension. Or perhaps a more reformist solution will suffice. Daniel Engster's book Heart of Justice provides a version of the latter view. Rather than fostering caring relations in society generally or in the workplace, his version of care theory focuses on basic needs of individuals:

Care theory, as I define it, aims only to ensure that all individuals can meet their biological and developmental needs and the needs of their dependents. As long as all individuals have real opportunities to work at adequately paying jobs, and policies exist (such as those discussed in Chapter 2) to support parenting, childcare, education, health care, and other caring activities, most individuals should be able to survive, develop, and achieve basic functioning even without a radical reform of the workplace.⁷³

In Engster's view, a focus on caring relations is too wide and demanding a theory.

However, as I have argued, a wider set of conditions underlies political agency, which I take to be the fundamental object of political care. Moreover, to speak of care and a caring society does not seem possible without taking into account their relational aspect. Caring societies are not just about individuals' basic functioning but also about relationships; is this or that society one in which the members of society care about and for each other? Are

73 Engster, Heart of Justice, 137-138.

the face-to-face caring relations that nurture us supported not just by material resources and policies such as parental leave but fostered (instead of undermined) by the wider political, economic, and social background?

Schwarzenbach offers a more radical proposal; via a “strong” reading of the difference principle, she argues for a form of market socialism as the form of economic organization that best expresses what she calls civic friendship (which has many similarities with political care, as I understand it).⁷⁴ Many of the considerations discussed in the foregoing may well support such a system. I remain open to the possibility that arrangements yet more distant from capitalism may be better expressions of the value of political care; however, the examination of such arrangements would require far more detailed treatment than it is possible to give here. I can only indicate some lines of inquiry given some apparent tensions between care and capitalism.

If a broadly Marxist account of class hierarchy in capitalism is correct, then capitalism has a tendency to undermine caring social (and indeed personal) relations. It is beyond the scope of the present work to attempt a vindication of such accounts; hence, my sketch of this tension is conditional. Capitalism, on this view, requires a division between the class that owns the means of production (and that on this basis effectively controls culture, law, and politics) and the class that must work for the capitalists in order to survive (and that lacks control not only at work but in culture, law, and politics). This hierarchy, and the conflict of interests that goes along with it, cannot produce the trust, goodwill, willingness to learn about the other, and so on that are needed for caring social relations. Among the

74 Schwarzenbach, *On Civic Friendship* pp. 164-175.

working class, class inequality itself, and alienated and exploitative work under capitalism will undermine self-respect, self-confidence, and so on. Furthermore, if it is true that capitalism fosters a view of persons as (and indeed fosters the development of persons as) merely self-interested, acquisitive, uncooperative, individualistic, and so on, then capitalism cannot be considered hospitable to the development or maintenance of caring personal or social relations.

4.3 Kant and political care

It may seem at the outset quite impossible to reconcile my commitment to a broadly Kantian framework (chapters 1-3) with political care, especially when one turns from Kant's ethical works to his political philosophy. The *Rechtslehre* (the first part of The Metaphysics of Morals) and other minor political writings contain much that is antithetical to the idea that a society should be caring and that a caring society will organize care work equitably and ensure that all its members have what they need to maintain their political agency. Kant's insistence on a category of "passive citizenship" encompassing women and those men who lack economic independence (as Kant construes it) is notorious; many are also dismayed by the centrality property rights assumes in Kant's account of the state and his refusal to acknowledge the conflict between economic inequality and formal legal and political equality. I shall argue that some of Kant's political claims contradict the basic principles of his ethics. I shall further argue that those basic principles demand a caring society (at least in the sense of "care" that I have outlined above).

The Kantian political story begins with the thought that if people are going to live

together, they will need to enter a “lawful” state:

From private right in the state of nature there proceeds the postulate of public right: when you cannot avoid living side by side with all others, you ought to leave the state of nature and proceed with them into a rightful condition, that is, a condition of distributive justice.- The ground of this postulate can be explicated analytically from the concept of right in external relations, in contrast with violence.⁷⁵

How does this fit with the idea found in many care theorists that caring social relations are necessary for justice, rights, and civil society itself? While Kant's account is not meant to be historical (the original contract is an “idea of reason”⁷⁶), it does reflect a (fashionable!) belief that the potential for violent disputes (in Kant's story, mainly about the use of objects, which leads to property rights) pushes us from state of nature to civil society. In his “Idea for Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” Kant echoes Rousseau in claiming that it is man's desire for status that pushes him from “barbarism to culture” and facilitates the unfolding of the human species' potential. Kant uses the term “social unsociability” to describe the tension between man's (sic.) desire to live among others and his desire to impose his will on others, which leads to conflict. One major center of conflict and possibly violence is the use of external objects; nonprovisional property rights are necessary in order for people to use objects without the constant risk of violent conflict and nonprovisional property rights can only exist in a civil state.

Historically, it is not hard to see how Kant is responding to the concerns of the

75 Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 86 (6:307)

76 Kant, “On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, But It Does Not Apply in Practice’” in Kant: Political Writings, Hans Reiss, ed., H.B Nisbet, transl. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,) 79 (8:297).

developing bourgeois class. However, as Herman notes,⁷⁷ there is room for maneuver: Kant does not specify the type of property to be instituted and in principle the issue could be dealt with by means of communal types of property rights. (There is little reason to think Kant himself would have approved of such interpretations but that is not my standard for an acceptable theory built on basic Kantian principles.) Those of us who are committed to care as a moral value and to the creation of caring societies need not deny that dealing with conflict and violence is one function of the state. However, Kant's focus on conflict as both problem and source of human development is revealing; absent is the complicating feature of women's care work, a practice that cannot easily be fitted in to this picture. Including women does not of course remove the possibility of conflict and violence but it does make its centrality to such accounts of the basis of civil society seem all the more strange: where are the caring personal and social relations needed to maintain it?⁷⁸

One distinctive feature of Kant's social contract theory is the notion that the civil state is “an end in itself which they all *ought to share* and which is thus an absolute and primary duty in all external relationships whatsoever among human beings (who cannot avoid mutually influencing each other).”⁷⁹ It is not, as in other social contract theories, merely a way of settling conflict among mutually hostile persons but a necessity for the full

77 Barbara Herman, *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 43.

78 The question is rhetorical; they are in the “private” sphere. But as feminists have long pointed out, to consign them to an ignored “private” sphere is to conceal much of relevance to the public, political sphere. Moreover, a just civil society requires not only private caring relations among personal friends and family but also caring *social* relations expressed through institutions, principles, movements, etc.

79 Kant, “On the Common Saying,” 73 (8:289), my italics. See also Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 86 (6:307).

expression of freedom.⁸⁰

Kant's idea of right (*Recht*) seems at first glance to offer a very narrow basis for the state and state action:

The concept of right, insofar as it is related to an obligation corresponding to it (i.e. the moral concept of right), has to do, first, only with the external and indeed practical relation of one person to another, insofar as their actions, as deeds, can have (direct or indirect) influence on each other.... Right is therefore the sum of the conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the choice of another in accordance with the universal law of freedom.”⁸¹

This may be interpreted as a libertarian manifesto, with little or no scope for state measures to ensure people have what they need to continue as political agents. I think Kant's basic principles, separated from the mistakes he makes about human nature, independence, and so on, can support a different view, one more consistent with the basic principles of equal moral worth of persons. There are two main problems. First, Kant does not see the range of social conditions necessary to secure the rights of all persons (e.g. how economic inequality or social stigma can undermine formal equality). Second, he fails to reconcile the conflict between (i) his basic principle of equal moral worth of persons (all persons have dignity beyond price) and (ii) his consigning some persons (women, men who lack economic independence as he construes it) to a subordinate political status.

For Kant, freedom, equality, and independence are the fundamental principles of the

⁸⁰ Herman remarks that “all moral judgment... takes place within the framework of a community of moral judgment”(Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 39) and further, “if we live among persons, membership in a civil society is both not optional and party constitutive of a community of moral judgment.” (ibid., 42)

⁸¹ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 23, (6:230).

state but his understandings of each are problematic:

In terms of rights, the attributes of a citizen, inseparable from his essence (as a citizen), are: lawful *freedom*, the attribute of obeying no other law than that to which he has given his consent; civil *equality*, that of not recognizing among the *people* any superior with the moral capacity to bind him as a matter of right in a way that he could not in turn bind the other; and third, the attribute of civil *independence*, of owing his existence and preservation to his own rights and powers as a member of the commonwealth, not to the choice of another among the people. From his independence follows his civil personality, his attribute of not needing to be represented by another where rights are concerned.⁸²

Kant claims that equality-as-subject is consistent with limitless inequality of wealth:

This uniform equality of human beings as subjects of a state is, however, perfectly consistent with the utmost inequality of the mass in the degree of its possessions, whether these take the form of physical or mental superiority over others, or of fortuitous external property and of particular rights (of which there may be many) with respect to others. Thus the welfare of the one depends very much on the will of the other (the poor depending on the rich), the one must obey the other (as the child its parents or the wife her husband), the one serves (the labourer) while the other pays, etc. Nevertheless, they are all equal as subjects before the law, which, as the pronouncement of the general will, can only be single in form, and which concerns the form of right and not the material or object in relation to which I possess rights.⁸³

⁸² Kant, Metaphysics of Morals, 91 (6:314).

⁸³ Kant, On the Common Saying, 75 (8:291-292).

Kant gives no argument for this claim, merely asserting the consistency of material and social inequalities with equality as subjects before the law. There are many ways in which inequalities of wealth, income, gender, or social status may undermine formal legal equality, including the greater access of the rich to legal advice and legal action; the greater influence of the rich on legislation and policymaking; gender bias in the way political and legal systems are set up and run; gender, class, race, and other bias among judges, legislators, and other public officials; the effect of gender roles on political participation and decision-making; and so on.⁸⁴ Kant would have to have a highly peculiar conception of equality-as-subject-before-the-law to justify a claim that women and men (especially in his time!) were equal as subjects of the law; perhaps something like “whatever (completely different) legal standards apply to their behavior, they apply equally strongly.” But this sort of equality-as-subject-of-the-law would approach meaninglessness. Kant has not given any reason why completely different *standards* should be applied to these categories of person.⁸⁵ How strange it would be that a moral theory built on the equal moral worth of persons—hardly a meaningless sort of equality, whatever else one thinks about it—should translate to this mere shadow of “equality” in the political realm. Why should the value of the equal moral worth of persons suddenly lose force “in public”? Nothing in Kant's ethical writings suggests that the fundamental tenets of his moral theory somehow do not apply

84 Allen Wood writes that, for Kant, civil equality is “a prohibition on a certain kind of asymmetry of power or hierarchy within the political system or system of right. It prohibits involuntary servitude and relations of dependence that are not voluntarily entered into. But it places no direct restrictions, for example, on how much wealth or property some may own or on how little others may own.” Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, 194-195. But power relations within the political system cannot be isolated from social and economic power relations; indeed, these factors greatly affect the extent to which many sorts of relation of dependence are voluntary or not. For these reasons, there is a Kantian argument to be made, I think, for restrictions on economic inequality because it infects the political realm so thoroughly.

85 The independence criterion for full citizenship, discussed below, is not the reason since it is a single standard that — in Kant's view— certain kinds of person (bourgeois men) met and other kinds of person (women, men who were not economically independent) did not.

socially or politically. When we act as members of societies, they still (very much) apply, albeit with distinctions as to what can be coerced and what not.

Kant proposes a seemingly simple criterion for citizenship: fitness to vote.⁸⁶ One might think that fitness to vote might have something to do with personhood, with capacities for reason, and so on, but Kant focuses on something else. Fitness to vote “presupposes the independence of someone who, as one of the people, wants to be not just a part of the commonwealth but also a member of it, that is, part of the commonwealth acting from his own choice in community with others.”⁸⁷ Membership of the commonwealth means “acting from his own choice (*Willkühr*) in community with others” and this presupposes independence (*Selbständigkeit*). By independence Kant here means not being under the direction of, or dependent for one's survival on, another person's will. Someone I hire to do some carpentry in my home will fail the test, says Kant; someone who does carpentry on his own premises and sells the resulting objects will pass it. Domestic workers, all women, minors, private tutors— all are consigned to Kant's ad-hoc category of passive citizens.

From this point especially, Kant gets himself into all sorts of philosophical trouble: within a page (6:314), he goes from stipulating that women and dependent workers (as we might call them) are passive citizens (i.e. citizens of some sort) to denying that they are citizens at all (they are instead “underlings” or “mere associates” of the state).⁸⁸ He even admits that the concept of passive citizenship appears to be contradictory, although this does not prevent his continued use of it; it is a useful idea rhetorically, since he can evade the uncomfortable question of what it

⁸⁶ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 91 (6:314).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 91-92 (6:314).

⁸⁸ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 91-92 (6:314-315).

might mean for women, hired woodworkers, and private tutors to be non-citizen underlings (*Handlänger*⁸⁹) of the state and yet, apparently, persons who are also equal in some way to citizens. If personhood is so important morally, how can this division be justified? Kant takes entirely the wrong lesson from the fact that in his society (as in most societies at present) some people are better positioned than others to make free choices. Instead of seeing the moral problem of persons— moral agents, beings with worth beyond price!— being prevented by social and economic inequalities from making free choices in their lives, Kant appears simply to shrug in the face of this situation and conclude that nothing morally interesting is going on; that is the way things are, and so these persons cannot be full citizens.⁹⁰

In fact, there is much of interest going on in Kant's citizenship criteria and in why and how some are judged to fail it. Citizenship (active real citizenship, at any rate) involves, as we saw above, acting from one's own choice (*Willkühr*) in community with others, and this requires, Kant says, independence— not being under anyone's direction and not being dependent on anyone for one's survival. Specifically, Kant says that active citizenship is closed to anyone whose affairs are managed by someone else. (Interestingly, the focus here appears to be not to whether such persons *could* manage their own affairs, but on whether they *do*.) Acting on one's own choice in community with others does seem central to citizenship but Kant skips much too lightly over the question of how to draw a clear line between those who can do this and those who cannot. It is a three-part requirement: (1) being able to make choices, (2) being able to act on one's choices, and (3) being able to co-ordinate this with others. Most people are able to make choices, although all

⁸⁹ This word can also be translated as “handmaid,” interestingly.

⁹⁰ Admittedly, Kant is writing in a very different time and perhaps is less to blame for this failure than someone writing in the present. However, my interest here is not to praise or blame Kant but to point out problematic elements in his political philosophy.

sorts of social and psychological factors may shape them or constrain them, for example, the effects of internalized oppression.⁹¹ Who can act on their choices? Obviously everyone faces some restrictions on the choices they can act on, but social and economic factors play a large role in widening the scope of some and narrowing the scope of others to act on their choices. Kant sees that forms of dependence can undermine one's ability to act on one's choices— it can be hard to think, speak, and act freely if that means criticizing one's employer, for example. But Kant does not see (1) the widespread and complex nature of dependence (there is no clear line dividing independent from dependent persons; there are many kinds of dependence and most people depend on others for many things⁹²) or (2) the moral problem of excluding some persons from full citizenship because of social and economic injustices they suffer. Kant does not, in this text, suggest that these passive citizens are *incapable* of carrying out the duties of citizenship (except for minors, who are not yet ready); there is no suggestion of inferior rational ability or any other inherent disqualifying factor.⁹³ The third aspect, being able to act on one's choices in community with others, goes unexplained here⁹⁴; perhaps if the community is so homogeneous (i.e. bourgeois Prussian men), it is not as complicated to agree on a vision of the common good! On any acceptable understanding of political community, this is in fact an important and challenging topic.

91 Note that Kant is not here talking about his requirements for moral agency (i.e. autonomy); see chapter 2.

92 Consider the dependence of a well-off professional couple on their domestic employees (childcare, cleaning, organizing, etc.), or that of an undocumented immigrant working as the domestic employee of a well-off professional couple, the dependence of a child on its parent, or that of the small record-store owner on her bank manager.

93 Kant famously held women to have inferior rational capacities to men but, perhaps unsurprisingly, never fully worked out how women could at the same time be persons who could enter the contract of marriage, which he held to be a joining of equals (except that the wife had to obey her husband, of course).

94 Although Republicanism presupposes it.

Underneath these peculiarities and problems, there is an important point that we could take in a completely different direction than Kant does: the dependence of these “passive citizens” is a big problem because they are no less persons than “active citizens” and their demotion to second-class citizen does, contra Kant, greatly affect their ability to exercise their rights as citizens (their legal equality, etc.). As I have argued above, formal equality is not worth as much as it should be if it is accompanied by wide and deep inequalities of wealth, income, safety, influence, education, respect, etc. The dependence of the traditional wife/mother/home maker or the salaried worker or domestic worker in fact gives us a compelling moral reason to change their circumstances. Each of us is dependent on others for at least some of our needs, but the difference here is that this dependence is accompanied by differentials in power. Where a relation of dependence is also a relation of domination, the capacity to realize one's rights as a citizen, to realize one's capacity for political agency, is undermined. There is thus compelling reason to rethink the structures in which such relationships take place (not to punish the person who suffers domination). A society where this has been done is one that much better realizes Kant's moral vision; if persons, in virtue of their being persons, have worth beyond price, then the societies in which they live ought surely to facilitate and strive to ensure all persons' genuine freedom. This is not just a matter of bare libertarianism— it cannot be, because (human) persons are vulnerable to hunger, disability, oppression, coercion, and so on. They all need care.⁹⁵ Now, Kant explicitly says that the proper aim of the state is *not* the happiness or welfare of its citizens; the well-being of the state, as Kant puts it, consists in “that condition in which its constitution conforms most fully to principles of right; it is that condition which reason, by a categorical imperative, makes it

95 See O'Neill, Bounds of Justice, 140.

obligatory for us to strive.”⁹⁶ Those who acknowledge care to be an important value and practice, as I do, need not disagree. However, for principles of right to be enacted, care is required, for it makes little sense to value someone's freedom if they do not have what they need to be political agents in the first place. What matters is the care required to maintain political agency, as I have argued in 4.2. Although there is plenty of room for disagreement on the extent of what is required for political agency, it is certainly more than bare survival but less than all-round happiness or welfare.

I have suggested some reasons to think that there is a tension between political care, as I understand it, and capitalism (certainly “laissez-faire” varieties thereof). I have further argued here that there is room for the value of the caring society in Kant, although on a particular interpretation; indeed, to realize the basic demands of Kantian justice, care, as I have defined it, is needed. Can we base a critique of capitalism on these grounds of caring and Kantian principles?

O'Neill suggests that Kantians would have to disapprove of capitalism *if Marx's description of the nature of capitalist employment is accepted*. (She does not say whether or not she accepts Marx's account, merely what would follow if one did.) On a Marxist account, workers have to accept the terms of employment offered to them by some capitalist or another because they need to work to survive; furthermore, the real bargain they are accepting— to create surplus value which is creamed off by the capitalist— is not made clear to them and instead false consciousness is fostered so that the illusion of freely consensual work is maintained. On O'Neill's view, coercion and deception are wrong because they violate the principle of possible

⁹⁶ Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 95 (6:318).

consent; in both cases, the victim could not possibly consent. In the case of capitalism, “no maxim of coercion or deception can be attributed to any individual”⁹⁷ but O’Neill thinks—contrary to standard, individualistic interpretations of Kant—that we can think of institutions as embodying maxims in the sense of having guiding principles. Thus, what we would judge in terms of the CI procedure would be “the principles that guide the institution of employment in a capitalist system.”⁹⁸

From another angle, we can now see that Kantians have good reason to accept that care, much as I have defined it in this chapter, is necessary for a rightful political order given the inadequacy of merely formal political rights without the conditions necessary for their exercise.⁹⁹ If, in addition, my claims about the tension between care and capitalism are correct, then Kantians have reason to be suspicious of capitalism *insofar as* it is an arrangement or set of arrangements that (1) make it less likely that everyone’s needs-for-agency are met (especially the less-privileged) and (2) undermine the caring relations that are necessary both for a just society to form and continue as well as for the formation and maintenance of moral and political agents.

4.4 Conclusion

I have argued for an interpretation of “political care” based on responsiveness to the needs of persons as political agents. Just as care generally must be seen in the context of caring relations, political care must be seen in the context of political caring relations, some defining features of

97 O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason*, 122.

98 *Ibid.*, 123.

99 Care is not of course the *only* necessary condition for a rightful political order.

which we have discussed above. Responsiveness in the context of political caring relations is required for the maintenance of just societies as well as being a good thing in itself. Taking political care seriously involves rethinking conceptions of “the citizen,” the sorts of needs considered politically relevant, and indeed the kind of economic and political system we can justify. I have further argued that there is at least a serious tension between care and “marketization” and, if broadly Marxist accounts of capitalist society are correct, between care and capitalism itself. Finally, I have suggested that Kant's basic principles, but not his mistaken views about fitness for citizenship and the compatibility of socio-economic inequality and formal equality, fit with and indeed may demand a theory of political care along the lines I have suggested.

Conclusion.

In the preceding four chapters I have tried to make the case for a certain conception of care in the context of Kantian ethics rather than an “ethic of care.” This position offers an alternative to “care versus justice” debates that have not, in my view, led to a comprehensive, satisfactory account of care's place in moral life. I have argued that care, like justice, is an important part of morality and should be taken seriously by moral philosophers. In particular, I have argued that Kantians should look to care as a useful concept that may help in thinking about what Kant called “duties of love.” In this Conclusion, I shall discuss the significance of the project and suggest some avenues of further research.

(i) The significance of the project

Contemporary work on Kantian ethics has not taken a great deal from developments in feminist philosophy such as the debate on care. As I have shown in chapter three above, the few Kantians who have engaged with the care debates have attended only to the earliest works such as Nel Noddings's Caring and Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice, thereby missing the growing sophistication of the care literature.

At the same time, care theorists have by and large assumed that Kantian ethics is hostile to their concerns. As I pointed out in chapters one and two, care theorists have tended to consider what all “justice ethics” have in common more important than what distinguishes, say, Kantianism from utilitarianism and have not, thus, engaged in detail with Kant's texts or with contemporary work on Kant, which has become rather specialized. Instead, an often-taught but

arguably textually-inaccurate account of Kantian ethics has appeared in the care literature.

My reading of the care literature and of Kant and contemporary Kantians convinced me that there were serious misunderstandings on both sides and that a sympathetic interpreter of both Kant and care could make a contribution by shifting the debate away from questions of “care versus justice” or (more recent) how to reconcile them and, instead, attempting to provide a rigorous account of care in a Kantian framework. I have tried to show care theorists that Kant's ethics is hospitable to care and provides a better care-inclusive moral theory than an “ethics of care.” I have tried to show Kantians that care is an important value and virtue and a practice of moral and political significance.

These tasks have been made easier by developments in both fields, as we have seen. In the care literature, there has been a move away from viewing care and justice as antagonistic and toward different ways of understanding their relationship; in addition, there has been increasing acknowledgement that autonomy, suitably construed, need not be rejected, and that care has relevance beyond personal relationships. In Kantian ethics, there has been a move away from more traditional readings of Kant that contributed to the widespread impression that the theory was rigid and rule-obsessed, hostile to emotion and relationships, and in thrall to a flawed conception of persons.

On my interpretation, care has a clear relationship to justice (and other values) and does not have to do more theoretical work than it can, for it does not have to ground an entire moral “orientation” or theory. Care, in short, gets its due but is not overburdened theoretically. Care's relationship to justice on my view is simple: they are both important values and virtues, along with other values and virtues such as courage, honesty, and integrity. Care is also a practice of

great moral and political importance.

I have argued (in chapter one) that the designations “justice ethics” and “care ethics” are ultimately unhelpful; to assume that an ethical theory is or should be based on one primary value leads to serious philosophical difficulties. It is reductive, in my view, to characterize Kantian ethics as a “justice ethic” since it does not, in fact, prioritize justice over other values (which, I have suggested, should include care). No moral theory *should* be based on one primary value or virtue.

Care, as I understand it, is responsiveness to need; moral care is responsiveness to need with a view to maintaining the cared-for's agency. It is a value, a virtue of persons and societies, and a practice. Political care is responsiveness to need with a view to maintaining political agency. Political agency assumes, of course, agency *simpliciter*, and adds conditions necessary to participate in various aspects of political life. As we have seen in chapter four above, these conditions might include education (beyond basic skills to include history, geography, economics, civics, etc), access to and training in technology (e.g. using the Internet to keep informed of current affairs and to participate in debate), and less tangible conditions such as a reasonable expectation of being able to express views without being subject to harassment, shaming, or belittlement, or generally what Rawlsians describe as the social bases of self-respect.

Care is, contrary to thinkers such as Nel Noddings, rational and indeed moral care is the *preserve* of rational beings; at the same time, of course, care has an emotional component. None of this need contradict Kantian ethics, for the stereotype describing it as a narrowly rationalistic, anti-emotion theory is not borne out by a close reading of Kant's texts and recent interpretative work. It is true that emotion cannot ground morality but as we have seen in chapter two

especially, that does not mean that emotion does not have a role in moral life; in Kant, we can point to moral feeling and the role of emotions in pointing out instances where we might fulfill imperfect duties and in pushing us to do our duty where we might otherwise fail to do so.

Taking care seriously need not conflict with a principle-based view of ethics; I have argued in chapter two that objections to principle found in the care literature do not succeed; acting on principle does not mean overlooking the context of a situation, risking self-righteousness, making false generalizations or idealizations, or failing to be responsive. These faults are indeed serious but do not necessarily accompany the use of principles.

The care literature has usefully highlighted the fact that human persons are relational and interdependent and thus need care. On traditional, “text-book” interpretations, Kantian ethics may appear to promote a view of persons as detached, purely rational and preferably unemotional, and so on but as we have seen, Kant in fact thinks it very significant that human beings are vulnerable and often need the help of others. This is why, for example, we may not have a maxim of no mutual aid. None of this supports the rejection of the idea of autonomy, however. As we have seen in chapter one, earlier suspicions of autonomy in the care literature have largely given way to now-influential relational accounts. These are at a relatively early stage of development. I have argued in chapters two and three that a Kantian conception of autonomy — detached from empiricist accounts of action— may provide a useful grounding for a theory of autonomy that care theorists may have reason to welcome. Kantian autonomy means autonomy of the will from the practical standpoint (*not* a split self) and does not imply self-sufficiency or detachment of the agent. In fact, many material and social conditions may support or hinder moral agency. Having an autonomous will— i.e. a will (i) not determined by alien

causes, that is, not controlled by, or example, feelings of jealousy and (ii) capable of giving law to itself— is necessary for moral responsibility. On the other hand, viewing human action from the theoretical standpoint (as wholly determined by the laws of nature) allows us to see what larger forces affect moral agency (for example, circumstances of oppression, violence, etc.). In the Kantian view, the main question in ethics is practical: what ought I do? This requires the assumption of an autonomous will (from the practical standpoint). But other questions are of course highly relevant to moral life, as we have seen; Kant would classify these as questions of anthropology and they would be broached from the theoretical standpoint. Many of these are questions that care theorists see as particularly important (and rightly so); Kantians need not and should not ignore them.

Care offers to Kantian ethics a way to connect several ideas up to now somewhat 'scattered' in the theoretical framework: practical love, *Menschenliebe* (love of humanity), aesthetic sympathy, and practical sympathy. Kant writes of “duties of love” but love is a problematic term since in this usage it does not (and cannot) depend on the “communicable” feeling usually designated thereby; one does not and should not have to love someone to care about and for her. Onora O'Neill has suggested an updated reading of charity as a way to capture the meaning of such duties but “charity” carries too much baggage: pity, disrespect, and a strong association with one particular religious tradition (namely, Christianity). That care refers to a practice (or several related practices) highlights the moral requirement of positive action to help others; although this is already part of Kantian ethics in the idea of imperfect duties, the “hands-on” connotation of care reminds us that while one might be able to respect others by merely refraining from doing things, caring for them often requires physical engagement, “getting one's hands dirty,” as it

were. Using the language of care also brings to prominence the heretofore ignored care work historically done by women.

Care offers a particularly important supplement and indeed corrective to Kantian political philosophy. Political care, as I define it, is responsiveness to need with a view to developing and maintaining political agency. Kant's political writings fail to acknowledge the role of social and economic circumstances (e.g. of economic inequality, oppression, etc.) in undermining (or otherwise) formal political rights. Not only do practices usually described as care play a crucial role in allowing society to continue (childcare, eldercare, etc.), but the wider idea of political care is, in my view, essential for just societies.

The concept of care offers a useful way of thinking about moral failures; many everyday—and indeed not a few serious— moral failures might usefully be viewed as failures of responsiveness to need. Recall that responsiveness, as I have used it, refers to both the capacity to attend to or recognize need (as morally compelling) and the propensity to respond to it, to take responsibility for acting to meet it. Ignorance, inattention, and indifference are failures of responsiveness and are moral problems arguably as pervasive as outright malice or hostility, if not more pervasive. Yet as we have seen, the moral failure involved in certain types of ignorance is far from straightforward.

Just as highlighting the importance of care as responsiveness might change the way we read Kantian ethics, a Kantian theoretical framework may help to resolve some problems related to responsiveness. A commitment to responsiveness as a moral value may imply limitless other-directedness and concern for every possible need of every other person— an unrealistic demand. On the other hand, placing limits on the responsiveness properly demanded of moral agents is a

dangerous business since we might be tempted to base such limits on our own convenience or bias toward those we see as “our own.” The Kantian idea of imperfect duties provides a satisfactory way to think about the limits, as I have argued above; we cannot be responsive to everyone in the same way, although we must recognize their equal moral worth, but we may not have a maxim or policy of unresponsiveness. We make judgments about our actions based on whether we can honestly say we do not have such a maxim. In thinking about proper limits to responsiveness, we do well to move beyond the level of the individual's acts of caring. Often, the most appropriate response is through social movements and institutions.

(ii) Avenues of further research

In this dissertation I have aimed to move the debate about care beyond the familiar questions of whether care is somehow opposed to justice or whether there is an “ethic of care,” that is, a new moral theory or “orientation” with care as its primary value. I have tried to clarify the relationship between care and justice and their place in moral theory. I have argued that it is unhelpful to think of “justice ethics” and “care ethics” and that we should instead think of care and justice as both parts of ethics *simpliciter*. I have argued for care as part of Kantian ethics. Care in the moral sense, as I understand it, is responsiveness to need with a view to maintaining agency. If these arguments have succeeded, some new possibilities for philosophical research on care open up.

In chapters one and two, I discussed responsiveness— which I take to encompass attentiveness or openness to noticing need and propensity to respond and take responsibility for

meeting those needs— and some factors that encourage and discourage it.¹ There is room for further research on these topics.

First, we can discuss responsiveness in many contexts; in chapter three above, the discussion focused on white attitudes to race and racism, a context in which ignorance and implicit bias undermine responsiveness. Responsiveness is of course relevant in contexts from the relatively mundane interactions of everyday family life to questions of global magnitude.

Second, we might expand our list of, and engage in a deeper examination of, factors that encourage and discourage responsiveness. In chapter three, we examined some relevant factors such as (more-or-less wilful) ignorance, implicit bias, lack of moral self-confidence, indifference, lack of sympathy, and lack of imagination. We might make some additions, for example:

1. Humility, as much as moral self-confidence, supports responsiveness; humility in this connection requires willingness to take seriously, and learn from, the experiences of others and not privilege one's own experience and a willingness to acknowledge and work on one's flaws.
2. Being perceptive and a good listener enables one to be responsive. Note that there is an element of competence here, as there are in many aspects of moral life, as I have pointed out in chapter one (p.20); being a good listener— someone with whom people feel comfortable expressing (for example) feelings of vulnerability and who attends carefully to what the other is communicating—requires openness to others, patience, and skill cultivated through practice.
3. Self-awareness helps one become (more) responsive. For example, one may be aware of one's poor listening skills and decide to work on them; one may be aware of the ways in which one is

¹ I have defined (moral) care as responsiveness to need with a view to maintaining agency. Responsiveness can of course have moral aims other than meeting such needs; I noted in chapter three (p.xx) its relevance in helping moral agents to avoid acts of disrespect for others.

good at or not good at meeting others' needs; one may decide to take the implicit bias test and investigate possible methods of combating one's implicit bias; one may realize that one's social anxiety is preventing one from reaching out to others.

Examining care as responsiveness, then, may help us to think fruitfully about moral education (including one's ongoing moral self-education). It is widely agreed that one ought to cultivate certain moral emotions— Kant argues for the cultivation not just of practical but of “aesthetic” sympathy— but bearing in mind some of the factors discussed above may help to focus such discussions. Engaging in care as practice may well be an important part of this kind of moral education.

As I have argued in chapter three, dealing with obstacles to responsiveness such as ignorance and implicit bias is not just a matter of individual obligations. These kinds of phenomena are widespread social problems that might be said to corrupt the entire moral “ecosystem,” as it were. Combining philosophical analysis and empirical work (for example the psychology of implicit bias) in order to seek resolutions of these problems is part of what Kant would call “moral anthropology.” It is also necessary to consider the role of social movements and political institutions in dealing with such large-scale problems. The concern of many individuals about, say, implicit bias and racism can be more effectively expressed through the focused work of a social movement than through individual efforts alone. Still more effective is action at the level of institutions. Thus we can ask, *how might political institutions be responsive* (specifically to political agency-threatening need)? Are there institutional analogues to the factors discussed above as contributing to responsiveness at the personal level? How, for example, might an institution be a “good listener” or the institutional equivalent?

Another avenue of further research is fleshing out the idea of the caring society. I have set some minimal conditions in chapter four. The caring society will appropriately value and support practices of care and will have as a guiding value ensuring that the conditions for developing and maintaining political agency are available to all. Appropriately valuing practices of care will require limiting their marketization since, as I have argued, market norms cannot properly value care. In contemporary capitalist societies of a more “laissez-faire” character, practices of care are often accorded low priority; childcare, healthcare, and eldercare of an acceptable standard are not available to all who need them and those who earn their living in these fields are not, generally, well paid or highly respected. The distribution of paid care work is often along lines of race and immigration status; childcare work in the United States is one example. Illustrating the changes in priority that care might prompt, Virginia Held asks us to “imagine reversing the salaries of business executives and childcare workers.”² Certainly, a caring society will ensure that those who engage in care work are well paid and themselves have adequate care. Furthermore, the present organization of work— which largely assumes that the worker has no caring responsibilities— would surely be transformed in a genuinely caring society.

People need not just childcare, healthcare, and eldercare but also certain material basics to develop and maintain agency (and *a fortiori* political agency). A further question for a fuller treatment of political care is how (if at all) this can be achieved under capitalism. One of the supposed merits of capitalism is that it responds to demand for goods in an efficient manner. However, those whose needs are not turned to “demand” by money will not have them met, unless via charity or “welfare,” which are often inadequate. Perhaps a much-improved model of

2 Held, *Feminist Morality*, 64.

the welfare state or minimum provision of certain goods could solve this problem; Daniel Engster suggests that providing everyone with adequate resources will enable them to obtain what they need in the capitalist market because companies will respond to their demand.³ There are two potential difficulties with this solution. First, fixing a standard of income adequacy might be difficult if incomes remain highly unequal, that is, if everyone has a certain minimum but some have a lot more because the higher earners will tend to drive innovations, e.g. in technology, sanitation, etc., that will change the prevailing standards of living, leaving lower earners constantly struggling to catch up. This becomes relevant for our purposes as soon as it affects one's ability to develop, maintain, or exercise political agency on an equal basis with other members of society. The best that can be done under capitalism is to reduce inequality of resources sufficiently to ensure the differences will not be relevant to political agency but not so much as to make investment by the capitalist class impossible. If such a balance cannot be achieved, tensions between care and capitalism emerge. The second difficulty is that factors such as advertising, education, and availability greatly complicate the relation between what people need, what they want to buy, and what companies make. Consider, for example, the effect of widespread junk food advertising, widely varying levels of nutritional education and awareness, and widely varying access to healthier products from neighborhood to neighborhood on people's food purchasing decisions. Attention to these background conditions is required in addition to the provision of adequate resources. However, restrictions on advertising and measures to promote healthy eating are controversial and many further questions arise. How are the specific material requirements for political agency to be decided upon? At what point, if any, does restricting

3 Engster, *The Heart of Justice*, 136.

advertising unjustifiably restrict freedom? What role should the state have in ensuring access to, say, healthy food for all?

Companies do not base production decisions on human need – at least, it is not a decisive consideration- but on what will maximize profit. There are of course capitalists who aim to meet human need and make profit at the same time, but their enterprise simply cannot succeed if profitability is subordinated to meeting human need. Capitalism has undoubtedly unleashed immense productive power; the question is whether, or how, this productive power can be directed toward meeting human needs, especially (for our purposes) those relevant to political agency. Many, I suspect, have marveled at the vast array of hair conditioners on display at the average U.S. drugstore and wondered what might have been achieved had the productive power that created them had been directed to other things. However, the possibility of maintaining such productive power and at the same time directing it to the meeting of human need rather than demand is an open question.

In chapter four, I suggested that care would be in tension with capitalism as such if certain claims of the Marxist tradition were true. Although the vindication of these claims is beyond the scope of the present work, as I have pointed out, some directions for future work can be set out. If the idea of political care can be brought into conversation, as it were, with Marx and the Marxist tradition, we may develop a basis for a care-based critique of capitalism- and perhaps a vision (or visions) of a socialism that incorporates care. One starting point for such work might be to ask whether Marx gives us good reasons to think care and capitalism are incompatible. Does capitalism undermine caring relations? Does it undermine political agency?

In his early essay on estranged or alienated labor, Marx paints a vivid portrait of work under

capitalism. Workers are alienated from the product of their labor, from the activity of labor, from other people, and from their “species being” (which centers on humans' capacity for free, conscious activity). If Marx is right, such conditions might be said to undermine the capacity for caring personal and social relations in several ways. Most directly, if people are alienated from one another under conditions of capitalist work, caring relations are surely made more difficult; in such a situation, says Marx, “each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the position in which he finds himself as a worker.”⁴ In particular, the relationship of worker to capitalist inevitably has (at least) an element of hostility because the products of the worker's labor is no longer the worker's own, but the capitalist's.⁵

There may also be scope to argue that alienation of workers from the activity of labor undermines capacities for caring relations in an indirect way; so, too, might it affect the less tangible conditions of political agency discussed in chapter four above (time and leisure, self-respect, and so on). This of course would require some detailed textual work. Marx writes that the worker

does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind... As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions- eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but

4 Karl Marx, “Alienated Labour” in The Marx-Engels Reader (2nd edition), Robert Tucker, ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1978), 77.

5 Marx, The Marx-Engels Reader, 78.

an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.⁶

Marx concluded that the proletariat, at the same time, was enabled in many ways by the very forces that alienated them; as they gathered together in large urban factories, class consciousness would emerge, class-based organizing would develop, and ultimately the proletariat would overthrow capitalism. If Marx's optimism about class struggle seems perhaps far-fetched from our current vantage point, we might nevertheless take something from his idea that the economic and political system can have complex, even contradictory effects; think of the complex causes and effects of women's increased participation in wage labor in the latter half of the twentieth century. Or perhaps Marx was simply wrong about the supposed galvanizing effects upon the proletariat of factory life but right about alienated labor under capitalism, in which case the results for the consideration of care's compatibility with capitalism will be clearer.

One of the central features of capitalism, Marx says, is the class division between bourgeoisie (the capitalist class, which owns the means of production) and proletariat (the workers, who must work for a capitalist in order to survive because they do not own the means of production). Of course, Marx does not claim that capitalist societies are the *only* hierarchical ones; on the contrary, “[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.”⁷ Capitalism *simplifies* class hierarchy— and, Marx thinks, creates the conditions for its own demise and the prospect of a society without class hierarchy. Whether or not the latter is the case, we can say that if class hierarchy is as essential to capitalism as Marx thinks, and if this class hierarchy undermines caring political relations, then capitalism and care are incompatible. Are caring

6 Ibid., 74.

7 Ibid., 473.

political relations among all members of society possible under capitalism? Is the gulf between Donald Trump or Mark Zuckerberg and the minimum-wage worker so large that caring political relations become impossible? Can the minimum-wage worker develop, maintain, and exercise political agency to the same extent as Trump or Zuckerberg? If we consider a less “laissez-faire” capitalist society such as Norway instead, can we say that the nursing home aide in Trondheim can develop, maintain, and exercise political agency to the same extent as Jon Frederik Baksaas, the CEO of Telenor? If not, could a reformed capitalism change this, and how?

Another theme that might be considered is the possibility that capitalist societies encourage traits inimical to caring political relations: greed, selfishness, a tendency to commodify others, and so on. Now, this sort of argument can cut both ways, since defenders of capitalism sometimes offer these traits as reasons to believe that there is no feasible alternative to capitalism. However, Marxists (and others, from Rousseau on) think that “human nature,” such as it is, is not static but rather is shaped by all sorts of forces, including the prevailing economic and political system. One might add that the presence of some undesirable traits does not rule out the existence of other, desirable traits such as cooperativeness and kindness (which are exemplified in the best instances of care as a practice). In a well-known passage in the Communist Manifesto, Marx describes the effects of capitalism on human relations:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all the feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' ... It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered

freedoms, it has set up that single, unconscionable freedom- Free Trade.”⁸

A society in which human relations are reduced to “callous cash payment” is hardly supportive of caring relations; however, note that what this replaces is not really an “idyll” but a more complex and in some ways more oppressive type of relation (patriarchal, feudal). The exploitative relations, Marx says, are just more clear now, “naked, shameless, direct, brutal.”⁹

Even if these claims can be vindicated, there are potential points of conflict between care and Marxism generally. It may be true, for example, that Marx's production-oriented view of human activity means that Marxism cannot explain the practice of care or comprehend its value any more than can capitalism.¹⁰

There are other topics for further research that I can only mention. For example, the question of whether or how care is applicable to animals and nature would require conclusions about their moral status. Clearly care of some sort occurs among animals and humans care for and care about animals, but it is unclear what the moral implications of this might be. Given my definition, much hinges on the extent to which animals have “agency” or something that would qualify them for some derivative form of moral care. Care for the environment seems a less likely candidate for a straightforward version of care but again, pending the examination of fundamental questions of value, it is difficult to say whether a derivative form of moral care might be enumerated.

We might also consider the application of my conception of care to specific practices and what might be morally demanded of or in them, For example, it may be fruitful to examine

⁸ Ibid., 475. See also 84, 93, 96.

⁹ Ibid., 475.

¹⁰ Schwarzenbach, On Civic Friendship, 64; see also part one of Bübeck, Care, Gender and Justice.

teaching as a practice of care, that is, a practice of responsiveness to students' need with a view to developing and maintaining their agency. As I have pointed out in chapter one, I do not think of teaching as a practice only of care since it aims of course at other things (transmission of learning for its own sake, training for specific social roles, benefit to society, etc.), but viewing it as a practice of care is one possible way of viewing it.

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