CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

A Dissertation in

Philosophy

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2016
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In my dissertation, *Care and Responsibility in a Global Context*, I examine the challenge of articulating what individual responsibility requires in the face of global problems, such as climate change and global poverty. First, I examine the nature of global problems and explain why they challenge traditional understandings of moral responsibility. While attributions of responsibility typically hold in cases where the causes and effects of an act are immediate and intentionally committed, the causes of many global problems are both spatially and temporally diffuse and include contributions from agents ranging from states (e.g., through public policy) to individuals (e.g., through everyday life practices, such as filling up a gas tank or buying inexpensive clothing).

Second, I examine the limitations of existing attempts in global and environmental ethics to ground claims of individual responsibility for global problems. Third, I argue that the ethics of care, which has been underutilized in philosophical debates in environmental and global ethics, can illuminate the nature of individual responsibility in these contexts in a way that avoids problems with existing accounts of global responsibility. To do so, I first respond to critiques that care ethics is overly focused on immediate and particular relations and cannot be applied to global settings. To overcome these criticisms, I examine the nature of care and develop an account of the duty to take care, i.e., the kind of obligation that agents have to care for general others. I then show how the duty to take care can be extended to global relations and argue that it requires agents to be attentive and responsive to the distant effects of their actions. Last, I apply this care-based understanding of individual responsibility to the issue of climate change. In doing so, my dissertation calls upon feminist moral theory to intervene in debates in global and
environmental ethics on the difficult problem of explaining the kind of responsibility individuals have to respond to complex global problems.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee—John Christman, Nancy Tuana, Sarah Clark Miller, Jonathan H. Marks, and Shannon Sullivan—for their support and advising in the development of this project. I am especially grateful to John Crawford of the Crawford Family Fellowship in Ethical Inquiry and the Rock Ethics Institute at The Pennsylvania State University, which provided me with invaluable time and resources to complete this dissertation. Finally, I am grateful to Peter DeAngelis for his tireless support and attentive care in daily life and in the completion of this project.
INTRODUCTION: CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

My dissertation has two primary aims. The first is to examine the nature of individual responsibilities for global problems, like climate change. The second is to consider the relevance of the ethics of care for articulating such responsibilities. In pursuit of these aims, I begin by considering whether individuals are responsible for the roles that they play in complex socio-economic processes that produce distant harms. I call these kinds of distant harms structural to indicate the ways in which larger systemic processes come to shape the ordinary everyday acts of individual actors. I am interested in, for example, whether individual responsibility can be assigned to individuals, who contribute to overall carbon emissions by using electricity or driving a car or who contribute to instances of global labor injustice by purchasing products that are produced in sweatshops. I return to the issue of individual responsibility and climate change in detail in the final chapter of this dissertation.

What makes questions of individual responsibility in this context so difficult is the nature of the individual acts that contribute to global problems. Acts like driving to work or buying a tee shirt are not in themselves morally faulty. They are, in fact, ordinary and necessary parts of everyday life in many parts of the world. The socio-economic structures that these acts support (e.g., global industries that maintain the dominant use of fossil fuels or use sweatshop labor), however, are morally faulty insofar as these structures cause unjust harms. As a result, individuals often unknowingly and unintentionally participate in social and economic structures that produce distant harms. Moreover, these structures shape and constrain individual everyday life choices in ways that make avoiding complicity with them nearly impossible. My dissertation asks whether
individuals have responsibilities concerning the far-reaching and sometimes imperceptible effects of their actions.

In the dissertation, I argue that individuals do in fact have responsibilities concerning the ways in which their everyday acts support and maintain large socio-economic structures that produce global harms. I find, however, the principles commonly used to justify individual global responsibilities wanting. Those principles attempt to ground individual responsibility in terms of an actor’s existing capacities, community relations, or causal connections to a harm. I argue that these principles fail, in different ways, to adequately deal with the complexities of assigning responsibility in a global context. This is especially the case with attempts to allocate individual responsibility in terms of causation given the complexities of tracing cause and effect relations through large-scale socio-economic structures. Following others, such as Samuel Scheffler, Dale Jamieson, and Iris Marion Young, I look for an alternative way of understanding individual responsibilities for global problems.

I argue that a care framework is well suited to this task. The second aim of my dissertation is to apply the ethics of care to arguments concerning global responsibilities. In this way, this dissertation also contributes to feminist moral theory and an emerging literature in global care ethics. The focus of care ethics on the moral saliency of social relations and its recognition of responsibilities concerning the needs and vulnerabilities of others make the care framework a valuable resource for articulating individual global responsibilities. Care ethics lacks an adequate account, however, of why moral agents ought to care for others in general and especially for distant others to whom agents are only connected through global socio-economic structures. I provide a normative
justification of caring obligations in formulating, what I call, a duty to take care. The duty to take care requires that individual moral agents take care such that their acts do not wantonly harm those others with whom they are in close and distant relations. I then apply this duty to take care to the case of individual responsibilities for global problems generally and climate change specifically. The dissertation proceeds as follows.

Chapter 1 sets out the guiding question of the dissertation. Do individuals have a responsibility to prevent or remedy distant structural harms to which they contribute through everyday life practices? I call this question the problem of systemic contributors. Systemic contributors are defined as those agents who contribute to global harms by participating in socio-economic arrangements through ordinary life activities. For example, a systemic contribution to global labor injustice occurs when an individual purchases a piece of clothing produced in a sweatshop. Although this act supports industries that profit from global labor injustice, the act is almost certainly committed without this intent in mind and, in many cases, without knowledge of these collateral consequences. Focusing on systemic contributions attends to the difficult problem of understanding how moral agents are involuntarily implicated in socio-economic structures that result in distant harms. In this chapter, I outline the key features of global structural harms and explain why the traditional Western understanding of individual moral responsibility is ill-equipped to trace causal relationships of responsibility in a globalized world. I then turn to the major principles commonly used to justify the existence of global responsibilities (i.e., capacity, communitarian, and causal principles). Finding that each of these principles fails to offer a normatively convincing and psychologically feasible way of articulating the global responsibilities of systemic
contributors, I advocate a turn to an alternative framework, the ethics of care. Instead of abandoning the project of justifying such responsibilities, I argue that a care framework can offer a new foundation for articulating individual responsibilities in a global context.

With an understanding of the kind of moral problem raised by systemic contributions to structural harms in hand, I turn to a close examination of the ethics of care in its application to global and structural problems. In Chapter 2, I focus on the advantages and challenges of using a care framework to articulate global responsibilities. Insofar as it offers a relational understanding of moral subjects and highlights the moral saliency of being attentive and responsive to the needs of those with whom one is in socio-economic relationships, the ethics of care presents a valuable lens for examining the responsibilities of systemic contributors. Critics of care ethics, however, suggest that a care framework is only suited to examining immediate relations between subjects who have intimate knowledge of each other’s needs, interests, and projects, such as a parent and child. As such, care ethics is said to be unsuitable for considering social justice issues in structural contexts. Because early work in care ethics did suggest that genuine caring relations are only possible in intimate relations between particular agents, many critics within feminist moral and political theory have accused care ethics of being parochial. The worry is that if care ethicists are completely committed to forgoing the application of universal principles of justice in favor of advocating an ideal moral relation in which there is total engrossment of the caregiver in the interests and needs of the other, this tradition would risk being unable to address issues such as domestic violence and other systemic social problems. Responding to these criticisms and demonstrating how the ethics of care is applicable to relations between distant others is a primary goal of this
dissertation. I introduce the idea of a general duty to take care in this chapter for this purpose.

In Chapter 3, I develop my account of the duty to take care for the purpose of grounding the responsibility of systemic contributors for structural harms. I formulate a duty to take care in response to the criticisms of care ethics discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the question of whether individuals are ever morally responsible for caring for others. To answer this question, I first offer an overview of how care has been defined within feminist moral theory. This is important because understanding what care is exactly is necessary before examining when and why it is required. I then turn to the problem of providing a normative justification to care. Or rather, I aim to answer the question of why individuals might be said to have responsibilities to care for others. Examining this question sets the stage for considering whether systemic contributors have a responsibility to care about the effects of their actions on distant others. In this chapter, I analyze two prevailing approaches to offering a normative justification of care, which I call the vulnerability approach and the dependency approach. After considering criticisms of each existing approach, I suggest that a new understanding of an obligation to care, a duty to take care, can supply a foundation for justifying caring obligations and explain why systemic contributors are responsible for taking care to avoid harming distant others within a global context. The normative account of care that I forward builds on feminist insights about the significance of attentiveness, social relations, and vulnerability in moral life, but also incorporates widely shared moral commitments about non-maleficence, indifference, recklessness, and negligence to demonstrate why moral agents have a responsibility to
care for others in social life and what such care requires. On my account, caring for general others with whom one is socially related means showing sufficient regard for their needs, interests, and vulnerabilities when deliberating on a course of action. Careless behavior, in turn, is morally blameworthy and fails to live up to one’s responsibility to take care in one’s social actions, because it demonstrates indifference to others by failing to be attentive to the ways in which others are vulnerable to the affects of one’s actions.

Having laid out the features of the duty to take care, I then use the concept to intervene in conversations on global responsibilities. In Chapter 4, I argue that a duty to take care adds an important resource to existing attempts to articulate individual global responsibilities, specifically concerning systemic contributors responsibilities regarding structural harms. This chapter analyzes two influential philosophical arguments on global responsibility, Thomas Pogge’s liability model developed in World Poverty and Human Rights and Iris Young’s social connection model developed in her late work. Pogge’s approach is useful in its attempt to engage critics of positive duty based approaches to global responsibility. Pogge’s dependence on a causal liability model to explain systemic contributor’s responsibilities, however, is unsuitable for articulating the distant moral relations between these agents and the structural harms to which they contribute. I follow Young’s critique of Pogge on this deficiency in his approach and analyze her alternative approach, the social connection model. While Young’s model better articulates the systemic and structural context in which harms like climate change and global labor injustice occur, I argue that her account fails to explain why the existence of a distant and unintentional social connection to an instance of injustice creates a moral obligation. I
argue that a care framework offers the normative foundation for the moral obligations of systemic contributions that Young’s social connection model lacks. Because the duty to take care requires individuals to be attentive and responsive to the ways in which their acts may cause harm, this moral obligation provides a concrete explanation of why systemic contributors are morally at fault when they are indifferent to the indirect and distant effects of their actions.

In Chapter 5, I take up a second example and apply the duty to take care to the problem of climate change. In this chapter, I consider whether systemic contributors to climate change can be said to have remedial responsibilities concerning this global problem. I begin by discussing the specific ethical challenges that climate change poses as a spatially and temporally diffuse phenomenon. While I recognize that the causes of (and solutions to) climate change are located at multiple levels of agency (e.g., states, local governments, corporations, and individuals), I focus on the responsibilities of systemic contributions to climate change. I choose this focus because it is the socio-economic choices and political commitments of individual moral actors that, taken collectively, significantly shape climate policy. Given this focus on individual responsibility, I investigate the inadequacy of the common Western understanding of moral responsibility for articulating responsibilities for climate change. I find that the scale and structure of climate change as a phenomenon outstrips traditional causal models of individual responsibility. I then turn to Iris Young’s social connection model and demonstrate how it offers a more sophisticated social ontology that recognizes the many ways that individuals, organizations, and institutional structures can all contribute to a particular problem like climate change. I argue, however, that her model alone does not
offer individual systemic contributors compelling reasons for why their unintentional (and possibly unknowing) contributions to climate change warrant an assignment of responsibility. I show that a care framework, specifically the duty to take care, offers a more psychologically feasible, descriptively plausible, and normatively convincing way to articulate systemic contributors responsibilities concerning climate change.

I conclude the dissertation by offering a brief reflection on the contributions my dissertation makes to the advancement of care ethics as a normative framework and the promise of this framework for intervening in debates about responsibility in global and environmental ethics going forward.
CHAPTER 1: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE PROBLEMS OF STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

The guiding question of this dissertation asks whether individuals have a responsibility to prevent or remedy distant structural harms to which they contribute through everyday life practices. I investigate the challenge of assigning responsibility in contexts where the causes of harm are distant, systemic, and often unintentional. Looking to cases like climate change or sweatshop labor serve as good examples for considering the difficulty of determining whether individuals have responsibilities for large-scale harms, because it is difficult to isolate the causes of these kinds of harms, since they are created by the contributions of many actors whose acts are shaped by larger socio-economic structures. The difficulty of understanding individual responsibility in a global context is a primary reason for the intractability of global problems like climate change and labor injustice.

One of the guiding assumptions of this project is that systemic social problems go unaddressed when individuals do not have a way for understanding themselves as moral actors or for having some kind of responsibility to do something about those problems. The primary aim of this chapter is (1) to explain the ethical challenges presented by large-scale global problems and (2) to evaluate the major principles that often guide philosophical approaches to determining global responsibilities.

In the context of these kinds of problems, I consider whether or not individuals, who contribute to such harms with their everyday acts (e.g., by emitting carbon or by buying the products of sweatshop labor), can be justifiably assigned any responsibilities for addressing these harms. I call these individuals systemic contributors. Systemic contributors consist mainly of those who are considered to be ordinary individuals—i.e., not actors occupying political office, policy making positions, executive positions in
major corporations, and so on. I argue that the moral status of the acts of systemic contributors is difficult to ascertain because these actors participate in, but do not necessarily know about or intend to contribute to structural injustice.¹

When an individual or group is harmed by a systemic social phenomenon, such as climate change and or global labor injustice, I refer to this kind of harm as structural. Workers being crushed to death and severely injured in the collapse of an unsafe garment factory are examples of structural harms. Another example of a structural harm is a family who loses the ability to provide for itself through their farming practices because of climate change related drought. The larger systemic social phenomena—for example, the socio-economic, legal, policy, and environmental arrangements and practices of carbon-emitting economies or global trade and labor practices—are what others have called structural injustices. I will be investigating then the kind of responsibility an individual, who participates in structurally unjust practices, has for doing something about the structural harms generated by those unjust systemic practices. To better understand the challenge of discussing the nature of individual responsibility for structural harms, it is necessary to look at the features of such harms.

First, structural harms are created by a confluence of causes, some of which are the intentional acts of discreet agents, while others are the unintentional acts of diffuse agents. The latter group, i.e., systemic contributors, are often the subject of campaigns to address structural harms, such as those that would have individuals buy fair-trade

¹ Structural injustice is defined in detail below, in reference to Iris Young’s work on the topic. It is similar to Johan Galtung’s concept, structural violence, by demonstrating how instances of injustice that are primarily caused by large-scale institutional processes.
products, give to aid organizations, or change their use of fuels. I focus on these agents because their quantitatively small and seemingly innocuous contributions to structural harms nonetheless support larger social and economic structures, which are the primary driver of such harms. The role of systemic contributors in supporting harm-causing structures raises difficult normative questions of whether responsibility can be attributed to individuals who unintentionally and indirectly harm distant others.

The reasons given for why systemic contributors ought to address structural harms vary. Some argue that these individuals have a charitable duty to provide aid to others. Still others insist that these agents have a responsibility to remedy injustices of which they are the beneficiaries. In this chapter, I will examine the general principles that are often used to justify the allocation of global responsibilities and evaluate the applicability of these principles to the question of the responsibility of systemic contributors for structural harms, which I call the problem of systemic contributors. I find that each of these principles face different problems when considered as a solution to the problem of systemic contributors. As I will show, these principles face a variety of issues. Some are descriptively implausible insofar as they depend on a mischaracterization of the nature of the actions of systemic contributors and their causal relationship to structural harms. Others are psychologically infeasible insofar as they provide moral actors with certain reasons for understanding themselves as having global responsibilities to which actors are typically psychological unresponsive to and unmotivated by such reasons. Still others are normatively unpersuasive insofar as they

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2 Peter Singer’s *The Life You Can Save* is directed at these agents, as well as other persuasive campaigns, such as the Environmental Protection Agency’s greener living initiative.
depend on normative commitments that are not widely shared and thus incapable of convincing actors, who do not already agree that they have some kind of responsibility for structural harms, that they have responsibility for their role in systemic social problems.

After evaluating the principles commonly used to assign global responsibilities to different actors, I propose that new theoretical resources are needed in order to answer the question of whether systemic contributors are responsible for structural harms. For this purpose, I turn to the ethics of care, which offers an alternative moral perspective that is less focused on allocating duties according to a universal principle and more focused on promoting caring relations between concrete individuals. I begin now by outlining the key features of structural harms and explaining why these features create new and unique problems for understanding the nature of individual responsibility in a global context.

FEATURES OF STRUCTURAL HARMs

In Responsibility for Justice, Iris Young discusses the nature of structural injustice and, in doing so, provides a helpful starting point for developing an understanding of the features of structural harms. Young differentiates structural injustice and the harms it produces from harms that result from “individual interaction” or the “specific action and policies of states or other powerful institutions.”3 When a person suffers a harm that occurs in an individual interaction, it is easy to identify the cause of that harm. If Sarah steals John’s bicycle, Sarah is the cause of the harm done to John and can be held

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responsible for this loss. (This of course assumes that her actions are not only the cause of John’s harm, but also morally blameworthy, i.e., that they breach a moral prohibition against stealing and are committed without justification or excuse). When individuals are harmed by the acts or policies of a state or other powerful institution, the cause of the harm is also easy to identify. Jim Crow Laws, for example, which codified social and economic disadvantages and political inequalities along racial lines, were responsible for harming African Americans for almost ninety years. These laws and the people who crafted and enforced them are the identifiable cause of these harms.

All of the causes of structural harms, however, are not as easy to identify. Young explains that structural injustice exists when

...social processes put large groups of persons under systemic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time as these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.4

Suffering from structural injustice has more to do with one’s social position than being victimized by an identifiable and discrete agent. For example, an individual’s vulnerability to homelessness is exacerbated by a number of causes, including the dynamics of a particular housing market, the availability of employment opportunities, and access to quality public transportation. These features that determine the social and economic situation of a homeless person are not discreet causes of harm. No one agent—a corrupt mayor, greedy real estate manager, incompetent city council, etc.—is the cause of that person’s homelessness. Instead the actions of many different agents together create circumstances that unjustly disadvantage certain groups and expose them to the

4 Ibid., 52.
Harms of homelessness. Harms that are produced as a result of structural injustice can be further exacerbated by individual wrongdoing, but they need not be in order to produce significant harms. For example, the harms of those who experience housing insecurity can be made worse by the explicit and intentional wrongdoing of a slumlord. Those vulnerable to homelessness, however, need not be intentionally wronged in this way—even though they frequently are—to say that they suffer structural harms, such as homelessness, severe deprivation, hunger, malnutrition, substandard health care, and so on.

Social structures are, for Young, objectively constraining. This means that social structures limit and facilitate individual choices in tangible ways by providing actors with finite life opportunities. Social structures include the physical properties of an environment (e.g., the kinds of buildings and infrastructure that exist within a certain space) as well as the formal and informal institutional and social rules, policies, and norms of specific communities (e.g., welfare and tax policy, city zoning practices, legal norms that protect landlords, and social norms about where certain groups of people ought to live). What makes the causes of structural harms so difficult to identify is their imperceptibility. Young explains that “we do not experience particular institutions, particular material facts, or particular rules as themselves the source of constraint; the constraint occurs through the joint action of individuals within institutions and given physical conditions as they affect our possibilities.”

5 For Young’s detailed discussion of structural injustice within the US housing market see Ibid., 43–52.
6 Ibid., 55.
shape and constrain individual choices and activities, they are often ignored in moral thought.

An important feature of structural harms is that they are perpetuated by social practices that seem banal in their own right. Young points to Marilyn Frye’s examination of gender oppression to elucidate this point. Frye compares the structural circumstances of women’s oppression (e.g., cultural norms concerning dress, occupation, and disposition) to the wires of a birdcage. She explains that if one takes up a myopic lens and only focuses on one wire at a time, he or she would never be able to understand why the bird does not just fly around this one obstacle. Similarly, many cultural practices, such as door opening or advice concerning appropriate dress, do not seem overtly oppressive when considered in isolation. By taking a wider view, however, “it is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers…which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.” The problem with structural harms generally and in Frye’s case of gender oppression specifically is that the bigger picture—e.g., the many different social practices and norms that taken together constitute gender oppression—is often overlooked.

Thomas Pogge suggests that there are significant motivational hurdles for agents, especially for those who benefit from current social and economic arrangements, to take up a wider perspective on structural harms. There is “general cognitive tendency,” according to Pogge, “to overlook the causal significance of stable background features (e.g., the role of atmospheric oxygen in the outbreak of a fire) in a diverse and changing

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situation. Instead of considering the social and economic circumstances that contribute to the conditions of a particular harm, individuals are more likely to take up a narrow lens and search for discreet, local, and malevolent causes of the harm in question. The result is that the structural contexts that made such harms possible in the first place are overlooked.

Another reason why many of the causes of structural harms are often overlooked is the fact that these causes are often spatially diffuse and temporally extended. Structural harms are not isolated, one-off incidents, but instead are systemic in nature, resulting from prolonged and ongoing practices. For example, the harmful effects of climate change are the result of the acts of many agents, located not only in different parts of the world, but also at different times. Many of the agents—individual actors, corporations, states, etc.—who have contributed to the quantity of carbon that persists in the earth’s atmosphere no longer exist and had little knowledge of the effects of their actions when they were alive. It is, as a result, impossible to hold such agents accountable for their acts and, even if it were possible to do so, it would be unjustifiable, since many of these carbon emissions were made in ignorance of their consequences. Along these lines, Stephen Gardiner calls climate change “a perfect moral storm,” because its causes are both intergenerationally and globally dispersed. He further suggests that this dispersion leaves our inherited understanding of responsibility ill equipped to deal with moral challenges of this nature.

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Another key feature of structural harms is that many of their contributing causes are social and economic practices that are entrenched aspects of daily life. This feature can be illustrated by considering the case of global labor injustice, such as sweatshop labor. Factory managers operating unsafe working conditions, as well as, a global garment industry that incentivizes the use of these working conditions are just two examples of the immediate causes of this structural harm. Structural harms, however, are also produced by indirect causes. For example, individuals contribute to the conditions of sweatshop labor when they buy cheap garments produced by unsafe factories. These agents are distantly connected to harms through their consumer practices. Their participation in the harms of sweatshop labor is driven by an interest in buying affordable goods, which is not in itself a malicious intent. Young compares this feature of structural harms to the tragedy of the commons. In these scenarios, individuals contribute to collective problems in the pursuit of their own interests (e.g., by grazing as many cows as they can on a shared pasture). Individuals who pursue their own interests do not aim to cause the collective problem (e.g., destroying the common grazing space), but harm results nonetheless after enough individuals make the same choice (e.g., to graze just one more cow), even though that choice by itself is not what ultimately causes the collective problem.  

Similar to the tragedy of the commons scenario, systemic contributors play a role in the genesis of structural harms, but do so—typically—unintentionally and through seemingly innocuous practices, such as commuting to work, buying clothing for one's children, or warming one's home. The non-malicious and innocuous nature of the kinds

10 Young, Responsibility for Justice, 63.
of actions through which systemic contributors participate in structural harms makes it particularly difficult to address such harms, since not many systemic contributors are even able to understand their behavior as being problematic.

A final feature of structural harms is the difficulty that systemic contributors face in opting out of the everyday practices through which they contribute to those harms. There are significant psychological, social, economic, and motivational barriers, which hinder individuals from considering the broad impacts of their acts. For example, refusing to participate in the fossil fuel based economy or a garment industry that depends on the use of sweatshops is extraordinarily difficult. Systemic contributors—i.e., those who typically benefit from structurally unjust circumstances—nonetheless have a limited amount of resources for changing their own behavior and the world around them. For example, the opportunities for employment, geographical proximity between work and affordable housing, public transportation, and the economic viability of owning a greener car all place constraints on an individual’s decisions to participate in carbon emitting economic practices. And this is only considering one type of behavior. Imagine the extent of the limits, taken as a whole, on a low to middle income person seeking to make low carbon impact choices in other areas beyond transportation, such as food, clothing, home energy use, heating, and cooling, and so on. Further, even if one decides to minimize one’s own contributions to a structural harm (e.g., by refusing to buy products produced in places which permit child labor or taking the bus more frequently), this will likely have little to no effect on the larger structure that causes the harm, if others go on behaving in the same way. Beyond financial constraints and limited choices (e.g., is there even a viable bus system where one lives?), this knowledge of the limited quantitative impact of
one’s actions, taken in isolation, provides further obstacles to acting in ways that do
something in response to a structural harm. And yet, even though taken individually their
quantitative impacts are limited, it is the interests of systemic contributors (e.g., for
convenient transportation, cheap clothing, etc.) that shape many of the social and
economic practices that cause structural harms.

The nature of structural harms make it difficult for systemic contributors to
understand those harms as being part of more systemic social arrangements and, even
when that is possible, further understanding their own role in those social arrangements is
difficult. Although it is becoming increasingly unlikely for individuals to completely lack
knowledge about issues such as climate change or sweatshop labor, understanding the
normative significance of this knowledge and acting on it, given the way that social
structures objectively constrain individual choice and action, is no easy task. In response
to this, it is often, I believe rightly, pointed out that a large shift in our thinking is
required if we hope to adequately address problems such as climate change or global
labor injustice. The shift that is required is one that provides a keen understanding of
whether and to what extent systemic contributors are ethically implicated in the
seemingly inescapable systems that generate structural harms.

**INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND STRUCTURAL HARMs**

This dissertation responds to a recent and growing call by moral and political
philosophers for a new way of understanding moral and political responsibility given the
challenges raised by global structural harms. Those who issue this call claim that
contemporary social and economic arrangements, specifically processes of globalization,
have outstripped inherited understandings of individual responsibility. This is significant because an understanding of what one is responsible for shapes an agent’s perceived sphere of moral concern, i.e., those people and events that an agent considers to be relevant to his or her moral life. In this section, I sketch out the features of the commonsense Western understanding of individual responsibility and examine why this understanding of individual responsibility has become problematic when considering the role of systemic contributors in supporting structural harms.

In traditional usage, claiming that someone is morally responsible for ‘X’ asserts that he or she has either committed or failed to commit some morally significant act, ‘X.’ Paradigmatically, moral responsibility is assigned to an agent for his or her discreet acts within immediate relations. If Nancy steals Jonathan’s wallet, she is responsible for a blameworthy act. Blameworthy acts call for reproach, restitution, or punishment. If Nancy, however, has instead recovered and returned Jonathan’s lost wallet, she is responsible for a praiseworthy act. Praiseworthy acts warrant approbation and in some cases reward. Call this the causal-liability view of responsibility.

Sometimes when we say that someone is responsible for an act, we mean that they have special obligations because of a particular role that they inhabit. Call this the role-based view of responsibility. Parents have special obligations to care for their children, medical practitioners have special responsibilities for those in their care, and judges have a special obligation to uphold the law. When an agent who has a special obligation properly executes or fails to execute the duties of their position, they are considered to be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. Together the causal-liability and role-based views of
Individual responsibility help individual agents to determine the scope of their obligations and appraise the moral character of their actions.

There are various considerations that are relevant to justifiable assessments of responsibility on the causal-liability view. Generally, acts must be committed voluntarily if the agent who commits it is to be held morally responsible. Imagine if John was unknowingly injected with a psychopharmaceutical that eliminates executive controls. If John were to steal cash from the register at work, yell obscenities at customers, and physically attack his manager after being confronted for his strange behavior, it would not be fair on the standard causal-liability view to hold John responsible for his behavior. This is because he lacked control over his actions. The causal-liability view only holds agents responsible for their freely chosen actions and this condition is not met in John’s case.

Individual responsibility is also typically only attributed to an agent if the consequences of the act in question were reasonably foreseeable. A man sweeping his front porch, who happens to throw up some dust into the path of a passing jogger, causing the jogger to have a deadly asthma attack, would not typically be considered to be responsible for this death since the effect of his action was unforeseeable. If a group of rooftop partygoers, however, decide that it would be amusing to start throwing heavy objects off the roof and onto the sidewalk below, these individuals would be considered responsible for any harm they caused to passersby since the consequences of their actions were highly foreseeable. The requirements of voluntariness and foreseeability together constrain attributions of individual responsibility on the causal-liability view. In paradigmatic cases of individual responsibility for blameworthy actions, the agent held
responsible is required to have acted voluntarily and with foresight of the harmful effects of his or her actions.

Because of the voluntariness and foreseeability requirements, our commonsense understanding of responsibility—the causal-liability view—is best suited to handling cases in immediate, small-scale scenarios. When a discrete and identifiable agent harms a discrete and identifiable victim, it is not overly difficult to determine whether or not the perpetrator acted intentionally and with full knowledge of the consequences of his or her acts. Small-scale scenarios—i.e., cases in which the agent and victim (or action and harm) are in close spatial and temporal proximity—allow third party observers to identify the discreet causes of harm, evaluate the obligations of the involved parties, and determine whether any of those obligations were not satisfied.

It is easy to begin to see how the constraints of this traditional model of determining responsibilities fail to obtain in global and structural contexts. Structural harms occur within institutional contexts and are caused by spatially and temporally distant agents. Not only do the features of structural harms mean that the agents who contribute to a specific harm are distantly related to one another, but also many of these agents contribute to the conditions of harm in small ways.

Dale Jamieson’s discussion of individual responsibility and climate change helps to illustrate the idea that the causal-liability view is misplaced in the context of structural harms. Jamieson argues that our commonsense view of individual moral responsibility is “inadequate and inappropriate” for addressing the problems posed by anthropogenic
climate change.\(^{11}\) Jamieson reminds us that the understanding of responsibility that I have been calling the causal-liability view is not only pervasive within our culture, but it is also part of a value system that is a product of a specific historical context. This understanding of responsibility is “coincident with the rise of capitalism and modern science” and evolved in “low population density and low technology societies, with seeming unlimited access to land and other resources.”\(^{12}\) Against this historical backdrop, a view of responsibility developed that is dominated by the presupposition that harms and their causes will be local in space and time, readily identifiable, and individual in character. An increasingly globalized world with transnational economies and wide-ranging communication networks, however, creates the potential for the commission of acts that create harms (and benefits) that are not local. Jamieson focuses on how the harms produced by anthropogenic climate change pose a serious challenge for our current value system, because the causes of climate change are remote and mediated by a complicated climate system that makes it difficult to trace harms back to their causes.\(^{13}\)

Taking up the ethical challenges posed by a global age more generally, Sam Scheffler explains how the traditional Western understanding of individual responsibility is unable to account for harms with causes that are complicated and remote.\(^{14}\) Scheffler argues that the causal and role-based features of the commonsense account serve a


\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Jamieson’s position is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

restrictive purpose, without which a model of responsibility would lose its psychological feasibility. He points to two additional aspects of the traditional understanding of individual responsibility that help to elucidate this point. First, our intuitions about individual responsibility assume a priority of negative duties over positive duties. Individuals are commonly understood as being more obligated to refrain from acts that inflict harm upon others than they are obligated to help others.\textsuperscript{15} The reason for this is that negative duties are assumed to be more circumscribable into a collection of acts that individuals can easily refrain from doing (e.g., stealing, beating, acting recklessly), while positive duties are potentially unrestrictable since a great number of people can demand help from others at any given time. The restrictive nature of negative duties is seen as offering individual agent’s more freedom to direct their own acts. Second, from this it is typically assumed that individuals are more responsible for their commissions (i.e., acts that they commit) than their omissions (i.e., those that they fail to commit). That is, actually causing harm is understood as being worse than failing to prevent harm from occurring. For example, causing someone to drown by pushing their head under water is a horrific act, while failing to rescue someone from drowning at the beach, while morally problematic, typically does not elicit anywhere near the same level of blame.

Scheffler suggests that negative duties and commissions are privileged within our commonsense understanding of individual responsibility due to a “phenomenology of agency,” which consists of “a widespread though largely implicit conception of human social relations as consisting primarily in small-scale interactions, with clearly

\textsuperscript{15} See for example the moral libertarian conception of individual responsibility in Jan Narveson, “We Don’t Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy,” \textit{The Monist} 86, no. 3 (2003): 419–33.
demarcated lines of causation, among independent individual agents.”

This phenomenology of agency results in the experience of harms that happen in close and personal contexts as being more morally significant than those that occur within distant relations.

The simplicity of determining the causes of wrongs within proximate relations is not the only reason for the dominance of this phenomenology of agency. Within proximate relations, individuals also have the opportunity to be emotionally affected by the harms that other’s experience. Although Scheffler does not explore this issue, the ubiquity of emotional responses to immediate experiences of causing harm to others provides another reason for why we typically understand individuals as being morally responsible for acts that occur within proximate interactions. It is easier to understand ourselves as having done something wrong when we can feel the effects of our actions. This way of experiencing social relations, agency, causation, and harm helps explain why moral agents have difficulty perceiving the moral relevance of their acts as systemic contributors. This is because in the case of structural harms agents do not exist in proximate relations with those their acts ultimately (and distantly) harm, which would make it possible for them to experience and emotionally respond to the effects of their actions.

In the same way that Jamieson diagnoses our understanding of individual responsibility as a historical artifact, Scheffler warns that our common sense understanding of responsibility “has its deepest roots in those relatively affluent societies that have the most to gain from the widespread internalization of a doctrine that limits

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their responsibility to assist the members of less fortunate societies."17 The phenomenology of agency that grounds our commonsense understanding of responsibility results in moral agents being largely incapable of taking account of the more remote and nonetheless harmful effects of their acts. Part of the reason for this inability is that the everyday choices of systemic contributors are structured by complex institutional arrangements, which “harness and channel human actions,” i.e., “recruit them as contributors to larger processes that typically have little to do with people’s reasons for performing those actions, but which often have profound and far reaching effects.”18 As such, Scheffler insists that what we appear to lack... is a set of clear, action-guiding, and psychologically feasible principles which would enable individuals to orient themselves in relation to larger processes, and general conformity to which would serve to regulate those processes and their effects in a morally satisfactory way.19

Scheffler is doubtful that existing attempts to develop unrestrictive accounts of individual moral responsibility (i.e., accounts that do not privilege negative duties and commissions), especially those of the consequentialist variety, have the ability to produce such a principle. Instead he suggests that we need to ask why it is the case that we focus so much on individuals as opposed to groups or collectives as the primary locus of our discussions of responsibility in the first place. In this dissertation, I will not respond to this problem by questioning the focus on individual moral agents as the primary subjects of responsibility and advocating for a turn to group, collective, or institutional versions of responsibility. Instead I turn to largely untapped resources from feminist moral theory,

17 Ibid., 44.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 45.
specifically the ethics of care, in order to challenge the dominance of the causal-liability view of responsibility. The ethics of care is helpful for moving beyond the limits of the causal-liability view, because it challenges the phenomenology of agency—i.e., the account of social relations, moral agents, etc.—upon which that causal-liability view relies. Instead of going beyond individual responsibility, I argue that what is necessary is to think about what individual responsibility demands when untethered from this modern, individualistic account of moral experience.

With Jamieson’s and Scheffler’s respective calls for a shift in thinking about individual responsibility in mind, I now turn to an examination of those principles that ground existing attempts to assign responsibility within global contexts. Accounts of global responsibility regularly consider structural harms, such as global poverty, labor injustice, and environmental degradation. I examine the principles commonly used for grounding global responsibilities in order to demonstrate what options are currently available for making sense of the normative character of the relationship that systemic contributors have to structural harms.

CAPACITY, COMMUNITARIAN, AND CAUSAL PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBILITY

David Miller identifies a collection of principles that are commonly used to justify claims of remedial responsibility (i.e., a responsibility to repair) within global contexts. Evaluating these principles is useful in determining whether individuals have a

responsibility to prevent or remedy distant structural harms to which they contribute through everyday life practices. Theorists developing various models of global responsibility typically take up what I call structural harms as their primary concern, although they often focus on the responsibilities that exist at other levels of agency as well (i.e., state, institutional, corporate, etc.). Each of the principles described below, i.e., the capacity, communitarian, and causal principles offer different criteria for determining responsibility attributions. Miller’s concern in locating each of these principles is to explicate the normative justifications that ground different attempts to assign responsibility to agents in global contexts.

These principles all aim to draw a morally salient connection between those that suffer from harm and those tasked with remedying that harm. Each principle incorporates some aspect of the traditional Western understanding of moral responsibility discussed above, with the causal principle matching the commonsense account most closely. Examining these principles offers us a terrain upon which to better consider whether it is justifiable to claim that systemic contributors have responsibilities to prevent or remedy structural harms. An examination of these principles also offers us an opportunity to evaluate Scheffler’s claim that there currently exists no action-guiding and psychologically feasible principles that can explain the moral connection between ordinary individuals and systemically generated harms.

I speak here of a responsibility both to prevent and remedy distant harms, even though Miller is explicitly using the language of remedial responsibility. I include a responsibility to prevent harms in this discussion, because in most cases in which an agent has a responsibility to remedy some harm, then that agent would also have a responsibility to prevent that harm from continuing to take place or from taking place again.
The capacity principle for assigning remedial responsibilities suggests that those agents who have the greatest capacity to remedy harm ought to be the ones who do so. This approach is reminiscent of the expression, “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.” In the field of global justice, the capacity principle is famously at work in the arguments of the hard-line utilitarianism of Peter Singer, who attributes responsibility for mitigating the effects of severe poverty to all those that have the capacity to do so. Taking the maximization of overall happiness to be central to determining individual responsibility, Singer suggests that anyone who lives above marginal utility (i.e., who has their basic needs met) ought to use their extra capacities and resources to mitigate the suffering of all those who live below that level. There is a strategic benefit of using the capacity principle in this way insofar as it distributes responsibility for aiding others to those most able to do so. In so doing, assigning responsibility in this way satisfies the practical constraint that norms dictating what agents ought to do only require of them what it is that they actually can do.

The capacity principle, however, relies on some problematic assumptions. First, according to Miller, the capacity principle assumes that one’s ability to effectively remedy harm implies that one should bear the burden of remedying that harm. I call this the Burden Distribution Problem (BDP). The BDP suggests that the intuitive move to distribute responsibilities for a particular harm (e.g., rescuing a drowning swimmer) to those that are most capable of remedying that harm (e.g., the strongest swimmer on the

beach) is more controversial than it may seem. Using only the capacity principle to
determine the distribution of responsibility also suggests, for example, that if one family
member (let’s say, Mom) is most capable of effectively completing all of the housework,
then she ought to bear all of the responsibility for the burden of domestic labor. In this
case, there are other concerns that the capacity principle ignores, such as the equitable
distribution of labor, which ought to determine who has responsibility to do what. The
BDP demonstrates that burdens of responsibility need to be assigned to agents for more
convincing reasons than just that they are capable of bearing them.

Using the capacity principle to assign responsibility also fails to take into account
the historical considerations that have lead up to an instance of suffering that now needs
to be addressed. I call this the Historical Contribution Problem (HCP). Miller articulates
the HCP with the capacity principle by calling on Aesop’s familiar fable in which a
grasshopper, who after spending his whole summer singing, finds himself suddenly
hungry at the start of winter. The industrious colony of ants living nearby, however, spent
their summer storing up food for the winter. Intended to teach the virtues of diligence and
hard work, the fable suggests that it is unfair to ask the ants to now share the fruits of
their labor with the dawdling grasshopper.25 The HCP recognizes that harms take place in
background conditions that are glossed over in the application of the capacity principle.
Although Miller utilizes a small-scale example in order to explain this critique of the
capacity principle, the HCP is particularly relevant concerning structural harms that occur
on a large-scale because these harms have taken place within prolonged social, economic,

25 Ibid., 103. This version of the Historical Contribution Problem appeals to libertarian
concerns regarding free riders, but it need not have this connotation as I suggest below.
and political contexts. Some may suggest that these histories, especially histories of domination and oppression, ought to be interrogated in order to identify responsible parties for structural harms.

The community principle offers an alternative to the capacity principle by suggesting that existing communal ties serve to justify remedial responsibilities. This principle draws upon the intuition that individuals have special responsibilities to those whom they are closest. The community principle asserts that agents who are more closely related to one another are not only best placed to aid their companions, but also acquire special obligations to do so as a result of explicit or implicit contractual relations existing between members of the same group. The community principle makes use of widely held intuitions about the existence of special obligations to family, friends, and fellow citizens. Individuals regularly understand themselves as being especially responsible for taking care of their children as opposed to other people’s children and for defending their country as opposed to someone else’s.

The scope of what counts as a morally relevant communal relation, however, is a matter of debate. While some see nation-state boundaries as creating a line of demarcation between those relations that are morally significant and those that are not, others suggest that international boundaries draw an arbitrary distinction concerning responsibilities to remedy harms. The community principle for distributing responsibilities, taken on its own, leaves the determinations of relevant moral borders ambiguous. I call this the Sphere of Concern Problem (SCP) with the community principle. This problem is brought into greater relief when considering various ways of determining one’s circle of moral concern.
Cosmopolitanism, for example, suggests that all human beings regardless of location constitute a shared moral community.\(^{26}\) Some animal rights theorists suggest that all animals or, at the very least some non-human high-functioning mammals, belong in this shared moral community.\(^{27}\) Those advocating environmental rights suggest that one’s communal ties extend to the ecosystems within which we live.\(^{28}\) These various ways of determining who or what is in one’s spheres of moral concern demonstrate that the community principle alone does not offer a way to distinguish which beings or what kind of social connections count as morally significant. What is needed is an additional argument for determining how far communal ties extend—for example, human dignity, sentience, etc.—without which the communitarian principle circularly argues that an agent A is responsible for thing X because X is the kind of thing for which A must take responsibility.

Any principle for assigning responsibility will have the quality of being more or less restrictive. The capacity and community principles fall on one end of a continuum of restrictiveness. By restrictiveness, I mean the extent to which each principle limits the scope of individual moral responsibility. This restrictiveness, as Scheffler noted above, determines the psychological feasibility of each method of assigning responsibility. Principles for assigning responsibility become less psychologically persuasive as the burdens of responsibility that they distribute become larger. When a principle suggests

\(^{26}\) See, for example, Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

\(^{27}\) Singer, for example, suggests that sentience determines whether or not a living being deserves moral consideration in Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Ecco Press, 2001).

that an individual ought to take responsibility for addressing more harms than they are capable of attending to, it is rejected as both normatively unreasonable and infeasible.

The capacity principle is robustly unrestrictive because its only criterion for assigning responsibility is the existence of relevant capacities. Anyone who is able to aid is responsible for doing so, and those most capable have the most responsibility. The community principle is somewhat restrictive in that it intends to limit remedial responsibilities to those who share a communal bond. The extent of the community principle’s restrictiveness depends upon the scope of the moral community in question. If the group is large, e.g., including all of humanity, then the communal principle becomes less restrictive.

Nell Noddings, like many others, worries that unrestrictive principles for assigning responsibility are problematic when applied to global problems insofar as these principles create “empathetic exhaustion.” Empathetic exhaustion results from the assignment of responsibility to those who cannot possibly make good on all of their obligations given the scope of the problem in question. Both the overwhelming nature of these unrestrictive principles for assigning responsibility and the more general worry that taking responsibility for structural harms can become morally overburdensome has resulted in the continued dominance of the commonsense understanding of individual moral responsibility described above. This is because the commonsense

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30 For a general critique of utilitarianism on this topic see J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, Utilitarianism: For and Against (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). For a reply to this critique, specifically concerning the overburdensomeness of global obligations see Peter Unger, Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
understanding—which incorporates both the causal-liability and role-based views of responsibility—restricts the scope of individual responsibility in ways that avoid problems of empathetic exhaustion.

Our commonsense Western understanding of moral responsibility is most closely guided by what Miller identifies as the causal principle. The causal principle simply suggests that an agent (A) is responsible for remedying some harm (B) when A is the cause of B. It is important to note that causation is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for assigning moral responsibility on the causal-liability view. An agent is responsible for a harm not only if he or she causes it, but if his or her causing of this harm is morally blameworthy in some way. As discussed above, moral responsibility on a causal-liability view requires that an agent commit an action voluntarily and that the consequences of the action be foreseeable. Under this principle, determining causation, i.e., who harmed whom, is the first factor in deciding who is responsible for remedying some harm. The second factor concerns whether the agent who caused this harm violated a moral obligation in some way or whether he or she has a justification or excuse for his or her actions, i.e., whether the actions are morally blameworthy.

The causal principle is more restrictive than either the capacity or community principles because it only assigns responsibility to those agents who can be linked to the chain of events that created the harm in question. This principle taps into commonsense Western intuitions about moral obligations, such as, “You broke it, you bought it.” Although the causal principle is restrictive, it can be taken up in regard to structural and
global harms. For example, a common way of determining who ought to remedy the harmful effects of climate change is the polluter pays principle, which suggests that those states most responsible for using fossil fuels ought to bear the brunt of the costs of increased climate variability.\(^{31}\) The causal principle is also predominate in legal attributions of responsibility in civil law concerning tort liability.

This principle is widely considered to be a fair way to assign responsibility because of its intuitive appeal and restrictive quality. Because moral responsibility is only attributed to those agents who (voluntarily and foreseeably) caused some harm, an individual needs to only be careful to avoid harming others if she wishes to minimize the scope of her responsibilities. Unlike the capacity and community principles, which by design are applicable to a larger group of agents, the causal principle circumscribes responsibility relations as tightly as possible. Under the capacity or community principles, agents cannot avoid obligations to assist others as long as they either possess excess resources or are part of a moral community in which harm occurs. The causal principle, however, allows individuals to avoid responsibility for addressing harms by simply minding their own business.

I will save a more extensive discussion of the difficulties of relying on the causal principle as a foundation for individual responsibility for structural harms until Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, I examine Thomas Pogge’s reliance on a causal principle for assigning responsibility to members of affluent nations for responding to global poverty in *World Poverty and Human Rights*. In Chapter 5, I examine approaches to climate

responsibility that are based on a causal-liability view. The reasons why philosophers like Pogge turn to a causal approach to grounding responsibility for a problem like global poverty is its intuitive appeal. If one can demonstrate that individuals have caused (or continue to cause) global poverty, then per the causal-liability view, which people already widely accept in standard moral and legal practices of holding people responsible for wrongdoing, you can demonstrate that such agents are responsible for responding to the problem of global poverty. Arguments that ground responsibility for climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts in claims about which agents have caused climate change through their carbon emissions have a similar intuitive appeal. From the discussions of the nature of structural harms earlier in this chapter, however, skepticism about efforts that depend on a causal-liability view to ground claims of individual responsibility in global contexts is warranted.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I will develop more detailed arguments that justify this skepticism toward causal-liability approaches to global and environmental responsibility. Here I will outline the general reasons motivating this skepticism. Tracing the causes of structural harms back to discreet agents is made difficult given what I have called the problem of systemic contributors. This difficulty raises questions about the causal principle’s suitability in global and structural contexts. As discussed above, structural harms and their causes are spatially diffuse and temporally extended. The global garment industry, for example, connects individuals living in vastly distant parts of the world through an industrial supply chain. The drivers of climate change (e.g., fossil fuel industries and the structural features of how societies supply energy and fuel transportation) connect actors that are not only far apart, but also who live during
different time periods in a network of causes that will alter the earth’s climate for future generations. The fact that structural harms are caused at multiple levels of agency (i.e., by state, institutional, corporate, and individual actors) poses perhaps the greatest challenge to attempts to assign global responsibilities in terms of causal contributions. While it may be possible to trace one action to a distant harmful effect (e.g., the purchase of one article of clothing can be connected to a particular sweatshop), it is questionable as to whether it is meaningful to say that this action causes a harm suffered by a particular worker given that this consumer purchase is only one small part of larger socio-economic arrangements—trade policies, labor regulations, business policies, management practices, etc.—that make the harm done to the particular worker possible. The issue here is the descriptive plausibility of the causal-liability view and the meaningfulness of tracking the causes of harms back to discrete effects in the context of structural harms on a global scale. Additionally, systemic contributors are limited in both their knowledge of the effects of their actions and constrained in their choices of life practices. This raises questions about whether systemic contributors satisfy the voluntariness and foreseeability requirements of the causal-liability view. Beyond these normative concerns about whether systemic contributors commit morally blameworthy actions on a causal-liability view, there are psychological concerns about whether it is possible for such agents to be morally motivated by the effects of their actions when those effects are often obscured from the agent.

Given the normative and descriptive limitations of the causal-liability view in a global context as well as the problems of the capacity and communitarian approaches, it
is worth asking whether an alternative approach is better suited to addressing the problem of systemic contributors.

**Care as an Alternative Framework**

If, as Jamieson and Scheffler argue, the commonsense Western understanding of individual responsibility evolved in a far less dense and interconnected world than the one in which we currently live, then we must look beyond the inherited causal-liability view to better understand the normative implications of contributing to structural harms in our contemporary global context. Turning to a care framework is helpful for this task. By care framework, I mean the moral perspectives that have emerged out of one form of feminist engagement with moral theory over the past three decades. The ethics of care is a critical feminist approach to moral theory that developed in response to two tendencies in both the history of ethics and contemporary moral theory, (1) the traditional idea that women are morally (and rationally) inferior to men and (2) the lack of attention to problems relevant to women’s experience (e.g., those issues supposedly confined to the private sphere, familial relations, care work, and so forth). The result of these critical efforts has been a diverse field of scholarship that shares a commitment to considering moral subjects as they are situated in and shaped by their relationships to others. Many philosophers working in feminist care ethics, such as Sara Ruddick, Virginia Held, Fiona Robinson, and Sarah Clark Miller, have investigated care ethics as a resource for global ethics. This dissertation contributes to this line of inquiry.

As discussed above, the causal-liability view of moral responsibility is based upon what Scheffler diagnoses as a phenomenology of agency that presumes that relationships that are morally significant consist in “small-scale interactions, with clearly demarcated
lines of causation, among independent individual agents.\textsuperscript{32} Against this ontological backdrop, the causal-liability view seeks to assign responsibility to individuals for the foreseeable consequences of their discreet and typically intentional actions. The causal-liability view is individualizing in a way that, while useful in assigning responsibility to and placing blame on individual agents in small-scale relations, fails to account for the nature of systemic contributors relationships to harm. This view of responsibility fails in this way because the world in which it developed, i.e., one in which individuals existed in social relationships that were less numerous, less dense, and more geographically circumscribed, has been fundamentally transformed. The problem of systemic contributors still raises the question of how to assign moral responsibilities to agents. But it poses this question in a new world in which individual actions participate in large-scale socio-economic arrangements, where (1) there are no longer clearly demarcated lines of causation; (2) harms are not always traceable to discrete agents but often are caused by numerous agents of various types (e.g., states, corporations, individuals, etc.) over extended periods of time; (3) agents are capable of acting in ways that have affects on peoples and environments that are spatially distant and temporally removed; (4) the foreseeable consequences of everyday actions become harder for individual agents to predict without extensive expert knowledge about issues, such as trade policy, management practices, economic development, labor regulations, environmental science, and so forth; and (5) the actions of individual agents are significantly constrained by social structures in ways that makes it difficult to evaluate the blameworthiness of such actions with traditional questions about whether actions are voluntary or intend a specific

harms. The normative challenge then is to provide an understanding of responsibility that reflects the way individuals experience themselves as moral subjects and moral life generally, not as isolated agents whose actions operate in a geographically limited sphere, but rather as actors living in a densely interconnected, global world.

The ethics of care is helpful for addressing the problem of systemic contributors because it provides an alternative phenomenology of agency, i.e., it begins with a different set of metaethical commitments about the nature of moral life. And, as I think the following discussions will make clear, these commitments are better suited for accounting for the nature of agency, action, and social relationships in a global world than those presupposed by the causal-liability view. The ethics of care begins with an understanding of moral agents as unique individuals, who are socially embedded and embodied in a world of relationships. Instead of focusing on how universal moral principles can be applied to individual actions, the ethics of care begins by attending to the various ways in which individuals are connected to others. The idea here is that moral choices and actions are only meaningful and properly evaluated against the backdrop of particular social situations. For this reason, the ethics of care is often called a relational ethic, because it views the relationships an agents has to others as a source of moral obligations. Not only do care ethicists view social relationships as the foundation of moral obligations, but they also consider participation in morally significant relations as the process through which moral subjects are constituted. It is this relational focus of care ethics that makes it well suited to capture the nature of social life and moral action in a global world.
In a global context, taking up a care perspective begins by considering systemic contributors as relational beings and thus focusing on the complex social connections to harm that the causal-liability view has such difficulty deciphering. Instead of focusing on global social connections in order to track harmful effects back to causally responsible agents, a care framework asks a different set of questions about those global social relationships. For example, how are moral agents shaped by large-scale social structures? What constraints do these structures place on their actions? What commitments and responsibilities do particular agents have to immediate relationships, such as family and friends? How do broader socio-economic arrangements make satisfying these commitments more difficult? What specific capabilities and resources do particular agents possess for acting differently? How are agents limited in the ways they act and choose, specifically in everyday life practices, to satisfy basic needs—such as housing, food, transportation, etc.—and pursue life projects by social conditions? What is moral significant about the social relationships agents have, not to immediate family, friends, and community members, but to those to whom they are distantly related through economic practices? Do these distant, complex, and mediated social relationships ground any caring obligations? And, if so, in what way can someone care about distant others and what would caring obligations require in the context of such a relationship?

As I will demonstrate throughout the dissertation, the framework of care ethics is well suited to examining the normative significance of the relationships that systemic contributors have to distant harms. It is helpful in this regard because it opens up a new set of productive questions because of its focus on social relationships and the responsibilities agents have to be attentive to the needs, well being, and vulnerabilities of
others with whom they exist in social relations. All of these questions opened up by a care perspective can in some sense be reduced to the following key questions: why do systemic contributors have responsibilities to care about the distant effects of their actions and what does care mean and require in such a context?

Before applying a care perspective to the problem of systemic contributors, I will first clear up some problems that immediately present themselves when attempting to use the ethics of care in a global application. If, as I have suggested, the causal-liability view is not well suited to addressing the problem of systemic contributors because it emerged at a time when small-scale individual interactions were presumed to be an essential condition of moral experience, then I must also consider whether this is also the case for a care ethics approach. In the next chapter, I will examine and respond to potentially one of the most damning criticisms of the ethics of care. Early accounts of care ethics, especially the version that Nel Noddings forwards, have been charged with being a parochial ethic due to the willingness of care ethicists to examine how moral obligations to care emerge in intimate contexts (e.g., between mothers and children, doctors and patients, domestic or health care workers and those for whom they care). By prioritizing an attentiveness to particular moral relationships over universal moral principles, the ethics of care opened itself up to criticism that it is not applicable to relationships between strangers, distant others, or the systemic conditions of injustice. In what follows, I examine and respond to these criticisms by arguing for the existence of caring obligations to general others, which I suggest should be understood as being central to an account of moral obligation based on care. I argue that by recognizing existing duties to take care (i.e., an obligation to act with care for general others in one’s social actions), it
is possible to both answer criticisms of the ethics of care as being a parochial ethic and
develop a tool with which to better understand the responsibility of systemic contributors
moral in the face of global harms.
CHAPTER 2: CARE, PARTICULARITY, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

In this chapter I examine one of the most damning criticisms of the ethics of care. This is the charge that care ethics is particularist in a way that makes it unsuitable as a framework for grounding obligations in the context of structural harms. I investigate this criticism because overcoming it is essential if care ethics will be of any use in providing an answer to the question of whether systemic contributors have moral obligations to remedy systemically generated harms. I will demonstrate that the ethics of care has numerous resources for both answering this challenge and responding to the problem of systemic contributors, including both a relational understanding of the person and a focus on the moral challenges of recognizing human beings as vulnerable, interdependent, and thus requiring care.

I now focus on those who claim that care theory is too focused on particular relations to be helpful in considering the structural features that provide the conditions of many kinds of harm (e.g., systemic poverty, racial oppression, gender injustice, etc.). I argue that, while the attentiveness of the ethics of care to moral obligations between particular, immediate, and concrete others is an important aspect of care theory worth retaining, this focus does not preclude the possibility of articulating how individuals are also responsible for taking care, in a more general sense, such that they avoid contributing to structural harms.

To make this argument, I first offer a general overview of the development of care ethics as a distinctively feminist approach to moral theory. Next, I overview some key features of the ethics of care, including how it has been distinguished from the justice perspective. While outlining these features I of course recognizing that care ethics, like
feminist moral theory more generally, consists of a number of diverse perspectives that cannot be reduced to a homogenous doctrine. That said, systematizing some of the central features of care ethics is nonetheless helpful in assessing its viability as a resource for global applications. With a general understanding of some of the main commitments of care ethics in hand, I then consider criticisms of the ethics of care as advocating a particularist approach to moral life that borders upon parochialism. Critics suggest that certain articulations of the ethics of care focus on concrete and immediate relations in a way that runs contrary to feminist interests in gender justice and equality. I argue that while these criticisms were in large part aimed at early formulations of the ethics of care, especially the version that Nel Noddings forwards, these critiques raise important concerns about the ability of care ethics to be applied to structural and global harms.

I then turn to Fiona Robinson’s work on global care ethics to examine an existing response to these criticisms. Although Robinson demonstrates how the key features of the care perspective make it useful for evaluating global and structural harms, I argue that care ethics still has more work to do in order to justify the existence of obligations to care for those who are harmed within the context of larger social, economic, and political structures. In particular, the ethics of care requires an account of individual responsibilities regarding relationships between parties who are either distantly related to one another or whose acts are mediated by larger social structures that create non-immediate harms. To this end, I begin to outline the basic structure my own account of a general duty to take care, which I continue to develop throughout the following chapters. I will argue that my account of a general duty to take care remains faithful to key features
of the ethics of care, while also providing an answer to how we can begin to understand individual’s obligations in regard to structural harms.

**THE ETHICS OF CARE: DEVELOPMENT AND KEY FEATURES**

The ethics of care has evolved over the last three decades in response to the exclusion and undervaluing of women’s moral experiences by the dominant philosophical tradition. The result of these efforts is an alternative framework for understanding moral life that is both diverse and yet unified in its commitment to being attentive to values, dispositions, and practices that have been historically understood as both feminine and philosophically irrelevant. In the last chapter, I diagnosed a number of challenges raised by attempting to apply a commonsense understanding of individual responsibility to the way most individual-level agents participate in systemically generated harms. Now I offer an overview of the development and key features of the ethics of care to consider its viability as an ethical framework for evaluating individual obligations for preventing or remedying structural harms.

**A DIFFERENT VOICE**

Understanding the ethics of care requires taking stock of its initial development. This is because, although diverse approaches to care ethics continue to develop, criticisms of early versions of care ethics remain influential. Carol Gilligan’s work on women’s moral perspectives offers a good starting point for understanding the roots of this feminist moral outlook, as it is often cited as serving as a catalyst for the development of contemporary
care ethics. With *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan sparked feminist philosophical interest in the exclusion of women’s moral experiences from the mainstream philosophical tradition by drawing attention to a recurring masculine bias within psychological research on moral development. Gilligan evaluated the treatment of women as subjects of psychological theories of moral development, in particular noting how Lawrence Kohlberg’s use of a Kantian inspired hierarchy of moral development adopted a vision of ethical experience that subordinates particularist and relational concerns to universalist and individualist ones. Gilligan argues that theorists such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg offered a biased and inaccurate portrait of women’s moral development by dismissing experiences that emerge within caring relationships as being morally irrelevant. In particular, she challenges the way in which this body of work suggests that females are, at best, problematic as research subjects and, at worst, consistently found to be morally inferior to their male counterparts.

Gilligan’s critique of Lawrence Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development has had lasting influence on feminist moral theory as it questioned what philosophical underpinnings ought to ground determinations of moral maturity. Kohlberg’s work on moral development, an extension of the work of Jean Piaget, codified a deontological

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33 Although Gilligan’s work garnered much attention, it is important to also note the influence of Milton Mayeroff’s book *On Caring* (1971) and Sara Ruddick’s essay “Maternal Thinking” (1980), which predate Gilligan’s publication of *In a Different Voice*.
perspective on moral maturity. According to his research, a child’s moral judgment is understood as developing through a six-stage process in which moral reasoning becomes more sophisticated as it becomes more impartial and abstract.

According to Kohlberg, the earliest stages of moral development are represented by a self-interested orientation towards the world in which the immature learn to make moral judgments by determining what will either fulfill their desires or gain them praise or reproach. From these initial stages, he claims that an individual becomes more mature when he or she begins to use interpersonal norms as reasons for guiding his or her behavior. Attentiveness to the expectations that exist within particular relationships as well as an appreciation of social norms distinguishes these middle stages of moral development from earlier stages. In the highest stages of moral development, individuals begin to understand themselves as guided by abstract and universal moral principles when deciding upon a course of action.

Gilligan challenges Kohlberg’s stages of moral development after observing that his studies, like many of those of his predecessors, consistently determined female subjects to be morally inferior to their male counterparts. Females tested against Kohlberg’s scale regularly peaked at the middle (interpersonal) stages of development, while males demonstrated abstract reasoning skills characteristic of the higher stages. Gilligan aimed to illustrate the underlying implications of Kohlberg’s findings by describing two gender-differentiated responses to one of Kohlberg’s tests of moral development: The Heinz Dilemma. In this dilemma, Heinz, a man with a dying wife, is

unable to pay for the medication that his wife needs to recover. When the druggist, whom he has visited, refuses to negotiate with him on the price, Heinz must decide whether to steal the medicine or go home empty handed. Kohlberg’s experiment asks adolescent boys and girls to decide what Heinz should do and why, and then measures their answers against his six-stage scale of moral maturity.

Gilligan describes the test of a male subject, Jake, who answers that Heinz should steal the drug because Heinz’s wife’s life is more important than the money that the druggist will loose from the theft. On Kohlberg’s scale, this answer demonstrates that the subject has logically reasoned through the expectations of existing laws and the problems posed by the specific moral values in conflict in the dilemma (stealing vs. letting someone die). Jake’s deliberations are, for Kohlberg, indicative of the higher stages of moral development. Gilligan also describes the answers of a female subject, Amy, who does not weigh the stakes of the dilemma in the same way as Jake. In her test, Amy asks contextual questions about the dilemma and suggests that the people described ought to keep working to find a better solution for everyone. While Kohlberg would claim that Amy’s response displays logical confusion and an inability to think for herself, Gilligan suggest that there is more to Amy’s frustration than mere confusion.

According to Kohlberg, Amy is morally inferior to Jake because she cannot move beyond the interpersonal concerns of the middle stages of moral development in order to derive an abstract rule or principle from which to judge Heinz’s dilemma. Gilligan argues, however, that the ranking of one child as being morally inferior to the other is created not by the children’s actual abilities to reason, but rather a scale that favors one kind of moral perspective over another. She suggests that Amy’s answers are
characteristic of a different moral perspective often taken up by women, which places
more value on understanding the moral contexts of particular relationships and the
importance of responding to the needs of others. Gilligan reinterprets Amy’s response as
one that is not unable to weigh competing rights and goods, but as one that is more
focused on identifying a failure on the part of the druggist to respond to the needs of
others. Gilligan insists that Amy’s perspective represents a different moral voice, which
mainstream Western moral theory has ignored or dismissed. This different voice is
indicative of the care perspective on moral judgment. She explains that Amy’s response
can be understood as taking up an alternative moral outlook insofar as “her world is a
world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection
between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception
of the need for response.” Gilligan’s subsequent research has focused on listening for
this different voice and has identified it as being operative in other moral contexts,
including a study of women’s moral deliberation concerning abortion and within the
context of political life.

Gilligan calls the different voice that she has identified the care perspective and
sets it up in contrast to the justice perspective, which is characteristic of the kind of moral
reasoning that takes place within the higher stages of Kohlberg’s scale. Within feminist
moral theory, these two perspectives have been taken up as follows. The justice

36 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development
37 Ibid., 30.
38 Carol Gilligan, “Concepts of Self and Morality,” in In a Different Voice: Psychological
Theory and Women’s Development, 28-30 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Carol
perspective is associated with attempts to formulate a rational foundation for universal moral principles and a focus on autonomy, independence, and rights. Alternatively, the care-based perspective has been associated with a special attention to caring relationships, dependency, and the role of emotions in moral deliberation. These two perspectives have typically been taken to represent two different ways of observing moral dilemmas, as well as, distinct sets of values concerning the most morally significant features of moral conflicts.

**JUSTICE VERSUS CARE**

A variety of feminist approaches to moral theory gained momentum following Gilligan’s work. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers’s collected volume, *Women and Moral Theory*, was especially influential in spurring discussions and criticisms of the division between what Gilligan identified as the justice and care perspectives on moral judgment. In her contribution to that volume, Gilligan clarifies her earlier work by elaborating upon the distinction between the justice and care perspectives using an image from Gestalt psychology. Like a duck-rabbit image, Gilligan suggests that the justice and care perspectives can be simultaneously present in any moral conflict, yet not contemporaneously taken up in moral judgment. What viewpoint one takes when considering a moral conflict will depend on a person’s background and disposition.

The care perspective prioritizes relationality as a key feature of human existence or, put differently, it recognizes that human beings have needs that they cannot secure on their own and are often dependent, especially in childhood and old-age, upon the care of others. Conversely, the justice perspective is portrayed as prioritizing an understanding of humans as individual autonomous agents, who act, think, and choose for themselves. The justice perspective thus focuses on the separateness and distinctness of persons and on values like impartiality and universalizability in order to guarantee that agents are treated respectfully. Each perspective highlights important and different aspects of moral experience. A question raised by these discussions is whether the perspectives are mutually exclusive, especially given the seemingly stark contrast between the way each perspective conceives of the human person, or whether a more subtle relationship between justice and care can be conceived. I will return to this question throughout the dissertation, including the Conclusion.

From the justice perspective, individuals considering a moral dilemma see the parties involved as separate and distinct individuals, typically with equal standing relative to each another. The justice perspective focuses on these individuals as the primary bearer of rights and aims that can be evaluated against the backdrop of universal and impartial moral principles. For example, the justice perspective’s use of universal principles is reflected in the Kantian categorical imperative or utilitarian greatest happiness principle. Alison Jaggar explains that

\[ \ldots \text{justice thinking is impersonal and general because it regards both moral subjects and the objects of their moral concern in terms of their moral status as representatives of humanity or as beings capable of pleasure or pain rather than in terms of their concrete specificity; care thinking is personal and particularized in} \]
that both carers and those cared-for regard each other as unique, irreplaceable individuals.\textsuperscript{40}

From a care perspective, one focuses less on individuals in abstract terms—e.g., as a separate and distinct bearer of rights or a being capable of experiencing pleasure and pain—and more on how particular people are embedded within social relationships and have specific needs, interests, and concerns. Often these relationships are intimate and private (e.g., spousal or parent/child relationships) and as such have garnered little attention within mainstream moral theory. The care perspective focuses on relationships of interdependence, the ways in which these relationships are necessary features of human life given that humans are vulnerable beings that rely on the care of others, and also how these relationships create vulnerabilities that are often relegated to the private domain and ignored by dominant moral theories.

An important distinction between the justice and care perspectives is the role of the emotions in each. Theories that take up a justice perspective see emotions as, in large part, ethically problematic insofar as they undermine one’s ability to be impartial. There are, of course, exceptions to this tendency, such as the way that Kant highlights the importance of respect as a moral feeling.\textsuperscript{41} The care perspective, however, insists upon the ethical value of emotions more broadly, especially emotions like sympathy and compassion. Care theorists of course recognize that not all emotions are helpful to the


process of moral judgment. For example, certain emotions are morally problematic, such as anger or disgust. The emphasis that care ethics places on the moral value of affect and emotions places it in the tradition of moral theories that includes virtue theory and sentimentalism (e.g., Aristotle, Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and so on).^{42}

With this brief account of the development of care ethics in mind, I now turn to outline some major aspects of this ethical framework that make it a distinct moral perspective.

**KEY FEATURES OF CARE ETHICS**

The first feature of care ethics is its commitment to understanding how individuals are constituted by their relationships to others. Nel Noddings, for example, takes relationality to be ontologically basic in the ethics of care. This means that “human encounter and affective response” are taken to be “a basic fact of human existence.”^{43}

This view of persons sees the relationships one has to others as, at least partially, constitutive of one’s existence. This means that one’s particular relationships make up a significant part of what it means to be who one is (e.g., a daughter, a member of a certain religion or ethnic group, a citizen of a particular country) as well as what one desires, wants, needs, believes, is committed and obligated to, cares for, and so on. Attentiveness

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to the importance of moral relationships within care ethics has caused many to term it a relational ethics. Held highlights “the moral value and importance of relations of family and friendship and the need for moral guidance in these domains” as a primary focus of the ethics of care.44 She notes that dominant moral theories, such as utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, are primarily focused on public relations between what they take to be “unrelated, independent, and mutually indifferent individuals assumed to be equal.”45 A distinct contribution of care ethics is that it highlights both how the private domain is subject to ethical reflection, and also how the kind of ethical reflection characteristic of the private sphere, where interdependence, relationality, and vulnerability are facts of life, can contribute to a broader understanding of persons as interrelated beings and moral life in the public arena.

The second key feature of care ethics is, of course, the insistence on the moral significance of caring relationships. Care is recognized as a universally shared feature of human experience. Being cared for is an experience common to all human beings, since no human being can survive without long periods of care during infancy and childhood. Held notes that we often forget that “every person starts out as a child dependent on those providing us care, and we remain interdependent with others in thoroughly fundamental ways throughout our lives.”46 Whether through illness, disability, or the distribution of domestic responsibilities, all human beings either require or must provide care at some point in their lives. Recognizing this fact—the ubiquity of care in human life—is why

46 Ibid., 14.
caring for the needs of others is a foundational feature of this moral framework. The centrality of care to human life has been taken up within feminist moral theory because responsibilities for caring labor have historically been distributed to women, who as mothers, housekeepers, teachers, and nurses bear the brunt of caring labor. Along these lines, Sarah Ruddick has examined what she calls maternal thinking as a form of moral reasoning, which had previously garnered little attention within philosophical and ethical thought.\(^{47}\) Although providing care for others has typically been the domain of women, Ruddick and others emphasize that care can be and is practiced by men and women alike when individuals are attentive and choose to respond to the needs of others.\(^{48}\) Despite the increasing equality of women within some communities and classes, caring labor is still more likely to be carried out by women, especially those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.\(^{49}\)

This focus on the ubiquity of caring relations in human life has lead to the third key feature of care ethics. This is a focus on dependence as a basic fact of human existence and one that is relevant to the discussion of moral action, deliberation, and obligation. For example, Eva Feder Kittay has examined how care often is provided between unequal parties. From this, she argues that moral theories that focus on justice, autonomy, and independence must be changed so that they take into account dependency relations as a necessary fact of life or risk obfuscating the moral obligations at play in the


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 18.

relationships between those that are disabled and those that care for them.\textsuperscript{50} Not only then does care ethics develop the normative significance of the fact that needing and giving care are necessary features of human life, but it also recognizes that any account of moral life must recognize how these caring relationships are typically characterized by dependence, inequality, and power differentials between those providing and receiving care.

The fourth and final feature of the ethics of care that I want to highlight is a general skepticism concerning the tendency towards abstraction and the use of universal principles in traditional moral theory. With caring relationships as a primary focus, the ethics of care prioritizes contextual analyses of relationships and an attentiveness to the particularities of individuals within relationships when making moral judgments. Seyla Benhabib is notably critical of contemporary moral theory, as exemplified in Rawls and Kohlberg, which she argues takes as its subject a “generalized” other that is both socially acontextual and disembodied, i.e., stripped of its particularity.\textsuperscript{51} For Benhabib, procedures of moral judgment, such as the veil of ignorance, offer us a way to take into account the needs and desires of others by projecting ourselves into the place of others. This kind of procedure, however, erases the particular perspectives of others and the needs, desires, or interests that we may not have been able to imagine when we project ourselves into their place. Instead she suggests that moral theory needs to treat “each and every rational being as an individual with [a] \textit{concrete} history, identity, and affective-


emotional constitution.” While care ethics generally rejects the tendency of most normative theories to privilege the role of abstract principles in moral life and instead advocates a view of moral judgment and deliberation that takes into account the particularities of actual relationships, this commitment has raised serious concerns. In the next section, I turn to criticisms of the ethics of care that suggest that its rejection of universal moral principles makes it unviable as an ethical framework for grounding the nature of moral obligations and evaluating moral problems between distant others.

CRITICISM OF CARE ETHICS

One criticism of care ethics is that it is overly particularist in its account of moral life, i.e., it runs into problems when it defends the idea that moral judgments can only be made with consideration of individuals as unique beings that exist within specific contexts. This way of being particularist is differentiated from universalistic moral theory that defends the idea that universal moral principles can be applied to individuals without consideration of the specificities of individual situations. Some critics claim that this particularist commitment leads care ethicist to become myopically focused on private, proximate relationships and miss the political, social, and economic background conditions of moral conflicts. Other critics point to this particularist tendency as also precluding care ethics from formulating a theory of global obligations. Those who forward these criticisms often have Noddings’ account of caring relations in mind as

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being paradigmatic of this exclusive focus on particular relations.\textsuperscript{53} Because of this, I will focus on Nodding’s work in this section as the primary foil to these criticisms, but it is important to note that these criticisms also challenge other formulations of care ethics.

I focus on two lines of criticism regarding the applicability of care theory to structural harms. The first is a concern about the relationship between care and justice as distinct moral perspectives. Critics worry that if the care and justice perspectives cannot be integrated, then this means that taking up a care perspective will prevent one from considering problems that are typically regarded as justice issues (e.g., gender inequality, racial oppression, systemic poverty, etc.) The second concern regards the focus that care ethics puts on particular and immediate moral relations. If taking up the care perspective always involves looking at particular, concrete situations, then this seemingly precludes consideration of the larger structures that shape particular relationships between individuals. Care ethics is, as a result, accused of being too close to the specificities of concrete relations to see the bigger normative picture of social and political justice.

Driving the first axis of concern is Gilligan’s gestalt image of the care and justice perspectives. Her account of these two perspectives as coexisting, yet incommensurate is problematic because it suggests that individuals can take up only one stance in regard to a moral conflict. In the justice perspective, one can abstract from particulars and use a general principle to reach a judgment. Or with the care perspective, one can look at the particularities of the situation to try to explain why there has been a breakdown of moral responsiveness and how it could be fixed. This gestalt image of the two views implies that either justice or care can be used as a comprehensive, self-sufficient ethical

\textsuperscript{53} Noddings, \textit{Caring}. 
perspective. Noddings makes this implication explicit in her account of caring relations. Her account has been subject to strong criticism.

Noddings’ formulation of care ethics is both early in the development of care theory and steadfast in its commitment that care is a replacement for the justice perspective. There are many more examples of care approaches that see justice and care as being mutually dependent to or even intertwined with one another as moral perspectives.54 Articulating the relationship between justice and care and even attempting to integrate the two has become an important task for care ethicists. When discussing the role of justice and care within family relationships, Ruddick, for example, views the role of justice as being “in tandem with care,” and she views care as providing “checks and inform[ing] justice when…it [justice] makes claims in an intrusive or appropriative manner.”55 Held recommends that we ought to keep the justice and care perspectives “conceptually distinct and…delineate the domains in which they should have priority.”56 Care concerns have priority, for Held, within the family (e.g., where the needs and abilities of particular children must be taken into account). Justice will have priority, she argues, within legal relations (e.g., where judges must treat individuals impartially to avoid making discriminatory rulings). While each perspective may have priority in one domain, each can still have a role to play within the other’s domain. Although more recent formulations of care ethics seek to challenge a strict distinction between care and justice, I focus on Noddings’ formulation of care theory as a competitor with justice-based moral theory, because the opposition that she advocates between care and justice

54 See Ruddick, Maternal Thinking; Held, The Ethics of Care; Tronto, Moral Boundaries.  
55 Ruddick, Maternal Thinking, 217.  
56 Held, The Ethics of Care, 17.
has raised lasting concerns about the viability of care ethics as a framework for addressing a wide range of moral, social, and political issues.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite debate about the exact relationship between care and justice, it is the focus of care ethics on particular individuals within concrete relations that differentiates it from other moral theories that place an emphasis on impartiality and universality as virtues of moral judgment. Critics claim that this attentiveness to particularity becomes problematic when it is combined with the claim that a care framework can completely replace the justice perspective. If care theory is seen as providing an ethical viewpoint that is primarily practiced within intimate and immediate relationships, then it has little to offer in the way of adjudicating considerations of ethical obligations between strangers. In a globalized world, where strangers often have the ability to affect each other’s lives through their social, economic, and political practices, the worry is that the care perspective turns out to be a kind of parochialism that keeps normative concerns close to home. Because it is fair to presume that one cannot know and care for general others in the way that one knows and cares for family and friends, any version of care ethics that is divorced from the justice perspective is seen by critics as providing a near-sighted ethical standpoint.

\textsuperscript{57} Ruddick and Held view the relationship between the care and justice perspectives as significantly more compatible than Noddings. My formulation of a general duty to take care will make the compatibility that they advocate more explicit. For more a more recent account of care ethics and its relationship to global justice from Noddings see, Nel Noddings, \textit{Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy} (University of California Press, 2002); Nel Noddings, \textit{The Maternal Factor: Two Paths to Morality} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
CRITICISM OF THE JUSTICE/CARE DISTINCTION AND NODDINGS’ PARTICULARISM

Concerns about the focus of care ethics on particular relations arise in reaction to the consensus within the ethics of care about what counts as the best way of approaching an ethical dilemma. Care ethicists argue that moral reasoning is best served by considering moral agents as unique individuals with experiences, emotions, interests, concerns, and relations to others that are specific to their situation. This way of understanding moral agents is contrasted with the classical liberal conception of the person. Held explains that, under the liberal conception, “the person [is seen] as a rational, autonomous agent, or a self-interested individual.”58 Where the liberal concept of the individual takes an individual’s separateness from others as primary,59 the ethics of care aims to consider individuals as they are embedded within and constituted by their relations with others.

Care ethics is especially attentive to the ways in which human beings are born dependent upon others and require care to develop into the rational and autonomous adults that liberal moral theory assumes them to be. This conception of the person stands in stark contrast to, for example, Hobbes’s tendency to “consider men as if… [they]… sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity without all kind of engagement to each other.”60 Care ethicists specifically and feminist moral theorists generally reject viewing persons in this manner because doing so creates “a false picture of society and the persons in it.”61 While abstracting from particularities may be useful if the goal is to understand moral relationships in terms of a contractual model and

58 Held, The Ethics of Care, 14.
59 Nozick and Rawls on separateness of persons
61 Held, The Ethics of Care, 14.
the values of impartiality and equality, Held suggest that in the ethics of care begins with an account of moral life in which

...many of our responsibilities are not freely entered into but presented to us by the accidents of our embeddedness in familial and social historical contexts. It [care ethics] often calls on us to *take* responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone.  

Held suggests that justice and care theories offer inverse perspectives on both moral life and the people who live it. Whereas liberal theory defends what some feminist critics take to be an atomistic conception of the individual and an overly generalized approach to moral theory, care ethics focuses on interdependency and particular relations. This stark opposition between care and justice, care theory and liberal theory, however, raises serious questions.

Onora O’Neill raises concerns about the rejection of abstract liberalism by care ethicists in the way that Held advocates above. O’Neill worries that a moral perspective that focuses too closely on particular and concrete relations risks “endorsing rather than challenging social and economic structures that marginalize women and confine them to the private sphere.”  

Famously, she warns that “a stress on caring relationships to the exclusion of abstract justice may endorse relegation to the nursery and the kitchen, to purdah and to poverty.” To better understand why O’Neill forwards this criticism of care, I turn to a more detailed examination of Noddings’ version of care ethics, which is especially vulnerable to O’Neill’s criticism.

62 Ibid., 14–15.
64 Ibid.
Noddings, who developed one of the first extensive approaches to care ethics, sets out care as a distinctively feminine moral perspective arising out of the experiences of women and mothers. She argues that “human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for, which . . . form the foundation of ethical response, have not received attention except as outcomes of ethical behaviors.” Noddings proposes that care is best understood not as a principle, but as an ethical ideal. She argues that care as an ethical ideal is universally relevant to moral activity, because all human beings have a memory of receiving care, consider caring to be a moral good, and seek to preserve themselves as caring beings. Noddings argues that care is not a universal principle for regulating actions, because genuinely caring relationships only occur in particular, lived human encounters. Instead Noddings investigates care as a moral practice that involves a reciprocal relation between two parties: the one-caring and the cared-for. Her work seeks to explicate the basic structure of this relationship.

Taking on the role of the one-caring involves an empathetic relationship to the cared-for, which Noddings calls engrossment. Engrossment is a receptive state, a “feeling with,” in which “I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality.” Noddings understands engrossment as an act of motivational displacement insofar as the one-caring takes up the needs and desires of the cared-for as part of his or her own needs and desires. Noddings’ explanation of engrossment is based on her understanding moral agents and action in terms of a relational ontology. Within a

65 Noddings, Caring.
66 Ibid., 1.
67 Ibid., 5.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 30.
caring relationship the one-caring adopts the needs of the cared-for as her own and is affectively and ethically motivated to meet these needs. The caring relation is reciprocal, for Noddings, because effective care can only be completed when the cared-for recognizes the role of the one-caring by affirming that care has been received. Caring relations, as a result, only obtain within immediate relationships, because the parties involved must be in contact with one another to be affected by each other and to be present in order to assure that care is effectively received.

Given the nature of care as a practical activity, Noddings explicitly argues that genuine care is only possible in personal, face-to-face relationships. Universal caring—or the idea that one can care for everyone—is impossible. In regard to strangers, she suggests that we can, at best, “care-about” these people. That is, “we can maintain an internal state of readiness to try and care for whoever crosses our path.” Caring-for distant others is impossible, however, since there is no affective, interpersonal relationship between parties. One can only experience engrossment and give and receive care in close relationships.

Noddings warns that one who attempts to extend genuine care to distant others risks being “bombarded with stimuli that arouse” one’s desire to respond to those who need care beyond one’s capacities to effectively respond. Noddings has more recently articulated these concerns in response to Peter Singer’s non-restrictive utilitarian model of global responsibility. She argues that individuals distantly related to global harms

70 Ibid., 18.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., 47.
cannot experience motivational displacement for distant others suffering from systemic poverty. This is because engrossment is not possible with distant others with whom one does not have a preexisting, affective, and intimate relationships. Even if this were psychologically possible, broadening one’s circle of moral concern in an attempt to care for those who suffer from severe poverty would only result in empathetic exhaustion, not the provision of effective care.\textsuperscript{74} For Noddings, genuinely caring for everyone—or general others—is impossible and attempting to do so is futile.

Claudia Card raises concerns about Noddings’ presentation of care ethics as a wholesale alternative to justice-based ethical theory.\textsuperscript{75} In particular, Card questions whether Noddings’ formulation of a care approach to moral judgment can “enable us to adequately resist evil” and especially “complicity in evil-doing.”\textsuperscript{76} Card considers two kinds of evil in her evaluation of Noddings’ work, including (1) evil that happens within intimate relations and (2) evil that happens in relations between strangers. In regard to the former, Card argues that Noddings’ account of engrossment within caring relations has the potential to become dangerous. For example, take the case of an abusive relationships in which the one-caring continues to prescribe to the ethical ideal of maintaining oneself as a care-giver and identifying with the needs of the cared-for at the expense of other values, such as dignity, equality, and self-respect. Noddings has missed, for Card, the way in which caring can be taken up “out of sheer necessity for survival, [as] the necessity to anticipate other’s needs in order to be a good servant or slave.”\textsuperscript{77} Noddings’

\textsuperscript{74} Noddings, “Complexity in Caring and Empathy.”
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 106.
adoption of caring as an ethical ideal, on this reading, looks both parochial and like a slave morality.

Concerning evil between strangers, Card worries about Noddings’ dismissal of ethical imperatives that arise beyond immediate relationships. Card explains that

... we are already separated from most people on earth, given how many we are and the limits of our personal resources. Since we can seriously affect far more people than we can encounter personally, we need an ethic that applies to our relations with people with whom we are connected only by relations of cause and effect as well as to our relations with those with whom we are connected by personal and potential encounters.\(^78\)

In her early and influential account, Noddings dismissed the task of understanding what the ethics of care might entail for distant relationships and focused on immediate relations.\(^79\) Card hints at one possible way to pursue this task, however, which I use below as an inspiration for developing care ethics as a framework for understanding responsibility in the context of structural harms. Card suggests that, at the very least, Noddings should acknowledge that there are “responsibilities to refrain from doing them [strangers] harm—*to be careful*, in a sense that does not require encounters with those for whose sakes we ought to *take care.*”\(^80\) By identifying how Noddings’ formulation of an ethics of care is unable to address evils that occur within intimate and distant relations, Card reasserts the importance of justice-based approaches to moral and political theory that have traditionally been more equipped to deal with global and structural harms and challenges the particularism of care ethics that leads it to both miss the kinds of

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 104–105.
\(^{79}\) Noddings has since applied her approach to global relations. See Noddings, *The Maternal Factor*.
\(^{80}\) Card, “Caring and Evil,” 102., my emphasis.
responsibilities agents have for strangers (or general others) and how a certain type of caring—taking-care—might be a way to express the nature of that responsibility.  

Alison Jaggar also criticizes care ethics for being too focused on immediate and particular relations. She raises this critique within the context of an evaluation of care theory as providing an alternative mode of practical moral reasoning for feminist thought. Jaggar, like O’Neill and Card, is critical of adopting the ideal of care as a replacement for justice, especially given the fact that many feminist concerns about the oppression and domination of women are well-served by the language of justice (e.g., the language of equal rights is useful in combating workplace discrimination and sexual harassment).

With these broader feminist concerns in mind, Jaggar identifies two blind spots in care thinking that are created by Gilligan’s account of the relationship between the justice and care perspectives.  

The first blind spot is the failure of the care framework “to explain how care thinking may be properly critical of the moral validity of felt, perceived, or expressed needs, so that it can avoid permitting or even legitimating morally inadequate responses to them.” With this Jaggar raises a concern about the lack of a normative justification for obligations to care. For the most part, care ethics has had relatively little to say about why agents have obligations to care for others and what makes care good or bad, beyond

81 Here Card refers to justice-based theories that defend the existence of global responsibilities for structural harms. One such approach, Thomas Pogge’s work in World Poverty and Human Rights, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
82 Jaggar, Alison M., “Caring as a Feminine Practice,” 189.
83 Ibid.
descriptive claims about the general existence of a human need for care.\textsuperscript{84} Jaggar notes that although it is the case that many care theorists draw a distinction between real needs and mere desires (e.g., the need for nourishment vs. the need for ice cream before dinner), these theorists generally do not explain how to justify the difference between the two.\textsuperscript{85} Care thinking needs to do more, for Jaggar, to offer a normative justification for what counts as good care, beyond the criterion that the cared-for accepts the care as satisfactory, since this still leaves open the possibility of neglectful and abusive relationships in which the care involved is approved of by the people in that relationship. Given the possibility of such cases, the cared-for accepting given acts of care as satisfactory is surely not a sufficient normative criterion for judging the legitimacy, effectiveness, and value of care.

The second blind spot in care ethics is caused by what Jaggar diagnoses as the overstated differentiation of the care and justice perspectives, in which one is said to attend to particular relations and the other to universal principles.\textsuperscript{86} Theories of justice

\textsuperscript{84} In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I will engage with the former concern in depth by evaluating the responding to existing normative justifications of caring obligations. \textsuperscript{85} In particular, Jaggar cites Gilligan, Ruddick, and Tronto as examples failing to offer a normative justification as what counts as good care (besides the fact that the care is perceived by the parties within the relation as good). For more other work that considers the differentiation between kinds of needs, see Diemut Bubeck, \textit{Care, Gender, and Justice} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sarah Clark Miller, \textit{The Ethics of Need: Agency, Dignity, and Obligation} (New York: Routledge, 2014). \textsuperscript{86} Jaggar, Alison M., “Caring as a Feminine Practice,” 193. Instead she argues that the difference between the two is better seen as a matter of degree, each perspective recognizes the importance of attending to particular situations and universal principles or concepts, but each emphasizing one side more. “Justice reasoning regards particular situations as tokens of more general types and so attends to what they have in common with other situations. Care reasoning, by contrast, focuses on the specificities of each situation, emphasizing the ways in which it is unique and responding to those involved as particular in the sense of nonsubstitutable or irreplaceable.”
apply universal principles to particular situations, although in doing so tend toward
generalization, and care theories rely on some general facts and ideals, e.g., the universal
need for and value of care, when evaluating concrete relationships. Jaggar claims that
care, with its “deep and yet narrow” focus, has been seen as best applied to small-scale
situations where knowing details about individual lives and situations is required for
making good decisions.\textsuperscript{87} While justice thinking, with its “wide but shallower focus,” is
understood as being better suited to evaluating large-scale institutions, where multiple
individuals need to be considered impartially and as equals.\textsuperscript{88}

Jaggar argues that care thinking’s special aptitude for evaluating particular
situations and the needs of particular individuals, while a virtue within small-scale
contexts, comes at a cost. Care ethics’ “weakness is that its attention to a situations’
specificity and particularity diverts attention away from their general features such as the
social institutions and groupings that give them their structure and much of their
meaning.”\textsuperscript{89} Because many care approaches have highlighted how care thinking occurs in
immediate, interpersonal circumstances, Jaggar worries about whether these ethical
theories can capture the broader institutional problems that structure particular harms.
Where one who is aiming to provide care may, for example, seek to attend to the
immediate needs of someone who has been injured, they may miss the features of a
society or an environment that created the conditions for the harm in the first place.
Jaggar claims that, for example, one-caring might be more focused on attending to the
unique individuals who are involved in a specific instance of racist discrimination, rather

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 194.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
than on the social, economic, and political institutions, which create and maintain the conditions of racist discrimination. While Jaggar recognizes that the core commitments of care ethics (e.g., an attentiveness to particularities, relationships, and interdependence) require that, in some sense, care givers be attentive to social contexts (e.g., race, gender, class) that shape particular situations to provide adequate care since responding to a particular person’s needs cannot be completely acontextual. She still worries that if the care and justice perspectives cannot be taken up simultaneously, individuals will participate in care only to forget about instituting justice and vice versa.

I take O’Neill, Card, and Jaggar’s criticism that care ethics is a parochial moral framework to raise a serious challenge to the general viability of care theory as an ethical framework. While not many care theorists following Noddings suggest that ethical obligations to care are limited to immediate or personal contexts, there remains significant work to be done to justify broader applications of this framework. As demonstrated above, views on the relationship between the justice and care frameworks and the scope of moral obligations within the care framework vary from theorist to theorist. Like Ruddick, I maintain that the care and justice frameworks are more closely connected than early accounts suggest. If this is the case, i.e., that care and justice are in some sense inseparable from one another, then the dismissal of care as the provincial moral code of the private sphere is unwarranted. Throughout the remainder of the

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90 Jaggar considers Lawrence Blum’s example of an African-American women who is passed over by a taxi driver as an example of how care theory focus on particularity may obfuscate larger structural features of some harms by attending to the women and taxi driver as unique individuals and not to the act as symptomatic of a social context of racial discrimination. See Lawrence Blum, “Moral Perception and Particularity,” *Ethics* 101, no. 4 (n.d.): 701–25.
dissertation I will argue for a the existence of a general obligation to care for others beyond the confines of preexisting, close relationships and in so doing challenge the stark opposition in between the justice and care perspectives. I do this by forwarding an account of the duty to take care, which I will show both makes good on feminist insights regarding the moral saliency of caring relationships and also demonstrates how care is presupposed by justice concerns about preventing wanton harm to others. Before offering my formulation of the duty to take care as a response to these criticisms, I first turn to existing work in global care ethics that has responded to these challenges by attempting to demonstrate the relevance of care ethics beyond the scope of face-to-face, particular relationships.

GLOBAL CARE ETHICS AND ROBINSON’S RESPONSES TO CRITICISM

The criticisms of care ethics outlined above were in large part aimed at early formulations of the ethics of care, such as the version that Noddings defends. A number of theorists have since developed care ethics as a framework for understanding the normative structure of global relations. By examining whether systemic contributors have any responsibilities regarding the structural harms in which they participate, this dissertation is conceived as a contribution to this literature in global care ethics. One global application of care ethics is found in the work of Sarah Ruddick, who argues that maternal thinking, an ethical orientation committed to preserving life and fostering

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growth, can be formulated into a feminist politics of peace.\textsuperscript{92} Elsewhere Virginia Held argues that the ethics of care is a powerful tool for evaluating both economic and global institutions. She suggests that care ethics helps to articulate the nature of social responsibilities to attend to the needs of children and their education, those who are dependent upon others, and those in need of health care.\textsuperscript{93} For Held, “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 for their environments, and to improve the lives of their children.”\textsuperscript{94} Along these lines, Fiona Robinson formulates what she calls a critical ethics of care for evaluating global relations. Robinson explains that a critical ethics of care “demands an awareness of social relations as a starting point for ethical inquiry and a commitment to using those relationships as a critical tool for uncovering, and beginning to address, the relations of oppression and subordination which exist at a global level.”\textsuperscript{95} In this section, I discuss care ethics as an approach to global relations. I focus on Robinson’s version of care ethics because she responds directly to the criticisms discussed in the previous section. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate the continuing need for a better response to these criticisms, which I will then offer below.

The criticism that care ethics is parochial (as well as essentialist and anti-feminist) is, for Robinson, an unsubstantiated allegation. She argues that care ethics is well suited to global applications for some of the same reasons that cause critics to worry about its viability. Robinson does this by recasting the key features of care ethics, especially its

\textsuperscript{92} Ruddick, \textit{Maternal Thinking}.
\textsuperscript{93} Held, \textit{The Ethics of Care}, 159.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{95} Robinson, \textit{Globalizing Care}, 165.
rejection of universal principles and its attentiveness to concrete and particular relations, in a new light. In doing so, Robinson argues that there is an intuitive fit between the focus of care ethics on social relations and the moral conflicts that arise in global and structural contexts. First, she suggests that “grand, formal theories” with their “universalizable rules and principles,” “seem increasingly unable to offer useful guidance about how human beings ought to live their lives.”96 Instead Robinson formulates a critical ethics of care that resists offering one-size fits all principles for resolving moral conflicts or determining obligations in the face of those conflicts. What a critical ethics of care does is highlight the importance of paying attention to caring relations, how they function, what motivates people to care for one another, and the structural and institutional contexts within which care takes place. She notes that a critical ethics of care is not concerned with preserving relationships at all costs, a concern Card raised above in regard to abusive relationships. A critical ethics of care, Robinson insists, is concerned with being sensitive and responsive to concrete circumstances, including harmful structural conditions and power dynamics that shape individual relationships.

96 Ibid., 40. I note here how Robinson also differentiates care ethics from moral relativism, because its rejection of universal moral principles may cause the former to be conflated with the latter. She argues that, while moral relativism says there are no criteria for comparing different ethical systems and their principles, the ethics of care is just not interested in cultivating such principles in the first place. Care is more concerned with considering ethical problems within a concrete and relational understanding of individuals and their situations. Her criticism of the usefulness of universal principles in determining global obligations here also warrants further analysis that, while I will not discuss it in further detail here, will be challenged by my formulation of a duty to take care.
Robinson acknowledges that “care does not, at first sight, seem to respond well to distance.” To respond to this concern, Robinson begins with Joan Tronto’s response to the worry that the care perspective seems to tempt individuals towards parochialism since “those who are enmeshed in ongoing, continuing relationships of care are likely to see the caring relationships that they are engaged in, and which they know best, as most important.” Tronto answers this challenge by broadening the scope of care and defending it as a political ideal that is connected to a theory of justice. Connecting care and justice, for Tronto, guards against the fear that “care as a political ideal could quickly become a way to argue that everyone should cultivate one’s own garden, and let others take care of themselves, too.” By conceiving of care as a political ideal, Tronto argues that care can be a norm against which we judge political institutions and economic arrangements, for example, by asking whether the state cares for basic needs through welfare policy. Robinson takes a different approach, however, in her defense of care ethics against the charge of parochialism. By evaluating the relational dynamics that characterize processes of globalization, Robinson argues that a critical ethics of care is, in fact, well suited for evaluating the ethical implications of global and structural harms.

Robinson’s defense of care ethics can be understood as responding to the same challenges as Scheffler’s discussion of individual responsibility in a global age. Recall that for Scheffler the commonsense view of individual responsibility is based on an experience of social relations and set of metaethical assumptions about the nature of

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97 Ibid., 43.
98 Tronto, Moral Boundaries.
99 Ibid. In Chapter 4, I will, in the vein of Tronto, demonstrate a kinship between a duty to take care and Iris Young’s social connection model, which attempts to justify systemic contributor’s political responsibilities for structural harms.
moral life that reflects the nature of social life in the early modern world. As I suggested above, following Scheffler and Jameison, the changing nature of social relationships and the increasing capacities of agents to affect and influence others in distant parts of the world (and in future generations) has rendered obsolete the account of moral experience on which the causal-liability view depends. In this way, a defense of care ethics as a global normative framework can begin with the claim that care ethics provides a descriptively incisive account of moral life and social relations that captures the nature of global social interaction. I suggest interpreting Robinson’s defense of care ethics in this way.

Robinson focuses on two processes characteristic of globalization. The first is a pulling together or shrinking of previously distant relations. Because of advancement in communication technologies, strangers are not as distantly connected to one another as they once were. The increasing recognition of global relations as shrinking in distance is what drives, for Robinson, the strong current of cosmopolitanism in global ethics. She notes that “more than ever before, the world is a single place, comprising human beings equally vulnerable to, for example, ecological threats; clearly this is a world in which the idea of ‘humanity’ has, for many people, increasing relevance.”100 The second process, which is perhaps a result of the first, results from having more knowledge about distant others. This process is the increasing recognition of the profound differences that exist in the world. She notes that “globalization has not replaced the exclusionary mechanisms of the modern international system; it is still characterized by sovereign statehood,

\[100\] Robinson, *Globalizing Care*, 45.
nationalisms, and a highly unequal global economy.”101 International relations are, for Robinson, characterized by an increasing acknowledgement of both interdependence and difference.

The ethics of care is, for Robinson, a good resource for understanding moral relations within contexts of interdependence and difference, because it is a “relational ethic” that values “the promotion, restoration, or creation of good social and personal relations,” while also recognizing the diversity of individuals within their particular relations. 102 Simply put, a relational ethics is an ideal moral framework for a global, increasingly connecting world. The focus of care ethics on concrete situations and interdependent relations make it, Robinson argues, a better moral framework for thinking through moral obligations than procedural techniques (e.g., the veil of ignorance), which miss many of the relevant details of moral life.

Robinson notes that when care ethics is applied to global matters, what is required is more than just simply urging people to care about distant others. She suggests that because care ethics focuses on the moral significance of moral agents being attentive to their responsibilities in the context of specific social relations, its application to global ethics requires that “those who are powerful have a responsibility to approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal relations have led to exclusion and marginalization, as well as at how attachments may have degenerated or broken down so as to cause suffering.”103 She insists that care ethics is capable of including a general obligation to be attentive to the

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 46.
103 Ibid.
structural causes of harms precisely because, as a relational approach to moral thinking, care ethics requires examination of the unique contextual features of any moral conflict or social problem. For Robinson, the claim that care thinking is limited to interpersonal, face-to-face relations has unfortunately been the result of “a narrow reading of ‘care’ and a limited moral imagination.”104 Instead of being limited in the way critics contend, the ethics of care amounts to a “relational turn…in thinking about ethics” that does not represent “a denial of lack of interest in conflict, power, domination, and oppression but rather a focus on the ‘interpersonal and social contexts in which these and all other human relations occur.’”105 The question that I want to consider now is whether Robinson’s defense of care ethics does enough to respond to claims that it advocates an apolitical, overly particularist ethic that is unhelpful for serious discussion of social, economic, and political conflicts.

One problem with Robinson’s defense of care ethics is that it does not offer a normative justification of obligations to care. Earlier I noted Jaggar’s concern that care ethics lacks an account of what counts as good care. The problem I am now raising is different. My concern is that Robinson and others, including Held, often claim that the unique perspective of care ethics can transform normative thinking about global, institutional, and structural relations, but they do not justify why individuals ought to care about others within these contexts. This is problematic because relationships between distant others do not usually include ties of affection that are typical in small-scale relationships between families, friends, or community members. Parties within global and

104 Ibid., 48.
structural relations do not typically know each other in this proximate fashion, if they know of each other at all. These people are related to each other insofar as their actions affect one another through social, economic, and political arrangements, but they do not normally consider each other while deliberating about a particular course of action. The idea here is that many of the features of preexisting, intimate relationships that motivate agents to care for one another do not exist in the global scale.

The question of why one ought to care for those with whom one has a preexisting, intimate relationship does not pose the same challenge as the problem of justifying obligations to care for distant others. Take, for example, the parent-child relationship. It is possible to ground the parent’s obligations to care for the child in, at least, three ways. The first justification is role-based and claims that the parent’s obligations to care for the child are required by what it means to be a parent. On this account, certain roles intrinsically obligate those who take them on. The second justification is consensual and claims that parents are obligated to care for children because they have consented to take on those obligations by choosing to have a child. The third justification is naturalistic. This kind of justification is implicit in Noddings account of the practice of caring-for. On the naturalistic account, care is needed by all human beings and, as such, is valued by all human beings. When agents are in certain relationships, agents become engrossed with particular others, are affectively motivated by their specific needs, and take these needs on for themselves. On this reading, the obligation to care for the child flows naturally from the parent’s engrossing relationship with the child. These justifications are not without their own problems. And the sharp distinctions between them might also be too hasty. (For example, it is easy to see how the role-based and consensual accounts might
be combined.) The point of sketching these possible justifications of caring obligations in particular relationships is to show that it is not immediately clear how any of these justifications extends to the relationships between distant others. This means that Jaggar’s worry about the justificatory power of the ethics of care in social and political contexts remains in play despite Robinson’s response. The charge that care ethics is too particularist is thus connected to another challenge that I take up in the next chapter concerning the normative ground of obligations to care. The connection is that concerns about how the scope of care ethics can be expanded beyond particular, preexisting, intimate relationships to include social relationships between distant others at its core is a skepticism that suggests that the kinds of reasons offered for why agents must care for others in particular relationships are not available in general, social relationships.

Some care ethicists would resist these efforts to craft a normative justification of care in the same way as one would craft a justification for principles of justice. This is because a key feature of care ethics is to reject the idea that abstract and general principles can adequately address moral issues and elicit moral motivations. In this way, some care ethicists might claim that constructing a principled justification of care would not only fall victim to the same criticisms that care theorists forward regarding justice principles, but it would also belie the nature of caring relations as only having meaning within concrete contexts. This response would conflate two senses in which care ethics is particularist. The first way care ethics is particularist is in its rejection of rule-based moral theories and its attempt to downplay the role of universal principles in moral life. The second way is in its focus on preexisting, intimate relationship in face-to-face contexts. It is possible for versions of care ethics—or any moral theory for that matter—
to be particularist in only one of the ways, both of these ways, or neither of these ways. If care ethics can provide a viable framework for addressing the moral questions that arise in social, political, and economic life, then moving beyond the second kind of particularism is necessary. Doing this requires, as I have been arguing, an account of why agents must care for others in such contexts. It does not, however, require that care as a moral activity in such contexts be guided by abstract moral principles that can be applied in a rule-like fashion to determine how to care in a given social situation. It is possible for care ethics to give an account of why agents must care in social, political, and economic contexts without also committing itself to providing a rule-like formula for guiding moral action. Put differently, an answer to the question of why agents must care for distant others does not require that care ethics provide its own version of the categorical imperative or greatest happiness principle. In this way, care ethics can respond to the charge that it is too focused on particular, intimate relationships without losing its commitment to moral deliberation, judgment, and activity as situated practices that cannot be reduced to mechanical procedures in which abstract moral rules are applied to particular cases.

The problem with care ethics lacking an account for why agents must care for distant others can be seen by returning to one of Robinson’s claims that I discussed earlier. Robinson claims that care ethics demands that “those who are powerful have a responsibility to approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal relations have led to exclusion and marginalization, as well as at how attachments may have degenerated or broken down so
as to cause suffering.” Like Held, Robinson highlights care ethics as a perspective that demonstrates how certain contexts require individuals to take responsibility and typically what responsibility requires on this account is attending to some failure of responsiveness for a particular harm. The problem, however, is that neither Held nor Robinson offer an account of where this responsibility comes from or how it is justified, i.e., what grounds claims that a particular moral agent has a claim in a given situation to take responsibility in this way. In this way, Robinson’s response is more hortatory than justificatory in her claim that that the care framework, by focusing on relations and interdependency, implores agents (especially powerful ones) to be attentive to how social, economic, and political structures cause harms.

As it stands, the ethics of care lacks resources for justifying the existence of obligations to care in the social, political, and economic contexts in which structural harms occur. As a result, care ethics lacks the foundation for grounding ethical obligations to transform behaviors that harm distant others and to change structural relations—whether social, economic, or political—that shape individual acts in ways that produce harms. Although Robinson repeatedly claims that the care perspective can be expanded to take into account the structural features that interact with individual relations, this is not the same thing as explaining why a care perspective requires agents to take account of these issues as a matter of moral obligation. This is precisely my goal, however, in turning to care ethics as a framework for responding to the problem of systemic contributors.

I have explained how a key feature of care ethics is its focus on obligations that arise within the context of interpersonal relationships. Held, for example, argues that the ethics of care “often calls on us to take responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone.”107 What I have been arguing, however, is that care ethics lacks a systematic formulation of responsibilities to care and why they are required of individuals. While Noddings is concerned with explaining why it is impossible to genuinely care for everyone, I want to investigate to what extent we are required to care for others, especially those whom we do not intimately know. In the next chapter, I argue that this investigation is essential for grounding the responsibility of systemic contributors to address structural harms.

I take as my starting point comments that Card made in the course of her criticism of Noddings. Earlier I noted Card’s suggestion that, at the very least, Noddings should acknowledge that there exist “responsibilities to refrain from doing them [strangers] harm,” i.e., responsibilities “to be careful, in a sense that does not require encounters with those for whose sakes we ought to take care.”108 Card makes this observation within the context of acknowledging the need for an “ethic that applies to our relations with people with whom we are connected only by relations of cause and effect as well as to our relations with those with whom we are connected by personal and potential encounters.”109 I argue below that there already is a way of thinking about care that goes a long way toward achieving both of these tasks. What I have in mind is the legal standard of care. This legal standard requires that individuals be careful to avoid harming

107 Held, The Ethics of Care, 14–15.
109 Ibid., 104–105., my emphasis.
others through reckless or negligent actions. This kind of obligation to care exists even when an agent is only connected to others by, to use Card’s phrase, relations of cause and effect. Although this normative ideal concerns the kind of care agents owe each other in their social activities, it has been ignored by care theorists.\footnote{An exception is Sarah Clark Miller’s evaluation of a global duty to care as relevant to cosmopolitan theories of justice. See Miller, “A Feminist Account of Global Responsibility.”}

In the next chapter, I examine the existing attempts to provide a normative justification of caring obligations. I argue, however, that care ethics can find such a justification of why agents must care for others by looking at this sense of care, i.e., an attentiveness to the ways in which one is socially related to others and how others are vulnerable to the effects of one’s actions. This type of care is a moral activity in which one must be non-indifferent to the needs, interests, and well being of others in order to avoid reckless or negligently doing them harm. The irony of turning to this way of understanding care as the beginning of a normative justification of care, of course, is that this understanding of care is taken from deep within the heart of the justice perspective.\footnote{I borrow this phrase, the heart of justice, from Daniel Engster, although as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, I use it in a very different sense. See Daniel Engster, \textit{The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).} Although some care ethicists might be skeptical by such a move, I will show that this way of thinking about care builds on many of the core commitments and intuitions of care ethics.
CHAPTER 3: A DUTY TO TAKE CARE AS A GROUND FOR CARING OBLIGATIONS

This dissertation investigates the nature of individual responsibility in the face of global, structural harms. In Chapter 1, I raised concerns about common Western intuitions regarding individual responsibility and their viability in a global context. I also suggested that a care framework might offer a productive way to understand the obligations of systemic contributors. In Chapter 2, I addressed one of the most troubling criticisms of the ethics of care, i.e., the claim that it only provides an ethics of private relationships that is unsuitable as a framework for addressing the systemic conflicts of moral, social, and political life. I argued that the ethics of care provides normative insight regarding structural harms, but also that it still needs to clearly articulate why individuals have duties to care for others more generally. The aim of this chapter is to evaluate what it means to have a responsibility to care. In particular, I investigate why we are obligated to care for others. This question is surprisingly complex and ambiguous and will need further clarification if answering it will help us to determine whether systemic contributors have responsibilities in regard to structural harms. The goal in raising this question is to determine what, if any, caring obligations agents owe to distant others.

In this chapter, I develop an answer to this question. I begin by offering an account of how care has been defined within feminist moral theory as a feeling, disposition, practice, and moral value. Defining care is a necessary first step in answering what obligations agents (and especially systemic contributors) might have to care for others. Without a definition of care in mind, we cannot be sure what is required by the existence of a duty to care. I then turn to an examination of existing attempts to ground caring obligations. These arguments take two forms, focusing on either the vulnerability of
others or the dependency of the self. The first form grounds caring obligations in the fact that human beings are susceptible or vulnerable to the actions of others. The second form grounds obligations to care in the fact that human beings require care and that agents cannot, as a result, consistently deny the moral importance of giving care to others, while also demanding care from others for themselves. I offer a third approach to ground obligations to care based on widely accepted prohibitions against wantonly and unjustifiably harming others. My account looks to the legal standard of due care at work in judgments of negligence and recklessness as inspiration for developing an account of a more general moral duty to take care or act with care in one’s actions. The content of this duty requires agents to be attentive to their relationships with others, including strangers, specifically how others are vulnerable to the potentially harmful effects of their actions.

**Taxonomy of Care**

We use the word care in a number of ways. I might, for example, indicate a preference when I say, “I do not care for rocky road ice cream.” I can also express affection when I say, “I care for my siblings.” In either case, the word care suggests a kind of attitude or feeling that I have in regard to something or someone. People who consistently show warm regard for others are called caring. When we use the word in this sense, we refer to a disposition or virtue that is generally valued. Care is also a practice. Parents care for their children when they meet their biological and emotional needs. Medical workers care for patients when they treat injuries and restore health. These different uses of the word care that refer to it as a feeling, disposition, or practice are useful in demonstrating the variety of ways the term is used and in signaling how the term has been taken up within ethical theory. The truth is that most theorists working in
care ethics define the term as all of these things and much more. In this section, I offer an overview of existing definitions of care as an ethical concept. I do this because understanding what care is serves as an essential first step in understanding what it means to claim that someone has an obligation to care.

Many of the earliest attempts to formulate a philosophical understanding of care focus on parent and child relationships and use this kind of relationship as a model for formulating a broader understanding of the concept. This is true of the first contemporary formulation of care in ethical theory in Milton Mayeroff’s *On Caring.* \(^{112}\) Mayeroff defines caring as helping another person, idea, or project grow and actualize itself. He suggests that care is a practice in which “I experience what I care for (a person, and ideal, and idea) as an *extension of myself* and at the same time as something *separate* from me that I respect in its own right.” \(^{113}\) His attentiveness to how care requires a simultaneous internalization of another’s needs, while also maintaining a respect for difference is a recurring theme within the ethics of care. Inspired by Mayeroff’s early work, Noddings sought to fine-tune a definition of what counts as genuine care.

Noddings begins with mother-child relations as a model for an ethics of care and employs this model in formulating her own definition of care. In the previous chapter, I noted how she differentiates genuine caring, or “caring-for,” from “caring about.” This distinction serves as an instructive starting point for considering various definitions of care because many who have sought to define care in her wake respond to this distinction. As discussed above, Noddings suggests that genuine care takes place in face-
to-face relations (between the one-caring and the cared-for). This is a major departure
from Mayeroff’s more broad understanding of care as something that can be practiced in
relation to objects and ideas as well as people.

For Noddings, “caring requires engrossment, commitment, and displacement of
motivation,” where the one-caring takes on the interests of another person as his or her
own.\textsuperscript{114} She highlights how care can be defined as an attitude or way of approaching
relationships. Held explains that “to Noddings, the cognitive aspect of the carer’s attitude
is receptive-intuitive rather than objective-analytic, and understanding the needs of those
cared for depends more on feeling with them than on rational cognition.”\textsuperscript{115} Care defined
in this way is a consuming activity, which Noddings models on a kind of ideal
relationship that can obtain between parents and children or those in similarly intimate
relations.

Because caring requires, for Noddings, an intense and close relationship between
those who care and those for whom they care, genuine care cannot obtain in relationships
between distant others. She suggests that care grows out of a natural attitude that
spontaneously emerges between individuals who are in each other’s presence. This
attitude can only later be transformed into an ethical ideal towards which to strive.\textsuperscript{116}
While care defined as such is more than a warm, emotional feeling, affection plays an
important role in promoting and fortifying caring relations.\textsuperscript{117} Although Noddings defines
care in terms of this immersive attitude, she is careful to note the importance of

\textsuperscript{114} Noddings, \textit{Caring}, 112.
\textsuperscript{115} Held, \textit{The Ethics of Care}, 31.
\textsuperscript{116} Noddings, \textit{Caring}, 4–5.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 33.
Noddings also suggests that in caring, we experience a relatedness to others that results in joy, a positive affect that furthers our commitments to care and reinforces the promotion of care as an ethical ideal towards which to strive.\textsuperscript{118} Noddings’ understanding of care cannot be expanded into a general moral obligation, since it is dependent on the spontaneous connection between two people. Unless relationships are immediate and involve a motivational displacement in the one-caring, then the most care that we can expect of others is what Noddings calls “caring about.” Caring about is “an internal state of readiness to try to care for whoever crosses our path”.\textsuperscript{119} This state is, for Noddings, the only kind of care that we can offer distant others. She considers this form of caring, however, to be

\ldots too easy. I can “care about” the starving children of Cambodia, send five dollars to hunger relief, and feel somewhat satisfied. I do not even know if my money went for food, or guns, or a new Cadillac for some politician. This is a poor second cousin to caring. “Caring about” always involves a certain benign neglect.\textsuperscript{120}

Although caring-about can include an emotional regard for others, it lacks both the motivational displacement and the commitment to successful care that can be found in face-to-face caring-for relations.\textsuperscript{121} For these reasons, Noddings dismisses caring-about as being unworthy of elaboration. This is because, for her, care is either all-in or

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] Ibid., 132.
\item[119] Ibid., 18.
\item[120] Ibid., 112.
\item[121] Deimut Bubeck also defines care as taking place within proximate relations. Her definition is differentiated from Noddings’ by suggesting that to count as care an individual must be meeting needs that another cannot meet themselves. Feeding an infant then counts as care, while cooking dinner for a spouse is not. She states that “caring for is the meeting of needs of one person by another, 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 possible be met by the person in need herself.” See Bubeck, \textit{Care, Gender, and Justice}, 129.
\end{footnotes}
impoverished. I note this distinction between caring-for and caring-about to highlight the amount of space that she has left between these two options. Many have sought to fill this gap by both broadening the scope of what can be understood as care and by further nuancing the definition of care as an ethical concept.

One alternative way of defining care comes from those working in virtue ethics. Michael Slote develops a definition of care in his agent-based virtue ethics, which “treats the moral and ethical status of acts as entirely derivative from independent and fundamental areatic (as opposed to deontic) ethical characterizations of motives, character traits, or individuals.”\(^\text{122}\) His approach defines care as a motivational attitude that can serve as the basis for determining the moral value of actions. Acts done from a caring attitude are morally good, while those done from indifference are bad. Slote takes issue with Noddings’ limitation of care to particular relations and instead advocates universal benevolence as a virtuous moral attitude to which we should all strive. Slote suggests that his understanding of care as a motivational attitude of universal benevolence is better suited to justice-based concerns precisely because it is extendable to everyone.

Feminist moral theorists, especially Virginia Held, have taken issue with virtue theory’s definition of care as primarily an attitude or disposition.\(^\text{123}\) Held argues that understanding care as an altruistic attitude, i.e., benevolence or compassion, misses how care takes place within a relational structure and focuses too much on the individual and his or her internal dispositions. Held explains that within a caring relationship agents “are


not competitors for benefits,” who choose to be either selfish or altruistic.\textsuperscript{124} The well-being of everyone in the relation is tied together.

Focusing too closely on care as an individual attitude also obscures the way in which care is a practice or, more specifically, a form of moral activity and social labor that is often inequitably distributed within societies. The formulation of care as an ethical concept must also include a practical component. If someone were to say that they care deeply about some issue, but chose to do nothing to try and address that problem, this inaction would lead us to judge that this individual does not really care about the issue in question. Defining care as a motivational attitude is inadequate, without also including in the definition of care the practical requirement of actualizing care in real practices.

Sara Ruddick highlights how care can be defined as a form of labor. For Ruddick, care manifests itself in a number of practices. She focuses on mothering, the preservation and fostering of children, as “a central instance and symbol of care.”\textsuperscript{125} Ruddick suggests that the various activities that mothers participate in can be summarized as caring labor.\textsuperscript{126} Caring labor is a practice that is both epistemological and practical.\textsuperscript{127} Epistemologically, caring labor requires individuals to be attentive to other’s vulnerabilities and aware of their needs. Practically, caring labor requires individuals to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{124} Held, \textit{The Ethics of Care}, 34. \\
\textsuperscript{125} Ruddick, \textit{Maternal Thinking}, 46. \\
\textsuperscript{126} Although Ruddick uses the gendered language of mothering, it is important to note that she suggests that mothering and caring labor can be practiced by any sex. She preserves the gendered language because of its historical significance and because it is still the case that women socially expected to take on more responsibility for caring for others. \\
\textsuperscript{127} Ruddick, \textit{Maternal Thinking}, 18.
\end{flushleft}
make a choice to respond to and meet the needs of others.128 In contrast to Noddings, Ruddick’s understanding of care does not begin with a spontaneous natural attitude, but is rather an orientation and a practice that agents choose to take up. For Ruddick, caring is the taking on of a responsibility; it is answering a demand that has been made. Providing care is voluntary and involves recognizing and responding to the vulnerability and needs of others.

Selma Sevenhuijsen, like Ruddick, understands care as both a “cognitive and moral activity.”129 She suggests that the ethics of care is not well served by suggesting that it is opposed to justice-based theories and claiming that it only focuses on concrete relations instead of generalizable principles. Sevenhuijsen instead argues that care is better understood as a different kind of “moral activity” altogether, where “moral problems are observed and discussed in the first instance from an attitude of caring, that is, with attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness and the commitment to see issues from differing perspectives.”130 Put simply, she suggests that care is an “ability and a willingness to ‘see’ and to ‘hear’ needs, and to take responsibility for these needs being met.”131 Care is seen here as taking on an attentive attitude and then responding in kind to the needs of others.132

128 Ibid., 19.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 The problem is that this definition of care really pushes the bounds of what we typically think we can morally require of one another. We expect others to be obligated to perform and not perform certain acts, but we do not necessarily think much about the attitudes that we require one another to posses. For extended discussions of responsibilities for attitudes see Larry May, Sharing Responsibility (Chicago: University
Joan Tronto argues that many of the dilemmas in which the ethics of care has been embroiled, such as those that arise from criticisms of its supposed parochialism, are caused by an “uncritical acceptance of our current way of thinking about care.” She instead seeks to present an alternative vision of both “the nature of care and its place in human life” to demonstrate how care can be understood as central to our moral and political lives. Tronto and Berenice Fischer define care as

...a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

Tronto and Fischer’s definition focuses on the practical aspect of care and also suggests that care takes place in more than close, interpersonal interactions. Tronto contends that “in assuming that care is dyadic, most contemporary authors dismiss from the outset the ways in which care can function socially and politically in a culture.” For Tronto and Fischer, care is both a practice and disposition. And, while care can be practiced in a single interaction, care is often an ongoing social and political process.

Held adds something important to these attempts to define care when she suggests that care is a value as well as a practice. She explains that, in the same way that justice can be described as an attitude or a disposition (e.g., by calling Cesar a just emperor) or as a practice (e.g., by referring to the justice dealt out by a jury’s verdict), care like justice also refers to a normative value. Where justice as a value refers to fairness and equality,

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134 Ibid.

135 Ibid., 103.

136 Ibid.
care as a value refers to the moral importance of “attentiveness, sensitivity, and responding to needs.” Held defines care both as a practice, which often is only adequately conducted with appropriate accompanying attitudes, and as a value, which guides caring practices and helps us to understand what counts as good care. Most importantly, for Held, care takes place within relationships, but these relations need not be immediate. Like Tronto, she suggests that care can take place at multiple levels of agency, between individuals, organizations, and societies.

The definitions of care described in this section are representative, although not exhaustive, of how care has been defined as an ethical concept. A precise definition of care may not be possible since care is, by its nature, a practice that responds to the particular demands of concrete situations. One of the key themes to take from these definitions of care, however, is that on most accounts care has both epistemological and practical components. Epistemologically, caring requires agents to be open and attentive to others so that they can come to know the vulnerabilities and needs of others. Practically, caring requires agents to transform that knowledge of the vulnerabilities and needs of others into actions that respond to those vulnerabilities and meet those needs.

With these two features of care in mind, I turn to investigate whether agents can be said to have obligations to care. To do so, I examine existing arguments that seek to ground caring obligations in terms of human vulnerability or dependence. While these arguments seek to offer a general normative justification of caring obligations, my ultimate purpose in this investigation is to help examine whether systemic contributors can be said to have obligations to care. This focus requires consideration of whether

\[137\] Held, *The Ethics of Care*, 39.
distantly related parties, people who typically do not have preexisting relationships with or intimate knowledge of each other, have responsibilities to care for each other.

A Duty to Care

If we were to think of care only as a feeling, it would be difficult to make moral demands upon others to care, since we typically think of feelings as beyond one’s control. It would also be impossible to make demands upon systemic contributors to care (qua feeling), since two key features of these agents are that they are disconnected from and sometimes unaware of the harms to which they contribute. Care has been shown, however, to be more than a warm feeling (despite the recognition of caring attitudes like benevolence and compassion as being morally significant and worth cultivating in ourselves). I will focus on the epistemological and practical sides of care and whether we can make normative demands upon others to engage in these aspects of caring.

Claiming that someone has a duty to care encompasses, at minimum, two distinct claims: (1) that agents have epistemic obligations to be attentive to the needs and vulnerabilities of others and (2) that agents have practical obligations to engage in practices of care to meet the needs of others. More is needed to justify these claims. In what follows, I evaluate existing formulations of a normative grounding or justification of caring obligations. Simply put, I examine the ways in which care theorists have attempted to answer the question, “Why care?” In previous chapters, I have suggested that the ethics of care can offer us useful tools for better understanding whether systemic contributors have moral obligations concerning structural harms. Examining existing attempts to ground caring obligations will aid us in determining whether agents who are distantly related to one another have obligations to care for each other in the first place.
and whether systemic contributors in particular have caring obligations concerning those who suffer from the effects of structural harms.

I look to two predominant approaches to formulating a normative justification of care: the vulnerability approach and the dependency approach. The vulnerability approach suggests that caring obligations are grounded in the vulnerability of others. The dependency approach suggests that obligations to care are grounded in the fact that every agent is at one time dependent upon care for their own survival and well-being. After examining these approaches, I offer my own formulation of a duty to take care. I ground this kind of caring obligation in widely accepted obligations to avoid harming others and broad agreement concerning the blameworthiness of acting with indifference toward others.

GROUNDING CARING OBLIGATIONS

Daniel Engster offers an overview of existing approaches to formulating a normative justification of care in his own attempt to formulate a rational account of caring obligations.\textsuperscript{138} I model my own discussion on his identification of the vulnerability and dependency approaches to give structure to existing attempts to try and answer the question, “Why care?”. In doing so, I take as given that the formulation of care as an ethical obligation requires normative justification. All theorists do not share this view.

For example, Noddings insists that there can be no demand made upon a person to have a natural impulse to care for another, because it is impossible to rationalize a

\textsuperscript{138} Engster, \textit{The Heart of Justice}. 

genuinely caring attitude. For Noddings, caring is a pre-reflective capacity that is latent within us and the impulse that one must care for another comes before any rational or ethical judgment about a state of affairs. She claims that it is from this pre-reflective disposition to care for others “that our inclination toward and interest in morality” is derived.  

Fiona Robinson also avoids providing a normative justification of care, but for methodological reasons, rather than, as is the case with Noddings, from a substantive claim about human nature. Robinson argues that because care as a moral outlook is a “practical rather than a theoretical, principled morality, care ethics must refer to particular contexts—specifically, specific relations among concrete individuals.” For this reason, Robinson develops, what she calls, critical care ethics, which does not rely upon universal moral precepts. In this way, she sidesteps providing a normative justification of care that would provide a general answer to the question, “why care?”. I am sympathetic to Robinson’s understanding of care ethics as dealing with concrete circumstances, but reject the idea that a normative justification for care is not compatible with a contextualized approach to moral deliberation and action.

Contra Noddings and Robinson, I worry that without an answer to the question of why we ought to more generally care for others in the first place, the ethics of care is left wanting. Without a normative justification, the ethics of care has no way of convincing those who do not immediately see or refuse to acknowledge the importance of care to ethical life. Care ethics needs to be able to provide an answer to those who ask, “Why

139 Noddings, Caring, 83.
140 Robinson, Globalizing Care, 38–39.
should I care?” if it is to be more than either a form of communitarianism, which presupposes the acceptance of existing cultural norms about the importance of caring, or mere hortatory. Along these lines, Sarah Clark Miller explains that uncharitable critiques of care ethics have suggested that it is “nothing more than an overly emotional, relativist, anti-justice, context-bound, ‘merely personal’ form of moral engagement.”\(^{141}\) Grounding caring obligations in a general principle would go a long way toward responding to these readings.

Engster offers a number of reasons why a justification of caring obligations is necessary. First, he suggests that even if we understand care as motivated by feelings like compassion or sympathy, we can use a normative justification of care to develop arguments for why “social practices, policies, and institutions” ought to support and cultivate caring attitudes.\(^{142}\) Second, a normative theory of care can explain why we ought to extend care to distant others. Caring feelings tend to emerge in close relationships. With an argument for why (and in what circumstances) we owe care to others, a normative justification of care can “correct for parochial applications of our sympathy and compassion and challenge ideologies that may constrict the scope of these emotions.”\(^{143}\) Third, Engster argues that a normative justification of care can aid in dismantling the largely unhelpful philosophical dichotomy between emotion and reason. Engster highlights how cognitive elements play an important role in the emergence of emotions and how rational argument can be helpful in provoking motivational attitudes

\(^{141}\) Miller, *The Ethics of Need*, 50.
\(^{142}\) Engster, *The Heart of Justice*, 37.
\(^{143}\) Ibid.
and even moral action. I take Engster’s argument concerning the need for a rational account of caring obligations or a normative justification of why agents ought to care to be convincing. I now turn to the work of those who have attempted to offer such an account.

**THE VULNERABILITY APPROACH**

One approach to formulating a normative justification of care looks to the existence of vulnerabilities that emerge within relationships between agents. The vulnerability approach suggests that we have responsibilities to care for others who are vulnerable to our actions. This approach is in large part inspired by Robert Goodin’s work in *Protecting the Vulnerable.* Eva Kittay and Grace Clement have used the vulnerability approach to formulate accounts of why we have responsibilities to provide care. While Goodin’s work is peripheral to the ethics of care, his focus on special relations and obligations to provide aid make him a valuable resource for better understanding caring obligations, especially between distant others.

Goodin’s aim is to demonstrate that positive duties to aid distant others can be derived directly from the same principle that tells us that we have special obligations to those with whom we are closest. He does this by offering “a single, coherent account of

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all of those special responsibilities that we traditionally/intuitively acknowledge.”146 The special obligations that he has in mind are those extended to family, friends, fellow citizens, those with whom we enter into contractual obligations, those from who we receive special services, and those that make special claims of need upon us (compassion, pity). Against voluntarist accounts that suggest that these obligations are binding because they are willingly accepted,147 Goodin argues that what unifies these special obligations is that they all involve being answerable to others who are vulnerable to our actions. He extracts from his analysis of special obligations what he calls the vulnerability principle: “If A’s interests are vulnerable to B’s actions and choices, B has a special responsibility to protect A’s interests; the strength of this responsibility depends strictly upon the degree to which B can affect A’s interests.”148 Care ethicists have used this principle to provide a normative justification for caring obligations.

Kittay, for example, takes up Goodin’s vulnerability principle and uses it to provide a justification of the claims made on caregivers, specifically dependency workers, by those for whom they care. She finds Goodin’s approach to be helpful to the ethics of care, because it derives responsibilities from concrete relations rather than abstract rules or principles. She claims that the caring labor of dependency workers is indicative of obligations that arises within special relations. Kittay explains that under the vulnerability approach, “the moral claim is a claim upon me only if I am so situated as to be able to answer the need. It is a moral claim upon me, only if the other is vulnerable to

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146 Ibid., 29.
148 Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable*, 118.
my actions.” Kittay thus suggests that the moral imperative to care for another within a dependency relation results from the fact that the dependent is particularly vulnerable to the acts of the person caring for them. An infant, for example, is extraordinarily vulnerable to his or her parent’s choices and actions. It is this special vulnerability, per the vulnerability principle, that grounds parental obligations to care.

Grace Clement uses Goodin’s vulnerability approach to argue that caring obligations change depending upon the proximity between agents. She suggests that Goodin’s model can be used to justify the existence of more stringent duties to care for those that are closest to us (i.e., family and friends). Clement cites the fact that immediate relations come with increased vulnerability to each other’s acts as a reason for those relations requiring increased moral obligations. Clement recognizes, however, that distant others can also be particularly vulnerable to each other’s actions and, as a result, argues that “the ethics of care has implications beyond our sphere of personal relations.”

Although she suggests that we have caring obligations that extend beyond personal relations, Clement cites the likelihood of increased vulnerability within close relationships to argue that the ethics of care does not entail the claim that we have to care for all others equally.

Engster offers a critique of the vulnerability approach that is most relevant to my concerns about formulating an answer to whether systemic contributors may have obligations to care for those affected by structural harms. He suggests that Goodin’s

150 Grace Clement, Care, Autonomy, And Justice: Feminism And The Ethic Of Care (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 73.
model problematically assumes that caring obligations already obtain within special relations and then uses this intuition about our moral responsibilities for those that we already care for in order to ground more distant obligations.¹⁵¹

A satisfying normative justification of care would not be built upon the existing intuition that special relations ground caring obligations. The problem with this approach is that it assumes the existence of what needs to be proved in the general case (i.e., caring obligations) as already being uncontroversial in the particular case (i.e., parents and children, doctors and patients, etc.). To be satisfying, the vulnerability approach would need to justify the existence of role-based responsibilities in special relationships instead of assuming their existence as a ground for more general responsibilities. It would also need to justify why this principle, which is derived from and at home in particular, special relationships, can be reasonably expanded to more general relationships. That is, just assuming that a principle that holds between family members also holds between strangers is passing over what is in need of justification, namely, that such a principle is relevant in more general relationships. A complete normative justification of care should offer an answer to why we ought to care for others generally and then show how this would be applicable to both special and distant relations.

¹⁵¹ Using the vulnerability approach to justifying moral obligations has also been met with criticism, including communitarian concerns about how group preference is essential for motivating the kind of political action needed to address the harms that affect distant others. See Jeffrey Abramson, “Review of Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities by Robert E. Goodin,” *Ethics* 97, no. 3 (1987): 659–61.
THE DEPENDENCY APPROACH

Instead of considering the vulnerabilities of others to justify moral obligations to care, Engster argues that caring obligations can be justified by reference to the fact that we are ourselves dependent upon others for care and thus must offer it in return. Like many others working in care ethics, he begins his argument by taking stock of the necessity of care in human life. All human beings, and especially infants, those who are ill, or elderly, depend upon the basic care of others for survival. Engster points to Kittay, who has cited this fact about human existence as a reason for calling all those who are not currently dependent upon others as “temporarily abled.”152 Engster also points to Baier, who has suggested that what primarily makes human beings human is the fact that they are “second persons” or, rather, beings that depend upon the care of their fellow beings to develop.153 In addition to citing how all individuals depend upon care to survive and flourish, advocates of the dependency approach also note that humans depend upon care at a social level. Engster suggests that

…we all depend upon the caring of others for others to produce individuals with whom we can become friends, marry, engage in sociable and productive activities, and rely upon if necessary for the care we may need to survive and function. The care of others for other supports the social environment that sustains us. 154

In this way, Engster’s rational account of caring obligations seeks to develop similar claims from Martha Fineman and Eva Kittay. For example, Fineman suggests that we are

152 Kittay, “The Ethics of Care, Dependence, and Disability.”
154 Engster, The Heart of Justice, 42–43.
obligated to care for others as a matter of “social debt.” According to Fineman, because we have benefited from the care that we and others have received, we must repay this benefit by caring for others ourselves.

Kittay also formulates a normative justification of care using the dependency approach. She argues that our dependency upon others for care, especially when we are infants, elderly, injured, are disabled, is a basic feature of human existence that creates the need for social cooperation. She further highlights how dependency relations extend beyond immediate relations since the practice of giving care also makes dependency workers dependent upon others for social support. As a result, Kittay sketches a normative justification for care in the form of a categorical imperative. Obligations to care are, for Kittay, not something that we must do for the sake of accomplishing other ends (i.e., hypothetical imperatives). Instead she argues that care giving is a moral obligation that is due to others because of the “dignity of persons as ends-in-themselves,” that we recognize when we “universalize our own understanding that were we in such a situation, helpless and unable to fend for ourselves, we should need care to survive and thrive.” Engster has further developed Kittay’s use of the dependency approach into what he suggests is a more complete rational justification of caring obligations.

Engster’s dependency argument proceeds as follows. All human beings can be understood as valuing care (i.e., it is that which helps them survive, function, develop their basic capacities, and frees them from unwanted or unnecessary pain and suffering).


Furthermore, all human beings can be understood as requiring care and making demands upon others to be cared for at some point in their lives. We can thus justify the existence of caring obligations as follows:

Since all human beings depend upon the care of others... and at least implicitly claim that capable individuals should care for individuals in need when they can do so, we should consistently recognize as morally valid the claims that others make upon us... and should endeavor to provide care to them when we are capable of doing so without significant danger to ourselves, seriously compromising our long term functioning, or undermining our ability to care for others.\(^{157}\)

He calls this the principle of consistent dependency.\(^{158}\) In formulating this principle, Engster suggests that the universality of dependency, especially the fact that we ourselves require the care of others in order to survive, grounds claims that others make upon us. His justification limits the scope of caring obligations to the aid that can be given without interfering with other similar obligations to care for oneself and others. He argues, however, that outside of these kinds of conflicts, we must care for who we can or risk inconsistently benefiting from the social practices of care without contributing to such practices ourselves. Ultimately, he suggests that his principle of consistent dependency obligates individuals to care for others, since failing to do so is both hypocritical and logically inconsistent. Those who fail to care treat other’s claims for care as morally invalid, while treating their own claims as valid are, for Engster, blameworthy in their inconsistency.

\(^{157}\) Engster, *The Heart of Justice*, 49.
\(^{158}\) Engster’s principle of consistent dependency is based on Alan Gewirth’s moral theory, which seeks to derive moral principles from the necessities of human existence. See Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
Engster’s dependency approach is problematic in a number of ways. At its core, his argument suggests that individuals are obligated to give care because they have received and will receive care themselves. Failing to participate in caring relations is, for Engster, logically inconsistent and hypocritical, since we tend to think of our claims to care as legitimate when we make them, but then refuse to respect such claims when they are inconveniently made upon us. One problem with this approach can be demonstrated by considering parental obligations to care for children. Under Engster’s dependency principle, (1) parents either have an obligation to care for their children because they were themselves recipients of care and are now paying that labor back or (2) parents have obligations to care for their children because they know that they will eventually require care from their children and are now investing in that future care. This scheme is counterintuitive, because it imagines dependents as taking part in reciprocal obligations that they have not chosen, when we might otherwise choose to view caring labor as performed in the spirit of a gift or as something purely altruistic (or for the reasons Goodin provides that are discussed above).

Marilyn Friedman critiques Engster’s suggestion that having received care in particular circumstances commits individuals to universal obligations to care. Engster suggests that the move to universal caring obligations is warranted by the fact that we cannot always know from whom we will demand care and therefore must ourselves be accountable to all others. Friedman disagrees, pointing out that the care that individuals

require to meet their basic needs does not come from everywhere. She explains that “the care networks required to sustain any particular caring person do not encompass ‘anyone in need.’ If my caretaker’s caretakers do not survive, I need merely claim care from someone else. . . [Engster’s] move to generality is thus not yet warranted.” The core of Friedman’s criticism is that he is unsuccessful in assuming that we can normatively derive universal obligations to care from special obligations.

Engster’s argument also faces the practical psychological difficulty of convincing individuals to understand themselves as being generally responsible for caring for others (and responsible for caring institutions) because they are themselves the kinds of beings that require care. Part of the reason for this difficulty, which Friedman also notes, is that dependency relations take place in concrete contexts and we often only recognize ourselves as dependent upon those that are closest to us. Some agents, especially those who are at the moment minimally dependent upon others, may have a hard time identifying with their past infant or future less-abled selves.

Despite the problems with Engster’s approach, we might still ground caring obligations by beginning with the recognition of the fact that all human beings require care and as a result cannot live in a world in which care is never given. For example, Sarah Clark Miller develops a normative justification of caring obligations as positive duties. She offers a novel hybrid approach that formulates a duty to care using Kantian and feminist care ethics. Miller, like Engster, recognizes that care ethicists have often skipped over the question of why we must care for others, and she responds to this

limitation in the literature with her own account. Specifically, she offers a “feminist interpretation of the Kantian duty of beneficence” to “demonstrate why we are obligated to respond to other’s fundamental needs through a consideration of human finitude, interdependence, and vulnerability.” Miller calls upon Kant’s justification of positive duties of beneficence to argue that since human beings are necessarily interdependent, electing to “a general policy to avoid the burden of helping others in need by agreeing to never have other people meet your needs would amount to choosing your demise (G4: 423; 32).” Miller grounds duties to care in this Kantian justification and demonstrates how caring obligations can be fully fleshed out in a way that both builds on this deontological foundation and makes good on many of the commitments of feminist care ethics.

For Miller, a duty to care requires agents to meet the fundamental needs of others, which an individual requires to maintain his or her dignity and agency. One asset of Miller’s approach is that, like Kantian positive duties, a duty to care is imperfect and relatively flexible. This allows agents who act on these obligations to delineate the nature and scope of their caring activities. In this way, this formulation of the duty also importantly ensures that caregivers preserve their own dignity, agency, and pursuits while caring for others.

Miller, *The Ethics of Need*, 45.

Ibid., 52. On 55, Miller explains that Kant suggests that while it is possible to, without inconsistency, propose a universal law of indifference (not helping others, and not receiving help from others), it is impossible for humans to will such a world because we are “finite rational agents.” That is, willing such a world would “destroy the conditions of willing their own existence” (55).
Miller’s grounding of caring obligations in Kantian beneficence is compelling. My project is differentiated from hers in that I seek to identify how caring obligations beyond positive duties can be grounded. The inherent flexibility in positive duty based approaches to care allows individuals to tightly limit and circumscribe the scope of their caring obligations. (This avoids problems of overburdensomeness that often plague positive duty based accounts of responsibility, which I will discuss in the next chapter.) I aim to show, however, that agents have other kinds of caring obligations based upon their negative duties to avoid harm that are particularly relevant to distant relations. In what follows, I formulate my own approach for grounding caring obligations. Because I contend that caring obligations extend beyond positive duties, I seek to reveal the existence of different kinds of caring practices and a normative justification for these practices.

**Taking Care to Avoid Harm**

Both the vulnerability and dependency approaches attempt to offer a normative justification for caring obligations conceived as positive duties. That is, they both seek to justify claims that individuals are obligated to aid others. The approaches conceive of care as a practice that primarily involves actively meeting the needs of others. This focus on care as a positive duty is, I believe, in part the result of Noddings’s influential account of care as taking place within close, interpersonal relationships in which a care giver, who is engrossed with the person for whom they care, tends to the needs, vulnerabilities, and interests of the cared-for.
Many of the challenges that these approaches face can be seen as symptomatic of attitudes towards positive duties as being less stringent than negative duties, non-compulsory, or even non-existent. I suggest instead that there is an overlooked ambiguity in the question, “Why are we obligated to extend care to others?”, that, if clarified, can helps us to discern an alternative understanding of caring obligations. This question is typically read as asking why an agent has positive duties to attend to the needs of others by giving aid, but it can also be understood as referring to caring in terms of carefulness or taking care to avoid harm befalling others. Put differently, this question can also ask why we are obligated to have concern or regard for others in determining our own behaviors.

I do not contend that an adequate theory of caring obligations can sidestep offering a normative justification of caring obligations conceived as positive duties, but my purpose in this dissertation is limited to further elucidating care in this second sense, which I call taking care or acting with care. I identify taking care as particularly applicable to understanding general obligations to non-immediate others, i.e., those with whom we are in social relations that are not close, interpersonal relationships. Because of its applicability to general social relations, taking care to avoid harming others has something in common with negative duties. Yet, as we will see, to satisfy this obligation,

164 For more on this, see Allen Buchanan, “Justice and Charity,” Ethics 97, no. 3 (1987): 558–75. This view of positive duties is indicative of moral libertarianism, which will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter. I will note here however that Kant never suggests that positive duties are less binding, they are just imperfect, meaning that their exact execution cannot be prescribed.

165 Recall that there is also a type of care, caring-about. I differentiate taking care from this as well.
it also positively requires individuals to be attentive to the vulnerabilities of others and respond accordingly in order to avoid doing them harm.

At the end of the previous chapter, I noted some instances where feminist moral theorists have made passing reference to obligations to take care. For example, Virginia Held begins her discussion of definitions of care by looking to the valediction, “take care.” She takes up this phrase as it is used to say goodbye or, more precisely, as a way of telling someone that they ought to take care to assure their own safety and well being as well as the safety and well being of others. Held notes that we often say this to children or those who are embarking on a risky venture. When I tell you to take care, I am telling you to “be careful not to harm yourself or others because our connection will make us feel with and for you.”

Care, in this sense, means being careful, attentive, and responsive to the world around you.

Recall also Card’s suggestion that individuals have obligations to take care in her criticism of some parochial aspects of care ethics. In using care in this way, she also refers to care in the sense of requiring someone to be careful. She insists that an ethics of care ought to acknowledge “responsibilities to refrain from doing . . . [distant others] harm--to be careful, in a sense that does not require encounters with those for whose sakes we ought to take care.” For Card, what care ethics is missing then is an account of the type of care that is owed to those with whom we are not in close, interpersonal relationships.

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166 Held, The Ethics of Care, 30.
In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on care in this sense and offer a normative justification that grounds obligations to care in this particular way. This focus contributes to the ethics of care by developing a normative account of an often ignored practice of caring. As I will show below, formulating a normative justification for obligations to take care also points to a more complex relationship between care and justice-based moral approaches in a way that demonstrates that practicing care is a necessary condition of social cooperation. (I will also return to this idea in more detail in the conclusion of the dissertation below.)

AVOIDING HARM, RECKLESSNESS AND NEGLIGENCE

Those who focus on the particularist aspects of care ethics agree that caring-for is a time-consuming practice that requires one to be fully engaged with another’s needs. While both sides of a caring relation draw benefits from this practice, caring can sometimes be overwhelming for caregivers and, as such, must be limited in its scope to avoid problems of overburdensomeness. To say that one cannot care for everyone (in this sense) is correct, but this is not to say that there are not other ways in which agents are ethically required to maintain caring relations with others.

One way that agents may be realistically required to care for everyone is in avoiding careless behavior. By everyone, I do not mean to imply that agents must carefully regard their relations to all others at every moment, but that they must maintain a regard for how their acts will foreseeably affect others generally and alter their practices that cause harm. While even this kind of obligation to care may seem overwhelming at first blush, this is a normative requirement that is typically accepted. We expect others to
take care to avoid harming others all of the time, when driving a car, producing and selling products, or even when holding open a door. Extending care to others in this alternative sense involves both epistemological and practical aspects. Epistemologically, agents must be attentive to the world around them. We expect each other to take stock of our environments, the needs and vulnerabilities of those to whom we are connected, and to be knowledgeable of what kinds of activities pose risks to others. What this means is that agents, when deliberating upon a course of action, must show sufficient concern for the effects of their actions on others. Practically, agents are expected to act carefully, that is, in ways that at minimum avoid wanton and unjustified harm to others and sometimes actively prevent harm or address the needs of others.

Tove Pettersen has touched upon care in this context in her defense of Gilligan.168 Responding to accusations that Gilligan commits the naturalistic fallacy by deriving the values of care ethics from a set of descriptive premises about human nature, Petterson seeks to locate a normative foundation for Gilligan’s theory. She argues that “for the perspective of care to constitute a normative theory, not merely a value-laden, question-begging and fallacious psychological construction, an evaluative premise must be added.”169 She locates this premise in Gilligan’s discussions of avoiding harm. Petterson argues that the principle of non-maleficence can be formulated as an answer to the question of why we ought to care for others. As Petterson notes, Gilligan herself lays the foundation for this reading in stating that “the absolute of care, [can be] defined initially

169 Ibid., 40., Citing Gilligan, In a Different Voice, 166, 174.
as not hurting others,’ and that ‘an ethic of care rests on the premise of non-violence—that no one should be hurt.’”\textsuperscript{170} Petterson identifies this view of avoiding harm to others as “the origin of the normativity of care” and uses it to defend Gilligan’s care ethics against critiques of naturalism.\textsuperscript{171} I will develop an understanding of caring obligations as avoiding harm.\textsuperscript{172}

One place where obligations to take care have been more fully developed is in the Anglo-American legal concept of due care. Although I am interested in ethical applications of this concept that are wider in scope, the legal conception of due care can help us better understand existing intuitions about care as a practice of avoiding harm. In the legal context, due care refers to the “just, proper, and sufficient care” demanded by a particular set of circumstances.\textsuperscript{173} Acting with due care requires “that degree of care that a reasonable person can be expected to exercise to avoid harm reasonably foreseeable if such care is not taken.”\textsuperscript{174} Failures to exercise due care are called negligent or reckless. Negligent acts are typically understood as those harms committed without knowledge of the risks involved in acting, while reckless acts involve a recognition of existing risks but a choice to act anyway. Negligence is characterized by “inadverence, thoughtlessness,

\textsuperscript{170} Petterson, \textit{Comprehending Care}, 41.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} I find the injunction to avoid harm to be a compelling starting point for the ethics of care. It is interesting that it is also a foundational principle of physicians to “do no harm” exhibiting another connection between care-giving and avoiding harm.
\textsuperscript{173} Henry Campbell Black, \textit{Black’s Law Dictionary} (St. Paul: West Group, 1990), 499. An important distinction to note is that in jurisprudence a standard of due care is used retrospectively in order to determine what care an agent ought to have exercised in order to avoid harm. The moral duty to take due care that I formulate is prospective, requiring agents to look forward to the ways they must take care in order to avoid contributing to harm in the first place.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
[and] inattention,” while recklessness is characterized by wanton disregard or indifference to risk. Negligent acts are typically considered less culpable than reckless acts, which are in turn less culpable than intentional acts. Briefly examining each of these forms of wrongdoing reveals how care plays an essential role in meeting our duties to others.

Negligence is a breach of a legal duty, where the agent in question has failed to exercise the care that a reasonable person would exhibit in similar circumstances. From the Latin negligentia, the word denotes carelessness or heedlessness. This tort often is used in cases of product liability, canonically in Donoghue v. Stevenson (1932), where Lord Atkin concluded that a manufacturer has a duty to care for potential consumers of his or her products. In this case, Donoghue fell ill after consuming a ginger beer with a dead snail inside of it. The ginger beer manufacturer was found liable for the harm caused to Donoghue due to a lack of care exercised in the manufacturing process. (Noteworthy for my purpose concerning obligations between distant others is the way in which this foundational case concerning product liability determines the existence of duties to care between distant others within the context of industrialization and expanding social and economic relations.) Lord Atkin notably called upon the neighbor principle in his ruling, citing the dictum “love thy neighbor” to argue that one “must take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to injure your

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175 Ibid.
neighbor,” where neighbor is defined as those who are immediately enough affected by one’s act that they can be reasonably taken into consideration. ¹⁷⁶

The relationships between systemic contributors and those that are affected by the structural harms to which they contribute do not meet the legal criteria of negligence, and I do not wish to suggest that they should. I instead want to simply point to how, in the development of the concept of legal negligence, obligations to take care to avoid harming others have been taken as a given. While justice and care approaches to understanding ethical relations have often been portrayed as incommensurable, this is one place within the Western tradition where we can see concerns for care, and especially responsibilities to be attentive to the vulnerabilities of others, as central to meeting the demands of justice. ¹⁷⁷

The legal notion of recklessness is similarly bound up with considerations of caring obligations. Reckless acts are differentiated from negligent acts, when the agent who commits a wrong either had knowledge or can be reasonably expected to have knowledge of the risks involved in that act. ¹⁷⁸ Recklessness, like negligence, has etymological roots that identify its connection to care: the Old English rece, reccee denotes “care” or “heed.” Recklessness is seen as more culpable than negligence because,

¹⁷⁶ Alternative accounts of determining negligence have been developed since, including the Anns test. What counts as “immediate enough,” especially in moral contexts will be an important question moving forward.
¹⁷⁸ For more on the subjective vs. objective recklessness distinction touched upon here see Duff and Tadros
whereas negligent acts can be committed as culpable oversights or accidents, recklessness tends to always include a callousness or indifference on the part of the person committing the act. As Alan White notes, a “‘careless’ man is one who does not take care [i.e., negligent]; a man who does not care is called ‘indifferent’ [i.e., reckless].”\textsuperscript{179} Recklessness is, as a result, more culpable due to the existence of a vicious disregard for the welfare of others. Both recklessness and negligence are failures to meet obligations to care for others, but each involves a different state of mind in doing so.

Canonical cases concerning recklessness, such as Lord Diplock’s opinions in R v. Caldwell and R v. Lawrence, offer a view into how the legal concept of recklessness initially took shape. The former case involves a disgruntled drunken man who sets fire to his former employers hotel with the intent of destroying property. In doing so, he endangered the lives of guests in the hotel. The latter is a case concerning reckless driving that resulted in death. In each of the cases, Lord Diplock refers to recklessness in an objective sense, which means that a defendant is guilty of recklessness in cases where they either ought to have perceived the risks involved in his or her act or perceived the risk and decided to act anyway. Failure to take due care is, in regard to recklessness, a failure to modify obviously risky behavior for the sake of preventing possible harm to others.

What considering the legal standard of due care which functions in determinations of negligence and recklessness has shown us is the pervasiveness of expectations of care within society, and especially concerning obligations to general others. I suggest that

standards of care within the law point us toward widely shared moral intuitions concerning the moral significance of extending care in our relationships to others.

**Obligations to Take Care**

Moral duties to take care range in their scope and applications. These obligations are, importantly, ubiquitous features of social life. While our legal obligations to take due care are limited by the scope of the law,\(^{180}\) we are constantly expected to care, in a practical sense, as we move through a world that we share with others. An ordinary example in which obligations to care are at play can be found in a case as mundane as walking down the street.

When walking down a busy New York City sidewalk, for example, there are practical expectations on individuals to take into account other people who share the sidewalk. While walking slowly may be inconvenient at times, we do have practical expectations of behavior in a shared world with others. Someone who decided to, instead of simply walking her morning commute, take the whole trip as if she were dancing the Russian trepak in the Nutcracker, would not just be eccentric, but would be breaking with social norms and expectations of the space. And although there could be cases where

\(^{180}\) One major factor in determining the legal scope of due care is proximity between agents. Proximate cause is a legal determination that is differentiated from cause-in-fact. Proximate cause identifies an act as being sufficiently related to a legal harm such that it can be determined to be the cause of that harm. It is related to the standard of due care through the “neighbor principle,” first developed by Lord Atkin in *Donoghue v. Stevenson*, which requires that one must take reasonable care to avoid acts that would likely harm one’s neighbors. While my account of a duty to take care is inspired, in part, by the legal standard of care, it deviates from the legal concept by considering distantly related contributions to harm to be morally salient. These distant contributions to harm, which are the focus of my account, in many cases may not be sufficiently proximate in order to be considered a failure to meet a legal standard of care.
such behavior can serve a higher artistic purpose,\(^{181}\) I suggest that, barring such cases, the fault in this kind of behavior is that the agent in question fails to take care in their relations to others. Dancing the Russian trepak not only disturbs the ordinary use of the space, it involves flailing and kicking the legs in ways that interfere with the ability of others to use that space safely. The person who participates in this behavior without making sure that they are a safe distance away from others fails to take care to avoid harming others. Even if the dancing commuter does not in fact harm someone on her frolicking journey to work as a matter of luck, we still consider her lack of regard for others in her behavior to be, in itself, morally troubling since it puts others at risk of being kicked, whacked, and injured in various ways.

I look to small-scale examples of taking care, like this one, to derive the structure of a more general moral obligation to care. Above, I discussed definitions of care that highlight both the epistemological and practical dimensions of care.\(^{182}\) While the work of these theorists focus on care as a positive practice of giving aid, I apply this twofold understanding of care to obligations to take care. Taking care can be understood as an expectation to avoid carelessly causing harm to others, but taking care in the sense of being careful in one’s actions is an active practice of understanding and being attentive to the vulnerabilities and interests of others.

\(^{181}\) For example, flash mobs serve to interrupt mundane spaces with organized artistic expression, but, even with this recognition, their execution would still need to show some regard for the norms of sharing public spaces.

Above I described two distinct understandings of care, caring-for and caring about. Here I am adding taking care as a third way to understand to care as a moral activity. Each of these kinds of caring present different challenges when attempting to ground caring obligations for distant others, because in each case one must demonstrate the foundation of a distinct kind of moral activity. Caring-about, according to Noddings, refers to a readiness to care for others who may cross into one’s sphere of moral concern. It is, for Noddings, a disposition that requires, on her dismissive interpretation, very little of the one who takes it up. In the last chapter, I discussed some of the practical and theoretical challenges of claiming that agents have obligations to care for systemic contributors to structural harms. Caring-for is a particularly difficult to apply to questions of obligations to distant others, since the concept was mainly developed in the interpretation of face-to-face ethical relationships. I argue that recognizing a third understanding of caring obligations as taking care offers us a way of avoiding the theoretical challenges of providing a grounding for these other forms of care. It also offers us a way to avoid interpreting the obligations of systemic contributors through the highly particularist lens of care *qua* caring-for. While Noddings only thinks caring for distant others is possible in the, to her eyes, impoverished form of caring-about, I propose that duties to take care more accurately articulate the nature of moral obligations to distant others.

Caring-for, caring-about, and taking care are not only three distinct types of moral activities with different obligations and epistemological and practical components, these modes of caring also have different ways to discuss failures to satisfy one’s caring obligations. Analyzing what it means to fail at each of these modes of caring can be
helpful in further differentiating the concept of taking care from existing accounts of the
two other kinds of care. While on Noddings’ reading the stakes of caring-about are
insignificant, this dismissal is too hasty. On my account, failing to care-about others
should instead be characterized as a closed off stance to the interests, needs, and
vulnerabilities of others. Not caring-about can thus be understood as being indifferent to
others in one’s orientation to the world. Understood in this way, caring-about is a morally
significant, cognitive activity that is part of all forms of caring practices, since one cannot
care for others in particular relations or act with care in general social activities if one
does not first care-about others, i.e., give their needs, interests, and vulnerabilities
sufficient weight, in one’s moral deliberations. Caring-for a particular other in a specific,
interpersonal relationship, such as a husband caring for his ailing wife, surely includes a
much richer set of cognitive and affective attitudes than merely caring-about. But caring-
about in the sense of non-indifference is nonetheless a basic precondition of all forms of
caring, whether caring for a particular loved one or acting with care in walking down the
street or driving a car. Even though caring-for includes cognitive and affective states that
go beyond this basic cognitive stance, it is nonetheless the case that one could never care
for anyone in this richer sense, if one is operating from a stance of indifference.

In Noddings’ understanding of caring-for, the imperative to care-for emerges
naturally from within engrossing intimate relationships. As we saw above, other’s
attempt to avoid this naturalistic reading of caring-for and instead ground moral
requirements to care for others in interpretations of special relations, the vulnerabilities of
others, or the fact of human dependency and the necessity of care for sustaining human
life. Regardless of how we understand its moral foundation, when individuals fail to care-
for others to whom they have caring obligations (e.g., parental obligations to care for their children), we call this failure neglect.

Whereas obligations to care-for typically hold between closely related parties in face-to-face relationships, a moral duty to take care, as I have described it above, involves the more general avoidance of behaviors that will wantonly and unjustifiably harm others. We call the failure to take care negligence or recklessness. In the case of moral negligence, individuals are careless in their interactions with others and fail to understand, i.e., are culpably ignorant of, how their acts cause harm. In the case of moral recklessness, individuals are knowledgeable about the risky nature of their acts, but fail to care about the risks posed to others when still deciding to pursue that course of action.

What we find morally blameworthy about failures to act with care is that they issue from deliberative processes that are indifferent to others. That is, negligent and reckless actions fail to take seriously the extent to which others with whom one shares the world are vulnerable to the effects of one’s actions.

What I have done here by providing this taxonomy of different types of care is to demonstrate how a care-based normative framework can helpfully illuminate the nature of obligations in moral life. This framework also provides a rich moral language for discussing moral failure when we do not live up to our obligations. A failure to care-for is neglectful. A failure to take care is negligent or reckless. And a failure to care-about is to be indifferent.

Earlier I discussed how each of the three forms of care has a different grounding. The previous sections of this chapter examined attempts to provide a foundation for positive obligations to care-for. The normative justification of taking care that I have
offered here takes a different form. I have discussed the legal duty to care as an example of our common acceptance of a moral requirement to act with care in one’s actions in a sense that is different from caring-for. The form of my argument is not simply one of pointing to our current acceptance of this sense of care as sufficient evidence to ground our moral obligations. I also am not completely reliant on moral intuitions about the importance of the principle of non-maleficence as a basic requirement of moral life. Rather I hope to show that these intuitions about the basic nature of duties to avoid harming others, the existence of legal duties to take care, our understanding of legal concepts like negligence and recklessness, and our responsibility practices in the law all together speak to a web of intuitions and practices surrounding care that are central to moral life. In this way, my concern has been (1) conceptual (in clarifying the structure of a type of care that has been often overlooked in care ethics), (2) interpretative (in bringing out the meaning and importance of this form of care to our moral life and responsibility practices), and (3) normative (in demonstrating that a moral obligation to take care is both consistent with and helps to explain a significant web of our existing moral and legal intuitions and practices).

The account of taking care that I have forwarded also makes good on key feminist philosophical intuitions. First, the concept of vulnerability plays a central role in my account. This is because recognizing how others are vulnerable to one’s own acts is

183 Here, I part ways with Held who suggests that care and justice thinking have different domains, and that the law is the domain of justice. My purpose is to demonstrate how care thinking plays an important role in articulating duties to avoid harm (a set of obligations, typically considered in the context of justice).
central to taking care to avoid doing others harm.\textsuperscript{184} Second, demonstrating the salience of relations to moral life is a basic feature of care ethics as a project, so much so that care ethics is sometimes called a relational ethics. This focus is not lost in my account of duties to take care. In taking care, agents must be attentive to their relations to both immediate others (e.g., those with whom they share the road) and, as I will argue in the following chapters, distant others (e.g., those who they affect through consumer practices). Third, this account of taking care also places great value on attentiveness to others as a morally significant activity. The key difference is that this account extends the scope of moral attentiveness beyond immediate and special relationships to general social relations. A duty to take care requires that agents be attentive to how they can harm others in general social activities, such as driving a car. This expanded scope of obligations to take care will be significant in the following chapters, when I discuss the nature of responsibilities to act with care with regard to one’s activities as a systemic contributor.

My aim in formulating a duty to take care has been to demonstrate how common Western moral intuitions about avoiding wantonly harmful behavior point to equally important, and in a sense even more basic, obligations to care. As I noted above in regard to the development of product liability law, the legal conception of due care has responded to socio-economic and technological changes by expanding the scope in which

\textsuperscript{184} Although I am using the language of vulnerability here, I recognize that the adoption of such language has, in some contexts, insinuated victimhood. I do not mean perpetuate such a use of vulnerability, but instead attempt to point to an inherent susceptibility in all agents to each other’s acts in an interconnected and interdependent world.
agents are expected to attend to caring obligations. Cases of this sort point to the fluidity of the legal notion of due care, which reflects a basic characteristic of common law systems as being flexible and adaptable to changing social contexts. I have suggested here that we can infer from these legal obligations a similar, though more extensive moral duty to take care. The flexibility of standards of care shows the promise of care as a norm with which to discuss moral obligations in the context of complex, changing, systemic problems that are the result of dynamic interactions between individual, institutional, corporate, state, and environmental factors. This fluidity of the duty to take care also reflects a final way in which this form of care makes good on feminist intuitions. Here I have in mind feminist commitments to the way in which the conflicts of moral life must be attended to with context sensitivity, an appreciation for the particularities of specific moral problems, and an awareness of the significance of broader socio-historical circumstances for particular moral conflicts. In order to take care in one’s actions, agents must understand themselves as being embedded and occupying a specific place within social and historical relations. Acting with care also requires agents to consider the particular and concrete circumstances of their own lives and relations to others. The key idea here is that what care requires and what it means to act with care is not a static moral ideal that remains the same for all people, places, and times, but rather a fluid norm that changes given the different situations of moral agents as well as the changing nature of societies. For example, as economic arrangements and technologies increase the reach of one’s actions, what it means for one to act with care or non-indifference, given these expanded material capacities, will change. Understanding how we can think about what it

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185 Donoghue v. Stevenson, see also MacPherson v. Buick Motor Co.
means for agents to take care in the context of expanding social connections due to global
economic arrangements and technologies is the focus of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 4: GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND THE PROBLEM OF SYSTEMIC CONTRIBUTORS

At the start of the dissertation, I set out my primary aim, which is to investigate what responsibilities if any systemic contributors have for structural harms. These agents pose a challenge for theoretical discussions of who is responsible for addressing global problems, like climate change or sweatshop labor, because these agents contribute to global harms with their everyday life practices (i.e., their consumer choices and ordinary practices) and are often greatly constrained in their abilities to act differently. While their individual roles in contributing to harms for distant others are often quantitatively small, indirect, and unintentional, global socio-economic structures, which create distant harms, are often responsive to the choices (e.g., as consumers) of and frequently benefit these individuals. Systemic contributors, as a result, hold the potential for transformative action to change socio-economic structures so that they produce less harm.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I presented an argument for the kind of care that individuals owe to general others (i.e., those to whom I am related through social activities beyond close, interpersonal relationships). I dealt with critiques that care ethics, as it was initially formulated, is too particularist and parochial to express the responsibilities that exist between strangers and especially global or distant others. As an answer to these concerns, I examine the structure of duties to take care in Chapter 3. The duty to take care requires that individuals act with care such that their behaviors do not wantonly and unjustifiably
harm others. This duty requires more than non-interference, but also demands that agents be attentive and responsive to the interests, needs, and vulnerabilities of others.\textsuperscript{186}

In this chapter, I take a care perspective on debates in existing literature on global responsibility, specifically controversies surrounding Thomas Pogge’s causal liability model of global responsibility. I consider critiques of Pogge’s causal model from Debra Satz and Iris Young and then examine Young’s alternative social connection model. Both Pogge and Young’s models are intended to express the nature of what I have been calling the responsibilities of systemic contributors for global problems (specifically, world poverty and labor injustice). However, as I will argue below, we can improve upon these approaches by recognizing how systemic contributors’ contributions to structural harms that befall distant others can be better understood as failures to act with care. I will contend that the normative language of care has the analytic benefit of providing a more plausible interpretation of the kind of moral failure that is at stake when individuals act in ways that contribute, albeit indirectly and unintentionally, to distant harms.

\textbf{Introducing a Duty to Take Care as a Form of Global Responsibility}

Thomas Pogge presents a minimal conception of global justice in \textit{World Poverty and Human Rights}. Critics, such as Satz and Young, have argued that, in seeking to respond to a libertarian rejection of global responsibilities, Pogge has presented an overly

\textsuperscript{186} For example, a careful driver must be attentive and responsive to (1) what other drivers are trying to do, such as changing lanes or making a turn (i.e., their interests), (2) what other drivers require to safely accomplish their interests, such as space to merge (i.e., their needs), and (3) how other drivers are vulnerable to one’s decisions in sharing the space, such as tailgating, etc.
restrictive account of global responsibility in terms of negative duties. On the one hand, Satz argues that Pogge unsuccessfully tries to attribute causal responsibility for world poverty to individuals living in affluent nations, who are not the primary or immediate cause of this harm. On the other hand, Young argues that Pogge’s understanding of global responsibility is too restrictive and blame-focused to allocate responsibility to the same set of people. In keeping with the language of this dissertation, I call the set of individuals that both Satz and Young have in mind systemic contributors to global harms. Systemic contributors refer to those individuals who, by living in affluent nations, maintain and contribute to unjust global institutions and economic arrangements through their everyday life practices. For example, American consumers who support industries that benefit from the use of sweatshop labor can be said to contribute to instances of labor injustice. These systemic contributors pose a difficult problem for attempts to assign global responsibilities, because their connections to global harms, though both complicated and distant, are not inconsequential.

My objective is not to defend negative duties as a completely adequate criteria for allocating global responsibilities, since Pogge himself has denied that he suggests this. Instead I defend Pogge’s project of attempting to persuade moral libertarians, on their own terms, that systemic contributors have responsibilities to remedy global harms. Although I am ultimately unconvinced by the efficacy of Pogge’s causal liability model

187 The moral libertarian holds that individuals can only be said to be responsible for remedying those harms, which they have caused, and not those harms, which they let occur.
188 See Iris Young’s “Responsibility and Global Labor Justice”.
alone, I see my care-based approach as similarly concerned with convincing those that would deny the existence of responsibilities to distant others on their own terms. To proceed, I first examine how Pogge’s argument adopts, what I call, a causal-liability model of responsibility. On this model, which the libertarian already accepts, individuals are only responsible for remedying harms that they have caused. Pogge’s goal is to show how individuals in affluent nations have a responsibility to do something about global harms, like severe poverty in the developing world, given their existing commitments to avoid causing harm.

Next, I examine two formidable criticisms of this project. Satz argues that a liability model cannot express the responsibilities of systemic contributors, because it is interpretively incorrect to describe them as the cause of global harms, which is the basic condition of assigning responsibility on this model. Young similarly argues that a causal-liability model is ill equipped for describing the responsibilities of systemic contributors, because their acts are not faulty in the way that the model requires. Because of these perceived failures of the causal-liability view, both Satz and Young recommend abandoning this model in favor of approaches to responsibility, such as political responsibility or utilitarian cosmopolitanism, that feature forward looking, positive duties. I take up Young’s social connection model and argue that it is susceptible to critiques of over-burdensomeness that are often levied against positive duty approaches to global responsibility. I also forward concerns that Young’s account does not do enough

\[190\] See my more detailed discussion of the causal-liability view of responsibility in Chapter 1.

\[191\] In this sense, Pogge takes up what David Miller calls a causal principle of global responsibilities. See Chapter 1 for an explanation of this principle, as well as, Miller, “Distributing Responsibilities.”
to provide normatively convincing reasons for why systemic contributors have global responsibilities.

To avoid the problems of heading down the paths that Satz and Young recommend, I suggest that we do not completely abandon the causal-liability model. To do this, I respond to criticisms that systemic contributors do not meet the conditions of a causal-liability view. I specifically focus on Young’s argument that the acts of systemic contributors do not meet the fault requirement of this model. I show how this claim is motivated by the fact that systemic contributors often unknowingly and unintentionally support global institutions and arrangements that cause harms. I argue, however, that although the acts of systemic contributors are often done in ignorance or without intent, this does not mean that they escape all categories of fault. I demonstrate how the normative language of care, recklessness, and negligence captures the kind of fault that characterizes the acts of systemic contributors. As a result, I suggest that the moral failure of systemic contributors is more adequately articulated as a failure to meet one’s duty to take care. I close the chapter by suggesting that the causal-liability approach, which grounds attributions of remedial responsibility on the claim that agents have, at least partially, caused harms that they must remedy, can be saved from Satz's and Young’s criticisms by providing a more fine-grained analysis of mitigated liability. This subtle account of mitigated liability in terms of care, recklessness, and negligence provides a way to both describe what is wrong with the actions of systemic contributors and justify
normative claims that they have responsibilities to remedy the harms to which they have contributed.\textsuperscript{192}

\textbf{POGGE’S MINIMAL CONCEPTION OF GLOBAL JUSTICE}

Pogge’s project in \textit{World Poverty and Human Rights} begins by considering the fact that despite much economic, technological, and moral progress throughout world history, the citizens of affluent nations remain relatively untroubled by the fact that a large proportion of the world's population continues to live in severe poverty. This indifference, for Pogge, is largely unjustifiable, as many of the excuses given for remaining uninvolved in efforts to alleviate world poverty are shallow.\textsuperscript{193} He takes seriously only one argument as making a case for ignoring world poverty. I call this position moral libertarianism, which claims that “we could prevent much desperate poverty through more foreign aid or other redistributive mechanisms,” however, the moral libertarian “takes such preventability to indicate not that we are actively causing poverty, but that we fail to contribute as much as we might to poverty eradication.”\textsuperscript{194} Placing emphasis on causal relations in defining the scope of individual remedial responsibilities, the moral libertarian suggests that, since she

\begin{verse}
\textsuperscript{192} By mitigated liability, I simply mean cases where an agent is less blameworthy than one who causes harm in an intentional and foreseeable manner and meets the conditions of the traditional causal liability understanding of moral responsibility. Mitigation in the law has two different meanings. In the criminal context, mitigated liability refers to those mitigating circumstances (e.g., age, history of abuse, diminished mental capacities, etc.) that would provide a reason for reducing punishment. In the civil context, mitigation refers to the responsibility of the harmed party to take reasonable steps to reduce the amount of pain they suffered.

\textsuperscript{193} These include suggestions that problem is too big, unsolvable, or that poverty relief will exacerbates overpopulation making the problem worse. Singer and Pogge offer nice rebuttals to these concerns.

\textsuperscript{194} Pogge, \textit{World Poverty and Human Rights}, 14.
\end{verse}
does nothing to cause the harms that befall the impoverished, she has no obligations to remedy their plight. While she recognizes that she could be doing much more to prevent individuals from suffering and dying in these circumstances, the moral libertarian argues that there is a significant moral difference between letting someone die and causing their death. (Though, of course, it makes little difference to the person who is dead.) Because she assumes she is not the cause of these harms, she contends that she is not responsible for remedying them.

A paradigmatic example of this position can be found in the work of Jan Narveson, who argues that individuals do not have duties to aid others to whom they have done nothing wrong. It is only negative duties that we all genuinely owe each other. While Narveson readily admits that beneficence, a positive duty, is a formidable moral virtue that people should practice, he takes such virtues to be “nice” or beneficial character traits rather than moral obligations. For the moral libertarian then it may be praiseworthy to help those in need, however, a lack of causal or contractual connection to those in need means that one is never blameworthy for choosing not to assist someone else.

This is the kind of argument for denying the existence of global responsibilities that Pogge wants to take seriously. To do so, he grants, for the sake of argument, the moral libertarian’s claim that individuals are only remedially responsible for those harms

that they cause. This lets him avoid having to provide a defense of the existence of positive duties to those who would already reject their validity. Instead Pogge takes on the challenge of restricting all global responsibilities according to a causal principle, which suggests that individuals are required to remedy those harms that they cause. This restriction offers Pogge an opportunity to craft a minimum conception of global justice based on negative duties. Though a concession, Pogge’s minimal conception of global justice aims to show the many ways in which those in the affluent world are actively causing the circumstances of global poverty. As a result, Pogge forwards an argument for global responsibilities to remedy world poverty that not even the moral libertarian can reject.

Pogge’s accommodation of a causal principle of global responsibility has been a source of controversy. In this chapter, I focus on two of these criticisms, because each concerns the assignment of responsibility to a particularly problematic group, i.e., systemic contributors. Both Satz and Young see Pogge’s model of responsibility as indicative of a causal-liability view. Before turning to why attributing liability to systemic contributors to global harms might be challenging, let us first consider how we might better understand Pogge’s adoption of the causal principle as forwarding a liability model of global responsibility.

By seeking to persuade the moral libertarian, Pogge takes advantage of widely accepted criteria for attributing responsibility. Generally speaking, “when we state that a person is responsible for some harm, we sometimes mean to ascribe to him liability,” in order to hold that person accountable by either attributing to them blame, an obligation to

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198 Pogge, World Poverty and Human Rights, 15.
make compensation, or both.\textsuperscript{199} Individuals are liable for a particular act if the act meets three conditions: (1) the act in question was \textit{caused} by the agent being considered; (2) the act in question was \textit{faulty} in some way (i.e., a breach of a moral or legal obligation); and, (3) there is a \textit{concrete connection between the faultiness of the act and the cause of the harm}.\textsuperscript{200} Joel Feinberg calls these the conditions of “contributory fault.”\textsuperscript{201} When an individual’s actions meet these conditions, we typically consider the agent to be liable and the faulty character of the act is what makes them, more particularly, blameworthy.\textsuperscript{202} For example, if Shannon steals John’s bicycle, she is liable because she (1) \textit{caused} the harm (having taken the bike); (2) her act is \textit{faulty} insofar as it (voluntarily and intentionally) breaches a moral and legal prohibition against theft; and, (3) it is Shannon’s \textit{faulty act that resulted in a harm} (John’s loss of property). This example offers a paradigmatic case that satisfies common Western moral intuitions concerning responsibility assignments as having the primary purpose of attributing liability and blame. It also highlights how such assignments typically concern the acts of discreet individuals within direct and proximate relations.

Pogge assumes this model when suggesting that “we – the more advantaged citizens of the affluent countries – are actively responsible for most of the life-threatening

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., my emphasis.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} How blameworthy they are will depend on other factors, like voluntariness and intent, which we will consider as we progress through the chapter. It is also important to note that there are is a category of non-fault liabilities to which blame is not attached. This is not what Feinberg has in mind here, as fault is imbedded in his definition of general liability.
poverty in the world.”\textsuperscript{203} Pogge’s claim is that systemic contributors are “shaping and enforcing the social conditions that foreseeably and avoidably cause the monumental suffering of global poverty.” Moreover, he suggests that “we are harming the global poor. . . [insofar as] we are active participants in the largest, though not the gravest, crime against humanity ever committed.”\textsuperscript{204} Pogge justifies these claims with a detailed historical account of how economic and political policies crafted by affluent nations have created and continue to maintain the conditions of world poverty.\textsuperscript{205} He can be understood as assigning responsibility \textit{qua} liability to the acts of systemic contributors, who are (1) the \textit{cause} of global poverty in that they uphold a global institutional order that creates this harm. Their acts are (2) \textit{faulty}, insofar as they support institutions that harm people. Put otherwise, systemic contributors aid and abet others that immediately create the circumstances of world poverty. Finally, it is (3) \textit{these faulty and avoidable acts that can be said to cause} world poverty.

These conditions of contributory fault are a valuable resource for not only understanding how Pogge’s model of global responsibility is best characterized as a causal-liability model, but they also offer a fine-grained account of the conditions of liability through which we can better understand the points of divergence between Pogge and his critics. In what follows, I focus on the first two conditions of contributory fault as they are taken up implicitly by Satz and Young. I argue that Satz denies the claim that

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{205} For example, Pogge examines how affluent nations let leaders of developing countries dictate the use of that country’s natural resources, even to the detriment of the people of a country. He also discusses how trade policies have been crafted such that essential pharmaceuticals remain expensive for those who need them most.
systemic contributors meet the first condition of contributory fault, while Young accepts
the claim that systemic contributors meet the first condition, but not the second. I suggest
that this perceived failure to satisfy one of the conditions of contributory fault sends both
Satz and Young in search of alternative models of responsibility in order to describe the
relations of systemic contributors to global injustice.

SATZ’S CRITICISM: ARE “WE” REALLY TO BLAME?

Debra Satz rejects Pogge’s adoption of negative duties as a minimal conception of
global justice for two reasons. First, she argues that Pogge’s project attempts to use a
“causal contribution principle” to justify the claim that individuals living in affluent
nations have a responsibility to alleviate world poverty. She doubts the extent to which
such individuals cause global harms in any robust sense. Second, Satz is concerned with
Pogge’s willingness to accommodate the libertarian rejection of positive duties. She
argues for the existence of positive duties and cites existing theories that adopt positive
global duties, such as those of cosmopolitan utilitarians or of civic responsibility, as
offering more promising models of global responsibility. Both of these criticisms are
indicative of Satz’s rejection of Pogge’s causal-liability perspective.

Satz’s first criticism is that the extension of Pogge’s causal-liability model of
responsibility to systemic contributors is ill conceived. Satz finds Pogge’s
accommodation of a “causal contribution principle” for allocating responsibility both
empirically and philosophically problematic insofar as this principle suggests that “we are
morally responsible for world poverty because and to the extent that we have caused
Her main concern is the identification of a we, i.e., individuals living in affluent nations, as causally responsible for the circumstances of world poverty. Satz argues that Pogge presents this “we” as a homogenous group of agents, who are all related to the same global harms in the same way (as those agents X, which cause harm Y). She argues that, in reality, such agents exist in a multitude of “diverse agency relationships” to world poverty. For Satz, relying on causal attributions of blame in order to allocate responsibility embroils Pogge in the difficult empirical project of distinguishing the complex causes of global harms, which she claims requires contextualized analyses to reveal the complex interactions between local and global causes. In this respect, Satz implicitly rejects that systemic contributors meet the first condition of contributory fault, since she does not view them as the cause of world poverty.

Satz reminds us that paradigmatically moral responsibility is attributed to agents who both voluntarily and with knowledge of the foreseeable consequences of their actions cause some harm. Many individuals, however, participate in and maintain the global institutional order in indirect and unintentional ways, for example, by living and working in a country that is the beneficiary of and whose leaders helped to structure certain international agreements or policies. Satz explains that an individual going about their everyday life likely has little knowledge of or negative intent regarding the causes of world poverty. Transparency issues at the level of international governance, especially in

\[\text{Debra Satz, “What Do We Owe The Global Poor?,” Ethics & International Affairs 19, no. 1 (2005): 47.}, \text{my emphasis.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 48.}\]

\[\text{Her contextualized approach suggests that we consider everything from local causes to the transparency issues of the International Monetary Fund. I take her focus on context-sensitive analysis to be important and harmonious with a care framework for understanding global responsibilities.}\]
organizations like the International Monetary Fund, make it impossible for “ordinary” individuals to participate in or even know about the ratification of unjust policies.²⁰⁹ For this reason, Satz argues that Pogge has unreasonably extended the scope of responsibility for world poverty to include the roles of these systemic contributors. She points to the prospect of blaming “a laid-off American steel worker” for the circumstances of world poverty as an unintuitive outcome of Pogge’s approach.²¹⁰

She suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the complicated nature of global relations reveals systemic contributors to be morally obligated via their failures to meet positive duties to aid others who suffer immensely rather than via their causal role in a vast global socio-economic order. She argues that positive duties, such as those that require individuals to provide easy rescue, are more demanding and compelling than many negative duties. In the end, it is Pogge’s focus on causation and a restrictive focus on negative duties in global relations that Satz rejects.

Satz’s reasons for rejecting Pogge’s model of global responsibility can be brought into greater relief by considering Jiwei Ci’s analysis of Pogge’s institutional conception of human rights obligations. Ci argues that the most radical feature of Pogge’s project is his shift from an interactional to an institutional understanding of negative duties.²¹¹ While an interactional conception of human rights obligations would have individuals avoid causing “direct harm to concrete individuals,” Pogge’s institutional conception adds to this that individuals ought to avoid upholding or imposing upon others “coercive

²⁰⁹ Satz, “What Do We Owe The Global Poor?,” 50.
²¹⁰ Ibid., 51.
social institutions under which they do not have secure access to the objects of their human rights.”

By expanding individual moral responsibilities to include obligations concerning the institutions that one supports or tacitly maintains, Pogge manages to greatly enhance the scope of individual negative duties for global harms. These institutional negative duties end up encompassing as many obligations as those approaches that uphold the relevance of positive duties for the same purpose. For Ci, then, “if anything appears to be sacrificed as a result” of Pogge’s restrictive use of a causal principle of global responsibility, “it is made up for through the radical reconceptualization of negative duties.”

Ci’s analysis gives us a good sense of Satz and Pogge’s main point of divergence. While Pogge seems to equate directly causing a harm with contributing to an institutional structure that causes harm, Satz takes the first to be within the scope of negative duties and the second to be beyond their scope. I will return to this difference between directly causing harm and contributing to institutions that cause harm later. For now it is important to note that Young will take systemic contributors to be responsible for, but not guilty of, the latter. Young, like Pogge, is concerned with formulating a model of responsibility aimed at the institutional contributions of individuals to global (and more local) harms. She argues, however, that a complete departure from the framework of liability is necessary in order to accomplish this task.

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212 Ibid., 86.
213 Ibid., 87.
YOUNG’S CRITIQUE: THE CAUSAL-LIABILITY MODEL AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

Like Satz, Young is critical of Pogge’s causal-liability model of global responsibility. She is less concerned, however, with the difference between directly causing harm and contributing to an institution that causes harm and more concerned with the nature of such contributions. Satz, Young, and Pogge are all acutely aware of the ways in which individuals are differentially situated in relation to systemically generated global harms. On Young’s account, however, Pogge is more focused on identifying those institutional actors who have the most power and ability to shape the rules that govern the global order and to whom he can attribute blame for the conditions of world poverty (e.g., the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and so on). And, as Satz’s critique demonstrates, Pogge lumps in systemic contributors with these kinds of causal agents, since they are complicit with an unjust global order that is shaped, often, for their benefit. Young is less concerned, however, with those that are obviously liable for their immediate acts (e.g., policymakers, leaders, etc.) and is more attentive to the ways in which the everyday, seemingly innocuous acts of many individuals contribute to global harms. The question of whether or not such individuals do cause (or merely contribute to the causes) of global harms is less important for Young than an analysis of the kinds of acts that contribute to those harms. As a result, much of her work in this area focuses on how, for example, the ordinary purchase of clothing turns the consumer into a participant in a global garment industry that unjustly benefits from the labor of sweatshop workers.  

Because Young focuses on the everyday acts of systemic contributors that participate in various forms of global and economic injustice, we can see her as implicitly rejecting the idea that systemic contributors meet the second condition of contributory fault. That is, she suggests that, while purchasing a cheap piece of clothing may support unjust global economic institutions and arrangements insofar as doing so provides a market for unfair trade and labor, the actual act of purchasing affordable clothing is not faulty in itself. One feature of blameworthy acts is that they typically are not socially acceptable, but it is precisely through their participation in socially standard acts (e.g., shopping at K-mart, using gasoline for transportation, etc.) that systemic contributors participate in global harms. Moreover, in purchasing cheap clothing at K-mart, for example, a consumer is pursuing the legitimate end of acquiring clothing for his or her family. As I discussed in Chapter 1 in detail, we are hard-pressed to characterize such acts, especially if the agents committing them are constrained in their socio-economic choices for a variety of reasons, as morally blameworthy. I take this perceived lack of faultiness in the acts of systemic contributors as one of Young’s primary reasons for rejecting Pogge’s causal-liability model. Because you cannot blame individuals for acts which are not faulty, Young argues that Pogge’s project implicitly “absolves too many ordinary people, in the South as well as the North, of their responsibilities they should take up, if only responsibilities to organize pressure on powerful actors.” To formulate

\[\text{215 I do not mean to suggest here that an act being socially condemned is what makes it blameworthy. We could of course imagine a society that is openly accepting of moral atrocities. I mention the connection here, however, to draw out the epistemic challenge faced by systemic contributors when it is their mundane, commonly accepted acts that participate in unjust institutions.} \]

\[\text{216 Young, “Responsibility and Global Labor Justice,” 382.}\]
a model of responsibility that can take into account the ways in which systemic
contributors are involved in institutional injustice, Young advocates a departure from a
causal-liability view of responsibility.

For Young, seeking to assign responsibility \textit{qua} liability obfuscates what she calls
instances of structural injustice. Structural injustice occurs when social and economic
institutions put “large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or
depivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, [while] at the same
time as these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities
for developing and exercising their capacities.”\textsuperscript{217} If one attempts to address this form of
injustice with a causal-liability model of responsibility, what ensues is a “blame-game” in
which isolating blameworthy agents (and those agents attempting to escape blame) is the
primary focus.\textsuperscript{218} Young notes the example of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New
Orleans as an instance in which the structural circumstances of devastating poverty,
limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure was created by the individual and
institutional decisions of a variety of actors over a long period of time. This kind of
structural injustice will persist, as will the harms that it causes, regardless of the blaming
and punishment of any isolatable set of agents. On Young’s account, addressing
structural injustice requires the collective action of individuals inspired to transform the
institutional structures which shape the choices available to them in their everyday lives.

\textsuperscript{217} Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model,”
\textsuperscript{218} Iris Marion Young, “Katrina: Too Much Blame, Not Enough Responsibility,” \textit{Dissent}
Engaging in this kind of political action requires, for Young, a new way of conceiving of our moral and political responsibilities.

**Young’s Turn to Political Responsibility**

The first part of this chapter analyzed criticisms of Pogge’s work in order to demonstrate that his causal-liability model of responsibility fails to adequately capture the kind of moral relation systemic contributors have to global harms. His model was found to be too restrictive to describe the kind of global responsibility plausibly assigned in these cases. I now consider some issues with Young’s alternative model of political responsibility. In fact, both Satz and Young suggest that some form of political responsibility may be better suited to describe the responsibilities of systemic contributors to global harms. Young develops an account of political responsibility for this purpose, which she calls the social connection model.

In part a revision of Arendt’s notion of political responsibility, which was developed in response to the Second World War, the social connection model takes up an understanding of responsibility derived “from a common membership in a nation and having to accept responsibility for wrongs done in its name.”

In light of an increasingly global age, Young replaces Arendt’s category of nation-state membership with

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219 Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 75–76. Arendt’s formulation of political responsibility was aimed at what she considered to be the inauthentic, vicarious guilt experienced by young Germans after the war. She aimed at drawing a strict distinction between those that were guilty of causing harm and those that were complicit with the guilty parties.
participation in transnational socio-economic institutions and arrangements as
demarcating the relevant scope of one’s political responsibilities.\textsuperscript{220}

Under Young’s model, agents are responsible for monitoring the overall effects of
the social structures of which they are a part and addressing gross harms, as well as,
instances of injustice that occur within these structures.\textsuperscript{221} In what follows, I raise some
concerns with the abandonment of a causal-liability model for understanding the
responsibilities of systemic contributors. It is important to note, however, that Young is
not offering a complete rejection of a causal-liability view. She thinks that Pogge is right
to adopt this view for agents who are the immediate cause of particular harms (e.g., a
sweatshop factory manager who denies employees bathroom breaks or fails to pay them
what has been promised). Young’s social connection model is specifically designed for
describing the responsibility relations of those that I have been calling systemic
contributors to global harms. I find that Young’s social connection model fails, in a
different way than Pogge’s, to adequately understand the moral significance of systemic
contributors’ complicity with global harms. Following this, I develop an alternative
approach based upon my account of duties to take care developed in the previous chapter.
My approach focuses on the acts of systemic contributors as instances of moral
carelessness and, in doing so seeks to preserve the insights, but avoid the problems of
Pogge and Young’s respective approaches.

\textsuperscript{220} See also Samuel Scheffler, \textit{Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and
Responsibility in Liberal Thought} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Onora
O’Neill, \textit{Faces of Hunger: Essay on Poverty, Justice and Development} (London:
\textsuperscript{221} Young, \textit{Responsibility for Justice}, 88.
The purpose of Young’s social connection model is to extend responsibility for harms that occur as the result of institutional structures to the many individuals who tacitly maintain these structures. Young’s model, as a result, shares many features with Larry May’s shared responsibility, insofar as its purpose is to distribute responsibility to lower level actors within larger systems of injustice. This is opposed to ordinary models of collective responsibility that place responsibility on a group agent without distribution to individual-level actors. One of the most important features of the social connection model is that it is not focused on assigning blame or guilt. Instead the social connection model is concerned with distributing positive forward-looking obligations to change the overall structure of social institutions, rather than apportioning blame and punishments to the individuals who make up those institutions.

Young’s reasons for abandoning Pogge’s causal-liability model are both normative and pragmatic. Following Arendt, she suggests that guilt is not an appropriate normative category to assign to systemic contributors, since these individuals are not guilty of causing harm in proximate, interactional contexts. Because assigning blame is a process often characterized by resistance and defensiveness, Young, as a practical matter, also finds assigning blame to be troublesome in contexts where rallying support for collective action is the primary goal. Young’s model distinguishes responsibility from blame by maintaining that systemic contributors indirectly cause harm through their institutional relations, while simultaneously suggesting that the acts in question are not faulty because they are mundane acts like buying affordable clothing. This presumption that such everyday acts are not faulty is, however, hasty. The problem is that Young’s

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222 May, *Sharing Responsibility*. 
social connection model fails to take into account the full range of acts considered to be morally problematic, by assuming that individuals are either completely liable for causing a harm (and as a result are guilty) or not liable at all.

I argue that a deficient account of what acts count as faulty is at play in both Pogge’s and Young’s respective models. This has been done by offering a reductive view of what counts as common Western moral intuitions about responsibility, whether libertarian or otherwise. Within this debate, it is assumed that our common understanding of responsibility maintains that individuals are either only liable for those acts that they cause (intentionally and voluntarily) or they are not liable at all. Pogge accommodates this view entirely in the development of his minimal conception of justice, while Satz and Young search for alternative approaches because they reject such a view. It is possible, however, to provide a more accurate interpretation of how systemic contributors are, to some extent, blameworthy for being complicit with harms to which they have indirectly contributed. What is needed to formulate such an account of the responsibility of systemic contributors for global harms is an understanding of mitigated liability. In the next section, I show how we can forward such an account by understanding the actions of systemic contributors as constituting to failures to act with care.

Young’s social connection model also does not go far enough in providing morally convincing reasons for why individuals are responsible for their social connections. By shifting from nation-state membership to social connections as the type of relations that demarcate the sphere of individual political responsibilities, Young’s model expands the scope of individual responsibilities to address harm, but sacrifices the communitarian justification of the reasons for such responsibilities. Under her model,
individuals are responsible because of their mere connections to harm, which are difficult to perceive and not typically entered into voluntarily by individuals themselves. (I.e., an individual does not choose the community into which they are born, the existence of social and economic opportunities, the amount and kind of available consumer choices, existing infrastructure, etc.) The problem with Young’s account is that it fails to offer individuals particular reasons for why simply being socially connected to some distant harm through convoluted social systems that are well beyond their control demands that they take responsibility to change their own acts and work for more just social arrangements.

A positive feature of Arendt’s version of responsibility is that individuals typically have one (or very few) claims to citizenship. Once expanded to include all of an individual’s social and institutional connections to injustice, Young’s social connection model embroils individuals in uncountable relations of responsibility. (E.g., if you want a cup of coffee, a green lawn in the fall, a pair of shoes, a can of cola, a warm house in the winter, a cell phone, a pair of pants, or a diamond engagement ring, then you are contributing to injustice somewhere else in the world). To avoid this apparent over-burdensomeness, what Young’s account needs is an explanation of what makes specific social relations morally significant, if it is not that one’s actions in those relations are either the causes of harm or that the harm occurs within one’s recognized scope of moral concern (i.e., one’s political community). Put bluntly, merely pointing to an individual’s social connections does not explain why those social connections have any moral importance. If what Young really wants is to offer individuals good reasons for why they should transform those unjust institutional contexts in which they participate, she needs
to offer them particular reasons for why their particular acts need to be transformed. In what remains of this chapter, I argue that we can explain why the social connections that Young highlights have moral importance with the normative language of care.

**UNKNOWING AND UNINTENTIONAL SYSTEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

Above I have suggested that Satz and Young both reject Pogge’s causal-liability model of global responsibility on the basis that systemic contributors fail to meet one of the three conditions of contributory fault. Satz doubts the extent to which systemic contributors actually cause global harms (condition 1) and implies that blame is inappropriate in this context. Young takes systemic contributors to be involved in instances of global injustice via their institutionalized social connections to harm (satisfying condition 1), but argues that these contributions result from ordinary life practices and, as such, are not faulty acts in a traditional sense (condition 2) that would justify attributing blame to systemic contributors. I will leave aside here problems with condition one concerning the question of causal contribution to global harms for two reasons. First, I take Pogge’s empirical case that systemic contributors do in fact contribute to global harms to be compelling. Second, Young’s structural analysis of individual-level institutionalized contributions to global harms through everyday practices provides a convincing supplement to Pogge’s account that nuances his claim that systemic contributions are causal agents participating in global harms in a way that helps it survive Satz’s challenge. For my purposes in this dissertation, I focus here on

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223 I am also convinced by his refutation of Satz criticism. See Pogge, “Severe Poverty as a Violation of Negative Duties.”
concerns with the second condition of liability regarding the faultiness of the acts of systemic contributors. The acts of systemic contributors may be seen as not faulty because they do not meet any of the following three conditions that are typically taken to be necessary features of morally blameworthy action: foreseeability, intentionality, and voluntariness.

On the common sense, causal-liability view, an individual is generally not blameworthy for causing harm, if he or she had no knowledge that harm would result as a foreseeable consequence of his or her action. If Vincent offers to share some of his homemade cookies with his colleagues at lunch and ends up accidentally make one of them seriously ill due to a peanut allergy, this is an unfortunate mistake, especially since Vincent would not have shared the cookies with his colleague had he known about the allergy. Lack of knowledge does not, however, always offer a way out of liability. If Vincent were a daycare provider who brought in the same cookies to share with the children for whom he cares, and he failed to recognize that a small child might not know to warn him that he or she has a peanut allergy, Vincent would be liable for negligence. Because it is common knowledge that that there are children who have serious peanut allergies (and he ought to know that small children might not think to tell him this when being offered a cookie), Vincent is expected to know that he ought to ask parents before feeding the children a possibly life-threatening substance. In Vincent’s case, his ignorance is not exculpatory, but rather culpable and, as such, is a key feature of what makes his act negligent.

Evaluating the moral faultiness of the acts of systemic contributors is challenging, since it is possible that many people may not know about how their own acts may
contribute, in often complex and indirect ways, to global harms and structural injustice. We do, however, live in an information age and, as such, it is possible that some of the ignorance exhibited by systemic contributors (e.g., not knowing about the causes and effects of climate change or the circumstances under which certain products are produced) are forms of culpable ignorance.224 If it can be demonstrated that systemic contributors act with culpable ignorance of the effects of their actions, then the claim that their lack of knowledge of their social connections to global harms exculpates them is not warranted. (I will discuss questions of epistemic responsibility and culpable ignorance in the context of climate change in the next chapter.)

In addition to having knowledge of the potential harms of one’s acts, one is also commonly required to have intended harm if one is to be held responsible. Unintentional harms happen all of the time. We call such unintentional harms accidents (e.g., when someone spills a beer on an expensive stereo system at a party), which are typically not considered blameworthy. Yet not all unintentional acts escape liability. If on the 4th of July, Robert decides to shoot off some fireworks in his backyard and ends up setting his neighbor’s house on fire, he is at fault for the fire, despite the fact that he did not intend to set the blaze. Robert is liable for recklessness. He knew, as any reasonable adult would, that setting off fireworks in a dense neighborhood was taking a serious risk. He was indifferent, however, to how taking that risk could harm others when he decided to start lighting cherry bombs.

As I have noted above, a key feature of systemic contributors is that they do not intend to harm others by participating in everyday life activities. It is not reasonable to believe that most systemic contributors are completely without knowledge of the relationship between fossil fuels and climate change or the conditions under which many diamonds are mined in Sierra Leone.\footnote{We might also say that systemic contributors are not voluntarily participating in these harms since their choices are socially constrained. For example, it may be very difficult for a person of modest means living and working in a suburban area to mitigate their carbon footprint on their commute to work. Having constrained choices, however, can be differentiated from having no choice at all. This is one of the difficult problems, however, that I will have to return to in the development of this account of global responsibility. I consider such complications in detail in the context of climate change in the next chapter. If systemic contributors are, as Satz mentions above, differentially situated in regard to global harms, then at least some of these agents must be able to effect change within the structures within which they live, whether that be through involvement in voting, political activism, changing their consumer choices, or simply changing their attitudes and cultivating new moral norms concerning distant others.} Not knowing about these harms and their causes, as suggested above, would likely be a case of culpable ignorance. Systemic contributors, however, most likely have such knowledge, but weigh the risks of their daily activities against the benefits that they gain from these acts and decide to go ahead with the act. We can call this way of behaving reckless insofar as systemic contributors choose to keep acting in ways to preserve their own lifestyles despite the fact that doing so maintains institutional structures that cause global harms.\footnote{For example, there are blockbuster films dedicated to each of these topics.}

What the preceding examples demonstrate is that lack of knowledge or intent does not necessarily mean that a given act is not morally faulty. Ignorance can be culpable, as in the case of negligence, and unintentional harms can be the result of recklessness. Both of these morally blameworthy forms of action, negligence and recklessness, are examples of failures to act with care. What this means is that Pogge’s project of applying a causal-
liability model of responsibility to systemic contributors should not be completely abandoned without first investigating the implications of these categories of mitigated liability and their adequacy as a normative lens for evaluating the acts of systemic contributors.

TURNING TO CARE AS A NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

In this final section, I review how what I have examined so far demonstrates the need for a turn to the normative language of care, recklessness, and negligence, if we are to generate a theory of individual global responsibility.

I have demonstrated that Pogge’s model is useful because it engages moral libertarians on their own terms by utilizing a causal-liability view of responsibility. Satz criticizes Pogge’s adoption of a causal contribution principle to account for the responsibility of systemic contributors, since she takes such actors to not be the cause of global harms. Convinced by Pogge’s argument that it is fair to characterize systemic contributors as causing global harms through their support for global institutions and socio-economic arrangements, I set this concern with the causal-liability model to the side. Turning to Young’s criticism, I demonstrated how it points to a normative problem with attributing liability to systemic contributors, since the acts with which these agents contribute to global harms are not prima facie faulty, but instead are mundane, commonly exercised practices. Young attempts to demonstrate how the normative language of blame and liability breaks down in the context of systemic contributions to global harms. This is significant because, for Pogge, assigning remedial responsibility to systemic contributors is grounded upon first demonstrating the liability of these agents. If the normative
framework of liability and blame cannot show systemic contributors to be at fault for their acts, then Pogge’s model fails to persuade moral libertarians on their own terms that systemic contributors have remedial responsibility.227

Both Satz and Young decide to abandon the causal-liability model as a framework for articulating the responsibility of systemic contributors. Satz points to utilitarian cosmopolitan frameworks, like that of Singer, as a viable alternative. Young develops a model of political responsibility—the social connection model—intended to leave behind the problematic blaming features of the causal-liability view by basing global obligations on an agent’s participation in systemic social arrangements. I argued above that these kinds of approaches, which are positive duty based approaches, open themselves up to critiques of over-burdensomeness. I focused on Young’s model, in particular, which suggests that individuals are responsible for those harms to which they are socially connected, which in a highly globalized world puts the average individual in a multitude of such relations of responsibility, potentially leading to moral paralysis and undermining Young’s goal of providing an account of responsibility that inspires collective action.

I recommended that, instead of abandoning the causal-liability perspective altogether, we consider the possibility of mitigated forms of liability to ground the remedial responsibilities of systemic contributors. The duty to take care, as explicated in

227 I do agree with Satz that the moral libertarian would most likely not accept, without further argument, the claim that systemic contributors are the cause of global harms. This is because Pogge’s claim assumes what Ci called an institutional conception of negative duties, where individuals are responsible for the violations of negative duties by institutions that they support. I hope to show that it is possible to for a moral libertarian to be convinced by this position, however, if it can be demonstrated that supporting such harm generating institutions is a form of recklessness. I assume here that libertarians accept a general duty to avoid reckless behavior as part of a broader commitment to the principle of non-maleficence.
depth in the previous chapter, requires agents to avoid negligent and reckless behavior. This is because failures to act with care exhibit a culpable form of indifference toward others, specifically the ways in which others are vulnerable to the effects of one’s actions.

Focusing on mitigated forms of liability, like recklessness and negligence, creates a middle ground between the blaming function of Pogge’s causal-liability model and the forward-looking nature of Young’s social connection model. Recognizing the importance of duties to take care highlights a kind of individual responsibility whereby agents are required to be attentive to the likely effects of their acts on others. This kind of attentiveness requires that agents be sufficiently knowledgeable about how their acts will affect others with whom they share the world. We fail to meet the demands of the duty to take care when we do not give sufficient weight to the interest, needs, and vulnerabilities of others when we deliberate upon our own course of action. In this way, to act with care requires agents to be attentive to the ways in which they are embedded within and constrained by social structures that channel the pursuit of their legitimate ends into types of activities that support unjust, harm generating socio-economic structures.

Recognizing the existence of individual duties to take care helps to avoid problems that Pogge and Young’s models respectively encounter. Whereas Pogge’s approach overextends itself by assigning the same kind of blame to IMF officials and the laid off American steel worker, introducing mitigated forms of liability into the account of global responsibility offers us a more subtle way to account for the different ways in which systemic contributors may be related to global harms. While systemic contributors are certainly not singlehandedly responsible for directly causing large-scale harms, like climate change or sweatshop labor, they are at minimum responsible for not being
indifferent to (or caring about) how their own acts support the socio-economic structures that cause these harms.

Whereas Young’s abandonment of the causal-liability view and defense of a social connection model runs into the unintuitive conclusion that systemic contributors are beyond blame completely in the roles that they play in contributing to structural harms, an examination of mitigated forms of liability offers a more interpretatively accurate account of the ways in which systemic contributors are culpable for not knowing about how their acts harm others (as in negligence) or are culpable for putting others at undue risk in pursuit of their own ends (as in recklessness). Instead of attempting to ground global responsibilities on one’s mere social connections, the care approach that I have forwarded maintains that individuals are morally required to be attentive to the ways in which their own social practices carelessly contribute to unjust social arrangements. Or, put differently, individuals are responsible for being non-indifferent to their social connections to others.
CHAPTER 5: RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE: THE PROBLEM OF SYSTEMIC CONTRIBUTORS

Climate change threatens to impact the environment and human life in unprecedented ways. The impacts are already being seen, most dramatically in the case of pacific island nations that are being overtaken by rising sea levels. Despite this, in the American context at least, galvanizing support for mitigation and adaptation efforts proves nearly impossible. One of the reasons that climate change remains an intractable problem is that it is not clear who is responsible to do anything about it. In this chapter, I argue that the difficulty in generating broad public concern about climate change is in part the result of the inadequacy of our existing moral frameworks. Simply put, climate change poses a challenge that our moral thinking to this point has not been able to meet. One of the most important aspects of our moral thinking is how we think about responsibility. To get people to take action on climate change one needs to be able to explain why it is their responsibility to do so. This chapter examines why our traditional understanding of responsibility is not up to this task and proposes that a care framework, and especially an understanding of how individuals are obligated by duties to take care, can better meet the challenge at hand.

I proceed as follows. In Section 1, I explain why climate change is not only a scientific, technological, and economic problem, but also an ethical one. In Section 2, I

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explain how, despite being a pressing ethical problem, our moral reasoning capacities are overwhelmed in the face of climate change. The focus here is on climate change as a problem for moral psychology. I point to climate change’s nature as a spatially diffuse and temporally extended systemic phenomenon as posing a particular set of epistemic challenges to our moral reasoning capacities. In Section 3, I turn to climate change as a problem for normative ethics. I focus on the traditional causal understanding of responsibility as being unequipped to articulate what individual responsibility demands in the context of climate change. This is because the causal model of responsibility is best suited to handling immediate harms with discreet causes. Climate change, however, is a complex phenomenon caused by agents operating at multiple levels across diffuse spatial environments over extended time periods. The moral project of tracking climate change harms back to the agents who cause them is fraught with difficulties from the start. Even worse, the causal model of responsibility encourages the psychological challenges to moral motivation discussed in Section 2. Not surprisingly, climate ethicists have called for new ways of thinking about responsibility to meet the ethical challenges of climate change.

The remainder of the chapter takes up this call. In Section 4, I look to the work of Iris Marion Young as providing one possible alternative way to think about responsibility for climate change. Young’s work is valuable, because it attempts to overcome the

229 The causal model of responsibility is first outlined in Chapter 1, in reference to David Miller’s work. See also Miller, “Distributing Responsibilities.” A application of the causal model, Thomas Pogge’s liability approach to global responsibility, is analyzed in depth in the Chapter 4. See also Pogge, World Poverty and Human Rights.
230 I discuss Young’s work in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3. In Chapter 1, I analyze her concept of structural injustice, which climate change can be seen as an instance of. In
limits of causal models of responsibility by grounding individual responsibility for global harms in the social connections that individuals have to distant others through social practices and economic arrangements. I ultimately find her attempt to ground individual responsibility in social connections unsatisfying. Directing agents to the social connections they have to distant others who are affected by complex global problems like climate change does not give individual agents reasons why they ought to take responsibility for those connections. Finally, in Section 5, I propose that the normative language of care provides (1) a descriptively plausible way to discuss the kinds of connections agents have to climate change impacts, (2) a normatively convincing way to ground their responsibilities, and (3) a psychologically feasible alternative to the causal model. Although care ethics has been to this point largely ignored as a potential resource for discussing responsibility in the context of climate change,\textsuperscript{231} I argue that the moral framework of care taps into broadly shared normative commitments, for example, moral beliefs that one should not act indifferently toward others, negligently, or recklessly, that are adaptable to the global context and avoid the psychological problems endemic to traditional causal understandings of responsibility.

Before turning to Section 1, a word is in order about the type of agents with which I am concerned. I call these agents systemic contributors. Systemic contributors to climate change are individual actors, who contribute to climate change through carbon emitting practices in their everyday lives. These individuals often contribute to climate

\textsuperscript{231} For an exception, see Fiona Robinson, \textit{The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).
change by, for example, filling up the gas tank of a car or purchasing products that are shipped great distances. In what follows, I am neither primarily concerned with institutional, corporate, and state actors nor with individuals who occupy political office or policy-making positions of significant influence.\textsuperscript{232} That said, the account I forward can be scaled up to apply to such agents. My focus instead is on individuals who lack the material capacities or political power to impact the climate in a significant way on their own.\textsuperscript{233}

The ethical obligations of these agents, who lack the capacities and powers of higher-level agents, are still of significant concern for two reasons.\textsuperscript{234} First, if systemic contributors do not see themselves as responsible for climate change, then they will continue to engage uncritically in the same consumption practices. Although individual contributions to climate change are quantitatively not as significant as those of large-scale carbon emitters, the consumer choices of individuals, for example, to buy certain goods or use certain types of transportation, provide the demand that supports economic


\textsuperscript{233} While I investigate what responsibilities systemic contributors have, if any, concerning climate change, it is worth noting the importance of further analysis of corporate responsibility concerning climate change. One reason for why it is important to look at corporations and their relationship to climate change discourse is that it is these agents that have played a major role in cultivating doubt and skepticism concerning climate change. For more on corporate responsibility and climate change, see Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, \textit{Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming} (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); David Michaels, \textit{Doubt Is Their Product: How Industry’s Assault on Science Threatens Your Health} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{234} Compare to Chris Cuomo’s analysis of how narratives concerning personal responsibility for greener living shift attention away from the higher-level agents (states, corporate, etc.). See Chris J. Cuomo, “Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Responsibility,” \textit{Hypatia} 26, no. 4 (2011): 690–714.
industries. Second, systemic contributors are the individuals who potentially make up collectives that yield political power that can put pressure on office holders to change policies to respond to climate change. Elected officials have little incentive to go out on a limb in support of mitigation and adaptation efforts if they will be punished politically for it. It is important then to talk about what it means for systemic contributors to be able to see themselves as being responsible for climate change if they are ever to commit themselves to public policies that will respond to climate change effectively, since those policies might impose burdens, restrictions, or other changes to their ways of life.

CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN ETHICAL CHALLENGE

Climate change is a large-scale ethical problem that has received relatively little attention from philosophers. This is in part because it is tempting to see climate change as a different kind of problem all together, for example, a technological problem that is in need of a scientific solution or an economic problem that calls for innovative policy-making. Steven Gardiner has pointed out the strangeness of this tendency given Al Gore’s assertion in An Inconvenient Truth that climate change is a moral rather than political issue, and the International Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) assertion that many of the questions and decisions to be made about addressing climate change will be

value judgments. Despite these calls to consider the ethical implications of climate change, ethical theorizing on the topic has been slow to start. Part of the reason for this, Gardiner argues, is the necessity of working with researchers in many disciplines in order to understand the many causes and effects of climate change. We can add to this multidisciplinary challenge the fact that the phenomenon is intimidating in its scope, both spatially and temporally. To make matters worse, climate change discourse tends to attract as much political vitriol as reasoned debate. These challenges make the task of engaging with the normative implications of climate change daunting.

Climate change is defined by the IPCC as “a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer.” The label climate change has been favored recently over global warming to avoid the assumption that the effects of overall atmospheric warming will simply result in perceivable warming trends. Anthropogenic climate change occurs when the greenhouse effect, which warms the earth through the interaction of atmospheric gases (such as CO₂) with solar radiation, is exacerbated through human-created industrialization processes that release more greenhouse gasses into the air. The IPCC, which is an intergovernmental body that brings together the work of thousands of scientists to present

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a scientific consensus concerning the causes and effects of climate change, has offered five assessment reports since 1990 tracking the state of climate science.

The most recent assessment report continues to offer compelling evidence supporting the thesis that human beings are influencing the climate system. The IPCC has found that the quantity of CO$_2$ and other greenhouse gasses (such as, methane and nitrous oxide) in the atmosphere “have all increased since 1750 due to human activity,” and this process has and continues to result in warming temperatures, rising sea levels, and ocean acidification. Gardiner explains that “the primary concern of many scientists” is not warming or changes in the earth’s atmosphere per se (since some variability is an inherent aspect of our climate system), but that “an enhanced greenhouse effect puts extra energy into the earth’s climate system and so creates imbalance.” This imbalance is understood as making increased climate variability more likely, which will result in costly harms for many human populations and ecosystems. While the presence of such a wide-ranging scientific consensus combined with a realization that human dependency on greenhouse gas emitting fuels exposes current and future generations to risks could be expected to result in large-scale mitigation or adaptation efforts, this has not been the case.

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND MORAL REASONING: THE EPISTEMIC CHALLENGE TO MORAL ACTION

Why does this motivational inertia persist? In this section, I consider how various features of climate change make it a particularly difficult ethical problem, especially for individual actors trying to understand whether or not they have moral obligations concerning this large-scale situation. I consider a number of obstacles to the possibility of individuals understanding their own responsibilities, including the problem of scientific uncertainty, the spatial diffusion and temporal extension of climate change’s causes and effects, the differential impacts of climate change, and the multiple levels of agency that contribute to climate change. These obstacles, I argue, make understanding the causes and effects of climate change difficult, which in turn make it hard for individuals to grasp their causal and normative relationship to climate change. While in this section I am concerned with the way that the nature of climate change provides obstacles to moral action, in the following section I examine how our common Western intuitions about the nature of individual moral responsibility exacerbate this problem.

Ezra M. Markowitz and Azim F. Shariff have recently presented an empirical study detailing six psychological roadblocks humans face in identifying climate change as a matter of moral importance. Markowitz and Shariff look to recent research in the social and behavioral sciences on the role of moral intuitions in motivating action to explain the psychological challenges that climate change poses. I integrate their findings

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240 I am assuming of course that there is a prima facie case that all those who emit carbon into the atmosphere have some kind of responsibility regarding climate change.

with my own account of the epistemological obstacles that humans face in trying to consider what, if any, individual responsibilities exist regarding this phenomenon.

The first obstacle for understanding the moral implications of climate change results from the nature of scientific inquiry itself. As an empirical and inductive discipline, climate change science admits a certain level of uncertainty, i.e., an openness that is typically understood as a strength of scientific inquiry. In making predictions, the IPCC uses the language of “likelihood” and “confidence” to articulate the long-term effects of climate change. For example, the Fifth Assessment report suggests that since 1950 it is very likely that there have been an increasing number of warmer days and there is medium confidence that there have been increased occurrences of drought.²⁴²

Skeptics use the existence of any uncertainty concerning the effects of climate change, however, as a reason for non-action. This is unsurprising given psychological research on the connection between perceived uncertainty and the tendency to be overly optimistic. Markowitz and Shariff note that recent research on individual understanding of the IPCC’s fourth assessment report finds that “respondents…systematically interpret the outcomes as less likely than intended by the experts.”²⁴³ Gardiner suggests that part of the difficulty of coping with scientific uncertainty concerning climate change comes from the fact that “our epistemological positioning with respect to climate change is

intrinsicly very difficult.” There is admittedly a degree of uncertainty in our capacities to know the future, however, the mere presence of any uncertainty, which is characteristic of any inductive scientific inquiry, is not by itself a reason for non-action. On a smaller timescale, weather forecasts are always uncertain to some extent, but we still use the data they offer as reasons for planning picnics or carrying umbrellas. The issue of scientific uncertainty has garnered attention from philosophers working in climate ethics with the consensus being that existing scientific uncertainties do not warrant the dismissal of imperatives to immediately address climate change.

Another obstacle to understanding climate change is that its causes and effects are spatially diffuse and temporally extended. Carbon emissions do not stay in one place, they disperse into the atmosphere, accumulate, and create increased climate variability in different places. Unlike an isolated instance of pollution, where, for example, dangerous chemicals can be linked to one company’s dumping up river, the causes and effects of climate change cannot easily be causally traced through spatial environments. This contributes to the difficulty of motivating mitigation efforts, because the moral intuitions that typically motivate action tend to take the form of “rapid, emotional visceral reactions.” Peter Singer vividly explains this problem with moral motivation when individual actors are tasked with imagining that “by spraying deodorant at [their] armpit in [their] New York apartment, [they] could, if [they] use an aerosol spray propelled by

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\footnotesize{244} Gardiner, “Ethics and Global Climate Change,” 8.
\footnotesize{246} Markowitz and Shariff, “Climate Change and Moral Judgement,” 244.
CFCs, be contributing to the skin-cancer deaths, may years later, of people living in Punta Arenas, Chile” and, by comparison, that by “driving their car[s], [they] could be releasing carbon dioxide that is part of a causal chain leading to lethal floods in Bangladesh.”

Because it is our immediate reactions to directly observable causes and effects that typically inspire action, claiming that a morally significant connection exists between mundane acts and distant climate events feels to many like hyperbole. The imperceptibility of the spatial connections between the causes and effects of climate change thus results in motivational inertia concerning mitigation efforts.

The causes and effects of climate change are also temporally extended. Climate change takes place over a long period of time. Many of those who have contributed to the existing quantity of CO$_2$ in the atmosphere are no longer alive. The effects of climate change are, as a result, “seriously backloaded” and “substantially deferred,” because the effects that we now feel are the result of past emissions and “the cumulative effects of our current emissions will not be realized for some time in the future.”

This temporal dispersion incentivizes current generations, who benefit from resisting mitigation efforts, to avoid dealing with climate change, thus creating increasingly severe effects for future generations. Markowitz and Shariff explain that future generations are, at best, perceived as less similar to oneself than one’s contemporaries and, at worst, as “out-group members.” This perception results in the view that future generations have less moral

\[\text{\textsuperscript{249}}\text{Markowitz and Shariff, “Climate Change and Moral Judgement,” 245.}\]
standing than current generations.\textsuperscript{250} It also decreases the odds that individuals accept the claim that they have responsibilities toward such groups.

Another challenge for understanding climate change and its moral significance is due to the effects of climate change being differentially distributed. Climate change affects different people in different places in different ways. This is often because of the preexisting social and economic circumstances of the people who must cope with increased climate variability.\textsuperscript{251} Gardiner calls these the “skewed vulnerabilities” caused by the “dispersion of causes and effects” of climate change.\textsuperscript{252} He notes that less developed states are not only likely to suffer from more extreme impacts of climate change, but also that these states are not well placed to hold more powerful high-emitting states responsible for the effects of climate change. Given that those who contribute the most to the causes of climate change stand to be less dramatically affected, the differential distribution of climate change tends to result in the complacency of those best placed to address the problem.\textsuperscript{253}

A final obstacle for understanding climate change as an ethical problem emerges from the causes of climate change existing at multiple levels of agency. Although

\textsuperscript{250} This view is often seen in the economic literature on climate change, which discounts the value of future generations. For an account of this, see Julie Nelson, “Economists, Value Judgments, and Climate Change: A View from Feminist Economics,” \textit{Ecological Economics} 65, no. 3 (2008): 441–47.
\textsuperscript{251} For an overview of gender differentiated impacts, see Irene Dankelman, \textit{Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction} (Washington, DC: Routledge, 2010). For philosophical work on the importance of being attentive to the differential impacts of climate change, see Nancy Tuana and Chris Cuomo (eds.), \textit{Hypatia} Special Issue: Climate Change, \textit{Hypatia} 29, no. 3 (2014).
\textsuperscript{253} See Michael D. Doan, “Climate Change and Complacency,” \textit{Hypatia} 29, no. 3 (2014).
existing literature in climate ethics tends to focus on responsibilities of nation states, the causes of climate change are created by both large and small scale actors, including states, local governments, corporations (both local and international), and individuals. Chris Cuomo explains that “climate change is a global issue that is also always local, as impacts occur and responses are implemented in specific locations.”

The problem that this creates is that attempts to address responsibility for climate change rarely consider actors at these various levels. The moral significance of individual actions is particularly under theorized in the context of these different levels of agency. As noted above, I focus in this chapter on individual level responsibility for climate change. I do so with the understanding that climate change cannot be solved by individual actions alone.

Despite this recognition, for reasons suggested above, I argue that we still need to think about why climate change continues to pose an intractable moral challenge for individual agents, whose socio-economic choices and political commitments taken collectively significantly shape climate policy or the lack thereof. In Section 3 below, I suggest that an examination of our existing understanding of individual moral responsibility can help to uncover the reasons for this intractability. Without an adequate account of responsibility that helps individuals understand how they are morally implicated in climate change, the collective action that is required to adequately address climate change is unlikely.

I focus here on those individuals whom I call systemic contributors to climate change. Systemic contributors consist mainly of individuals, who contribute to climate

255 See Cuomo (2001) on the limitations of public focus on individual and household level mitigation efforts.
change through everyday activities (e.g., purchasing food, clothing, gasoline, and so on). Addressing the responsibility of systemic contributors is an entrenched moral problem, because these agents contribute to climate change harms unintentionally and perhaps in some cases, although this is increasingly unlikely, unknowingly. The acts of systemic contributors are also highly structured by social and economic arrangements, which channel the everyday acts of individuals into a system that generates climate impacts elsewhere. Individuals who live a long distance from their place of employment, for example, often have little opportunity to mitigate their travel related carbon emissions given the structure of their community’s transportation infrastructure. If Sarah’s directly intended goal in driving her car is to get to work, pursuing this goal only has climate impacts because of the socio-economic arrangements and existing infrastructures in which those goals are pursued. We can imagine Sarah making the same choice to go to work in another socio-economic context and that choice not having the same moral implications. The difficulty of understanding the responsibility of systemic contributors is increased because of the complex way that individual choice and social structure together facilitate carbon-emitting behaviors. It is not easy to understand how to talk about Sarah’s responsibility for her climate impacts when they are the unintended consequence of what is, on its face, a morally appropriate behavior, i.e., commuting to work. Given the features of climate change outlined in this section and the complex situation of systemic contributors, articulating what individual responsibility may require in the face of climate change is no easy task.
INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Recently climate ethicists have argued that a fundamental change in the way that we (in developed nations) think about responsibility is required if we are to galvanize broad public support for responding to climate change. Dale Jamieson suggests, for example, that a revision of our basic understanding of individual responsibility is necessary if we are to address climate change.256 Gardiner has argued that a “conceptual paradigm shift” is required in regard to how we think about our moral relations to others.257 In this section, I argue that the features of climate change described in the previous section (i.e., scientific uncertainty, spatial diffusion and temporal extension of causes and effects, differential impacts, and causes at multiple levels of agency) are not comprehensible with the dominant understanding of individual moral responsibility. I also argue, however, that this does not mean that climate change is not an ethical problem or that it is not a matter of individual moral responsibility. Instead I suggest that we need to look to existing, though less prominent understandings of responsibility (i.e., duties to take care) to articulate why systemic contributors have a duty to address the causes and effects of climate change.

Paradigmatically, individual moral responsibility is thought of in small-scale contexts where one agent is the cause of an identifiable harm. Climate change discourse picks up on this framing when it focuses on allocating blame to affluent peoples as the primary causes of climate change, which disproportionately affects less affluent

peoples. I call this formulation of individual responsibility the causal liability model. Jamieson notes that, under such a model, agents are presumed to have acted intentionally, to be relatively close in space and time to the effects of their actions, and the causal chain between act and harm is presumed to be easily traceable. A favorite example of Jamieson’s, Jack stealing Jill’s bike, serves as paradigm case in which the harm in question is easily traceable to a discreet cause. In his example, we are first asked to consider the “case of Jack intentionally stealing Jill’s bike,” which is paradigmatic insofar as “the individual acting intentionally has harmed another individual, the individuals and the harm are clearly identifiable, and they are closely related in time and space.” To demonstrate how climate change presents difficulties, Jamieson then alters the scenario on each of these paradigmatic axes.

First, he asks us to consider whether allocating responsibility to Jack for the theft of Jill’s bike is as simple if Jack is one member of an unorganized group who each takes one piece of Jill’s bike or perhaps one piece of a large group of bikes in which Jill’s happens to be a part. He then asks us to consider Jack’s responsibility if Jack and Jill live very far apart, but Jill’s bike is stolen as a consequence of Jack ordering a used bike from a bike shop. Finally, Jamieson asks us to consider a scenario in which Jack, who is living long before Jill is born, makes it impossible for Jill to ever own a bike by consuming the

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259 This model is at work in the polluter pays principle. For more on this, see Simon Caney, “Cosmopolitan Justice, Responsibility, and Global Climate Change,” in Climate Ethics: Essential Readings, ed. Stephen Gardiner et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
261 Ibid.
necessary materials for making bikes. Since Jack and his contemporaries have used up all
of these materials, Jill will never be able to have a bike. Each case is intended to
demonstrate how our common Western understanding of moral responsibility is attached
to the immediacy of causal relations. When the world becomes more complicated and
interconnected, however, our moral understandings have trouble keeping pace.\(^{262}\)

In addition to the problem of the scope and traceability of causes and effects of
climate change revealed in Jamieson’s thought experiment, the paradigmatic form of
Western moral responsibility also requires the act in question to be morally faulty in
some way.\(^{263}\) In the case of Jack and Jill, theft is widely understood as a morally faulty
act. Notice that Jack’s acts become less faulty, however, as the examples are transformed
(e.g., he picks up one piece of a bike, orders a bike from a store, or participates in the
consumption of some materials). If responsibility assignments work best when the act in
question transgresses some moral norm that prohibits intentionally harming others, then
the causes and effects of climate change do not easily satisfy this criterion. Participating
in everyday activities such as commuting to work (e.g., by driving a car), acquiring food
for one’s family (e.g., by buying products at the local superstore), or providing a
comfortable home (e.g., by heating and cooling one’s home) are not on their face
blameworthy acts. The harms that issue from such acts tend to be spatially distant and
temporarily removed from the cause. The actions, which in themselves have direct ends
that are not morally blameworthy (e.g., commuting to work, acquiring food and clothing,
etc.), only issue in harm because of larger structural processes. The decisions to purchase

\(^{262}\) For more on this theme beyond the context of climate change, see Scheffler,
“Ideal Responsibility in a Global Age.”

\(^{263}\) Feinberg, “Collective Responsibility.”
goods, which are traditionally morally acceptable for one to acquire, only issues in moral harms, because of the socio-economic arrangements that frame those decisions and connect those decisions to distant, typically unintended, and, in some cases, unforeseen consequences. If the causal liability model requires not merely that an agent directly cause a harm but to have done so in a morally faulty way, it is unclear how systemic contributors can be easily handled by such a model, which traditionally treats cases, such as theft, fraud, assault, and similar paradigmatic cases of moral wrongdoing.

Jamieson suggests that trying to articulate responsibilities for climate change on the causal liability model results in attempting to hold one diffuse group responsible for creating the conditions of a future harm for another diffuse group. Without any immediacy or intent between parties, judgments of liability become tenuous. And since the acts in question involve the ordinary practices of everyday life (e.g., going to working, acquiring food, clothing, housing, etc.), these acts lack any obviously faulty characteristics that might draw the attention of their agents to their distant harmful effects. Because climate change makes it “difficult to identify the agents and the victims or the causal nexus that obtains between them. . .it is difficult for the network of moral concepts (for example, responsibility, blame, and so forth) to gain traction.” If we are to understand climate change as an ethical problem that concerns everyone, Jamieson suggests that our traditional understanding of responsibility needs significant revision.

265 Ibid.
THE PROMISE AND LIMITS OF YOUNG’S ATTEMPT TO GO BEYOND LIABILITY

Iris Young has developed a concept of political responsibility, the social connection model, which may serve this purpose. This is in part because she contends that the causal liability model of moral responsibility is problematic for addressing large-scale harms. Like Jamieson, Young seeks to reveal the limitations of our common Western understanding of moral responsibility. In the previous chapter, I introduced Young’s social connection model as an alternative approach to articulating global responsibilities in general. While Young’s work tends to focus on large-scale social justice issues, like poverty, housing discrimination, and global labor injustice, I adopt her social connection model and apply it to the problem of climate change as a similarly large-scale social justice issue, which in fact, as I noted above in the discussion of differential impacts, intersects with the other issues that Young considers more explicitly.

Young argues that liability models of moral responsibility focus too much on isolating causes and placing blame to be beneficial for addressing complex systemic problems. Large-scale, harm-generating phenomena of this kind are, for Young, less the result of individual action and more the product of social structures, which shape individual actions and their effects. For Young, social structures are

...the confluence of institutional rules and interactive routines, mobilization of resources, as well as physical structures such as buildings and roads... [that]constitute the historical givens in relation to which individuals act, and which are relatively stable over time. Social structures serve as background conditions for individual actions by presenting individuals with options; they provide ‘channels’ that both enable action and constrain it.266

266 Young, Responsibility for Justice, 111–112.
When social structures, such as those that shape housing, transportation, and consumer opportunities, generate harms, Young considers such harms to be a matter of structural injustice.

Structural injustice occurs for Young when social structures, including everything from institutional rules to social norms to the physical features of a place, put “large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities,” while at the same time enabling “others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities.” ²⁶⁷ The harmful effects of climate change are an instance of structural injustice insofar as these circumstances are created and shaped by institutional structures that create climate winners and losers. Close ties between fossil fuel and automobile industries combined with the decisions of past urban planners and social norms concerning desirable housing and transportation all work in concert to keep the consumption of fossil fuels high. Given the entrenched economic interests of powerful parties, it is unlikely that such structural relations will change in the near future. We can accordingly expect to deal with increasingly severe effects of climate change, which will likely disproportionately harm those who live in the southern hemisphere and often have inadequate means to cope with increased climate variability and sea level rise. Young’s concern is to ask how individual and collective agents ought to think about their responsibilities in regard to this kind of phenomenon.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Young, “Responsibility and Global Justice,” 114.
²⁶⁸ Young, Responsibility for Justice, 95.
Under the causal liability model, responsibility for harm is attributed to discreet and isolatable agents that have intentionally and voluntarily caused a foreseeable harm. The primary purpose of this model is to both restrict the scope of responsibility and isolate blame. Focusing on Hurricane Katrina as an instance of structural injustice, Young demonstrates the limits of this model. She describes how in the aftermath of the hurricane a “blame-game” ensued to identify “whodunit” or, rather, who was liable for the residents of New Orleans not being adequately warned or evacuated, the failing infrastructure, or the lack of an adequate emergency plan. Perhaps this mayor should have sent buses sooner. Or perhaps that elected official should have pursued levee repairs in the years before the hurricane. Or perhaps this police unit should have evacuated that hospital and this nursing home sooner. All of these questions are important and do identify the blameworthy actions of many individual agents in response to this natural disaster. The problem with this mode of questioning, however, is that it obfuscates other questions concerning the structural circumstances that contributed to the severe poverty and substandard infrastructure of the city of New Orleans prior to the storm. No single actor—political official, emergency responder, etc.—is to blame by themselves for the complex socio-economic conditions that amplify the harms that the hurricane caused.

The liability project of isolating blameworthy agents is fraught with even more difficulty if we start to consider that Hurricane Katrina and other super storms like it are not in any

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269 Young, “Katrina.”
270 Ibid., 41.
pure sense natural disasters, but might actually be increased in their frequency and severity by anthropogenic influences on the climate system.

Although the causal liability model serves an important purpose in identifying blameworthy agents in criminal and civil law, Young considers the restrictiveness of the liability model problematic when it obfuscates questions concerning the structural circumstances that created the conditions for a given harm in the first place. While liability models have an important role to play in assigning blame to culpable agents, this paradigmatic way of attributing responsibility is not an exhaustive account of the ways in which agents can be understood as being responsible for harm. Her worry is that focusing solely on placing blame on discreet causes absolves everyone else of their contributions to structural injustice and the obligations they have to prevent or remedy such injustice.

Young formulates an alternative account of responsibility called the social connection model, which she claims is better suited to understanding individual obligations for large-scale systemic harms to which they as individuals contribute through their everyday practices. As with her early work in Justice and the Politics of Difference, Young argues that the “grounds of moral responsibilities” lie “neither in the political structures of the nation-state nor in people’s awareness and affirmation of a connection to others, but in the objective systemic institutional relations in which they dwell together with distance to others.” Socially connected responsibility derives from our participation in structures that connect us to injustice. Because we need not

272 Young, “Responsibility and Global Labor Justice.”
intentionally or knowingly contribute to these harms, Young distinguishes the social
collection model from projects of assigning blame. Socially connected responsibility is
understood as a non-isolating and forward-looking shared responsibility. It is intended to
capture the kind of responsibility that individuals have to join together in collective
action to transform harmful structural processes.  

Young’s social connection model holds promise for better articulating individual
obligations concerning climate change. First, its recognition of the need for obligations
concerning structural injustice grounds this model of responsibility in a sophisticated
social ontology that recognizes the many ways that individuals, organizations, and
institutional structures can all contribute to a problem. Second, the forward-looking focus
of the model disconnects responsibility from blame in a way that captures how systemic
contributors may be responsible for acts that are unintentional, sometimes unforeseen,
and structured by larger social and economic institutions. For these reasons, her model
potentially stands to motivate moral action better than the causal liability model, which
often results in defensiveness and blame passing rather than responsibility taking and
action.

Although I recognize these promising features of Young’s social connection
model for determining the responsibilities of systemic contributors, I worry whether a
mere connection to a structural harm is normatively sufficient to ground responsibilities

275 Young, Responsibility for Justice, 104–113. Compare to Larry May’s discussion of
shared responsibility in May, Sharing Responsibility.
276 For a recent application of Young’s social connection model to climate change
responsibility, see Fanziska Martinsen and Johanna Seibt, “Climate Change and the
Concept of Shared Ecological Responsibility,” Environmental Ethics 35, no. 2 (2013):
163–87.
to address climate change. An account of why particular connections are morally relevant would strengthen her account. Put differently, to persuade actors that they have responsibility in regard to some systemic problem, it is insufficient merely to direct agents to the social connections they have to distant harms. In Jamieson’s example of Jack, who in purchasing a bike from a used bike shop contributes to the theft of Jane’s bike, Jack’s mere connection to this harm is not a normatively sufficient reason for him to take responsibility for Jane’s loss, especially since nothing about his act is morally faulty. (Those additional reasons might come in the form of pointing out how it is common knowledge in Jack’s neighborhood that most of the bikes in that shop are stolen, and that his actions should be informed by such knowledge.) It is necessary to give agents like these reasons as to why those social connections are morally significant. Young’s social ontology is descriptively powerful in pointing to the structural nature of the connections that systemic contributors have to distant harms, but it lacks a convincing normative account about what kind of responsibilities those connections generate. Young’s account can help systemic contributors better understand their role in a complex socio-economic and environmental system, but it does not go far enough in helping those agents understand the moral significance of that role.  

I also worry that using a model that is divorced from blame fails to offer an adequate description of the moral status of being a systemic contributor to climate change. Knowledge about the causes and effects of climate change has become commonplace, perhaps even unavoidable. Continuing to contribute to the problem

\footnote{I use the language of “roles” here because Young likens her social connection model to Robert Goodin’s role-based account of obligations to distant others. See Goodin, \textit{Protecting the Vulnerable}.}
without serious reservation or without also seeking to change the structural conditions that limit one's choices may not be as worthy of blame as voluntary and intentional wrongdoing per the standard liability model, but it seems hard to deny that it meets some standard of a mitigated form of blame.

**THE DUTY TO TAKE CARE AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

With the discussion in Section 2 of the spatially diffuse and temporally extended systemic nature of climate change and Young’s account of global structural injustice, the complexity of climate change as a moral phenomenon should be apparent. In this section, I propose a norm that can both describe the kind of relations that systemic contributors have to climate change and normatively explain why these relations ground individual responsibilities to respond to climate change. I call this norm the duty to take care.²⁷⁸ By this, I mean a moral duty to act with sufficient care such that one’s actions do not wantonly harm others. The key problem with explaining systemic contributors responsibilities for climate change in terms of a causal liability model is the psychological feasibility of this application. Causal responsibility is ideally applied to cases in which harms are relatively local and causal relations are uncomplicated and traceable. The social connection model attempts to circumvent this problem with applying the causal principle to complex, large-scale harms by suggesting that agents can be responsible simply via their connections to more distant harms.

²⁷⁸ I develop an account of the duty to take care in my dissertation, *Care and Responsibility in a Global Context.*
Both the causal liability model and the social connection model, however, lack descriptive plausibility when considering the relations that systemic contributors have to climate change. The causal liability model fails to take into account the ways in which systemic contributors unintentionally contribute to climate change.\textsuperscript{279} For example, an individual who drives to work intends to make a living or provide for her family, not contribute to overall CO$_2$ emissions. The issue is complicated further when we consider the case of well-intentioned agents whose choices to satisfy the morally acceptable end of commuting to work, for example, are structurally channeled into carbon-emitting forms of transportation, even if they want to avoid pursuing their ends in ways that have such side effects. Actions that are committed unintentionally, unknowingly, or involuntarily are typically fully or partially excused in blame assessments. In the case of systemic contributors to climate change, the lack of intent to harm needs to be taken into account in considering what responsibilities they have, if any.

The social connection model aims to solve this problem by offering a sophisticated social ontology, which demonstrates the ways in which everyday, widely accepted life practices can be connected to instances of structural injustice. This model makes a compromise, which is to extend responsibility more broadly by grounding it in the connections agents have to distant harms through social practices, but also sacrificing the blaming function of the causal model. I have argued above that in doing so the social connection model looses some of its descriptive plausibility. In considering the case of

climate change, the presumption that systemic contributors are not at all culpable for their role in carbon-emitting social practices is unrealistic. On the one hand, Young’s insight is that the same structures which agents contribute to and support also in turn shape and constrain their everyday choices, thus making evaluating the extent of causal liability difficult. On the other hand, the claims that agents are beyond blame for their role in such practices, for example, that agents might have no knowledge whatsoever of the climate impacts of their carbon-emitting practices, is also implausible.

Both the causal liability and social connection models lack normative persuasiveness when considering the possible responsibilities of systemic contributors for climate change. The former attempts to grounds claims that agents have responsibilities to do something about climate change in their past causal contributions to climate change, but fails to consider the way that such responsibility claims should be sensitive to the fact that many agents contribute to these harms unintentionally and under significant constraint. The latter tries to suggest that mere connection to harm makes one responsible for doing something about those harms. Each account also has psychological feasibility problems. Whereas the first normative account has problems in motivating action because it fails to nuance the blame it ascribes to systemic contributors and encourages defensiveness when forward-looking obligations to do something about climate change are grounded in these backward-looking blame assessments, the second account fails to give agents reasons why they should be motivated by the social connections they have to a given structural harm. In this section, I suggest that it is possible to develop a model of moral responsibility that is psychologically feasible, descriptively plausible, and normatively convincing, but also that we have to look to new resources to do so.
Care may seem to be a surprising place to turn, since it has often been forwarded as a natural attitude that is beyond normative justification.\textsuperscript{280} I suggest, however, that we can interpret the primary problem with the social connection model as, at least in part, failing to offer individuals persuasive reasons for why they must care about their connections to distant harms. What is required is an account of why systemic contributors must care about the ways in which they are implicated in the causes and effects of climate change. To do this, I first consider the plausibility of suggesting that agents have a duty to take care and what such a duty requires.

The principle of non-maleficence suggests that agents have a prima facie obligation to avoid harming others without justification or excuse. It is impossible to avoid harming others if one is not attentive to how others are potentially vulnerable to one’s actions and responsive to this vulnerability. I call this cognitive attentiveness and responsiveness to the vulnerability of others in one’s moral deliberations taking care. Taking care is both a precondition of avoiding harm to others and a normative duty in its own right. On the one hand, taking care in one’s moral deliberations is instrumentally valuable insofar as it is necessary if one is to avoid doing harm to others. When agents act carelessly and actually harm others, the careless way of behaving and indifference to the interests of others in deliberation is morally significant insofar as it results in a violation of a basic moral duty to not harm others. On the other hand, taking care is a duty with intrinsic moral value in its own right. In cases when agents act carelessly, but as a matter of luck do not in fact harm anyone, such agents have acted in a blameworthy manner, but have not violated the principle of non-maleficence. We say such agents are blameworthy,

\textsuperscript{280} Noddings, \textit{Caring}. 
because their actions issue from a deliberative process that failed to give sufficient weight to the fact that others are vulnerable to the effects of their actions. The failure to satisfy the duty to take care can thus be called moral indifference, signaling that what is normatively problematic about careless behavior is that it fails to show requisite moral concern for others. An example of this is found in the legal duty of due care, which grounds legal judgments that individuals are culpable for reckless actions whether or not those acts actually harm anyone. Avoiding harm to others instrumentally requires agents to recognize and be attentive to the ways that they exist in relation to others and one’s material, social, economic, and political capacities to affect them. This moral concern, however, is not only instrumentally valuable, but a norm in its own right.

Any moral perspective that accepts the principle of non-maleficence then also must require that agents, at least for instrumental reasons, care about (or not be indifferent to) their relations to others, if they are to satisfy the duty to not unjustifiably harm others. My suggestion is that any moral framework that raises harm avoidance to the level of a basic moral duty should also, for the reasons just outlined, consider the duty to take care in one’s deliberations and actions to play a similarly foundational role in an account of moral obligations. Taking care is primarily a norm governing moral deliberation that requires agents to take others into account when deciding how to act. The duty to take care, put most simply, requires individual to be attentive and responsive to the needs of others. This focus on attentiveness and responsiveness as central aspects of moral deliberation places my formulation of a duty to take care firmly within the
tradition of care ethics.\textsuperscript{281} The main difference with that tradition, however, is that care here is not considered as a particularist form of moral concern that one shows for those with whom one has pre-existing intimate relations, for example, in parent-child or doctor-patient relationships.\textsuperscript{282} Instead taking care as a deliberative norm has a more generalized scope, as it requires that one must be attentive to the way one’s actions affect all others whom might be vulnerable to one’s chosen course of action. Whereas care in the sense of caring for particular others is not as easily adapted to the global context, the duty to take care is especially suited to such a context because it imposes a general obligation to consider the consequences of one’s own actions.

The duty to take care is normatively persuasive given its close association with the principle of non-maleficence, which is widely taken to be a non-controversial assumption of most moral thinking. My suggestion is that understanding oneself as obligated to take care in one’s actions is inseparable from understanding oneself as obligated to avoid harm, since one cannot avoid harming others without first caring in the sense just described. Turning back to the case of systemic contributors, the duty to take care then has the theoretical benefit of attempting to convince agents of their responsibilities to do something about a complex global problem by appealing to a norm with broad normative appeal. As Markowitz and Shariff show, overcoming many of the

\textsuperscript{281} The recognition of the moral importance of attentiveness, responsiveness, vulnerability, and relationships is a key aspect of many approaches in feminist ethics. See Walker, \textit{Moral Understandings}; Held, \textit{The Ethics of Care}; Kittay, \textit{Love’s Labor}; Tronto, \textit{Moral Boundaries}. While these approaches focus on the epistemological and practical demands of caring, they have not explicitly connected care to the imperative of harm avoidance, with one exception. See Pettersen, \textit{Comprehending Care}.

\textsuperscript{282} See Noddings, \textit{Caring}. For a critique of Noddings’s particularist account of care, see Card, “Caring and Evil.”
psychological obstacles to motivating moral action in the face of climate change can be
helped by appealing to norms to which actors are already committed.\textsuperscript{283} Whereas
tries have been made to appeal to values, such as national security and religious
values (e.g., being the earth’s shepherds), I am proposing here that norms regarding care
and indifference provide an even more widely shared starting point for moral
conversation.

The duty to take care is also more descriptively plausible than the causal and
social connection models. Whereas the causal model suggests that systemic contributors
are responsible for climate change as if they immediately and intentionally attempt to
bring about its harms and the social connection suggests that systemic contributors are
not blameworthy at all, the language of care opens up the possibility of assigning a
mitigated form of liability. In the same way that the legal standard of due care assigns
mitigated blame to those who act recklessly or negligently, a duty to take care assigns
some blame to systemic contributors for their indifference to the ways in which their
everyday carbon-emitting practices harm others, but not without awareness of the
structural conditions that limit their possibilities for pursuing otherwise morally
appropriate ends. Generically, a failure to satisfy one’s duty to take care refers to
indifference to others in one’s moral deliberations. In the context of climate change,
agents fail to take care when the climate impacts of their practices and the harms these
potentially cause to others are not given sufficient weight, if any weight at all, in deciding
upon a course of action (e.g., how to get to work, provide food for one’s family, buy
clothing, etc.).

\textsuperscript{283} Markowitz and Shariff, “Climate Change and Moral Judgement,” 245.
Applying this norm to climate change seeks to exploit the descriptive analogy between, on the one hand, driving a car in a way that shows a negligent or reckless disregard for those in one’s proximity, and, on the other hand, driving a car in a way that negligently or recklessly disregards the contributions of this action to the risks of climate change. While the key difference in the analogy is the proximity between agents, their acts, and those harmed, I suggest that the moral fault in each case, indifference, is the same. In the same way that a reckless speeder is responsible for failing to drive with care for others on the road, the reckless emitter is responsible for his or her indifference to those that are harmed by his or her participation in the institutional structures that create climate change (e.g., by emitting carbon, creating the demand for certain means of transportation, not using less environmentally impactful transportation options when they are available, and so on). On both sides of the analogy, agents act in pursuit of their own ends, come what may. The moral fault in these cases in not that the failure to take care actually results in a discreet harm, but the lack of concern for harming others itself is blameworthy. For example, the reckless driver should still be held responsible for their actions, even if in that particular case no one was harmed because of sheer luck. Similarly, the quantifiably small climate impact of any single systemic contributor to climate change and the limited ability to influence the overall direction of socio-economic and climate policies, especially relative to higher-level actors, is not at issue. The morally significant question, when asked through the lens of the duty to take care, is whether that individual shows sufficient moral concern for the consequences of their carbon-emitting behaviors, i.e., whether the vulnerabilities of others to his or her practices registers in a morally significant way in moral deliberation. If the duty to take
care places the demands on moral deliberation that I have suggested, then systemic contributors have a responsibility to consider and show sufficient concern for the environmental and human costs of their actions in deliberation, even if in practice they are constrained in how they act on these concerns.

What this analogy provides is a shift away from a concern about whether an individual played a causal role in bringing about some harm and, instead, focuses on whether agents give the risk of potential harm to others sufficient weight in their moral deliberations. It makes explicit what is already assumed by those who take seriously obligations to avoid harm, which is that we have obligations to take care to avoid or mitigate harm that may come to others via our actions. Like Young, I am concerned with our objective social connections to distant others, but I argue that what makes those connections morally relevant is that they are relations to human vulnerability toward which one must exhibit adequate care.

Failures to satisfy one’s duty to take care concerning climate change can take various forms. Returning to the analogy of reckless driving can help to develop these obligations more fully. Let us consider the analogy in more depth.

First consider reckless Robert, who regularly drives at least 20 mph over posted speed limits. Robert loves the idea of going fast. In fact, feeling the wind whipping through his hair and imagining weaving in and out of traffic so that he can get to his destination in the fastest time possible actually gets him out of bed in the morning. Whether or not Robert actually ends up hurting others while driving like this, he is culpable for driving recklessly. He is morally (and legally) responsible for the fact that he fails in his deliberation about how he ought to drive to consider the needs and
vulnerabilities of other people on the road. By driving recklessly, Robert fails in his duty to drive with care.

Now consider gas-guzzling Gwen, who seeks to consume fossil fuels as a matter of principle. Gwen lives a considerable distance from her job and chooses to drive to work everyday despite affordable opportunities to use public transportation. She can afford to trade in her car for something more fuel efficient, but chooses not to do so. A friend and co-worker of Gwen’s has even approached her about carpooling together to work in order to save money and limit their use of fossil fuels, but Gwen thinks that wanting to save money makes her seem cheap and that concerns about environmentalism are stupid. Instead Gwen decides to trade in her current vehicle for an even larger one to make a political statement about how she feels about environmentalism. It is not as if she does not know anything about climate change. She consciously turns away from a news channel when stories about climate science are presented that raise concerns about her practices. Gwen is boldly indifferent to the effects of her choices on the environment and others. She recklessly pursues her own interests despite the fact that doing so contributes to endangering current and future generations. Gwen fails in her duty to take care because of her indifference to the needs and vulnerabilities of those affected by her choices.

Two obvious objections emerge here. The first is that Gwen’s bold indifference is not representative of the moral perspective of the typical systemic contributor. If this is so, then that is good news for all of us. The intense political opposition to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, however, suggest otherwise. The second objection is that the analogy between the reckless driver (Robert) and careless carbon-emitter (Gwen) misses a key difference between the cases. This difference is that Gwen’s choices are
structured in significant ways by socio-economic arrangements and existing infrastructure. Whereas Gwen’s careless behaviors are significantly shaped by her context, the same cannot be said of Robert. Even if Gwen’s mental states were less blameworthy, given the opportunities available to her, the objection goes, she would most likely act in the same way.

To address this objection, let us consider the more difficult case of conscientious Cara. Cara drives to work everyday from a great distance. She cannot afford to live any closer to her job, so she has decided to live in a distant suburb with a good public school system for her children. The public transportation in her community is expensive and unreliable and she cannot afford a more fuel-efficient car, though she wishes that she could. Even if Cara were to get extra resources to mitigate her carbon emissions, she has what she considers to be more pressing uses for this money (e.g., new school clothes for her children and medication for her ailing mother). The duty to take care does a better job than alternatives in expressing what, if any, responsibilities Cara has in this scenario. The causal model would lump Cara in with all agents who contribute to climate change by emitting greenhouse gasses: (1) Cara engages in carbon-emitting practices; (2) these practices cause harm to the environment and other people; (3) one should not unjustifiably harm others; (4) therefore Cara has a responsibility to not engage in her current practices. The constraints on Cara’s actions as presented in this example reveal the inadequacy of this kind of analysis. In the extreme case, if Cara truly has no other alternatives, then the causal liability model gives her a responsibility to do what she cannot in fact actually do. Conversely, the social connection model uses Cara’s connection to distant harm through her socio-economic practices to assign responsibilities
to her, but the model lacks an account of why Cara should be concerned with these social connections, when her proximate relations with her children already carry extensive responsibilities. Instead my care model asks whether Cara gives sufficient weight to those who are negatively impacted by her actions in her deliberations about how she acts. The care approach also helps Cara to see these systemic connections to climate change as being morally significant because they are relationships in which human vulnerability to unjustifiable harm is at stake. Cara meets her responsibility to take care if her deliberations on her practices reflect a sufficient concern for this vulnerability. Whether or not Cara’s social situation allows her to act on this concern is a separate question.

In the example, Cara is concerned about the ways in which her acts perpetuate climate change. She is also seriously constrained in her ability to do anything about it. She would love to carpool, buy an electric car, or take reliable public transportation to work. Even better, she would love to live closer to where she works. But all of these things, given her current situation, are beyond her capacities. When Cara engages in carbon-emitting practices when she commutes to work, a model that says she fails completely in her responsibilities regarding climate change is clearly too blunt of an account. Not only does it not do justice to the constraints on Cara’s actions, but it also fails to give her credit for the concern she does have for climate change. This kind of model is also psychologically problematic, because it risks alienating Cara by labeling her as irresponsible as if there is nothing to differentiate her and Gwen. But Cara’s case is different given her refusal to share Gwen’s indifference to the consequences of her actions.
Cara fulfills her duty to take care by demonstrating a sensitivity and concern for the effects of her actions as well as a willingness to change her practices, if that becomes possible in the future. Some may think that this is an inconsequential contribution to understanding the responsibilities of systemic contributors for climate change, since it does not result in an imperative to take immediate action in her particular case. It is likely, however, that most systemic contributors fall on a continuum between Gwen and Cara, being more or less indifferent and more or less capable of responding in productive ways to climate change, depending on the particular situations of particular moral agents. The more material and social capacities an agents has and the more political influence that an agent wields, then the more that satisfying the duty to take care will require more than only caring deliberation, but also caring practices, which reflect a sufficient concern for the consequences of one’s actions.

What my turn to care has done has offered is (1) a normatively convincing account of systemic contributors responsibilities for climate change insofar as it assigns responsibilities to agents on the grounds of something that is actually in their control (i.e., their indifference or caring attention to the needs and vulnerabilities of others in their moral deliberation) and (2) a descriptively plausible account of the kind of responsibility that systemic contributors deserve to be assigned, neither completely immersed in or divorced from the language of blame. Because values surrounding care, indifference, negligence, recklessness, and the like already have a broad purchase, the duty to take care has the potential to motivate action. Because of this potential, the care approach is also hopefully more (3) psychologically feasible than the alternatives considered above. Instead of agents asking in a generically vague and unhelpful way about whether they
cause or are to blame for climate change, this model provides a way for agents to reflect on their level of moral concern for climate change as the primary locus of their responsibility. Because in many cases agents have limited material, social, and political capacities and powers to act on these concerns (especially on their own and in isolation from one another), the duty to take requires that agents be responsible for that over which they have control, i.e., the extent to which they honestly care about climate change as a problem that poses great risks for vulnerable human populations.

CONCLUSION

I expect that actually getting systemic contributors to recognize their duty to take care in relation to climate change will face in its own way issues of psychological feasibility. Being more morally responsive to harms that occur in close proximity rather than those at a great distance may be an inescapable fact of human experience. Although this poses a challenge to a care approach, which emphasizes the moral importance of attentiveness and responsiveness to the vulnerabilities of others, this psychological fact most likely challenges all theories of global responsibility in motivating moral concern.\(^{284}\) The globalization of travel and communication networks and the work of artists, journalists, and documentary filmmakers may serve as an antidote to the problem of the psychological feasibility of caring about distant others.

\(^{284}\) For example, the child in the pond analogy often fails to motivate action to alleviate global poverty. See Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality.” Also see Peter Unger’s response to these issues in Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence.*
The complexity of climate change, public disinformation campaigns about climate science, and the limits placed on individual choice by social and economic arrangements requires nuance in the application of the duty to take care. One immediate way in which agents might, at least in part, satisfy a duty to take care is in carefully evaluating their own knowledge and ignorance concerning the effects of their actions. This is because an honest and accurate understanding of one’s practices is a precondition of deliberating upon whether these practices satisfy a standard of care.

Feminist work on epistemic responsibility and epistemologies of ignorance can go and has gone a long way in helping to establish whether agents succeed in this task. Epistemic responsibility concerning climate change may, for example, require what Heidi Grasswick calls “responsible trust.” The scale of the phenomenon and the varied technical expertise required to decipher probable outcomes of ongoing emission rates is an overwhelming prospect for those who do not specialize in climate science. Yet agents can seek to distinguish credible from non-credible sources of information and to support those who offer credible information concerning climate change. Recognizing that as a systemic contributor one may stand to gain from delaying mitigation efforts and that this incentivizes one to view the climate impacts of one’s actions in certain ways is an important part of avoiding indifference to the needs and vulnerabilities of those who stand to be harmed by this delay. Although systemic contributors may not have the ability to individually significantly reduce levels of carbon emissions (e.g., by changing their light bulbs or riding a bike to work), they can begin to reshape the climate of climate

change discourse, express their concern about climate change with others, and put political pressure on more powerful agents to transform the structural processes which produce climate change.287

By demanding epistemic responsibility in this way, the duty to take care requires agents to honestly reflect on their social positioning and face the reality that one’s lifestyle may affect others in harmful ways. Continuing to uncritically participate in and contribute to the social structures that produce climate change, once one has the knowledge of their harmful effects, is morally reckless. Failing to recognize and respond to the problem of climate change is a failure to take care and when we fail in this way we are being careless with our futures and our world.

287 Here I suggest that systemic contributors can make good on what Simon Caney calls second-order responsibilities concerning climate change and that doing so is required by the duty to take care. See Simon Caney, “Two Kinds of Climate Justice: Avoiding Harm and Sharing Burdens: Two Kinds of Climate Justice,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2014): 125–49.
CONCLUSION: CARE AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL JUSTICE

The primary aim of this dissertation has been to ask what, if any, responsibilities systemic contributors have to prevent or remedy structural harms. After considering problems that arise when applying the common Western understanding of individual moral responsibility to global problems, like climate change, I suggested that a care framework is better suited to articulating individual responsibilities in a global context. I then formulated a duty to take care for this purpose, which suggests that individuals have a responsibility to be attentive and responsive to their relations with others and give these relations sufficient moral weight in moral deliberation. The duty to take care demonstrates how feminist care ethics can inform our understanding of moral responsibilities to avoid harm, negligence, and recklessness, most importantly by demonstrating how caring obligations, which require being attentive to the vulnerabilities of others with whom one is related, are an essential precondition for meeting duties of non-maleficence. In this conclusion, I offer a brief summary of the dissertation, articulate the dissertation’s main contributions, and consider the broader implications of my argument going forward. I primarily focus on the dissertation’s contributions to and implications for feminist moral theory, because one of the primary aims of the project has been to demonstrate how care ethics can respond to criticisms in a way that demonstrates its viability as a normative framework and its usefulness as a resource for intervening in philosophical debates concerning global and environmental responsibilities.

The dissertation began by asking whether individuals have a responsibility to prevent or remedy harms that are caused by the contributions of many agents whose actions are shaped and constrained by complex social and economic institutions. Put
otherwise, my focus has been to consider what individual responsibilities exist concerning large-scale global problems, especially when the individual-level agents who contribute to these problems are an unorganized group, who make contributions as the result of their everyday life practices. I have considered this question in detail, while attending to the various features of the relationship between systemic contributors and structural harms that make this question particularly difficult to answer. Most importantly, I have considered the ways in which systemic contributions to global harms are often unknowing, unintentional, and structured by large-scale socio-economic institutions.

This focus led me consider debates concerning global responsibilities for problems, such as global poverty, global labor injustice, and climate change. I considered how structural harms manifest themselves through complicated and far-reaching socio-economic systems, in which many individual-level agents play only a small part. This is particularly evident in the case of climate change where systemic contributors participate in social and economic structures through their everyday practices (e.g., driving a car, consuming electricity, buying food). These structural harms are also created by acts that take place at multiple levels of agency (i.e., states, international and local corporations, and individuals). Although considering the responsibilities of systemic contributors is only one piece of a larger project to address these kinds of global problems, examining the nature of individual responsibility for global problems is still an important task. This is because demonstrating what, if any, individual responsibilities exist for structural harms is helps to provide individuals with motivation to take part in collective action that can reshape socio-economic structures in ways that produce less harm. One of the great
challenges of providing a grounding of the responsibility of systemic contributors is that individual agents are typically motivated to take responsibility when they can see how they have knowingly caused or will cause harm as a direct result of their intentional actions. For this reason, I gave special attention to the limitations of the traditional Western concept of individual responsibility in a global context given that the actions of systemic contributors are not easily handled by a causal-liability model (i.e., their acts are not on their face morally faulty, malicious, or intentional). These issues left me looking for a different way of understanding individual responsibilities in a global context.

Judging the prevailing principles for assigning individual responsibility unsuitable for harms that occur in global, structural contexts, I looked to an alternative framework—the ethics of care. In this way, this dissertation is also intended to contribute to the literature on global care ethics.\(^{288}\) I begin my engagement with the ethics of care by considering criticisms of care ethics as parochial. Feminist critics of care ethics worry that early formulations of care ethics that focus exclusively on particular and immediate relations advocate a parochialism that makes care ethics blind to the structural features of situations that create and facilitate harms.\(^{289}\) Addressing this critique is necessary before applying care ethics to the global problems, like climate change, with which I am concerned. In responding to these concerns, I considered Fiona Robinson’s response to these critiques and find that, while she points to many commitments and resources within


care ethics that demonstrate its potential as a framework for addressing global problems, she does not definitively refute the charges leveled at the ethics of care. The reason that care ethics has faced difficulties in responding to this line of criticism is that care ethics has traditionally analyzed care in terms of a dichotomy between deficient care (i.e., caring-about) and genuine or robust care (i.e., caring-for). The problem is that it is not clear how either of these ways of understanding care—i.e., caring-for and caring-about—operate outside of the proximate relations in which care ethicists have traditionally examined them. In response to this limitation, I argued that we need to understand care as it exists beyond particular, intimate relations. That is, care ethics needs to address what care is and requires in social life generally.

The major contribution of the dissertation is my formulation of an alternative way of understanding caring obligations in terms of a duty to take care. I look to two sources in formulating this duty. The first resource is feminist moral theory and the second is the legal standard of due care. Care ethicists, such as Virginia Held and critics of care ethics such as Claudia Card, make reference to the existence of obligations to take care such that one does not cause harm. For Held this imperative is expressed in the wish that someone “take care” in his or her ventures. This expression of the imperative requires someone to be attentive and responsive to his or her own needs as well as the needs and vulnerabilities of others while moving through life. Card suggests that there exists a responsibility to take care such that the effects of our actions do not unnecessarily cause harm to others. Card points to this alternative formulation of a caring obligation in response to Noddings’ definition of care as an engrossment that can only take place within immediate and particular relations. I develop the duty of taking care, which Held
and Card only briefly mention, by looking to similarities between the emergence of the concept in feminist moral theory and the legal standard of due care. I build the account of taking care by showing how it can account for common moral and legal intuitions and practices concerning the blameworthiness of careless, reckless, and negligent actions. From there, I went on to explain what it means to meet one’s duty to take care in a broader ethical sense by looking to how caring obligations have been defined and justified within feminist moral theory.

Another way of understanding the guiding purpose of the dissertation then is as asking whether and, if any, what kind of care individuals owe to distant others. My answer is that, at minimum, individuals owe to each other to act in a way that satisfies the duty to take care. That is, individuals must be attentive and responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of others in order to avoid harming one another. In this way, satisfying the duty to take care is not only a precondition of acting according to the principle of non-maleficence, but also valuable in itself since taking care means one acts in a way that does not treat the needs, interests, and vulnerabilities of others with indifference. One goal of this account of taking care is to show that individuals have responsibilities to understand themselves as living within social relations that carry moral significance and that those relations must be approached with sufficient care in one’s everyday life practices. This account makes four contributions to the ethics of care, specifically to discussions of the normative foundations of the care framework and its viability for grounding general duties to non-particular others. In the remainder of the conclusion, I discuss these four contributions and their implications.
The first contribution of the project is that it responds to concerns that care ethics is merely a provincial morality, i.e., a normative framework that blinds us to ethical and political problems that are systemic in nature. The worry is that, by focusing on the moral salience of immediate, loving relationships, the ethics of care fails to direct our attention to broader social, economic, and political forms of injustice. The suggestion is that care ethics replicates problematic gender norms concerning caring labor, so that “a stress on caring relationships to the exclusion of abstract justice may endorse [the] relegation [of women] to the nursery and the kitchen, to purdah and to poverty.”

The excessive focus on particularity, according to critics, means that one who takes up a care perspective cannot see or address how particular instances of harm are part of larger systems of injustice. Care ethics is, as a result, seen as relegating moral life to the private realm.

I respond to these concerns by first examining how care ethics was, in its early formulations, too focused on one form of caring—caring-for. To respond to this limitation, I show how care ethics must and can develop an understanding of a more general type of caring obligation. In forwarding this account of a care as a more general moral activity, I build on the same commitments to attentiveness, responsiveness, and relations of responsibility, which care ethics has shown to be so important in particular and private relations, and demonstrate their relevance to our public lives as social beings.

\[291\] Considering the moral saliency of particular, immediate, and private relations is an important feature, and an asset, to the ethics of care. Attentiveness to the moral saliency of particular relations was in large part missing from mainstream moral theory until the development of care ethics. This however does not mean that care ethics cannot have an important role in theorizing about general, distant, and public relations, as well.
that exist within systems of socio-economic relations. By formulating an account of what it means to care for general others in social life more broadly and what a duty to take care requires in our social practices, I have not only shown that critics are right to point to limitations in care ethics as being overly focused on a particularist conception of care, but also that these criticisms are too hasty in dismissing care ethics altogether as a private, apolitical morality.

The second contribution is to provide a new approach to answering the question of what grounds moral obligations to care. This question, which concerns the normative justification of care, is addressed by looking to a common epistemological and deliberative activity that is the foundation of caring-for, taking care, and even the Anglo American legal standard of due care. This epistemic and deliberative activity most closely resembles what Nodding’s hastily dismisses as a deficient form of care—caring-about. What I have argued is that a more robust conception of caring-about is needed. Instead of dismissing caring-about as a mere superficial feeling of sympathy for others, I have sketched an account of caring-about as a more significant moral activity in which moral agents are attentive to their relations to others and mindful of the vulnerabilities of others to the effects of their actions. Focusing on this epistemic and deliberative activity provides the moral foundation of both taking care and caring-for. This is because in failures to care-for (i.e., neglect) and take care (i.e., negligence or recklessness) there is a similar moral failure that takes place at a cognitive level, i.e., an indifference to the well-being of others and how one’s activities—whether acts or omissions—harm others or place them at unreasonable risk of being harmed. For example, whether considering instances of reckless driving or neglectful parenting, we find both actions to be morally
faulty because each involves indifference to others as the common root of moral failing. A prescription against acting from indifference thus undergirds all forms of caring and grounds their moral necessity. By examining how the standard of care functions as a legal duty (despite the fact that the legal realm has been dismissed by care ethicists like Held as being dominated by the justice perspective), what this project does is show that feminist work on the moral significance of caring helps us better understand the foundation of our moral and legal duties to avoid harming others. It is by understanding what is normatively significant about all types of caring, from caring-for to taking-care, that it becomes possible to explain why care is required of agents and what caring means in different spheres of moral life.

The third contribution of the dissertation to feminist moral and political theory follows from the strategy I adopted to normatively justify caring obligations. This contribution is that the project provides a new way to question the sharp distinction between the public and private realm or, rather, political morality and private morality. I do this by showing that care, as a normative obligation and practice, is required by both private relationships (in the family) and by public relations (between strangers). I have shown that even though there are different species of care, what connects them all is a certain cognitive activity (i.e., the mental practice of being attentive to the needs and vulnerabilities of others). This cognitive activity, which is equally important for providing good care to particular others (e.g., caring-for a child) and in living one’s life in

292 One project that I would like to pursue in the future is to consider whether the difficulty in legal scholarship of differentiating between recklessness, negligence, gross negligence, etc. results from the fact that we are dealing with and attempting to distinguish between different types of moral indifference in each case.
ways that avoid wantonly harming others (i.e., in taking care), provides a normative foundation for moral action that undergirds both private and public morality.

The final contribution of this dissertation is that it provides a new way of thinking about the justice and care distinction. Care ethicists, such as Held, have argued that the justice perspective depends on care insofar as subjects of justice depend upon someone caring-for them (e.g., raising them as a child) in order to develop the capacities of an autonomous agent who is able participate in moral deliberation and the public world of justice. This is one way of articulating the relationship between justice and care. I call this the instrumental interpretation of the justice-care relation, because it maintains that justice depends on caring practices as a sort of material precondition of the realm of justice existing in the first place. In this way, care is an instrument through which the subjects of justice are created.

My account, however, suggests a different, non-instrumental way to understand the relationship between justice and care. By differentiating between different types of care and focusing on the duty to take care, it becomes clear that care is not merely instrumentally related to justice. This is because taking care is part of and, in some sense, at the heart of the justice perspective. For example, corrective or remedial justice (i.e., tort-law) depends upon a standard of care to adjudicate disputes over wrongful harms that occur between various kinds of agents (e.g., individuals, corporations, etc.). When someone has been wronged, for example, when he or she is a victim of reckless treatment, we can say that his or her rights to bodily integrity (or possession of property) have been violated and that he or she suffers unjustly unless this wrongful damage is corrected. We can also say that he or she has suffered from a lack of care that was due to
him or her as a moral person. In this sense, just relations between people in a system of cooperation requires agents to act with care for one another or, put differently, to take each other’s rights, interests, needs, and vulnerabilities seriously. Put simply, justice means treating someone to whom we are socially connected with sufficient care. On this reading of the justice and care relationship, justice does not just instrumentally depend on caring practices, but instead acting justly is acting with care. Instead of the instrumental reading of the relationship between justice and care, I call this the ontological interpretation, because it makes a claim about what justice is. And, on my account, which focuses on taking care as a general form of care, justice is a social state of affairs in which agents act with care toward those with whom they are in relation and, similarly, enjoy living in a social system in which others act with serious care for their own needs, interests, and vulnerabilities.

This interpretation of the relationship between justice and care has implications for discussions in global and environmental ethics. From philosophers to activists, the language of justice has been the lingua franca for articulating what morality commands in the face of global problems, such as climate change or poverty in the developing world. Hence, we see calls for climate justice, global justice, and so on. What I have argued for in this dissertation is that care ethics provides a framework that provides a better lens through which individuals can make sense of their responsibilities in the face of such global problems. Individual responsibility, according to my care framework, requires that individuals be attentive to the effects of their actions, but more specifically to act with care towards (i.e., not be indifferent to) those who are affected by one’s daily life practices. One might worry, however, that grounding global individual responsibility
in terms of care removes large scale, systemic global and environmental problems from the realm of justice and places them in the individual realm of private care.

But this worry is unwarranted if justice and care are related in the way that I suggest. If justice refers to a system of social cooperation in which agents take care with regard to how their actions affect others, then this gives us a vision of what justice looks like on a global scale. Global justice refers to a state of affairs in which individual agents act with care toward those with whom they are distantly connected through global socio-economic arrangements and practices.

If global justice requires a set of global socio-economic arrangements in which it is possible for agents to take care in their actions that affect those to whom they are distantly related, then the foregoing analysis should make clear how difficult it is to achieve the ideal of global justice. This is because, given systemic conditions, even well intentioned agents are often prevented from acting with care, because of the constrained and morally imperfect choices available to them. I have argued, however, for the moral significance of agents caring about the harmful effects of their actions, even if their particular social situations make it difficult or impossible to act in accordance with what they care about. For example, non-indifference to the climate impacts of one’s actions might be all that one can do in some situations to satisfy the demands of moral responsibility with regard to climate change. Or, to take another example, caring about the conditions in which one’s affordable clothing is made, even if one’s economic situation demands that one must still buy it, is the minimum requirement of acting responsibly with regard to global labor justice and the harms done to sweat shop workers. In this way, non-indifference or caring-about is the minimum that one must do to satisfy
the demands of moral responsibility in a global context. And, if justice and care are
related as I suggest, such non-indifference or caring-about is the first step toward global
justice. Realizing global justice, however, requires social and political action to transform
socio-economic arrangements so that non-indifferent agents, who want to do less harm in
their everyday practices but are prevented by social conditions from doing so, can act in
accordance with what they care about.


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AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS, ASSISTANTSHIPS

Philosophy Travel Funding Award, Penn State, Fall 2015
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The Crawford Family Fellowship in Ethical Inquiry (Full Year, Competitive Dissertation Fellowship), Penn State, 2013-2014
Rock Ethics Institute Fellow, Penn State, Fall 2010-2013
Philosophy Travel Funding Award, Penn State, Fall 2011
Excellence in Graduate Recruiting Summer Scholarship, Penn State, 2010
Graduate Assistantship, Penn State, 2009-Present
Graduate Assistantship, The University of Memphis, 2007-2009
Phi Beta Kappa, May 2006
Rutgers Summer Institute for Diversity in Philosophy, 2005