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Ethics and Agency: Conceptualizing Moral Community

by

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Introduction

David Shoemaker begins his article "Responsibility and Disability" with the phrase "'[m]oral community' is a term of art in philosophy."[1] He goes on to argue that the moral community is the community of agents with whom we can engage in moral address. Shoemaker takes it for granted that there is some line—though perhaps not an obvious one—at which the scope of morality ends. But is this the right way to conceptualize moral community?

My thesis will explore the issue of how to give an account of moral community. The issue at hand is not primarily an ontological one; I am not deeply concerned with defining the phrase as such. Instead, I am interested in the ethical implications of conceptualizing moral community. Who—or what—should be included in our understanding of moral community? Our moral obligations are directly related to our understanding of moral community; we cannot be morally obligated to those who fall outside the scope of our moral community, though we can have general obligations: for example, not to cause harm intentionally.

Shoemaker is primarily concerned with a community that encompasses reason-givers. His conception of "moral community" is one that focuses explicitly on norms of moral address. The boundary drawn, then, demarcates a line between those who are capable of engaging in some level of moral address, and those who are not. In addition to some sorts of people—such as psychopaths and the severely cognitively disabled—this conception of community must exclude non-adults and non-humans.

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[1] David Shoemaker, "Responsibility, Agency, and Cognitive Disability," in Eva Feder Kittay and Licia Carlson, eds., Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 201.

This sort of boundary drawing intrigued me, and pushed me to ask what a conception of moral community ought to look like, and what it ought to do. If it is reasonable to say that one person falls inside the boundary of our moral community while another one does not, then I want to make it clear what the consequences of that separation are. I am questioning whether the line that Shoemaker is interested in is drawn too tightly. In giving us an account of moral community, did Shoemaker pick the right norms? Should the scope of morality—the boundaries of the moral community—be seen as being confined to those who can engage in moral address, and if so, can that boundary be clearly demarcated?

Throughout my thesis, I will explore a number of different ethical theories to determine which ones best provide the tools necessary to constructing a robust account of moral community. Out of all the philosophers whose theories I will explore, only Shoemaker explicitly mentions moral community, but his concern is indirect, as he uses the idea of moral community to get at issues of responsibility and moral address. These philosophers do not share all of my concerns, and do not themselves come up with accounts of moral community. However, I can use the implications of their ethical theories in order to determine whether or not that theory provides the tools necessary to conceptualize moral community.

My thesis will be divided into five parts. The first part is a framework chapter, which is an explanation on the concerns I have that any account of moral community must answer to satisfactorily. The second chapter will explore Kantianism, specifically that of Kant and then Shoemaker, and will look to answer the question of whether these philosophers can provide the tools to respond to the two

concerns I give. My third chapter looks at consequentialism, focusing on the utilitarianism of Mill and Singer, and then examining the theory of the consequentialist Peter Railton. My fourth chapter looks at care ethics, to determine whether that theory can provide the basis for a robust conception of moral community. The fifth—and final—body chapter looks to Karen Barad's philosophical insights and sees whether they can answer adequately to the two concerns. I will end with a conclusion that states more precisely how we ought to conceptualize our moral community, and what the ethical implications of that conceptualization are.

The framework chapter goes over the two major concerns that any conception of moral community must answer to: non-exclusivity and relationality. Although I do not define precisely what a conception ought not to be exclusive of, I will argue that any account of moral community that is exclusive rather than non-exclusive is lacking in some way. A theory may be too exclusive in two ways, both of which involve drawing too sharp a line around some population. First, it may be exclusive in the interests that it considers, if it allows its followers to ignore the interests of some beings but not others. Second, it may be exclusive in its conception of agency, if it allows for a dichotomy between complete moral agents, and completely passive non-agents. A serious account of moral community must also answer to the concern of relationality. Relationships must be of fundamental importance—not merely as valuable things, but as locations of agency itself. For a theory to answer fully to this concern, it must define agency in a way that views relationships as indispensable to the process of agency.

I focus on Kant and Mill in my second and third chapters because these thinkers have had a huge amount of influence on our ethical sensibilities. Because they—and their followers—have been so influential in crafting our understanding of what it means to be moral or ethical, I want to determine whether their theories can answer to my two major concerns. I will argue that neither Kant nor Mill can adequately respond to my concerns. However, modern followers of their theories—Shoemaker and Peter Railton—are able to give some suggestion of how to respond to those concerns, though they are still not able to answer all of them under the Kantian or utilitarian framework.

The fourth chapter focuses on care ethics—that of Nel Noddings and Eva Feder Kittay. I explore the philosophy of Shirong Luo as well, to illuminate and complement Noddings' theory. Care ethics takes the concern of relationality very seriously, though care theorists generally, and Noddings specifically, are not centrally concerned with non-exclusivity. Kittay does give a suggestion as to how a theory can answer to the concern of non-exclusivity, both in showing how we are involved in complex networks of "nestled dependencies" and showing that agency exists on a continuum, rather than being a single characteristic that a being either does or does not possess. I will argue that while Noddings' insights about the nature of relationships are extremely helpful in conceptualizing moral community, she does not redefine agency in a way that answers satisfactorily either to the concern of non-exclusivity or to that of relationality.

My final body chapter looks to Karen Barad, a physicist who is also concerned with matters of ethics. In this chapter, I will show the importance of

undermining certain metaphysical assumptions that are prevalent in our culture—such as that of individualism and representationalism—and how we need to alter our understanding of metaphysics in order to conceptualize moral community in a meaningful way. I will show that Barad's concerns overlap with mine to a great degree, although in the writings that I am exploring, she does always answer to those concerns fully because she is primarily a theoretical physicist, not a philosopher. I will argue that her theory goes a long way in showing us that our metaphysical assumptions have important consequences for our ethical beliefs and actions, as well as our understanding of who and what should be included in our conception of moral community.

My conclusion will revisit how complex an idea moral community is, and how important it is that we understand the ethical consequences of choosing to see someone as being either a member or not a member of the moral community—explicitly or implicitly. I will also argue that moral community is not—and cannot be—a fixed concept. Instead, we should recognize the ways that we include and exclude a variety of beings and concepts in our understanding of our world—metaphysically and ethically. We must take responsibility for those exclusions and inclusions, and recognize whether we ought to change the way that we make them, now or in the future.

My thesis considers several philosophers, separated by difference of emphasis and tradition. I am not aiming to discredit or undermine the work of any particular philosopher, but merely to determine whether those philosophers can account for the concerns I have. Philosophers have rarely taken "moral community" as a primary

consideration, and when they have, they have not focused on making their account of moral community relevant to a wide range of moral concerns. The tradition that emphasizes moral community focuses instead on Kantian-style moral address. I hope that my thesis will push us to consider how we (at least implicitly) make assumptions about what it means to participate in a moral community, and the ethical implications that follow those assumptions.

Chapter 1

Two Major Concerns: Non-Exclusivity and Relationality

In this chapter, I will examine two major concerns to which any robust conception of moral community must answer. The two concerns can be summed up as "non-exclusivity" and "relationality." "Non-exclusivity" refers a refusal to leave beings out of an ethical theory. Some theories attempt to respond to this concern by showing that we must be non-exclusive in recognizing those beings whose interests ought to matter. Still, these theories might be exclusive in terms of how they define agency—leaving out a number of beings from this definition. The "relationality" concern has to do with the fact that many philosophical theories do not truly take relationships seriously—they are treated (if they are valued at all) either as instrumental goods, or as intrinsic goods that are still not constitutive of moral agency. These two concerns will motivate my work, and a robust account of moral community must be able to satisfy them in some way.

For each concern, the full conception of what is lost in theories that do not take the concern seriously will come out in later chapters. I am seeking, in this chapter, to give the reader a sense of why each concern interests me, and what the ethical consequences are that attach to any theory that takes one of the concerns seriously. Most of what I refer to in this chapter will be brought out more fully in later chapters, and so I am not seeking to give the reader a full account of any one of these concerns, or to explore precisely and completely what is at stake when each goes unfulfilled. I am interested primarily in describing the outline of each concern, allowing that my interest may shift based on the philosophic explorations I undertake

in the rest of my thesis. I will be using these concerns in order to explore why various moral theories do not provide the correct tools for constructing an account of moral community.

Moral theories often address one or the other of these concerns, though they often cannot fully satisfy either. Currently, utilitarianism is most concerned with issues of non-exclusivity and care ethics is deeply concerned with issues of relationality. However, neither of these philosophies redefines agency in a way that shows either that agency is a non-exclusive process, or that agency is interactive and that relationships are constitutive of both morality and moral agency.

Non-Exclusivity

I first want to address the concern of non-exclusivity more in-depth. This issue is deeply important to many philosophers, including those who espouse the two major modern philosophical trains of thought: utilitarianism and Kantianism. Both are concerned with including all of the relevant beings in their moral theories. Kantian philosophy is focused on including all moral agents within the bounds of its theory. Utilitarian philosophy focuses on including all sentient beings, whose needs we must take into consideration when making moral decisions.

Kantian philosophy can claim to be non-exclusive because it does not exclude any rational beings from the scope of its philosophy. It does not exclude any being that we can hold accountable—and that can hold us accountable. Kantian philosophy focuses on both the absolute moral duties that we have to other agents, and the

absolute respect that we ought to have for them. However, it does not fully satisfy the concern of non-exclusivity for two reasons. First, it excludes a number of beings from its morality, and so we are only obligated to take the interests of non-rational beings into consideration either because they display a proto-rationality, or because our own maxims show that we already value those interests. Second, the Kantian definition of agency is extremely exclusive, in that it is limited solely to rational beings. A wide range of beings are considered morally passive, and are not shown as participating in the process of moral agency.

The utilitarian response to the concern of non-exclusivity is focused not on moral agents (or agency), but on sentience and suffering. In attempting to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number, we must take into account the happiness (or suffering) that would be accrued by all sentient beings. Since the basis of this morality is about minimizing suffering and maximizing happiness, it is imperative that we do not exclude beings whose happiness (or suffering) *should* matter to us. Still, the most prominent utilitarian theorists do not provide an account of agency that is non-exclusive. There is still a divide between those beings who are agents, and those beings whose interests matter but who are morally passive.

I want to emphasize the point that there is no simple answer to the question "exclusive (or inclusive) of what?" There is no simple way to say that, for example, utilitarian philosophy is *non-exclusive* while Kantian philosophy is *exclusive* without explaining what those theories ought not to be exclusive of. Instead, I will let this concern to come up throughout my thesis. It will allow me to say that something is

missing from a given theory—that something is excluded—even while acknowledging that a theory *is* in some way responsive to this concern.

Consequentialism responds to the concern of non-exclusivity by refusing to exclude any sentient beings from the realm of its theory. Theories such as Kantianism, even while it insists on its own version of non-exclusivity, marginalize a number of beings who ought to matter. However, consequentialism's way of dealing with this concern is not fully satisfying. Sentient beings are seen as valuable things (or receptacles for the ultimately valuable thing that is happiness or pleasure). This sort of understanding of non-exclusivity does not take into consideration the importance of relationships, which leads me to my next concern of relationality.

Relationality

Relationality is a somewhat more complex concern than that of non-exclusivity. What is at stake in the non-satisfaction of this concern is a theory that does not take seriously the constitutive nature of relationships in constructing what it is to be human. As in the concern of non-exclusivity, a number of different theories take seriously the concern of relationality, and attempt to address and satisfy it in two major ways. The first treats relationships as only instrumentally valuable as a way to accomplish some further end, and the second treats relationships as intrinsically valuable—but as intrinsically valuable objects that are not constitutive of our selves and of agency.

Many utilitarian theorists, including Mill, treat relationships as valuable only insofar as they tend to increase the happiness of the sentient world. What is intrinsically valuable is the state of affairs in which the happiness of all sentient beings is maximized. Relationships can contribute to this state of affairs by making those involved in them happier, or by encouraging us to seek out the happiness of others as well as ourselves. However, in these theories, they are never themselves valuable. They are always subject to appraisal in reference to the ultimate end—that of the state of affairs in which happiness is maximized. It is obvious that we can become estranged from our own relationships in these situations—that we can feel alienated from those to whom we are close or committed.

However, even theories that do not treat relationships as merely instrumental goods can still fail to treat them as constitutive of value and agency. Just as a utilitarian concerned with non-exclusivity would take sentient beings to be points (or receptacles) of value, a consequentialist concerned with relationality might take relationships themselves to be intrinsically valuable *things*. Care ethics, likewise, sees relationships as valuable (indeed the source of what is valuable), but does not necessarily go far enough to answer fully to this concern. A theory that allows relationships their full due will not treat relationships merely as things (instrumentally valuable, intrinsically valuable, or otherwise). Instead, a theory that takes relationality seriously will allow that relationships are constitutive of selves, and that relationships are locations of agency. It is possible that certain theories (such as care ethics) would not object to this classification of agency—but the concern of relationality for these theorists does not extend to the point of redefining agency so

that relationships are shown as being not merely valuable things, but what constitutes our reality.

Any moral theory that takes my concern of relationality seriously will see relationships as not only *expressing* agency, or as allowing an agent to develop and sustain her agency, but as constitutive of agency. If this concern is properly understood, then it demands that we see agency as a process of engagement, not as a characteristic of an individual.

This concern may require us to rethink some of our most basically held beliefs (acknowledged or not) about what agency is, and even what individual selves are. A satisfactory answer to this concern will show that moral agency and action are tied up in relationships. Agency, in this view, must be interactive rather than individual, something intertwined rather than clearly meted out to some beings but not others.

A conception of moral community that takes seriously both of these concerns is not one that will merely capture our experience as moral and social beings. This conception, once developed, will have certain ethical consequences. Rethinking agency, for example, is not merely a metaphysical issue; instead, different conceptions of agency require that we treat other beings in certain ways, and that we seek to create certain circumstances in order to realize agency as far as possible in any of these conceptions. As members of a moral community, we are responsible for other members—either merely responsible for their welfare, or responsible (to some extent) for their development, or responsible for creating the conditions necessary to fostering their membership (and the membership of others) as much as possible.

Throughout my thesis, I will be using these concerns to formulate a conception of moral community that answers to the concerns while showing what we ought to value morally and the ethical consequences of taking these concerns seriously. I will look to a variety of different moral theories, and ascertain whether they provide the proper tools to allow me to conceptualize moral community. I will do so by exploring in what ways these theorists (or someone sympathetic to these theorists) could respond to these concerns. I want to make it clear that I do not believe that all moral theorists focus on conceptualizing moral community—many would not share my concerns, or would understand them differently. With this in mind, I will not treat these theories as attempts to conceptualize moral community that succeed or fail to various degrees. Rather, I will treat the theories as providing tools that either help to satisfy my concerns, or provide a basis for better articulating the concerns themselves, and the consequences that result in their (non)fulfillment.

Chapter 2

Kantianism: Kant, Korsgaard, and Shoemaker

In this chapter, I will explore Kantianism, one of the major strands of modern western philosophy, with respect to my two major concerns of non-exclusivity and relationality. First, I will explain the basics of Kant's philosophy, and determine whether his system of ethics can answer to my two concerns of non-exclusivity and relationality. In this section, I will briefly discuss Christine Korsgaard's Kantian argument for humane treatment of animals. I will argue that Kant's philosophy cannot make room for a fully non-exclusive or relational conception of moral community. Next, I will explore the philosophy of David Shoemaker—a modern philosopher who uses a Kantian framework—and determine whether his philosophy better satisfies the concerns. I will argue that Shoemaker gestures toward an understanding of relationships and agency that better addresses the relationality concern than Kantianism, but that his philosophy does not fully satisfy either of the two major concerns.

Kant's Philosophy: Rationality, Autonomy, and the Kingdom of Ends

Kantian ethics makes two basic assumptions about humans and morality: first, that if we are rational, then we are also autonomous; and second, that rational beings have access to a single enduring moral code, by virtue of their rationality, regardless of their background. Kant argues that if one is a rational agent, then one is automatically required, by reason, to obey the dictates of reason absolutely. As for

what an agent should morally do, Kant argues that "ordinary reason…is well able to distinguish, in every case that occurs, what is good or evil, in accord with duty or contrary to duty."[2] Reason, without any special education or experience, should be able to determine what is correct and incorrect in every possible situation without the need to confer with other agents or use empirical data. In fact, Kant says that "everything empirical…is even highly detrimental to the purity of morals"[3]. Our rationality leads us to find the nature of duty, which we must obey as rational agents. Kant sums up duty as obedience to the categorical imperative. Reason compels us to use this law as the basis for all of our maxims, which affect how we act and what we intend. One of the formulations of the categorical imperative is, "I should never act expect in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law"[4].

Although Kantian agency seems to be completely solitary, duty relates purely to the way that we treat other people—specifically, other rational agents. We must respect others, not as individuals with diverse interests and goals, but as fellow rational beings capable of obeying universal law. One of Kant's many formulations of the categorical imperative is that of respecting others as ends in themselves: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means"[5].

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[2] Immanuel Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. James W. Ellington (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 16.
[3] Kant, 34
[4] Kant, 14
[5] Kant, 36

Kant's moral ideal is that of the "kingdom of ends." In this "kingdom," everyone is a rational being who is capable of grasping the universal law (the categorical imperative) independently. There is no need of laws imposed from the outside on a person in order to correct her or his behavior. Instead, each person is motivated only by duty, and so is able both to legislate and to obey that legislation, since "the dignity of humanity consists just in its capacity to legislate universal law, though with the condition of humanity's being at the same time itself subject to this very same legislation"[6]. Everyone will legislate the exact same rules, in this scenario, because each is bound to the categorical imperative. The kingdom of ends is not possible so long as we rational beings do not universally obey duty. However, we must always act as though we are in this kingdom, respecting the dignity of others though they might not respect our dignity, and might not act out of—or even in accordance with—duty, as all rational beings "must in all his actions…be regarded at the same time as an end"[7] and never merely as a means, regardless of what their ends *are*.

The members of this "kingdom of ends" would be bound by respect for one another. What each rational agent respects in each other rational agent is her ability to grasp and obey universal principles. Although people are likely to have close personal relationships, what is morally important is every being's ability to follow maxims based on absolute duty. "[D]uty does not rest at all on feelings, impulses, and inclinations, but only on the relation of rational beings to one another"[8]. Nothing

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[6] Kant, 44
[7] Kant, 35
[8] Kant, 40

more than mutual respect for the rationality at the foundation of the humanity of every other member binds the members to one another. Nobody would treat any other member (merely) as a means, but rather as an end as well. Respect here is a formal, cognitive act, and emotional caring or love has little importance.

Major Concerns: Can Kant Respond to Them?

I will now explore whether Kantianism is amenable to my two concerns for creating a robust conception of moral community. First, I will ask whether Kantianism is non-exclusive; then, whether it provides the tools for constructing an account of moral community that takes seriously the concern of relationality.

My concern of non-exclusivity has not been completely and clearly spelled out. I have not yet indicated what a conception of moral community ought to be inclusive *of*. Kant is clear that he does not want to exclude any rational beings—the only beings, on his theory, who have dignity and are capable of acting morally—from his ethical philosophy. Only our rational nature is inherently valuable, and so Kant is not concerned that his theory might exclude non-rational beings.

As beings capable of moral thinking and action, we ought not intentionally to mistreat any being—rational or not. There are two reasons for this. First, we are undermining our moral selves by getting pleasure from doing harm, even if that harm is not directed toward beings with dignity. As rational beings, we ought not to value the infliction of harm—and if we do so, then we open the possibility for not taking seriously the infliction of harm on rational beings, those beings who alone are capable

of dignity. The second reason that we cannot harm animals is more complex. As Korsgaard argues, the fact that animals cannot legislate universal laws does not inherently exempt them from their protection— a universal law can extend its protection to someone who did not participate, and could not have participated, in its legislation"[9]. When we value taking seriously our desires, then we are "we are in a sense valuing our animal nature, for we are still conferring normative value on the kind of natural good characteristic of creatures who experience and pursue their own good"[10]. As we value our animal nature—not just our rational one—we also confer value onto animals themselves. Therefore, we do not have a duty only to ourselves to treat animals humanely. Instead, we have a duty to animals because we confer value onto them by valuing not just our rationality but our desires and satisfactions as well, and disvaluing pain. However, it is still the case that we get to this place by beginning from the idea that only rationality is inherently valuable. There will always be a divide between those that legislate universal laws, and are obligated to formulate maxims that are in line with those laws, and those that are subject merely to natural law and inclinations. If we take Kant's theory seriously, we cannot create a conception of moral community that is truly non-exclusive, because there is a clear divide between a small set of beings that is included in the moral theory—rational beings—and those who are not.

The second major concern that I posed that any conception of moral community must satisfy is that of relationality. Kantian philosophy holds a high

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[9] Christine Korsgaard, "Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties to Animals: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values," Delivered at University of Michigan February 6, 2004 pg. 96
[10] Korsgaard, 105

degree of respect for human respect and relations, but ultimately does not see relationships as being fundamentally valuable.

Kant's morality is that based entirely on the categorical imperative—every rational being has the ability to comprehend and implement universal, permanent moral law. Kant would certainly admit that circumstances, in reality, affect an individual's likelihood of obeying moral law. For example, someone who was abused as a child might take a hypocritical stance toward morality, recognizing its normative force while giving up on the possibility of realizing it as an ideal altogether. Such a person would likely justify immoral actions defensively, indicating that he or she could recognize moral duties without self-legislating them. However, every rational being is required to abide by the imperatives of duty, regardless of background or education. I want to use the example of a psychopath here—something that will come up when I discuss Shoemaker. A psychopath is someone who is capable of using reasons, and recognizing their normative force, but who has no emotional incentive to obey moral duties—such as the incentive of empathy or love. For Kant, a psychopath is subject to moral law. A psychopath who does obey moral law, in fact, would be an example of a moral being, as he would likely have no motivation other than duty to follow the categorical imperative.

Our duty is concerned entirely with our interactions with one another, but the particular nature of the relationship is morally unimportant. Whether I am interacting with someone to whom I am very close, or a stranger, I must make sure that my actions accord with the categorical imperative—and I am only truly acting morally when my moral actions are done out of a sense of duty, rather than love or sympathy.

A close relationship might even be detrimental, since I might do something that is opposed to my moral duty (such as lie or steal) in order to better the situation of a person or animal I care deeply for. It is clear that Kant's moral theory precludes the intrinsic moral importance of relationships, and that relationships cannot be constitutive of morality.

Kant's philosophy also cannot account for a conception of agency as inherently relational, and relationships as entirely constitutive of agency. The idea that agency is a continuum, that is not only expressed by relationships, but created by them, would undermine his notion of autonomous beings as ones who could obey the absolute moral law regardless of circumstances. Kantian philosophy demands that we see ourselves and others *primarily* as rational—and therefore autonomous—beings capable of comprehending and implementing the categorical imperative. As Kantian philosophy is concerned with autonomy and freedom, it cannot answer fully to the concern of relationality.

Shoemaker's Philosophy: Accountability and Agency in the Moral Community

I will now explore the philosophical theory of David Shoemaker, in order to determine whether it is possible for a theory to satisfy my two concerns in a Kantian framework. Shoemaker is not obviously a Kantian—he is not concerned with issues of autonomy and freedom. He comes from the Strawsonian tradition, which is focused primarily on issues of accountability and responsibility. However, he does use a Kantian framework—that is, he does understand that we can view each other

either as agents capable of acting on principles and reasons, or as beings acting on inclinations, but not as both in the same moment.

Shoemaker is the only philosopher I am studying who has a conception of "moral community." He begins his piece "Responsibility, Agency, and Cognitive Disability" with the claim that "'[m]oral community' is a term of art in philosophy" [11]. He also asserts that philosophers use "moral community" primarily to understand *who* is responsible and *why*[12]. I am interested in moral community itself, and the conceptualization thereof, and so I am coming at the issue from a different angle than is Shoemaker.

In order to figure out exactly where the moral community ends, Shoemaker uses two examples: that of mild mental retardation (MMR), and that of psychopathy. He argues that adults with MMR are members of the moral community—the population of which is "made up of only those who are capable of meeting the accountability face of responsibility, those capable of holding, and being held, *accountable* to one another"[13]—though not paradigmatically so, and that psychopaths are non-members, but are closer to membership than some other beings are. The implication is that we can treat as accountable—and be held accountable to—adults with MMR, even if those adults cannot be treated as accountable to all people at all times. In contrast, we are incapable of reciprocal responsibility to and from psychopaths. It is unclear whether Shoemaker believes that psychopaths can hold us accountable to them, or whether their exclusion from Shoemaker's conception of the

[11] Shoemaker, 201
[12] Shoemaker, 201
[13] Shoemaker, 211

moral community implies that we are not morally accountable to them either. Shoemaker does not see this sort of accountability as lining up with a *legal* accountability. He certainly believes that psychopaths are legally accountable for their actions, even if we cannot hold them morally accountable to us. This placement can be contrasted with Kant, who would certainly take a psychopath to be an accountable, autonomous moral agent, as psychopaths do understand and use reasons, even if they do not have the emotional powers necessary to make following duty easy or natural.

Although Shoemaker has an individual conception of agency in much the same way that Kant does, his idea of agency is related to and expanded by our relations with others, rather than to a separate and absolutely commanding reason. We can take a stance toward someone as an agent, who acts by reasons, or as a non-agent whose actions are explained by instinct or inclination, but not by deliberately chosen reasons or principles. We use the concept of agency in order to decide whether to treat someone as accountable, and this decision is based partly on the fact of whether that person has the preconditions of agency, and partly on our taking a sort of accountability-holding attitude toward that person.

Shoemaker focuses on emotional powers in explaining whom we should and should not treat as accountable, as "[t]he capacity for certain sorts of emotional responses is necessary for the development of the intellectual capacity for sensitivity to, appreciation of, and responsiveness to moral reasons…"[14]. However, some level of cognitive ability is required, as we must be able to recognize when others are in

[14] Shoemaker, 205

pain, when what we are doing is causing others pain, and how to avoid causing such pain in order to be reasonably held morally accountable. "What provides the conditions for accountability to us are…sensitivity and arousal to the distress of others, emotional maturity and empathy"[15]. There does not need to be abstract reasoning, or an understanding of what universal principles are and how and when to apply them.

Unlike Kant, Shoemaker argues that we need a sort of motivation in order to behave like good members of the moral community. Some people, such as psychopaths, are able to understand and use complex, abstract reasoning. However, they are not appropriate targets of moral address in part because they are not able to have an emotional reaction to another's suffering, and so are not motivated to prevent or stop harm. On psychopaths, Shoemaker argues that "someone for whom the plight of others makes no emotional dent surely lacks the capacity to be appropriately sensitive to the moral reasons deriving from their plight"[16].

Shoemaker does not think of people as agents (or potential agents) who can work through difficult moral problems on their own. Instead, his vision of agency is merely a vehicle by which we are able to interact with others in complex ways. Only when we hold someone accountable to us morally are we able to engage with him in moral address. We hold someone accountable by viewing her as an appropriate target of moral address. When someone—someone whom we hold accountable—wrongs us, we respond by engaging that person in moral address. We can let her know that we feel angry or hurt by chastising, ignoring or censuring her. Shoemaker does not

[15] Shoemaker, 210
[16] Shoemaker, 205

go into detail about non-concrete interactions. However, drawing from the Strawsonain tradition—and consistent with Shoemaker's philosophy—we see that we hold someone accountable when we imagine that we at least theoretically could engage that person in moral address. For example, we feel outraged when we hear of a murderer who has since died, even though we cannot for obvious reasons engage that person in moral address. However, if we hear that a dead *lion* has killed a person, we might feel angry that a person died, or outraged that someone (an agent) did not take proper precautions, but we do not feel the same complex emotion toward the lion. We cannot even imagine ourselves engaging morally with the lion. Although Shoemaker does not go into detail about our moral interactions with animals, we can imagine having a limited moral address with an animal. For example, we might have an emotional reaction if a pet dog bites someone, and in chastising the dog, might expect it to feel some level of shame. This sort of interaction does not imply that we think that the dog is a rational moral agent, but that the dog might be able to have some sort of response to a moral demand, such as not to bite people.

This fact strengthens a point I made earlier. Although Shoemaker focuses on emotional maturity, or the ability to have complex emotions about other people, as the central aspect of his agency, a certain level of cognitive ability is also required. We attribute many complex emotions to non-human animals, but we almost always take the objective attitude towards them, and rarely do we attempt to engage them in any sort of moral address. Although there is no perfect way to figure out who has, or does not have, the requisite cognitive and emotional skills to be held accountable, we

tend to hold accountable to us who distribute a certain level of emotional and cognitive maturity, and seem to be motivated to interact with others in a way that is susceptible to moral address. Even if we imagine that the other would not necessarily be very affected by our attitudes, we still hold responsible those to whom it seems sensible to display those attitudes.

For Shoemaker, we can treat someone as accountable to an increasing number of people[17]. For example, a parent might hold her child accountable before a stranger does, and a mentally disabled person's caretaker might hold him accountable to herself, and treat him as though he is accountable to other people in order to expand the circle of people to whom he sees himself as accountable, and who hold him accountable. At first, however, the mentally disabled person is "eligible for accountability, [is] held to be so primarily just by those with whom [he] *already* find[s] [himself] emotionally engaged…family, friends, caregivers"[18]. There is interplay between agency and relationships that does not exist in the Kantian view of agency. However, agency is still individual, to some extent, and while the relationships that we have are important, they may not be morally significant—they are merely a way of expressing and refining our agency.

Major Concerns: Can Shoemaker Respond to Them?

I will now explore whether Shoemaker's philosophy can respond to my two concerns of non-exclusivity and relationality. The first concern is that of non-

[17] Shoemaker, 218-219
[18] Shoemaker, 217

exclusivity. Unlike Kant, Shoemaker does not focus on our status as rational beings. His moral theory focuses not just on those rational beings, but on those with whom we do or could engage in moral address. Still, Shoemaker's focus is on bringing more beings into the folds of agency and the community of those capable of engaging one another in moral address. He is straightforward in saying that many beings are not part of our moral community—only "those agents eligible for assessments of moral responsibility"[19] are. I want to emphasize that he uses the phrase "moral community" to indicate that group of beings whom we hold accountable, and with whom we are capable of engaging in moral dialogue. As I am using the phrase in a different way, I want to point out that his conception of moral community does not focus on the concern of non-exclusivity. It is not important to Shoemaker that a variety of beings—such as psychopaths and the very severely mentally disabled—are excluded from what he calls our "moral community."

Shoemaker's focus on responsibility and moral address is similar to Kant's focus on moral agency, though the two groups—the morally responsible and the Kantian agents—are not completely coextensive. In both cases, a number of beings are excluded from the bounds of the moral theory. Neither Kant himself nor the Kantian Shoemaker is able to respond satisfactorily to the concern of non-exclusivity.

My second concern is that of relationality. Shoemaker's philosophy depends more on concrete relationships than does Kant, and so gives a suggestion for how a robust conception of moral community might cope with the demand for satisfaction of the concern of relationality. For Shoemaker, morality is intertwined with

[19] Shoemaker, 201

responsibility, and the ability to hold and be held responsible for our actions. When we are very young, for example, it is senseless for anyone to hold us morally accountable—we do not have the emotional or rational capacities to understand what this accountability is, or to be moved by it to act in a certain way. However, with education and certain types of interactions, it gradually becomes more and more appropriate to hold us accountable for our actions—first, our parents might act in ways that imitate holding accountable even before doing so makes sense, but eventually we are able to participate in moral address and to hold ourselves and others accountable.

Here, interactions and relationships clearly have a pivotal point in Shoemaker's philosophy. Relationships are also centrally important in agency—which is seen not as an attribute that divides one set of people from another, but as a complex set of characteristics that makes it reasonable for others to treat us as accountable. However, relationships still appear to play an instrumental role. Concrete—and not so concrete—interactions, including moral address, are useful in expanding our circle of accountability. Relationships are not inherently valuable, nor are they necessarily the location in which agency takes place. They merely play an important role in agency's development, and in expressing agency. The actual relationship—and interaction—is less important than the question of whether or not it helps to expand one or both of the participants' circle of accountability. Shoemaker's philosophy cannot fully answer to the concern of relationality. However, Shoemaker still draws to our attention an extremely important feature of relationships—that they are fundamental in developing and expression agency and responsibility. Our

relationships help to define our responsibilities, and caring relations are capable of pushing us to hold ourselves responsible to a wider circle of beings, and to engage—or be capable of engaging—in moral address with a greater array of beings.

Shoemaker is only concerned with those relationships between agents—or potential agents—and those who might engage them in moral address or help them to expand their circle of accountability. What is most helpful here is the intimation that agency is neither something that is an attribute of a specific individual, nor something that can be attributed however we see fit. When we recognize someone as an agent, we are treating her as accountable, and presuming that she has certain attributes—such as a level of both cognitive and emotional maturity—that make it appropriate to treat her that way. It is not the case that she just *is* an agent, and just is morally accountable for her actions, regardless of how others treat her. It is also not the case that she suddenly becomes accountable when someone treats her as such, and will go back to being non-accountable when we cease to treat her so. We can attribute agency to a range of beings, but only if they have the appropriate characteristics—for Shoemaker, there is a limit beyond which attributions of agency are inappropriate.

Shoemaker gives us a good sense of what an account of moral community that takes at my concern of relationality seriously would look like. His account does connect relationships with agency, and does show that agency is not either something that someone either has or does not have, or something that we can appropriately attribute anywhere we see fit. Instead, agency is complex, and requires both certain skills and a certain attitude toward the agent. However, this account does not fully

satisfy either of the two concerns, and so in conceptualizing moral community, I must explore other theories that answer even more fully to these concerns.

Chapter 3

Consequentialism: Mill, Singer, and Railton

In this chapter, I want to explore consequentialism, the second major strand of modern philosophical thought, with an eye on whether it some of its major proponents provide the necessary tools to conceptualize moral community in a way that takes seriously my two major concerns. First, I will explore the ethics of two of the biggest utilitarian thinkers: John Stuart Mill and Peter Singer, one of the most influential modern utilitarians. I will then look at each concern, determining whether their utilitarianism is able to address the concern adequately. I will argue that their utilitarianism responds to the concern of non-exclusivity, but does not fully satisfy either concern. Next, I will look at Peter Railton, a consequentialist who is concerned with alienation and relationships. I will see if his theory better speaks to my concerns than do Mill's and Singer's. I will argue that Railton gives an account of the value of relationships that comes closer to fulfilling the relationality concern, but ultimately does not satisfy either concern.

Mill's Philosophy: Happiness and Sentience

Mill argues that all that is of value in this world is happiness—which he defines as pleasure (broadly construed, so as to include the pleasures of the intellect,

which he argues are "are more desirable and valuable than others"[20]) and freedom from suffering. For Mill, everything we do can be good or right only so far as it increases the general happiness of the sentient world, or alleviates suffering—"actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse of happiness."[21] Good utilitarians do not have to have the goal of the alleviation of suffering in mind. "[T]he motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action,"[22] so our motives can be almost anything, as long as this goal is somehow accomplished. We can take our relationships to be genuinely and inherently meaningful, and as long as they lead us to increase the sentient world's overall happiness (for example, by encouraging us to forego some amount of pain or inconvenience in order greatly to increase our loved ones' happiness), then Mill would consider those relationships to be morally positive. Even if the motive were something such as greed, if it does lead to the alleviation of suffering or an increase in overall happiness, then Mill would be satisfied. Mill believes that we ought to promote conditions in such a way that people no longer see any distinction between their own happiness and that of others. Utilitarianism "would enjoin [that]…the interest, of every individual [would be]…in harmony with the interest of the whole."[23]

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[20] John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," The Basic Writings of John Stuart Mill: On Liberty, The Subjection of Women, and Utilitarianism (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 241.
[21] Mill, 239
[22] Mill, 251
[23] Mill, 250

Mill argues that we are allowed to consider, in most cases, "the interest or happiness of some few persons."[24] His reasoning is that it is rare that any one person can affect a large group of beings, or can affect those very far away. However, to the extent that our actions do have an impact on a wider range of beings, we must consider all of those beings before acting. In fact utilitarianism requires that each agent "be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator"[25] in choosing action—we should not act so as to increase our own happiness if it decreases that of others. Mill is concerned with manageability, since it would be impossible for me to consider the impact or possible impact of every decision on every potentially impacted being. Our world is a far more interconnected one than the one that Mill lived in. As citizens of the modern world, by Mill's reasoning, we ought to consider the far-reaching implications of our actions.

We must consider the happiness of all sentient beings when we act, though "some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and valuable than others,"[26] namely those only available to reasoners. Unlike Kant, Mill believes that we owe something even to beings who are incapable of reasoning, and therefore of acting on principles. We should take seriously the happiness of others not because we respect their ability to reason, but because in recognizing our own desire for happiness, we ought to see that our happiness is not more valuable than others' happiness. Mill argues that since each person desires his or her own happiness, "each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore [is] a good to the aggregate of all

[24] Mill, 252
[25] Mill, 250
[26] Mill, 241

persons."[27] There is still a divide between actors—those of us capable of grasping and acting on the principle that Mill presents—and those beings whose interests we ought to consider but who must count, for Mill, morally passive.

Singer's Philosophy: Evolution and Rationality

Singer, although he is also a utilitarian, is more interested in scientific explanation and justification for utilitarianism than Mill is. Singer leans heavily on evolutionary biology in order to explain why we act in "moral" (i.e., altruistic) ways, and where our rationality comes from. Unlike Mill, Singer is individualistic and focuses far more on rationality—although he views rationality as an evolved characteristic, and not a special quality that is essentially human.

Singer, however, agrees with Mill that morality is ultimately about the greatest good for the greatest number, and that our main focus as moral beings should be to alleviate suffering and increase happiness, regardless of whether the targets of our actions are rational or near us or not. The way that is likeliest to accomplish this, Singer (like Mill) believes, is the creation of the types of social institutions and personal relationships that promote the care of those who otherwise would not be able to help themselves, who would otherwise might be hurt by us. Such a system would harness "our inclinations…so that, taken as a whole, the system works to everyone's advantage."[28] However, Singer—unlike Mill—also imagines a morally idealistic

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[27] Mill, 270
[28] Peter Singer, The Expanding Circle,(New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), 157.

being, who would not rely on institutions or relationships to motivate her to act morally. Mill is not an idealist in this way.

Singer points out that the capacity for loving feelings we have towards those in our immediate vicinity—first our family, then our community—is evolved. We share this capacity, to some extent, with other animals, especially those related closely to us. Therefore, what we consider "moral" when we act on those feelings starts to look less like ethics, and more like simply following our biology. "Discovering biological origins for our intuitions should make us skeptical about thinking of them as self-evident moral axioms."[29] However, there is one thing that we do not share with other animals—rationality. Singer prizes rationality in a way that Mill does not, although he does not believe that rationality is a special, inscrutable quality that dictates laws that humans must obey absolutely. Instead, rationality is just another evolved characteristic that has been expanded and passed on because it allows us to come up with complex ways to improve our chances of passing on our genes.

With rationality comes the possibility of a universal form of morality. Singer argues that once we begin to reason, we see that our needs—and the needs of those around us—are no different from the needs of everyone else, though other beings are not as close to us and do not incite the same altruistic instincts as members of our family and community do. He argues that, "once we understand the principle [of caring about/preferring our own more] as an expression of kin selection, that belief

[29] Singer, 70-71

loses credibility."[30] Singer compares reason to an escalator that we cannot get off of even if we do not like where it is going, saying, "reasoning is inherently expansionist. It seeks universal application."[31] Once we determine that the interests of others are as important as our own, we are compelled by reason (though not absolutely) to act in a way that conforms to that realization. Of course, our instincts and emotions are often stronger than our reason, and so we do not always conform to the high standard that reason sets for us.

Unlike Mill, Singer asks us always to consider a global population of sufferers. As rational agents, we are required to recognize that "the principle of impartial consideration of interests…alone remains a rational basis for ethics."[32] There is nothing moral in prizing the needs and feelings of those close to us (in terms of physical proximity, familial relation, race or species) simply because we are hard-wired to do so. The (potential) suffering of all beings should be considered equally, even though some of these beings are far away from us geographically, or are extremely different from us. Although humans have much more complex and far-reaching interests than, say, mice, we should still value the mouse's desire to avoid suffering as much as a human's. When considering the desire to avoid suffering, we must "give equal weight to the interests of the human and the mouse."[33] The *only* rational and moral thing to do is to consider the interests of all sufferers before making any moral decision.

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[30] Singer, 71
[31] Singer, 99
[32] Singer, 109
[33] Singer, 121

Singer offers both an idealistic world and a more pragmatic moral vision. He believes that ideally, all rational beings would consider the interests—especially the interest to avoid suffering—of all sentient beings before making moral decisions, and would base those decisions on what would most alleviate suffering or increase happiness: "there is no magic in the pronoun 'my' which gives greater intrinsic importance to my interests [or those of those who matter to me]…Hence when I ask myself what it would really be best for me to do…the answer must be that I ought to do what is in the interests of all, impartially considered."[34] However, he recognizes that this goal is not realistic—humans are not just rational, but also feeling and reacting animals. Many factors prevent us from acting in the way that Singer desires. Singer admits that "taking seriously the idea of impartial concern for all would be impossibly demanding."[35]

Singer offers, then, a second-best world: one in which we combine our rationality, sympathy and evolutionarily developed instincts to help others. In this scenario, we should strive to act like the people in the first scenario—by considering all interests equally. However, we should not hold others to that same (extremely difficult) expectation. This society, like Mill's, would involve institutions that would encourage us to act altruistically towards others. These institutions could also help us accomplish more than we could have as individuals, however rational and impartial. We should develop our relationships and feelings of sympathy, because those compel us to help those who otherwise would not be able to help themselves, such as children

[34] Singer, 153
[35] Singer, 159

and the elderly. "Fostering family bonds means that children, the sick, and the aged get better care than they would from an impersonal bureaucracy."[36]

Singer's philosophy, unlike Mill's, remains conscious of a more global population, in which we should consider the needs of even those we are ordinarily unconnected with. He is also more vocal about the need to consider even animals' interests than Mill is. We should view ourselves as part of a larger set of (potential) sufferers, and should recognize that morally, we are more alike these sufferers—all of them—than we are different. In today's world, we are connected to people (and other animals) all over the globe, and it is unconscionable that we should ignore their suffering merely because it is easier to turn away from evidence of their suffering than it is to help them in any way. We also should recognize that in a fundamental way, the suffering of others is not somehow less important than our own (or our family's), and so should act in a way that is humane to everyone who does or could suffer.

Major Concerns: Can Mill and Singer Respond to Them?

I now want to explore whether the utilitarianism of Mill and Singer can answer to my two concerns. The first concern is that of non-exclusivity. In the previous section, I argued that Kantian philosophy does not take seriously the concern of non-exclusivity because we do not have to consider the needs of non-rational beings, or if we do, we only have to do so because of our valuing them, not because

[36] Singer, 159

their needs and desires are intrinsically valuable. Utilitarianism does seem to be less exclusive than Kantian philosophy, in that we are morally obligated to take into consideration not just the needs of some finite set of agents, but of the whole sentient world. For utilitarians, we cannot ignore the suffering of non-agents merely because they are not rational. We also cannot ignore suffering because it is far away from us, or because it is inconvenient to address it. Mill and Singer are both concerned with non-exclusivity, and both are able to provide some answer to this concern—that is, they argue that we must attend to the suffering of all sentient beings. However, there is still something exclusive about their philosophies. Both Mill and Singer distinguish between rational and non-rational beings. Singer, especially, believes that rationality is the basis of morality, and therefore of agency. Utilitarianism is non-exclusive in the sense that we cannot exclude any sentient being from consideration when making moral decisions, but it is still exclusive in that it sees only some beings as moral agents. Some beings whose interests we must consider are morally passive, and do not take part in the process of agency.

My second major concern is that of relationality. Utilitarianism can find value in close relationships. Specifically, relationships expand our circle of concern: I am more likely to choose an act that will increase the overall happiness of sentient beings if I am attached to the happiness of others, rather than merely to that of myself. However, these relationships are not intrinsically valuable—they are merely instrumentally so. In fact, for Singer, the ideally moral person would *not* pay more moral attention to those close to her merely because she had a relationship with them. Instead, she would consider every action from a detached perspective in which no one

particular being's happiness (including her own or that of someone close to her) would count more than that of any other being. Close relationships might serve to undermine this ideal, since we might feel committed to dedicating our time, energy and resources to those with whom we have concrete relationships, rather than distributing them based on need. However, Singer recognizes the difficulty of attaining his ideal, and so relationships—on his view—serve the purpose of persuading us to and be altruistic and generous, at least to those close to us, by making us happy when we do so.

For both Mill and Singer, then, relationships can have an instrumental value. As Bernard Williams argues, most goods in utilitarianism are only valuable so far as they "[conduce] to some intrinsically valuable state of affairs"[37]—that of a higher level of happiness, and correspondingly, a lower level of suffering for sentient beings. This state of affairs is intrinsically, inherently valuable, and actions and goods (generally speaking) are only good if they contribute to it. Our relationships, and any other commitments that we have, no matter how deep or important to our lives, will always be of secondary importance compared to the principle of utility. As good utilitarians, we must always be prepared to give up—or ease up on—any commitment or relationship if that is "the decision which utilitarian calculation requires."[38] We can easily become morally alienated from such relationships (and commitments), since those are not intrinsically valuable, and we are always required to examine them in light of our moral ideal. Further, both Mill and Singer do seem to understand

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[37] Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in Bernard Williams and J.J.C. Smart, Utilitarianism: For and Against. (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 83.
[38] Williams, 116

agency and moral action as things possessed or undertaken by individuals, not developed and located in relationships. A conception of moral community founded on this theory, then, would not be able to answer fully to this concern.

Railton's Philosophy: Alienation and Value

Peter Railton is a modern consequentialist who sees value in something other than that state of affairs in which the most sentient beings are made the happiest. Instead, he argues that we can be "objective consequentialists" without measuring the value of each action by how much it directly contributes to the general happiness[39]. Specifically, he argues that we ought to value relationships—and other commitments—for their own sake, rather than for their instrumental contribution to the general happiness.

Railton argues that most forms of utilitarianism lead to alienation from those things that make our lives worth living. In Railton's view, the type of utilitarianism that demands impartiality is one that alienates us from "certain valuable types of relationship."[40] We are unable truly to value our connections and relationships, because those relationships and connections are valuable only so far as they contribute to the utilitarian ideal. Good utilitarians might have to give up those relationships—or might have to perform actions that detract from them—in order to focus on increasing the general happiness. We are not good utilitarians, at least in

[39] Peter Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality," Philosophy and Public Affairs (1984), 153.
[40] Railton, 137

Singer's view, if we allow our personal affections to get in the way of our acting morally. However, as Railton says, some "of the very 'weaknesses' that prevent us from achieving this moral ideal [of perfect abstraction]—strong attachments to persons or projects—seem to be part of a considerably more compelling human ideal."[41] Even if we are engaged in close, affectionate relationships, the utilitarian justification for doing so is instrumental—and so it seems that we cannot truly *care* about others.

Railton therefore believes that we ought to value our relationships, and the characteristics and skills necessary to creating and sustaining those relationships, in themselves—"loving relationships…are among the most important contributor to whatever it is that makes life worthwhile; any moral theory deserving serious consideration must itself give them serious consideration."[42] Railton argues that classical forms of utilitarianism—such as that of Mill or of Singer—cannot do so. However, this failure to account for the importance of relationships in many forms of utilitarianism does not imply that we must be reject consequentialism altogether. Instead, Railton argues for a sophisticated consequentialism, one that supports the "idea that one should have certain traits of character, or commitments to persons or principles, that are sturdy enough that one would at least sometimes refuse to forsake them even when this refusal is known to conflict with making some gain—perhaps small—in total utility."[43]

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[41] Railton, 140
[42] Railton, 139
[43] Railton, 157

However, Railton does not think that we should focus solely on the wants and needs of those closest to us. He does agree with other utilitarians that we should also consider the general happiness, and act to increase it. In fact, "[i]ndividuals who will not or cannot allow questions to arise about what they are doing from a broader perspective are in an important way cut off from their society and the larger world."[44] It is not enough to value either the utilitarian goal of increasing happiness, or merely our own relationships and commitments. We ought to consider both, allowing ourselves to "shuttle back and forth from more personal to less personal standpoints"[45] without negating the importance and value of either standpoint, or of the commitments and actions required by each standpoint. Railton assumes that there is a clear division between "personal" and "less personal" standpoints, and that we can move cleanly from one to another—at one moment considering the interests of those closest to us, and at the next moment taking an objective view that considers the interests of all sentient beings equally.

Unlike Mill and Singer, Railton both makes explicit and argues against the assumption that we are completely independent beings, capable of making moral decisions autonomously. Railton understands that our roles and relationships form an intrinsic part of our identity, and not only will we be alienated from others in disvaluing those things, but we will also be alienated from ourselves. Railton does think that autonomous decision-making is possible, but only if we refuse to "conflate autonomy with sheer independence from others."[46]

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[44] Railton, 151
[45] Railton, 164
[46] Railton, 147

Major Concerns: Can Railton Respond to Them?

I now want to explore whether Railton's consequentialism is better suited to answer to my two concerns than is Mill's or Singer's. My first concern is that of non-exclusivity. Railton's relationship to non-exclusivity seems more complex than that of Mill or Singer. For Railton, it is morally acceptable to focus on the needs and wants of those with whom we are intimately connected, even if we recognize that doing so will lead to a net decrease in the general happiness. However, we ought not to be focused solely on those people at all times. We should aim to increase the general happiness, but we need not do so with every single action or commitment. Railton's consequentialism is non-exclusive, in that we should not exclude any sentient beings from the scope of our morality. His theory is still exclusive in that some beings are excluded from the process of agency, although agents are not conceived as fundamentally autonomous.

My second major concern is that of relationality. Singer and Mill could only account for the importance of relationality instrumentally, and so their versions of utilitarianism were unable to satisfy this concern fully. Railton shares my concern, but sees relationships only as intrinsically valuable *things*. He does not see

relationships as an important part of agency, or as constitutive of morality—he merely allows that they are endpoints of value, just as individuals—or their happiness—are endpoints of value in utilitarian forms of consequentialism. Railton certainly comes closer to satisfying the concern of relationality, but he does not completely answer it.

Railton does come closer than either Mill or Singer in answering to this concern, mostly because of his argument that part of our identity is bound up in our relationships and the roles that those relationships entail. Since we are not ultimately completely independent, all of our actions are necessarily shared, to some extent. However, Railton does not seem interested in showing that agency is relational rather than individual. Railton's consequentialism comes closer to answering my concerns, especially that of relationality, than classical theories of utilitarianism, but none of the consequentialist theorists explored above, whether utilitarian or not, fully answered to either of my concerns.

Chapter 4

Care Ethics: Noddings, Luo, and Kittay

In the previous chapter, I examined the moral theories of Kantianism and consequentialism, with an eye to whether these theories could provide the requisite tools for conceptualizing moral community. I concluded that neither system of ethics provides the tools to conceptualize a fully relational moral community. In this chapter, I plan to explore care theory—specifically that of Nel Noddings (and Shirong Luo)—with respect to my two major concerns (non-exclusivity and relationality) that will help me formulate a robust conception of moral community. I will argue that Noddings and Luo provide helpful insights as to how we ought to conceive relationships as fundamental to the self and agency, but that their theories do not supply the tools necessary to conceptualizing moral community in a non-exclusive way. After examining the theories of Noddings and Luo, I will consider the philosophy of Eva Feder Kittay, who explores relationality in a way that accounts for the complexities of our dependence. I will argue that certain insights of hers can supplement Noddings' understanding of the importance of relationships.

Noddings' Philosophy: Relationships and Care

Nel Noddings sets out a detailed account of care ethics in her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. She takes relationships to be absolutely fundamental to her moral philosophy. She uses the example of the relationship between a mother and a child as the paradigm case of what she calls

"natural caring." Natural caring is the ethical ideal in this theory, the type of relationship that we should strive to engage in and, when that is impossible or unreasonable, replicate. Noddings "locate[s] the very wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response."[47] What is important about these relationships is care—and Noddings distinguishes types of relationships based on whether and what kind of caring occurs within a given relationship.

Caring, for Noddings, is inherently relational. She even argues that "[r]elations, not individuals, are ontologically basic."[48] Noddings explores the caring relation using the terms "one-caring" and "cared-for." The one-caring is the one who provides an active and engaged form of caring to the cared-for, who accepts this caring. In order for genuine caring to take place, caring must be "completed" in the cared-for. Caring is not an ethical action effected by the will of an agent onto a passive non-agent. This form of care theory can be contrasted to that of Michael Slote, whose philosophy is based on care ethics but is agent-focused. As Liezl van Zyl argues, in Slote's "account of rightness acts are *made* right because (and only because) they are done from virtuous motives."[49] Noddings can be distinguished from this sort of care ethics through her focus on the caring relation, rather than on the caring agent's action or motivation.

For Noddings, a caring relation is not the responsibility of the one-caring alone. Rather, it "must be somehow competed in the other if the relation is to be

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[47] Nel Noddings, Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 3
[48] Noddings, xiii
[49] Liezl van Zyl, "Agent-Based Virtue Ethics," Journal of Moral Philosophy 6 (2009): 3

described as caring"[50]. Caring is an attitude that is directed toward a particular cared-for. Although the cared-for is an important part of the process of caring, Noddings does not make an immediate gesture toward the agency or the responsibility of the cared-for. Instead, most of her book focuses on the virtue of caring from the one-caring's point of view, demanding a certain attitude and investment on her part.

Noddings departs considerably from both Kant and Mill in her explanation of the ethical ideal. Though in one sense, Kant and Mill are at opposite ends of the spectrum, in another important way they are actually very similar. Both are committed to an impartial ideal that is abstracted from individuals and concrete circumstances and relationships. Kant focuses on the categorical imperative, which he argues holds us to a certain standard regardless of our circumstances. We must abide by this imperative, even at risk of damaging our relationships or of putting ourselves or others at risk. Mill, at the other end, is a consequentialist. Our motive is not important in assessing a particular action (that is, a motive of duty does not make an action more or less ethical), but the consequences are. The ethical ideal is completely abstracted from any individual or group. Instead, what matters is one's effect on the aggregate happiness (and suffering) of the sentient world. Noddings has no absolute ethical principle that is separate from concrete individuals and their caring relationships. She argues that absolute, abstract principles often get in the way of caring, for when we focus on such principles, we "lose the one cared-for"[51]. Noddings focuses on the ideal of caring, rather than on any absolute principle. She discusses the ideal of natural caring, which is not a specific for action, but rather an

[50] Noddings, 4
[51] Noddings, 36

attitude taken by a one-caring toward a cared-for. This attitude is receptive, responding to the needs of the cared-for rather than some principle or ethical theory that is separate from the concrete situation.

In eschewing the abstract in favor of the concrete, Noddings' theory focuses on actual relationships, rather than on the obligations we have to the broader human or sentient world. Because of this, her philosophy risks complete moral neglect of those to whom we are not intimately and concretely connected. She attempts to resolve this difficulty by creating two distinct, though not rigidly separated, categories of caring. The first is "natural caring." The example that she uses for this is the relationship between a mother and a child. In natural caring, Noddings argues, the one-caring (in this case, the mother) does not have to work at caring. Natural caring is "universally accessible"[52] and responsive. The one-caring reacts fluently to the needs of the cared-for, without abstracting from or analyzing the situation. In that type of situation, the one-caring simultaneously wants to care and is moved to care—nothing (or little) prevents her from going through with the act of caring, at least at the level of motivation. Her love is natural, and so she wants what is best for the cared-for (in this example, the child), and wants the cared-for to flourish. She does not nurture her child because of some principle or abstract ideal, but merely as the expression of her natural caring. In such situations, we "do not begin by formulating or solving a problem but by sharing a feeling"[53]. Noddings argues that this sort of

[52] Noddings, 5
[53] Noddings, 31

caring is not "moral" in any traditional sense, but is the foundation for her theory of morality. Our "inclination toward and interest in morality derives from caring"[54].

In situations where caring does not happen naturally and easily, we instead must involve ourselves in ethical caring. Ethical caring involves a level of reasoning and abstraction that is not present in natural caring. In ethical caring, however, there might be little or no desire to care. For example, the potential one-caring might not know the person in distress; she might dislike the person; or she might have her own problems to worry about and not want to get involved. The potential one-caring, then, should recognize what Noddings refers to as the "I must"[55]. In recognizing this need, she must remember the feeling of natural caring, and choose to act in a caring manner, even if she does not feel the natural sentiment of care (or does not care enough to be motivated to act). Noddings agrees with Kant that what requires no effort—natural caring—cannot be thought of as sufficient for morality, but argues that natural caring is the foundation for ethical caring. Our "caring is the foundation of—and not a mere manifestation of—[our] morality"[56]. Ethical caring cannot exist without natural caring, and so is not superior, even though natural caring is not strictly moral. Although a level of abstraction is required in ethical caring, the one-caring still reacts to the concrete individual and situation, not to an abstract principle.

Noddings does not discuss, in this book, whether or not there is an analog of "ethical caring" in the cared-for. Does the cared-for have to rise to the occasion, helping to complete the caring relation even though he does not spontaneously do so?

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[54] Noddings, 83
[55] Noddings, 81
[56] Noddings, 42

It seems that this sort of "ethical responsiveness" must sometimes be required for a cared-for, so that a relation can be maintained even if this responsiveness is not generated fluently.

For Noddings, ethical caring ought to take place only when we are incapable of natural caring, for any variety of reasons, and we should always aim for natural caring. She distinguishes "caring for" from "caring about," and argues that we ought to maintain and expand our natural caring, rather than focusing on caring about as many people as possible. We are obligated to care for those in our circle of caring—those with whom we have concrete relationships—as well as to be open to caring for those not in our circle. Noddings wants us to be responsive to what she terms "proximate strangers," people who may call out to us for help. "I should reach out as one-caring to the proximate stranger who entreats my help. This is the ideal one-caring creates"[57]. While we must be prepared to care for those people (and must care for them when they are in need), we are not under any obligation to help those with whom we have no relationship until they call out to us directly.

The consequence of this line of thinking is that we are always in a position of being prepared to care, ready to accept those who can cry out in need. However, Noddings downplays what she calls "caring-about" (distinct from "caring-for"), since caring about "always involves a certain benign neglect"[58]. In Noddings' care theory, there are a number of beings to whom we do not have specific obligations. We are not likely, for example, to have special obligations to most animals—other than not abusing or otherwise maltreating them. Non-human animals "can in some sense be

[57] Noddings, 101
[58] Noddings, 112

genuine cared-fors,"[59] but Noddings does not think that we ought to expend too much of our moral energy on them. Our moral energy ought to be focused on those human beings in our circles of caring, though we must recognize that when someone in need calls out to one of our cared-fors, we may become obligated to respond. Noddings argues that when "human beings call out for help, it is obligatory for those in proximity to respond…If they cannot find the material resources to respond adequately, they must address the next circle…The cry for help may be heard directly in my own circle. Then I must respond…"[60]. Our circle of care—those to whom we are morally obligated—is limited, though it always has the capacity for growth and change, and we must be prepared, as ones-caring, to accept those changes with an open heart and a caring attitude.

Luo's Philosophy: Confucianism and Virtue

Shirong Luo's philosophy can serve as a complement and a supplement to Noddings'. Luo's work is focused at the convergence of Confucian philosophy and care ethics. While I am not focusing on Confucian ethics in my thesis, I want to draw out a couple of points that Luo makes that emphasize and add to much of what interests Noddings.

First, Luo draws out an important distinction between care ethics and Confucian ethics that is helpful even though I am not exploring Confucianism. He shows that Noddings is not primarily a virtue ethicist, because virtue ethics, including

[59] Noddings, 149
[60] Noddings, 153

Confucianism, focus mostly on the virtuous agent—and her actions—rather than on relationships. In contrast, Noddings is concerned with the caring relationship, rather than the one-caring as agent. She makes it clear that her theory is not agent-based virtue ethics, because she regards the caring *relationship* as primary in moral evaluation [while] early Confucian ethics seems to be paradigmatically agent-based"[61]. (Not all philosophers agree that Confucianism is primarily an agent-based theory; however, it is clear that it is at least *more* so than Noddings' theory). As shown earlier, not all care theorists are relationship- rather than agent-focused. Luo draws attention to the centrality of relationships in Noddings' work: ethics and virtue are created in and by relationships, though in reality, it is impossible to separate caring relationships from the virtue of care.

One consequence of this line of thinking is that the virtue of care is inherently relational. There is no possibility of an individual agent developing the virtue on her own. In order to become virtuous, we must exercise our virtue, and this "exercise of virtue is always directed toward others"[62]. The development of virtue in virtue ethics—including care ethics—is deeply connected to its exercise. Unlike Kantian ethics, which demands only strict adherence to the categorical imperative, virtue ethics requires practice and experience. That experience is inevitably tied to relations with others, and so our agency—and our virtue—are at least partially reliant on others, not just ourselves. Although neither Noddings nor Luo specifically address

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[61] Shirong Luo, "Relation, Virtue, and Relational Virtue: Three Concepts of Caring," Hypatia 22 (Summer 2007): 99.
[62] Luo, 104

agency, this fact does relate to how agency must be understood, since our own agency only makes sense in the context of interacting with others.

Secondly, Luo not only focuses on important points of Noddings' philosophy, but also supplements it. He shows that while Noddings sees the one cared-for as being an intrinsic part of the caring relation, since "caring is, as a matter of fact, not controlled entirely by the one-caring; it is a mode of shared control,"[63] she does not go into depth about the virtue of the cared-for. As Noddings is not primarily interested in the virtue of care *qua* individual virtue—whether exemplified by the one-caring or the cared-for—it makes sense that she does not focus on the distinction between the caring virtue of the one-caring and the virtue of the cared-for. Luo emphasizes, even more so than Noddings does, the fact that the cared-for contributes to the caring relation based on his abilities. Luo argues that the "sort of virtue one exercises depends on one's power, capacity or resources."[64] He uses the example of a baby who "smile[s] responsively because that is what a baby is capable of"[65] to show how even a non-adult human can express virtue in the context of relationships. Our agency, then, requires not only interacting with others, but also drawing out their agency, as their contribution is a vitally important part of the caring relation.

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[63] Luo, 95
[64] Luo, 105
[65] Luo, 105

Major Concerns: Can Noddings and Luo Respond to Them?

Now, I will look to my two major concerns, and explore whether or not the care ethics of Noddings or Luo can answer to each. My first concern is that of non-exclusivity. Noddings is not concerned directly with non-exclusivity. She believes that we are obligated to help those with whom we are close—with whom we have relationships—but not that we are obligated to help those who remain remote from our circle of caring. One interesting point, however, is that there is no definite boundary beyond which we have no obligation to act in caring ways. Noddings stresses the idea that we can be called upon to assist the "proximate stranger:" the person—or perhaps certain type of animal—who cries out for our help even though we were not previously engaged in any sort of relationship with her. Noddings does seem to be worried about being overly exclusive, as she wants to emphasize that we ought to be prepared to care for any number of people, even if currently are not interacting with them. Noddings is still primarily concerned with our natural caring—which can only take place in concrete relationships. In distinguishing "caring for" from "caring about," Noddings argues that we can only care *for* a limited number of people, and that while we can care *about* a cause or number of causes, that sort of caring is not an ideal of care, since "[o]ne is attentive just so far"[66]. Instead, we ought to focus our moral energy on those closest to us, and are only obligated to resort to other forms of caring when we find that we are not capable of natural caring.

[66] Noddings, 112

Although Noddings' theory is less exclusive than, for example, Kant's, since she does not draw a line beyond which we have no moral duties, her version of care ethics can still not fully answer to this concern.

Noddings does give some suggestion for how to answer to the concern of non-exclusivity in agency. She does not address the issue of agency in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* head-on, but by showing that caring engages many beings who would otherwise not be considered agents, she indicated that our understanding of agency ought not to be overly restrictive. However, Noddings' theory cannot totally satisfy this concern. She does not actually define—or redefine—agency, and her focus on specific sorts of relationships, specifically relationships between human beings, seems to mark a boundary between agents and non-agents.

Luo tackles the issue of non-exclusivity of agency more directly than does Noddings. He specifically addresses the virtue of both the one-caring and the cared-for, showing that agency must be widely distributed. Rather than merely asserting that the virtue in relationships is shared, he argues that caring relations are "constituted by two relational moral virtues—caring and gratitude."[67] In his work on Confucianism, Luo does not discuss agency as such, and does not seem concerned with expanding its definition to include those left out by Noddings' ethical theory. The type of care ethics propounded by Noddings, then, is not fully able to answer to the concern of non-exclusivity.

[67] Luo, 102

My second concern is that of relationality. Noddings uses relationships as the foundation of her ethical theory. These relationships are constitutive of both the individual and the moral. Relationships, for Noddings, are both instrumentally and intrinsically important. Instrumentally, relationships help us achieve the ideal of natural caring. Natural caring is more genuine and spontaneous than ethical caring—or other sorts of ethical activity—and responds to the needs of those for whom we care, rather than from some perhaps mistaken intellectual understanding of what those needs should be. Relationships serve also to help us act ethically, as we are more motivated to invest the time and energy required for helping someone if we already care for that person and are engaged in a relationship with him or her.

Relationships are also intrinsically valuable. Noddings holds up natural caring as an ideal in part because she already thinks that relationships are important. Natural caring and relationships are both deeply important and valuable, and serve to make one another possible. However, Noddings does not merely see relationships as intrinsically valuable things, the way that a consequentialist—such as Peter Railton—might. She sees our relationships as part of who we are, not something that we, as autonomous individuals, choose to engage in and can then disengage from. Although Noddings does not address agency, it is clear that for her, relationships must form a central part of agency, and so must be a location of agency.

In order for the concern of relationality to be completely satisfied, agency must be redefined as a process rather than as an individual characteristic. Noddings does not focus on this particular concern. Her concern with relationships, however, shows that her work does need an implicit definition of agency that does not presume

that agents are completely autonomous. Noddings still focuses on the aspects of caring that relate to the one-caring, rather than the cared-for. Because of this focus, she does not show how agency is a process, rather than a characteristic, or how relationships, rather than individual beings, are the animators of moral action and agency.

Luo focuses not just on the virtue of caring of the one-caring, but also of the cared-for. When he argues that both participants in a relationship can have virtue, he shows that agency is not something that is possessed and expressed by independent individuals. Relationships for Luo are absolutely intrinsic in developing and sustaining agency, because we are capable of acts of agency in the context of relationships, and our agency is enhanced both by being cared for and by caring. Although Luo does not discuss agency in depth, he shows that relationships are important not just for showing agency but for creating it, as relationships are where we are capable of developing the virtue of care—either that of the one-caring or that of the cared-for. Luo does focus more directly on how both the one-caring and the cared-for contribute to the caring relationship. Agency must be shared in this scenario, because the ones-caring are not independently exercising their caring virtue. Instead they are only capable of participating in caring relationships to the extent that the cared-fors exercise their own virtue in accepting or rejecting the one-carings' virtue.

Kittay's Philosophy: Nestled Dependencies

I now want to explore the philosophy of Eva Feder Kittay, because she—like Noddings and Luo—places caring relations at the center of her philosophy, but is interested in such relations from a political standpoint as well as an ethical one. She focuses on caretakers of dependents, specifically dependents who will never become fully independent.

Like Noddings, Kittay wants us to understand that we are dependent at many points in our lives, and will likely have to care for dependents. Kittay sees us as not only engaged in relationships, but also engaged in the world and community as a whole. She argues against moral accounts that assume that "moral claims within relationships are made by individuals who are equals,"[68] especially Kantianism and the political theory of the Kantian John Rawls.

Throughout her book, Noddings uses the trope of a circle in order to show our moral obligations. We are most obligated to those in our innermost circle, and our obligations get fainter as we move outward. Kittay, in contrast, uses "nestled dependencies" to describe our relationships. These dependencies link "those who help and those who require help in order to give aid to those who cannot help themselves."[69] Dependency links all of us, personally and politically. We are not just

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[68] Eva Feder Kittay, Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency (New York: Routledge, 1999): 99.
[69] Eva Feder Kittay, "Human Dependency and Rawlsian Equality," in Diana Meyers, ed., Feminists Rethink the Self (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 233.

ones-caring; we also must be cared-fors in order to engage actively in caring relations.

Kittay recognizes the complexity of caring relationships. She sees that our participation in particular relationships has an effect on our other relationships and on our personal and political needs. We cannot be the center of our own circle; instead, we should recognize that we form a part of a wider array of nestled dependencies. Kittay argues that societies should recognize the importance of the care that dependency workers provide, and should seek "ways to attend to the well-being of the caretaker."[70] As a political theorist, as well as an ethical one, Kittay also discusses the fact that many dependents are unable to represent themselves politically, or make moral demands on the wider society. She emphasizes the importance of the role of the caretaker, stressing that a "dependent can define the terms of political participation *only* to the extent that she can speak on her own behalf, can be heard as an independent voice…and can act on her own behalf…For the rest, she must depend on those responsible for her well-being."[71] The dependent is connected to the larger society and world—and to those whose political decisions deeply influence her life—through those with whom she has caring relationships.

Major Concerns: Can Kittay Respond to Them?

I want to go over, briefly, whether or not Kittay's theory is able to answer fully to my two major concerns for a conception of moral community in a way that

[70] Kittay, 1997: 234
[71] Kittay, 1997: 247

Noddings and Luo cannot. Kittay does seem to answer better to the concern of non-exclusivity than does Noddings, though non-exclusivity is not a fundamental concern of either philosopher. As a political theorist, Kittay is interested in the interconnections between people as well as between the larger society and governmental institutions. Noddings' circles end, creating a boundary beyond which our moral obligations do not extend. Our obligation to care-for extends only to those who are in our circle of care, though proximate strangers may briefly enter this circle when they cry out to us for help. In contrast, Kittay's nestled dependencies seem to extend indefinitely. We are not merely obligated to one another, but dependent on one another as well. Our dependencies extend to institutions, which are engaged in nestled dependencies with other individuals and institutions as well. There is no possible boundary, in this theory, marking the edge of any person or institution's moral obligations. We might have good reasons to focus our moral energies on some beings rather than others, but these reasons cannot include the fact that they are included in our circle of care, and others are simply not. Kittay is focused on human relationships, so it is unclear how her idea of nestled dependencies deals with non-human animals, but it is clear that her theory provides us with insight as to how the concern of non-exclusivity might be adequately answered.

Kittay is not fundamentally concerned with redefining agency to be more non-exclusive. As a political theorist, she is more interested in altering social arrangements and political institutions to better accommodate dependency and care-giving. By suggesting that care-givers can speak on behalf of their dependents, she shows that her primary consideration is not expanding the definition of agency to

those who are non-agents in the traditional sense. However, she does not assume an absolute divide between agents and non-agents. Kittay discusses her daughter, a severely cognitively disabled woman. She writes that "[g]iven the scope and breadth of human possibilities and capabilities, she [the daughter] occupies a limited spectrum, but she inhabits it fully…Sesha's coin and currency is love. That is…what she reciprocates in spades."[72] This possibility for genuine capability and reciprocation, even from a person who is neither rational nor linguistic, shows that agency is not confined to some finite set of beings. In expressing Sesha's capacity as being on some spectrum, Kittay implies that agency might exist, at least in some limited way, even in those who are not rational adult humans. Although she does not actively redefine "agency" so as to make sure that it is as non-exclusive as possible, Kittay suggests a way to adequately satisfy the non-exclusivity concern in showing agents to exist on a spectrum.

My second concern is that of relationality. Like Noddings, Kittay sees relationships as being instrumentally and intrinsically valuable. Caring relationships are required in order for dependents to get their needs fulfilled—it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a person to put in the time and energy necessary to take care of a dependent without any sort of caring relationship between them. Relationships are also constitutive of our lives, and so are inherently valuable as being part of what makes us who we are. Since dependency—both being dependent and caring for dependents—is such an important part of life, relationships create the individual, rather than individuals creating the relationship. However, Kittay—like Noddings—

[72] Kittay, 1999: 151-152.

does not focus on agency, and is not fundamentally concerned with the agency of dependents. To satisfy the concern of relationality, it is not enough to consider relationships important or valuable. Instead, they must be seen as constitutive of agency. Relationships, not individual, must be shown to be the primary locus of agency. Kittay does not address relationships as being fundamental to or constitutive of agency. Her version of care theory is able to address the concern of relationality, but not completely answer it.

Care ethics provides us with a number of insights as to how moral community could be conceptualized. First, it shows how conceptions of moral community ought to involve an understanding of relationships that places them as prior to individuals. In order to provide a robust account of moral community, we must see individuals as interconnected rather than radically independent. Second, it shows how we ought to understand agency as relational, rather than individual. We cannot express and develop our agency, except in the context of relationships. Finally, drawing from Kittay, we see that we are part of a complex web of dependence and relationships, and not only are we unable to see ourselves as primarily autonomous individuals, but we are unable to separate out individual roles and relationships. We are involved in "nestled dependencies," and so cannot draw a clear boundary between those to whom we are morally obligated and those whose interests and needs do not, and ought not to, affect us.

Chapter 5

Redefining Agency: Barad, Haraway, and Meyers

In my previous chapter, I discussed care ethics, focusing on the relationships that form the foundation of such theories. Noddings uses the term "relationship" in a traditional way, one that we all immediately recognize—that is, a relationship is between two individuals, who are the same beings over time, even though the relationship might affect each in a variety of ways, and may even be constitutive of each being. Noddings' theory (and others) does begin to address the relationality condition of my conception of moral community: she does place relationships at the center of her theory, and see them as good in themselves, not just instrumentally. Further, she recognizes that we are not fully autonomous or independent—we are who we are because of our relationships.

However, care theory does not fully satisfy either the non-exclusivity concern or the relationality concern. Noddings does not seek to define "agency" in her theory, and is not fundamentally focused on creating a theory that is as non-exclusive as possible. Her focus is on caring relationships, not on reconceptualizing metaphysical beliefs so that agency is both non-exclusive and deeply intertwined with relationships. In order for the concern of relationality to be fully satisfied, we must define moral agency in a way that shows relationships, rather than individuals, to be locations of agency.

In this chapter, I will show how the non-exclusivity concern can be satisfied using Karen Barad's philosophy. I will argue that: first, we are not ontologically separate from other beings or forms of matter; second, that we enact relationships that

are meaningful and do contribute to moral agency; and third, that our interactions and relationships do not close off the possibility for others' agency, or for our responsibility to those with whom we are not currently interacting. I will also argue that agency is a process, rather than an attribute of certain individuals. I will further argue that agency is the enactment of certain skills that are created and sustained by our environment and our interactions. Relationships are thus necessarily constitutive of agency.

The first part of my chapter will be dedicated to how Karen Barad's philosophy responds to concerns about non-exclusivity agency, by rejecting both metaphysical individualism and representationalism. Representationalism goes hand-in-hand with individualism and boundary making. It requires that we see individual things as distinct, and capable of being simply expressed in words. Representationalism demands that we see language as transparent. The sort of agency allowed for by the combination of individualism, representationalism, and clear boundary-making practices does not admit of degrees or nuance.

Barad does not explicitly give us a clear idea of the ethical consequences of representationalism. Therefore, I will also look to Donna Haraway, who argues that representationalism poses an ethical problem because it subverts the importance of concrete relationships, and reduces nonlinguistic beings to passive acted-upons rather than part of larger configurations of morally significant interactions. So, in this section,, I will ask whether Barad and Haraway provide the tools necessary to developing a philosophically sound conception of moral community.

I will argue that Barad does not give us a clear enough picture of responsibility in her definition of agency. Diana Meyers suggests a conception of agency that relies on "competencies," and is compatible with Barad's theory. I will use some insights from Meyers to support my final conception of moral agency, showing that although she is focused on a different set of concerns than Barad is, some of Meyers' insights can supplement Barad's ideas about agency in order to show how this understanding of agency still allows for individual responsibility.

Barad's and Haraway's Philosophy: Phenomena and Meaning

Barad's theory is deeply complex and eschews much of the language and assumptions that underlie familiar philosophy. She is primarily a physicist, not a philosopher, though she believes that physics and philosophy are inseparable—"ethics and science go hand in hand"[73]. Many of the examples she uses are ones from the world of science, but she argues that any decision a scientist makes is an ethical one, and our interactions with the world are not fundamentally different from the interactions between a scientist and laboratory materials. Barad rejects individualism: instead of individuals, phenomena—particular configurations of matter and concepts—serve as the fundamental building blocks of existence. As independent individuals do not exist apart from their environment and interactions, the theory of representationalism is misguided. Agency is a pattern possible only in the context of the creation (and recreation) of phenomena, not a particular attribute or set of

[73] Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 395.

attributes. The fact that agency is spread out over existence expands our personal responsibility.

One of Barad's most important arguments is that phenomena form the fabric of existence, rather than individuals. Phenomena cannot be individuated—they cannot be separated into units, but are constantly shifting configurations of discourse and matter. Barad contends that interactions (or, as she calls them, "intra-actions") precede individuals. Barad uses the term "intra-actions" to emphasize that there are not preexisting autonomous individuals that interact with one another, but there is some activity of sub-phenomena within any given phenomenon. I will continue to use the word "interaction" but want to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that this word is being used carefully and refers to intra-actions within phenomena. Phenomena are not entities that are ontologically separate from other entities or phenomena. Instead, the recognition of a phenomenon is the recognition of a specific configuration—parts of the world are included, and parts are excluded, but the phenomena that we recognize are constantly changing. What is excluded in one phenomenon might be included in another, overlapping phenomenon. Phenomena create what matters. For example, the life of an organism (including a human) is a phenomenon because the organism determines, in its interactions with the world, what matters and what does not. The fact that the life of an organism is a phenomenon rather than a fact independent of context implies that an organism is not inherently separate from others, and an organism does not inherently have a single identity through time: as Barad puts it, "'identities' are mutually constituted and (re)configured through one another in dynamic intra-relationship with the iterative

(re)configuring of relations of power"[74]. Meaning is created through the enactment of these phenomena, not because any individual creates or recognizes meaning on her own. On this account, agency is involved in the process of reconfiguring phenomena in order to create meaning; agency is "not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world"[75].

Part of this chapter must be dedicated to exploring metaphysical questions. Part of my reason for doing so is the fact that the ethical implications of Barad's philosophy cannot be explored except in the context of her metaphysics. Her definition of agency is deeply intertwined with her metaphysics, and I cannot fully explore her conception of agency without first explicating some of her metaphysical ideas. Comprehending this sort of metaphysics proves essential to fulfilling the two major concerns that must be satisfied in creating a robust conception of moral community: non-exclusivity and relationality. This foray into metaphysics—though it may not seem directly related to the ethical concerns of my thesis—is necessary, and the implications of this philosophy are deeply ethical.

Along with metaphysical individualism, Barad also rejects representationalism. Representationalism, and the rejection thereof, is both a metaphysical and a linguistic issue. Those who espouse representationalism assert that language is a transparent medium—and that we can pick out and understand the world's population of individual objects using language. As Barad rejects individualism, she also rejects representationalism, since representationalism suggests that individual words (or ideas) correspond neatly to individuals in the world.

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[74] Barad, 241
[75] Barad, 141

Without a concept of metaphysically independent individuals, there can be no easy correspondence between words and individual parts of the world. However, her rejection is more profound than this explanation implies. Barad rejects not only the notion that we can comprehend and refer to individual objects with language, but also the notion that language is transparent. Representationalists see language as essential to understanding the world. Because humans are unique in our ability to create, use, and understand complex languages, representationalism assumes human exceptionalism. She argues that "[r]epresentationalism, metaphysical individualism, and humanism work hand in hand,"[76] and so her rejection of individualism and representationalism imply rejection of any sort of human exceptionalism—including ascribing language any special status. Barad argues that the discursive "is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enabled what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements"[77]. Barad is rejecting not just representationalism, but human exceptionalism as well.

A more directly ethical argument against representationalism is offered by Donna Haraway. She rejects the sort of representationalism in which one (human) being purports to speak for a non-linguistic being. She argues that in this sort of representationalism, we ask that the representers display a sort of objectivity that means that they must necessarily be separate from that which they represent. In such cases, the "represented is reduced to the permanent status of the recipient of action, never to be a co-actor in an articulated practice among unlike, but joined, social

[76] Barad, 134.
[77] Barad, 146.

partners"[78]. For Haraway, we are deeply interconnected, and there is no way to separate one non-linguistic being from its surroundings and from those with whom it interacts. We should recognize the importance of concrete relationships, for both linguistic and non-linguistic beings. Rather than seeing non-linguistic beings as passive and in need of representation, we should recognize their active participation in relationships. We should understand their moral importance within concrete, specific interactions, and allow those relationships to shape our understanding of those beings and how we should see and treat them, rather than conceiving them as relying on an outside observer.

In addition to undermining traditional ideas of language and representation, Barad also must create a completely different conception of moral agency than the classical sense we are familiar with. Traditionally, our conceptions of moral agency have focused on the individual and the rational. Many modern philosophers, especially Kantians, argue or assume that agency is coextensive with both rationality and accountability. Agents are sharply distinguished from passive non-agents, and are capable of impacting the world in a moral way after conscientious deliberation. We can admit that we cannot know for certain whether another being is an agent—or whether another's agency is perfect or imperfect. However, the *concept* of agency, traditionally, is pure—and so we cannot conceptualize imperfect agents. When we think of someone as an agent, we foreground her rationality against her status as a natural being. Kant would argue that we cannot focus on both aspects at once, though we can go back and forth between viewing her primarily as an agent and viewing her

[78] Donna Harway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," Cybersexualities (Edinburgh University Press: 1999), 335.

primarily as a natural being. The different between an agent and a non-agent (which is analogous to the difference between a member and a non-member of a moral community) is conceptually absolute.

This definition of agency makes no sense in Barad's philosophy for two main reasons. First, she disagrees with the claim that there are ontologically separable individuals. Any individualistic notion of agency must be rejected in her philosophy. Second, Barad attributes no privilege to mind, language or rationality. The traditional, Kantian view of agency rests on the assumption that our rational faculty is in some way metaphysically distinct from our other faculties. Even utilitarian philosophy—which focuses on all sentient beings—seems to use this divide between the rational agent, who ought to consider the happiness of the whole sentient world of which she is a part, from the non-rational patient. For Barad, the mind is material and is not unique to humans. Therefore, her view of agency must radically depart from our traditional conception thereof, and from the dichotomous view of agency as a marker that sharply distinguishes the set of rational beings from the set of beings who are merely passive.

Barad's conception of agency depends upon her notion of phenomena. Agency is the process of drawing boundaries that make one part of the world intelligible to another. This "intelligibility is a matter of differential responsiveness, as performatively articulated and accountable, to what matters"[79]. As no individual (or group of individuals) is solely responsible for these boundary-drawing practices, it makes no sense to attribute agency (or an act of agency) to any individual. Barad

[79] Barad, 335.

thinks that even matter is agentially enacted—though this does not mean that "agency should be granted to nonhumans as well as humans, or that agency can simply be distributed willy-nilly over nonhuman and human forms"[80]. Agency is widely distributed, but it does not belong to—and so cannot reasonably be granted to—particular individuals both human and nonhuman.

One side effect of redefining agency, and undermining our traditional notion of the individual, is that we must find a new way of understanding accountability. Barad does claim that the "acknowledgment of 'nonhuman agency' does not lessen human accountability; on the contrary, it means that accountability requires that much more attentiveness to existing power asymmetries"[81]. Yet, how can she support this assertion?

Her solution is complex, because our responsibility does not entail being autonomous self-originators of action. Instead, responsibility attends phenomena because the cuts enacted matter—what is excluded from phenomena is deeply important. Any time we engage in the process of reconfiguring phenomena, we are "enacting cuts." Through these cuts, we help to determine what matters by excluding some parts of the world from a given phenomenon. Even though we are not individually accountable for the cuts enacted, and we are part of many phenomena that we might have chosen to enact differently, we are still responsible for determining what matters, and for enacting cuts that emphasize and influence those determinations. On Barad's account, ethics is "about mattering, about taking account

[80] Barad, 235.
[81] Barad, 219.

of the entangled materializations of which we are a part"[82]. For example, those who live in patriarchal societies do not choose to be born there, and might not consciously choose to enact sexism. However, they must be conscious that sexism (which is both material and discursive) contributes to the enacting of phenomena. They are responsible, then, not merely for fighting against sexism, but also for recognizing that sexism is part of the phenomena that they help to enact. Sexism is not just conceptual, but also material—its materiality forces us to be responsible for it, even when we do choose to participate in sexist phenomena.

Major Concerns: Can Barad and Haraway Respond to Them?

In this section, I want to explore Barad's philosophy—supplemented by Haraway—with respect to the two major concerns that I introduced in the first chapter of my thesis—that of non-exclusivity and that of relationality. My first concern is that of non-exclusivity. Barad does provide insight into how we can answer to this concern. In order for a theory to be exclusive, it must say or assume that there are real, morally important separations and distinctions between some beings and others. In arguing that there is no ontological distinction between one individual and another—that there is not even a real separation between the physical and the conceptual—Barad shows that there is no single community of agents, or of beings of any sort, that excludes all other beings. Her idea of constantly shifting and variegated phenomena expands on this claim, since phenomena are always exclusive

[82] Barad 384.

of something, but are interrelated with other phenomena. Although we always enact exclusions, what is excluded changes—and ought to change—and so nothing is ever completely and permanently excluded from the bounds of her ethical theory.

Barad's conception of agency is also non-exclusive, in that it is not granted to some limited group of beings and withheld from others. Agency, in her account, is not a characteristic of individuals, and so it cannot be assigned to some beings but completely withheld from others. The agency involved in the creation and reconfiguration of phenomena is complex and widespread. In refusing to omit any particular beings or concepts from the process of agency, Barad is able to answer fully to the concern of non-exclusivity, both in the interests that are seen as mattering and in her distribution of agency.

The second concern is that of relationality. A robust conception of moral community will place relationships at the center of its theory. Such relationships will be inherently morally meaningful, not just instrumentally so—though they will play instrumental roles as well. In my last chapter, I wrote that Noddings is a care theorist whose relational philosophy provides the tools necessary to construct a conception for a moral community that fulfills this relational aspect. Noddings, though she believes that relationships precede individuals, uses a fairly traditional notion of relationality in her care ethics. Care ethics is akin to virtue ethics, but focuses almost exclusively on the virtue of care—especially the virtue that the "one-caring" has in relation to the cared-for.

Barad, in contrast, challenges the familiar notion of relationality. Rather than focus on relationships between human beings—some of whom are abler, in various

ways, than others—she wants us to see relationships where we would traditionally not see them. Her relationality is inclusive, rather than exclusive: individuals are not ontologically separable, and relationality extends to all material and to all discourse. Relationships are agentially enacted phenomena, though it is not the case that the members of the relationship have the only or final say in the enactment of the cuts that draw the boundaries of the phenomena.

Phenomena are "(re)configurings"[83] of the world in which one part of the world is made intelligible to another. Relationships are a type of phenomena that involve specific boundary-drawing practices and exclusions. They do not include merely what we see as active participants, but also what we normally count as conceptual, since Barad believes that the conceptual and the physical "form a nondualistic whole"[84]. Matter and concepts are involved in enacting phenomena, including relationships. These relationships require inclusions and exclusions—a focus on any particular relationship necessarily excludes others from that phenomena (though they may be included in other, overlapping phenomena).

At first glance, the type of relationality that Barad espouses seems to be at odds with—perhaps even incompatible with—Noddings' theory. Although Barad does not interpret relationality in a traditional sense, she would not dismiss the importance of the sort of relationships that Noddings endorses. The phenomena covered by traditional accounts of relationship are still important to Barad's theory. For Barad, phenomena create and constitute meaning and mattering. The exclusions marked by boundary-drawing practices are deeply meaningful, and demand our moral

[83] Barad, 139.
[84] Barad, 120.

attention. It is not the case that Barad would reject the understanding of relationality that is crucial to Noddings' account. Rather, Barad would say that this sort of relationality is extremely important in helping us to determine what matters, and what we ought to attend to, but it is not the extent of our moral responsibility. The traditional notion of relationships is merely one kind of phenomenon—though a very important one—in Barad's theory. The sustained relationships that Noddings focuses on are also fundamental to Barad's philosophy—and placing importance on such relations is itself an act of agency. These relationships are deeply meaningful, and when we (help to) enact the boundaries that define them, we become morally obligated to them. Noddings should, in fact, already be committed to many of Barad's claims, as she wants to say that our agency is inseparable from one another—I am an agent insofar as I recognize (the potential for) another's agency, and seek to help expand or sustain that agency. Though Noddings does not primarily use the language of "agency," she argues that the "cared-for is essential to the relation. What the cared-for contributes to the relation is a responsiveness that completes the caring"[85]. Clearly, the one-caring's agency is directly related to her relationship with the cared-for. However, Noddings' focus is narrower than Barad's, as she is interested primarily in those relationships that revolve around care and occur between two human beings (or perhaps a human being and certain animals).

I want to emphasize that in Barad's philosophy, there is no place where our relationships stop being morally meaningful, nor are there beings (or concepts) we can confidently exclude from the phenomena of which we are a part. We may choose

[85] Noddings, 181.

to focus our moral energies more on those relationships in which all parties seem to be self-consciously accountable, but we must take responsibility for those exclusions that we help to enact. When we help to enact phenomena that exclude certain concepts or beings, we must take responsibility for those exclusions, and recognize that we may be constituted by a variety of phenomena that we may not even recognize ourselves as being a part of, and thus responsible to a wider range of beings than we previously realized.

In order for a conception of moral community to satisfy the concern of relationality, it must redefine agency in a way that shows how relationships, not static individuals, exercise agency. Both Haraway and Barad show how important it is that agency not be ascribed to individuals, and Barad defines agency in a way that gives relationships their full due as participants in the process of agency. In her argument against representation, Haraway pinpoints the problem with the agent/non-agent dichotomy. Those who believe in such a dichotomy believe that non-linguistic beings cannot morally participate in relationships or other morally important phenomena. There is a grave danger here that purportedly objective observers will insist that they "know best" for some non-linguistic being, allowing them to make decisions on that being's behalf. This insistence on "objectivity" requires a separation from the represented beings, thus dismissing the importance of close relationships in developing and expressing needs and desires. Haraway's rejection of representationalism goes hand-in-hand with relationality, as she believes that relationships and what matters morally are interconnected and that there cannot be representation of an individual from a detached state. Representation appears simple,

but "articulation is not a simple matter. Language is the effect of articulation, and so are bodies"[86]. This articulation takes place through relationships, not as the purposeful expression of autonomous individuals.

Barad is more specific in her conception of agency. Phenomena are agentially enacted, and their boundaries (and exclusions) are defined agentially. Agency is a doing, not by any specific pre-existing individual, but a doing that enacts certain boundaries that exclude some part of the world from another. We should recognize that attributing agency (or excluding it) is itself an agential act. Agency is a nuanced phenomenon. We do not make someone an agent merely by declaring that she is one. One the other hand, agency is not a characteristic that exists in individuals regardless of whether we recognize it and how we interact with those individuals. Our attributions of agency—and our withholding thereof—have moral consequences.

As a physicist more than a theorist of ethics, Barad does not discuss, in her writing on metaphysics, these particular attributions. Although Barad is concerned with issues of responsibility, her work on ontology is not fundamentally focused on these issues. Her definition of agency still leaves open certain questions of responsibility and what it would mean to attribute agency to beings (even understanding that individuals are not autonomous agents).

Taking and attributing responsibility is a complex phenomenon. Barad believes that we are responsible for the range of phenomena in which we are involved, though not in a straightforward, individualistic way. So what exactly are we doing when we take (or attribute) responsibility? Surely Barad would not agree

[86] Haraway, 351

that by doing so we are implying that (for example) we had full control of our actions in a particular situation, and so are accountable for those actions, and perhaps their outcomes. This is more or less our traditional view of responsibility—that an individual chooses to act a certain way, and so is accountable to others, and ought to be able to give reasons for her actions. Without ontologically separable individuals, and without a privileged, nonmaterial entity called "mind," this notion of responsibility ceases to find traction. What does Barad mean when she insists that our responsibility is expanded, rather than decreased, by her philosophical views? For an adequate account of responsibility, we must look beyond Barad's work.

Meyers: Competence and Responsibility

Diana Meyers' insights into agency can help answer the questions about responsibility that Barad leaves off in her theory. Meyers raises her questions in the course of examining the nature of agency for women in patriarchal societies. She explores the ways in which women who are extremely oppressed are still able to possess some degree of agency, saying that "it is undeniable that women exercise some agentic skills despite this hostile [patriarchic] environment"[87]. Her conception of agency is different from both the traditional, rationalist conception and that of Barad. This conception focuses on what she calls "competencies," and (human) beings are agents so far as they possess one or more of these competencies in some degree. The competencies that she lists are: introspection skills; communication

[87] Diana Meyers, Gender in the Mirror (Oxford: University Press, 2002) 5.

skills; memory skills; imagination skills; analytical skills and reasoning skills; self-nurturing skills; volitional skills; interpersonal skills[88].

How Meyers and Barad Can Respond to the Relationality Concern

Meyers' competencies-based conception of agency suggests a way to define agency so that the relationality concern can be fully answered while providing us with an explanation for when and how to attribute agency. This definition of agency is necessary because Barad's conception of phenomena distributes agency so far that the question of who we should hold accountable, and how, becomes difficult to answer.

Meyers' competencies are complex, in part because they are heavily context-dependent. For example, the requirements for communication are extensive. A society (or an internalized sense of oppression) may prevent someone from communicating her desires. However, the problem goes deeper: the woman may be prevented from forming and acknowledging certain desires by these same forces of oppression—and so even if she is linguistic, will not completely possess the communication competency, as she will not be able to communicate those repressed or unacknowledged desires. Although Meyers' claims inherently individualistic—individuals possess skills in certain degrees, and are agents to that degree—her philosophy is actually deeply relational. Whether and how our competencies develop and are exercised is dependent on our relationships and our social situation. Meyers uses the phrase "intersecting identities" to describe how we are pulled different ways

[88] Meyers, 20.

by the different groups we belong to. She writes that to "define oneself intersectionally, one must activate competencies that mesh intellect and feeling in order to seek out and assimilate nonstandard interpretive frameworks"[89]. Inherent in this view is the idea that we do not have a single, autonomous self that is separate from our surroundings. Also inherent in this theory is the fact that there are no perfect agents—there is no sense in which one can reason individually, without being affected by our relationships and the different aspects of our identity, about which actions to perform and then deliberately going about and doing so. Our surroundings affect our competencies in any number of ways, and so these competencies increase and decrease throughout time and place, shifting along with those who surround us and those who affect us.

Meyers' theory gives us a clearer picture of responsibility than does Barad's. Certain competencies, in a strong enough degree, correspond to responsibility. For example, someone with a strong ability to reflect on her actions, and to reason about those actions before performing them, can consistently be held, by those with reflective competencies, responsible (and accountable) in a way that is senseless for beings unable to self-reflect. Beings capable of analysis and reason seem to be good candidates for accountability, especially those who possess, to a strong degree, interpersonal competencies that allow them to understand how their actions affect others.

At first glance, it seems that Meyers' theory of competencies-based agency is incompatible with Barad's theory, which does not recognize the existence of

[89] Meyers,167.

autonomous individuals (or agents) and does not privilege the human mind. However, a more nuanced reading of Meyers' work allows us to say that these competencies are not absolute. It is not the case that some individuals have these competencies (to varying degrees), while some do not. Rather, we should recognize, in Barad's terminology, that recognizing these competencies in others is itself an act that involves moral agency. This is not to say that these competencies do not exist, or are unimportant. Rather, recognition of these competencies is an important phenomenon, not as inherent properties of autonomous individuals, but as parts of larger phenomena (including the phenomenon that encompasses a human life).

Recognition of these competencies—and the agential powers that they entail—expands our responsibility. When we choose to recognize these competencies, and their importance in agency and responsibility, we become responsible for helping create the conditions—whether through interaction with others or through social change—that foster these competencies. Our recognition that attributing (and taking) responsibility is a phenomenon does not lessen the impact of such attributions. The way that phenomena are enacted matters—the exclusions and inclusions in any particular phenomenon have real ethical consequences, and even those phenomena that we do not recognize have consequences. When we recognize competencies in another being (or the potential for such competencies), we are involved in an act of agency—as is the being whose agency we are concerned with—and as such, we are responsible for that phenomenon. For example, a parent who holds her child accountable for an act of cruelty towards another child must take responsibility for the decision to treat her child as responsible. The parent views her

child as an agent—though perhaps not a fully developed one—and this view is itself an act of agency involving the parent, both children, the parent's understanding of what agency is, the environment in which the child has grown up, and a large number of factors, material and conceptual, social and environmental, that affect the ability of the parent to recognize the child's agency.

Barad's non-individualistic philosophy, then, does allow us to say something very specific about responsibility: that we are responsible for our own attributions of agency, and in recognizing the (potential) agency of others (with the understanding that "others" here does not refer to objectively, ontologically separate individuals), we are partially responsible for *their* agency. Further, the agential act of attributing agency would be impossible without the interactions in which we make such attributions—and so our own agency is impossible without the agency of others.

This definition of agency is necessary in order to fulfill the second condition of adequacy for a philosophically sound conception of moral community: that of relationality. This sort of relationality extends well beyond our traditional notion of relationships. There is no material or discursive practice that does not play some role in shaping the phenomena that guide how we see our world, and how we interact within it. Our responsibility comes from our role in enacting phenomena, and taking responsibility for the exclusions from those phenomena—though this responsibility is not ours alone, we recognize ourselves as agents (using Meyers' list of competencies, and seeing that we possess some because of our environment and interactions), and so hold ourselves responsible as such.

This chapter has shown how a more nuanced definition of agency is necessary to satisfy both major concerns. An expansive definition of agency contributes to the fulfillment of the "non-exclusivity" concern because such a definition breaks the dichotomy between deliberative, autonomous agents and passive non-agents. A competencies-based definition of agency allows us to recognize that there are no perfect agents—no individuals who are capable of impacting the world without being morally affected by it. Barad's non-individualistic framework breaks this dichotomy even further, showing that attributing agency is itself an exercise of agency—one that is not the sole responsibility of a particular individual. We are agents only so far as we interact with others within constantly shifting phenomena, and so it makes no sense to withhold any attribution of agency when only in the context of these interactions is agency even possible.

Phenomena separate one part of the world from another, but these separations are constantly changing, and we are responsible for recognizing the exclusionary consequences of such separations. We are always involved in a variety of overlapping phenomena, some of which we may not even recognize ourselves as participating in, and even that which seems completely distinct from us may someday become inextricable from us in the context of larger phenomenal patterns. When we recognize that agency is involved in interactions, which form the bedrock of phenomena, then we realize that we can never exclude anything neatly from our moral community. At any moment, we might recognize (some of) the phenomena that we are involved in, and focus our moral energies on the particular consequences of those phenomena. However, we are responsible for the implications of those

exclusions that we enact, and for helping to enact new phenomena that might entail ethical consequences for beings or concepts that had previously seemed distinct from us.

This definition of agency also answers to my worry about relationality. Phenomena—configurations of the world that create what matters—constitute our existence. These phenomena always involve agency, expanding our understanding of both relationships and of agency. Only this extensive definition can answer full to the concern of relationality.

A robust conception of moral community requires the understanding of phenomena that Barad provides, as well as the competencies-based comprehension of agency that Meyers gives us. This conception may take special note of the relationships that Noddings is interested in, which focus on care, but will recognize that this traditional understanding of relationality does not comprise the extent of our moral responsibility or moral agency.

Conclusion

My thesis has focused on the question of how moral community ought to be conceptualized, and what the ethical consequences are of this sort of conceptualization. I began with two concerns, arguing that any robust conception of moral community must be able to answer adequately to the concerns of non-exclusivity and relationality. Throughout my thesis, I have shown that most of our ethical theories are not able to satisfy these concerns fully. Kantianism is unable to account for the centrality of relationships in our moral lives, although Shoemaker, who develops his philosophy within a Kantian framework, shows how important relationships are in our moral development. Shoemaker also argues that relationships are the occasions for agency, and essential to its development and expression. Kant's theory is exclusive in the range of interests it would have us consider and in its definition of agency. Utilitarianism is less exclusive in the interests that it would encourage us to think about when making moral decision, but it still allows our conception of agency to be attached exclusively to self-conscious individuals. Care ethics provides a detailed and complex account of relationships, but does not place primary focus on non-exclusivity, either in scope or in the definition of agency. Further, although care ethics does place primary emphasis on relationships, it does not show how agency is itself manifest in relationships, rather than as something that has occasion for expression and development in relationships.

In chapter 5, I discussed Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and Diana Meyers. I showed the importance of undermining some of our most deeply held metaphysical beliefs in answering to my two major concerns for any account of moral community.

I concluded that we cannot mark any definite line beyond which our moral obligations do not extend, just as we cannot mark the exact place where an individual ends and the rest of the world begins. Instead, we must see ourselves as both participating in and helping to create various phenomena, which on each occasion exclude some beings and concepts, but which are constantly being reconfigured.

What the final chapter brought out is that a robust conception of moral community is not static. There is no single moral community that includes some discrete number of beings and concepts, and excludes all others. There are not discrete beings and concepts at all. A single conceptualization of moral community is impossible, because any attempt at determining boundaries is bound to leave out something integral. Instead, our moral community is one that we help to create: its conceptualization goes hand in hand with its formation. The problem with certain conceptions is that they tend to limit our actual relationships, and our moral world.

We are constantly forming and reforming the boundaries of the moral community. We do not do so autonomously, and we do not have complete control over the phenomena in which we participate. As parts of the phenomena that we form, we are responsible—though not solely responsible—for the inclusions and exclusions that we enact. As the phenomena are reconfigured, so are we, and so are our responsibilities. We must be cognizant of the shifting boundaries and exclusions that we draw, and recognize when those boundaries and exclusions ought to change. The conception of moral community with which I conclude my thesis is an emerging one, not one that captures perfectly something that already exists. We have an obligation to create this community, both in theory and in practice.

Our part in both forming and conceptualizing moral community has a number of consequences, ethical and otherwise. One of the biggest consequences is that while the patterns of inclusions and exclusions that shape our understandings of moral community are not solely our responsibility, we must hold ourselves more widely accountable than we otherwise would.

Ontologically, we are not absolutely separate from other beings. However, there are very good reasons to see ourselves as independent beings who are the same throughout time, but we must recognize that our seeing ourselves as independent individuals is a particular phenomenon that we ought to take responsibility for. We must hold ourselves responsible for what is being excluded when we enact this phenomenon, and be aware that nothing licenses a categorical or permanent exclusion. There may also be good reasons, at any particular moment, to expand the scope of our attention—and so to be attentive to whether we ought to reconsider what (and who) we are excluding at any given time.

We also ought to recognize that just as there is no absolute separation between individuals, there is no absolute separation between what we tend to regard as "mental," such as concepts, and what we regard as "physical," such as objects and individuals. Problems such as racism and sexism are conceptual and physical, and we must take some responsibility for these problems and recognize how profoundly they are both the product and the cause of moral limitations. To some extent, we are *all* responsible for the phenomena in which we play a part, even if there is no element for which we are individually responsible.

This conception of moral community does not demand that we never exclude any beings or concepts from our moral relations. Instead, we are constantly creating and altering relations, so that a being or concept that appears to be completely distinct from us at one moment might end up being part of a phenomenon of which we are also a part in the future.

One important thing to note is that all of our communication, development, and decisions take place in phenomena. This does not imply that we should not be held accountable for our actions or our words. It does imply that we must recognize the importance of relationships, education, social mores, laws, media, and other concepts and phenomena in contributing to the way that we develop and communicate. Our moral development is deeply influenced by our surroundings, since we are not absolutely autonomous and independent individuals. Taking seriously the importance of these various influences on our development requires changes in a number of social, political, and institutional systems.

For example, if we recognize this conception of moral community, we would see how educational and ethical development cannot be separated, and so we should both value teachers more, and set up the sort of system that allows for the development of lasting relationships between teachers and students, instead of focusing on standardized testing. Crimes would serve as an impetus to enact reform on a number of levels, though this understanding would not undermine our holding criminals accountable for their actions.

This account of moral community does leave a major question to be answered. Shoemaker and others who participate in the post-Strawson dialogue view moral

community as focusing on norms of moral address among reason-givers or potential reason-givers. What is the analog of this focus in my conceptualization? I have shown the importance of relationships and interdependence. However, I have not been able to give a single set of norms that serve to show how the various phenomena of our moral community are connected to one another, and why they all belong in a single conception of moral community. I do not have the space to explore or answer this question, but I recognize that in conceptualizing moral community, I am opening up a new set of complex concerns.

My thesis has shown that conceptualizing moral community is not about determining boundaries or figuring out the right permanent exclusions. Instead, it is about recognizing ourselves as participants in a messy world, one that is not clear-cut or stagnant. When we embrace the vibrancy and interconnection that constitute our lives, we must also embrace responsibility for creating the phenomena that make them possible, and refuse to enact exclusions that allow us to deny, permanently, our responsibility to anyone or anything.

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