CARING ABOUT STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE:

A CRITIQUE OF IRIS MARION YOUNG AND A CARE ETHICS INTERVENTION

By

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Anushri Rastogi**, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis titled "Caring about Structural Injustice: A Critique of Iris Marion Young and a Care Ethics Intervention" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.

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Chandigarh, 30 May 2025 Anushri Rastogi

ABSTRACT

This thesis critiques Iris Marion Young's social connection model of responsibility towards dismantling structural injustice, arguing that her separation of political from moral responsibility is principally mistaken and often practically insufficient. Through the example of Jai and Aju—two fictional individuals differently situated within a sweatshop system—it demonstrates that political responsibilities, as Young conceives them, may still lead to moral scrutiny and even blame. The thesis proposes care ethics as a more grounded alternative, drawing on thinkers like Joan Tronto, Eva Kittay and Stephanie Collins to reframe responsibility as relational, embodied, and context-sensitive care. Unlike Young's model, which risks vagueness and detachment, care ethics centres responsiveness, interdependence, and emotional engagement. It shows how political responsibility can be morally substantive, without reducing it to guilt or legalistic blame. Ultimately, this work suggests that a care-based model can better motivate action and ethical transformation in the face of structural injustice.

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I am also grateful to have come across bell hooks—she taught me that it is possible to talk seriously about politics while also talking about love and care.

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Introduction

This work is written during a time of mass disillusionment with the west—at a time when the world orders of moral authority are revealing their colonial roots, universities are disappointing their students, and people are waking up to the reality that any hope of salvation must start with looking within and understanding what we must do to make things better. The imperial world order is alive and thriving. And my country, India, continues to descend into creating a surrogated[1] beast of its own—a Hindu nationalist state. It is more important than ever to engage in activities of philosophizing or in radical activities of thought.

While this thesis does not deal with these topics directly, it aims to highlight and clarify a central point of several political/personal arguments, disagreements—what is it that we owe to each other in the context of grave structural/systemic[2] injustices? This reckoning, in this dissertation, comes with debates about what constitutes moral and political responsibilities (and which are the collective imperatives we must contribute to?).

This text engages with a particular notion of political responsibilities which are argued for by Iris Marion Young. These responsibilities exist for structural injustices, on all participants of unjust systems, and arise from the 'social connection model.' In the opening chapter of *Responsibility for Justice*, Iris Marion Young lays the conceptual groundwork for a

[1] Alok Rai in *Hindi Nationalism* talks about how the Hindiwallahs (the proponents of a sankritized standardized Hindi as the national language) are the surrogates of a British colonial legacy of standardizing language at the cost of authenticity and diversity for colonial ends. While the British wanted to turn Indians into "brown Englishmen" the Hindiwallahs want to turn all Indians into some type of homogenized script of Hindu Nationalists.

[2] Note that the terms systemic and structural while often substituted for each other, are distinct in that former implies a more coherent unity than the latter. So, when the causalities circle around specific entities or their linearity or correlations can be established more closely, the harms caused therein are more systemic than structural. I use both terms in the text based on my assessments of the context based on this differentiation. Readers are welcome to use whichever term they think more appropriate.

shift from conventional moral discourses of blame to a structural, political account of responsibility. She begins by diagnosing a shift in the public discourse surrounding poverty and welfare: whereas mid-20th century frameworks understood poverty as a systemic failure implicating collective institutions, more recent neoliberal accounts cast poverty as being a consequence of individual moral deficiency. She points out three normative assumptions underlying this individualizing discourse—namely, that personal responsibility and structural causation are mutually exclusive, that background conditions are just, and that the moral scrutiny of responsibility should fall only on the disadvantaged.

Young challenges these assumptions on both empirical and philosophical grounds. She argues that structural injustice arises not from individual wrongdoing but from normalized institutional processes in which many participate without overt malice. Rather than exonerating individual agency, this view reorients moral and political responsibility toward collective participation in social structures that systematically disadvantage some while benefiting others. Rejecting the "liability model" of responsibility (which is backward-looking and rooted in fault), she gestures toward a "social connection model" that emphasizes forward-looking obligations to address injustice.

Crucially, Young distinguishes sharply between moral and political responsibility, arguing that the former is rooted in personal guilt and interpersonal relations, whereas the latter arises from collective participation in institutional structures. Her goal is to provide a framework for responsibility that does not rely on fault or blame, but still holds agents accountable for structural injustice in which they are implicated. This distinction undergirds her broader effort to reconceive how responsibility operates in complex societies marked by interdependence and non-obvious causal chains.

In the first chapter of this work, I examine Iris Marion Young's social connection model of responsibility towards structural injustice, with a focus on her distinction between moral and political responsibilities. Young argues that responsibilities that arise from one's indirect causal contribution to unjust structures are political in nature and thus do not engender moral culpability or liability. In doing so, her model aims to shift attention away from individual blame to collective political action.

I argue that her sharp separation between political and moral responsibility is ultimately untenable. For the imperatives she assigns as political are in fact grounded in moral reasoning. I further argue that blameworthiness upon non-fulfilment of responsibility exists in principle and acts of blame in such situations are often necessary in practice for discharging responsibility towards the collective political action that Young envisions. I further show how Young's framework struggles to handle questions of internal moral reflection, character, and personal responsibility for contribution to injustice. I argue that certain contributions, especially when avoidable or made in bad faith, call for moral scrutiny and possibly even blame.

This chapter lays the groundwork for my broader argument: that an alternative moral imagination that does not revolve around culpability—one that is relational, and context-sensitive—can achieve Young's goals more effectively than her attempted split between the moral and the political.

In the second chapter, building on my critique of Young's moral political distinction, I show that her model also ultimately leaves agents with contentless vague obligations. I suggest that moral responsibility must include not just a call to act as Young's model does, but also guidance on how to act well.

In this chapter I sketch the beginnings of an alternate moral imagination that can provide specific but non-rigid obligations and also accommodate emotions that result from admitting principal blameworthiness and the act of being blamed. Drawing on care ethics, I argue that the responsibilities Young identifies as political are better understood as grounded in moral obligations of care—relational, contextual, and attuned to both structural conditions and personal experience. I flesh-out care as a normative framework—drawing on thinkers like Joan Tronto and Eva Kittay—to show how it avoids the pitfalls of blame-avoidance, moral vagueness, and abstract structuralism, while retaining Young's emphasis on forward-looking, shared responsibility.

Unlike Young's model, which treats causality as the basis for responsibility, the care framework roots responsibility in our collective interdependence and human vulnerability. This while allowing for accountability and blame, emphasises on the need for care. In doing so, I argue that care ethics not only better fulfils Young's own motivations, but also reintroduces conscience, empathy, and moral character into political responsibility—without collapsing into punitive moralism.

Chapter One

Non-moral responsibilities and empty spaces

In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

-Martin Luther King

Young's model of responsibility is a social connection model (simply called Young's model from here on). That is to say that political responsibilities (which are assumed by Young to be separate from moral responsibilities) arise from being associated to unjust structures. The nature of this connection or association is not precisely defined. Young writes that any person who "contributes to structural processes that create injustices" is responsible for their amendment. She calls these responsibilities "obligations of justice between people" (Young, 2006, p. 102). Catherine Lu also interprets the determinant of whether this type of responsibility exists to be that a person 'contributes' to an unjust system (Lu, 2018). Contribution here, does not mean complicity, because these responsibilities are also argued to be held by "those who can properly be argued to be victims of structural injustice" (Young, 2006, p. 123). Young wants to highlight those actions of collective agents that form the "background conditions" of a structural injustice but cannot be called blameworthy (they cannot be a basis for ascription of blame) (Young, 2006). For example, buying fast fashion is an action she describes as being a part of the background conditions that allow the structural injustice related to sweatshop labour exploitation and waste creation continue. What determines if an action contributes directly (in a way that would make us guilty or culpable for this injustice) or indirectly (as a background condition as described by Young)? This question is addressed by Young in the following manner. She argues that "what counts as a

wrong for which we seek a perpetrator and for which he or she might be required to compensate, is something we generally conceive as a deviation from a baseline" (Young, 2006, p. 120). When "we follow the accepted and expected rules and conventions of the communities and institutions in which we act" but still end up forming background conditions for a structural injustice, we have political responsibilities to help amend this structural injustice through some political action (the nature of which is left up to the discretion of each agent) (Young, 2006, p. 120). Obviously, victims could not be complicit in these structures, but they can be argued to contribute to them. A mother-in-law could be oppressed by patriarchal structures, she might also contribute to them if say, her compliance to the demands made on her through patriarchal structures, conditions her son to have certain expectations of his wife. Here, she can hardly be called complicit (in a sense of legal complicity), but she does unknowingly contribute to the structure.

It is a forward-looking model of personal but shared responsibility which claims to expand the scope of responsibility beyond direct liability for interactional harms. This means that the responsibilities arise from the fact that there is injustice in a structure and that you contribute to that process in some indirect way. Note here that, this model is not a backward looking, but a forward looking one i.e. the contribution must be continuous. For example, not the fact that you once bought from McDonald's even though it is on the BDS list, but that you continue to do it. Similarly, the fact that you buy fast fashion regularly, your taxes pay for a genocide, you buy gas from Big Oil etc.

The action, A continues to contribute to an unjust structure. Martha Nussbaum summarizes Young's notion of responsibility as "you have a job to do" (Ferguson, 2009). This is consistent with Young's summary of her own objective as "how ought moral agents,

whether individual or institutional, conceptualize their responsibilities in relation to global justice" (Young, 2006).

Responsibility can be read in the following two ways. One as merely describing a causal chain of events in which one can be rightly said to be an agent. The second, would be to say that a person can be held responsible for something, which would normally entail the possibility of blaming them for non-fulfilment. The mother-law in the above example, is responsible for following through with patriarchal expectations. But we might feel that she cannot be blamed for it or expected to bear the full costs of the consequences. We may then say that our mother-in-law is causally (though maybe only partially) but not substantively responsible for her son's attitude. A part of what Young is talking about may well be interpreted as a causal responsibility. She talks about the contribution that a person makes to an unjust structure is critical in determining if they have obligations. But the obligation itself is a substantive responsibility because it is a responsibility to do something (a task responsibility) and because Young admits that there might be situations where people could be "called out" to give an account of how they are fulfilling their responsibilities (Young, 2006). So, this mother-in-law under Young's model, could be argued to have political responsibilities to become aware of her contribution and then, engage in actions oriented towards dismantling the unjustly gendered division of labour. She can choose how she fulfils this responsibility. While she may be called out to give an account of how she is fulfilling these responsibilities, once she gives such an account, "then others usually ought to accept her decision" (Young, 2006, p. 126). It seems that there is a weak form of accountability in Young's model of responsibilities—if you do not fulfil your responsibilities, while you may be called out, you cannot normally be blamed. Confusingly, according to Young, none of this

qualifies this responsibility as a moral one. She calls them political and not moral responsibilities.

The moral-political distinction

A responsibility that arises out of a judgement of a structure as unjust presumes obviously at least this moral judgement, that this structure is producing morally unacceptable outcomes. A determination of injustice cannot be made without morality. Nor does Young think it can be. She writes "when we judge that structural injustice exists, we mean that at least some of the normal and accepted background conditions of action are not morally acceptable" (Young, 2006, p. 120). An imperative to not contribute to a structural injustice is clearly a moral one—it arises out of a moral reason (an injustice is morally wrong, and we must not contribute to it). But that is not precisely the imperative that Young places on us. Out of all the things we can do to fulfil Young's political responsibilities, not contributing to a structural injustice (to any extent which may be possible given agents function in limited circumstances), may just be one of the ways we can choose. Still, the imperative that 'injustice is wrong, and we must do something to amend it' or more accurately 'injustice is wrong, and we must do something to amend it *because* we contribute to it' still is very much a moral reasoning. She draws out this causality explicitly in her work—the responsibility does not exist because of some kind of bond of humanity or nation-state relationship, it is because we contribute to this injustice that we have these particular responsibilities (Young, 2006). So then, why insist that these responsibilities themselves are not moral?

Note here, that even though these responsibilities are argued to exist because we contribute to the structural injustice, they do not arise out of a determination of a liability. According to Young, we contribute, causally, to the structure but we are not liable for the outcomes in a legal/moral sense. Young's project is motivated by the desire to shift focus

away from a few culpable parties and expand it to the rest of society which support the background conditions that allow the system to run (Young, 2006 & 2011). This is a noble aim. But how could an articulation of 'you have a job to do' regarding structural injustice be made without a moral imperative? That is, how could we tell someone they have to do something about a moral wrong—they have a responsibility—without having a moral reason for assigning that responsibility or obligation? It does not seem plausible to say this. The only indication towards the distinction between moral and political responsibilities in Young's model is that she mentions moral responsibilities would entail blame if not fulfilled. Therefore, the conception of a moral responsibility revolves around culpability or guilt in her model.

In her posthumously published book "Responsibility for justice," she develops her notion of 'the political' as a partial continuation (with significant critiques) of Hannah Arendt's treatment of the relationship between guilt and responsibility. Arendt's conception of political responsibility also distances itself from the moral and the legal (the latter two being personal categories). "In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political considerations of conduct stands the world" (Arendt, 1987). Additionally, political responsibilities do not arise out of guilt or blame. Intent, for Arendt is not a determinant of culpability for Eichmann. His actions and their consequences are enough to indict him as guilty because they directly contributed to the deaths of the transported Jewish people (Arendt, 1964). But what is important to Young here, is whether intent matters for the majority of Germans, who might have supported Hitler, but did not directly cause deaths of Jewish people—those people who were a part of the background conditions. Young's model focuses on causality rather than intent (or any personal, internal matters such as those of the conscience).

She borrows from Arendt, the definition of political responsibilities as being not moral and as not following from (or arising from) guilt. The following implications arise in Young's model. (1) There are no personal consequences to the non-fulfilment of political responsibilities in the form of blame (because they are not moral). There are several problems that arise from this. Martha Nussbaum points to one of them—what if people refuse to fulfil these responsibilities even after they are informed, have reasonable ability to follow through and have been asked to give an account of these responsibilities. Do they now become culpable or morally blameworthy if they either refuse to provide an account of these responsibilities or they engage the question in bad faith? At some point, Nussbaum argues, moral judgement (a form of blame) would be fair to assign (Ferguson, 2009). (2) 'The political' distances itself entirely from personal moral questions. The specifications of the content of these responsibilities are left largely, open to interpretation. Young describes the general spirit of what she means by a political responsibility. "Political responsibility is not about doing something by myself, however, but about exhorting others to join me in collective action" (Young, 2011). This is similar to Arendt's articulation of the 'the world' being in the centre of political responsibilities—your actions should be motivated by the aim of actually making a (significant) change in the structure you are targeting. But, a lot of choices made at the personal level influence political action and Young herself notes that ultimately, the individual is the "central locus of ethical responsibility" (Young, 2006). Morality is not only something to be adjudicated externally and through actions but also an intimate and internal matter. Any pseudo-legal imagination of the moral does not allow us to factor in personal biases, prejudices, ideological/social conditioning, thoughts, intention, self-interest etc. For any articulation of "you have a job to do" there must also be an articulation of "these are the educational, social, emotional or other skill requirements you must fulfil in order to do this job." For example, what role would personal moral virtue play in this model

of responsibility? It seems Young's moral agents (a phrase she uses to describe the recipients of her political responsibilities (Young, 2006)) while presumed to be moral (engaged in some activity of moral investigation) may not be moral at all. At least, if they are not, we cannot blame them. Or even arrive at the conclusion that they are not acting morally in relation to their political responsibilities. This obfuscation could lead us to absurd conclusions. For one, that an imperative to be morally observant (or to observe moral standards) may not be a moral imperative itself, even if the lack of observance leads to disastrous outcomes (here, structural injustice). How do we even talk about how we have neglected to be politically responsible in the past (since she clearly rules out backward looking responsibility) without being able to bring up our personal moral conditions and choices we did and did not make, and why?

Circumventing the problems of choice vs. chance

Young uses the example of sweatshops to aid her proposal for a social connection model. I am going to introduce a hypothetical sketch here. Aju is a young worker in Dharavi who works for an H&H sweatshop in Mumbai. He works in the warehouse lifting boxes, packaging etc. His boss, Jai, used to work in the same factory until a few years ago and has now managed to make his way up to opening a small factory outlet of his own. Aju, like his peers, does not have proper bathroom breaks, barely affords two basic meals a day and has chronic and sporadically acute back pain (due to the continuous lifting). Workers beyond the age of twenty-five are not allowed to work in the factory and he is twenty-four (though he tried to lie and say he is younger; he was not believed). Jai makes his workers work hard— "I used to do three times the work you all do" is a common retort Aju hears from him. While Jai's self-image is that of a lenient and forgiving boss—he never physically or verbally abuses his employees—he feels that some strictness with workers is always required. Perhaps

the industry standards for being a good boss are low and Jai is not ready to accept that he had been exploited as a worker—in order for his work in his youth to have meant something and for him to continue to draw pride from his struggle, he perhaps clings to that idea of himself as a 'good worker' strongly and expects his workers to also be 'good'.

Are Aju and Jai contributing (even if involuntarily in the case of the former) to the unjust structure—the sweatshop industry particularly and capitalism broadly? Our moral intuition might make us hesitate to say that Aju has contributed to the unjust structure, some of us might express this hesitation towards Jai also. We might be tempted to say that they were limited by their circumstances. Fair, but then, do we not need Aju and Jai and all the rest of us to work together to correct this ubiquitous beast that is capitalism? How do we articulate these imperatives? Young's motive, as best understood by me, is to solve this struggle between the need for collective action and political discourse getting caught up in a blame game of who owes how much and why. Aju, Jai, all employees of H&H, its consumers and even people working with affiliated businesses all have a responsibility to amend this structural problem, not because we are culpable in its actions or because we are liable for its outcomes; but because in the course of living our lives, our actions end up moving certain parts of this machine called a structure that allow it to sustain itself.

In essence, Young's model of responsibility circumvents this difficulty of assigning liability or determining if people had a genuine choice in doing or not doing something (a herculean task) and gets us to a place where we can assign responsibilities without it. Harm is caused through your actions, even if (a big if) the actions are outside the scope of your self-governance. The questions of choice are suspended in favour of a detached, almost mechanistic view of events. A causes B, and therefore the agent who does A has responsibility in ensuring B does not happen. If you were to frame this question as a moral

one, you might have to then discuss the question of choice. This seems to be an important reason for Young's insistence that these responsibilities are not moral but political.

Note here that, as previously discussed, the agent's contribution must be continuous, not backward-looking. We used examples of people buying from boycotted brands, fast fashion companies etc. One question that gets left behind here is that: Is the first imperative to stop contributing? Someone should not be able to think that even while contributing and having the choice to not do so, they can do other things to discharge their responsibilities. This means that there will have to be standards for judging whether the actions being taken towards discharging these political responsibilities are enough. But this in turn would leave the door open for blame. Young does not give us any prescription about the way in which these responsibilities are to be discharged. Her framework works well for the kind of contributions that are impossible to not make in the modern world—everything from eating chocolate to eating fruit and vegetables and buying clothes might contribute to climate crisis or fund a genocide or a war. Even if we might be able to opt in to relatively better options, there are some contributions we cannot escape. But with the examples I have mentioned above, I see some possibilities of escaping contribution. After attaining awareness about boycotted companies and fast fashion brands, most people can afford to buy alternatives. What does her framework tell us about these contributions that one might be able to escape, if they reflect deeply enough? Could we argue that Jai might have some ways of being able to escape contribution? 'Whether or not to stop contributing in limited ways is possible' cannot be answered without a radical dialogue with yourself or some form of radical self-engagement. One might sense that such a purely forward looking, non-liability-based and impersonal model might not create the right incentive to critically dissect one's own actions and well, liability in a system. (Is this even important?) In Young's model, if Jai has done

nothing wrong, why should he think about changing anything in his life? This is the central concern of the second chapter.

Responsibility without blame?

Young's political responsibilities might play an important role in 'moving things along' by allowing people to work toward common goals without getting wrapped up in emotions that personal blame may incite such as those motivated by insecurities, self-perception, defensiveness etc. Nussbaum summarizes Young's argument as "the focus on guilt is pragmatically damaging…we produce defensiveness rather than cooperative helpfulness" (Ferguson, 2009, p. 137). But Young's critique is not merely pragmatic—she is not merely saying that we should not blame because it hinders discourse. As discussed before, she also believes that principally, blame simply does not exist for people contributing to background conditions of structural injustice.

The first question to ask here would be if a task responsibility i.e. a responsibility to do something is conceptually stable without the possibility of blame or criticism (the former being a moral category). Young says clearly two things that are important here, that people can be criticized for not fulfilling their responsibilities and that they can be asked to give an account of how they have fulfilled their political responsibilities (Young, 2006). As hinted at previously, even a weak form of accountability does not seem conceptually stable unless people can be criticized if they fail the accountability test. And Young writes that people can fail to fulfil these responsibilities. But any failure must be judged against a standard. Let's imagine that there are no standards for judging whether someone is fulfilling their political responsibilities, then this weak accountability is no accountability at all—people have no incentive to take seriously this accountability process if there are no consequences for failing the test. Any articulation of a political responsibility is not merely an empty space that people

can choose to fill in any manner. There have to be at least some minimal standards for judging what constitutes a fulfilment of a political responsibility. It is possible that Young thinks that situations where people fail these standards are relatively rare. Additionally, she insists that this accountability process cannot result in moral blame. Both these assumptions (it being unclear if she actually makes the former assumption) need to be re-investigated.

Let's bring Jai back into the conversation. Jai as a factory outlet owner, should clearly have a job to do under Young's framework—he, just in the process of his daily work is participating in a system that sustains itself through the exploitation of workers like Aju. And Aju, also has a job to do—he contributes to the structural injustice through his labour which (alongside the labour of many others) is crucial to the fast fashion industry at large and to H&H in particular. We pondered over their culpability earlier and concluded that there was a hesitation in blaming them for the structural injustice related to the sweatshop industry. Let's explore this hesitation. According to Young, the causal link between the actions of actors who contribute to the background conditions of structural injustice (Aju and Jai in our sketch) and the injustice itself are too indirect. In other words, people are not liable for the unjust structure and its outcomes, they merely end up contributing indirectly (in the sense explained previously).

The following is my response to this claim. A moral responsibility may not necessarily result in blame as a consequence of its non-fulfilment. If people can be asked to present an account of how and whether they have been fulfilling their responsibilities, the determination of blame can then be made based on whether or not the given account is satisfactory or if people had valid reasons for not being able to fulfil their responsibilities. Youngs hesitates further from admitting that this accountability process (which she admits exists in her model as stated previously) can lead to blame. She writes that people should

'usually' accept the accounts given. But unusually, if the accounts are not acceptable (they seem to be in bad faith), could we blame people then? It is unclear. This is puzzling because Young herself admits that this form of accountability is crucial (Young, 2006). Lu's intuition is that Young thinks of blame and punishment at its extremes—perhaps as legal punishment (Lu, 2018). As hinted earlier, I do think there is a pseudo-legal structure to how Young thinks of morality. The exclusion of common human affect resulting from anything to do with prejudice, bias, social conditioning, defensiveness etc. may be a result of this underlying legalism. But for the current purposes of this thesis, we do not need to investigate the cause of this exclusion—it is enough to show that this exclusion exists and is in fact, deliberate.

Young thinks that personal focus on things like guilt distracts us from thinking about institutional change. She writes: "People become more focused on themselves, their past actions, the state of their souls and their character, than on the structures that require change…Such self-indulgence can distract us from discussing more objectively how social structures operate, how our actions contribute to them, and what can be done to change them" (Young, 2011). Is this assertion true? How else can people change their inner attitudes and biases, unlearn harmful practices, and dissect their own place in a structure, if not through a dialogue with themselves? Young seems to consider this dialogue futile.

Jai's involvement in this structure is wrapped up with his personal beliefs about himself, about what makes a good worker, his past as a worker and his resulting attitude towards his own workers. These personal beliefs are a result of some complex psycho-social phenomena. Structural factors influence his beliefs, and the collective attitudes of all people (including Jai) add up to form structures. It is safe to say that he is not personally and solely culpable for the structures he is a part of. Young is right in saying that the link of causality is too indirect for us to trace this form of culpability to people like him. But, as a recipient of

this conditioning, does he not have any true choice in unlearning bias and prejudice, and dissecting his own pride in his past work (where he was presumably exploited)? This is a difficult question to answer, and it is understandable why Young might have wanted to circumvent this question. But what happens if this question becomes unavoidable? Let's say Aju, recognizing a sense of injustice and responsibility for amending it, starts engaging in small acts of protest—asking for unlimited bathroom breaks, shorter working hours and moving trolleys so that workers do not have to carry heavy things over long distances. Now, Jai could feel that these demands are unfair, and the employees are being ungrateful. He might say that the only way he can accommodate the demands is by laying off workers—and he might genuinely believe this. It might seem that he does not have enough empathy for the workers. And the reason for this might be his personal beliefs about himself as a worker in the past. He may think, for example, that the workers are creating a fuss over something that never bothered him—he might not have realized the harm done to him by his own past exploitation. In this situation, it seems unlikely that Jai could be convinced by an appeal to his political responsibility. How would one even make the determination of this without examining the moral terrain of the situation? He could say and genuinely believe that he has no other choice.

This leaves us at the dead end, how could we move beyond this situation without asking Jai to reinvestigate his choices and motivations, actions and beliefs? This extensive activity of re-investigation, on what basis do we ask him to do if not his conscience? And how ever could we make this appeal to his conscience, without first understanding these responsibilities as also moral. I agree with Lu, who, for other reasons, also reads these responsibilities as moral responsibilities (Lu, 2018). And this process of reinvestigation cannot be merely forward-looking, it may require past information about Jai's actions, raise

questions about his moral character and require him to work towards changing his own attitudes and predispositions. This investigative process seems to come really close to what might follow from a process of accountability and even blame. Jai might not be culpable for the structural injustice as a whole, but we might want to hold him culpable if he, for instance, roadblocks the worker's strike even after repeated attempts to make him aware of the conditions of the workers or tries to steamroll them into coming back to work by threatening to hire new workers (labour is abundant and cheap and he might truly not have any malicious intent in mind while doing this). Here are some other examples. Even if I am not culpable for the entire sweatshop industry's exploitative practices by buying from Zara, I could be culpable for contributing to that structure is small and diffused ways if I can be shown to have reasonable access to knowledge about the exploitative nature of this industry as well as reasonable ability to shop elsewhere. What if a buyer continues to buy from BDS listed brands even though there is proof that boycotts are working for that particular brand? Would we not judge morally, the last few people who continue to buy from a McDonalds which is barely keeping its doors open? The point here, is not to adjudicate whether culpability exists in these individual cases, but to show that culpability and moral judgement is possible and perhaps needed in Young's model, albeit for particular contributions and in diffused ways for actions that are still very much contributions to structural injustices and not quite interactional harms. This diffused culpability can exist alongside those contributions which are the reason Young's responsibilities are assigned to people in the first place. Note that, in all the above examples, the actions of people still remain too indirect for us to be able to call the actors culpable for an interactional harm or for the entirety of the structural harm. They are still merely contributing to background conditions. But they are engaging in actions that seem to us can be a fair basis for moral judgement and blame.

As previously discussed, Nussbaum makes a complementary argument. She asks Young that if an agent had responsibilities they did not fulfil; they are made aware of them, and they refuse to fulfil them, is the agent now responsible for the refusal? (Ferguson, 2009). This would make the responsibilities backward looking and introduce some form of diffused liability back into the reasons for putting these responsibilities on people. Claudia Card for example, suggests that these actors may be culpably negligent, in as much as they have the responsibility to monitor the institutions and structures they live in, and they failed to shoulder that responsibility. She phrases this culpability as 'inexcusable' i.e. an actor has no good excuse for not fulfilling their responsibilities (Ferguson, 2009). Our mother-in-law, we might say can be excused for her contribution to her son's attitude, because she is herself harmed and subjugated by the pattern she is passing on. People who continue to buy from boycotted brands, like McDonalds' without any compelling reason, we might say are inexcusable and culpably negligent. This distinction might be instructive in resolving some issues in Young's model. But, as we can see, the this responsibility without the possibility of blame has several logical gaps, and it seems that any responsibility becomes meaningless if we cannot judge through some standards and a process of accountability whether the responsibilities have been fulfilled.

As we can see, the possibility of blame in Young's model remains present principally and the situations which result in a determination of said blame may not be so rare. Even if Jai is in fact a politically conscious individual, what if he simply does not think engaging with the striking workers' demands is a part of his political responsibilities? Do Young's contentless responsibilities do a good job of guiding people like him?

Blame as good information

Young also does not consider the distinction between the fact of someone being blameworthy and the fact of actually blaming them, when she articulates the futility of blame in discourse. Both can have a different set of considerations. We can judge people to be blameworthy in principle and decide, based on considerations of pragmatism (that it will be counterproductive to discourse, dialogue, resolution) or care (that we owe some care to this person and should therefore withhold the articulation of blame). In the case of Jai for example, we might say that he might be blameworthy, but we do not want to blame him to avoid him becoming defensive. But is the articulation of blame always futile?

Nussbaum offers a counterargument to this assertion by Young. She suggests that just like a child needs to understand their mistake before they can be asked to not repeat it, so do we (Ferguson, 2009). Let's say you tell a young child who just caused some soda to spill that 'we should not spill soda.' This directive may not be enough and relies on the child's ability to make the connection between the spilling of the soda and their own actions which led to the soda spilling. The child may not make this connection between their actions and the soda spilling, and the directive therefore becomes a vague suggestion rather than a call to amend or scrutinize one's actions. But if you tell the child 'Don't push the glass away like that, it caused the soda to spill, and now we have to clean it up' the child is more likely to understand the link between their action, the result, and the result's undesirability. This brings us back to the question we left open earlier, why should Jai change anything about his behavior, investigate his beliefs and assume responsibilities that Young's model is assigning to him?

Nussbaum gives a powerful example for showing how blame can be politically significant, resolution oriented and does not need to result in a blame-game. Martin Luther King Jr. evoked the feelings of guilt in his white audience about the United States of America

having failed its citizens of color. But this was only an integral part of a larger forward-looking message. She writes:

> Now of course King did not harp on guilt: most of his message was future directed. But it was important that the ascription of guilt was part of the mix, for the situation of black Americans was bad, and white Americans, through their inaction and negligence, even if they were not malicious ringleaders, bore the guilt for that ongoing situation, 100 years after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. If King had dwelt only on the glorious future, without telling white Americans that they have been irresponsible and negligent in the past, I think his speech would have had less power to motivate constructive engagement than it in fact did. (Ferguson, 2009)

It is not hard to imagine that Jai might be convinced to change his mind if an appeal is made to his conscience and his past as a worker. This conversation could very well include blame to shake Jai out of apathy. Yes, blame can make people defensive. But it can also motivate people to look inwards and dissect their own actions. Blame can, if used correctly even within a resolution-based framework, be a great instigator of change. Jai, if he can resonate with Aju's pain and suffering as well as of other workers, may be inclined to give in. If this dialogue replicates widely enough (for example, Aju's strike turns into a city-wide strike), the change that has been brought about becomes politically significant. Gandhi's entire strategy of political protest was based on the kind of inner work (working on biases, developing moral character) that Young dismisses. Yet, no one can dispute that he brought about politically significant change. Nussbaum, addressing this very point, writes:

> Gandhi's life, and the movement he created, shows that a turning within can sometimes be not just the catalyst of a turning outward, it can be simultaneous with it. Both he and his followers learned to practice a critique of their own violence, their own tendencies to domination, as an essential aspect of their freedom struggle on behalf of the nation as a whole. I guess I think that if we turn outward prematurely, before we conduct an honest critique of our own inner world, our dedication to ameliorative action may prove shallow or short-lived. Forces that remain in the personality, pushing us toward narcissism, will ultimately distract us from social efforts. (Ferguson, 2009, p. 145)

Human relationships are the minutest level political discourse. They are governed personally. If we cannot leave out morality from this relationship, then we cannot leave it out of any imagination of the political realm. It seems by all means that Young should agree to this. Her claim that these inner moral dialogues and character growth are irrelevant to political change very simply does not hold up. Nor does the assumption that blame (as principally present or as affective expression or as strategically used) will always result in what she calls a blame-game. Just as blame can be a part of healthy conflict resolution between individuals when used with caution and care, it can be a part of healthy public discourse when used with caution and care too.

Chapter Two

Structured bodies, care and conscience

For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?"

- bell hooks

Ideological conditioning runs deep through our society. The structures in Young's explication of structural injustice, do not just exist as an external imposition upon people but are embodied by us in our personal and political lives. Young spends a lot of time in the first chapter of her posthumously published book breaking down the arguments of theorists who ascribe the blame for homelessness and poverty upon people who are homeless and poor (Young, 2011). The arguments that she unpacks are not merely products of intellectual exercises but also of a crucial feature of structural injustices—the internalized dehumanization directed at oppressed groups. Homelessness (an example Young uses extensively in her argument) isn't just a one-off chance encounter with inequality of wealth—we are structurally and systematically conditioned to consider poor people as less than human, and to derive our own humanity from our ability to support the capitalist system or to be 'productive'. Our worth, our ability to 'make something of ourselves', our ability to 'make our life' is not merely an extension of human hubris and radical individualism (which play an important role) but also the sub-structure that supplies blood to the beating heart of the capitalist system. We hardly notice the capitalist metaphors that have seeped into our daily life—'spending' time, 'time is money' (Lakoff, 2008).

Undoing this, is no small task. What is the relevance of a framework of responsibility if we cannot first get moral agents (the supposed recipients of Young's responsibilities) to agree whether homeless people deserve shelter (there are a lot of those who do not agree)? And then there is a question of whether we want to fight for the right to shelter out of benevolence or because we are radically committed to the task (we believe that even the rudest, least hardworking and least 'talented' person deserves decent shelter, sufficient food, clean water, clean air and so on). It is not only the homeless who are denied their humanity (though they suffer most violently from this denial); it is also our own humanity that is denied. And so, if it is our humanity that has been threatened, then it is first and foremost our humanity that must be returned to us. The test of any robust call for resistance then is how it can return to us what is systematically and structurally denied to us (all of us—even if we are complicit in and benefit from that system). This does not lead to empty spaces and virtue signalling. This calls for a concrete and radical engagement with the world and the self.

As discussed earlier, the vagueness in how responsibilities are to be discharged in Young, and the discretion allowed in that space needs to be qualified by some things that a person should put first on their list when they set out to do good—these could look like a critical understanding of class/race/caste/religion-based discrimination, actually talking to and listening to people who are to be supposedly helped, to engage in critical self-reflection and undo aspects of social conditioning/prejudice that they find problematic and most importantly, if feasible, to stop contributing to structural injustices in whatever ways possible. Jai and others like him not only need to agree that they have a job to do but also have at least some notions of what this job constitutes. The question 'a responsibility to do what?' must be answered more concretely than Young answers it, while flexibility may have its benefits. Jai should not be able to get away with for example, (let's say he agrees here that he has a

responsibility) continuing to reject Aju and others' demands for better treatment while maybe donating to a charity which works on alleviating poverty.

Another excellent example to emphasize the importance of content in delineating these responsibilities as well as having some standards as to whether responsibilities have been or are being fulfilled is a majority of 'development work' going on in Dharavi. A lot of this work is oriented towards giving people things without any requirements to actually listen to people's needs and working with them to make their situation better. This results in huge incongruences. As it turns out, most rehabilitated people (through slum rehabilitation projects) rent out their allotted flats and shift into temporary settlements elsewhere. This has been a huge problem for these projects. And the response of government officials is to usually villainize the poor people as not wanting to make their situation better or being accustomed to a dirty lifestyle. But this is not true. There are several accounts of why these allotted flats are abandoned including disrupting local economy and simply not being suited to the needs of the people (Baweja, 2015).

Aju's neighbourhood was also rehabilitated. Not only is his mother not able to run her kiraana[3] store out of the back of the house because their flat is on the fifth floor (there is no footfall), his sister is no longer able to get as much work working as a maid since she can now only work during daylight hours (the entrance to their society faces away from the commercial residences where she works and as opposed to hustle bustle of the slum, the society is often desolate before and after sunset, making it unsafe for her to walk through it in the dark). It is more important than ever for Aju to keep his job (he is nearing 25 which is the upper age limit to work at Jai's factory) and to earn more than he earlier did. This incredibly

[3] Grocery

costly development project aimed at giving them a better life has made their quality of life much worse.

And often this is not merely an innocent coincidence—the rehabilitations project capitalizes on prime real estate right next to the Mumbai airport. While half of the land that is reclaimed from slums is used as commercial real estate, half is used for rehabilitation. The slum-dwellers are not consulted about their needs (Baweja, 2015). The real estate developers who are tasked to build these projects do not have to incur any costs on the purchase of land—which is like hitting a gold mine in a city like Mumbai. Because of the way power is concentrated in the hands of people with money and the general dehumanization of or paternalistic attitudes towards the slum dwellers, the project ends up centring the interests of the builders rather than those of the slum dwellers (Baweja, 2015). Ultimately, this 'development' project is perpetuating the very same structural injustice that it purports to ameliorate.

All the people involved in this development project might pass Young's very weak test of accountability. In fact, we may even consider the actors are not acting in bad faith. They might truly believe their actions are contributing towards dismantling unjust structures. But they have hardly contributed anything towards improving structural injustice faced by workers in Dharavi. They have in fact done the opposite; they have made their lives harder and more precarious. Still, under Young's model neither can we blame them nor guide them to do better. These paternalistic relationships between supposed victims and benefactors are far too common. Uncritical good intentions are highly susceptible to power hierarchies.

But even if we were to specify the content, and say this is what constitutes the job you must do; would we avoid the pitfalls of this situation? It is possible, for example, that the specifications of content and actions become neckties and choke all humanity out of us i.e.

preclude context specific compassion, empathy, flexibility and creativity. What if these specifications end up arising out of the same hierarchies which we are trying to subvert? For example, a lot of 'development theory' is very specific, but remains opaque to the needs of the people it is supposed to help. If we cannot speak of conscience and goodness when we speak of morality and morality when we speak of resistance; then any explication of responsibility would be little more than an exercise to reduce human behaviour to mathematics. And we know that it is not so. In this sense Young is right in not trying to specify exactly what to do and what not to do. But as we have seen, the responsibilities cannot remain entirely contentless either. The task of philosophy is more important than merely answering the question of whether it is morally wrong to not donate, or to do or not do any specific action; it is also to help people achieve clarity about their own moral convictions and how best to achieve them so that nothing obscures their vision. To be able to say perhaps, that if we believe that bystanders and witnesses have moral obligations i.e. if knowledge and proximity and capability for action place on us moral obligations; then to speak about a genocide, to attempt to make the world better (whatever may constitute such an event), to act, to cultivate love, to not be apathetic are also moral obligations. Theory must be able to guide people about not just 'what to do', but also 'how to be' to better fulfill their moral responsibilities. While Young expresses a disdain towards this type of personal reflection or indulgence, her model is incomplete without it.

Having already shown that Young's responsibilities are moral in nature, we are left with two problems in her framework. One, as identified towards the second half of chapter one, is that Young ignores that blame exists principally and may even produce politically significant positive change. Second, as described above, is that these responsibilities must have some content, though we do not want this content to be rigid and mathematical.

In this chapter I propose as a solution, an alternative imagination of morality that does not revolve around culpability, has specific but not rigid content and allows us to accommodate all the emotions that result from admitting principal blameworthiness as well as from the act of being blamed. The proposal is simple—the content of these responsibilities imagined as relational and contextual care (as normative rather than merely descriptive) fulfils Young's motivations better than Young's own model. Briefly, care as a normative principle has been defined as following by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher:

> Care is a species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher & Tronto, 1991)

To add to this definition, caring as I am using here is as a relational, contextually embedded and moral activity that involves attentiveness, competence, and responsiveness in addressing the needs of others, especially those who are vulnerable or dependent. It has following principles: (1) it is relational, the basis of moral obligations is found in the relations between people as opposed to abstract structural processes (as in Young); (2) it is contextually sensitive, it allows for people to determine the specific nature of their obligations through the concrete particulars of interrelated human lives; and (3) it constitutes both, people's actions and attitudes, "where the latter, importantly, are usually not one-off performances, but rather ongoing practices, habits, and dispositions" (Collins, 2025).

These relationships of dependence are described as "inevitable" and "inextricable" by Eva Kittay (2015). When applying interpersonal care ethics to structural injustice, we must imagine not merely relationships of emotional dependence but also of material dependence. For example, the fact that we use electronics puts us all in a relationship with the people in Congo mining cobalt. The fact that we buy fast-fashion puts us in a relationship with the

sweatshop workers of Dharavi and Bangladesh. Every taxpaying USA citizen is connected to and in relationship with the people dying in Gaza. This is why the "nested dependencies" in care ethics model work really well with Young's model of social connection. What it adds though, other than specific content and an introspective dialogue with the self, is that it does not have to rely on pre-existing connections or dependencies. Kittay's articulation of dependence as inevitable means that future dependencies are an expected part of life and a legitimate ground for responsibility towards structural injustice. Even everyday actions such as walking on a road built by others to breathing air which is affected by others' choices to eating food grown by others, we are and will always depend on other people. This is an intrinsic and inextricable part of human life itself. The fact that we cannot escape human connection and dependence, and that we will not survive without it, create on us, moral and political responsibilities to care for each other.

With this understanding of care in mind, I want to further develop my intuition. I will first elaborate further the question of blame, after which, I will explicate the nature of care as content and finally, explore the consequences of this shift on the perception of the self and the other in context of structural injustice.

Care as opposed to punitivism

According to Young, Jai has certain responsibilities. As discussed in the first chapter, these are moral responsibilities. (How ever could we convince Jai he has responsibilities which he may or may not believe he has without using a moral reason?) As discussed above, as per Young these responsibilities do not have any stipulations as to how they are to be discharged—they are empty spaces that people may fill either based on their discretion or based on existing collective action guidance that they are exposed to. Before continuing the discussion on content, I want to address the question of blame further. Young's model seems

to incorporate a weak form of accountability—according to her, it must normally not result in blame. As hinted previously, this raised a host of questions. What happens when actors act in bad faith? Do they now become culpable? How well does this model instruct agents acting in good faith to understand and discharge their responsibilities? As we have seen, Young's answers to these questions are insufficient. Already having addressed Young's fears about blame. I would like to propose an alternative way of looking at blame.

The hesitation surrounding blame in Young seems to indicate a discomfort with what may just be healthy conflict. Even blame as affect can be a crucial expression by oppressed people. Blame and rage can be vital parts of resistance (hooks, 2000). Hanna Pickard emphasizes the importance of affective blame in interpersonal conflict (Pickard, 2013). A lack of emotional regulation and fragility on the part of recipients of such blame is not reason enough to discard blame altogether. My question would be, why are we so scared of blame? Affective blame can be understandably hard to bear, granted. But principal blame, why the hesitation surrounding that? Principally, blame means that you did not pass the accountability test in fulfilling an obligation. That some action of yours (or lack thereof) caused some harm which could have been avoided. A part of why I think blame may be hard to accept is that we look at morality from a pseudo-legal perspective. For us, and for Young, morality often revolves around culpability. There seems to be a close relationship between blame and punishment. So, if we were to accept blame, we might become worthy of punishment. Punishment necessitates at least some withdrawal of care (this care being previously available to this person).

If we thought of wrongdoing as something to be treated, rather than punished, then this hesitation surrounding blame might become weaker. We change 'they must be punished' to 'they must learn to do better' (and possibly 'we can help them do that'). From punitivism

to reformism. It is completely sound to say that holding responsible, blame, accountability, without withdrawal of care, can all be directed towards motivating that change in a person, rather than making them feel cornered and villainized. Let's say Jai is in fact acting in good faith in responding to Aju and others' demands. He is exhausted by the strike and at this point, merely wants to hire new workers. But he still feels an attachment or some subtle sense of loyalty to his workers and so decides to sit down with Aju for a conversation. Jai has been aware of Aju's situation back home (about his mother's lost income and sister's reduced income) and has in fact been helping him by giving him advances on his salary (which he also often neglects to deduct from his following salary). This benefactor-benefacted relationship has made it even harder for Jai to swallow Aju's purported betrayal. While Young's responsibilities may not even be accepted by Jai (why should he admit even causal responsibility), a responsibility to care which arises out of his humanity and dependence relationship with Aju might seem more amenable to him. In fact, it might have been this very sentiment of knowing that he depends on his workers which may have made him loan the money to Aju in the first place. In this situation Jai and Aju might be able to have a conversation. A responsibility to care (not just interpersonally but also politically) is not only less vague than a responsibility towards some abstract structural goal, but it also does what Young wants to do which is not get trapped in a blame-game. The focus becomes the care relationship between people or groups rather than what someone did or did not.

Remember that Young's primary motivation for this project is "to expand the scope of responsibility beyond a few culpable parties" (Young, 2011). This is a good aim. But does she go far enough in implicating other people contributing to background conditions? As we saw in the previous chapter it seems that she does not—her hesitation to ascribe blame creates some problems. But a model of care avoids that problem. Instead of suppressing or dismissing blame, it makes something else more important—the care relationship between

people. This care relationship may very well require people to accept principal as well as affective blame, but that is not what is emphasized. If we want a framework that does not emphasize on blame, maybe we should think about expanding the scope of responsibility beyond one whose basis is causal responsibility. And expanding the scope of morality beyond culpability. It must be something else that is the basis of a responsibility and not contribution. As Stephanie Collins points out while theorizing care ethics as an amendment to Young's model "this [care model] allows that backward-looking blameworthiness—and the 'liability model' of responsibility—does indeed have a place in our moral assessments" but "[the care ethics model] seeks to turn attention elsewhere" (Collins, 2025)[4].

Young writes in one place that her project is motivated by the desire to revive the older understanding where "the members of a whole society collectively bear responsibility for taking care of one another's old age, health care, and children, and for keeping us out of poverty" (Young, 2011, p. 9). Note here that her own model lacks the prima-facie responsibility to care that seems to be alluded to here—if the basis of responsibility is contribution, it is not plausible to say that people have responsibilities towards people affected by natural disasters or suffering due to old-age. The next section discusses how dependence relationships might be a good alternative to the social connection model.

Care as content

Young does not think that "humanitarian" or "cosmopolitan-utilitarian" accounts of responsibility do a good enough job of giving us a good basis for responsibility towards each other. For Young, it is not sufficient to say that we are all human to ascribe responsibility. Nor

[4] Accessing the pre-print version of this article available on the authors website due to be published as Collins, S. (2025). Care ethics and structural injustice. In M. Carter (ed.), The Bloomsbury Handbook of Care Ethics. Bloomsbury Press.

is it enough to say that we all benefit when we cooperate. A responsibility creates an imperative and this imperative cannot merely arise out of an incentive (Young, 2006). Even though Young hesitates to call this a moral responsibility, it seems nevertheless that she is saying here that there has to be some moral reason for this responsibility to be ascribed. That is why she traces contribution to structural injustice among people to provide a sound basis for political obligation. But as we have seen, this model misses out on delivering on the kind of political change that Young herself envisions. Several care ethicists theorize a *dependence model* as a basis for responsibility. Eva Kittay uses the term "nested dependencies". I find her account of how our "inevitable dependency and inextricable interdependency" creates moral obligations to care most convincing (Kittay, A theory of justice as fair terms of social life given our inevitable dependancy and our inextricable interdependancy , 2015). She writes:

> All these explanations have some merit. But they seem to skirt what is most obvious: that we are born dependent and stay dependent for a long period, and that the care and protection of dependent beings is a shared enterprise most successfully carried out when responsibility is shared between the individuals closely connected to the dependent and the community at large. Humans as a species have little choice about the need for collective action insofar as they have evolved in such a way that their very survival depends not on them alone. That is, the idea that we can begin by thinking of persons as "independent centers of activity" involves more than the normal distortion of an idealization. There is an incoherence at its heart. It may be logically possible for there to be such beings, but such "persons" cannot be human persons who have inherited the social capabilities and needs that make human life possible and that make human life, in all its variety, what it is. (Kittay, A theory of justice as fair terms of social life given our inevitable dependancy and our inextricable interdependancy , 2015)

It is the fact of us being human, biologically, and how we remain dependent for care for a very long time in childhood for example—which is quite uncommon among animals—as well as how human societies have evolved; that show us how we are inevitable dependent on

others for care. This is not just a description or fact, it also holds moral force. According to care ethics, humans are embedded in dependency relationships which make moral demands on them (Kittay, 2019).

For example, let's say that Jai, on stepping out of his workshop one day, saw Aju crying outside the shop. This might naturally create an emotional moral demand upon him to comfort him or to talk to him. A common philosophical thought experiment called the drowning child experiment is often used to highlight our moral intuition about this. Let's a child is drowning in a lake and pass them by. You are the only one there and you know how to swim. Would we agree that now you have a responsibility to save that child given, (1) the child needs saving (2) you are well placed to fulfil that need and (3) the cost to you is minimal (your clothes get wet) compared to the gravity of the child's need. Similarly, would we give up our seat in a metro for a disabled or old person? Or help someone (a child or disabled or old person) across the street if they looked like they were in distress? Here, our moral intuition informs us about our responsibilities. This responsibility is not only contextually sensitive, but also relationally situated.

It is important to note here that Kittay argues that even though we might try to think of political theory as existing outside of a personal ethical realm, all theory is at some level based on an interpersonal ethic. One might argue for example, that Young's political responsibilities are based on some defined idea of the self (the holder of responsibility) as separate from the other (towards whom responsibility is directed). A theory that did not see the self as a defined and definite self, might not make the same mistake—the responsibility towards people arises spontaneously out of a relationship. But I will reserve this argument for later. For now, it is sufficient to say that for Kittay, this interpersonal ethic is an ethic of care which is embedded in human relationships. She writes:

> We hold fixed the distinction between an ethic and a political theory, wherein political theories are applicable to social institutions, while ethical theories govern relationships between individuals, and say that justice is a virtue of political institutions. Yet, political theories of just societies are based on an ethic: that is, on an understanding of what constitutes moral relationships among the members of a community. The question of justice can be said to be the question of how we arrange our social institutions so that citizens can realize an ethical life. (Kittay, A theory of justice as fair terms of social life given our inevitable dependancy and our inextricable interdependancy , 2015)

So, in the context of structural injustice, the basis of a responsibility towards one another is that we depend on one another. This is similar to the social connection model, but differs significantly in the following ways: (1) it does not require us to establish causal responsibility but can nevertheless accommodate principle and affective blame; (2) it has content, the content is care. Stephanie Collins combines insights from Joan Tronto and Eva Kittay to delineate the following features of care as content: (1) it tells recipients of responsibilities to build and nurture care relationships with people with attentiveness to their needs; (2) to respond appropriately and take care of needs; (3) build in oneself the attitudes and skills to respond effectively; (4) to be responsive to the person (group) being cared for and be vigilant about the potential for abuse; and (5) to keep building this relationship and providing care until the care is taken up or actually helps the person being cared for (Collins, 2025).

Consumers of fast fashion and boycotted brands have responsibilities to care and hence go through all the steps delineated above. In making themselves responsive and learning how to care for the people of Gaza, they might inevitably be motivated to buy better. At least, they could not claim to be appropriately fulfilling their responsibilities under this model if they do not. Their actions can rightly be labelled as morally inexcusable. Jai, under this model, has a responsibility to care for Aju and his workers. Even though he gave him

monetary allowances, he cannot claim to have been nurturing a caring relationship with Aju if he does not also act towards the demands his workers are making on him. His care will have to be received by Aju and benefit him. If at any point in this relationship, Jai stops being responsive to Aju's needs, he cannot claim to be caring for him any longer. This model also instructs him on how to go about caring and fulfilling his responsibilities. All the people involved in the Dharavi rehabilitation project also fail the responsiveness test and cannot be called to be caring about or caring for the rehabilitated people of Dharavi.

Under this model of responsibility, not only are paternalistic relationships avoided (because the recipients of care are active participants in determining the relationship of care or at least, in case they are severely disabled, responsiveness to their interests is imperative to the fulfilment of responsibilities); it is also entirely possible to care for oneself as well the other. In fact, care for oneself might not even be seen as completely distinct from care for the other—they can be wound up intricately. When we say that Jai has a responsibility to care for Aju, he does not have to do that at his own cost—generally heathy relationships require empathy and understanding. A personal relationship of care being a model for political relationships means that listening to one another and responding authentically and engaging in this ever-shifting dialogue becomes the model for care. This model does not necessarily teel us what to do exactly but how to do it. In this how, we discover the various ways of responding from which we may choose based on our critical judgement. In this way, it provides specific but not rigid guidance on action.

Care as political resistance

But what exactly does care look like as a political act rather than merely an interpersonal one? While I have argued that personal introspection and interpersonal relationships are indispensable parts of the category of 'the political'; we still need to answer how an ethic

grounded in the former translates as the latter. The first thing to say here would be that this responsibility to care while based in an interpersonal ethic, should not exclude the most vulnerable who might be far away from us and less accessible to us. As discussed earlier, this responsibility is based on all material, emotional, present and future dependencies. But what does it mean for a person buying a shirt in Vienna to care about the worker in Bangladesh who made it? The methods of caring may need to be reimagined as we imagine care as a political act. Boycotts, protests, awareness campaigns and all other forms of political organizing are ways in which we can care for people who are exploited by systemic injustices that we participate in in our daily lives. The process of care may require that we dissect our own biases/actions, research and read about the issues at hand, actually listen to ones being hurt, build empathy and compassion in ourselves, be reflexive and responsive to the needs of the people concerned and try to then choose where to direct our energies to be able to best care for the most vulnerable. These actions may be personal, interpersonal, political or all at once.

The buyer in Vienna may check how the shirt was produced, research supply chains, identify that the increasing linen/cotton exports to the west are creating shortages or increasing prices of these fabrics back home in India/Bangladesh where these fabrics are more needed because of the weather and decide to buy instead, fabrics (preferably locally sourced) which are more suited to the European climate. This buyer may also, if they have the space to, try to find out about the needs of the sweatshop workers by learning from organizations led by garment workers, and contribute financially or by volunteering to help these efforts. This buyer may also participate in boycotts, advocacy for trade policy changes and other on-going efforts based on their critical judgement about which efforts are actually helping the people who are supposed to be helped. This buyer may also initiate such political

actions or participate in offering alternatives to western buyers. These are all valid forms of care that this buyer may offer to the people being exploited by structural injustices.

This approach does not merely relabel boycotts and other political actions as care, it also infuses political action with responsiveness, reflexivity and other features of interpersonal care ethics. In the rehabilitation programme for example, a practice of care would mean that the priority of the project is shifted to making the actual lives of the slum-dwellers better, rather than freeing up and developing land. This would mean the government will have to radically reinvestigate their own motivations for the project, unlearn any abstract notions arising from the academically discredited trickle-down development theories and allow the needs of the people on ground to be their sole guides for action. Not just that, but when projects fail i.e. people start leaving the reassigned homes, instead of taking refuge in our biases against slum-dwellers (e.g. they are just dirty people who do not know what is good for them), care would require that we see the people in front of us as capable of knowing about their lives, things that we may not know—we should be able to see them in their full humanity, flaws and competencies together. We should be able to admit that we can learn from them, we should be able to admit that we may have things to teach them but also that they might have things to teach us, not just as objects to be observed, but as people with intellectual and creative lives and with their own ways of making sense of the world. A relationship of care requires that we see each other as human and treat each other with respect and dignity.

Concluding Remarks

"If you have come here to help me, then you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

-Lilla Watson

Responsibility seems to begin with separation. Any responsibility that is assigned to us leads naturally to the question: a responsibility towards whom? This 'whom' must be distinct from the self. This means that care, obligation, and justice must move outward from the self, as if from a sealed container. But what if the self is not sealed? What if the self is porous, historical, embodied, conditioned by memory, desire, biology, friendship, love, and harm? What if it is not so sharply separated from the other(s)? Even if we do not imagine an argument as radical as that, we say safely at least, that a responsibility framework requires us to imagine ourselves as separate from the other. The existence of this separation is a matter quite different from whether we should imagine and articulate this separation when we articulate what to do in the face of injustice.

In my interpretation, Young's social connection model deals with this separation through an attempt to sidestep blame. By reframing responsibility as political rather than moral, she hopes to avoid the guilt and defensiveness that moral accusation can incite. She perhaps imagines that this will soothe any discomfort that arises out of being placed in separation to the other. But as this thesis has shown, in trying to evade blame, Young ends up diluting responsibility from its emotional and moral substance. But can there be no other ways of relating to others to better motivate ameliorative action? Ways which may need us to not just work around this separation but weaken it (or perhaps, overcome it)? Her model, in attempting to be more inclusive and action-oriented, ends up offering empty spaces—spaces

where people can claim to be responsible while avoiding accountability, self-reflection, or change.

The example of Jai and Aju shows how dangerous this can be. Jai contributes daily to a system that harms people like Aju. Yet under Young's framework, he can avoid scrutiny so long as he acts in good faith—or claims to. And if he does truly attempt to act in good faith, Young's model has nothing to offer in terms of guidance. Real change, as I have tried to show, often begins not necessarily in the abstract terrain of political structures, but in the messy space of personal introspection and human relationships (both grounded in emotional and material dependence). Jai's responsibility to Aju cannot be fully captured by impersonal obligation. It must be grounded in moral accountability, in responsiveness, in care.

This is not a sentimental point. The care framework, as articulated by Tronto, Kittay, and others, does something Young's framework cannot: it draws moral responsibility out of our entanglement with or dependence on others, not just from our participation in systems. It tells us not just that we have a job to do, but how to listen, how to respond, how to stay with another's need long enough that we might even be changed by it. If Jai lends Aju money but ignores his demands for better working conditions, he cannot claim to care. Care, in this framework, is not a feeling or a gesture—it is a moral practice, relationally situated and continuously renewed. Young herself seems to brush against this insight, though she does not dwell there. She writes of Levinas:

> Phenomenologically, I experience responsibility most primordially in embodied encounters with other persons. Being in the presence of another calls me to responsibility as I look into the depth of their eyes, sense the vulnerability of their flesh, apprehend their neediness and desire. I find myself opening toward them in communicative gestures of acknowledgment or welcome prior to the substance of any proposition. (Young, 2011, p. 162)

Notice how what Levinas is saying seems similar to Tronto and Fisher's explanation of how care is experienced in the body (Fisher & Tronto, 1991). Responsibility as an embodied and felt experience seems to be quite distinct from the way Young articulates these responsibilities, as impersonal. She dismisses embodied and internal experiences personal or interpersonal. She explains that this way of relating to others is relevant only if it results in political action (Young, 2011, p. 165).

Levinas and Fisher and Tronto, in their explanation of this embodied experience, describe a melting of separation between the self and the other. We feel the pain of others, see their needs almost as if they were our own. This exercise seems to come to fruition only when empathy leads to a merging of yourself with the other. This, I believe allows us to be more vulnerable and open to the other. A dissolution of the sharp separation between the self and the other may be essential to effectively motivate ameliorative action towards structural injustice. This may be articulated as an embodied and erotic experience that calls us to act and to show up for each other.

Thus a responsibility framework, which is purely linguistic and cognitive may not hold the same essence as an embodied one. This raises a big question about how embodied experiences translate to linguistic/cognitive frameworks and what places do each of them hold. I do not have any answers to any questions that arise from this. What is important here though, is if this articulation of responsibility as a cognitive linguistic imperative the only and the most effective way to motivate each other to take up action towards dismantling structural injustice. At least, it cannot teach us how to be. What we may need is not just a better list of obligations but also a better orientation—a way of being in the world that allows us to hold others close without collapsing into guilt or paternalism. This is what care ethics offers. And this, I believe, is where any model of responsibility must eventually go.

Audre Lorde, for example, imagines self-care as a political act (Lorde, 2012). This self-care is not individualistic, the self is relational, porous, and shaped by the same forces that harm others. To care for the self well may in fact be to care for others; to care for others truly may be to confront the ways in which we benefit from their suffering. If frameworks of responsibility do not bring us to this recognition—if they allow Jai to feel morally intact while contributing to Aju's hardship—then they are not enough. We may not need another language of responsibility. We may need to feel it in our bodies. We may need to let it transform us.

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