

# Moral Distanciation: Modernity, Distance, and the Ethics of Care

Sacha Ghandeharian

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## Abstract

This thesis undertakes a phenomenological investigation of the relationship between *distance* and *politics*. In the contemporary socio-political context, it is becoming ever more apparent that there are other, perhaps more alienating kinds of distance, apart from mere spatio-temporal distances. A feminist ethics of care reveals the ways that *emotional-psychological* distance can be detrimental to the meeting of human needs within socio-political life. Dominant, rationalist approaches to politics, which emphasize impartiality, objectivity, and universality, are not only ill-equipped to address emotional-psychological distance; indeed, they exacerbate this kind of distancing through the structure of moral reasoning on which they rely. Notions of ‘common humanity’ – central to universal-rationalist approaches, and requiring the establishment of a *public/private boundary* – intensifies this emotional-psychological distancing from others in the effort to bridge the spatio-temporal gaps between distant individuals, and *impersonally mediate* relations between the multiplicity of proximate strangers in modern *metropolitan* environments.

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## Chapter One: Introducing Distance(s)

The stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people. (Simmel [1908] 1950, 405)

Care does not, at first sight, seem to respond well to distance. This, of course, contrasts starkly with justice ethics or rights-based moral reasoning, for which ‘distance’ ensures impartiality and is therefore fundamental to sound moral judgment. (Robinson 1999, 43)

This thesis undertakes a phenomenological investigation of how distance constitutes and constrains moral and political relationships and reasoning. Through a close reading of important texts within the feminist and ethics of care literature, as well as other relevant works in social and political philosophy, I will explore how distance has been conceptualized, implicitly and explicitly, in theories of how we approach (or should approach) moral and political questions.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, if politics is understood as the search for the ‘best ways to live,’ this thesis will demonstrate that the promotion of ‘distance’ – specifically in its emotional-psychological dimension – in dominant modern universal-rationalist approaches to ethics and politics, is, in many ways, counter to this goal. Moral rationalists often rely on conditions of universalizability and impartiality – as the means to attain order, consent, and/or justice – which require an emotional-psychological distancing from the particular, context-specific features of one’s social existence, including their particular relationships with concrete others.

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<sup>1</sup> In regards to human relationships, I see physical and emotional distances as *nominal* properties, in the sense that everyone is their own person, and, therefore, always at a base-level of physical and emotional distance from others. However, I am mainly concerned in this thesis with distance as an *ordinal* property – something which is present to varying degrees in the context of interpersonal relationships. It can be best described as a *matter of degree*.

Questions regarding our moral relationships with distant strangers have occupied a central place in contemporary moral and political theory, particularly the field of international ethics. *How do my actions affect people who are halfway around the world? What are my responsibilities to those anonymous others, in distant countries, whom I will never meet, or see face-to-face? Do I have any obligations to these people? If so, what course of action should I take to fulfill my duties to these individuals or communities?*<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, these are important and complex issues in the sense that distances of space and time are a constituent factor of social existence.<sup>3</sup> When others are physically far from us – when we are not confronted with their physical presence – we are less likely to respond to their needs. That said, most moral analyses of ‘distant strangers’ assume that actual physical distance is *the* salient moral issue. These discussions also tend to assume that the moral agent lives in the affluent West (the global North), while the distant stranger is an impoverished individual in the global South.<sup>4</sup> However, this ignores the moral importance of a different kind of distance – emotional-psychological.

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<sup>2</sup> In the “Introduction” to a special issue of *The Monist* on the topic of morality and distance, “moral distance” is distinguished from “moral indifference” (Chatterjee 2003). The political theory of distance that I try to develop in this thesis sees these two aspects of morality as interrelated and co-constituting.

<sup>3</sup> I will often refer to both space and time as constituting the physical dimension of distance. This is not only because space and time are deeply related in conceptions of the natural world, but is also because my discussion of distances in the context of the modern city (Chapter Four) has an important temporal component. It should be noted that this temporal component is not historical and/or generational, although universal-rationalist principles do assume a kind of ‘timelessness.’ I will mainly be concerned with notions of efficiency, and modern capacities to travel over large distances in ever-shortening amounts of time.

<sup>4</sup> My concern here is not to advance an argument about a ‘legal’ or ‘metaphysical’ responsibility, but rather is to analyze the ways in which distance – both physical and emotional – hinders our ability to recognize/respond adequately to need as a result of it being harder to be attentive, receptive, and responsive. Therefore, for the purposes of analysis, I take as given that an awareness of pain and suffering would, at least initially, compel some sort of (emotional) response.

My point of departure in this thesis is the premise that a stranger is always distant regardless of whether they are near or far, in terms of actual physical distance or space. Indeed, the very notion of a stranger implies a sense of distance. Therefore, to call someone a ‘distant stranger’ is somewhat redundant, but its continued emphasis suggests that dominant discourses in political theory (including international political theory) have ignored a particular dimension, or manifestation, of distance.<sup>5</sup> We do not even have to take the stranger as our point of reference in order to experience psycho-emotional distance. Indeed, we can recognize it in its most basic form in our relationships with loved ones; such distance is present whenever one says, or hears, from a loved one: ‘You seem distant.’<sup>6</sup>

Typically, the distant person is characterized as *inattentive*, *unreceptive*, and/or *unresponsive*. These characteristics are similar to those identified by some care ethicists as features of deficient care work (Held 2006; Noddings 2002; Tronto 1993; 2013). Indeed, many of the concerns that I will raise about distance – regarding its potential socio-political harm – are similar to concerns raised by care theorists in regards to the neglecting of care as a morally valuable practice and disposition. Theories of care highlight the particular form of moral reasoning embodied in the practices of caring for particular others within human relationships, and argue that this form of moral reasoning

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘distant strangers’ as a means to explain the kind of distance I am primarily concerned with in this thesis. The stranger is someone that can be physically close, yet emotionally and psychologically distant. Therefore, I do not use ‘stranger’ as analogous to the ‘Other,’ but merely as a way to juxtapose the two kinds of distance that are at play, and the somewhat paradoxical relationship between them.

<sup>6</sup> As I will argue, the fact of being Other means that there is a minimum degree of distance, just from the fact that we are different people; however, this distance varies, and, therefore, one can become more or less ‘distant.’ Therefore, distance is not the opposite of intimacy; however, both physical and emotional distances play a role in determining the existence or level of intimacy present between subjects. Therefore, we can think of the degree of intimacy existing between subjects as being in a constant state of flux.

has been devalued in light of dominant (masculine) universal-rationalist approaches to morality and politics. It is therefore our close, particular relationships with concrete others, to whom we are responsible for providing care, which sustains human life, and, by extension, the health of socio-political communities. I argue that distance – like care – can be viewed as both a disposition and a set of practices, and, as relevant to discussions concerning the well-being of individuals and societies (Tronto 1993, 104).

Ultimately, my goal will be to flesh out the role that distance (in its various manifestations) plays in both our moral and political relationships, as well as our theories about those relationships. Theory and practice will therefore be seen as interrelated, and co-constituting. Once we identify the kinds of distance at play, their causes and their effects, we are faced with the question of how to make sense of these distances in moral and political theory. Thus, this thesis poses the following central question: *What kind of theoretical lens should we use to best understand the role of distance in our moral and political relationships; what form or theory of moral reasoning can best address ways of mediating and minimizing the detrimental effects of these distances in contemporary (global) society?*<sup>7</sup>

I will argue that dominant, rationalist approaches to moral and political theory, which emphasize impartiality, objectivity, and universality, are not only ill-equipped to address emotional-psychological distance; indeed, they accentuate or exacerbate this kind of distancing through the structure of moral reasoning on which they rely. I will argue

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that distance does not have any positive effects. As I discuss in Chapter Three, emotional distance is important in avoiding biases and injustices in the socio-political realm. Also, being attentive to an Other's needs includes knowing when that Other needs a degree of distance, both physical and emotional, from Others. Therefore, distance is not something to be eradicated (this is not possible, nor desirable). It is rather the tendency in universal-rationalist moral and political theories to prioritize principles of non-interference and an individualistic conception of autonomy (and, therefore, of distance – both physical and emotional – as their guarantors) that I will critique from the care perspective.

that, by contrast, a feminist ethics of care reveals the ways that emotional-psychological distance can be detrimental to the development of moral relationships and/or reasoning.

The claim that a feminist ethics of care is uniquely suited to address the role of distance in socio-political life may seem somewhat counter-intuitive, as critics have often charged care ethics with being best suited to personal relationships, particularly familial relationships. However, the legitimacy of such a critique hinges on a limited understanding of both distance and the ethics of care. In the contemporary social and political context, it is becoming ever more apparent that there are other, perhaps more alienating kinds of distance, apart from mere space-time distances. A feminist ethics of care is especially well-equipped for a critique of distance in its emotional and psychological form. This is doubly true in the sense that care ethics can not only be used as a means to understand and critique the role of distance in society, but offers an alternative form of moral reasoning that can help to minimize the effects of distance in everyday life and politics.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will further elaborate on the distinction I make between physical and emotional distance, indicate why the ethics of care is especially useful in thinking about the relationship between distance, morality, and politics, and outline the structure and method of my argument.

### **Distance and Distanciation**

Central to this thesis is the distinction between ‘distance,’ and what I will often refer to as ‘distanciation.’ By distance I mean the basic forms of space and time distances that exist as a result of our nature as individuated subjects. Human beings are embodied, and, therefore, are spatially and temporally distinct from one another (I am a

particular material body, inhabiting a specific spatial and temporal location in relation to other material bodies). This is why Doreen Massey defines space as the “dimension of multiplicity, of the more-than-one ... a plurality of positionalities” (2004, 14-5). As a consequence of distance, we are also able to perceive what I will call ‘distanciation.’ As material bodies we also have distinct psyches (I have a particular identity, consciousness, memories, emotions, mental makeup etc... in relation to other psyches). Being spatially and temporally distinct (at a distance from everyone else) means that we are also psychologically and emotionally distinct (distanced) since a particular mind is inseparable from the particular body it inhabits. Space-time distance therefore entails at least a minimum of emotional-psychological distanciation just from the fact that human beings are materially, and, therefore, mentally, distinct from one another in the concrete world; I can experience the presence of another person, but can never experience their inner state of mind directly (in the first person), as I can my own.<sup>8</sup> Emotional-psychological distanciation is, therefore, connected to this base level of spatio-temporal distance; both are constitutive of our experience of reality, and, therefore, set the parameters in which socio-political relationships take place.

That being said, spatio-temporal distance and emotional-psychological distanciation can, at times, expand and contract somewhat independently from one another. I can get physically closer to someone without necessarily becoming psychologically closer; likewise, I can expand the degree of physical distance from

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<sup>8</sup> This is where empathy becomes crucially important. Empathy is best understood as a disposition that individuals can have towards others, and is *ordinal* in the sense that some are more empathetic than others. It is important to keep in mind that a disposition of empathy is not just a passive attitude, but rather is an active orientation towards understanding others from their context-specific position (this point will be elaborated in my discussion of Diana Meyers’s notion of ‘empathic thought’ in Chapter Three). In this thesis, empathy is closely tied to distanciation, and, in particular, one’s *receptiveness* to the particularity of others.

someone without necessarily increasing the level of psychological distancing.<sup>9</sup> My use of the term ‘distancing’ is related to that of Anthony Giddens, whose theory of time-space distancing (broadly speaking) explores the phenomenon whereby modern social relations have developed an increased capacity to traverse the boundaries of space and time, and thus implies that the constitution of interpersonal encounters is not solely a matter of physical proximity (1990, 18-21).<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, distancing will refer to the emotional and psychological landscape of social relationships, particularly, the process whereby individuals become more or less emotionally and psychologically distant. Therefore, while the changing nature of space and time, as they relate to the experience of human relationships, is important to my discussion, the primary focus will be on the mental coordinates of those relationships.

It should be noted that distance and distancing, since they are foundational to human existence, can never be completely overcome. The question is not whether there is, or, is not, distancing; the question is how this distancing can be intensified or minimized in human relationships. Therefore, the goal of my critique is not to suggest that distancing is ‘bad’ and should be eradicated; I do not think this would be possible or desirable. However, I will argue that just as there can be greater and lesser degrees of distance between human subjects, there can be greater and lesser degrees of distancing between those same subjects. The task then becomes to identify, as closely as possible, the nature of this distancing, in the hope of minimizing it when harmful to the well-

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<sup>9</sup> Christine Milligan and Janine Wiles make a similar argument regarding the physical and emotional dimensions of distance in regards to the impact that geographical distance has on relationships of care (2010, 740-1).

<sup>10</sup> “Disembedding” is the term Giddens uses to refer to the removal of “social relations from the immediacies of context,” which is characteristic of modernity (1990, 28).

being of individuals engaged in relationships. A feminist ethics of care is very useful in trying to identify the negative effects of a moral and political theory that prioritizes the use of impartial and/or detached reason as a means to mediate the multiplicity of social life, thus accentuating the initial emotional-psychological distancing between people by directing their attention to abstract rules and principles instead of the *real* situations of particular others.

Distancing, like care, is both a disposition and a set of practices. The *disposition* of distancing can be characterized as an inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and/or unresponsiveness to the particularity of others. Distancing, as a set of *practices*, is most apparent in two forms, which I will call: ‘impersonal mediation’ and the ‘public/private boundary.’ Furthermore, the dispositional and practical dimensions of distancing are interconnected and co-constituting; the disposition enables the practices, and the practices intensify (require) the disposition.

Dominant moral theories – of rights and justice – construct moral subjects as autonomous, impartial and distanced from others. Rationalist moral reasoning acts as an impersonal mediator between subjects. Liberal justice reasoning constructs moral agents as individuals who are guided by formal, rationally-generated rules and principles; rather than being attentive, receptive and responsive to the concrete, context-specific existence of particular others, they must distance themselves in order to gain a ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel 1986). Thus, distancing as disposition and practice are intertwined. This distancing (impersonal mediation) coincides, and is further accentuated, with the drawing of moral boundaries within socio-political life, in particular the division between public and private life, and the corresponding split between public and private uses of

reason (Tronto 1993; 2013). I identify the public/private boundary as a *practice* since implicit in universal-rationalist moral and political theories is the separation of public from private spheres, and, thus, of people's public and private identities. This separation (or distance) has to be maintained, and/or, adhered to, at least implicitly, in the moral reasoning of the justice perspective. Therefore, along with the practice of impersonal mediation is the practice of maintaining the public/private distinction (boundary) in socio-political encounters.

Impersonal mediation and the public/private boundary construct human interaction as governed by a pre-set form of moral and political reasoning that is held as universal. This is another reason why the feminist ethics of care is well-suited to a critique of distancing, since it challenges the proposed universal status of dominant (modern) approaches to ethics – approaches that have Enlightenment notions of a common humanity and rationality at their core (Benhabib 1985; Nicholson 1998). A central argument of this thesis is that it is this very conception of 'common humanity' that intensifies an emotional-psychological distancing from others, in the effort to bridge the spatio-temporal gaps between distant individuals, and mediate relations between the multiplicity of proximate strangers.

The crucial point to note is that both practices of distancing – impersonal mediation and the public/private boundary – hinder moral agents' ability to recognize the particularity of concrete individuals and the relationships of which they are members (the disposition of distancing). One of the primary goals of this analysis will be to demonstrate how this process of distancing takes place, and the detrimental effects that such distancing can bring about. This is politically significant for several reasons: a)

moral distancing is a feature of modern capitalist societies, where the value of efficiency often necessitates the assumption of common needs, wants, and a shared sense of justice; political institutions which are based on this assumed uniformity often try and meet individual and social needs *at a distance*, thus being inattentive to important context-specific factors, which would allow for more appropriate and adequate response; b) distancing devalues the moral significance of the practices of care that sustain life and that (historically) have been performed by women; c) distancing, in part, sustains the boundary between public and private life, thus perpetuating gender inequalities; and, d) distancing makes it harder to engage in the kinds of relationships that serve to develop our identities and to live a fulfilling life. Therefore, if political theory is about finding the ‘best ways to live,’ moral distancing becomes politically problematic on a number of fronts. Distance, care, and politics are all issues of *human relationships*, and refer to the properties and/or conditions of human interaction.

It should be noted that the primary focus of this thesis will be on the ways that distance and distancing effect moral and political relationships at the level of *individuals within political communities*. Furthermore, I take a very broad view of politics; therefore, these relationships can range from the most general interpersonal social encounters, to encounters between citizens and bureaucracies and/or political institutions, and/or political decision-makers and particular social groups. These relationships will be assessed with reference to the recognizing and fulfilling of human needs, and how our dispositions in encounters can hinder or help this process.

## **Distance and the Ethics of Care**

Taking into account the emotional-psychological form of distance (what I will be calling ‘distanciation’) outlined above, we see that the ethics of care is not only well-suited to critique such moral distanciation, but is perhaps one of the few moral theories that can do so without falling into a general moral skepticism, or nihilism. The reason for this is that the ethics of care’s primary concern is the investigation of the moral significance of particular, context-specific relationships of care. Such a moral theory need not arise from any foundational argument about human virtue, the ‘good,’ or laws of reason, but rather starts from a *relational ontology*, that recognizes our shared dependency on ongoing practices of care (Robinson 2011, 29). Such a view takes our closeness to others, and, therefore, our mutual vulnerability, as the starting point of thinking about moral reasoning; however, the crucial difference between this approach, and the approach of most modernist moral theory, is that the ethics of care does not then try to distance itself from the context of these relationships, in order to construct formal rules or principles for moral conduct. Care ethics, in this sense, maintains its focus on the network of relationships that construct particular individuals’ lives, and at different times, in different ways, makes that life possible. Theories that promote moral distanciation not only fail to represent accurately the concrete realities of human life, but propose forms of moral reasoning that can often be detrimental to the well-being of actual persons.

My analysis will concern itself with comparing and contrasting the abstract-impairity of what has been called the ‘justice voice’ – an example of what I call the ‘distant voice’ – with the ‘care voice’ that recognizes human life as concrete and

relational.<sup>11</sup> The care voice is often charged with not being amenable to the realities of distance in modern life, but I argue that it is moral theories that try and overcome these spatio-temporal distances through the promotion of universal forms of moral reasoning that accentuate a different form of distance (emotional-psychological) in ways that are more detrimental than mere physical distance (care theory addresses these physical distances as well). Universalizing rights, principles, duties, or methods of decision-making so that they are applicable no matter the time or place, is ultimately counter-productive since, as they try to minimize the limiting effects of spatio-temporal distance on moral relationships, they increase the degree of emotional-psychological distancing.

Distancing is built into the process of moral reasoning in the justice voice and intensifies emotional-psychological distances between people through the general privileging of rationalism in the institutions and structure of everyday socio-political life. Impartiality is often presented in modern moral theories as the rational, autonomous person's safeguard against the determined world of nature and irrational emotion. What the ethics of care, especially in its explicitly feminist versions, shows, is that this freedom is the freedom of a very particular kind of subject, with a very particular kind of reason, which in the moral and political theory canon is taken as universal. This subject is masculine, self-sufficient (which usually means healthy and wealthy), and spends most of his time in the public realm of politics and the market. The ethics of care is crucial in our understanding of distancing since it demonstrates how a moral theory that encourages

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<sup>11</sup> Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) introduced the distinction between the care voice and/or care perspective and the justice voice and/or justice perspective, which refers to the different moral perspectives/theories she heard expressed by males and females in studies of moral development. The voice or perspective of care (to put it simply) takes as its primary focus the responsibilities of care that develop in the context of personal relationships. The voice or perspective of justice, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with the 'objective' rules and/or principles that should govern human behavior. The ethics of care literature frequently uses this shorthand, and I do the same in this thesis.

the distancing of oneself from the particular features that situate them, and others, in the world should not be taken as *the* template of moral reasoning, since such distancing devalues the moral voices of those engaged in actual relationships with particular others, and is a detriment to the concrete practices that sustain life and allow it to flourish.

The ethics of care is therefore crucial in the attempt to critique the practices of distanciation in universalist moral and political theories for three specific reasons: a) it reveals that dominant approaches to moral theory have ignored the value of care in sustaining and nurturing human life; b) that the formal and abstract nature of the justice voice cannot adequately meet the needs of concrete persons; and c) that the view of moral autonomy (particularly that of the Kantian deontological model) does not accurately reflect how individuals lead their lives in relation to particular others.

### **Method and Outline**

Inevitably, there will be a normative element to my argument, in that I wish to suggest that there are forms of moral and political reasoning that are more conducive to building healthy relationships that sustain life and human fulfillment in socio-political communities. However, I start from the premise that social reality is fluid, and, therefore, requires a kind of moral reasoning that is open (flexible) to changing circumstance, to particular situations and persons; in this sense, I am not seeking to prescribe, or defend, a definitive moral and/or political theory, but rather want to demonstrate how attempts to locate a definitive moral theory have led to a distancing of human subjects from one another. Thinking about moral and political questions should focus less on efficient ways to traverse and order spatio-temporal distances and the multiplicity of physical reality, and more on the moment of arrival, where concrete persons, in context-specific

situations, engage in relation. The ethics of care, on the other hand, can be read as attempting to traverse the distance that still remains when we reach our destination by means of a common, decontextualized moral language.

The second chapter will consist of a brief outline of some of the dominant approaches to moral and political theory that I have designated as the ‘distant voices.’ I will do this in two parts, the first of which will look at the basic elements of the Kantian deontological approach to morality, as well as at a more contemporary application of such an approach in the form of John Rawls’s notion of an ‘overlapping consensus.’ In Kant ([1785] 2005), we find what is arguably the most effective example of the effort to establish an *impersonal mediator* (in the form of a universal moral law) to govern human relationships. Rawls’s notion of an overlapping consensus is an illustration of distancing as the drawing of socio-political boundaries, particularly the public/private sphere distinction, which accompanies the impersonal mediation of the ‘freestanding’ political conception of justice ([1993] 2005). In the second section of Chapter Two, I will turn to the communitarian tradition, looking specifically at the Hegelian critique of Kantian ethics, and Charles Taylor’s assessment of what he calls the ‘primacy of rights’ approach (1985). While I will argue, from a feminist perspective, that communitarianism ultimately does not provide an adequate solution to the problems of distancing, it is still useful in the sense that the communitarian critique, in my view, represents an attempt to minimize the degree of distancing that one finds in the dominant liberal-universalist approach, by attempting to couch discussions of rights and duties in communal practice, rather than a universal and detached conception of rationality. It should be noted that my intention is not to provide a comprehensive assessment of the above theories, but only to

establish some basic features of the dominant modern ethical traditions – as they relate to the topics of distance and care ethics – that I will critique in subsequent chapters.

In the third chapter, I will turn to a discussion of *encounters*. It is in the context of our everyday encounters that we can, potentially, experience care, as well as emotional-psychological distancing. Therefore, in order to appreciate the ways in which distancing can be harmful to socio-political life at-large, we first have to understand how it is detrimental to the various encounters, the totality of which, constitutes a socio-political community. My analysis will compare Nel Noddings's description of 'natural caring' (2002), and Diana Meyers's notion of 'empathic thought' (1994). I will place these two concepts within the broader context of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical and political philosophy, as it appears in his short essay, "Peace and Proximity," in which Levinas charts the movement from 'ethical responsibility' in proximate encounters, to the institution of 'political justice,' suitable to remote encounters ([1984] 1996). I argue that a parallel can be drawn between Levinas and the ethics of care in the sense that both question the *prioritizing* of reason in our moral and political thought. The goal of this comparative reading will be to demonstrate how emotional-psychological distancing is intensified as a result of efforts to *mediate* the multiplicity of remote and proximate others through an impartial systematizing of our ethical responsibilities to those others. Indeed, it is in such efforts to rationalize our moral encounters that we can become increasingly emotionally-psychologically remote from those who are nevertheless physically proximate. This remoteness is characterized by a disposition of inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness to the particularities of those others whom we encounter, especially as it relates to the concrete needs of those others.

It is in the ethics of care that we find an alternative approach to encounters, what I will call ‘caring encounters.’ I use the term ‘caring encounters’ to identify any instance where individuals are attentive, receptive, and responsive to particular others (especially as it relates to their needs) in interpersonal relations. These criteria correspond to the dispositions necessary for effective caring, as outlined in the ethics of care literature. Such encounters can range from close, personal (familial) relations to instances of professional caregiving. It is important to note that professional caring, because of the possibilities for bureaucratic restraints, and its nature as paid-work, is always at risk of being inattentive and unreceptive to others. Furthermore, I use the notion of caring encounters not to suggest some sort of ‘ideal’ encounter that is caring, but, rather, to demonstrate how encounters can become *more caring*, as opposed to *more distant*. Therefore, according to these admittedly broad criteria, caring encounters can occur across physical distances, even though they may be negatively affected by such distance.

I will therefore juxtapose the distant encounters of the justice voice with the caring encounters of the care voice. I will argue that our experience of close, personal caring relations is a better starting point for our moral and political deliberations, and certainly a more natural point of departure than that of disembodied rationality.<sup>12</sup> One can more accurately identify the needs of the Other when they are emotionally and psychologically close, and gain a better awareness of the nuances of those needs and the situations from which they arise. Thinking about morality should not start from the assumption of human remoteness, but rather from the experience of human proximity,

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<sup>12</sup> Close personal relationships and disembodied rationality are not necessarily in opposition. It is the *prioritizing* of disembodied rationality in modern rationalist approaches to morality and politics which I (and the ethics of care) am critical of. Furthermore, in the final section of Chapter Three, I will analyze how the ethics of care addresses the dangers of paternalism and unhealthy relationships.

particularly in relations of care. That being said, it is important to address the role of impartiality in theories of justice. Therefore, I will assess (from an ethics of care perspective) the claim that impartiality is crucial in order to avoid socio-political disadvantages resulting from bias, favouritism, and/or prejudice. I will show that the care perspective does not reject impartiality as such, but rather, the prioritizing of impartial reason in the moral and political theories of the justice perspective.

In the second section of Chapter Three, I will argue that the tendency for an attitude of emotional-psychological distancing in one's encounters is determined, in part, along gender lines. It is in Nancy Chodorow's description of the process whereby boys and girls separate themselves from the mother (the primary care-giver), through the demarcation of ego boundaries (1978), that we can potentially locate the origin of the emotionally-psychologically distant voice. Nancy Chodorow argues that because boys have to differentiate themselves more completely from their mothers in their process of identity formation, and the mother, (historically) as primary care-giver, is the person who is spatio-temporally closest to the boy, the male child develops an increased tendency to emotionally and psychologically distance themselves from others, in order to facilitate separation from the mother. This increased tendency for distancing is thus part of masculine identity, and reflects the predominance of the distant justice voice among males, as identified by Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice* ([1982] 1993).

The relationship between gender, distance, and morality is further elaborated in Sara Ruddick's notion of 'maternal thinking' (1989), which argues that the prioritizing of public life often requires mothers to take a position of distancing vis-à-vis their encounters with their children. The boundaries of public and private can often lead to a

fragmentation or self-distanciation, where the mother is caught between the demands of impersonal-universal public reason, and an emotionally involved, contextual rationality of care (Ruddick 1989). The rationality of care, necessary for the sustaining and flourishing of human life, requires attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness to the specific needs of particular others, whom we engage with in emotionally-proximate caring encounters. Reflecting on Diana Meyers's notion of empathic thought (1994) and Sara Ruddick's concept of 'reflective feeling' (1989), in the context of Noddings's description of the encounter (2002), illustrates the possibilities for alternative forms of interaction, that minimize emotional-psychological distanciation, and thus provides more effective means of addressing needs at both the interpersonal, as well as political, levels. Like Noddings (2002) and Meyers (1994), Ruddick (1989) advocates an approach to human encounters that does not eschew the use of reason, but rather argues for a use of reason that is grounded in our emotional-psychological proximity to concrete others. It is when individuals traverse the boundary between public and private that they can become distanced from their own unique sense of moral responsibility (their moral voice), while simultaneously becoming distant in their everyday encounters with others – as (impersonally) mediated by the distant justice voice.

There has been some engagement between the ethics of care and Levinas's ethical theory (Diedrich, Burggraeve, Gastmans 2006; Lavoie, Koninck, Blondeau 2006), but virtually none between the ethics of care and Georg Simmel.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in Chapter Four, I will continue my discussion of encounters, but this time, from the macro-perspective of modern city life, where distant encounters are the norm. In Simmel

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that Guy Oakes mentions, in passing, the potential similarities between Simmel's notion of a 'female sense of justice,' and the ethics of care, in his introduction to a collection of Simmel's essays on women, sexuality, and love (Oakes in Simmel 1984, 46-7).

([1903] 2002), we find a description of social encounters, as situated in modern city life (what Simmel calls the ‘metropolis’), that clearly illustrates the distinction between spatio-temporal distance and emotional-psychological distancing. Simmel argues that it is the over-abundance of proximate others in modern urban life that necessitates mediation by means of instrumental rationality – what Margaret Urban Walker (1998) calls the ‘theoretical-juridical model of moral reasoning.’ To survive in the modern city, one must emotionally distance themselves from others, and this, for Simmel, is what leads to the development of a ‘*blasé* outlook.’<sup>14</sup> Simmel’s somewhat paradoxical claim that we are most remote from others, at the very moment that we are surrounded by others, nicely illustrates what I mean by emotional-psychological distancing in contradistinction to spatio-temporal distance. In Simmel’s writings we also find an explicit attempt to distinguish traditionally ‘masculine’ from ‘feminine’ forms of moral reasoning (1984); this description bears a striking resemblance to the findings of Carol Gilligan (1993) in *In a Different Voice*, in which the distinction is made between the justice voice and the care voice.

In the second part of Chapter Four, I will connect this description of life in the city, and the forms of moral reasoning that employ an impersonal mediator, with the distancing of the public (politics and the economy) from the private, which Joan Tronto (1993) identifies as one of the moral boundaries constitutive of modern Western society.

My aim in this thesis is to build a persuasive case as to why universalistic theories of moral reasoning are not up to the task of mediating the inherent distance

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<sup>14</sup> Loren King offers a helpful definition of city life, which takes into account the advent of urban sprawl, when she writes: “I use the terms ‘metropolitan life’ and ‘city life’ to denote ways of life characteristic of modern urban regions, including both dense central city areas and more dispersed outlying residential and commercial areas that are linked to a central city, or cities, by transportation and communication networks, and corresponding patterns of trade and employment” (2004, 98).

(individuation) in human interactions, since they accentuate distancing (emotional-psychological). Not only does turning to the ethics of care, I argue, help us understand distancing, but it also serves to remind us of our capacities to limit this distancing in human encounters. Care, in this sense, involves recognition of the modern world as a “spatially extensive and diverse matrix of social relations and political deliberations” (Robinson 2011, 14), of networks of actual, context-specific relationships, where the substance of our moral encounters with proximate others should be focused on being attentive, receptive, and responsive to particular needs in the “historical and spatial contexts of real, lived experiences” (Robinson 2011, 29).

## Chapter Two: Distant Voices

Rationalism endorses a particular epistemological approach to being political that, among other things, champions certainty and predictability in the hope of engendering a modicum of stability within the quotidian existence of individuals as well as the political structures that constitute the community. (Beattie 2013, 194)

My goal in this chapter is threefold; first, I will briefly present four important theories/theorists that are representative of dominant modern approaches in moral and political thought (i.e. from the Enlightenment onwards). Second, I will demonstrate how one can identify the practices of distancing (i.e. mediation and boundary) in these theories (especially in Kant and Rawls), as well as efforts to minimize moral distancing (specifically in the cases of Hegel and Charles Taylor). Finally, I will introduce some criticisms of these moral theories from both feminist philosophy, as well as other contemporary political theorists, as it relates to various elements of my analysis.

### **Kant and Rawls: Duty and Consensus**

The ontological dualism of the culture of the ancient regime had to be replaced by a functional dualism, and the crisis of modernity had to be resolved by means of adequate mechanisms of mediation. It was paramount to avoid the multitude's being understood ... in a direct, immediate relation with divinity and nature, as the ethical producer of life and the world. On the contrary, in every case mediation had to be imposed on the complexity of human relations.... The ethical world is incommunicable except through the *schematism of reason*. (Hardt & Negri 2000, 78-9, italics in original)

In Kant, we find, arguably, the most influential theory of moral rationalism. Kantian ethics is representative of what I have called the 'distant voice' in four important (interrelated) ways. First, Kantian ethics assumes a distinction between reason and the natural world, and, furthermore, that human beings hold a privileged position in relation

to nature as a consequence of their rationality. Second, human beings, through the proper exercise of reason, are said to become aware of moral principles and/or duties; actions are then morally-justified to the extent that they align with these rational principles. Third, arriving at these principles (the moral law) requires the exercise of reason free from the particular circumstances of individuals' lives; reason, in its highest form, is 'pure' (i.e. universal and impartial). Finally, from a Kantian perspective, adherence to the moral law is what constitutes human beings as autonomous.

Historically, the influence of Kant's systematizing of morality has been profound, and much of Western moral philosophy since has, to varying degrees, been a critique or development of Kantian ethics. Most importantly, for the purposes of my analysis of distance, is the influence of Kant as it relates to the division between the public and private uses of reason, as well as the emphasis placed on universalizability as the standard for judging the validity of moral and political principles. As I will discuss, John Rawls ([1971] 1999; [1993] 2005) is heavily influenced by the Kantian version of the social contract – as comprising laws and principles that have universal validity, and, therefore, providing the basis for social and political consensus. One also finds the notions of public reason and universalizability as central to Habermasian discourse ethics, which relies on an assumption of common rationality as the basis for forging (democratic) agreement on moral and political norms and principles through inclusive and uncoerced dialogue, in-line with the standards of the *public* use of reason (Habermas 1995).<sup>15</sup> The cosmopolitan tradition in international relations and global ethics, likewise, has firm roots in Kantian moral and political philosophy – primarily the notion of a

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<sup>15</sup> Fiona Robinson (2011a) and Virginia Held both criticize (from an ethics of care perspective) the highly idealized view of dialogue implicit in Habermasian discourse ethics (2006, 20).

*rational*, universal moral law as that which “can help to create a world marked by predictability, order and stability” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 1).<sup>16</sup>

### The Moral Law

For Kant, as he argues in *The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, reason demands that the actions of all persons be commensurable with the moral law, which, as an imperative of reason, transcends all other concerns and particular interests. For an act to be moral, it must be motivated by reverence (not emotion) for the moral law, and detached from any projected end that originates from inclination (i.e. happiness or the satisfaction of needs). An action finds its moral worth solely in the motivating principle (i.e. “the good will,” which is intrinsically good in itself) (Kant [1785] 2005, 55). The specific obligations of a good will are “duties” that all are impelled to follow, and these duties are grounded in human rationality. Kant argues further that this ability to live and make decisions according to the moral law makes man free (2005, 92). This freedom is a freedom of the mind, and arises from man’s ability to disembody his will, and, therefore, gain autonomy from the sensible world of inclination. Hence, one’s social positioning does not alter their ability to follow the moral law; neither does his material or concrete circumstances impede him from keeping a pure and good will as the motivation for his actions. Moral principles are independent of experience as,

all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely *a priori* in reason, and that, moreover, in the commonest reason[.]... It is just this purity of their origin that makes them worthy to serve as our supreme practical principle, and that just in proportion as we add anything empirical, we detract from their genuine influence and from the absolute value of actions. (Kant 2005, 72, italics in original)

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<sup>16</sup> Kant’s theory of “perpetual peace” is perhaps the most well-known example ([1795] 1970).

The exercise of free will is rooted in the use of practical reason; *pure* practical reason is the mechanism by which one determines which ends are consistent with the duties that arise from the commands of reason (Kant [1788] 2005, 132-4).<sup>17</sup> In this way, practical reason is shown as having two primary functions; the first of these is the capacity for practical reason to subject external causality to rules. This ability to direct external entities towards certain self-determined goals makes it so that the individual is not completely subject to external causality. The second capacity is the way in which practical reason allows the individual to subject internal causalities to self-given rules. However, because of our imperfect rationality, there always exists a tension between pleasure and duty – in other words, between the sensual world, and the world of rational thought. The purpose of the categorical imperative is to bring this world of the senses under the command of reason (Kant [1797] 2005, 157-8).<sup>18 19</sup>

Man within nature is the only being, through his ability to reason, that can act by his own volition in accordance with the moral law. Kant writes: “The will is a capacity to choose *that only* which reason independent of inclination recognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good” (2005, 73, italics in original). However, man is an imperfect rational being as a result of being subject to the world of sensibility. Therefore, he must bring the world of sensibility under the commands of reason. One now comes to the demands of reason, which are its imperatives. Kant states that there are two distinct

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<sup>17</sup> On this point, I am drawing from Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, selections of which are included in Kant (2005) as an appendix.

<sup>18</sup> The ‘sensual world’ is the determined world of nature and our particular existence within it, including our concrete relationships with particular others. The sensual world, i.e. the physical world, is distinguished from the world of pure reason/abstract universal thought.

<sup>19</sup> From Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, selections of which are included in Kant (2005) as an appendix.

imperatives of reason. The first is the “hypothetical imperative,” described as a command that a particular action is necessary as a means to bring about a specific end. The second imperative is the “categorical imperative,” which commands that an action be able to fulfill the requirements of duty, and in that way to be good, and, therefore, necessary, in and of itself; thus, categorical imperatives are *a priori* (Kant 2005, 74).

The first principle of the categorical imperative is that an individual’s every action must be by nature a maxim that could be willed as universal law (i.e. be universally-valid) (Kant 2005, 81). The second principle requires that, in acting, rational beings recognize man as an end in himself (Kant 2005, 87). This second principle subsequently leads to the notion of a “kingdom of ends”; this demands that the actions of individuals must be in “harmony with the ends of humanity” and, as Kant writes: “From this results a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws” (2005, 92).

The social contract, in Kant, becomes a regulative idea of reason, a *mediator* of social relations that synchronizes individual wills with one another across both space and time (this is the “universal law of right”) (2005, 154). Kant gives us a glimpse at how this rational mediation – what Hardt and Negri call a form of “weak transcendence ... [where] [m]odernity replaced the traditional transcendence of command with the transcendence of the ordering function” (2000, 79, 88) – is applied in practice, when he writes:

Impulses of nature, accordingly, involve *obstacles* within the human being’s mind to his fulfillment of duty and (sometimes powerful) forces opposing it, which he must judge that he is capable of resisting and conquering by reason not at some time in the future but at once (the moment he thinks of duty): he must judge that *he* can do what the law tells him unconditionally that he *ought* to do. (Kant [1797] 2005, 158, italics in original)

Liberal-democratic theorists, such as Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, incorporate the notion of the categorical imperative in their theories of political justice – every member of society should only act from maxims that could gain universal consent, thus allowing each individual will to coincide with everyone else’s. As Habermas argues in his reflections on the role of public reason in Rawls’s political theory of justice: “The role of the categorical imperative is taken over by an intersubjectively applied procedure which is embodied in participation conditions, such as the equality of parties, and in situational features, such as the veil of ignorance” (1995, 116). In a sense, politics – from the justice perspective – becomes the practical application of the categorical imperative.

In Kantian ethics we find a *universal* moral law, which requires both distanciation from the sensual world, and hence, from our connection to particular others, as well as a corresponding self-distanciation from one’s own particularity, and, therefore, from one’s particular moral voice (Hutchings 2013, 32); this particular, or context-specific, moral voice is replaced by the impersonal mediator of the categorical imperative “in which self-sufficient reason alone holds sway” (Hutchings 2013, 25). John Rawls will draw on the Kantian themes of universalizability and impartiality in order to develop a political conception of justice that can accommodate the cultural diversity of modern Western life by facilitating the reaching of a consensus on the basic principles of justice that could be commonly held by all rational persons.<sup>20</sup> However, I argue, such a consensus will depend on a separation of the public from the private spheres of life. The establishment of a *boundary* between the particularities of private life and the universality of public life becomes the basis for social and political unity in much the same way that Kantian

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<sup>20</sup> Note that Rawls’s political philosophy is primarily concerned with formulating principles of redistributive justice.

universalizability becomes the basis for establishing a *unity in multiplicity*, as illustrated through the image of a kingdom of ends. Therefore, Rawls can be seen as representative of the distant voice as a result of his reliance on reason as impersonal mediator, and the corresponding boundary between the public and private realms of social existence, which hinder attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness to others.

### Rawls, Public Reason, and the Overlapping Consensus

In *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls presents the concept of an “overlapping consensus” to demonstrate that it is possible to have a stable and just society, with free and equal citizens, who are not unified in regards to a single “comprehensive doctrine” of religious, ethical, or philosophical principles (2005, 133). Such a consensus is necessitated by the existence of a “reasonable pluralism” – as to the moral values that should guide human life – in modern democratic society. As a result of this reasonable pluralism, stable and legitimate political order can only be achieved if each member of a society is able to endorse a common “political conception of justice,” not as a compromise, but because it is compatible with their own comprehensive doctrine (or conception of the good). A political conception of justice, which allows for a wide variety of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, contributes to stable social unity (Rawls 2005, 134).

Political power is coercive, and in a constitutional regime, this power is that of the public. The public is composed of rational persons, and political authority must be legitimized and compatible with society as a group of free and equal members (Rawls 2005, 136). Therefore, political authority is ‘just’ when it is founded on a constitution that can be assented to by all rational persons, even though they may hold differing

comprehensive doctrines. *Reasonable* political concepts are those which deal with basic justice, and the ideals and principles of a fair and just political society (Rawls 2005, 137). Once these *political* values are established in an overlapping consensus, they are relatively stable as a result of a common political conception of justice that fits with various comprehensive doctrines, but, nevertheless, remains independent (i.e. ‘freestanding’) (Rawls 2005, 140-3).

This consensus on the political conception of justice is not just an agreement between varying competing interests; neither is it merely the act of bowing to authority. One consents to these political values as a result of their position as rational beings, and use their own comprehensive doctrine as the foundation for this consent (Rawls 2005, 147). Therefore, its stability is not threatened by any shift in the distribution of social power (Rawls 2005, 148). This stability is maintained by respecting the limits of reason in regards to discovering the definitive principles of the good life, while coming to agreement on the fundamental principles of justice, and building an overlapping consensus around these principles (Rawls 2005, 152). These principles can be summed up as being the terms of fair social cooperation that would be agreed upon by rational, impartial, free, and equal citizens in an ‘original position’ behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ (i.e. what can be reasonably agreed upon by citizens who are at a distance from their particularity, and thus, unbiased) (Rawls 2005, 158).

Political stability can only come about by agreement on the basic rights and liberties that will govern a given political community. Rawls stresses the importance of public reason, what he calls “common human reason” (2005, 137), in the search for legitimate principles of order with universal validity, much in the same way Kant does.

Furthermore, one could argue that Rawls's political liberalism is the natural evolution of Kantian ethics in the sense that it strives for compatibility with multicultural society, and thus abandons the metaphysical dimension of the Kantian project; although, this compatibility depends on keeping one's particularity 'at home,' thus not allowing it to muddy the waters of a relatively shallow conception of public justice – what Olena Hankivsky describes as “an outline of a painting that has yet to be filled in” (2004, 31).

Therefore, Rawls's stable consensus reinforces the boundary between public and private life, and, therefore, public and private reason. One has an overlapping consensus so long as individuals maintain a necessary degree of *distance* between the private sphere – which constitutes their concrete existence and particularity in significant ways – and the public sphere of supposedly universal principles of justice, arrived at through the exercise of man's common rationality.<sup>21</sup> Distanciation as *impersonal mediation* and the *public/private boundary* are connected in the sense that the 'freestanding' conception of justice impersonally mediates society, in part, through the establishment of a boundary between public (universal) and private (particular) life. Slavoj Žižek expresses the paradoxical nature of this process when he writes:

The basic opposition here is that between the collective and the individual: culture is by definition collective and particular, parochial, exclusive of other cultures, while – next paradox – it is the individual who is universal, the site of universality, insofar as she extricates herself from and elevates herself above her particular culture. Since, however, every individual has to be somehow particularised, has to dwell in a particular lifeworld, the only way to resolve this deadlock is to split the individual into universal

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<sup>21</sup> In this thesis, I am not critiquing the public sphere as such, but rather how the public sphere has been constructed in opposition, and, as separate (distanced), from the private sphere, whereas in practice the interactions between public and private are much more fluid in terms of individual lives. The self-determination that most individuals desire and/or need, and that is supposedly offered by the public sphere as traditionally conceived in liberal political thought, is arguably itself limited by historical divisions of public/private (as will be seen in my discussion of 'public' time in Chapter Four). The ethics of care (as we will see) also entails a critique of how the concept of self-determination or autonomy has been traditionally conceived in modern rationalist moral and political theory.

and particular, public and private. (2008, 141)

Hegel, as I will argue in the next section, attempts to reconcile this division between universal and particular, public and private, by developing the notion of ‘concrete ethical life.’ This represents an attempt to minimize the degree of *distance* between moral principles and concrete social relations, and, therefore, between individuals in political communities (since the more detached moral rules/principles are from *actual* social relations, the more impersonal they will be, and thus more inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to the particularity of others). However, Hegel’s ultimate reliance on universal reason, especially as made concrete in the institutions of the state, places him in the category of the distant voice, even if it is a slightly closer voice.

### **Hegel and Taylor: Ethical Life and Community**

What is distinctive about Hegel’s moral philosophy is that it makes essential reference to particular social structures as necessary for leading an ethical life. By contrast Kant’s moral philosophy puts forth a conception of the moral individual apparently independent of any social structure. (Blum 1982, 299)

#### Concrete Ethical Life

Hegel, in *The Philosophy of Right* ([1821] 1991), identifies as a crucial element of human freedom the capacity individuals have to abstract themselves from their immediate contextual existence, into the realm of pure self-consciousness. Hegel conceives the human will as having three moments, or dimensions; the *universality of the will*, in part, is the individual’s ability to retreat from their immediate historical/material context (the *particularity of their will*) into the realm of the pure ‘I.’ This negative function of the universality of the will (what we could call its capacity for distancing – becoming inattentive, unreceptive, and/or unresponsive to the particular) also has a

second function, which is its ability to engage with different forms of content in the world, and to make this content its own through rational contemplation (for instance, in deciding on the moral principles that will guide one's interactions with others). The individual is then able to reinvest the products of their reflective thinking back into their particularity (i.e. their social context), thus reconciling the moments of universality and particularity; this reconciliation constitutes the *individuality of the will* (Hegel 1991, §5-§7; Moggach 2010).

Hegel's claim regarding the negative function of the universality of the will is "not to deny the world, but to show that we can resist being submerged in it: we can relate to the world freely precisely by virtue of this initial dissociative [what I have called distanciation] capacity" (Moggach 2010, 12). I propose that both Kant's and Hegel's moral thought engage in practices of distanciation and encourage the corresponding disposition of distanciation, but where Kant sees adherence to the *a priori* categorical imperative as constituting individual autonomy (as freedom from the sensible world), Hegel presents freedom as the ability to exercise one's rationality in relation to the concrete world of objects and other human subjects. As Douglas Moggach explains:

Hegel thinks that Kant's error here is to consider the standards of willing to be absolutely timeless, whereas they are inscribed in a developmental history of reason; and Kant fails to complete inward morality with the outward practices, institutions, and effects of freedom in ethical life, where autonomy becomes concrete. (2010, 14)

For Kant, moral autonomy lies in the act of individually willing maxims consistent with the *a priori* moral law, as well as the notion of a kingdom of ends. For Hegel, the ethical does not stop at the level of individual willing/adherence to maxims of a universal moral law; the kingdom of ends must become a physical reality in the ethical

community of the state. In Hegel's political theory, socio-political institutions become an active participant in the exercise and expression of human freedom, where the satisfaction of individual needs, and the communal good, are embodied in the commonly willed rational institutions of the state; duty and inclination, which were distanced from one another in the Kantian good will, are reconciled by Hegel in the ethical community of the state, where citizens recognize their moral autonomy (and the moral autonomy of others) in the very social structures of which they are a part (1991, §135, §258, §261, §270). As Kate Schick, reflecting on the work of Gillian Rose, explains:

His [Hegel's] emphasis on recognition takes political theory away from thinking in terms of abstract universals, atomised individuals or radical particularity. Speculative Hegelian thought is attuned to the ways in which individuals are situated not only in relation to one another but also in relation to socio-political structures and historical processes. (2013, 46)

In the context of my analysis of moral distancing, we can perceive a shift from Kantian *morality* to Hegelian *ethics*, in which the ethical is, in a sense, 'brought back down to earth' from what Kimberly Hutchings calls "a no-place that is grasped self-consciously as an idealised world oriented by truths that transcend time and place" (2013, 29). We can read Hegel's development of concrete ethical life as an attempt to minimize the degree of distancing between moral subjects and their particular lifeworld in the process of moral reasoning; distancing in social encounters is also minimized in the sense that ethical relations become concrete in social institutions that are open to change through critical reflection. However, it is important to note that the primary objective is still to mediate social relations according to the demands of universal reason, and, therefore, through impersonal mediators (even if these are made concrete in the form of state institutions). Lawrence Blum expresses this point when he writes:

Hegel criticizes Kant for the abstractness, formalism, and individualism of his moral theory. Still, his own philosophy can be understood as an attempt to work out the concrete social forms which would embody Kant's centrally-placed values of universality and reason. For Hegel, to live an ethical life is to live within – to adhere to and to identify oneself with – certain social structures which actualize 'the universal' (which, as in Kant, is meant also to be the highest expression of individual autonomy. (1982, 289)

The move from Kant to Hegel is in many ways mirrored in the move from Rawls (liberalism) to Taylor (communitarianism), which is unsurprising given the fact that Rawls draws heavily from Kant's philosophy, while the communitarian critique of liberalism, of which Taylor is a part, draws heavily from Hegelian ideas about society and ethics. Therefore, I read Taylor as another example of trying to minimize the level of distancing that is found in social relations as governed by the principles of modern moral rationalism. However, the communitarian critique, in general, still exhibits unnecessary distancing in the sense that it merely changes the source of modern rationalist principles, rather than questioning the effectiveness of these principles in sustaining human life, and, by extension, cultivating the ground for diverse, fulfilling social relationships.

#### Charles Taylor on Atomistic Moral Theory

Charles Taylor's essay, "Atomism," is primarily a response to liberal social contract theories, specifically those which posit what Taylor calls the "primacy of right" doctrine (1985, 188). Taylor argues that the primacy of right approach is flawed, and these deficiencies arise from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the human self, and the role society plays in the development of human capacities. Taylor designates such theories as falling under the category of "political atomism" and argues that concern for the common good of society should be given a voice equal to that given to the

protection of individual rights in political and moral philosophy (1985, 189).

Social contract theories typically present society as a group of detached individuals, living together primarily in order to fulfill their distinct interests. For Taylor, it is an error to conceive society in this way – merely as an instrumental entity. In such a conception of society, the rights of the disembodied individual are prioritized above society as a whole. The protection of these rights, and, therefore, of social order, is then used to legitimize the existence of mediating political structures (and authority) (Taylor 1985, 187). Taylor criticizes the lack of emphasis placed on the role individuals must play in the maintenance of the collective, of communal relationships, as the source of what we value in life, and from which we should not distance ourselves in the name of adhering to abstract rights (1985, 189).

Taylor stresses the fact of human interdependence, and the role of society as the precondition for the development of human characteristics (1985, 190). Examples of these characteristics are: rationality, morality, and autonomy/freedom (Taylor 1985, 191). Man has these “potentialities” granted to his existence as a “sentient” being, with self-awareness and self-feeling; with these attributes also comes a respect for other such beings (Taylor 1985, 192). Ultimately, Taylor’s conception of human nature rests on these uniquely human capacities, and the potential for these capacities to flourish in a society of close, interconnected individuals, each fulfilling his “obligation to belong” (1985, 198).

Taylor goes on to indicate that when there is a conflict between individual rights, and the collective, it is not reasonable for an individual to persist in their adherence to a right if it would mean irrevocable harm would be done to society as a whole. Without

society human capacities cannot develop – rights only exist because a society sees such human capacities as worthy of protection and development; it is an interdependent relationship (Taylor 1985, 198). Therefore, the notion of a disembodied self, distanced from social context, is not only empirically mistaken, but normatively undesirable.

For Taylor, freedom entails choosing from a variety of options in regards to how to live one's life, as well as how one behaves in relationships with others. If one holds an atomistic view of human nature they inherently limit themselves to certain base concerns. For Hobbes it is maximization of pleasure, and in Locke it is the protection of one's property. Only in the community can true autonomy be exercised (Taylor 1985, 204). Communal principles must also be communicated from generation to generation, and, therefore, necessitates personal, nurturing interactions among socially embedded individuals (Taylor 1985, 205). If one accepts that there should be a commitment to human freedom, then the particular political structure of a society must be one that best safeguards the civilization which makes this freedom possible in the first place. This is because, as Taylor puts it: "Freedom and individual diversity can only flourish in a society where there is a general recognition of their worth" (1985, 207).

Taylor shifts the focus away from viewing politics as merely a tool to sustain individual rights, and demonstrates the active and creative role citizens can play in promoting human capacities – above all freedom. For Taylor, and other communitarian thinkers, it is society, rather than individual rights, that facilitates autonomy. The exercise of this freedom entails active participation on the part of citizens in the formation of political institutions – as the "instruments of common decision" – in a form similar to Hegel's description of the concrete ethical life of the state (Taylor 1985, 208).

The emphasis on community as the source of moral values, I argue, continues the process of minimizing distancing in moral relations begun by Hegel's formulation of concrete ethical life; however, whether we argue that the source of ethical principles originates in communal activity, or the use of pure practical reason, we can still end up with a set of codes or procedures that impersonally mediate interpersonal relationships. Therefore, I argue that the communitarian critique of liberal ethical theory can be seen as minimizing *vertical* distancing, in the sense that moral value is seen as arising from communal (particular) relationships, rather than from a detached and transcendental reason; however, *horizontal* distancing remains in the form of impersonal mediation (whether it be moral principles, communal traditions, or socio-political institutions). Changing our focus from an abstract and disembodied *humanity*, to a concrete and embodied *community*, does not mean recognition of those relations in which we are emotionally and psychologically closest to another person in terms of being attentive, receptive, and responsive. The claim that "in most "liberal" theories there are only hand waves concerning our proper attitude to our children, to the ill, to our relatives, friends and lovers" (Baier 1985, 55) can therefore still be applied to the communitarian framework. Ultimately, arguing that moral values grow out of communal practices does not preclude the possibility of some values or forms of moral reasoning becoming hegemonic within those communities, thus hindering the quality of moral relationships, as well as the development of unique moral voices, where one is attentive, receptive, and responsive to their own particularity and the particularity of others (Hekman 1992, 1115-7; 1995, 40, 58, 61). This, in part, arises from the prevailing tendency in modernist moral and political theory to frame the debate as a clash between prioritizing either individual

rights (arising from one's membership in a common humanity), or the communal good (Frazer and Lacey 1993, 167-9), leaving unacknowledged the significance of forms of moral reasoning that take place in close, personal relationships of care. As Fiona Robinson argues:

A view that all human selves are constituted by their social and communal relationships does not itself entail a critique of these highly individualistic selves, nor does it promote the moral value of caring personal and social relations, as many feminist moral and political philosophers have done. (1999, 74)

In what follows, I will elaborate on how the feminist ethics of care can be read as a critique of the above dominant voices in moral and political theory, specifically of the way these distant voices represent forms of principle or rules-based moral reasoning, which promote increasing emotional-psychological distancing in our various social encounters. Exploring the nature of emotionally-attached relationships – such as those in caring encounters – will demonstrate that while the realities of spatio-temporal distance does call out for forms of social mediation, we must be critical of those that champion distancing in the name of practicality, equality, and rational maturity, and, which often requires the drawing of a *boundary* between public and private spheres of life. As Beattie and Schick argue: “The pursuit of order and moral agreement in modern ethics [often] allows no space for contingency or for acknowledging the vulnerability of judgment” (2013, 6). Therefore, such a critique will hopefully, at the very least, move us towards “a vision of ethics which recognizes the moral incompleteness, and the profound contextual inappropriateness, of an ethics which seeks to uphold impartiality by maintaining a depersonalized, distancing attitude towards others” (Robinson 1999, 8).

### Chapter Three: Distant Encounters

There is a conflict at the center of modernity between, on the one hand, the immanent forces of desire and association, the love of the community, and on the other, the strong hand of an overarching authority that imposes and enforces an order on the social field. (Hardt & Negri 2000, 69)

The main function of the symbolic order with its laws and obligations is to render our co-existence with others minimally bearable: a Third has to step in between me and my neighbours so that our relations do not explode in murderous violence. (Žižek 2006, 45-6)

In the following two chapters, I will argue that Western society from the eighteenth century onwards – especially as it is characterized by the rise of liberal ideology and the rapid growth of capitalism – exhibits a heightened degree of emotional-psychological distancing in everyday social encounters. The ethics of care literature is uniquely suited to understanding the process of distancing, which takes place even between individuals who are spatially and temporally near. It is important to keep in mind that distancing, like inadequate practices of care, can be characterized by a *lack of attention*, *lack of receptivity*, and *inappropriate or inadequate response*. These three features of distancing comprise the disposition or attitude that a distant individual exhibits in relation to the particular others he/she encounters.

The socio-political consequences of an attitude of distancing, much like those of the devaluing and/or ignoring of the significance of care, is a growing inability to respond adequately to the many manifestations of vulnerability, exhibited by all human beings to varying degrees over the course of their lives. This shared vulnerability and dependence on others is what is meant when it is said that *care* forms the basis for a relational ontology; the Self is not only a “being-in-relation,” but also depends on

concrete others for the various practices of care that enable the Self's continued existence. In light of this relational ontology, what we generally refer to as morality is seen as

constituted by our relations with others; thus, there can be neither procedures for ethical deliberation nor needs and interests prior to, or in the absence of, moral relations. It is through immersion in the day-to-day moral activities of these relations, moreover, that one learns how to act morally – how to listen, exercise patience, understand and be attentive to needs, and consider and reconsider one's moral decisions in the light of the needs and demands of others. (Robinson 2011a, 847)

I argue that high levels of emotional-psychological distancing runs counter to this relational ontology, and, therefore, to the goals of not only sustaining human life, but of creating the potential for that life to be morally meaningful in the context of one's day-to-day relations with others within socio-political communities. As I have already stated, if we take political theory (broadly conceived) as the search for the 'best ways to live,' then emotional-psychological distancing becomes a socially and politically significant issue, since it hinders the attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness, which are necessary in order *to live* and *live well*. To reiterate, in this thesis, I am critiquing both the political theories that take Enlightenment reason as their starting point, and, which encourage emotional-psychological distancing, as well as aspects of modern social life (e.g. capitalist production and urbanization), which are facilitated by, and reinforce, such emotional-psychological distancing. Theory and practice are thus interconnected and co-constituting.

My analysis in this chapter will center on the theme of encounter and its relationship to moral development, as described by Nel Noddings (2002). I will analyze *encounter* alongside Levinas's short political essay, "Peace and Proximity," in which

Levinas charts the movement from ethical responsibility in proximate encounters, to the institution of political justice, suitable to remote encounters ([1984] 1996). I will then argue that Noddings's concept of natural caring (2002) and Diana Meyers's notion of empathic thought (1994) can be read as alternative forms of engaging in moral encounters, which do not exhibit the high degree of distancing characteristic of moral encounters as mediated by the distant voice of universalist ethics. These *caring* encounters exhibit lesser degrees of distancing because they are more attentive, receptive, and responsive to the *particular* needs of *proximate* others.

Furthermore, I will explore how one's attitude or disposition to encounters can come to exhibit greater or lesser degrees of emotional-psychological distancing. Nancy Chodorow's investigation of gender differences – vis-à-vis the demarcation of ego boundaries – will help to illustrate how the tendency for distancing develops differently in men and women. Chodorow (1978) argues that, males, through their greater degree of differentiation from their primary care-giver (historically, the mother) are better prepared for the highly depersonalized environment characteristic of modern public life (the metropolis), where the justice voice becomes loudest (this will be the subject of the fourth chapter). Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* (1989) will be helpful in demonstrating how the pressures of modern public life, and the particular conception of rationality that corresponds to this public sphere, can intensify levels of distancing in the mother's encounters with her children. Both Ruddick and Chodorow demonstrate how the tendency for emotional-psychological distancing is influenced by a child's relationship to their primary care-giver, a relationship that is significantly influenced by the pressures of modern *public* life. Therefore, theories related to care are crucial to

understanding how emotional-psychological distancing in one's social encounters is *learned* – somewhat paradoxically – as a result of the particular context, and/or, nature, of the environment in which one's encounters with the person who is (typically) most proximate (both spatio-temporally and emotional-psychologically) takes place.

Ultimately, the unnecessary intensification of distancing through over-reliance on impersonal mediation – which is characteristic of dominant trends in modern moral and political thought since the Enlightenment – is harmful to the cultivation of the character traits (or ethical qualities) of *attentiveness*, *receptiveness*, and *responsiveness*, which are crucial in the development of healthy socio-political relationships and communities (Tronto 1993, 127-37; 2013, 34-5). It is this type of distance – emotional-psychological, which has been ignored in light of various efforts to order the multiplicity of spatio-temporally distanced individuals. The ethics of care offers the conceptual tools to better understand the nature of this distancing, as well as a new sense of direction that is helpful in moving towards minimizing distancing. It is through disregarding the ethical and political significance of caring encounters that the disposition of distancing – necessary for modern public life as it is currently constituted – is reproduced within the very relationships (mother-child) that begin with the highest degrees of both spatio-temporal and emotional-psychological proximity.

### **Remote and Proximate Others**

#### *Starting at Home: Nel Noddings on Encounter and the Relational Self*

The custom, since Plato, has been to describe an ideal or best state and then to discuss the role of homes and families as supporters of the state. What might we learn if, instead, we start with a description of best homes and then move outward to the larger society? (Noddings 2002, 1)

In Chapter One, I argued that emotional-psychological distancing can be present between individuals who are spatio-temporally close. In this sense, distancing becomes a property of one's everyday encounters with others. In order to appreciate the ways in which distancing can be harmful to socio-political life at-large, we first have to understand how it is detrimental to the various encounters, the totality of which, constitutes a socio-political community. In Nel Noddings's *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy*, we find an exploration of the significance of encounters, not only to the development of the relational self, but to society as a whole (2002, 3). The ethics of care has a distinct advantage in fully understanding the nature and significance of encounters since its point of departure, in many cases, is the home, the place where encounters are most intense, and where an individual is most susceptible to having her/his identity framed by the content of those encounters. Indeed, Noddings begins her discussion of encounter at its most basic, where "[t]he infant organism encounters bodies, both animate and inanimate. It begins to locate its incipient self in a place and, as its own self develops, it becomes aware of encountering other selves" (2002, 4).

If we accept this view of encounters – as the basic building blocks of our identity, and, by extension, of society as a whole – then moral and political theorizing should start from the lived experience of concrete persons, and their relationships. The ethics of care challenges dominant forms of modern moral rationalism, where rules or principles are seen as morally valuable to the extent that one can disconnect them from particular encounters, and posit them as universally-valid. Such a view is seen as epistemologically and ontologically problematic since our lives and ways of thinking are sustained and constituted by our encounters with the world, specifically, other selves. Moral theories

that prioritize the use of detached and/or abstract reason are therefore susceptible to missing important features of human life, making their ethical prescriptions problematic.

I argue that there is a co-constitutive relation between these dominant moral and political theories, and the phenomenon of emotional-psychological distancing, the consequence of which is that such theories produce inadequate moral prescriptions; they *lack an attention* to the complexities of everyday life, are *unreceptive to the particularities* of concrete persons, and, therefore, suggest *inadequate or inappropriate ways of responding* to those persons, and their needs, in our everyday encounters. As Noddings writes, “a moral prescription means little to one who has not already lived it or experienced it in close connection with other selves” (2002, 5).

I argue that the *disposition* of care can be seen as an alternative to the attitude of distancing vis-à-vis social encounters, and produces corresponding (alternative) practices. This is not to say that individuals consciously decide to become emotionally-psychologically distant, but rather that modern norms of moral reasoning in conjunction with the socio-economic parameters of modernity draws one to embody moral values and principles that leads to a distancing from others (manifested in the practices of impersonal mediation and the public/private boundary). Likewise, this is not to say that *all* encounters can become caring; it is merely to claim that our experience of close, personal caring relations is a better starting point for our moral and political deliberations, and certainly a more natural point of departure than that of disembodied rationality. Caring, in this sense, becomes what Noddings calls an “empirical universal,” a “desire to be cared for” that is common to all human beings (2002, 12). At first glance, this may seem to fall into the same problems of universalization that dominant forms of modern

moral and political theory were criticized for earlier. However, I do not feel that this is the case. Noddings's claim is a very modest one, and merely suggests that all individuals, at various points in their lives will need *and want* to be close to others. Moral theories that ignore this feature of human life, and instead ground morality in the effort to mediate the multiplicity of spatio-temporally distinct individuals, miss a fundamental feature of what it is to be human. As Annette Baier points out, such theories focus on the principles that guarantee "reciprocal non-interference" (i.e. the maintenance of distance) as opposed to reflecting on the moral values that arise from the "reciprocal attachment" of human beings in their everyday encounters (1994, 23).

Therefore, I propose that we reorient our focus away from producing ideal theories of how we should relate to remote others, and instead reassess how we approach encounters with those others who are already proximate, thus ensuring that they do not become overly emotionally and psychologically remote in ways that would be detrimental to their well-being and the well-being of society as whole. Such a reassessment will also positively impact our encounters with those who are physically-remote, in the sense of encouraging attentiveness and receptiveness to those others, and the web of particular relations (both socio-political and personal) that constitute their lives. Turning our attention to the importance of encounters in the development and constitution of individuals and societies is the first step in understanding the nature and effects of moral distancing. Comparing some further aspects of Noddings's theory of caring encounters with some very basic aspects of Levinas's ethics will help to further clarify the relationship between encounter, morality, and distance, while also serving as a

bridge in the transition to my broader discussion of distanciation (in the form of impersonal mediation) as it appears in modern city life.

The Distant Face: Peace, Proximity, and Caring Encounters

A proximity different from some “short distance” measured in geometrical space separating the one from the others. Peace different from the simple unity of the diverse integrated by synthesis. Peace as a relation with the other in its logically indiscernible alterity, in its alterity irreducible to the logical identity of a final difference attaching to genus. (Levinas 1996, 166)

Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow me to do justice to the depth and complexity of Levinas’s *ethics as first philosophy* ([1961] 1969; [1974] 1998); however, the notion that there is an ethical responsibility for the Other (prior to any moral reasoning) at the heart of all human encounters, is important for the current discussion of distance and the ethics of care. I want to stress from the outset that my intention here is neither to offer a comprehensive account of Levinas’s philosophy nor to argue that Levinas and the ethics of care should be read as expressing a common moral theory. However, there are three arguments put forth in Levinas’s philosophy in general, and the essay “Peace and Proximity” ([1984] 1996) in particular, that are important for the argument I am making in this thesis. First, ethical responsibility, for Levinas, is rooted in receptiveness to the vulnerability of the Other, as it is expressed in the face of that Other. Second, ethics is constituted by attention and response to the needs of that particular Other, for whom we take responsibility. Third, we should be cautious of attempts to systematize this ethical responsibility into rational principles and political institutions

(Levinas 1996).<sup>22</sup> It is these three features of Levinas’s ethical philosophy that are relevant to my analysis of distance from the perspective of a feminist ethics of care.

Emmanuel Levinas (1996) makes a distinction between what he calls “ethics” – the face-to-face encounter, and “politics” – the realm of creating order through rationally derived laws and theories of justice. Politics, in this sense, exhibits an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing through efforts to rationally mediate the multiplicity of space-time in a way that is universally-valid. For Levinas, we are responsible for the Other as a result of the Other’s inherent vulnerability; it is thus “[t]he face as the extreme precariousness of the other” and “[p]eace as awareness to the precariousness of the other” (Levinas 1996, 167). Levinas’s thesis is that peace is grounded in our attention to the vulnerability of the Other, whose very face commands us to abstain from doing harm, and compels us to respond to need. This ethical responsibility in our relation with the Other is prior to morality, justice, and politics, and constitutes the core or ground on which politics appears; as Levinas writes: “The proximity of the neighbor – the peace of proximity – is the responsibility of the ego for an other, the impossibility of letting the other alone faced with the mystery of death” (1996, 167). This responsibility is concrete and experiential, it is *felt in encounter*. In Chapter Two, I highlighted four different modernist approaches to political organization, and argued that in spite of their significant differences, all led to political arrangements that utilized practices of emotional-psychological distancing – impersonal mediation and/or the public/private boundary – in order to mediate the multiplicity of socio-political life. In contrast, the Levinasian perspective suggests that the peaceful coexistence of the

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<sup>22</sup> For Levinas, the origin of all instances of political totalitarianism can be traced back to such a ‘totalizing’ effort.

multiplicity is to be found in this ethical moment, rather than as a result of the Kantian categorical imperative, Hegelian *geist*, the social contract, the community, or various other forms of political authority (Levinas 1996).

The fundamental difference between ethics and politics (for Levinas), as I read him, can be narrowed down to the shift in how we experience our responsibilities to others. In the *ethical encounter* we respond to the face of the Other – as that face appears to us in its irreducible difference. We might say that the face of the Other, in this instance, appears in an *unmediated* fashion. In the realm of *political encounters*, however, our responsibility for the Other becomes mediated by rules and principles that requires the positing of commonality, i.e. a reduction of the Other to the Same, as Levinas would say. Therefore, in ethics – we are responsible for the other as Other, whereas, in politics – we are responsible for the other because he/she is ‘like us,’ and shares common features that deserve our respect. David Campbell makes this point in his analysis of Levinasian ethics and its possible applicability to the realm of international ethics:

If one understood *humanism* to mean a “humanism of the ‘other’,” then there would be no greater humanist than Levinas.... In Levinas’s thought, ethics has been transformed from something independent of subjectivity – that is, from a set of rules and regulations adopted by pre-given, autonomous agents – to something insinuated within and integral to that subjectivity.... This argument leads us to the recognition that “we” are always already ethically situated, so making judgments about conduct depends less on what sort of rules are invoked as regulations, and more on how the interdependencies of our relations with others are appreciated. (1994, 462-3, italics in original)

On the other hand, Levinas acknowledges that human life is not limited to a series of individual face-to-face encounters. Human beings live in societies, which are situated across space and time, and, therefore, politics eventually steps in to mediate relations between individuals who stand in relation to others, without ever seeing them face-to-

face.<sup>23</sup> This is what Levinas means by “The Third” (1996, 168). It is here that Levinas becomes crucial to an understanding of moral distancing. One way of reading Levinas’s “third person” is as analogous to what I have called spatio-temporal distance, and what Doreen Massey refers to as the “dimension of multiplicity” (2004, 14). It is here that reason, law, justice, and politics appears. This reading of Levinas is in keeping with my analysis of distancing since it demonstrates how the reality of spatio-temporal distance opens the door to an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing through the exercise of reason in the formulation of universalistic moral and political theories. The move from ethics to politics occurs when “[t]he relation with the other and the unique that is peace comes to demand a reason that thematizes, synchronizes and synthesizes, that thinks a world and reflects on being, concepts necessary for the peace of *humanity*” (Levinas 1996, 168, italics added).

I argue that a parallel can be drawn between Levinas and the ethics of care in the sense that both question the *prioritizing* of reason in our moral and political thought. This is not to say that rational principles should be thrown away all together, in favor of some more primordial, or emotional, ethical attitude. Rather, we can interpret the ethics of care, along with Levinas, as a critique of the ways that Western liberalism has distanced the ideals of justice, equality, and freedom, from their true source: the close, personal *encounters* where individuals are attentive to the vulnerability of the Other, responsive to the needs of the Other, and receptive to their particularity (in the case of Levinas, their *alterity*) (1996). Couching political ideals in the language of universal-impartialist reason, while making them easily *portable* over large spatio-temporal

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<sup>23</sup> This refers specifically to relationships between individuals within human communities, either face-to-face, or via socio-political institutions.

distances, nonetheless increases the level of distancing that exists between individuals who are otherwise near. Levinas's recognition of this apparent 'catch-22' in the move from the ethical to the political is expressed by William Paul Simmons when he writes: "Although this universalization distances the ego from the Other, it must be done to reach the others" (1999, 97).

The similarities between Levinas and care ethics are further apparent in Noddings's distinction between what she calls 'natural' and 'ethical' caring (2002). It is through this distinction that we can better understand why high levels of distancing (inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness) are detrimental to meeting the needs of concrete individuals in socio-political communities. To reiterate, the existence of distancing is not a 'yes or no' question. As explained in Chapter One, human beings are subject to an initial degree of distancing from the mere fact that we are all physically, and, therefore, mentally individuated to a certain extent. The difficult moral and political question then becomes: *how do we deal with this fact of human multiplicity (spatio-temporal distance), in a way that keeps emotional-psychological distancing at 'safe' levels?* This is why a *political* theory of distance is important, and the relationship between natural and ethical caring provides useful insights into how we might approach this significant moral and political dilemma.

Noddings, somewhat reminiscent of Levinas, grounds the caring encounter in a "moment of nearly pure relation" (2002, 17), where "[t]he attentiveness of caring is more receptive than projective, and it is not primarily intellectual, although it has an intellectual dimension" (2002, 13). Likewise, the "cared for" also has to be receptive to the care being offered (Noddings 2002, 19). This dual receptiveness in the caring

encounter is necessary for the members to recognize the particularity of one another, and, therefore, become able to respond appropriately in their encounter (Noddings 2002, 20).

Distance becomes a key factor in caring encounters since “[c]aring will always depend on the connection between carer and cared-for” (Noddings 2002, 20). To this we should add that *connection* can refer to both spatio-temporal connection, as well as emotional-psychological connection. One can be sitting at the bedside of a patient, holding his/her hand, yet if emotional-psychological connection is lacking, the caring encounter will be limited in its ability to meet the full range of the patient’s needs. One way that emotional-psychological connection can be hindered, thus keeping carer and cared for at an emotional-psychological distance, even if they are physically close, is reliance on so-called universal ethical prescriptions. This is how we should read Noddings’s distinction between natural and ethical caring. Again, similar to Levinas’s distinction between ethics and politics, natural caring is described as “a form of caring that arises more or less spontaneously out of affection or inclination ... [and where] [n]o mediating ethical-logical deliberation is required.” In cases of natural caring, one pays direct attention to an Other, and through being receptive to the Other’s concrete, particular situation is able to respond appropriately vis-à-vis their needs (Noddings 2002, 29).<sup>24</sup> Spatio-temporal distance is crucial to one’s ability to engage in an encounter of natural caring; however, my point is that spatio-temporal closeness (while at times can be a *necessary* condition) is not a *sufficient* condition for natural caring to occur. One must

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<sup>24</sup> Noddings is primarily referring to person-to-person caring in nonprofessional settings. However, I argue it can apply to both in the sense that the ‘spontaneity’ is not primarily about affection as such, but about recognizing and responding to needs through direct interaction and receptiveness to the Other. Obviously, this spontaneity would be affected by professional settings (and standards); however, it is not necessarily impossible. I think we can also read Noddings as suggesting ‘natural caring’ as a theoretical ideal for the purposes of analysis – i.e. juxtaposing the two types of caring – without trying to establish a definitive form of ‘ideal care.’ The limitations of this approach are further discussed later in the chapter.

be emotionally and psychologically engaged (i.e. close). One who is distant (inattentive and/or unreceptive), will be unable to engage in a relation of natural caring, and thus will be incapable of reaching their full potential in responding to the Other's needs.

On the other hand, ethical caring is characterized by the care that we can be said to owe others as a result of our moral norms and/or religious beliefs (Noddings 2002, 30). For one to *ethically* care they do not have to be directly engaged with a concrete other; indeed, we can think of care in this sense as more of a general attitude towards the world at-large; it is a concern for other individuals as co-members of humanity. It is therefore conceivable that one could ethically care at a distance, both physical and emotional. The difference between natural and ethical caring is that in natural caring the "weight and depth of need call forth obligation before any decision is made on exactly what to do. We accept responsibility for the Other and are accountable to the Other, not to a set of *a priori* rules" (Noddings 2002, 50, italics in original). This requires a closeness to the Other that cannot be achieved if we defer moral judgment to the *mediator* of pure rationality.

While I feel that Noddings's distinction between natural and ethical caring is a useful one, some limitations can be identified. First of all, using the terminology of the 'natural' suggests that there is a fixed or determinate form in which people should engage in relationships of care. I think this criticism can be answered by focusing on natural caring as a disposition or attitude of openness and receptiveness to the contingency of the Other's needs. Therefore, it is not that there is only one way of caring for an Other, which is the natural way to care, but rather that accurately identifying an Other's need for care depends on a disposition of openness and receptiveness to the contingencies of the

Other's situation – unmediated by moral presuppositions of how one is *supposed* to respond. The second limitation of the natural/ethical caring distinction is that it does not tell us much about how we should respond, once we become aware of need. This is true; however, I do not think that Noddings's distinction is made with this goal in mind. It is not about telling us all we need to know about moral relations with others. Therefore, the disposition of natural caring seems to lack reflection on how best to respond to need, however, perhaps the whole point of natural caring is that the identification of needs is the precondition for response, and this precondition is best fulfilled by the disposition of natural caring – an unmediated openness and receptiveness to others. As Noddings argues, “rules and policies should not make it *impossible* for responsible agents to vary their responses in ways that might benefit their charges” (2002, 5, italics in original).

But now that I have established that high levels of emotional-psychological distancing are incompatible with the requirements set out by Noddings for a natural caring encounter, *what is it about* emotionally-close caring encounters that make them more desirable than forms of ethical encounters that are mediated by universal laws or principles, as it relates to moral and political issues? What is it about being attentive, receptive, and responsive that helps us to more adequately respond to an Other's needs? The answer is that one can more accurately identify the needs of the Other when they are emotionally and psychologically close, and gain a better awareness of the nuances of those needs and the situations from which they arise. By being attentive to the contextual specificity of the situation that the Other finds themselves in, and being receptive to how the Other interprets their own situation, one can more adequately respond to their

particular needs. This is made clear by Noddings when she distinguishes “expressed” from “inferred” needs. As Noddings writes:

One might argue that all needs are inferred since even a cry must be interpreted, but the terms *expressed* and *inferred* still capture an important distinction. An expressed need is internal: it arises in the cared-for either consciously or behaviorally. If an inference is made, it is made directly from observation or sensory reception of the cared-for. (2002, 64, italics in original)

In order to provide adequate care, one cannot be distant from the ways that individuals *express* their need for care. Distanciation, through the form of impersonal mediation, means that instead of being attentive to the Other’s expressions, the focus is placed on meeting rational moral and/or political standards. In this sense, one becomes blocked from receiving the other as Other, thus becoming “absorbed in the intricacies of the game instead of the plight of real people” (Noddings 2002, 60). Politically, this distanciation becomes concrete in impersonal institutions that are tasked with meeting the needs of citizens; however, the fulfillment of these needs is often hindered by standards of impartiality, as well as other socio-economic constraints. For both Noddings and Levinas, modern societies find themselves in a tension:

The demands are indeed too many for an individual to satisfy, but it may be a mistake to assume that large impersonal institutions can do an adequate job in the individual’s stead. Even when their basic physical needs are met, people often feel uncared for in institutional situations. (Noddings, 2002, 124)

Diana Meyers suggests that the use of “empathic thought” (1994, 18) is more conducive to the recognition of an Other’s needs, whereas the *impartial* mediation of abstract moral principles and/or institutional procedures blocks the kind of *caring* encounters that allow for adequate degrees of *attentiveness*, *receptiveness*, and *responsiveness*. Abstract moral reasoning – whether it is being exercised on the personal

or institutional level – tends to “submerge difference in universal human interests” (Meyers 1994, 18), thus allowing moral encounters to take place between distant persons. Empathy, on the other hand, “not only enables people to discern situations that call for a moral response, but also is needed to identify morally significant considerations.” Empathy, by definition, cannot take place in the context of an emotionally-psychologically distant encounter. The Kantian moral law, acting as a third-party (i.e. as impersonal mediator), makes empathy unnecessary in the fulfillment of one’s moral duties, or in the respecting of mutual non-interference (Meyers 1994, 19). The Kantian moral law therefore becomes conducive to the realities of spatio-temporal remoteness, but sacrifices a crucial element that sustains emotional-psychological proximity. This emotional-psychological distancing, “that enables one to size them [people] up can interfere with the apprehension of moral concerns” (Meyers 1994, 31). This apprehension of moral concerns, necessary for adequate moral response, requires the kind of attentiveness and receptiveness that empathic thought facilitates, and that cannot be accomplished by the distant voice.

Like Levinasian *ethical responsibility* and Noddings’s *natural caring*, “empathy is grounded in a protomoral fellow feeling for other persons. Yet, unlike sympathy, empathy seeks understanding of others and preserves independent judgment and agency” (Meyers 1994, 34). Empathy therefore requires both “attentive receptivity” and “analytical discernment” (Meyers 1994, 33). This is an important point in the sense that it does not advocate some kind of eradication of distance or distancing; it merely suggests that distance and distancing should be minimized when they preclude possibilities for personal, caring encounters, in favor of impersonal, *distant* ethical

encounters. This is reflected in Meyers's notion of a "spectrum of degrees of empathy ranging from the most minimal incident-specific empathy with a stranger to the broadest empathy with an intimate" (1994, 36). The attainment of "broad empathy" occurs when we are emotionally and psychologically closest to the Other, since it "yields an interpretation of the sources – both the sources in the person's social context and the unique individual sources – of the other's experiences" (Meyers 1994, 36). It involves a high degree of attentiveness and receptiveness to the particularity of the Other, and thus creates the potential for a more comprehensive moral response to the totality of the Other's concrete situation. Empathic thought therefore starts from the assumption of human differences, whereas the distant voice begins with a view of human commonality that is inherently minimalistic.<sup>25</sup> It is when human

difference cannot be assimilated to universal categories, [that] the dilemma of difference explodes the logic of impartial reason.... [Potentially,] one reflects without the benefit of empathy, and impartial reason ratifies principles that are oblivious to the reality of individual and social difference. (Meyers 1994, 41)

A defender of universal-rationalist moral and political theories might argue that the purpose of impartiality is not to ignore the particularity of others and the various context-specific situations that those others may find themselves in, but rather to ensure that individuals are not unfairly disadvantaged as a result of bias, prejudice, and/or favouritism; impartiality helps to ensure equality, and, therefore, justice. I would agree that this is an important function of impartial theories – particularly in the realm of social, economic, and political policies – and that this view is not necessarily incompatible with

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<sup>25</sup> Meyers further makes the point that the logic of "justice as impartiality" inevitably breaks down since: "Impartial reason assumes a single model of personhood. If this model is highly abstract, it will support only the most general prescriptions, but if this model is richly detailed, it will not fit all persons. In the name of justice, then, impartial reason may seek to eradicate differences that are constitutive of people's avowed identities and thus abrogate its own commitment to respect persons" (1994, 26).

political theories of care. It is not impartiality *as such* that is criticized from the care perspective, but rather the prioritizing and broad scope of impartiality in universal-rationalist theories (Baier 1994, 19). As Virginia Held argues, it is the presupposition that “the more abstract the reasoning about a moral problem the better because the more likely to avoid bias and arbitrariness,” that is contested by the care perspective (Held 2006, 11).

This follows from the view that:

The ethics of care respects rather than removes itself from the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships[.]... The compelling moral claim of the particular other may be valid even when it conflicts with the requirement usually made by moral theories that moral judgments be universalizeable. (Held 2006, 11)

Again, this is not to say that impartiality is not an important and useful moral tool in the effort to avoid bias or favouritism; however, it is not necessarily appropriate, useful, or the most important tool, for every job, and this is what the care perspective highlights. Therefore, encounters should not *always* conform to “moralities at best suitable for legal, political, and economic interactions between relative strangers” (Held 2006, 14). Impartiality is not appropriate in every situation, and the prevalence of taking interactions between relative strangers as the primary focus of moral and political theory has obfuscated the kinds of moral values (and practices) that sustain life and allow that life to flourish in the context of close, personal relationships of care (Clement 1996, 71). This is why Held suggests a solution that would take considerations of justice and care as having priority depending on the particular domain of life in question. Furthermore, taking the moral value of care more seriously could help minimize the harmful effects of distancing in those realms (i.e. the public sphere) dominated by the concerns of justice (specifically, impartiality). This position leads to the suggestion that:

In the realm of law, for instance, justice and the assurance of rights should have priority, although the humane considerations of care should not be absent. In the realm of the family and among friends, priority should be given to expansive care, though the basic requirements of justice surely should also be met.... As care would move to the center of our attention and become a primary concern ... we might have a society that saw as its most important task the flourishing of children and the development of caring relations, not only in personal contexts but among citizens and using governmental institutions. (Held 2006, 17-8)

Held's argument regarding the place of care relative to justice in the various spheres of social life includes the claim that care is one of, if not *the*, fundamental moral value in human life. For Held, justice presupposes some form of care (an interest in the well-being of others), whereas care is not dependent on a sense of justice (Held 2006, 17).

A similar argument is made by Joan Tronto in her conceptualization of "relational responsibilities" in contradistinction to the dominant notion of (universal) moral responsibility, derived from principles of justice (2012, 304-5). If we reflect on our everyday experience of responsibility we recognize that it is not primarily the Other's status as a human being that we find morally compelling, but rather that: "Some form of relation either presence, biological, historical, or institutional ties, or some other form of 'interaction' exists in order to create a relation and, thus, a responsibility" (Tronto 2012, 306). At the most basic level, relational responsibility originates from "the [mere] fact of being alive and the nature of human vulnerability [that] places one in relationships and thus already in the midst of relationships that produce responsibilities" (Tronto 2012, 308). These intuitive reflections on the nature of our responsibilities seem to conflict with the ideal of justice as impartiality, especially in those spheres of life in which our partial relational responsibilities seem to be of more immediate significance to us than broad (universal) duties or obligations to humanity as a whole (Tronto 2012, 309). Indeed, the

values and practices that arise in the fulfillment of these relational responsibilities (of care) are themselves crucial in attaining the goals of justice (Tronto 2012, 314; Tronto 2013, 27). The impact of reorienting our focus onto the role these (proximate) relational responsibilities play in moral and political life can even extend to the global context:

In the end, if we hope for citizens to recognize their global responsibilities, weak but universal ties may not be as useful as strong but partial genuine connections. Making those partial connections of relational responsibility more visible will lead the way to a more just world. (Tronto 2012, 315)

Thus, we are faced with a familiar problem: *how can we apply the lessons of natural caring and/or empathic thought to a world characterized by multiplicity, scattered across vast distances of space and time?* Indeed, care ethicists have recognized that one of the most appealing features of universal-rationalist theories is the ability to travel across these spatio-temporal distances (as well as cultural boundaries) (Held 2006, 21) – as Tronto writes: “With one claim, one covers everybody” (2012, 313).

I argue we can read Levinas, Noddings, Meyers, Tronto, and Held as sharing a similar (alternative) outlook as to the universal-rationalist approach. For instance, Noddings, like Levinas, does not want to suggest that reasoning about morality is ‘wrong’ or inferior to a more instinctual or natural form of morality. Rather, like Levinas, Noddings wants to redirect our attention to the kinds of experiences that serve as the basis for our rational deliberations on ethics, specifically, the experience of face-to-face caring encounters, where “consciousness is colored by both feeling and cognition” (2002, 100). Thinking about morality should not start from the assumption of human remoteness, but rather from the experience of human proximity, particularly in relations of care. It is therefore “[w]hen we cannot care directly for others but wish that we could – when, that is, we sincerely care about the well-being of others – we rely on principles of

justice that approximate (or enable others to understand the actions we would perform if we could be bodily present [i.e. we care at a distance]” (Noddings 2002, 3). Meyers expresses a similar sentiment when she states that “[w]hile it is undeniable that many moral questions concern distant strangers, it would be inadvisable to take action with respect to distant strangers as the paradigm of moral relations. Doing so would reduce morality to a relatively crude instrument” (1994, 137).

Noddings’s and Meyers’s point, which I share, is that we should not become dependent on theoretical principles of *caring about* (a general interest in the well-being of others), thus distancing ourselves from the practices of *caring for* (the concrete activities that contributes to the well-being of particular others) that teach us to be receptive to the complexity and variety of needs that arise in the multiplicity of interpersonal encounters (Noddings 2002, 22-23; Tronto 1989, 282-3; 2013, 22). As I have argued, it is not a matter of whether there is or isn’t distancing at work; what is important is the identification of excess distancing, which can hinder the ability of moral agents to engage in the emotional and psychological closeness that will allow for the most effective meeting of their needs, thus helping sustain and foster meaningful lives in the social and political communities of which they are a part.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the ethics of care is helpful in understanding the nature and effects of distance in moral and political theory. I have also argued that the level of distancing that exists between moral subjects is fluid, and fluctuates depending on the attitudes or dispositions of those subjects. It is here that care theory becomes especially well-suited to an understanding of distancing since the ethics of care literature recognizes that emotional-psychological distancing varies

along gender lines, and coincides with the division between the masculine justice voice and the feminine care voice (Gilligan [1982] 1993). Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) demonstrates how the development of ego boundaries along gender lines reflects the necessity of a distant voice for entry into the (masculine) public world of the metropolis.

## **Gendered Encounters**

### A Genealogy of Gendered Distance

The point, for relational persons, is that as we modify and often distance ourselves from existing relations, it is for the sake of better and often more caring relations, rather than for the splendid independence, self-sufficiency, and easy isolation of the traditional liberal ideal of the autonomous rational agent. (Held 2006, 49)

As I have argued, human beings experience their lives, to a certain extent, as physically and mentally distinct (therefore, at a distance) from others; however, the development of spatial distance and psychological distancing is fluid. Furthermore, changes in psychological and spatial distances, while often interconnected do not necessarily happen synchronously. Changes in the degree of psychological distancing do not necessarily move at the same rate, or in the same direction, as changes in the degree of spatial distance, and vice-versa. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) is helpful to an understanding of distance and distancing, since it not only explores the dynamic that exists between physical and psychological distance, but also demonstrates how the tendency for emotional-psychological distancing in one's social encounters, varies from person to person. Chodorow charts the intensification of emotional-psychological distancing along gender lines, and, therefore, anticipates differences in how the genders approach their moral encounters.

Noddings (2002) argued that the human self, beginning in infancy, develops through its various encounters; however, as Chodorow explains: “At birth, the infant is not only totally dependent but does not differentiate itself cognitively from its environment. It does not differentiate between subject/self and object/other” (1978, 61). This is a crucial point in the sense that individuals, at the very beginning of their lives, do not experience themselves as spatially or psychologically distant from the people and objects that surround them.<sup>26</sup> Now, obviously we know that the infant is a particular body, containing a particular psyche, but in the infant’s earliest experiences there is neither a sense of spatio-temporal distance, nor emotional-psychological distancing. As Chodorow writes: “For the most part, in spite of cognitive perception of separateness, it [the infant] experiences itself as within a common boundary and fused, physically and psychologically, with its mother” (1978, 62). This means that there is a process of both physical and psychological *distancing* that begins soon after birth, where the child learns of their physical and psychological distance from others.

Both spatio-temporal distance (physical distinctiveness) and emotional-psychological distancing (mental distinctiveness) are crucial in the development of the self, since: “Both ego boundaries (a sense of personal psychological division from the rest of the world) and a bounded body ego (a sense of the permanence of physical separateness and of the predictable boundedness of the body) emerge through this process [of identity formation]” (Chodorow 1978, 68). One way of reading Chodorow’s analysis

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<sup>26</sup> I use the term ‘distant’ instead of ‘distinct’ because I want to highlight the ways in which the concept of ‘distance’ is an important analytical tool in investigating issues of human relations, since it implies a sense of degree or spectrum of intensity. Therefore, it is more useful to talk of one being more or less *distant* from others, rather than more or less distinct. I argue that thinking in terms of ‘distances’ more accurately reflects the physical and psychological fluidity of interpersonal relationships, including those in the socio-political context. As one study puts it: “Self-other boundaries determine not only where *I* end and *You* begins, but the space between *Us*” (Ingoglia et. al. 2011, 272, italics in original). A theory of distance describes the *space between* – both physically and emotionally, and, as co-constituting.

is to see the determining factor as to why women continue to fulfill the role of mother as being the lower degree of emotional-psychological distancing between mothers and daughters, which culminates in “girls com[ing] to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries” (1978, 93). This, in large part, arises as a consequence of mothers and daughters being of the same gender, and thus experiencing themselves as less differentiated, as opposed to the higher degree of differentiation existing in the relationship between mothers and sons (Chodorow 1978, 109). The relationship between mothers (historically, the primary care-giver) and daughters is one of “attachment characterized by primary identification,” which contributes to the “constitution of different forms of “relational potential” in people of different genders” (Chodorow 1978, 166).

This reading of Chodorow’s analysis suggests that it is because boys construct their personalities (as masculine) through a greater degree of differentiation from their primary care-giver (their mother), that they develop a tendency to engage in encounters with a high degree of emotional-psychological distancing. In other words, since the boy has to differentiate himself from the very person who is spatio-temporally closest to him, he becomes more likely to approach encounters (even with proximate others) with a heightened degree of emotional-psychological distancing. Boys become caught in a tension where their self-definition depends on distancing themselves from the person who (for the majority of their childhood) they have been dependent on for life-sustaining care. Since the boy cannot *physically* distance themselves from their primary care-giver, they *emotionally* and *psychologically* distance themselves (to achieve differentiation). The crucial feature of this tension is that boys tend to curtail the “empathic tie” to their

mothers in the process of forging their ego boundaries (process of differentiation) (Chodorow 1978, 166-7). Therefore, one explanation for why males tend to exhibit the distant voice of reason-based ethics is that the construction of masculine identity requires a greater degree of distancing from their mother, the primary care-giver (who is by definition, spatio-temporally close). Since a child's first experience of encounter is with their mother, and the boy's distancing attitude towards the mother is connected to the formation of his (masculine) identity, the boy learns how to engage in encounters with a psychologically-distant attitude. This point is echoed by Chodorow when she writes:

Because all children identify first with their mother, a girl's gender and gender role identification processes are continuous with her earliest identification and a boy's are not.... A boy, in order to feel himself adequately masculine, must distinguish and differentiate himself from others in a way that a girl need not – must categorize himself as someone apart. Moreover, he defines masculinity negatively as that which is not feminine and/or connected to women, rather than positively. This is another way boys come to deny and repress relation and connection in the process of growing up. (1978, 174)

As we will see in the next chapter, Carol Gilligan's findings in *In a Different Voice* (1982) corroborate Chodorow's claims regarding the different empathic and relational capacities in males and females. However, a number of studies since also share similarities with Chodorow's observations. All of these studies have important differences in terms of objectives, as well as the inferences drawn from the data by those performing the studies; however, they all contain significant empirical evidence that is compatible with Chodorow's hypothesis.

A 1990 study of 22 infants – 11 boys and 11 girls – whose primary caretaker was their mother, observed differences in how boys and girls interacted with their mothers, while at the same time moving away from the mother in order to interact with peers

(Olesker 1990, 326-7). It was observed that “[t]he girls showed a high degree of responsiveness to the social world from the beginning of the ninth month ... [while] boys focused less on mother and could be more easily distracted by and attracted to toys” (Olesker 1990, 328). In particular, girls “shared activities and feelings with her [mother]” more so than did the boys (Olesker 1990, 329). As Olesker further writes:

The gender differences in the babies seemed to stimulate different interaction patterns between the mothers and their children. Girls sought their mothers out more, insisted on tactile contact with her, and often would not leave her side. While mothers of girls stayed closer to their daughters, they did not initiate more contact with them than did mothers of boys. (1990, 333)

While moving into the social world of interactions with other children and adults, “[g]irls initiated contact with peers one third more often than boys, and did more varied things with peers. Girls contacted other adults more often than did boys” (Olesker 1990, 335). Therefore, there seems to be a correlation between the girl’s closeness with the mother – as primary care-giver – and the proclivity to engage in relations with others, even at this early stage of childhood.

Mary Lee Nelson, in her survey of the psychological literature on separation and connection, observes that it is in the girl’s close relationship with the mother that “[s]he develops the capacity to individuate without relinquishing the capacity to remain in connection, which allows her to foster healthy relationships as she matures” (1996, 341). This point is especially important in the sense that the higher degree of connection observed between mothers and daughters should not be misconstrued as a failure to develop or individuate, but, as Chodorow and Gilligan demonstrate, merely signals a process of development and individuation which is relational, and results from the fact that the development of the girl’s (gender) identity is not tied to a differentiation from her

primary care-giver in the same way as that of boys. This relational feature of the girl's development also means that

self-esteem is dependent on her capacity for the development of relational competence, including the capacity to experience and communicate accurate empathy.... Girls who have healthy relationships with their mothers learn this skill through mutual interaction. (Surrey 1991 cited in Nelson 1996, 341)

Ultimately, connectedness and differentiation should not be seen as dichotomous, since:

The developing self does not grow away from relationship. Rather, healthy self-development is a result of supportive and intimate, yet flexible relations with significant others.... [It is] a process of simultaneous increased self-definition along with capacity for intimacy. (Surrey 1991 cited in Nelson 1996, 340)

A 2005 study examining the relationship between empathic capacity and emotional separation from parents in adolescents concluded that “more empathic youngsters tended to be less separate from their parents” (Huey and Henry 2005 cited in Ingoglia et. al. 2011, 272). A 2011 study involving 331 Italian adolescents, 54 percent of them women, supported the idea that:

Emotional separation and detachment are related to different facets of youngsters' processes of self-other boundary regulation. The experience of separating from parents seems to be linked to a low disposition to adopt the other's point of view and to vicariously share his or her emotional state. (Ingoglia et. al. 2011, 278)

Furthermore, the study found that compared to boys, girls reported a lower degree of “self-other differentiation, and separate self,” as well as higher degrees of “empathic concern, perspective taking, [and] connected self” (Ingoglia et. al. 2011, 280). Those responsible for carrying out the study also state that: “Gender had an effect on all the observed variables related to self-other boundary maintenance and on the separation factor (Ingoglia et. al. 2011, 276).

Therefore, the evidence suggests that masculine identity is constituted through distancing from the mother, and this distancing leads to the distant voice necessary for modern public life, as it prepares the ground for moral reasoning free of emotional and psychological connection.<sup>27</sup> We should remember that the disposition of the distant voice is characterized by inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness. This moral voice is both constituted by, and constitutive of, societies characterized by a growing number of rapid encounters between relative strangers across space-time. It is this *voice* that becomes most prevalent in men, as opposed to women, who, throughout childhood, develop

a basis for “empathy” built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not. Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another’s needs or feelings as one’s own ... [and] experience themselves as less differentiated than boys, as more continuous with and related to the external object-world and as differently oriented to their inner object-world as well. (Chodorow 1978, 166-7)

This early intensification of emotional-psychological distancing, characterized by more rigid ego boundaries and a corresponding decrease in the capacity to empathize, orients males to the public world, the “nonrelational spheres” (Chodorow 1978, 170). The landscape here is not primarily a physical landscape, but an emotional-psychological landscape, where the male learns to mediate their encounters with spatio-temporal multiplicity through the use of a distant voice. Furthermore, this process is connected

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<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that the process of becoming an individual distinct from one’s parents is not an important process in order to engage with confidence in encounters with others. This is why I choose to use the word ‘distant,’ since it implies the notion of *degree*, rather than thinking of one’s ‘distinctness’ as a ‘yes or no’ question. Therefore, what I and the ethics of care are critiquing is the overinflated sense of human distinctiveness in universal-rationalist moral and political theories, such as liberal theories of justice. These theories are reflective of traditionally masculine norms and ideals. Therefore, being distinct, as well as connected to others are not mutually exclusive, as will be seen later on in my discussion of *relational* and/or *mutual* autonomy.

with the distance and distancing that exists between the public and private realms in modern society. This *boundary* between public and private means that:

Girls' identification processes ... are more continuously embedded in and mediated by their ongoing relationship with their mother. They develop through and stress particularistic and affective relationships to others. A boy's identification processes are not likely to be so embedded in or mediated by a real affective relation to his father. (Chodorow 1978, 176)

What the above excerpt points to is the way that women develop an attitude or disposition towards *encounters* (human multiplicity) that is mediated through close, personal forms of interaction; by contrast, because of the father's (historically) physical and emotional remoteness from the private realm, the male develops his attitude or disposition towards *encounters*, in the abstract, and, therefore, *impersonally* (Chodorow 1978, 176). Chodorow posits that females therefore come to see their identity as tied to concrete relations with others with whom they can empathize, whereas the male's is conceived in isolation from others. This, in a way, encourages males to appeal to a notion of commonality among the human multitude that is based in a universal use of reason, since their sense of Self and Other has been formed primarily in the abstract, and at a distance from their primary care-giver (the mother), thus, at a distance from the particularities of concrete individuals. Since the male is lacking in his ability to be attentive and receptive to the particularity of others (he is distant), he tends to appeal to minimally common human traits in order to relate.

The use of an *impersonal mediator* (abstract rationality) becomes the primary means by which the masculinist public sphere orders spatio-temporal difference. Distancing through the forms of mediation and boundary, are, therefore, intimately tied with how gender both structures, and is structured, by modern Western society.

However, the dominance of moral rationalism as the impersonal mediator of spatio-temporal multiplicity depends on a very particular conception of rationality, a conception that can be challenged on the basis that it ignores the use of reason in practices of care. Chodorow demonstrates how the male identity comes to disassociate from the mother, and, therefore, from his relational potential, but *what does this relational potential consist of? What is lost when emotional-psychological distancing is seen as a prerequisite for moral maturity and human development? What are the consequences of situating impartial reason as 'The Rational,' hence intensifying emotional-psychological distancing between human selves?*

### Maternal Distancing

Sara Ruddick offers an important critique of the dominant (masculine) conception of rationality – a conception that ignores the exercise of reason that one finds in ‘maternal thinking’ (1989). I argue that we can see maternal thinking as an alternative to the impersonal mediation that one finds in the distant justice voice of impartial reason. Like Noddings (2002) and Meyers (1994), Ruddick advocates an approach to human encounters that does not eschew the use of reason, but rather argues for a use of reason that is grounded in our emotional-psychological proximity to concrete others. Similar to the Levinasian critique of Western moral and political rationality (in light of the Holocaust, European imperialism etc...), Ruddick argues that “dispassionate transcendence ... [is] failing in the streets as [well as] in the living room” (1989, 7).

For Ruddick, “[m]aternal practice begins with a double vision – seeing the fact of biological vulnerability as socially significant and as demanding care” (1989, 19). Such care expands to involve the three demands of: *preservation, growth, and social*

*acceptability*, and requires the corresponding practices of: *preservative love*, *nurturance*, and *training* (Ruddick 1989, 17). The demand of growth is not limited to one's physical health, but is also a matter of "emotional and intellectual growth" (Ruddick 1989, 19). Additionally, "[s]ocial groups require that mother's shape their children's growth in "acceptable ways"" (Ruddick 1989, 21). This last point is significant in that it speaks to my point that the promotion of impersonal mediation is not limited to moral and political theories that give priority to the use of abstract reason, but also to moral and political theories that advocate the primacy of the community. Just because one situates a historically and culturally specific community as the source of moral and political theory does not preclude the possibility of certain norms of behaviour becoming dominant, thus intensifying the emotional-psychological distance between particular persons involved in concrete encounters.

Indeed, it is in the experience of mothering that we find a concrete, everyday instance of the kind of harm that can come from the impersonal mediation of universal and/or culturally dominant norms as governing moral encounters. According to Ruddick, when

a group demands acceptable behavior that, in a mother's eyes, contradicts her children's need for protection and nurturance, then the mother will be caught in painful and self-fragmenting conflict ... [and will be] less motivated by moral self-definition than by fear or a need for social survival. (1989, 22)

In such instances, the mother can feel pressure to become distant from her child in the sense that the demands of universal reason, or communal norms (it is these dominant norms that Ruddick is specifically referring to), impinge on her ability to be fully attentive, receptive, and responsive, not only to her child, but also to her own sense of

moral voice or intuition. The fragmenting or *distancing* from the concrete needs of the child, in order to make that child acceptable for the public realm, also involves a corresponding distancing from one's own sense of moral responsibility in their caring encounters with emotionally and psychologically proximate others.

I argue that this is what Ruddick means when she writes of “maternal powerlessness,” of the “many external constraints on her capacity to name, feel and act” (1989, 35). Ruddick even uses the language of distance when she writes that “the distancing inherent in child birth is mirrored by dependence on medical expertise.... [The] proliferation of experts can create distance between mother and child” (1989, 36-7). These specific excerpts are mainly referring to health professionals – as embodying modern (scientific) rationalism – who can be seen as mediating between mother and child vis-à-vis the practices of physical *caring for*; however, if the growth of the child is also a matter of emotional and intellectual health, we can read the prevalence of the justice voice, the distant voice in modern Western society, as constituting a similar distancing between mother and child through mediation by dominant social groups, educators, mental health professionals, the media, and moral and political theorists.

The primacy of abstract-impartial rationality is challenged by Ruddick's notion of a “rationality of care” (1989, 46), that is not a distant form of rationality, but one embedded in the practices of being attentive, receptive, and responsive to a *particular* Other, with whom one is emotionally and psychologically connected. Such a rationality of care therefore involves creativity in the sense that mothers have to adjust their ways of encountering the child depending on that child's unique set of needs and/or personality.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This is not to imply that mothers ‘plan’ their encounters with the child, but rather that being attentive and receptive to the child's *particular* needs means that mothers often have to adapt within their

The intensification of emotional-psychological distancing involved in the use of universal-impartial reason does not reflect the nature of mothering practices, practices that are necessary for the sustaining of life. This is because “[i]n protecting her child, a mother is besieged by feeling, her own and her children’s. She is dependent on these feeling to interpret the world. The world that mothers and children see and name, separately and together, is constructed by feeling” (Ruddick 1989, 69). However, just like we saw in Noddings’s discussion of *inferred* versus *expressed* needs (2002), as well as in Meyers’s discussion of empathic thought (1994): “Feelings cry out for thought; hence, reflective assessment of feeling is a defining rational activity of mothers” (Ruddick 1989, 70). In concrete practices of sustaining lives, and thus fostering the potential for those lives to be fulfilling and meaningful, emotion and reason are not adversaries, but rather are collaborators in caring encounters characterized by the exercise of “reflective feeling” (Ruddick 1989, 70).

The separation of emotion from reason, and nature from culture, is mirrored in the division between the public and private spheres of life (Held 1990, 322-3). It is here that we again see the harmful effects of distancing, this time in the form of the boundary between public and private. This distancing is felt in everyday life when certain forms of behavior, aspects of one’s personality, or features of one’s particularity, must be kept at a distance from the public realm. Such distancing maintains the dominant position of certain values, ideals, forms of reasoning, by presenting them as universal to all rational creatures. It is argued that social unity, the peaceful ordering of spatio-temporal multiplicity, depends on a political order based only on principles that can be assented to

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encounters in order to respond appropriately. Furthermore, this *disposition* of care can be disrupted/altered when under the gaze of others – as representative of dominant societal norms/values.

by the common (public) use of reason (Rawls 2005). For mothers (historically, the primary carer of children), this means that they can “often suffer from a sense of fragmentation as they experience, within and between their homes and more public places, rapid shifts of power and powerlessness, recognition and invisibility, nearly awesome love and routine contempt” (Ruddick 1989, 92). This boundary between public and private means that certain values, or ways of life, are ignored, and thus seen as politically irrelevant (a crucial issue for Joan Tronto (1993; 2013) in her development of a *political* ethic of care). This not only serves to marginalize those individuals who embody those values or ways of life in their daily practices, but also blocks the potential social and political good that could come from their incorporation into socio-political life. Especially as it relates to care and mothering, the distancing between public and private obscures the crucial role that practices of care play in the sustaining of human life, and, by extension, social and political communities. As Ruddick writes of the boundary between public and private:

[There is] a disconcerting gulf between the kinds of thinking required of me at home and those I engaged in “outside”.... People govern their allegedly “personal” relations abstractly, letting disconnected, rule-dominated “fairness” override care and sympathy. (1989, 96)

It is in the public realm that impersonal mediation can most forcefully influence the encounters between mothers and children. We might say that Ruddick’s notion of “the gaze of others” is impersonal mediation *par excellence*. It is when confronted with

the gaze of others [that] mothers punish behaviour they would otherwise gently correct and accept blame for “failures” that, in private, they would not recognize as such. Relinquishing authority to others, they lose confidence in their own values and in their perception of their children’s needs. (1989, 111)

It is the last sentence which is most crucial, in that it demonstrates how impersonal mediation can intensify the emotional-psychological distancing between persons in the sense of hindering attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness in one's encounters with particular others. It is when individuals traverse the boundary between public and private that they become *distanced* from their own unique sense of moral responsibility (their moral voice), while simultaneously becoming distant in their encounters. For Ruddick, this distancing not only means that mothers can act in ways detrimental to the interests of themselves and their children – thus appearing to betray (seem distant) the child's trust and loyalty in her “maternal authority” (1989, 111) – but also leads to a sense of inauthenticity. It is this sense of inauthenticity vis-à-vis one's particular moral values (Ruddick 1989, 112) that I am referring to as constituting a self-distancing (an emotional-psychological distancing from oneself), what Hutchings calls a “self-effacing” (2013, 32). In such self-distancing one becomes inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to their moral feelings or intuition, thus reproducing that distancing in their encounters with others. *If one does not pay attention or is not receptive to their moral feelings and intuitions, than how can that person respond with attention and receptiveness in their encounters with others?* Ruddick writes that it is “when she thinks inauthentically [that] a mother valorizes the judgment of dominant authorities ... who determine the limits of moral reflection” (1989, 113). Whether this authority is that of moral rationalism or communal customs, there is an impersonal mediator placed in the middle of moral encounters, which intensifies emotional-psychological distancing between the participants of those encounters, and hinders the ability of those individuals

to respond to each other's particular needs according to attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness, all of which require a *caring* use of reason.

### Criticisms of Care as Gender Essentialism

Before moving on, it is important to address the primary criticism levelled at the ethics of care, which is that it essentializes gender and gender differences with respect to moral reasoning (Heyes 1997). I argue that for the purposes of analysis we can break down the gender essentialism critique of the ethics of care into two (interrelated) parts: a) the *scientific-philosophical* objection, and b) the *social-political* objection.

In the first instance, the ethics of care is often criticized as being “an account that theorizes women as a category with a set of essential attributes” (Young 1990, 87). Therefore, the same kinds of criticisms that are levelled at the notion of universal humanity (such as those made in this thesis) can be applied to the (alleged) positing of “universal womanhood” in the work of Chodorow, Ruddick, Gilligan etc... (Young 1990, 87). On scientific and philosophical grounds this raises serious questions about the evidence or method being used to discover such a ‘female nature.’ For instance, Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982) have both been criticized on the basis that their studies lack an attention to diversity; consequently, their theories are based on the experiences of predominately white, middle class men and women (Bordo 1990, 138; Young 2005, 14). Furthermore, Chodorow has been criticized for (allegedly) taking “one pattern of difference between men and women” – unique to a particular socio-historical context – and concluding that this points to an *essential* difference between males and females (Bordo 1990, 138).

This last criticism seems rather dubious in the sense that Chodorow explicitly frames her theory as one on the socio-cultural *reproduction* of mothering. The phenomenon of women as the primary carers for children is something that is reproduced “through social structurally induced psychological processes” (Chodorow 1978, 7). If it were a biologically or psychologically essential characteristic of females, then such reproduction would not be necessary.<sup>29</sup> The objection related to a lack of diversity in studies such as Chodorow’s (1978) and Gilligan’s (1982) is a fair criticism; however, I argue that *even if* the experiences described in these studies are those of a particular race or class, this should not disqualify them as being relevant to an analysis of gender or care, nor should it disqualify the value of the practices or ways of thinking that are observed. It is important to note that Gilligan herself has stated on numerous occasions that what she observed is not a *woman’s* voice, only a *different* voice. At the very beginning of *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan states:

The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women’s voice’s that I trace its development. But this association is not absolute[.]... No claims are made about the origins of the differences described or their distribution in a wider population, across cultures, or through time. Clearly, these differences arise in a social context where factors of social status and power combine with reproductive biology to shape the experience of males and females and the relations between the sexes. (1993, 2)

In fact, Susan Hekman has taken Gilligan’s notion of the *different voice* as a springboard to argue that moral and political theory should recognize that there is a multiplicity of *different voices* that corresponds to the diversity of human subjects. Care and morality

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<sup>29</sup> Clearly, the role of men in caring for children continues to change; however, the dominant notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ that grew out of those historical gender dynamics continues to influence familial and socio-political arrangements in crucial ways.

can be thought of as common to all cultures, while at the same time acknowledging diversity in how these will be filled out in practice (Hekman 1995).

Connected to skepticism regarding the scientific and philosophical validity of care theory, is skepticism regarding its status as a *feminist* theory, i.e. the social and political implications of starting from the historical position of women as primary care-givers (in particular, for children) as a means to fight oppression and gender inequality. One such criticism is that the effort to promote and/or re-value the characteristics or practices that have historically been associated with women would only serve to reinforce stereotypes that have facilitated the social subordination of women in the first place, and their relegation to the private sphere (Alcoff 1995, 435-9; Young 1990, 87-9). For example, Marilyn Friedman argues: “To promote esteem for women as nurturers ... is to risk implicitly endorsing the stereotype that women are merely nurturers, a view that would reinforce social practices by which women are excluded from non-nurturing occupations and activities” (1995, 57-8).

There is certainly the potential for this type of essentialism to become socially and politically detrimental to feminist goals; however, if the ethics of care does not entail a biological or psychological essentialism, then the values and traits attributed to women in their socio-historical role as mothers need not be tied exclusively to women. The ethics of care need not “romanticize” female values (Bordo 1990, 149), or go, as Linda Alcoff puts it, from a view of “woman-as-housewife” to “woman-as-supermom” (1995, 435). Using the theoretical lens of *care* is rather a means to highlight the crucial nature of practices and values of care for the sustaining of human life (and, by extension, socio-political communities). Care theory also uncovers the ways that these practices and values have

been undervalued in contrast to historically masculine values (e.g. principled impartiality) – thus serving as a means to subordinate women by framing caring work as relying on a morally immature use of reason – and the ways in which the burdens of care have been disproportionately fulfilled by women, and hence led to structural socio-economic inequalities (Robinson 2011, 32-3). Therefore, it would at best be counter-productive “to delegitimize *a priori* the exploration of experiential continuity and structural common ground among women” (Bordo 1990, 142, italics in original). This is why Iris Young encourages us to view gender as a social structure, rather than as an essential property of individuals (2005, 22); these structures “are historically given and condition the action and consciousness of individual persons” (Young 2005, 25). Likewise, Joan Tronto points out “that to say something is gendered is not the same thing as saying that it reflects a difference between men and women” (2013, 84). Therefore, the claim is not that women became the primary care-givers for children because they have a natural disposition to fulfilling that role, but rather that once put in that situation by patriarchal power, the kinds of values and practices that sustain life were more developed, and thus associated, with women. The historical devaluing of caring practices and women as a group goes hand-in-hand. The socio-historical link between gender and care is thus crucial to feminist critiques of patriarchal societies.

Therefore, care ethics is a *political* theory in the sense of critically

reshaping ... the idea and goals of ethics in order that they may address not only the real needs and concerns of particular persons but the normative and structural constraints which erect exclusive moral boundaries and inhibit the creation of caring relations both within and between social groups. (Robinson 1999, 53)

This theory is *feminist* since it includes a socio-political re-evaluation of those values and practices historically associated with women, which, so far, have been excluded from serious political consideration. Therefore, care theory also challenges the division between public and private, and the corresponding “supposition that what occurs in the household occurs as if on an island beyond politics, whereas the personal is highly affected by the political power beyond” (Held 1990, 334). The devaluing of caring work leads to a devaluing of those who are associated with such work (rightly or wrongly). Since care is crucial to individual and societal well-being, this devaluation means that there will always be individuals who take-on the practices of care, and thus risk being marginalized in socio-political life (or that those who find themselves doing caring work will be those who are already marginalized because of factors such as: race, class, gender etc...).

The last criticism or concern raised against the ethics of care that I wish to address is the charge that carers and relationships of care are idealized in the care literature, and that this idealization ignores the ways in which relationships of care can be damaging to the individual autonomy of carers (e.g. self-sacrifice) (Young 1990, 88) and cared-for (e.g. paternalism).<sup>30</sup> This criticism grows out of the social-political objection to the ethics of care, and applies not only to women, but to society at-large. The concern regarding autonomy is a valid one, and is anticipated by care ethicists. Gilligan herself pays substantial attention to the risk of the care voice becoming a voice of self-sacrifice, where one is responsive to others to the detriment of being adequately responsive to themselves. Gilligan avoids this problem by including in her description of responsibility the notion

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<sup>30</sup> The term ‘carer’ (as I use it here) refers to anyone who is providing some sort of care to another. In this sense being a care-giver is not a specific role, but something that most people engage in at various points over the course of their lives.

of self-responsibility. Therefore, as Gilligan argues, there is no reason why an individual should not take themselves as requiring a caring response, even when such a response would mean harm to another; there are situations in which some kind of harm will be unavoidable, and there is no reason why an individual must *necessarily* prioritize the well-being of another over one's own. In fact, caring for oneself is a prerequisite for caring well for others (Gilligan 1993, 70, 74-6, 81-4, 90). Therefore, the ethics of care includes caring self-encounters, where an individual is attentive, receptive, and responsive to themselves vis-à-vis their own needs.

On the other hand, there is always the risk of paternalism (i.e. the loss of autonomy). However, this again depends on the nature and context of the relationship. Furthermore, it seems that the expressed fear of paternalism tends to arise out of an *a priori* aversion to the notion of dependency, which ignores the reality that dependency is an unavoidable feature of life, and one that every individual will at some point embody and/or have to respond to, at various points in the course of their lives (Held 2006, 55; Tronto 1993, 135, 162; 2013, 146; Young 1990a, 54-5). Practices of care are not only a requirement for life, but also for the exercise of autonomy, and this insight leads to a conception of autonomy as *relational* (Clement 1996; Keller 1997; Meyers 1987; Nedelsky 1989; Oliver 2002). When one reflects on the necessary background conditions, which facilitate the exercise of individual autonomy, there comes the realization that it “is not isolation, but relationships – with parents, teachers, friends, loved ones – that provide the support and guidance necessary for the development and experience of autonomy” (Nedelsky 1989, 12). This, of course, does not mean that care cannot become smothering or controlling, but if one is truly attentive and receptive to the needs and wishes of

another (which is what care ethics encourages) then care becomes the means by which autonomy can be practiced, rather than its antithesis (Clement 1996, 23-4). As argued by Grace Clement, it is the same “symbolic system that dichotomizes public and private, masculinity and femininity, work and love, and instrumentality and expressivity [that] results in a dichotomy between care and autonomy” (1996, 49). One way to prevent paternalistic relations of care is to foster what Virginia Held describes as a “mutual autonomy,” which, “includes mutual understandings and acceptances of how much sharing of time, space, daily decisions, and so on there will be, and how much independently arrived at activity” (2006, 55). Interestingly, it is not distance – as non-interference – that ensures autonomy in this instance, but rather the proximity of caring encounters, where individuals are attentive, receptive, and responsive to a particular Other and their needs.

Ignoring the relationship between gender and care – out of a fear of gender essentialism – in my opinion, comes from an inattentive (mis)reading of the ethics of care literature as a whole, and risks disregarding its *feminist and political* implications such as a reconceptualization of autonomy that more accurately reflects socio-political reality. However, this is not to say that such theorizing should be inattentive to the risk of essentialism and its potential socio-political harmfulness to feminist goals.

In the next chapter, I will turn to a discussion of the nature of encounters in modern city life, as described by Georg Simmel ([1908] 2002). I argue that in Simmel’s portrait of the modern city (the metropolis) we get a glimpse of how distancing operates in everyday social relations (in the West) in spite of the growing number of densely populated living-spaces. This distancing is intensified and sustained by what

Margaret Urban Walker (1998) sees as a theoretical-juridical moral language, as well as by the boundaries of public and private, a crucial feature of the money economy (Tronto 1993; 2013). Simmel is rarely mentioned in the context of a feminist ethics of care, but his analysis of gender, in a number of ways, anticipates the findings of Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice* ([1982] 1993).

## Chapter Four: Metropolitan Encounters

Two themes determine today's liberal tolerant attitude towards others: respect for otherness and openness towards it, and the obsessive fear of harassment. The other is OK in so far as his presence does not intrude, in so far as the other is not really other. Tolerance coincides with its opposite: my duty to be tolerant towards the other effectively means that I should not get too close to him, not intrude into his/her space – in short, that I should respect his/her intolerance towards my over-proximity. This is what is more and more emerging as the central 'human right' in late-capitalist society: the right not to be harassed, i.e. to be kept at a safe distance from others. (Žižek 2006, 101-2)

It is in the public realm of the modern city – the metropolis, that we find impersonal mediation, through the use of theoretical-judicial modes of moral reasoning (Walker 1998), at its most prominent. Georg Simmel observes that social relations in the metropolis reflect the broader trends towards a money economy and an overall intellectualization of existence. These factors contribute to the development of a *blasé* attitude in one's relation to society, and to a sense of *reserve* vis-à-vis the proximity of others. I argue that the *blasé* attitude is a form of distancing manifested as a lack of attentiveness, and *reservation* towards the closeness of others is a form of distancing as an inability, or unwillingness, to be receptive to the particularity of the Other. Indeed, the appearance of such dispositions in modern city life is characteristic of the broader move from ethics to politics as described by Emmanuel Levinas, where the mediation of human multiplicity (spatio-temporal distance) requires the systematization of moral principles with universal validity, and thus, intensification of emotional-psychological distancing. For Levinas, *ethics* is when we take responsibility for the Other, as that Other appears in his/her difference; the shift to *politics* occurs when the multiplicity of others is mediated

according to a responsibility that depends on a notion of human sameness (Levinas 1996).

Distanciation through impersonal mediation (the distant voice of modern reason-based morality), is connected to the *boundary* that separates so-called public from private spheres of life. The liberal-rationalist position argues that universal moral principles, or forms of moral reasoning, are the source of ‘just’ social and political order in the modern city, and, therefore, must be held at a distance from the particularities of private life. The private realm, it is often argued, is representative of nature, instinct, emotion, and partiality, all of which conflict with the intellectualism of the public sphere. However, as Joan Tronto (1993; 2013) argues, this distanciation between public and private is not only harmful to the status of women (who historically have done the bulk of caring work in the home), but is also problematic if we wish to develop societies that are able to adequately meet the needs of its people and offer the possibility for lives that are fulfilling and morally-meaningful in the development of the close, personal relationships that are necessary in order to sustain individual life, and, by extension, society at-large.

Reflecting on Sara Ruddick’s notion of inauthenticity and maternal powerlessness (1989, 113), I argue that attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness to the needs of particular others requires the exercise of a moral voice that is not *impersonally* mediated by the distant voice of abstract/detached moral rules/principles. Responding adequately to the needs of an Other requires reflection on the particularities (the so-called private aspects) of oneself, as well as of the Other. It requires the exercise of a moral voice that allows for emotional-psychological proximity in our moral encounters. Thus, the minimizing of emotional-psychological distanciation requires the kind of moral reflection

on the particular contexts of concrete others, which is often drowned out in the public realm of state institutions and the market economy. When one *speaks past* the impersonal mediator, and beyond the public-private boundary, the moral value of our close, proximate *caring encounters* is uncovered, and suggests an alternative approach to mediating the multiplicity of our encounters in socio-political life.

### **The *Blasé* Voice: An Encounter between Simmel and Care Theory**

#### From Rural Life to the Metropolis: The Intensification of Distanciation

The essentially intellectualistic character of the mental life of the metropolis becomes intelligible as over against that of the small town which rests more on feelings and emotional relationships.... The metropolitan type – which naturally takes on a thousand individual modifications – creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it. Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner ... [and from] a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depths of the personality. (Simmel 2002, 12)

In “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” Georg Simmel tries to uncover the psychological changes that have accompanied the rapid shift from rural to urban living characteristic of modernity (i.e. industrialized production in the scientifically-technologically advanced West).<sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> More precisely, it is an “investigation of the

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<sup>31</sup> Simmel’s image of the city, what he calls the ‘metropolis,’ can be read as a symbol for the social changes that occurred in the period of late-modernity as a result of economic industrialization, and advances in science and technology. Therefore, Simmel is not necessarily writing about a *literal* city, but rather of the modern city as most exemplifying the mental configurations of modern life in the West.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Jacobs helps us to understand Simmel’s notion of the ‘metropolis’ as symbolic of a *way of life*, which does not necessarily correspond to a specific physical territory, when she writes: “Cities exist in an era of increasing geographically extended spatial flows. Rural to urban and transnational migration is transforming the demography of cities in unprecedented ways, such that there is more internal multiplicity and the spatiality of city dwellers is stretched between here and there. Where cities end and rurality begins is unclear, and city effects pulse outwards drawing in rural-based lives and spaces, creating hybrid urbanisms and new types of con-joined city regions. Cities are nowadays intensely embedded in global networks of connectivity, be they economic, cultural or political.” In this sense, we “think beyond the city-as-territory” (Jacobs 2012, 412).

adaptations made by the personality in its adjustment to the forces that lie outside of it” (Simmel 2002, 11). In other words, Simmel wants to understand the emotional-psychological landscape that corresponds to the spatio-temporal landscape of modern life, represented by the metropolis. What is most significant for the argument being presented in this thesis is the observation that the increase in spatio-temporal proximity, coincides with an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing. While Simmel does not frame his argument in these terms, I nonetheless suggest that we can read his essay as an attempt to convey the paradoxical phenomenon whereby the over-proximity of others leads one to become increasingly *remote*. It is “the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli ... with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life” (Simmel 2002, 11) that encourages an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing, through abstract reason, as a means to order one’s encounters with the unrelenting multiplicity of metropolitan life. This is in contrast to a “slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory mental phase of small town and rural existence” (Simmel 2002, 12).<sup>33</sup>

It is the demands of metropolitan life – primarily of the money economy, which coincides with a high concentration of spatially-proximate others – that requires an intellectualist attitude towards others, an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing. In order for the metropolitan individual to mediate the multiplicity of their encounters in the city, they have to develop what Simmel refers to as

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<sup>33</sup> One feature of modern city life, which reflects the spatio-temporal demands of the money economy and urban sprawl, is the prevalence of private automobiles as the primary means of transportation. Especially in North America, neighborhoods are routinely designed around travel by car, thus leading to the constitution of physical spaces which discourage walking, and, therefore, decrease the chances of interpersonal encounters (King 2004, 108, 111-2).

a purely matter-of-fact attitude in the treatment of persons and things in which a formal justice is often combined with an unrelenting hardness. The purely intellectualistic person is indifferent to all things personal because, out of them, relationships and reactions develop which are not to be completely understood by purely rational methods. (2002, 12)

Formal justice is thus representative of the broader intellectualization of existence, and has a significant impact on the nature of our everyday encounters. Emphasizing the use of the intellect in one's encounters towards others can involve an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing since: "All emotional relationships between persons rest on their individuality [i.e. particularity], whereas intellectual relationships deal with persons as with numbers, that is, as with elements which, in themselves, are indifferent" (Simmel 2002, 12). There is an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing in the move from rural communities to large cities in that the over-proximity of others requires an intellectualization of encounters as a sort of coping mechanism (Simmel 2002, 12).

The intellectualization of social life goes hand-in-hand with the rapid expansion of capitalist production, which replaces domestic production and direct person-to-person exchange, and is at the core of the form of life in the metropolis (Simmel 2002, 13). The demands of a money economy require levels of efficiency and regularity that necessitates that individuals interact through a common distant voice, since, in a very simple sense, *there is just not enough time in the day*, or mental stamina, to be attentive, receptive, and responsive in all our daily encounters. Therefore, our moral rules governing behavior have to take on a universal applicability much like money becomes the common element

of exchange (Simmel 2002, 12).<sup>34</sup> In both cases, the *personal* is pressured to conform to the *impersonal*. Indeed, as Simmel writes:

The modern mind has become more and more a calculating one. The calculating exactness of practical life which has resulted from a money economy corresponds to the ideal of a natural science, namely that of transforming the world into an arithmetical problem. (2002, 13)

This is most apparent in how metropolitan individuals relate to space-time vis-à-vis their encounters:

Punctuality, calculability and exactness, which are required by the complications and extensiveness of metropolitan life, are not only most intimately connected with its capitalistic and intellectualistic character but also colour the content of life and are conducive to the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign human traits and impulses which originally seek to determine the form of life *from within instead of receiving it from the outside in a general, schematically precise form.* (Simmel 2002, 13, italics added)

It is therefore the demands of the money economy in the spatio-temporally extensive metropolis that requires the adoption of what Simmel calls the “*blasé* outlook” (2002, 14), and what I have termed the ‘distant voice,’ in our impersonally mediated social encounters. The spatio-temporal demands of the landscape of the modern city require an emotional-psychological distancing from the particularities of the Other. However, the *blasé* voice is not primarily a means to relate morally to others who are spatio-temporally remote (as is the Levinasian transition from ethics to politics). Rather, it is a means to distance those who threaten to disrupt the regularities of our public/economic lives with their over-proximity. Therefore, the distant voice – the *blasé* voice – requires us to become inattentive to the particularities of the Other, to adopt

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<sup>34</sup> Giddens, reflecting on Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money* ([1907] 2004), makes a similar point when he writes: “Money is a means of time-space distanciation. Money provides for the enactment of transactions between agents widely separated in time and space” (1990, 24).

an indifference toward the distinctions between things. Not in the sense that they are not perceived ... but rather that the meaning and the value of the distinction between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless. They appear to the blasé person in a homogenous, flat and grey colour. (Simmel 2002, 14)

I argue that it is this ability to speak with the *blasé* voice that is learned in the child's early relationship with their primary care-giver (the mother), as described in my interpretive reading of Nancy Chodorow and Sara Ruddick (Chapter Three). We first learn to distance ourselves from the proximity of others by emotionally-psychologically differentiating ourselves from our primary provider of care. Learning to speak with the *blasé* voice is a prerequisite for entry into the public/economic sphere of the modern Western metropolis. This sentiment is echoed by Simmel when he writes that "this psychological intellectualistic attitude and the money economy are in such close integration that no one is able to say whether it was the former that effected the latter or vice versa" (2002, 13). In other words, did the *blasé* voice develop as a means to serve metropolitan life, or did metropolitan life become so mentally unbearable that it led to the desensitization and detachment of the *blasé* voice as a means to adapt? Determining which came first is less important than understanding the ways in which emotional-psychological distanciation is connected with the demands of public life, and how this relationship is reproduced and reinforced in the gendering and devaluing of the moral worth of practices of care. Moral distanciation and marketized modern life are co-constitutive.

The *blasé* voice is one of silence, of non-response. Therefore, the mental attitude that has to be adopted by participants in their encounters with one another in the metropolis is one of *reserve*, since, as Simmel writes:

If the unceasing external contact of numbers of persons in the city should be met by the same number of inner reactions as in the small town, in which one knows almost every person he meets and to each of whom he has a positive relationship, one would be completely atomized internally and would fall into an unthinkable mental condition. (2002, 15)

Here we can interpret “positive relationship” as connoting an attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness to the particularity of those others whom we encounter. *Reservation* therefore represents a disposition of distancing towards others, “in consequence of which we do not know by sight neighbours of years standing,” which can further develop into “a mutual strangeness and repulsion” (Simmel 2002, 15) to the proximity of otherness. It is in this sense that ‘the stranger’ is necessarily distant, and this distancing, facilitated through the practice of deferring moral judgment to the impersonal mediator of the abstract intellect, in our encounters, is what makes metropolitan life possible (Simmel 2002, 15).

I propose that we can establish a link between Nancy Chodorow’s analysis of the reproduction of mothering and Georg Simmel’s description of modern metropolitan life. As I argued in Chapter Three, we can interpret Chodorow’s description of the boy’s differentiation from the mother as the process whereby the male identity *learns* to establish an augmented degree of emotional-psychological distancing from others who are nonetheless proximate (in the case of the mother, the primary care-giver, the most proximate Other). This leads to the tendency of a heightened degree of distancing from others, which is a requirement for life in the public realm. Therefore, Chodorow and Simmel seem to be in agreement about the necessity of distancing as the means of being socialized into the modern public world of politics and the market; as Simmel concisely puts it: “What appears here directly as disassociation is in reality only one of

the elementary forms of socialization” (2002, 15). Here we see the paradox in much of modern liberal-rationalist moral and political theory (especially in its Kantian deontological form), where we learn to be part of a society by learning to distance ourselves from the others that form that society.<sup>35</sup> This is achieved by making the *blasé* voice – the voice of reciprocal non-interference – the official moral language of the city.

The mutual reserve and indifference, and the intellectual conditions of life in large social units are never more sharply appreciated in their significance for the independence of the individual than in the dense crowds of the metropolis, because the bodily closeness and lack of space make intellectual distance really perceivable for the first time. It is obviously only the obverse of this freedom that, under certain circumstances, one never feels as lonely and as deserted as in this metropolitan crush of persons. For here, as elsewhere, it is by no means necessary that the freedom of man reflect itself in his emotional life only as a pleasant experience. (Simmel 2002, 16)<sup>36</sup>

### The Justice Voice is So *Blasé*: Hearing a Different Voice

The most basic questions about human living – how to live and what to do – are fundamentally questions about human relations, because people’s lives are deeply connected, psychologically, economically, and politically. Reframing these questions to make these relational realities explicit – how to live in relationship with others, what to do in the face of conflict – I found that I heard women’s and men’s voices differently. Women’s voices suddenly made new sense and women’s approaches to conflict were often deeply instructive because of the constant eye to maintaining relational order and connection. It was concern about relationship that made women’s voices sound “different” within a world that was preoccupied with separation and obsessed with creating and maintaining boundaries between people. (Gilligan 1993, xiv)

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<sup>35</sup> As Slavoj Žižek puts it: “One is truly universal only when radically singular” (2008, 144). For Michael Sandel this contributes to the modern liberal (procedural) state where: “In our public life, we are more entangled, but less attached, than ever before (1984, 94).

<sup>36</sup> Loren King, building on Jane Jacobs’s work, suggests an alternative vision, where the spatial configurations of modern city life *could* be used in order to develop an “inclusive metropolitan democracy” (2004, 111). Jacobs argues that the presence of high population density environments could, if constituted by a combination of residential and commercial spaces, lead to growing social networks – characterized by high levels of economic and social diversity – in spaces conducive to safe and creative public encounters (Jacobs 1961 cited in King 2004, 105).

If metropolitan life strongly encourages the intellectualistic mediation of the distant voice of formal justice, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* ([1982] 1993) demonstrates how this voice is a (historically) predominately masculine one, which denies the moral significance of emotionally-proximate relationships in the constitution of social life. It is in the historical experience of women that we can discern a different voice – the care voice. This voice is the expression of “[t]he ideal of care ... [as] an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone” (Gilligan 1993, 62). In Gilligan's words, the “voice of care”

is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order – a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health. (1993, xvi)

It is this “voice of care” in our encounters with others to which I will now turn.

Gilligan critiques the dominant theories of moral psychology and, more specifically, what she sees as the implicit devaluing of the (historically) feminine form of moral reasoning (1993). The moral concerns of women, as Gilligan hears them expressed, are often directed towards particular relationships of care, while male moral thought is largely dominated by a concern for universal principles for action (1993, 17). This concern for relationships is not only perceived as a weakness, but as a lack of maturity, a deficiency that makes women less fit for the world of public life where personal autonomy, and adherence to blind impartiality, are signs of moral development (Gilligan 1993, 18). Gilligan states that (historically) women are characterized by “a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (1993,

19). For the women in Gilligan's study, it is often relationships that are of primary moral concern, as opposed to individuals, viewed as isolated rights-bearers (for instance). Consequently, one can see "why a morality of rights and noninterference may appear frightening to women in its potential justification of indifference and unconcern" (Gilligan 1993, 22). It is therefore the perceived inability of women to emotionally-psychologically distance themselves from particular others, that "becomes by definition a failure to develop" (Gilligan 1993, 9). For Simmel, it is this same emotional-psychological distancing from others that is a requirement for socialization in the spatio-temporal conditions of the modern metropolis. That being said, we should keep in mind that the question here is not whether women can or cannot emotionally-psychologically distance themselves (obviously they can, just as much as men), but rather whether such distancing is a positive force in socio-political life.

Gilligan's critique, in large part, is a response to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which situates "a principled understanding of fairness that rests on the free-standing logic of equality and reciprocity" as the highest stage of moral maturity (Gilligan 1993, 27). The universal point of view of the "postconventional" stage is preceded by the "preconventional" stage of the individual, egocentric point of view, and the "conventional" stage of morality as adherence to shared norms and values as that which maintains social cohesion (Gilligan 1993, 73). Moral maturity, for Kohlberg, is reached when "relationships are subordinated to rules ... and rules to universal principles of justice" (Gilligan 1993, 18). The notion of a freestanding logic – reminiscent of Rawls's political conception of justice – is the kind of impersonal moral and political mediation, *distanced* from the concrete lives of particular others, that leads to an

inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness to those particular others whom we encounter; it is the intellectualism of the justice voice that coincides with the *blasé* outlook and attitude of reserve towards others in the modern public world of the metropolis. This notion of a freestanding logic that impersonally mediates relations between distinct individuals is not as prevalent in Gilligan's conversations with women. The feminine voice tends to express a view of social encounters not as "a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships" (Gilligan 1993, 28). The focus of moral concern in encounters, therefore, becomes primarily a matter of *responding* to particular others with whom we form a *relationship*, rather than relating to the Other, as abstract Other, by focusing moral attention on individual adherence to universal rights and/or principles.

The distant voice of formal justice intensifies our emotional-psychological distancing from others since a reliance on rights and principles – with universal applicability – as the primary means of relating to particular others can hinder our ability to adequately respond to their needs. It is the *impersonality* of the justice voice that intensifies this distancing, and, I argue, does so unnecessarily. I am not suggesting that politics should be stripped of its function as mediator of social encounters, but I am arguing that the high levels of emotional-psychological distancing, which coincides with the impersonal mediation of universal-rationalist theories of justice, is harmful to individuals and their relationships in human communities. The care voice represents a form of mediation that conceives moral problems as arising

from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights[.]...  
The morality of rights differs from the morality of responsibility in its emphasis on separation rather than connection, in its consideration of the individual rather than the relationship as primary. (Gilligan 1993, 19)

Gilligan recognizes this opposition between *impersonal* and *personal* mediation when she reflects on the different voices of eleven year-old boys and girls, responding to a hypothetical situation whereby a man (Heinz) is confronted with the dilemma of whether to steal life-saving drugs for his wife, from a pharmacist who is unwilling to provide those drugs at an affordable price. Gilligan concludes that: “Both children ... recognize the need for agreement but see it as mediated in different ways – he impersonally through systems of logic and law, she personally through communication in relationship” (1993, 29). The former form of mediation is characterized by an emotional-psychological distance, while the latter requires the kind of attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness that arises from emotionally-proximate encounters – the *caring* encounters described in Chapter Three –

where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for another, a perception of the need for response (Gilligan 1993, 30) ... [in] a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules. (Gilligan 1993, 29)

The ‘Heinz dilemma’ – originally used by Kohlberg in his studies of moral development – is similar to a thought experiment used by Kant in his effort to demonstrate the practical value of the categorical imperative. Kant asks us to imagine a situation in which a man is entrusted to keep a sum of money for a person who subsequently falls ill and dies. The heirs of the deceased – who themselves are extremely wealthy – know nothing of the deposit that by law should be transferred to them, and it is impossible that they would come to know of it unless told by the holder of the money. The man in possession of the money has fallen on hard times, and his misfortune extends to his wife and children. Kant then asks the question: would it be morally permissible for the poor man to keep the money, thus alleviating the urgent needs of his wife and

children? Kant concludes that if the poor man is to remain consistent with moral duty, and, therefore, consistent with the demands of reason, he must answer, ‘no’ ([1793] 2005, 146-7).<sup>37</sup> It is significant that both Kant and Kohlberg approach their similar thought experiments by assuming that the hypothetical individuals remain consistent with an ideal morality to the extent that they maintain an emotional-psychological distancing from others. *Does the poor man in Kant’s example not have any responsibility to his wife and children? Why is he not given the option of interacting with the rich heirs, and, therefore, potentially mediate the situation in such a way that would address the needs of his family?* For both Kohlberg and Kant, rationality – moral maturity – is achieved when the individual can impersonally mediate the situation on his own (i.e. at a distance from others), and such impersonal mediation is possible because for the moral rationalist “normative ‘oughts’ are pre-decided and prescribed apart from a consideration of wider socio-historical context” (Schick 2013, 48). The impartial point-of-view is thus the most rational. This view of moral maturity is tied to traditionally masculine qualities, and the *feminist* ethics of care challenges the assumed superiority of these qualities in socio-political life.

Gilligan observes a distinction between conceiving moral dilemmas as, on the one hand, an “impersonal conflict of claims,” which “abstracts the moral problem from the interpersonal situation” in order to mediate the dispute according to an “objective logic of fairness” (the law) (1993, 32), and, on the other hand, a breakdown of communication between “members of a network of relationships” (1993, 30) where there is a failure to respond to the needs of a particular Other (1993, 32). The exaggerated perception of

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<sup>37</sup> From Kant’s “On the Common Saying: ‘This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice’,” selections of which are included in Kant (2005) as an appendix.

one's separateness (or, distance) from others, which coincides with the justice voice, and facilitates the devaluation and ignoring of the moral significance of caring practices, perhaps, is achieved through the emotional-psychological distancing from spatio-temporally proximate others and the world that develops in the male's relationship with their primary care-giver, who, historically, tends to be a woman. The intensity of the juxtaposition whereby one has to become emotionally distant from the person who is nevertheless continuously physically closest carries on into a moral and political theory that is overly individualistic since it lacks an awareness of "life as dependent on connection, as sustained by activities of care, as based on a bond of attachment rather than a contract of agreement ... [and seeing] relationships as primary rather than as derived from separation" (Gilligan 1993, 57).

The most explicit connection between Gilligan's observations in *In a Different Voice* and Simmel's theory of gender differences as it relates to social interaction, centers on the issue of how males and females relate to the notion of 'Law.' In one of Gilligan's studies, a young woman expresses a view on the law that is compatible with my argument that impersonal mediation intensifies the emotional-psychological distancing between subjects in their social encounters. Gilligan observes: "Previously she equated morality with being "law abiding" ... now she articulates a basis for judging the law in terms of whether or not it is hurting society and whether or not it "puts a barrier" in the way of compassion and respect" (1993, 123). This is contrasted with the view that "rules [i.e. laws], by limiting interference, make life in community safe, protecting autonomy through reciprocity" (Gilligan 1993, 37-8). This contrast is reminiscent of Levinas's distinction between ethics and politics and the 'peace of proximity.' The women in

Gilligan's studies suggest that human aggression is tied to the "fracture of human connection" and that the practices of care are what

make the world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression rather than by seeking rules to limit its extent. In this light, aggression appears no longer as an unruly impulse that must be contained but rather as a signal of a fracture of connection, the sign of a failure of relationship[,]. . . a problem in making connection, causing relationships to erupt and turning separation into a dangerous isolation. (Gilligan 1993, 43)

Simmel also recognizes the (historically) feminine tendency to prioritize the maintenance of *relationships* – approaching morality as primarily a matter of *responding* to concrete others within those *relationships* – over the following of *rules*. Furthermore, Simmel juxtaposes the feminine outlook, vis-à-vis morality and the law, with the masculine sense of justice, which posits itself – falsely in Simmel's view – as objective. This sense of justice appears objective, or, 'freestanding,' when detached (distanced) from the concrete socio-historical practices from which it arose. As Simmel goes on to write:

Our historically defined morality, individualized by considerations of both time and place, seems to us to fulfill the conditions of the concept of morality in general. The female "sense of justice," which differs from the male in many respects, would create a different law as well. . . . A body of law that developed in this fashion on the basis of the specifically female sense of justice could be denied acknowledgment as an objectively valid body of "law" only because the objective is a priori identified with the male. (1984, 68)<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> On this point, Simmel himself does not offer much in the way of elaboration; however, the ethics of care may be representative of what Simmel has in mind, as seen in my discussion of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*. Simmel is not suggesting a specific set of legal principles that corresponds to his notion of 'femininity,' but rather suggests that the differences in how males and females experience their relationships with others, in the context of their particular social roles, would produce differing points of view vis-à-vis the role of the 'Law' and how it should be administered. We can extrapolate from Simmel's text to suggest that a 'female sense of law' might incorporate 'feminine' relational insights (as Simmel sees them), such as increased attention to personal and social context. One potential example of how a Simmelian 'female sense of law' may differ from traditional (masculinist) legal theory and practice can be found in the work of moral philosopher Susan Wolf. In her essay "Morality and Partiality," Wolf presents the example of a mother whose son has committed a crime, but may avoid punishment (i.e. incarceration) as a result of the crime being wrongly attributed to another person. The mother, who is also helping her son hide from police, is aware of this error and yet does not come forward to corroborate the

Simmel, in my interpretation, can be read as arguing that the masculine conception of justice, as objective and depersonalized, is linked to men's tendency to distance and/or detach their various activities in the public realm of politics and the economy from their individual personality, or sense of self (the cliché, 'don't take it personally, it's only business,' while admittedly a simplification, is a good illustration of this point). In other words, men have historically demonstrated a tendency to compartmentalize the various aspects of their lives, and differentiate them from the 'core' of their personality. Women, on the other hand (in Simmel's view), often see themselves, and their activities, in the context of their relationships with particular others, and as continuous with their personal identity (1984, 70). Simmel describes the female experience – as *relational* – in the language of spatiality and distance when he writes: “Its periphery is more closely connected with its center and its aspects are more completely integrated into the whole than holds true for the male nature” (1984, 72-3). This difference leads to distinctly masculine and feminine notions of morality and/or justice, where “a different form of knowledge is based on a different mode of [historical] existence” (Simmel 1984, 77).

This is not to say that Simmel's language, which often speaks of 'the female' in general, is not problematic; while one can see the similarities with Gilligan's discovery of a different voice, it is important to be critical of Simmel's tendency to generalize, and,

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innocent man's denial. A universal-rationalist morality, in this case, obviously would dictate that the mother should come forward with the truth even though it would be her own son that would be hurt by her action. Wolf does not take issue with this view, and agrees that according to impartial morality (and thus, impersonal reason) the mother is in the 'wrong' if she keeps the information hidden. What Wolf does take issue with is the suggestion that the mother's partiality to her son, as that which, to a significant degree, makes her life 'meaningful,' should be, by definition, less relevant than the demands of universal moral reason when she is weighing her options. Wolf suggests that just because impartial morality may be one of our important human virtues, it does not mean that it should necessarily *always* trump other reasonable concerns. The mother's partial 'love' or 'care' for her son in this case should be seen as a reasonable motive for going against what impartial morality dictates, and .may even be worthy of praise (1992, 253-6).

potentially, essentialize women as somehow ‘existing for others’ (similar to criticisms of Gilligan). This dual sense of compatibility and danger is evident in a statement such as:

They [women] are fleeting and committed to individual contingencies; they come and go with the demands of the moment; they do not represent the construction of a cultural world that is in any sense permanent and impersonal. On the contrary, they stand in the service of the lives and the persons that can develop from this structure. (Simmel 1984, 93)

In the above excerpt we can see a number of affinities with the ethics of care. First, there is the suggestion that women are more attentive to the particularities of others, and the context-specific situations that elicit moral response. Second, there is the suggestion that the female sense of justice is concerned, not with coherence to an impersonal or rigid system of law, but with responding with care in concrete relationships. However, one also has to concede that there are significant causes for concern. The use of the word “fleeting,” or the phrase, “they come and go with the demands of the moment” could be read as suggesting that women have an inferior capacity for reflective thought – an inability to distance themselves critically from the moment and evaluate situations from a macro-perspective. Also, to say that women “stand in service” connotes an image of women as lacking the capacity or desire for autonomy; also absent is any sense in which women regard themselves as also requiring moral response. There are signs in Simmel’s argument which suggest that he does not intend to make such problematic assertions, since he explicitly states a number of times that these are positive qualities that have been framed as deficiencies in light of masculine norms and values being the dominant force in socio-political life, so much so that they are (falsely) taken as objective and gender-neutral (1984, 67); however, even if

the intention is not there, this does not mean that Simmel's arguments cannot produce problematic conclusions and generalizations about (supposedly) female moral reasoning.

Simmel's writings on love are another helpful resource in understanding the relationship between distance, morality, and care, in the sense that Simmel makes explicit the relationship between universal-rationalist morality and what I have called emotional-psychological distancing – specifically, the practice of impersonal mediation. For Simmel: “There is a sense in which we come from a greater distance when we do someone a good turn because of morality or inner acquiescence, religion, or social solidarity than when we do this because of love” (1984, 155). But why is this case? It is because, when we act morally towards an Other with reference to some overarching principle of justice, or religious code, we regard the Other not in their particularity, but according to the *general* characteristic of “humanness,” which then facilitates the impersonal mediation of universal principles or rules. This process has the potential to intensify inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness to those particular others whom we encounter. Simmel uses the example of charity to bear out this point:

Universal philanthropy, precisely as an emotional state of love, is in general quite dispassionate. It has something of the abstract character of all the generalities that the eighteenth century made into value concepts: the general rights of man, [and/or] the general moral law of the Kantian ethic[.]... It applies to the concrete individual only indirectly and through the medium of this abstraction. (1984, 182)

Simmel's point in these reflections on morality and love is not that societies should do away with moral and political principles all-together and ‘just love each other’; rather, the point, I argue, is that when we rely solely on abstract principles of moral conduct, we risk becoming emotionally-psychologically distant from the particular others whom we encounter, and thus less able to alleviate their needs. Obviously Simmel

recognizes that complex societies, like the modern Europe in which he is writing, will operate according to shared understandings about human beings, as well as common moral norms or values. Simmel merely wants to juxtapose universalistic, and/or, rules-based, forms of morality (assumed to be the primary subject of moral and political theory) with the kind of *love* existing in one's close, personal relationships, to demonstrate that cooperative relations with others do not rely solely on the intellectualistic use of reason. Therefore, the lesson for Simmel is that:

By itself, law, regardless of how precise and rigorous its execution, could never hold a society together if it were not complemented by morally voluntary acts of goodness and decency, harmony and good will. In the same way, even these voluntary acts together with the law would still not result in a possible society if they were not also complemented by those emotional propensities and that affection and sympathy without which sociological proximity and intimacy and constant mutual contact would be utterly unbearable. (1984, 182-3)

Universal moral and political principles can be useful, and, even necessary, in that they connect us to others (who are spatio-temporally distant) without requiring concrete interaction; however, such principles – taken as universally-valid – can also distance us from those others who are physically-proximate, in the sense that they can make us inattentive to their particular, concrete existence. On the other hand, when we act out of *love*, we “do not need a bridge, which separates just as it connects” (Simmel 1984, 155); this is because love “embraces its object in a strict and unmediated fashion” (Simmel 1984, 165), and “no instance of a general sort is inserted between them. When I respect someone, this is mediated by what could be called his general quality of worthiness” (Simmel 1984, 164). This paradoxical “bridge, which separates just as it connects” is that of *impersonal mediation*, and is an illustration of the tension that exists between spatio-

temporal distance and emotional-psychological distancing, which I have tried to uncover in this thesis, and which, I argue, the ethics of care is crucial to understanding.

The care voice offers an alternative vision of how to mediate the spatio-temporal multiplicity of social encounters, which does not depend solely on an intellectualistic exercise, such as ranking abstract rights, detached from the world of particular individuals and relationships, in order to find out which have logical priority over others (Gilligan 1993, 95). Instead, the care voice exemplifies

a contextual judgment, bound to the particulars of time and place ... thus resisting a categorical formulation ... [and which] casts ... [moral] dilemma not as a contest of rights but as a problem of relationships, centering on a question of responsibility which in the end must be faced. (Gilligan 1993, 58-9)

This responsibility manifests as “the need for response that arises from the recognition that others are counting on you and that you are in a position to help” (Gilligan 1993, 54).

In order to respond adequately to need, one requires the kind of “empathic understanding” that arises in proximate encounter, i.e. an encounter characterized by attentiveness and receptiveness to the particularity of the Other, “as the prerequisite for moral response” (Gilligan 1993, 57). This is not to say that there is some ‘ideal’ state of proximity; it is rather a matter of degree, and the ethics of care can be read as suggesting that the more proximity (in one’s disposition towards others) the better in terms of effectively responding to human needs. Emotional-psychological proximity in social encounters is consistent with the reality of the “ongoing process of attachment that creates and sustains the human community” (Gilligan 1993, 156). The impersonality of the intellectualistic justice voice intensifies an emotional-psychological distancing that:

a) fails to reflect the reality of human interdependence, and b) promotes a form of moral

reasoning that is inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to the needs of particular others. The high degree of distancing engendered by the justice voice is politically problematic in the sense that the well-being and cohesion of the spatio-temporal multiplicity of society is threatened by the “isolation, which ... hardens into indifference, an absence of active concern for others, through perhaps a willingness to respect their rights” (Gilligan 1993, 163). Furthermore, such attentiveness and receptiveness to the contextual-specificity of the Other is required in order to uncover the social conditions that contribute to the arising of some needs in the first place, a task for which a moral and political theory of non-interference is not well-equipped. As Gilligan writes:

Hypothetical dilemmas, in the abstraction of their presentation, divest moral actors from the history and psychology of their individual lives and separate the moral problem from the social contingencies of its possible occurrence. In doing so, these dilemmas are useful for the distillation and refinement of objective principles of justice and for measuring the formal logic of equality and reciprocity. However, the reconstruction of the dilemma in its contextual particularity allows the understanding of cause and consequence which engages the compassion and tolerance repeatedly noted to distinguish the moral judgments of women. Only when substance is given to the skeletal lives of hypothetical people is it possible to consider the social injustice that their moral problems may reflect and to imagine the individual suffering their occurrence may signify or their resolution engender. (1993, 96)

Therefore, in the effort to address the realities of spatio-temporal distance (i.e. the multiplicity of physically distinct individuals stretched out over space-time), theories of moral rationalism accentuate the emotional-psychological distancing (feeling of separation and isolation) between individuals living in socio-political communities. This expansion of emotional-psychological distancing even coincides with the shrinking of the physical distance between subjects and the rapidly increasing frequency of social encounters. Such emotional-psychological distancing, facilitated by reliance on the

impersonal mediation of universal-impartial morality, is conducive to life in the modern city (the metropolis), which is characterized by the need to efficiently coordinate a high volume of proximate others, to the demands of the modern money economy. Likewise, Gilligan suggests that the masculine model of moral development is posited as superior since it is most compatible with “modern corporate success” (1993, 10).

### The Politics of Impersonal vs. Interpersonal Mediation

Moral rationalism abstracts from particular suffering and draws on technical expertise to prescribe solutions for the universal good: in short, it exercises invulnerable judgment derived from an impoverished, disembedded conception of reason. (Schick 2013, 57)

For Jean Bethke Elshtain, the “state is an edifice that monopolizes and centralizes power and eliminates older, less universal forms of authority” (1998, 363). The modern state, which is the “locus of structured, ‘legitimate’ public life” (Elshtain 1998, 366), is one that is overly competitive, too reliant on instrumental rationality, and is built on impersonal, contractual relationships that leads to taking human beings as mere means to the ends of market efficiency and social order; the public world is ultimately the world of “bureaucratic rationalization” (Elshtain 1998, 368). The “technocratic public order,” as Elshtain puts it, is built upon the principle of “formal-legalistic, abstract personhood” (1998, 371), which devalues emotionally-proximate relationships of caring; this devaluation is accomplished by disregarding relationships based on intense emotional connectedness, and care, as being irrelevant to the public world of productive and orderly adulthood. The *impersonality* of wholly contractual relations, which serves to dull the emotional facet of moral responsibility – replacing it with respect for autonomy and individual rights – is detrimental to human society as a whole as it intensifies emotional-

psychological distancing, and, therefore, inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness to the needs of particular others in our social encounters. This emotional-psychological distancing is a requirement of liberal-justice, in which “individuals, as moral legislators, should have a degree of emotional independence, in the sense of being able to distance themselves from their personal affections and interests when making political decisions” (Robinson 1999, 25). Moral legislators, in the liberal tradition, are typically conceived as being autonomous, self-sufficient, equal, and rational; these assumptions are reflected in the absence of substantive political discussions around the value and necessity of care in the maintenance of a healthy society, which, as Hankivsky writes: “In any country where the welfare of citizens is considered to be a priority, care is a relevant issue for political analysis” (2004, 30).

The state that Elshtain describes – the world of bureaucratic rationalization (1998, 368) – requires the kind of impersonal mediation that I have argued is fulfilled by the justice voice. This justice voice, which is a function of the heightened intellectualism that Simmel observes in Western societies as they shift from predominantly rural living to life in the metropolis, is an example of what Margaret Urban Walker calls the “theoretical-juridical model of morality” (1998, 7). It is this kind of theoretical-juridical morality that I take Hardt and Negri to mean when they write of “mechanisms of mediation” achieved through a “schematism of reason,” as being a predominant feature of modernity and “Empire” (2000, 78-9). Morality, in this sense, is *theoretical* as a result of being “propositionally codifiable,” and is *juridical* in the sense that it forms the basis for an “impersonally action-guiding code within an agent” (Walker 1998, 7-8). As Walker writes:

The right equipment tells one what is right to do ... no matter who one might happen to be and what individual life one is living, no matter what form of social life he inhabits and one's station within it. This unilateral individual, yet impersonal, action-guidance is believed possible because morality is seen as socially modular. (1998, 9)

In this sense, moral subjects are encouraged to distance themselves emotionally and psychologically from their own particular lifeworld, and, by extension, the particularity of those others whom he/she encounters. The subject can then defer moral judgment to a set of law-like, universally-valid rules or norms, instead of being attentive, receptive, and responsive in their encounters with concrete others. This emotional-psychological distancing is sustained "by excluding most of what morality might consist in as a socially and psychologically real dimension of human life" (Walker 1998, 15). Emotional-psychological distancing also serves to "defeat or defy motives of attachment to particular people that give us reasons to live or allow us to live well" (Walker 1998, 19). The detachment from particular others, therefore, also serves to hide from view the moral significance of the *caring encounters* that sustain human life, and contribute to an individual's ability to (autonomously) pursue his/her interests.

The emotional-psychological distancing of impersonal mediation can be felt both in interpersonal social encounters, as well as an individual's encounters with socio-political institutions. Walker observes that

in interpersonal situations, this form of moral consideration looks evasive; in social or institutional ones it is bureaucratic or authoritarian. Unilateral decision, formulaic, and repeatable categorical uniformities displace flexible appreciation and communicative interaction. (1998, 53)

This, I argue, is what Elshtain is referring to when she describes the modern Western state as a structure of bureaucratic rationalization. Abstract moral reasoning can make us inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to the needs of particular others, and does so

by placing the barrier of an impersonal mediator (universally-valid principles, rules, and/or norms) in-between human subjects in their social encounters – including their interactions with, and/or, in, social, political, and economic institutions (the state and the market). Therefore, the justice voice (potentially) facilitates the druggist's unresponsiveness to the needs of Heinz's wife, as well as the absence of any kind of interpersonal dialogue between the rich heirs and the poor man in Kant's hypothetical moral dilemma. Such theories are predicated on an atomistic view of human beings in societies, and, therefore, ignore the role of *responsibilities* and *relationships*, in favor of *rights* and *autonomy* (primarily as non-interference), in the constitution of social and political life.

As I have suggested, the problems of emotional-psychological distancing do not arise as a result of moral mediation as such, but rather, as a result of the rationalistic emphasis on *impersonal* (or, impartial) moral mediation as the basis for politics. Walker's work is helpful in that she elaborates a view of moral encounters that recognizes that *interpersonal* encounters will always be mediated, to a certain extent, by some common understandings (the most obvious of which are a societies' common linguistic understandings) (1998, 57); however, by juxtaposing the *theoretical-juridical* model of morality with an *expressive-collaborative* model, the opportunities for more interpersonal moral encounters are made clear, as are paths for minimizing the heightened degree of emotional-psychological distancing, exemplified by life in the modern metropolis. As Walker writes:

The expressive-collaborative view is designed to capture interpersonal and social features of morality that the theoretical-juridical model hides.... The theoretical-juridical model pictured morality as an individually action-guiding system within or for a person. The expressive-collaborative

conception pictures morality as a socially embodied medium of understanding and adjustment in which people account to each other for the identities, relationships, and values that define their responsibilities. (1998, 61)

This view of “morality as social negotiation in real time” (Walker 1998, 64) therefore acknowledges the importance of being emotionally-psychologically proximate to those we encounter (i.e. being attentive, receptive, and responsive to particularity). The very notions of *expression* and *collaboration* assume this kind of proximity, and mean that morality consists of “an ongoing process of self-expression and mutual influence” (Walker 1998, 62). Therefore, morality should not be conceived as a static and unchanging set of *principles* – a ‘freestanding’ mediator of socio-political relations – but rather, as praxis, “with significant expressive, interpretive, and ... collaborative features. [Furthermore,] [i]f actual dependency or vulnerability ... is the basis of many moral claims, the specific nature ... of the claims cannot generally be determined in the abstract” (Walker 1998, 107). In other words, physical distance from the concrete situation of those claims is not the only kind of distance that can limit moral understanding and response. *Emotional-psychological distancing* can limit one’s ability to understand the particularity of such instances (and causes) of vulnerability and need, and, therefore, renders one inattentive and unreceptive to those context-specific needs; in this context, the moral subject is unable to form an adequate judgment of how to respond to alleviate (prevent) pain and suffering.

A political theory predicated on the modern liberal “norms of independence and self-sufficiency,” where the (morally-mature) individual is “expected to transcend dependency once they enter the public realm ... fail[s] to grasp the realities of human interdependence and the need for caring mechanisms in both the private and public

spheres of our lives” (Hankivsky 2004, 5). Furthermore, so-called ‘freestanding’ moral and political principles – serving as impersonal mediator between formally equal and autonomous citizens in the public realm – assumes that human beings (their needs, interests, and capacities to fulfill those needs and interests) are universal. Therefore, the justice perspective at the very least promotes a minimalistic view of human beings in order to ensure the compatibility of neutral and/or objective political principles. Indeed, it is only through adopting a homogenous view of persons, and their lives, that the state can incorporate principles of justice that sees “impartial regard for all persons” as the basic structure of political life (Hankivsky 2004, 6, 21). The emotional-psychological distancing that accompanies this universalistic approach to human subjects blinds societies from the reality that there is a complex array of different needs that arise from an equally complex and diverse multiplicity of concrete situations. Furthermore, individuals do not share equal capacities, or opportunities, vis-à-vis adequately meeting these needs, and, therefore,

governing the public sphere in accordance with the liberal tradition results in social policy that is limited in its capacity to capture and respond to issues of diversity and difference. When important information is screened out, the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating policy is compromised. (Hankivsky 2004, 6)<sup>39</sup>

Care theory challenges these assumptions about human beings (a symptom of an individualist-ontology), and questions the adequacy of liberal theories of justice – and of universal-prescriptive ethics in general – as they pertain to the welfare of individual

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<sup>39</sup> Will Kymlicka and Martha Nussbaum both criticize Rawls’s “difference principle” on the basis that it measures the “worst off position” only in regards to “social primary goods,” thus ignoring the impact of “natural primary goods” (Kymlicka 1990, 71-3). As Nussbaum explains, “Rawls’s list of “primary goods,” although it includes some capacity-like items, such as liberty and opportunity, also includes thing-like items, particularly income and wealth, and it measures who is least well off simply in terms of the amount of these thing-like resources an individual can command. But people have varying needs for resources ... [and] different abilities to convert resources into functioning” (1999, 34).

citizens and political communities. The common thread among such universal-prescriptive moral and political theories (whether one is looking at rights or duties-based approaches) is the attempt to mediate socio-political relations according to a fixed set of principles or rules – derived through abstract reasoning and implemented with impartiality – which can be consented to by all equal, autonomous, and rational agents (Robinson 1999, 150-1). This is not to say that there are not important differences between Kantian deontic, liberal-contractual, utilitarian, or other rationalistic and/or universalist approaches to morality and politics; however, as they pertain to the current topic of emotional-psychological distancing and the ethics of care, these theories can all be seen, I argue, as representing forms of impersonal mediation.<sup>40</sup> In contrast to these dominant forms of moral and political rationalism, care theory stresses the reality of human interdependence (of relationships) and shared vulnerability– in both public and private spheres of life – not only in regards to basic survival, but also for human, and, therefore, communal, flourishing (Hankivsky 2004, 7). Consequently, care ethics challenges the justice voice and its emphasis on emotional-psychological distancing on the basis that it is: a) a poor reflection of how human beings actually live their lives, and b) a normative theory that actively hinders the capacity and opportunity for citizens and institutions to be attentive, receptive, and responsive in their social and political encounters (where dependency and shared vulnerability are a normal and constant feature of all human life) (Robinson 2011, 11; Tronto 2013, 146). Therefore, a more accurate

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<sup>40</sup> As Virginia Held argues: “Although the conceptions of what the judgments of morality should be based on, and of how reason should guide moral decision, are different in Kantian and in Utilitarian approaches, both share a reliance on a highly abstract, universal principle as the appropriate source of moral guidance, and both share the view that moral problems are to be solved by the application of such an abstract principle to particular cases. Both share an admiration for the rules of reason to be appealed to in moral contexts, and both denigrate emotional responses to moral issues” (1990, 329-30).

portrait of social existence would portray “moral subjects as relational,” and “ethics as fulfilling responsibilities through practices of care” (Robinson 2011, 28).

The justice voice lacks the contextual sensitivity that is crucial in determining how human needs arise, as well as ascertaining important information about the particular features of said needs; both are crucial in determining an appropriate (caring) response, which requires

attentiveness to the complexity and relational qualities of individual lives. Congruence with contextual sensitivity insists that the basic knowledge of an individual requires full comprehension of that person’s particularity.... Because an ethic of care prioritizes a relational ontology, it also involves paying specific attention to how individual identities, social status, and needs are shaped and constructed through their intersection with a range of private and public social and institutional arrangements. (Hankivsky 2004, 32, 34)

Contextual sensitivity implies emotional-psychological proximity with others, such that individuals are attentive and receptive to particularities, in what are often ongoing encounters that develop over time. Indeed, an adequate awareness of human difference requires this kind of active engagement, and cannot be assumed apart from concrete interaction. *Critical reflection* on the contexts of moral and political relations is also crucial when considering the role of seemingly neutral structural and institutional arrangements in contributing to the production of needs and/or hindering the capacity of individuals in addressing their needs and/or the needs of others (Hankivsky 2004, 21; Koggel 2002; Robinson 2011, 5; 1999). A structural barrier, arising from the assumption of a universal autonomous individual in liberal theories of justice, can be something as simple as ‘hours-of-operation’ of government services which do not accommodate the temporal restrictions arising from the responsibilities and commitments of mothering (Tronto 2003) (this point will be elaborated on in the next section).

Being receptive in caring encounters means that others are able to express themselves, and be heard, in their own voice – apart from reductive generalizations – in what Hankivsky calls “a safe space for others to express their “otherness”” (2004, 35). In this sense, *receptiveness* involves being attentive to the Other’s particular personal and social context, as it relates to (and potentially creates/accentuates) their needs. It involves trying to understand the Other from *their perspective*, akin to Meyers’s notion of empathic thought (Koggel 2002, 260-1). Therefore, in terms of politics it could involve relations between fellow citizens, citizens’ dealings with government services, as well as policy makers who are trying to address certain needs. It is not something that we necessarily actively bring about, but is rather something that we will engage, and/or, have already engaged, in. Politically, it is a disposition in our encounters that emphasizes attention to contextual specificity, in order to investigate networks of relationships and the ways in which these relationships facilitate or hinder the meeting of needs and sustaining of life (Koggel 2002; Robinson 1999; 2011; Tronto 1993; 2013).

Liberal theories of justice hinder the kind of proximity necessary for contextual sensitivity since “under a liberal ethic of justice, our rights and obligations are fixed in advance by abstract rules rather than by context-sensitive assessments of the needs of those around us” (Hankivsky 2004, 21), and thus impersonally mediate social encounters (theoretical-juridical morality); the potential for encountering and responding (morally) to diversity is significantly limited, since

according to the liberal standpoint, making morally just decisions typically entails treating everyone according to the criteria of neutrality, impartiality, abstraction, and objectivity. Justice is achieved when individual rights are equally protected and each member of society is treated fairly. (Hankivsky 2004, 21)

The justice voice contributes to the Simmelian *blasé* outlook – most prevalent in the metropolis – first, by positing a universal model of personhood, which emotionally-psychologically distances us from our particularities and the particularities of others, and which then facilitates the development of a set of ‘freestanding’ principles and/or rules to act as an impersonal mediator of social relations.

Defenders of a liberal ethic of justice, such as Will Kymlicka, argue that the opposition between the justice perspective’s “respect for humanity” and the care perspective’s “respect for individuality” has been exaggerated in much of the feminist ethics of care literature (1999, 272-3). Take for example Kymlicka’s argument, which, drawing on the work of Susan Moller Okin, suggests that the impartiality of Rawls’s original position does not deny diversity, but rather encourages a respect for the wide array of particular others that can exist in a society, when contemplating the principles of justice that will facilitate an overlapping consensus (i.e. social unity). As Kymlicka writes:

The fact that people are asked to reason in abstraction from their own social position, natural talents, and personal preferences when thinking about others does not mean that they must ignore the particular preferences, talents, and social position of others.... Rawls insists that parties behind the original position must take these things into account. (1999, 274)

Even if it were the case that rational persons in the original position were required to acknowledge the particularities of all others in society, this does not address the problem that it does so *impersonally*; therefore, the notion that individuals could engage in a kind of comprehensive reflection on the multiplicity of potential particularities that could exist in a society seems to miss the point of contextual sensitivity all-together. An abstract or impersonal consideration of particularity is arguably a contradiction in terms

as it fails to recognize the concreteness of particular situations, contexts, and relationships; these situations, contexts, and relationships can often involve a level of complexity and specificity that requires concrete observation and communication over time. This type of concrete engagement is not possible in the scenario presented by the original position since “context is undermined by the lack of a real plurality of perspectives. One cannot reach a contextual understanding of the other because the other does not exist” (Hankivsky 2004, 20). Feminist theories of intersectionality, in particular, support the notion that particular social positions and the disadvantages or injustices that can follow from those identities, are often not as easily identifiable, or clear-cut, as one may think or like (Crenshaw 1990). Determining in the abstract how certain particular characteristics or contexts can intensify – or present obstacles in attending to – needs, often leads to judgments lacking in effectiveness, and, therefore, would benefit from an ethic of care where “concern for context is fundamental, not a desirable addition” (Hankivsky 2004, 20). Furthermore, being attentive to contextual-specificity involves critical reflection on the various socio-political arrangements that may be detrimental to people’s welfare (beyond a mere failure to ensure equal protection of rights and enforcement of principles) (Hankivsky 2004, 21).

As Fiona Robinson writes: “It is not the idea of ‘justice’ as such, but the individualist, atomistic ontology, the liberal-impartial view of persons as ‘generalized’ rather than ‘concrete’, and the concomitant reliance on abstract moral principles which are corrected by the care perspective” (1999, 25). The justice perspective is hampered as a result of being founded on an inaccurate/incomplete picture of human life, which neglects the centrality of caring relations as that which sustains the health of individuals,

and, by extension, society as a whole. Care starts from a *relational*, as opposed to *individualist*, ontology. For instance, the abstract rights that one finds in the liberal justice perspective seem to be inappropriate (or ill-suited) when applied to questions about the welfare of concrete individuals, as they have an exaggerated view of the degree to which individuals are physically and psychologically independent. Within a liberal rights-based approach, the assumption is that as long as an individual is not unfairly constrained or interfered with (i.e. has their rights respected) they should be able to independently satisfy their needs and pursue their interests (Robinson 1999, 63, 149); however, this view fails to acknowledge the reality that societies are constituted by a multiplicity of interweaving relationships, and “that rights become meaningful only when we turn our attention to the nature of the duties or responsibilities,” within those relationships, “which are necessary to ensure that rights are fulfilled” (Robinson 1999, 150). Therefore, it is not necessarily that universal rights or duties serve no positive function whatsoever (they certainly do), but rather that the acknowledging of a right or duty is merely a means to an end, and on their own are incapable of effectively solving issues related to the welfare of concrete persons (Robinson 1999, 148-150). Furthermore, when rights and duties *are taken* as the be-all-end-all of moral reasoning, socio-political encounters are negatively affected by the emotional-psychological distancing of impersonal mediation. This is in stark contrast to the standpoint of care, where

the type of moral response that arises is not one based on the necessity of fulfilling a *duty* or seeking to be *fair*; rather, it is a mode of responsiveness which may vary according to the the nature of the particular moral situation.... Rules appear to be clear guides to action only after all that makes a given context unique has been subtracted. (Robinson 1999, 41, 42, italics in original)

Liberal theories of justice may be attractive, and, seemingly, even necessary when considering the spatio-temporal conditions of the modern-Western public sphere (the metropolitan landscape that characterizes much of life in the West), as well as the heightened degree of global social, economic, and political interaction (characteristic of the age of globalization). The ethics of care can be read as both: a) a critique of these moral and political theories, which are posited as most-conducive to the (modern) realities of space-time, and b) a critique of the socio-economic practices which themselves encourage a particular approach in how one relates to the properties of space-time (i.e. the limitations and potentialities it presents). In other words, when the ideals of market efficiency, competitiveness, and the expansion of global markets hold sway over much of social and political life – particularly in the Western world – then the favored forms of moral reasoning will be those that are: a) *portable*, i.e. universally-valid, and, therefore, “unrestricted by spatial or temporal boundaries” (Robinson 1999, 67); b) *on-demand*, i.e. applying fixed, pre-established principles/rules to guide individual action; and c) *time-effective*, thus allowing for moral obligations to be fulfilled in isolation from others, at a distance, and with a minimum of ‘unproductive’ interaction (i.e. respecting rights). This model of moral reasoning not only ignores the significance of our responsibilities in relationships of care, which transcend concerns for justice and ‘objective fairness,’ but can also facilitate indifference to the needs of others (Hankivsky 2004, 23). Robinson, drawing on Walker’s notion of a theoretical-judicial morality, makes a similar point when she writes:

Indeed, we must recognize that the suggestion that only an impersonal, impartial, universal-prescriptive ethics is useful in large-scale contexts is what maintains and upholds our disposition to ‘keep strangers strange and

outsiders outside'; it is this disposition towards distant others which must be overcome. (1999, 49)

To this we can add that these impersonal moral and political theories can make those who are already spatio-temporally proximate *into strangers*, thus obfuscating a clear and substantial understanding of their needs.

The emphasis placed on *responsibility* in the ethics of care – a “responsibility [which] goes beyond what has typically been associated with the liberal measurement of objective fairness operationalized through rules and rights” (Hankivsky 2004, 23) – promotes awareness of individuals’ interconnection and interdependence with proximate others, with whom relationships are maintained and developed over long periods of time, operating according to principles and dispositions other than those of detached rationality (Hankivsky 2004, 18). The impersonal mediation of the justice voice intensifies emotional-psychological distancing, and hinders the attentiveness and receptiveness that is necessary in order to be sensitive to the multiplicity of particular others, and the corresponding diversity of needs. These needs cannot be adequately addressed by a moral and political theory that tends to emphasize “negative liberties” as a means “to ensure mutual respect for a principle of non-interference” (Robinson 1999, 62). As Žižek’s quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, these (minimal) rights have largely become a means “to be kept at a safe distance from others” in our public lives (2006, 101-2); however, this safe distance – facilitated through the prioritization of abstract rights – comes at the cost of neglecting a range of responsibilities, practices, and/or dispositions that contribute to sustaining life and allowing that life to flourish.

The impersonal mediation discussed in this chapter coincides with a division between the so-called ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres of life, a boundary which reflects the

separation (or distance) between the home and the political-economic realm. Dominant moral and political theories have focused the majority of their attention on life in the public sphere of ‘universal personhood’ and productive/orderly ‘adulthood,’ while disregarding the moral significance of the home (in particular, the practices of care that sustains human life and allows that life to flourish). In the next (and last) section of this thesis, I will discuss emotional-psychological distancing in the context of the public-private boundary, and the detrimental effect such a division has vis-à-vis the hindering of attentiveness, receptiveness, and responsiveness in socio-political encounters. Furthermore, I argue that the boundary between public and private (especially if we restrain ourselves to the current context of life in the modern metropolis) is indicative of the different ways that subjects can relate to the properties of space-time (domain of multiplicity), and, consequently, exhibit varying degrees of emotional-psychological distancing in social encounters. Politically, these differences point to competing visions of social mediation and cooperation (impersonal vs. interpersonal), in which the ethics of care suggests “strategies of *closeness* rather than distance or *remoteness*, based on promoting *interaction* rather than following *rules*” (Robinson 1999, 160, italics in original).

The ethics of care literature illuminates the ways in which rationalist moral theory, in particular theories of justice (broadly conceived), intensifies emotional-psychological distancing – impersonal mediation and the public/private boundary – in the pursuit of moral and political principles conducive to life in the modern metropolis (characterized by densely populated living-spaces stretched over physical space, and the demands of a money economy). Globalization has furthered the apparent need for moral

and political principles that are spatio-temporally portable and efficient in the mediation of socio-political communities within, and, across, borders.

## **Public-Private Cityscapes**

### Distancing the Domestic from the Productive

Joan Tronto identifies three “moral boundaries” in modern socio-political life, which are reflected in the dominant (modern) moral and political theories (1993, 6). The first boundary, that between morality and politics, is the tendency, “in modern thinking, [that] either one or the other of these two realms of life become instrumental to the other, or [that] the two should be as separated from each other as possible” (Tronto 1993, 7-8). This is followed by the “moral point of view boundary,” which “requires that moral judgments be made from a point of view that is distant and disinterested ... [i.e.] as universal as the capacities of humans to reason” (Tronto 1993, 9). It is the third boundary that Tronto identifies, that between public and private life (1993, 10), which I suggest is a practice, and/or form, of emotional-psychological distancing, which coincides with the impersonal mediation of the justice voice and the spatio-temporal reconfigurations of modern life (made explicit in Simmel’s image of the metropolis). Therefore, all three moral boundaries are interconnected; in separating morality from politics, and/or establishing a moral point of view, one has to differentiate between public and private life. This differentiation facilitates a notion of universal humanity, which then allows for the *intellectualistic* governing of the public sphere according to abstract, universalizable principles and instrumental rationality. Therefore, while the public/private division has played a significant (implicit) role in my analysis up to this point, for the purposes of understanding the relationship between distance and care being proposed in this thesis, it

is important to address this *boundary* specifically, as a distinct manifestation (or practice) of emotional-psychological distancing.

The spatio-temporal properties of modern urban life (i.e. densely populated living spaces, stretched out over physical space, which then necessitates a high degree of coordination and mediation of potential conflict in-line with the demands of the modern market economy) leads to moral and political theories with “universal grounding”; by founding moral and political principles on a minimalistic conception of “formal reason,” moral rules become easily accessible and understandable to all those who are expected to conform their behavior in accordance with those rules (Tronto 1993, 28-9). We can see a similarity here between Simmel’s description of life in the metropolis and Tronto’s account of why the universalistic moral approach came to prominence in the West in the eighteenth century (Tronto 1993, 33). As Tronto writes:

Because the individuals who are following the rules need not know much about the other individuals who are also following the rules, universalistic morality need not assume much intimacy among members of the same moral community. Such members may even be located at great distances from one another, but since they share a commitment to the same rules to govern moral conduct, they need not fear the immoral conduct of others.... These conditions seem to describe the conditions of human life that prevail in the presence of a geographically large, diverse, market-oriented, world. It permits competition among people, some degrees of equality in their capacities, and allows much distance among adherents of the same sets of rules. In a complex number of ways, the existence of universalistic morality creates the possibility of separate spheres of life. (1993, 29)

What Simmel adds to this account is the notion that it is not only the need to have moral relations with those who are physically-distant from us that makes universalistic moral theory attractive, but also the need for individuals to mediate their relations with an abundance of proximate others – whom he/she encounters in the course of everyday

public life – with a minimum of mental energy or investment of time. Morality in the public sphere of the metropolis, therefore, strives to be portable and efficient.

The division of social life into public and private spheres is important to a discussion of distance and the ethics of care because it is the distancing of economic life from the household (in modernity) that, potentially, led to the establishment of a public sphere, which could expand over physical space, and, therefore, necessitate forms of impersonal mediation between strangers, or distant others, in the first place.<sup>41</sup> <sup>42</sup> The requirement of impersonal mediation, then, encouraged the emotional-psychological distancing that separates one's private identity from their public identity, and can be traced back to this original, concrete process, of distancing the sphere of "domesticity" from the sphere of "productivity" (Tronto 1993, 34; 2013, 80). Tronto argues that these social and economic changes (i.e. industrialization) led to the intensification of "social distance," and the prevalence of cosmopolitan ethics, where:

There developed a greater distance from others who are quite close: individuals no longer relied solely upon their own family, household, or neighbors to guide their actions.... On another level, those who were more distant became closer; a greater perception of common humanity grew throughout the [eighteenth] century. (1993, 37-8)

The move from the emotionally-connected realm of the family to the public sphere of relative strangers, arguably, also intensifies one's perception of being differentiated from

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<sup>41</sup> Linda Nicholson argues from a Marxist-feminist perspective that: "Indeed, when we think of what is pivotal about industrialization it is that the production of goods ceases being organized by kinship relations and an activity of the household. The creation of goods by members of the household for the purpose of use by the household and organized primarily in accordance with family roles becomes replaced with the creation of goods by members of many different households for the purpose of exchange and organized in accordance with the profit motive" (1987, 23).

<sup>42</sup> Grace Clement also argues along the same lines, describing industrialization as the moment where "family relations and production were separated and the gender division of labor was intensified" (1996, 52).

others, and coincides with the desire for methods of impersonal mediation (Tronto 1993 37-8).

The central argument of this thesis is that it is this very conception of ‘common humanity’ that intensifies an emotional-psychological distancing from others, in the effort to bridge the spatio-temporal gaps between distant individuals, and mediate relations between the multiplicity of proximate strangers. Furthermore, I argue that the ethics of care can be read as a challenge to the prevalence of emotional-psychological distancing in modern socio-political life and the dominant strands of moral and political theory that encourages the disposition and practices of distancing. The physical boundary established between public and private therefore coincides with an emotional-psychological distancing between an individual’s *universal* and *particular* characteristics, which leads to inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and, ultimately, unresponsiveness in meeting their needs, and the needs of others. Furthermore, this distancing – encouraged by liberal political theories – can potentially produce inequalities in spite of a fair and equal distribution of rights. Tronto provides an example of how such inequalities can arise from the public/private division – as it relates to the spatio-temporal properties of modern socio-political life – in her analysis of time.

### Metropolitan Time-Zones

The relationships and concerns of the typical metropolitan resident are so manifold and complex that, especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities intertwine with one another into a many-membered organism. In view of this fact, the lack of the most exact punctuality in promises and performance would cause the whole to break down into an inextricable chaos. If all the watches in Berlin suddenly went wrong in different ways even only so much as an hour, its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time. Even though this may seem more

superficial in its significance, it transpires that the magnitude of distances results in making all waiting and the breaking of appointments an ill-afforded waste of time. For this reason the technique of metropolitan life in general is not conceivable without all of its activities and reciprocal relationships being organized and coordinated in the most punctual way into a firmly fixed framework of time which *transcends all subjective elements*. (Simmel 2002, 13, italics added)<sup>43</sup>

Emotional-psychological distancing, in the form of drawing a boundary between the public and private identities of individuals, manifests in a practical, spatio-temporal boundary between public and private places. In other words, when the public realm is conceived according to what Elshtain calls “formal-legalistic abstract personhood,” which is held *at a distance* from the particularities and contingencies of an individual’s so-called ‘private life’ (their social identity, relationships, responsibilities, mental and physical characteristics etc...), the organization of space and time will reflect this neglecting of particularity. This is one way to interpret the above excerpt from Simmel, which is specifically referring to the ways in which our relation to temporality is shaped by the demands of metropolitan life (urban landscapes and the capitalist economy). In order to conform to these features of metropolitan life, time becomes a means to coordinate encounters in a way that maximizes efficiency, and, as a consequence, “transcends all subjective elements” (Simmel 2002, 13).

The relationship between the public/private split and the structuring of time in modern Western society is placed in the context of the ethics of care in Joan Tronto’s 2003 article, “Time’s Place.” Tronto argues that the experience, and/or relationship to time varies according to gender; she writes that “the modern separation of work from household and the increasingly tight control over labor time within capitalist production

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<sup>43</sup> Again, we can see a similarity here between Simmel’s description of the metropolis and Giddens’s theory of time-space distancing, in which he argues that “coordination across time is the basis of the control of space” (Giddens 1990, 18).

has resulted in a bifurcation of men's and women's experience of time." This difference reflects the historical role of women as primary care-givers in the reproductive and nurturing realm of the home, and man's existence in the productive realm of the economy (Tronto 2003, 122). Therefore, there is a conflict between the demands of the efficient and productive use of time in the economic realm, and the practices of care, which, if they are to be done adequately, should not seek to maximize time, but rather to be flexible and attentive to the needs of others, both physically and emotionally. As Tronto writes, "little in caring can be enhanced by being 'forced' in a time/space compression: not learning, healing, reflecting on one's experiences, dying. While the compression of time-space might make capitalists richer; it makes human lives of care poorer" (Tronto 2003, 123).

When the public realm is temporally-structured in a way that neglects, or actively conflicts, with the reality of caring responsibilities, which are relegated to the private sphere, structural inequalities can arise in individuals' abilities to address their needs. Since the focus of this chapter has largely been an examination of care and distance in the context of modern city life, we can take Tronto's example of the *tempi della citta* ("the city's time") movement – in which Italian women advocated for government buildings to adopt 'hours-of-operation' that more reflected the temporal realities of the responsibilities of child-care – as an example of the kinds of structural inequalities that can arise from conflicting public and private *time-zones*.<sup>44</sup> This movement originated when Italian women (who were predominately those tasked with taking care of children) found that their access to public offices and government services were hindered by a public

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<sup>44</sup> In Giddens's description of modernity (specifically, the process of time-space distanciation), it is "the clock [which] expressed a uniform dimension of "empty" time, quantified in such a way as to permit the precise designation of "zones" of the day (e.g., the "working day")" (1990, 17).

structuring of time that conflicted with their responsibilities to care. Another example of this phenomenon is the discrepancy between ‘business hours’ and ‘school hours’ (in the West), which hinders many so-called ‘working’ mothers (and fathers for that matter) to be available for their children at certain times of day (Tronto 2003, 124; 2013, 166). In both cases, public and private time come into conflict, and constitutes barriers to fulfilling responsibilities of care. Consequently, Tronto argues that more thought should be given to the “gendered aspects of time/space compression,” as well as recognition that the organization of space-time is not a natural or socio-politically neutral feature of life (2003, 125).

In summary, the emotional-psychological distancing of impersonal mediation, with its positing of the universal human or citizen, with a public identity that is separated from, and takes precedence over, one’s private identity, in political and economic matters, manifests into different spatio-temporal conditions between public and private places. This process hinders institutions and persons from being attentive, receptive, and responsive to the full range of human needs in society. Furthermore, this impersonal mediation originates in the spatio-temporal conditions of modernity, where production is distanced from domestic life in the move towards capitalist societies, culminating in the modern metropolis. In the metropolis, a formal justice mediates the encounters between strangers, towards the ends of social order and economic productivity, while ignoring human interdependence on practices of care that require emotional-psychological proximity if human needs are to be fulfilled adequately.

## **Conclusion: Minimizing Distanciation**

In the beginning is the relation.... All actual life is encounter. (Buber [1923] 1996, 69, 62)

This thesis has sought to provide a phenomenological exploration of *distance* as it appears in socio-political life, as well as the moral and political theories that both influence, and are a reflection of, that life. Primarily, my analysis takes the form of juxtaposing an interpretive reading of dominant universal-rationalist perspectives in modernist moral and political philosophy – designated as the justice voice (an example and/or form of distant voice) – with the feminist ethics of care – the proximate care voice. However, it also incorporates other elements of moral and political philosophy (along with sociology, geography, and psychology) into the ethics of care literature, such as the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Georg Simmel, as well as more contemporary theorists, such as Slavoj Žižek, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri.

The central argument of this thesis can be broken down into three parts. In Chapter One I argued that, conceptually, distance can be understood as two related, yet distinctive, features of social life. Distance, in the first instance, refers to the spatial and temporal conditions of life, for example, the physical distance between an individual in Canada and an individual in France. The second way that we can understand distance – what I have called ‘distanciation’ – is its emotional and/or psychological dimension, which corresponds to the degree to which an individual or group of individuals is (or is not) attentive, receptive, and responsive to particular others. Therefore, distance is a relational property, which applies to all of the various encounters that take place in socio-political life. Furthermore, *emotional-psychological distanciation* and *spatio-temporal*

*distance* do not always expand/contract in a synchronized fashion; in other words, one may be more emotionally and psychologically proximate to a family member living in another continent (i.e. spatio-temporally remote), than with the individual living in the apartment or house next door. In the second instance, one is *physically* proximate, but can nonetheless be emotionally-psychologically remote.

In Chapter Two I provided a brief overview of some examples of what I take to be the dominant modern-rationalist approaches to moral and political philosophy. These theories all promote *practices* (or forms) of emotional-psychological distancing, which require and reinforce a *disposition* of emotional-psychological distancing (i.e. being inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to particular others). The two practices of emotional-psychological distancing are: *impersonal mediation* and the *public/private boundary*. Impersonal mediation is the body of abstract rules/principles contained in modern universal-rationalist systems of moral and political thought, which mediate the encounters between particular subjects. The public/private boundary is the tendency for such theories – in order to attain universal validity/consent – to separate the public and private spheres of life, and, therefore, the public and private aspects of subjects' identities. The second part of my argument, therefore, is that both practices (and/or forms) of moral distancing (impersonal mediation and boundary) are constitutive of modern rationalistic moral and political theory, and lead to an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing because they require the disposition of being inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive to particular, concrete people, and their needs. Furthermore, it is the attempt of universal-rationalist ethics to overcome the realities of spatio-temporal distance – in a world that is more and more dominated by urban

landscapes, characterized by densely-populated living spaces stretched out over physical space, and interactions between disparate parts of the globe – that has intensified the emotional-psychological dimension of distance. Therefore, there is a tension that exists between wanting to establish social cooperation and moral relations between individuals who are separated by space-time distances – and/or, individuals living in spaces where they are surrounded by an over-abundance of proximate others, and, therefore, unable to be attentive and receptive to every person they encounter in their lives – and emotional-psychological distancing. Perhaps we are becoming more proximate in certain ways, while becoming more remote in others. This is not to say that distance and distancing are ‘bad’ or can be overcome, it is just to say that we can perceive a complex relationship between these two types of distance.

In Chapter Three I began my critique of universal-rationalist forms of moral and political theory, and the consequent intensification of emotional-psychological distancing, from the perspective of the feminist ethics of care. I framed the discussion around the theme of encounter and Levinas’s notion of the ‘peace of proximity,’ and demonstrated how differences in how the genders approach moral and political questions correspond to different dispositions of emotional-psychological distancing. The third part of my argument, therefore, is that distancing – characterized as inattentiveness, unreceptiveness, and unresponsiveness to particular others – are the conditions that make for the absence, or inadequacy of practices of care. In other words, if one has the disposition of being distant from others, then this distancing will be reflected in inattentive, unreceptive, and unresponsive practices vis-à-vis meeting the needs of those others. One’s tendency to emotionally-psychologically distance themselves from others, I

argue, is established along gender lines, and corresponds with the different relational tendencies in men and woman that are described in the ethics of care literature. Like the ethics of care, I argued that high-degrees of emotional-psychological distancing do not ensure social cooperation – as suggested by proponents of the justice voice – but rather are harmful to the welfare of individuals and communities.

In Chapter Four I compared the work of Georg Simmel, in particular his analysis of modern city life, as well as his writings on gender and morality, with the work of Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto. The purpose of this section was to highlight the way that emotional-psychological distancing and spatio-temporal distance are distinct forms of distance by using Simmel's description of the metropolis – as a space where individuals are surrounded by proximate others, and yet are distant from those others. This distancing – what we might call indifference (Simmel calls it a '*blasé* outlook' and/or 'attitude of reserve') – vis-à-vis others is a consequence of the features of densely-populated living spaces, stretched out over physical space, where material production has been separated from the home, and which is then coordinated and organized in-line with the demands of a money economy. This coordination is fulfilled by the impersonal mediation of abstract principles and rules of universal-rationalist moral and political theories. Furthermore, these depersonalized templates for social encounters can only be facilitated through the establishment of a boundary between individuals' private and public identities, which allows for the formation of a 'common humanity.' This is further illustrated by Tronto's reflections on how the public sphere is temporally organized in a way that creates barriers to the fulfilment of need, as a result of the impersonal mediation

of the justice voice which fosters inattentiveness and unreceptiveness to particularity (in this specific case, that of gender).

Not only is the ethics of care an important theoretical-lens vis-à-vis understanding the complex nature of distance and the harmful socio-political practices and/or conditions that can arise from an intensification of emotional-psychological distancing, but, I argue, ‘distance’ can be a useful analytical tool in identifying *why* individuals and institutions in socio-political life tend to disregard (or be unaware) of the importance of the disposition and practices of care, necessary to the sustaining and flourishing of all human life, and the networks of relationships in which that life unfolds. Distance is a property of *relation* and is always a matter of *degree*.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it is not a question of *is there distance/distanciation or isn’t there?* Rather, it is a question of *how much distance/distanciation exists and what role does human activity (socio-political practices and institutions) have in intensifying aspects of these distances, which are detrimental to human welfare?* Using the theory of distance that I have developed in this thesis, one can approach questions of individualism, indifference, inequality, and/or social conflict – all of which are relevant to the role and status of care in socio-political life – by attempting to identify the *degrees* to which impersonal mediation and/or the establishment of boundaries (i.e. the mutually-constitutive practices of distancing) make individuals inattentive, unreceptive, and, ultimately, unresponsiveness to the particularity of others (i.e. the disposition of distancing), and the concrete needs which are presented to us, and which we will undoubtedly (at some point) present to others throughout the multiplicity of encounters that constitute our lives.

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<sup>45</sup> My argument here is influenced by Grace Clement’s notion of “degrees of autonomy.” For Clement, the question is not: *is an individual or group autonomous or not?* But rather: *how autonomous are they?* (1996, 25).

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