Abstract

A perennial debate in the field of Global Ethics revolves around the possibility of a universalist ethics, and contestations over the nature – and significance – of difference (be it economic, cultural, political, etc.) for moral deliberation. Alongside, but heretofore not explored in depth by, the Global Ethics literature is a growing literature (coming from decolonial studies and the ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology) on multiple ways of being-in and seeing the world, described by the language of the ‘pluriverse’ (de la Cadena 2015; Mignolo 2013). This scholarship illuminates not only the different ontologies or worlds that exist globally, but also the political processes through which these worlds come into contact, conflict, and in many ways, co-constitute each other. In this way, while the pluriversal scholarship points to ontological difference, it also emphasizes the (partial) connections (Strathern 2004) between worlds.

This dissertation begins with the concept of the pluriverse – the idea that instead of a single world with different paradigms, we have a matrix of multiple yet connected worlds – and investigates the ways in which this notion necessitates a rethinking of the field of Global Ethics as it has been conceived thus far. In particular, I consider how the field can reorient itself towards building an ethics for the pluriverse, where differences are deep and pervasive, i.e., ontological.

Ultimately, drawing upon a feminist ethics of care, I argue that a pluriversal ethics can fruitfully be thought of as an ethics of vulnerability and precarity. The ethics of care is premised on a relational social ontology, which sees ethics as a problem of responsibilities in relations, and which foregrounds the moral saliency of our mutual
vulnerability (including the vulnerability of moral judgement) that stems from our relationality. In so doing, the ethics of care reconceptualizes moral dilemmas along relational lines. My argument is that this line of thinking, when combined with a conceptual distinction between vulnerability and precarity (where precarity refers to intensified vulnerability that results from unequal relations of power), provides a useful meta-theoretical orientation from which to begin building a pluriversal ethics.
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Introduction: The Pluriversal Challenge to Global Ethics

Kimberly Hutchings (2010) argues that the field of Global Ethics\(^1\), that is, the “field of theoretical inquiry that addresses ethical questions and problems arising out of the global interconnection and interdependence of the world’s population” (1) – can be divided into two theoretical orientations. On the one hand, ‘rationalist’ approaches\(^3\) to global ethics, according to Hutchings, are united in their assertion that reason is the “basis for the authority for ethical claims” and that “the foundations of ethics can be discovered and explained through the exercise of reason by the ethical theorist, in abstraction from the contexts and concerns of actual ethical debates” (2010, 28-29). More specifically, rationalist approaches to global ethics “reject the idea that context, embodiment or emotion do, or should, play a part in authorizing what is ethical in genuine ethical judgement” (Hutchings 2013, 27, emphasis in original). Instead, ethical theorizing is seen as an individualized task, in which moral philosophers use reason – abstracted from their embodied socio-political context – to grapple with abstracted ethical issues. This attempt to eschew positionality allows the moral theorist to make universalizing claims from an ‘objective’ vantage point via the exercise of a particular type of reasoning. In other words, the moral “epistemological emphasis [is] on the atomised reasoning individual”

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1 I use the capitalized ‘Global Ethics’ to refer to global ethics as a field of study, while the lowercase ‘global ethics’ refers to global ethical practices more generally.
2 Importantly, while some literature distinguishes between ethics and morality – with ethics representing the ‘right’ and morality representing the ‘good’ (Benhabib 1992) – following Hutchings (2010, 8), I use these terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation as I reject this separation. Rather, I assert that a conception of what is right is necessarily underpinned by a conception of what is good and vice versa (Geras 1999). Of course, when I draw directly upon a piece of scholarship which upholds the distinction, I then use whichever term is necessary to stay true to the work I am citing.
3 In particular, Hutchings (2010) discusses four rational approaches in the field of Global Ethics: contractualism, utilitarianism, deontological ethics, and discourse ethics.
(Beattie and Schick 2013, 3-4), who can access universal moral principles which can then be applied to our political situations and conflicts (Tronto 1993).

For example, utilitarian and contractualist ethical theories presume that all humans are instrumentally rational in that they can derive, assess, and rank their interests, and then calculate the ways in which to maximize these interests. This entails a universal view of human nature – that is, above all else, humans seek to maximize their interests – and a particular notion of rationality based on the capacity to identify and rank these interests (Hutchings 2010, 38). Ethical deliberation, from these perspectives, involves the exercise of this rationality so as to accumulate a particular kind of moral knowledge which can then be applied to the separate sphere of politics so as “to create a world marked by predictability, order and stability” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 1). Deontological moral approaches, on the other hand, rely on deduction to identify rules and principles consistent with the laws of reason. These rules and principles are viewed as transcending emotion, relationality, community, history, and socio-political-economic context more broadly (Beattie and Schick 2013, 2); in other words, they are viewed as universally prescriptive in form (Hutchings 2010, 38). Thus, for all of these approaches, a particular notion of reason/rationality, and an emphasis on reason/rationality as the means through which ethical deliberation should rightly unfold, orients the ‘disembodied’ moral philosopher, and provides universal foundations for the authority of the moral claims made by this impartial moral judge.

Situated in opposition to mainstream rationalist theories of Global Ethics,
according to Hutchings’ (2010) schematic, are ‘alternative’ approaches. While the alternative approaches discussed by Hutchings are distinct, what they have in common is their rejection of the privileging of abstract, impartial, and/or universal rationality as the means through which we can solve and/or attend to the ethical and moral dilemmas which arise as a result of our global interconnectedness (Hutchings 2010, 58-72). Instead, the alternative approaches foreground the moral salience of context (where context refers to a variety of factors, including community, social relations, emotions, embodiment, and the ways in which power permeates all of these things).

In so doing, the alternative approaches to global ethics not only agree on the moral salience of context, but also draw out the dangers of “the idea that ethics can be given a rational grounding, that moral claims can have the status of truths, and that there are certain fixed, essential properties associated with being ‘human’” (Hutchings 2010, 67). These dangers are specifically related to the ways in which (moral) knowledge and power are intertwined. The power/knowledge nexus has been highlighted particularly in the ‘post-positivist’ tradition of International Relations theory more broadly.

Consider feminist approaches to International Relations. While feminists in

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4 Specifically, Hutchings (2010) discusses virtue ethics, feminist ethics, and postmodernist ethics. Virtue ethics is not referred to in this dissertation, as it is not a particularly prominent approach in the Global Ethics literature. See also footnote 19 in this chapter.

5 I use the capitalized ‘International Relations’ to refer to International Relations as a field of study, while the lowercase ‘international relations’ refers to international relations and practices more generally.

6 While the following argument draws upon International Relations literature which may not be categorized explicitly as related to global or international ethics, I do not feel that it is fruitful to silo out the Global Ethics literature from critical International Relations scholarship more generally, as critical International Relations theory is always-already a normative endeavor (that is, committed to interrogating critically the relations of power that uphold the global order and that are (re)produced through various knowledge systems). Furthermore, as the alternative approaches emphasize, context is of great moral import when considering global ethical issues; drawing upon empirical analyses and data is a key tool for the moral philosopher (Walker 2007). As global ethicists, “we have to look at where moral views are socially sited and what relations of authority and power hold them in place” (Robinson 2006, 226); critical International Relations scholarship more broadly helps us with this task.
International Relations have, of course, been committed to incorporating women, as a group, into analyses of the workings of the international sphere (see, for example, Enloe 2014) – thereby providing an empirically richer site from which to understand the social relations that comprise the international realm (Peterson 2004) – feminism also provides a far deeper critique of knowledge production in the field of International Relations by uncovering its androcentric bias (Tickner 2006). Many of the very analytical concepts and categories that permeate the field are deeply gendered; for instance, V. Spike Peterson (2004) explores how positivism and objectivism are linked to essentialized masculinity, and are therefore valued under patriarchy, while subjective knowledge is coded as feminine and devalued in the field of International Relations. In this way, the feminist project in International Relations demonstrates two facets of the knowledge-power nexus. On the one hand, the very act of looking at women – their social actions, their roles in systems of production, in war, and in emancipatory movements (Bedford and Rai 2010) – reveals the ways in which knowledge claims have excluded the experiences of women, thereby contributing to and reflecting the marginalization of women as agents and actors in the international sphere (Tickner 2006). On the other hand, feminists in International Relations have also pointed out how the very standards of scholarship – universal ‘views from nowhere,’ objectivism, and the scientific method – as well as the analytical categories used to explore the international sphere – such as war (Hutchings 2008) and the capitalist system of production (Griffin 2010; 2016) – are coded as masculine (Peterson 2003), and thus reflect and reproduce gendered relations of power. By demonstrating how knowledge production in the field simultaneously reflects and reproduces the gender hierarchy whereby that which is coded as masculine is valued,
and that which is coded as feminine is devalued, feminism in International Relations demonstrates the deep relation between knowledge and power.

Similarly, post-colonial scholarship in the field also demonstrates the ways in which knowledge and power are deeply intertwined. In particular, post-colonial scholarship critiques many of the fundamental assumptions of International Relations and reveals how these assumptions have been crucial to the (political-ethical) colonial project, and thus have had, and continue to have, powerful effects on social relations in the international order. For instance, Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (2002) note how International Relations is based on the assumption that the West is the agent of history in the international sphere; this knowledge claim has the powerful effect of constructing non-Western countries as passive and marginalized actors in the international realm.

Giorgio Shani (2008) critiques how mainstream International Relations scholarship understands history and time as linear and progressive, arguing that this assumption renders alternative temporal frames invisible and nonsensical, while Sanjay Seth (2011) critiques how International Relations valorizes the moral and legal systems which were crucial to justifying the colonial project. Robbie Shilliam (2014) uncovers how even so called ‘critical’ schools of thought in International Relations, particularly constructivism, are guilty of (re)producing colonial relations of power, because while constructivists claim that the world is only ever understood through interpretation, they still assert that a researcher must interpret – or at the very least, is better able to interpret – the experiences of others. This assumption echoes the colonial distinction between a true ‘knower’ who

7 I return to this point in more detail in chapter three.
8 This is related to the constructivist commitment to establishing the ‘middle way’ between post-positivism and positivism (Wendt 1999). On the one hand, constructivists claim that the world is a social construction;
can produce knowledge, and a ‘known’ who can only ever be a passive recipient of knowledge claims. This distinction was historically (and is continually) used to legitimize the colonial notion of some people as human subjects and others as ‘less than.’ Finally, Charlotte Epstein (2014) explores how the idea of a universal truth or good, as espoused by both mainstream schools of thought (for instance, Liberalism which sees liberal values as the universal pathway to peace) and some critical schools of thought (for instance, variants of critical International Political Economy which see emancipation from capitalism as the ultimate normative goal), was crucial to the colonial project, which linked the universal good with the ‘rational’ ideas of the West, thereby deeming particular knowledges and values of non-Western peoples ‘irrational.’ Taken together, these examples show how post-colonial approaches are committed to interrogating critically any and all knowledge claims and revealing the ways in which the field of International Relations has produced, and continues to produce, knowledge that both reflects and perpetuates the power relations that are at the heart of colonialism.

In the same ways that post-colonial and feminist scholarship demonstrate the relationship between power and knowledge in the field of International Relations more broadly, the alternative approaches to global ethics likewise prioritize the relationship between (ethical/moral) knowledge and power, and foreground the consequences of failing to attend to this relationship when asserting moral claims. Specifically, the

on the other hand, they assert that they can adopt a scientific realist methodological approach to understanding the world. However, as Steve Smith argues (2000), the first claim suggests there is no distinction between subject and object, while the second requires a subject/object distinction. Leaving aside this clear meta-theoretical tension, however, the salient point for the argument at hand is that Shilliam’s critique (2014) points out that in accepting and reproducing the subject/object distinction in their research, constructivists are guilty of adopting a colonial ideal which was crucial to executing the colonial project and which continues to shape the relations of power between colonized and colonizer.
alternative approaches are united in that they critique the rationalist approaches for their separation of ethics and politics, and for their related assertion that the rationalist perspective is the sole, unbiased, and ‘true’ approach to contemplating global ethics. In other words, the alternative approaches highlight that in failing to foreground the ways in which any and all moral claims are always embedded in and co-constitutive of socio-political-economic contexts, the rationalist approaches involve an unexamined “privileging of white Western approaches to global ethics […] that not only neglect but actively oppresses alternative voices and perspectives” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 2).

In summary, the field of Global Ethics, as presented by Hutchings, can broadly be understood as divided based upon a debate over the moral (im)possibility of universality and, relatedly, different understandings of the relationship between ethics/ethical knowledge and the political. On the one hand, rationalist approaches valorize a ‘universal’ reason in an attempt to make or locate universal moral principles which can then be mobilized across various contexts. This involves an understanding of ethics as a realm separate from the socio-political; ethical knowledge is accessed by the impartial, apolitical moral philosopher, and this knowledge is then applied to the realm of politics. On the other hand, alternative approaches highlight the particularity of knowledge, and therefore of ethical knowledge, by understanding that ethics and the socio-political are deeply intertwined and co-constituted. In other words, the alternative approaches see ethics as operating in and through (relations of) power. In so doing, alternative approaches foreground not only the impossibility of asserting universal authoritative standards in forming moral judgements, but also the dangers of attempting to do so (Robinson 2006, 227). Indeed, for the alternative approaches, “the radical privileging of
moral rationalism as neutral and universal smuggles in unexamined moral hierarchies that shut down other voices” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 9), both reflecting and reproducing global hierarchies of power.

Finally, it is important to note that implicit in this debate regarding the (im)possibility of universal claims are contestations over the nature of difference, and the significance of difference, for moral deliberation. For example, the rationalist approaches ultimately attest that difference (for instance, cultural, social, material, political) can be separated out from moral deliberation (as ethics is seen as a distinct ‘realm,’ separate from context), and/or subsumed and transcended via higher-level reasoning and universal moral principles. In taking context seriously, and in asserting the inseparability of politics and ethics, the alternative approaches, on the other hand, foreground that while we share an interconnected world, differences across social groups within that world are morally significant. That is, differences in and across culture, economy, religion, politics, knowledges, and other identity categories take moral primacy when navigating ethical issues, as these differences comprise the very context in and through which moral dilemmas arise, and shape the ways in which we understand, dialogue about, and deliberate on these dilemmas. Thus, while each particular approach will differ in terms of how they conceive the nature of ‘difference,’ and in terms of how they propose we navigate differences, the alternative approaches share a commitment to interrogating the ways in which ‘difference’ is morally salient when grappling with ethical dilemmas in our shared and interconnected world.

1.1 The Challenge of the Pluriverse
Alongside, but heretofore not explored in depth by, the Global Ethics literature, is a growing literature on multiple ways of being-in and seeing the world – described by the language of the pluriverse (de la Cadena 2015; Mignolo 2013) – that illuminates not only the different ontologies that exist globally, but also the political processes through which these ways of being come into contact, conflict (Rojas 2016), and in many ways, co-constitute each other (Povinelli 2011). An example will help demonstrate this notion of multiple distinct, yet-intertwined, ontologies or worlds.

In her book *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (2015), Marisol de la Cadena presents a decade-long dialogue between Mariano and Nazario Turpo, a Quechua father and son, and herself, a Peruvian-born anthropologist living and working in the United States. This dialogue revolves around the ways in which the worldview of Mariano and Nazario, on the one hand, and the worldview of de la Cadena on the other, both exceed each other and intertwine in meaningful ways. For instance, in December 2006, 1,000 peasants gathered in the main square of Cuzco, the Plaza de Armas. “They had traveled from their villages located at the foot of a mountain named Ausangate, well known in Cuzco as a powerful earth-being, the source of life and death, of wealth and misery” (de la Cadena, 2010, 338). Ausangate, as an earth-being, is more than a mountain for the peasants: “obtaining a favorable outcome requires maintaining proper relationships with it and its surroundings (other mountains, lesser entities)” (de la Cadena, 2010, 338). The reason that these peasants had gathered in the square was to protest a prospective concession of a mine located in the Sinakara, one of the peaks of the

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9 Worldview is not quite the right word, but to avoid putting the cart before the horse, it serves as a useful placeholder until my later discussion regarding the enactment of worlds (see below).
mountain chain of which Ausangate is a part (de la Cadena, 2010, 338). As de la Cadena notes, while these peasants formed a large part of the gathering, other protesters were also present, including members of the Catholic brotherhood (de la Cadena, 2010, 338). On the face of things, these diverse people from diverse backgrounds were all gathering and partaking in the same protest against the development of the mining project.

However, as de la Cadena recollects, this surface appearance was, in fact, misleading, and masked deep ontological differences across protestors – including differences between Nazario’s political actions and thoughts and de la Cadena’s political actions and thoughts. De la Cadena explains:

Yet the degree to which this demonstration was different was brought home to me by my friend Nazario, whose village, Pacchanta, is at the foot of the Ausangate. He was there to protest the mining project – in fact he had called to let me know about the event. Initially, while we were demonstrating, I thought we shared a single view against the mine; however, once we debriefed about the meeting, and how it could influence future events, I realized that our shared view was also more than one. My reason for opposing the mine was that it would destroy pastures that families depend on to earn their living grazing alpacas and sheep, and selling their wool and meat. Nazario agreed with me, but said it would be worse: Ausangate would not allow the mine in Sinakara, a mountain over which it presided. Ausangate would get mad, could even kill people. To prevent that killing, the mine should not happen. I could not agree more, and although I could not bring myself to think that Ausangate would kill, I found it impossible to consider it a metaphor. Preventing Ausangate’s ire was Nazario’s motivation to participate in the demonstration and therefore it had political import. (2010, 338-339)

What de la Cadena realizes is that while Nazario and herself are together engaging in a political act to protect Ausangate, their understanding and stake in this political act is, in fact, radically different. In Nazario’s world, Ausangate is not a belief or metaphor – rather, “Ausangate is, period” (de la Cadena 2015, 26, emphasis in original). More specifically, Ausangate is an ontological being, a being that is enacted and real in Nazario’s ontological and epistemological frame. In de la Cadena’s world, Ausangate is a
mountain – one that may impact the lives of others – but not an agential being itself.

Nonetheless, despite these differences, Nazario and de la Cadena were, in that moment, together residing in a common political space. In this way, this example points to the existence of deep ontological differences, and illustrates that such differences, like those between Nazario and de la Cadena, cannot be subsumed or reduced to a singular ontology. Instead, as de la Cadena explains, “my world was included in the world that my friends inhabited and vice versa, but their world could not be reduced to mine, or mine to theirs” (2015, 4). The literature on the pluriverse, and the notion of a matrix of connected yet distinct worlds, has grown from ethnographic accounts like this one, which demonstrate deep and pervasive ontological difference(s).

Mario Blaser (2016) uses a different term to refer to the pluriverse; according to Blaser, the term ‘political ontology’ “capture[s] two distinct but inter-related processes: “On the one hand, it refers to the politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world or ontology. On the other hand, it refers to a field of study that focuses on the

10 While the term ‘political ontology’ is an important one in the pluriversal literature, I take some issue with the term and the definition of the term. Blaser refers to political ontology in the singular; I believe that in this way, he is attempting to foreground specifically the politics involved in the practices that shape the configuration of the pluriverse, i.e., the political practices that situate and connect worlds differently in the global political economy. However, I find his definition of political ontology, as the ‘politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world,’ unclear, as it also suggests a plurality of political ontologies: it is logical that there would be multiple political ontologies, as each world is constituted by its own set of political practices (even if there is a structural set of political practices that connect and order worlds, and thereby impact individual worlds too). My concern here is therefore that, on the one hand, if Blaser’s term is meant to refer only to the politics involved in the configuration of the pluriverse, then the term seems to imply that specific worlds are somehow not ‘political’ (and therefore, just ontologies). This would also imply a separation between the political practices that unfold between worlds and the (de-politicized) practices that unfold within a world. This type of separation, I argue, is inappropriate for understanding the political nature of the pluriverse. For instance, in the next chapter, I describe the political-theoretical assumptions, premises, and practices that comprise the modern world; I then demonstrate how these ‘internal’ political practices interact with other worlds, shaping both the internal political practices of modernity as well as the configuration of the pluriverse along colonial and racialized lines. Thus, the internal politics involved in the practices that shape a world, in my view, is not separable from the structural political ontology (the politics involved in the practices between worlds and that therefore also shape a world). On the other hand, if this is not the case, then there must be multiple political ontologies, as
conflicts that ensue as different worlds or ontologies strive to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other” (2009, 877). Each of these meanings merits some discussion.

First, thinking about political ontology as the politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world requires thinking about ontology more generally, and then ontological practices. Ontology is most commonly understood as “any way of understanding the world [that involves the making of] assumptions (which may be implicit or explicit) about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on” (Scott and Marshall 2005). More simply, ontology refers to the assumptions and framings through which we understand the world and conditions of being. In this way, ontology is tied to epistemology – how we know what we know. An understanding of the world requires an epistemic framework or set of criteria from which to determine the validity of said understanding of the world (Hutchings 2001). At the same time, our ontological assumptions influence our epistemic positionalities.

The notion of political ontology described by Blaser expands this understanding of ontology by focusing on the politics involved in the practices through which

individual worlds are also shaped by their own internal political practices. However, in this case, I believe that using the term ‘political ontology’ to connote both (that is, the political practices between worlds that shape worlds and the political practices within a world that shapes that world) can be confusing. From a different vantage point, Ben Turner (2018, 4) likewise criticizes the singularity of ‘political ontology,’ as a singular political ontology “cannot fully account for the plurality of ways of understanding political life.” Claudia Briones (2013, 560) makes a similar point, and wonders if naming this project in the singular might end up neutralizing ontological multiplicity. Given my own critique, and the concerns raised by Turner and Briones, I therefore generally avoid using Blaser’s term ‘political ontology’ throughout this dissertation (excepting this introduction to the concept), although my work clearly borrows from and builds upon his political ontology scholarship in significant ways. Instead, I use the term ‘world’ or ‘onto-epistemology’ (explicated below) to refer to the practices and relations (which, I argue later, are always political) that constitute a specific world. The pluriverse, then, is the term I use to refer to the structure (the relations and connections) between worlds (which I again argue later is always-already political).
“ontologies perform themselves into worlds” (2009, 877). As Blaser (2013, 23) writes, “an ontology is a way of worlding, it is a form of enacting a reality.” Unlike ontologies as defined above, ontologies here are not simply claims about the world, or framings for understanding the world, but instead, consist of the (de)stabilizing and continual processes and (political) practices which bring worlds into existence, and through which we come to know the world itself; political ontology in particular is meant to distinguish the political aspects of these practices.

Second, Blaser also argues that political ontology refers to a research agenda which aims to explore and understand the ways in which worlds conflict and interact. This dimension of political ontology stems from the two characteristics of political ontology described above. If ontology is understood as the way we see the world, the ways in which we claim authority for that viewpoint, and the practices that enact this world, then research – as a practice and an act (Aradau and Huysmans 2014) – is a part of the enactment of ontologies. Research on political ontology cannot be divorced from the ontologies that are examined, nor can it be divorced from the world of which the researcher is a part. As Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans (2014) explain, “Understood as devices, [research and] methods are seen to enact social and political worlds. Understood as acts, methods can become disruptive of social and political worlds” (598), because “if methods enact particular worlds, their experimental connecting and assembling can also create ruptures in these worlds” (608). Thus, research is both performative – in that it enacts certain worlds – and political – in that the ways in which our research enacts these worlds has (unequal) material and ideological consequences for our ontologies/worldings. Research, as a site of ontological struggle, is necessarily
implicated in the very concept of political ontology.

Given this, I suggest that for the concept of political ontology, the relation between ontology and epistemology, as explicated above, is even more primary. From a political ontological perspective, it is through acts of worlding that we not only enact reality but also that we come to know reality. By extension, the frames we use to validate how we know reality likewise construct that reality. I suggest that the understanding of ontology implicit in the concept of political ontology may therefore be better captured by the term onto-epistemology, as it prioritizes the *co-constitutive relationship* between how we see and understand the world and the ways in which we claim authority for that particular understanding of the world. Onto-epistemology emphasizes the indivisibility of these two moves: seeing the world in a particular way cannot be separated from the framing used to claim validity for that world, nor can the framework used to validate a world view be separated from broader acts and practices which bring worlds – and ergo our understandings of worlds – into existence. Indeed, the framework used to validate a world view is, itself, an enactment of worlds, and the world it enacts simultaneously constitutes the framework for validating said world. Throughout this dissertation, I therefore use the term onto-epistemology¹¹ (instead of just ontology) interchangeably with worlds; I believe that a world is defined according to a particular co-constitutive continually enacted ontology and epistemology, and can thus be conceived of as such.

¹¹ This term is not, perhaps, new, although the way I am using it is novel. For instance, Cristina Rojas (2016) uses the term onto-epistemic to refer to a world which has deep relations with nature; in other words, it refers to a particular characteristic or quality of certain worlds. Karen Barad (2008, 147) uses onto-epistemology to refer to the study of practices of knowing in being. My use of the term onto-epistemology (or onto-epistemic framings), however, is not a description of a quality of a particular relational world, nor does it refer to a field of study; rather, my claim is that all worlds are onto-epistemologies, i.e., a co-constitutive continually enacted ontology and epistemology.
Finally, based on this understanding of worlds, or onto-epistemologies, it becomes clear that the notion of a single, universal, world is nonsensical. Worlds do not pre-exist our human interactions; they are an outcome of our relations, our interactions, our practices, our knowledge, and our political conflicts revolving around these issues. Given the multiplicity of these relations and practices, a single onto-epistemological standpoint is not possible. Instead, there are multiple worlds (Agathangelou and Ling 2009) or a pluriverse (de la Cadena 2015): a matrix of entangled worlds that are connected through relations of power (Mignolo 2013). This connectivity is important; as Walter Mignolo explains, “pluriversality is not cultural relativism” (2013, np), as it is not a world of independent units. Instead, the pluriverse is “more than one, but less than many” (Blaser 2018, 47); it is an acknowledgement that while we reside in the same present, our worlds can be very different. Marilyn Strathern’s (2004) concept of “partial connections” captures this relationality by foregrounding that these worlds are not singular units; rather, relations are always-already “integrally implied” (Rojas 2016, 379). Thus, while differences across worlds may be deep and pervasive (onto-epistemic) – and thus not (necessarily) reducible or translatable – they do not limit our interactions, nor do they negate the significance of the ways in which the global order – the partial connections between worlds – come to shape particular worlds (often unevenly so). Instead, these differences, and the notion of the pluriverse, demand that we dwell in the messy entanglement between worlds and pay attention to the ways in which the

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12 Notably, this phrase, and similar sentiments (i.e., “more than one, less than two”) is prominent in the work of several critical science and technology scholars and decolonial scholars. For instance, de la Cadena writes about entities that are “more than one, yet less than two” (de la Cadena 2010, 347). Blaser takes this specific iteration of the phrase from Annemarie Mol’s *The Body Multiple* (2002, 55).
enactments of certain worlds are prevented or disparaged through these entanglements.

This idea of the pluriverse thus presents a more expansive political landscape as compared to mainstream conceptualizations of the ‘global.’ In particular, the notion of multiple worlds does not simply ground the political in competing perspectives, interests, viewpoints, or goals within a singular world, but rather, locates politics as the very processes through which multiple worlds are both deeply intertwined and radically different, creating the very boundaries of what is knowable and speakable. Simply put, in the pluriverse, ‘differences’ are at their most deep and pervasive; what is at stake in the pluriverse are different worlds/worldings, different onto-epistemologies. These ‘differences’ fracture prevalent notions of the ‘global’ as a shared and common world, and of ‘global politics’ as contestations over different ideologies, values, and interests within this common world.

The Pluriverse and the Political

The work of Jenny Edkins (1999), and her distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ is useful for understanding the pluriversal landscape. In contrast to ‘politics,’ which can be understood as the political reality as it is already described and acknowledged,

‘the political’ has to do with the establishment of that very social order which sets out a particular, historically specific account of what counts as politics and defines other areas of social life as not politics. (Edkins 1999, 2, emphasis in original)

In other words, for Edkins, the political represents a moment of ungrounding and grounding, in which a social order is ruptured, reconfigured and shifted, and instantiated anew. In the pluriverse, worlds or onto-epistemologies are connected through relations of
power; the differentials in these power relations situate certain worlds ‘above’ and ‘below’ others, resulting in a configuration of worlds that may be thought of as a social and political order (albeit one that is contingent, fluid, and shifting). When this relational web of onto‐epistemologies is arranged as a hierarchy of domination, certain worlds exist outside of ‘politics;’ they are rendered invisible or incomprehensible by the logic of the dominant world. At the same time, when these relations of power shift, and the marginalized worlds illuminate, and perhaps even reconfigure, the boundaries of the dominant world, there is a political moment which may redefine the order itself and, in so doing, redefine what counts as politics. In this way, the pluriverse, I argue, is always already operating at the level of the political.

An example will help to illustrate this. In March 2017, the local Māori tribe of Whanganui in the North Island of New Zealand/Aotearoa won recognition for the Whanganui river as their ancestor, meaning that the river must be treated as a living entity. The river was granted this recognition, and the same legal rights as a human being, after 140 years of struggle by the Māori people. Under this new status, the New Zealand legal system sees no differentiation between harming the tribe and harming the river “because they are one and the same” (Roy 2017).

This case, I suggest, is an example of a conflict between two worlds. On the one hand, some may suggest that this is simply a conflict between cultures, as opposed to a conflict between worlds. However, the concept of the pluriverse, and of multiple worlds, or onto‐epistemologies as I call them, is, in part, a response to the tendency to devalue certain ways of being as simply ‘beliefs,’ ‘traditions,’ or ‘culture,’ while other ways of being are viewed (often implicitly) as ‘true’ or inherently valid. In naming the Māori world a world, and describing this conflict as a conflict between worlds, I am giving full ontological weight (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014; quoted in Jaeger 2018, 229) to the practices and relations that constitute their way of being and knowing. I believe that giving this ontological weight to non-Western ways of being is a necessary step towards decolonization, and towards destabilizing the hierarchies of power which render some ways of being as ‘true’ and others as less
hand, the New Zealand Government – constituted by the modern world, which in its current neoliberal manifestation is premised on thick individualism, private property, and a clear distinction between humans and nature – constructs the river as property. On the other hand, the Māori tribe knows the river as an ancestor and still-living kin. This understanding is key to the enactment of the Māori’s relational onto-epistemology, which is devoid of the human/nature and living/nonliving binaries that constitute the modern world (Povinelli 2016). However, under the current configuration of the pluriverse, whereby the modern world dominates and marks the boundaries of ‘legitimate’ politics, the Māori world was rendered unintelligible for over 140 years. The river was not viewed by the state as kin, or as a living entity, but rather was treated as property. Indeed, even the Māori’s own view of the river as kin was not acknowledged by the state. As a result, the reproduction of the Māori people’s world was undermined, as the river was both treated in a way that violated the logic of their world and denied a subject status that is key to their broader onto-epistemology.

The 140-year struggle to recognize the river as a living entity, then, is an example of the enactment of the political as defined by Edkins. In this case, the Māori fought to bring into relationship two incommensurable logics: their own understanding of the river as kin and the view of nature as property that in part constitutes modernity. In so doing, the Māori made visible that which was invisible, namely, their relationship with the river, and more fundamentally, the world which this relationship in part enacts. Importantly, in

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14 See ‘Outline of Argument’ section below for a brief discussion of what I mean by the ‘modern world’ or ‘modernity.’ This is expanded and elaborated upon in chapter two.
bringing together these two incommensurable logics, equivocation was not overcome. The Government of New Zealand does not see the river as a human in a literal sense, nor do the Māori fully embody the legal human rights framework which facilitated this recognition. Rather, in bringing together these two logics, a tentative reconfiguration of the pluriversal order was achieved, one in which “the [characteristically political] contradiction of two worlds in a single world” (Rancière 1999, 27) is foregrounded. For this reason, I believe that the pluriverse, as the landscape comprised of multiple connected yet often contradicting worlds, must be thought of as political.15

A Decolonial Project

Lastly, it is important to emphasize that pluriversal scholarship is firmly embedded in a decolonial project, particularly represented by the Latin American research program modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (MCD), subsequent literature critiquing and expanding upon this program (described as the ‘ontological turn’ (Rojas 2016)), and related decolonial anthropological literature (see, for example, Blaser 2009; 2013; 2016; de la Cadena 2010; 2014; 2015). That is, the notion of the pluriverse is not an apolitical abstract concept; rather, as Mignolo argues, pluriversality is tied to a specific normative commitment:

[P]luriversality as a universal project means that the universal cannot have one single owner: the universal can only be pluriversal, which also corresponds with the Zapatistas’ vision of a world in which many worlds coexist. All of us on the planet have arrived at the end of the era of abstract, disembodied universals – of universal universality. Western universalism has the right to coexist in the pluriverse of meaning. Stripped of its pretended uni-versality, Western cosmology would be one of many cosmologies, no longer the one that subsumes and

15 A central contribution of this dissertation is developing further what the political means in the pluriverse, so I return to this point frequently, and in greater detail, moving forward.
In other words, pluriversality is inherently a critique of the modern world which, through ongoing processes of colonialism (including epistemological practices such as those espoused by the rationalist approaches to Global Ethics described above), has posited itself as the one true and legitimate world, the world of ‘universal universality.’ Simultaneously, pluriversality is also a normative call to envision a world in which multiple worlds are possible as *worlds*, as ‘universals’ in their own right, as opposed to different beliefs, traditions, or paradigms within a one ‘true’ world. As Hans-Martin Jaeger (2018, 228) summarizes, this “ontological turn [thus] seeks to take seriously the multiplicity of being (alternatively designated as radical alterity or pluriversality) by overturning the Western philosophical presupposition of one ontology (‘reality’ or ‘nature’) and multiple epistemologies (‘representations’ or ‘cultures’).” In so doing, the notion of the pluriverse, and the ontological turn in the decolonial project, seeks to substantiate every world’s right to its own universality.

Without overstating this ‘divide’ (that is, the debate in the decolonial literature between the epistemological research program (see, for example, Mignolo 2012a; 2012b) and the ontological research program (see, for example, Blaser 2009; 2013)), it is also for this reason that I believe the concept of onto-epistemologies is especially useful in the context of the pluriverse. Currently, decolonial theory is viewed as consisting of two moments: the ‘epistemological’ moment versus the ‘ontological’ moment (Rojas 2016). As Cristina Rojas writes,

> The first targets the epistemic logic of modernity–coloniality by making visible the mechanisms through which modern rationality manages the world and legitimizes the universality of modern knowledge. Scholars forming part of the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (MCD) research program commit to “an other
way of thinking” that counters the main narratives of modernity (Christianity, liberalism, and Marxism) […]. The “ontological” moment, on the other hand, aims to interrupt the modern commitment to the existence of one world. (2016, 374; quoting Escobar 2007, 180)

I suggest that the notion of worlds or ‘universals’ – to borrow Mignolo’s language – as onto-epistemologies may better situate us to move beyond such an epistemological/ontological debate by foregrounding the fact that any attempt to restructure the world order so that multiple worlds may co-exist must simultaneously attend to the co-constitutive nature of ontology and epistemology, to the ways in which every world is a co-constitutive onto-epistemology.16

Research Question

The notion of the pluriverse, of a matrix of interconnected worlds, thus poses a significant challenge to the field of Global Ethics. As outlined above, Global Ethics has been characterized by a debate regarding the (im)possibility of universality. On the one hand, rationalist approaches purport a thick universality (what Mignolo might call a universal-universality), while alternative approaches – via various critiques – question (perhaps devastatingly so) the possibility of a universal ethics at all. However, the pluriverse ruptures this bifurcation. In giving “full ontological weight” (Holbraad, Pedersen, and Viveiros de Castro 2014; quoted in Jaeger 2018, 229) to other ways of

16 At the same time, while this dissertation departs from the idea that ontology and epistemology are co-constitutive (and thus aims to move beyond the ontological/epistemological debate in the MCD research program), it is notable that I generally engage with the pluriversal literature which emphasizes the ‘ontological’ throughout this discussion (although I do engage with the ‘epistemological’ branch to a lesser extent throughout, for instance, in chapter two and briefly in chapter three). Accordingly, I wish to acknowledge explicitly my (arguably) more ontological than epistemological positioning within the literature on the pluriverse. This positioning is particularly evident in that much of my thinking and argumentation relies heavily on anthropological ethnographies that demonstrate pluriversal conflicts (see section 1.4 below); these ethnographies are influenced by/come from the ontological turn in anthropology.
being/knowing, the pluriverse puts forth a compelling normative claim: every world has the right to claim their own universality. In this way, the pluriverse poses a normative challenge that requires a multiplication of universality, as opposed to either a single universal or a multiplicity of (contingent) particularities. What meta-ethical orientations can theoretically accommodate the multiplication of universality? At the same time, how do such meta-ethical orientations provide us with practical guidance in terms of dealing with ethical issues that cross worlds, and the universals within? More simply, how can we rethink (global) ethics in the pluriverse, where differences are at their most deep and pervasive? How might we build a pluriversal ethics?

1.2 A Preliminary Assessment of the Field: Are Current Approaches in Global Ethics Compatible with the Pluriverse?

To begin to explore possible answers to these questions, this section returns to Hutchings’ (2010) framework to parse out (in a preliminary way) whether the rationalist and/or alternative approaches can provide a fruitful starting point from which to contemplate the challenge the pluriverse poses to the field of Global Ethics. Importantly, this brief overview of the compatibility of the pluriverse and dominant approaches to Global Ethics is in no way exhaustive; I return to this discussion in chapter three, where I engage more thoroughly with work on cosmopolitanism (see, for example, Appiah 2006; O’Neill 2000), discourse ethics (see, for example, Linklater 1996a; 1998; 1999; 2005), and postmodern ethics like postfoundational cosmopolitanism (see, for example, Caraus and Paris 2016). However, this preliminary review is useful here, as it also allows me to draw out briefly the particular challenges posed by the notion of the pluriverse to the ways in
which we do Global Ethics.

**Rationalist Approaches**

*Moral Cosmopolitanism*

Moral cosmopolitanism is undeniably one of the dominant approaches to ethics in the field of Global Ethics, forming the basis for a variety of specific ethical theories, such as the capabilities approach (see, for example, Nussbaum 2013), human rights and rights-based approaches to international ethics (see, for example, Gould 2006), and global justice (see, for example, Pogge 2008). The rich literature focusing on cosmopolitanism starts from the notion of a “worldwide community of human beings” and “promotes global coexistence despite or because of […] diverse cultures, religions, races and ‘civilizations,’ on the one hand, and divergent political, ideological and economic interests, on the other hand” (Grovogui 2005, 103). In other words, from the cosmopolitan perspective, the ultimate unit of concern is individual human beings or persons, as opposed to group affiliations (Caney 2005, 3). Because “the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to *every* living human being equally” (Pogge 1994, 89, emphasis in original), cosmopolitanism prioritizes a universal humankind – one that trumps differences across social groups – and cosmopolitan scholars deploy this universal as the basis from which to think through moral conflicts and propose moral principles to guide the resolution of such conflicts (Archibugi and Held 1995). Even when cosmopolitan scholars have attempted to pay attention to particularity and (cultural, social, identity-

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17 While Hutchings does not discuss moral cosmopolitanism in her framework, I review this particular approach in this dissertation because of its specific prevalence in Global Ethics and normative international relations theory, and because the philosophical foundations of moral cosmopolitanism tend to be either utilitarian, contractualist, and/or deontological, three of the specific rationalist approaches Hutchings attends to in her schematic.
based, etc.) difference, or to expand cosmopolitan frameworks in order to accommodate for difference (see, for example, Appiah 2006; Grovogui 2005; Jabri 2007), it is always particularity within a singular world. The problem here is that difference is, at best, glossed over, and at worst, assimilated and absorbed based on the dominant normative notions of subjectivity that perpetuate international power hierarchies. Moral cosmopolitanism thus cannot sufficiently attend to ethics in the pluriverse, where differences are at their most deep and pervasive (where there are multiple worlds, and not simply different identities, cultures, interests, and so on, within the one world).

**Discourse Ethics**

Andrew Linklater (1996a; 1998; 1999; 2005) specifically applies discourse ethics to the international sphere by developing “the case for a multicultural dialogical cosmopolitanism modelled on Habermas’s discourse ethics” (Shapcott 2002, 222). Discourse ethics, for Linklater (1998, 92), provides a suitable model of dialogue for “post-Westphalian” forms of community in which radically different agents “are equally free to express their moral claims, able to explore the prospects for solving their moral differences and capable of reaching an appropriate compromise in the absence of consensus.” The consequence of using discourse ethics in this way, according to Linklater, is a dual questioning of “traditional modes of exclusion” – including the exclusions that result from the sovereign state system and its emphasis on national citizenship and boundaries – and an imagining of “new dialogic possibilities” (1996a, 88) which involve both a greater universality (in that all people are able to participate in the dialogue) and openness to difference than the modern state has allowed (1996a, 87).

Discourse ethics, however, has been widely critiqued by scholars who highlight
the universalizing tendencies of discourse ethics (see, for example, Dallymar 2001; Hopgood 2000; Hutchings 2005; Robinson 2011c; Shapcott 2002) inherent in the assumption that in order for agents to participate in the dialogue, they must have a shared and common lifeworld (Habermas 1987, 24; see also Anievas 2005; Rustin 1999). Indeed, the assumption of a shared and common lifeworld is obviously at odds with the pluriverse. Further, discourse ethics locates reason – and therefore emancipation – in language, thereby erasing or devaluing other ways of knowing, as exemplified in the pluriverse (see, for example, de la Cadena 2015). In so doing, discourse ethics also renders those agents with different forms of reason as unintelligible as subjects of emancipation. Second, and relatedly, discourse ethics relies on an implicit assumption of knowability (qua intersubjectivity (Anievas 2005, 150)). That is, discourse ethics assumes that ‘the other,’ and knowledge more generally, can be known and validated by all through dialogical exchange. However, as the literature on the pluriverse demonstrates, when differences are at their most robust, knowing across worlds may not be possible.18 Discourse ethics, with its fundamental assumption of mutual understanding and knowing, provides little guidance on how to deal with normative issues when knowing fully is impossible. For these reasons, discourse ethics is not an appropriate approach for dealing with moral dilemmas in the pluriverse.

**Alternative Approaches**19

18 Consider the Māori example above; non-Māori subjects cannot ‘know’ the river as kin.
19 Hutchings (2010) also includes virtue ethics and feminist ethics under the ‘alternatives’ heading. In Hutchings schematic, virtue ethics or communitarianism is an alternative approach to ethical deliberation because it is a deeply contextual ethic, which foregrounds the moral salience of particular communities, institutions, and relations. For this same reason, however, virtue ethics has not been especially prominent in the Global Ethics literature, which foregrounds our interconnectedness globally, as opposed to foregrounding distinct communities (a notable exception is, of course, the work of Michael Walzer (2015)). Because the challenge of the pluriverse from a global ethics perspective is to navigate competing ethical
Postmodernist Ethics

While postmodernist ethics might best be conceived of as a spectrum encompassing a variety of approaches, Hutchings argues that they are broadly united by their assertion that “any answer to the why question in ethical theory is always open to deconstruction” (2010, 68). This leads poststructural theorists like Judith Butler to argue for “moral humility” (2004), as all moral claims must be open to revision and cannot be substantiated on foundational grounds. Pragmatists like Richard Rorty (1989) similarly argue that moral claims are contingent upon the equally contingent ‘universe of meaning’ of which they are part; in other words, for Rorty, all moral claims lack “external validation” (Hutchings 2010, 69).

Edkins (1999) offers a compelling explanation of the poststructural approach to ethical and political questions more broadly; in particular, her distinction between ‘politics’ and the ‘political’ is again relevant. ‘Politics,’ as noted above, describes the activities involved in the administration of social life within a particular socio-symbolic order; ‘the political,’ on the other hand, refers to the constitution of the socio-symbolic order itself (Edkins 1999, 2). Poststructuralist (international) political theory, including its normative variants, is oriented towards thinking specifically about ‘the political’ and the co-constitutive relationship between subjectivity and a particular socio-symbolic

claims and concerns across onto-epistemologies, where differences are at their deepest and most pervasive, this approach is not attended to in depth in this dissertation (although I touch on some related themes briefly in chapter three). Feminist ethics, however, plays a central role in the line of thinking developed in this dissertation, as my proposed approach to a pluriversal ethics based on an ethics of care is embedded within this tradition. I elaborate on feminist ethics more fully in chapter four.

20 I wish to emphasize that ‘postmodernism’ is an umbrella term in Hutchings’ (2010) schematic which encompasses numerous schools of thought and approaches to ethics, including poststructuralism, postfoundationalism, antifoundationalism, and pragmatism. Thus, I will use the appropriate designators to refer to the specific works of particular theorists while following Hutchings in grouping them collectively under the heading of postmodernism.
order – that is, the “fictions” that structure “social reality” (Edkins 1999, 6).

Significantly, ‘the political’ as founding acts (and their concealment) of forms of subjectivity and socio-symbolic order are always predicated on the absence of ultimate grounding for social existence (Edkins 1999, 7); the impossibility of ultimate grounding for social existence necessarily implies the impossibility of establishing (any) grounds for ethical judgment. Interrogating any claims to ethical foundations and the ways power operates through such foundational claims, as well as grappling with the impossibility of establishing grounds for ethical deliberation and action, forms the starting point for thinking about ethics from a poststructuralist lens.

While poststructuralist ‘antifoundationalism’ offers us a scathing critique of the modern world (and the related rationalist approaches that construct/uphold that world) by demonstrating that the so-called ‘universal’ grounds supporting modernity are contingent, I have two reservations about the potential for poststructuralist ethics to help us rethink global ethics in the context of the pluriverse. First, an argument can be made that the poststructuralist approach reproduces the modern divide between nature (object) and culture (subject) in its emphasis on the role of discourse and the symbolic. As Bonnie Mann (2002, 353) argues, in the poststructural account “subjectivity does not inhabit the interior universe of individual subjects so much as it is the ocean we are swimming in. The entire world becomes a collective and textualized interiority.” If we are to take the challenge of the pluriverse seriously, we cannot assume that nature is always mediated through discourse for subjects of other worlds – indeed, much of the anthropological literature related to the pluriverse (see, for example, de la Cadena 2015), as well as literature on indigenous cosmologies and philosophy (see, for example, Coulthard 2014;
Wilson 2008), indicates that this is not the case. An approach to ethics which privileges discourse above nature in this way can be blind to this potentiality, and in many ways mimics the separation of culture from nature, and the related privileging of culture over nature,\textsuperscript{21} which was (is) key to the colonial project (Rojas 2016).

Second, and perhaps more importantly, I believe that this critical deconstructive approach is severely limited in terms of building an ethics in the pluriverse because, as argued above, an important normative component of the pluriverse is the multiplication of worlds,\textsuperscript{22} and the universalities that constitute each world. That is, an ongoing orientation towards deconstruction – while useful for challenging any one world’s claim of universal-universality, and the relations of power that may bolster and uphold such a claim – provides little guidance for how to proceed with the normative task of multiplying worlds, and therefore cannot help us imagine what a pluriversal ethics might look like.

1.3 The Ethics of Care and Building a Pluriversal Ethics

The final alternative approach under Hutchings’ (2010) framework is feminist ethics, particularly as represented by the ethics of care. \textit{My argument in this dissertation is that a critical, feminist ethics of care is a normative orientation conducive to building an ethics for the pluriverse because it demands that we dwell in the (mutual) vulnerability that}

\textsuperscript{21} As Rojas (2016, 371) argues, the nature/culture distinction functions by “locating certain humans closer to nature and depriving their life of value. On the contrary, moderns [have ‘culture’ and] are [thereby] provided with the legitimate right to improvement and the right to destroy those that do not exercise this right, which is seen as equivalent to their failure as humans.”

\textsuperscript{22} Of course, by ‘multiplying worlds’ I do not mean to suggest that the goal of ethics in the pluriverse is the literal and active creation of worlds; rather, the multiplication of worlds refers to the normative task of reconfiguring the world order to allow ontological and epistemological space for those worlds already existing, as well as the conditions of possibility for worlds yet to come.
arises from our relational being. On the one hand, in foregrounding our relationality and giving moral weight to the practices that sustain relational selves, the ethics of care is attuned to the multiplication of worlds; on the other hand, in foregrounding our mutual vulnerability (which arises from our relationality), the ethics of care simultaneously highlights the impossibility of one moral voice, and orients us to attend critically to relations of power which suppress different moral voices (and in so doing, suppress and devalue certain ways of being in and seeing the world more broadly).

The literature on the ethics of care can most accurately be traced back to psychological theory (Gilligan 1993) and feminist philosophy (Ruddick 1989), which identified an approach to moral reasoning based on the relational self and the enhancement and preservation of specific relationships. As Carol Gilligan (1993) argued, this relational approach or ‘voice’ differed from the rationalist voice that dominated moral psychology at the time (indeed, the rationalist voice was presented as the definition of morality);23 notably, this rational voice is the same voice underpinning the rationalist approaches in Global Ethics discussed above. Whereas the rationalist voice conceives of morality as the impartial application of rules and principles to abstracted ethical dilemmas, the relational voice constructs moral problems “as a problem of responsibility in relationships” (Gilligan 1993, 73); as a result, moral selves emerge through relations of

23 Importantly, the relational self that Gilligan heard was articulated by the girls and women she interviewed, while the rationalist voice was articulated by the boys and men who participated in her study. Gilligan thus tied the suppression of the relational self to the gender system of oppression. For this reason, and following Selma Sevenhuijsen (1998, 34-35), I believe that the ethics of care can, and should, be thought of as a feminist ethics of care because it emphasizes a commitment to “further reflection on the feminist attitude to care and ethics, and the decoding of the gender-load inherent in established moral and political philosophy. Both care and ethics are indeed so interwoven with gender that we cannot do without continuous reflection on feminist interpretations and feminist points of view.” I expand on the meaning of ‘feminist ethics’ in chapter four.
responsibility and care for particular others (Robinson 1999), and morality is understood as practices – that is, as present in and a feature of almost everything we do (Walker 2007) – and specifically the practices that emerge in and through our relations with others (Robinson 2011c).

Accordingly, an ethics of care approach also changes our conceptualization of moral agents, who are now understood to be dependent and vulnerable beings, constituted by relations and their positionality in various relations and systems of power, as opposed to autonomous and independent liberal subjects (see, for example, Feder Kittay 2002; Feder Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005; Hekman 1995). That is, we are embedded in complex relations of power; as a result, our moral relations are themselves characterized by these same relations. Because of this recognition, care ethics prioritizes a sensitivity to the political, social, and economic contexts (see, for example, Hankivsky 2004; Tronto 1993; 2013) that (always-already) shape morality. Furthermore, given that contexts are multiple, and that moral agents are constituted by their unique context, the ethics of care also suggests a multiplicity of relational moral selves. Specifically, subsequent work on the ethics of care built on this ‘discovery’ of a different voice to highlight the heterogeneity of moral subjects, and, correspondingly, the multiplicity of moral voices/epistemologies/theories. As Susan Hekman writes:

The epistemology implicit in [Gilligan’s] work replaces the disembodied knower with the relational self. The knowledge constituted by this relational self is a very different kind of knowledge. The relational self produces knowledge that is connected, a product of discourses that constitute forms of life; it is plural rather than singular. Gilligan hears moral voices speaking from the lives of connected, situated selves, not the single truth of disembodied moral principles. She hears these voices because she defines morality and moral knowledge as plural and heterogenous. (1995, 30)

The plurality of moral knowledge, as suggested by care ethics, implies that the
ways in which we make ethical claims – or knowledge claims more generally – are vulnerable and cannot be taken as unassailable. Rather, there are limits to knowing, and knowledge itself is always situated and thereby insecure. The ethics of care thus encourages an orientation towards vulnerability; the moral self must prioritize the limits of their knowing, the uncertainty of ethical claims, and the reality that “all moral judgement is unsafe” (Hutchings 2013, 26). This is important for engaging in ethical deliberations across difference because it reminds ethical actors of the critical task of questioning their own assumptions and biases and interrogating how power operates in and through moral judgements and knowledge claims.

This vulnerable disposition, therefore, is distinct from empathy or approaches to morality which emphasize and prioritize the fostering of understanding of ‘the other.’ Empathy suggests that it is morally salient to know the other, to place ourselves in the other’s shoes (see, for example, de Meriche 2015; 2016). However, when differences are at their most robust, knowing the other fully may not be possible. A disposition towards vulnerability, as espoused by the ethics of care, instead involves a more radical recognition of alterity than possible when knowing via empathy is the goal: foregrounding our vulnerability (which stems from our relational being) is an implicit acknowledgement of the limits to knowing across deep differences (which are themselves the product of our relational being). This is, of course, not to negate the importance of empathy; rather, this is just to point out that empathy has limits. An orientation towards vulnerability, as present in the ethics of care, is better equipped to acknowledge and dwell with the challenges posed by this limit.

With this understanding of care ethics in mind, I argue that the ethics of care
provides a useful orientation for building a pluriversal ethics. The ethics of care conceives of agents as relational selves constituted by their unique and particular contexts. As a result, moral agents and moral knowledge are multiple and heterogeneous. At the same time, a relational ontology, of course, prioritizes our interconnections. Thus, morality as such is always situated and connected. This understanding of morality, I suggest, echoes much of the normative-political project of the pluriverse – that is, a radical acknowledgment of the multiplicity of worlds that are deeply connected, but also differently situated, within relations of power. Further, a care ethics approach is committed to interrogating relations of power which render certain moral voices less legitimate than others and that come to frame ethics more fundamentally. Again, this parallels the pluriversal project of deconstructing the notion of a universal-universality, and the relations of power that uphold the modern world as the ‘legitimate’ arbitrator of truth and knowledge.

In prioritizing the vulnerability of all moral judgment, the ethics of care also requires what Isabelle Stengers (2005) calls a slowing down of reasoning. In recognizing our vulnerability, a care ethics approach requires us to pause and consider how our ethical judgements are always-already vulnerable; it also requires us to consider how moral dilemmas, and the ways in which moral dilemmas come to be understood across difference, arise from our material vulnerabilities situated in relations of power. An approach to morality built on the ethics of care therefore pays close attention to how our moral judgements themselves (re)produce and are co-constitutive of worlds, and therefore may be culpable in the (re)production of certain harms. Finally, because the ethics of care conceives of morality as practice, the moral task is no longer one of
determining abstract rules and principles for governing ethical dilemmas; rather, care ethics orients us to focus instead on the practices which allow moral selves (and by extension, worlds) to reproduce and sustain themselves.

In this way, the ethics of care provides us with a different understanding of morality, and a different orientation to contemplating and addressing ethical dilemmas. Expanding on the ways in which the ethics of care reconceptualizes morality, and demonstrating how this different approach to ethics can help us build a pluriversal ethics, is the purpose of this dissertation.

1.4 Methodology, Positionality, and Audience

As noted above, Blaser (2009, 877) also uses the term political ontology to refer “to a research agenda that focuses on the conflicts that ensue as different worlds or ontologies strive to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other.” Again, as noted above, this research agenda (like all scholarship) is fundamentally linked to the enactment of worlds. From a pluriversal perspective, researchers do not exist outside of worlds; they enact and are enacted by worlds.24 By extension, research is implicated in the enactment and disruption of worlds. Research – as a practice and an act (Aradau and Huysmans 2014) – is a part of the enactment of onto-epistemologies. Understanding that research is both performative – in that it enacts certain worlds – and political – in that the ways in which our research enacts these worlds has (unequal) material and ideological

24 It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to draw out fully a theory of the subject and its relation to the world in which the subject is produced (and which is, in turn, produced by the subject). However, this dissertation assumes that subjects and worlds are produced co-concomitantly; I believe that many features of the pluriverse, such as the limits to knowing and the enactment of multiple worlds, cannot make sense otherwise.
consequences across onto-epistemologies – is central to the pluriversal project.

Accordingly, I see research – and specifically the Global Ethics literature that is interrogated in this project – as a part of the worlding process, as part of the practices through which worlds are enacted (Blaser 2009). Following from this, I see the literature examined in this thesis as not simply a representation of an externally given world; rather, the literature is co-constitutive of the world which it alternatively (re)produces and disrupts. Similarly, I do not see methods as techniques of representation that simply extract information from externally given worlds while leaving the worlds they represent untouched; rather, the device of extraction enacts worlds in the sense that it is an active force that is part of a process of continuous production and reproduction of relations, an endless process of bringing worlds into being. It is with this general disposition that I undertake this theoretical dissertation, which develops conceptual and theoretical tools to build a pluriversal ethics.

To this end, as I engaged with the concepts and literature that constitute the core of this project, I followed Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True’s feminist transformative method (2006), which relies on several (related) key theoretical practices. First, this method involves skeptical scrutiny, or ongoing critical attention to all key elements of the research design and contexts (Ackerly and True 2006, 257). Feminists following this method note the institutions, constructs, systemic conditions, and actors that are alternatively included or excluded in their projects. They examine their own positionality and assumptions, as well as the ways in which power operates in and through the research process. Second, this method involves a political commitment to being attentive to relations of power, and particularly to those who are marginalized through the current
configuration of the world order (Ackerly and True 2006, 257). Lastly, according to Ackerly and True (2006, 258-259), a feminist theoretical methodology requires conceptualizing the field of knowledge as collective, in which knowledge claims are always-already relational, but in which some claims are given more weight than others due to the ways in which power operates in/through epistemology. In following these practices, Ackerly and True argue that feminist International Relations scholars engage in ongoing collective self-reflection. This reflection helps answer the question of “how to generate a theory of international relations that not merely describes and explains global politics but that contributes to the transformation of global politics through its own theoretical practice” (Ackerly and True 2006, 243) because it allows feminists to recognize the reification of disciplinary and political boundaries that limit the possibilities for International Relations theory and practice. Taken together, the elements of this method have allowed me to engage with the relevant literatures critically and reflexively, and in a way that allows me to foreground the productive nature of my project, i.e., the type of world(s) my project enacts.

**A Few Additional Notes**

A caveat must be made regarding language in this dissertation. While I have made every attempt to capture the notion that worlds or onto-epistemologies are performative, enacted, and unfolding, there are some discursive limitations that arise when speaking of worlds (and when attempting to develop broader concepts and theoretical tools so as to analyze worlds and their unfolding). As Lesley Green (2013a, 562) writes, “[f]inding a grammar for emergence, in a language that is attuned to objects or subjects, is indeed
challenging.” In grappling with this challenge here, I suspect that at times my language around worlds fluctuates between sometimes treating them as objects and sometimes treating them as subjects, when they are, instead, relational unfoldings. In some ways, I do not think I can overcome this challenge entirely (without getting unproductively bogged down in the process), and so I hope that the reader will bear with me as I attempt to think pluriversally with an imperfect language. To be sure, when I refer to a world or onto-epistemology, I mean neither to personify nor objectify it. Instead, worlds should be understood as a complex and emerging web of practices and relations.

I also owe a great amount of gratitude to various ethnographic scholarship. As noted above, the pluriversal project is intimately tied to the field of anthropology, and examples of the deep and pervasive differences that characterize the pluriverse are most often seen (that is, made visible) through rich ethnographies that cross worlds. As will become apparent through this dissertation, I also believe that moral philosophy can only be undertaken in dialogue with contextually specific and detailed analysis of how people live their lives. That is, I see ethics as “a continuing negotiation among people” (Walker 2007, 67, emphasis in original); accordingly, moral claims can only be made by looking at how people live their lives, the struggles they face, and the ways in which their lived-experiences align or conflict with their needs, desires, and interests (Robinson 2015). Following from this, my theoretical work here relies heavily upon three ethnographic examples – two of which have already been introduced (the struggles to protect Ausangate and Whanganui, respectively), and a third which I introduce in chapter five regarding how to care for atiku / caribou. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Marisol de la Cadena (2015) and Mario Blaser (2016; 2018), whose ethnographic work I use here.
to ground continually my theoretical thinking. My hope is that this dissertation demonstrates the fruitfulness of thinking about questions of global ethics in a way that does not lose hold of our material reality and the ways in which we actually do ethics. For this reason, I extend Ulrich Oslender’s (2019, 1703) “impassioned plea for greater consideration and application of ethnographies in decolonial debates,” and, I would add, moral philosophy.

And, finally, I wish to make clear that, in making my argument, the point of advocating a care ethics approach to moral deliberation across deep and pervasive difference is not to suggest that others must adopt this approach (and particularly not others outside of my world). In fact, I believe that pluriversal ethics must be plural in the fullest sense: there are likely multiple ways to approach, understand, and build ethics in the context of multiple worlds, given the very onto-epistemic multiplicity that comprises the pluriverse. Some such approaches have already been articulated, including Mignolo’s de-colonial cosmopolitanism (2010) and Stengers’ cosmopolitical proposal (2005). In putting forth my argument, I do not wish to obfuscate this plurality, and I am not attempting to insist that the meta-ethical tools developed here must be the ethical tools used by others in different worlds.

Instead, I see this dissertation as addressing actors in my own world, which I call modernity. I believe that the modern world has been unable to recognize its own vulnerability; instead, modernity is premised on universal truths and one ‘right’ way of

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25 I provide a brief overview of and engage with these approaches later in the dissertation (specifically, I discuss Mignolo’s work in chapter three and Stenger’s proposal in chapter five).
26 Again, see ‘Outline of Argument’ section below for a brief discussion of what I mean by ‘modernity.’ This is expanded and elaborated upon in chapter two.
being in the world. One of the reasons that I assert a care ethics approach to building a pluriversal ethics is to foreground and flesh out the importance of vulnerable existence – at the onto-epistemological level – in the pluriverse, and particularly for modernity. Vulnerable existence, as I argue in this dissertation, challenges the logic of rationalism which so fundamentally shapes the modern world, and which involves the mastery of mind over body, culture over nature, and certainty over uncertainty. In so doing, I believe that the ethics of care creates an openness to multiple ways of knowing/being (as opposed to asserting a different way of knowing/being meant to replace modern rationalism); this openness can, I believe, help us build a pluriversal ethics without precluding the possibility of a multiplicity of pluriversal ethics.

1.5 Outline of Argument

This dissertation proceeds as follows. The next chapter, chapter two, continues to lay out the central research problem just described via a discussion of the problem of modernity. Specifically, this dissertation departs from the premise that the central obstacle to rethinking global ethics in the context of the pluriverse (or to put it differently, the central obstacle which prevents much of the field of Global Ethics from thinking pluriversally) is modernity. The purpose of this chapter is thus to delineate my understanding of modernity, building particularly upon postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought, and to demonstrate why modernity is an obstacle to building a pluriversal ethics.

In particular, I argue that modernity is a world. By this, I mean modernity is a collective thinking/being/doing (an onto-epistemology); it is an ideology and political philosophy, an understanding of subjectivity and the world, and then a normative
commitment to ordering the world according to these premises. Modernity is therefore also a set of practices and social relations; it is a continual enactment and (re)production of a particular order. Importantly, this enactment and (re)production does not occur within a vacuum. As such, modernity, as a world, is also always-already implicated with and in other worlds. It is demarcated by other worlds and it interacts with other worlds in various material and symbolic ways. Understanding modernity as connected to other worlds foreshadows why this particular definition of modernity is useful in the context of the pluriverse, that is, a matrix of worlds connected through/by relations of power.

In this chapter, I also define power and politics in the context of modernity. Specifically, I suggest that power here can be understood as the ability to claim itself as the universal world (indeed, the only world), and politics is the technical and calculated task of ordering global social relations in the image of that world (thus, to return to Edkins (1999) distinction between politics and the political, modernity operates at the level of politics, not the political). More concretely, I argue that the historical unfolding of modernity was such that modernity was/is able to (re)make social relations in its image (through both material and symbolic means). At the same time, however, I argue that the modern world fails to see how this (re)making of social relations is very much the product of political processes and relationships of power; instead, the modern world mistakes its hegemonic position in the global order for abstract and universal rightness. This chapter concludes with a brief overview of the ways in which postcolonial scholarship, critical theories from within Europe, and decolonial literature have sought to illuminate and decenter modernity’s assertion of itself as the whole of the real.

Chapter three continues the broader discussion about modernity by linking the
Global Ethics literature to the modern world. In particular, this chapter argues that this literature has been complicit in reproducing the binaries and hierarchies that underpin modernity; more exactly, modernity and the Global Ethics literature are co-constitutive. As a result, I argue that (much of) the Global Ethics literature is premised on the same assumptions and binaries as modernity. Because of these theoretical underpinnings, (much of) this literature is not equipped to contemplate ethical horizons in the pluriverse.

More specifically, I return to the task already started in this chapter and assess more fully whether existing approaches in the field of Global Ethics can grapple with the challenge that is the pluriverse. To this end, chapter three draws again upon Hutchings’ (2010) rationalist/alternative framework, with a particular focus on moral cosmopolitanism, discourse ethics, and variants of postmodernist ethics. Through this discussion, I find that all of these approaches are unable to offer a useful vantage point from which to contemplate ethics in/for the pluriverse, albeit for different reasons. In demonstrating why these approaches fail to offer us tools for a pluriversal ethics, however, I am also able to highlight further the normative challenge of the pluriverse. In particular, I contend that the challenge for building an ethics for the pluriversal is characterized by a distinct combination of (1) the need to attend to our shared material existence while simultaneously (2) foregrounding the multiple and actually existing ‘universals’ or onto-epistemologies which comprise the pluriverse. Furthermore, pluriversal ethics must also be able to navigate (3) the problem of incommensurability across difference, and the limits of knowing when differences are at their deepest and most pervasive, or onto-epistemic. To attend to the unique challenges posed by these three attributes, I conclude in this chapter, requires a different orientation to ethics, a
different understanding of morality, and a different set of tools than those offered us by moral cosmopolitanism, discourse ethics, and postmodernist ethics. Beginning to theorize such an orientation and toolkit, drawing upon feminist ethics and particularly the ethics of care, is the task of the remainder of the dissertation.

Chapter four begins this task by laying the theoretical groundwork for my central argument, which is that the ethics of care can provide a useful orientation to contemplate ethics in the pluriverse and build a pluriversal ethics. To this end, this chapter reviews the literature on the ethics of care (see, for example, Gilligan 1993; Hekman 1995; Robinson 1999), with a particular emphasis on its feminist relational ontology, situated epistemology, the ways in which this ontology and epistemology foreground vulnerability, and the broader ways in which the ethics of care reconceptualizes ethics and morality. I also respond to three charges often raised against the ethics of care: (1) that the ethics of care essentializes women and cannot attend to difference; (2) that the ethics of care is only useful for particularistic and close relations, and therefore offers little value for navigating global ethical issues; and (3) that the ethics of care is not a political ethic. In so doing, I develop fully my understanding of the ethics of care as a critical and political theory that is attuned to differences all the way down.

Finally, with this theoretical groundwork laid, chapter five begins the key task of this dissertation, which is demonstrating the ways in which a critical ethics of care can reorient us to contemplate ethics in the pluriverse. To this end, this chapter makes several theoretical arguments. First, I suggest that the pluriversal project is a normative project, and that the moral and ethical dimensions of the pluriverse must be made explicit in thinking about and enacting the pluriverse. In this way, I demonstrate that while the
Global Ethics literature needs to contend with the pluriversal challenge (as I have argued above), the literature on the pluriverse would likewise benefit from a sustained engagement with moral philosophy. To begin such a dialogue, I next draw upon the ethics of care literature to make a distinction between vulnerability and precarity and I consider how this distinction helps us understand the configuration of the pluriverse and the multiple worlds – that is, onto-epistemologies – of which it is composed. This framing, I suggest, redefines ethics in the image of the pluriverse, and foregrounds the ways in which particular ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse always take place within a broader horizon of precarity, whereby certain worlds are rendered ‘more’ or ‘less’ vulnerable than others in and through the processes of ethical deliberation between and among worlds.

More precisely, as the ethics of care literature articulates, vulnerability is an inherent ontological condition of subjects who are embedded in relations of dependency (Gilligan 1993; Robinson 2011c). I suggest that precarity, on the other hand, is intensified vulnerability resulting from unequal distributions of power that render certain subjects more or less vulnerable than others. In this way, vulnerability, I contend, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for precarity. This chapter develops and mobilizes this understanding of vulnerability and precarity so as to understand worlds/onto-epistemologies and to demonstrate how this lens allows us to consider the explicit effects of global material and ideational hierarchies of power – including capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and colonialism – on particular worlds. In this way, this meta-orientation allows us to attend to two ongoing pressing ethical concerns in the pluriverse. First, it provides a lens to analyze why some worlds are marginalized and made precarious in the
pluriverse (while others appear more stable or are more easily reproduced). Second, because the configuration of the pluriverse, and the relations of power which shape the relations between worlds, comprise the backdrop against which ethical dilemmas and conflicts between worlds always unfold, this lens also allows us to understand this background, and thereby better understand ethical dilemmas across worlds.

In developing this meta-orientation, and contemplating this ‘background,’ I also attend to the pluriverse as political (in the sense employed by Edkins (1999) and as described above). Specifically, I argue that thinking about the political relationally (as the ethics of care implores us to do) reveals that the political in the context of the pluriverse involves complex layers of socio-symbolic orders (worlds, onto-epistemologies); as such, the political moment may not occur equally for all worlds involved in a conflict between worlds. Because of this layered ‘politicality,’ I suggest that thinking about the political in the pluriverse requires foregrounding equally the political as associative (a collective coming together) and as dissociative (agonistic and ruptural) (cf. Marchart 2007). The ethics of care, as both a critical and productive ethic, is well positioned to hold these two traits of the political at the fore. I ultimately argue that care ethics provides us with tools to contemplate the political (rethought in the context of multiple partially-connected vulnerable worlds) as (dis)associative, involving relational layers of onto-epistemic rupture and conflict, on the one hand, and onto-epistemic continuity and cooperation, on the other.

Lastly, I conclude the chapter by moving from the preceding meta-ethical discussion to a more concrete example so as to outline other ways in which the ethics of care can help us deliberate and navigate specific ethical conflicts between worlds. I draw
particularly upon an ethnography regarding a conflict over caring for what the modern world calls caribou and the Innu Nation calls atiku (Blaser 2016; 2018). Through this example, I aim to demonstrate how the meta-orientation developed in the previous discussion orients us to contemplate this ethical conflict. In so doing, I also draw out other ways in which the ethics of care can help build a pluriversal ethics and bring my argument full circle: by starting with the ethics of care, it becomes clear that the pluriverse is always-already constituted by morality. Because of this, a pluriversal ethics does not simply refer to the application of ethics to a new global context; instead, building a pluriversal ethics (and particularly building one using the ethics of care) is, I suggest, the very means by which the pluriverse may flourish.

Finally, in chapter six, I return to the field of Global Ethics, and offer some concluding thoughts on what the preceding discussion means for researching and doing global ethics in and for the pluriverse.
This dissertation departs from the premise that the central obstacle to rethinking global ethics in the context of the pluriverse is modernity.\(^1\) While it is notable that critiques of modernity are plentiful,\(^2\) it is not always clear what, exactly, is meant by ‘modernity.’ The purpose of this chapter is to present my particular understanding of modernity, which builds specifically upon postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought. Importantly, this definition of modernity should not be thought of as universal or definitive. Instead, the definition of modernity developed here is a working definition that highlights, as will become evident, the particular aspects of modernity that I believe make it such a formidable foe for pluriversal ethics.

In short, this chapter asserts that modernity is a ‘world.’ By this, I mean that modernity is a collective thinking/being/doing; it is an ideology and political philosophy, an understanding of subjectivity and the conditions of being, and then a normative commitment to ordering social relations according to these premises. Modernity is therefore also a set of practices and social relations; it is a continual enactment and (re)production of a co-constitutive onto-epistemology. Importantly, this enactment and (re)production does not occur within a vacuum: modernity, as a world, is also always-already implicated with and in other worlds. Modernity delineates itself in relation to

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\(^1\) It is noteworthy that the use of the term ‘modernity’ in the singular is contested; in particular, several postcolonial and decolonial scholars have emphasized that there are multiple modernities (see, for example, Chakrabarty 2008; Chatterjee 1997; Chaudhuri 2004; Dussel 1993; Gaonkar 2001). This distinction, and the difference between modernity and modernities, is addressed below.

\(^2\) For instance, postcolonial scholars, decolonial scholars, postmodern and poststructuralist scholars, and various schools of feminist thought have all grappled with the problem of modernity.
other worlds, while also being shaped by (and shaping) other worlds. This, as may be obvious, foreshadows why this particular definition of modernity is useful in the context of the pluriverse, that is, a matrix of worlds connected through/by relations of power.

To explicate this definition of modernity more fully, this chapter employs a conceptual distinction between ‘modernity as thinking’ and ‘modernity as doing’ – although as will become apparent, this thinking and doing are intimately intertwined, and thus constitutive of a world. Distinguishing between the thinking and doing of modernity is therefore simply a heuristic device to help one think through the facets of the world called modernity. Using this device, this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I discuss modernity ‘as thinking.’ This, I suggest, is the way in which modernity sees itself; it is an attempt to describe modernity on its own terms. This narrative has been called ‘Intra-European Modernity’ by scholars like Arturo Escobar (2008) so as to foreground the ways in which this narrative is premised upon a “view of modernity as essentially an European phenomenon […] that can be fully explained by reference to factors internal to Europe” (165). In this self-narrative, I suggest, modernity can be understood as a particular axiological break from the Ancients in the Western philosophical tradition, and thus as a particular type of thinking and orientation to philosophy. This orientation, I argue, is best captured by the idea that Man is the orderer of all around him, i.e., Man is able to master Nature and order the world according to his needs and desires, or sense of moral rightness.³

³ Of course, this is only one of many possible readings of the ways in which modernity fits into the history of philosophy more generally. Thus, the self-narrative I develop here, as emphasized below, is not a unified or explicit feature of all the thinkers of modernity – nor of all thinkers who critique modernity. There are libraries of secondary literature on modernity that I cannot engage with given the scope and purposes of this dissertation. Instead, as will become evident in the following, I rely for the most part on a highly
After reviewing ‘modernity as thinking,’ I then turn to a discussion of modernity ‘as doing.’ Specifically, drawing upon postcolonial, decolonial, Marxist, and feminist scholarship, I describe the historical enactment of the principles derived from modernity ‘as thinking,’ and thus link modernity fundamentally to colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. This conceptual device of ‘modernity as doing’ thereby serves to fracture the mirror in which modernity admires itself in, revealing the ways in which the (seemingly) progressive, rational, and ordered vision supplied by ‘modernity as thinking’ resulted in (and from) a ‘modernity as doing’ comprised of violence, domination, and exploitation.

In the third section, I demonstrate more directly the ways in which ‘modernity as thinking’ and ‘modernity as doing’ map on to one another in order to put forth my conclusion that modernity is a world. That is, by demonstrating the ways in which the thinking and doing of modernity are intimately intertwined and co-constitutive (that is, an onto-epistemology), I assert that modernity is more than a paradigm, or philosophical orientation, or moral system, or political arrangement; rather, modernity, as a whole, is a way of thinking/being/doing that, while fluid and changing, is characterized by an ontological distinction between Man and Nature, a rationalist epistemology, and an axiological bent towards ‘rationally’ ordering the world to meet Man’s needs and desires.

In the final section of this chapter, I then define power and politics in the context of modernity. Specifically, I suggest that power here can be understood as the ability to

selective reading of some key primary sources. Additionally, where I do cite secondary sources, I am simply drawing upon these pragmatically and selectively, as opposed to adopting these perspectives wholesale. Keeping this in mind, my point here is to provide one reading of modernity that is, I believe, particularly important for understanding modernity more generally, and specifically for understanding modernity in the context of this dissertation.
claim itself as the universal world (more precisely, the only world), and politics is the technical and calculated task of ordering global social relations in the image of that world. More concretely, I argue that the ontological distinction between Man/Nature, the rationalist epistemology, and the particular axiology of order underpinning modernity necessarily resulted in a particular historical situation in which modernity now holds the power to (re)make social relations in its image. Further, because of modernity’s self-narrative (what I have called ‘modernity as thinking’), the modern world fails to see how this (re)making of social relations is very much the product of political processes and relationships of power (that is, ‘modernity as doing’); instead, the modern epistemology mistakes modernity’s hegemonic position in the global order for abstract and universal rightness. This limited perspective, as decolonial scholars have noted, is Eurocentrism (Dussel 2000; 2009). This section thus also includes a brief overview of the ways in which postcolonial scholarship, critical theories from within Europe, and decolonial literature have sought to illuminate this Eurocentrism, and decenter modernity’s assertion of its reality as the whole of the real. Lastly, this chapter concludes by briefly returning to the pluriverse to decentre modernity further. The pluriversal literature and the ‘ontological turn,’ I believe, pose an even greater challenge to modernity, and its view of itself as the whole of the real; indeed, as I ultimately argue, this challenge is so robust that it necessitates a rethinking of (modern) approaches to global ethics.

As a final note before proceeding, I wish to reiterate that in building the argument that modernity is a world, I necessarily present an incomplete argument. To recount the entirety of the unfolding of the modern world, and to analyze the various thinkers, texts, and encounters within and of that world, is impossible. I therefore wish to emphasize that
the argument put forth here is in no way meant to be totalizing or complete. Rather, in selecting key concepts and counter-concepts, literatures and counter-literatures, and historical moments and counter-moments, my goal is simply to convince the reader that thinking of modernity as either a type of political philosophy, a historical moment, a set of norms, an epistemological orientation, or a political project is insufficient. Instead, it is all of these at once, and more.

2.1 Modernity as Thinking (Or Intra-European Modernity)

Axiology (from Greek ἀξία, axia, meaning ‘value’ or ‘worth’) refers broadly to the philosophical study of value and goodness of all varieties (Schroeder 2016). It thus encompasses both ethics and aesthetics, or the philosophical contemplation of both the right and the beautiful, respectively. Axiological questions, at their core, encourage us to contemplate the nature of value. What do we value? Why is it of value? What is the good? What is right? What is just? The answers to these questions are not simply of philosophical import; rather, they colour fundamentally how we think of, and act in, the world.

The Western philosophical tradition, I posit, is underpinned by an axiological

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4 Importantly, I am using the term ‘axiology’ in the broadest sense here. There are specific philosophical schools that are often referred to as axiological schools; for instance, ‘value theory,’ tied to consequentialism, is often denoted as an axiological school. I am not concerned with these particular branches of philosophy. Instead, I see axiology as a fundamental category of contemplation, akin to epistemology and ontology, that normatively orients our thinking/being/doing.

5 The categories and claims employed in this first section are, perhaps, problematic. What is ‘Western Philosophy’? Who counts in this tradition and who does not? Shortly I also speak of the ‘Ancients’ and the ‘Moderns.’ Again, to whom do these categories refer? The problem of categorization and classification is a perennial one, and one that is of great concern in this dissertation as a whole. Every time a theory, concept, or category is employed, something is captured, and something is lost. There is also much power in the act of categorization and knowledge creation, as discussed briefly in the introductory chapter, and as is elaborated more fully in the proceeding discussion. This outline of the so-called Western political philosophy tradition does not evade these issues.
assumption that ‘order’ is the right, good, and beautiful. This, of course, is a sweeping claim, one which I cannot defend fully here. At the same time, the claim is thin; what is meant by ‘order,’ what exactly is the source of ‘order,’ and how to achieve this ‘order’ are questions left open for debate. Nonetheless, I believe that thinking of ‘order’ as a founding axiological assumption of the Western philosophical tradition is useful for theorizing the particular change in philosophical orientation that characterizes modernity.

To demonstrate, consider Jane Bennett’s summary (of modernity’s) narrative of the break between the ‘pre-moderns’ and ‘moderns’ of Western philosophy:

Once upon a time there was a (medieval Christian) world where nature was purposive, God was active in the details of human affairs, all things had a place in the order of things, social life was characterized by face-to-face relations, and political order took the form of an organic community experienced as the ‘prose of the world’ (Foucault 1970). But this premodern cosmos gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic nation state. (2009, 127-128)

In this narrative, I suggest, the fundamental shift Bennett identifies can be thought of as a reorientation towards a human-centered order. Premodern Western philosophy, while already oriented towards order, located order outside of — although not apart from — humans. Order, in these views, was a whole that is “the totality of the parts” (Strauss 1959, 39); people were part of this, but not above it. Even more significantly, people were not the source of ordering. Order came from elsewhere. In Plato’s Republic (1991), for instance, order and the good was to be found in the cosmos, a well-ordered universe.

That said, it is worth emphasizing that this section, as outlined above, attempts to recount the self-narrative of modernity. As will later be made clear, this self-narrative is problematically Eurocentric (and patriarchal, racist, and colonial). However, it is necessary to present this narrative in order to arrive at this conclusion, and to demonstrate its Eurocentric biases. In other words, my reproduction of this well-worn biased narrative – and the problematic categories of which it is comprised – is purposeful.
Man could not know the cosmos in full; rather, political philosophy in this tradition was characterized as a “quest for cosmology rather than a solution to the cosmological problem” (Strauss 1959, 39). Augustine (1958), on the other hand, saw God as the source of order; while we can never replicate the order found in the City of God due to original sin, the highest normative task is to attempt to create the order of the City of God as much as possible on an individual and communal basis. In both cases, order exists and is derived from something outside humans; the best people can do is contemplate this order and attempt (always only partially) to find their place in it. As Charles Taylor (1991, 3) summarizes, “People used to see themselves as part of a larger order […] a cosmic order, a ‘great chain of Being,’ in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and/or our fellow earthly creatures.”

The moderns, on the other hand, drastically shifted in terms of their conceptualization of order, and more specifically, in terms of their role within this order. In particular, modern political philosophy eschewed the possibility of a source of order ‘out there;’ Max Weber (1981) famously referred to this as the “disenchantment of the world,” that is, “the secularization of a traditional order that had been imbued with divine or natural purpose” (Bennett 2009, 128). With this ‘disenchantment,’ humans became the ‘orderers.’ As Escobar writes, “Philosophically, one may see modernity […] in terms of the emergence of the notion of Man as the foundation of all knowledge and order of the world, separate from the natural and the divine” (2008, 166, emphasis

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6 Man is here used purposively, to emphasize the masculine bias underpinning this type of thought, as is evident in much of the texts most commonly referred to as exemplary of the Western political philosophical tradition. The linkages between patriarchy and modernity are drawn out more fully in subsequent sections. 7 Weber in fact borrowed this phrase from Friedrich Schiller (Gerth and Wright Mills 1981).
This understanding of humans as the source and agent of order is commonly traced back to the works of Niccoló Machiavelli (1998) and Thomas Hobbes (1985), and involves several theoretical moves, which merit unpacking here. In particular, the following section briefly demonstrates, through a discussion of Machiavellian and Hobbesian thought, the modern ontological assumption that Humans are distinct from, and stand over, Nature, i.e., the cosmos, the natural world, a higher being, a transcendental order, in essence, anything that is non-human. I then discuss the epistemological shift that corresponds to this assumption, starting with the emergence of empiricism and the scientific method, focusing on Baconian science. Next, I discuss the work of John Locke and Immanuel Kant as examples of the (modern) moral and political philosophy that arises from these ontological and epistemological premises. Finally, I end this brief overview of the ‘self-narrative’ of modernity with a discussion of history as progress, drawing particularly on the work of G.W.F. Hegel. History as progress, I contend, incapsulates modernity’s understanding of itself; Man, as distinct from Nature, has cultivated his reason through time until obtaining full self-consciousness, ultimately making this reason manifest in the State. ‘Modernity as thinking’ identifies itself as the moment and site of this development, and thus the pinnacle of progress and development.

**Ontological Binary: Human / Nature**

In *The Prince*, Niccoló Machiavelli (1998) rejects the idea of an “approach to politics which culminates in a utopia” (Strauss 1959, 41), like those that must be envisioned via

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8 Also quoted in Escobar (2007; 2010).
“the construction of an imagined republic or principality, such as Plato’s Republic or St. Augustine’s City of God” (Mansfield 1998, xi). Instead, Machiavelli posits that a political science must depart from politics as it is actually practiced: “politics is thought to be carried on for its own sake, unlimited by anything above it” (Mansfield 1998, vii). In reorienting political thought towards that which exists, Machiavelli also asserts that “no moral rules exist, not made by men, which men must abide by” (Mansfield 1998, vii). Or, as Leo Strauss (1959, 42) explains, “if there is no natural end of man, man can set for himself almost any end he desires. […] The power of man is much greater, and the power of nature and chance is correspondingly much smaller, than the ancients thought.”

In locating man as the source of morality, Machiavelli simultaneously introduces the concept of will. Man, as creators of the good, can control or tame chance and nature with his will. Man no longer needs to attempt to know the good (however imperfectly) so as to bring himself into harmony with nature, the cosmos, or religious deities. Rather, man can directly act upon the world to create order; this is captured in Machiavelli’s famous passage on fortune:

> It is not unknown to me that many have held and hold the opinion that worldly things are so governed by fortune and by God, that men cannot correct them with their prudence, indeed that they have no remedy at all; and on account of this they might judge that one need not sweat much over things but let oneself be governed by chance. […] Nonetheless, so that our free will not be eliminated, I judge that it might be true that fortune is arbiter of half of our actions, but also that she leaves the other half, or close to it, for us to govern. And I liken her\(^9\) to one of these violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another; each person flees before them, everyone yields to their impetus without being able to hinder them in any regard. And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging. It

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\(^9\) It is noteworthy that fortune/the river is denoted female here. The linkage between masculinity/femininity and modernity is developed more fully below.
happens similarly with fortune, which demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dikes have not been made to contain her. (Machiavelli 1998, 98-99)

Fortune, chance, and nature can be mastered by human will – they can be ordered – in Machiavelli’s world.

While Machiavelli certainly does not present a coherent ontology – that is, a cohesive set of claims about what exists in the world (Hutchings 1999, 3) – there is, I suggest, an ontological distinction that emerges from his political science. Now that Man is the orderer, Nature (i.e., change, fortune, and the natural world) is that which is to be ordered. Human and Nature thus come to exist as distinct entities, in opposition to each other. Machiavelli, in other words, provides the philosophical foundations for one of the first fundamental ontological binaries of modernity: Humans / Nature.

Yet the implications of Machiavelli’s thought do not end there. Not only is Man distinct and separate from Nature, but human will means that Man can also act upon Nature. This gives us the second, but intimately related, ontological binary that is foundational for modernity: Subject / Object. Humans contain the capacity to will, to act upon Nature, which is now to be mastered. Thus, the Subject / Object distinction is mapped onto (and co-constitutive of) the Human / Nature binary: Humans are Subjects, while Nature is the Object.

Indeed, from these ontological premises, acting upon Nature (fortune, chance), as part of ordering, becomes normative in character, as the ability of one’s will to master is, for Machiavelli, virtue (virtù). Exercising this virtue leads to glory, earned via one’s ability to will, that is, to create and maintain order over all around you:

I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune
is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity. (Machiavelli 1998, 101)

The hopes of achieving this glory, or cultivating virtue as the exercise of will to master, is normatively good; violence is justified – and even valorized – if it leads Man to master Nature more effectively.

Thomas Hobbes is also a central figure in the creation of the modern imaginary, premised specifically on an ontological distinction between Humans and Nature (Rojas 2016), although he departs from Machiavelli in key ways. Most importantly for the discussion here, the starting point for order in Hobbes is located in “the desire for self-preservation, or negatively expressed, the fear of violent death” (Strauss 1959, 48). For Hobbes, the state of Nature – that is, the pre-social world – is a world demarced by fear and insecurity:

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre as is of every man against every man. For WARRE consisteth not in Battell onely, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, Wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of Time is to be considered in the nature of Warre; as it is in the nature of Weather. For as the nature of Foule weather, lyeth not in a showre or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many dayes together: So the nature of War consisteth not in actuall fighting, but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is

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10 Strauss argues in his discussion of present day (modern) tyranny and classical (ancient) tyranny that the mastery or conquest of nature is, in fact, the quality which distinguishes the two (and thus is key to distinguishing between the classics and the moderns more generally). The classics rejected the mastery of nature as unnatural (“i.e., as destructive of humanity”) (Strauss 1959, 96); as a result, they did not fathom present day tyranny. While I agree with this argument – that the mastery of nature is a key difference between Western classical philosophy and Western modern political philosophy – I locate this difference more fundamentally, as described above, in differences regarding the theorization of the source of and pathway to order.
Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because their fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes 1985, 185-186)

Escaping this solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short existence is the impetus for order for Hobbes.

With this purpose of finding “a way to peace and ‘commodious living’”

(Macpherson 1985, 11), Hobbes develops a “system of politics as a science”

(Macpherson 1985, 10), starting from the Galilean assumption that “everything, including human sensation, is caused by motion, or more accurately by differences of motion”

(Macpherson 1985, 18):

Galileo postulated that motion was the natural state – things moved unless something else stopped them. Hobbes would apply this to the motions of men, would get a system to one another, and would then deduce what kind of government they must have to enable them to maintain and maximize their motion. (Macpherson 1985, 19)

This scientific method, used to deduce the ideal social organization, reduces everything to matter in motion.

In casting everything, human and non-human nature alike, as matter in motion, one could argue that Hobbes also implicitly asserts a conquering of Nature by reason. That is, in Hobbes’ theory, there arises a point where the realities of life in the state of Nature lead Man to consent to the creation of a sovereign (which he calls Leviathan).

This sovereign – and the consent which invokes Him – establishes order and frees Man from a constant fear of death by creating a more general situation of peace. In this
consenting, then, matter in motion is given (a human) order: Man uses his reason to create a collective that allows him to escape the disorder (danger, chaos, unpredictability) of Nature (matter in motion). In this way, in the Hobbesian scientific method and reasoning, Nature, as matter in motion, is mastered; Human becomes ontologically distinct from Nature in man’s capacity to reason and consent to the rule of Leviathan. Again, this separation, in which Human is distinguished from Nature, becomes a primary ontological assumption underpinning the modern onto-epistemology.

**Epistemology: Empiricism and Science**

The separation of Human / Nature, as an ontological move, comes with (and from) a corresponding epistemological shift. Epistemology refers to “the theory of knowledge, a branch of philosophy which is concerned with establishing how (and in relation to what) knowledge claims can be assumed to be reliable” (Hutchings 1999, 4). Modernity’s epistemic orientation, I suggest, is rooted in empiricism and Science (which, as discussed below, later culminates as rationalism).

Empiricism is an epistemology that asserts that knowledge is gained through sensory perception (Locke 2009). With the separation of Human / Nature, Nature is completely outside of Man; Man perceives, and comes to know Nature, through the senses. This epistemology, when understood within the axiological context that order is of value, and that Man is the source of order, suggests Science – that is, the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and controlled experiment – and the scientific method.

Francis Bacon is often acknowledged as the forefather of Science in this tradition.
His philosophy of science is premised on induction, which involves the twofold notion that we can determine general laws from particular observations, and that the same causes will have the same effects time and time again. He writes:

> There are and can be only two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms. And this way is now in fashion. The other derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms at last. This is the true way, but as yet untried. (Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Aphorism XIX; quoted in Johnston 1965, 82)

This second, ‘true way,’ of discovering truth involves empiricist observations and the conduction of repeatable experiments until universal laws are ascertained. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 44) summarizes, understanding is now akin to measurement.

> Significantly, the axiological bent towards order that I have suggested previously is again evident in Bacon’s work, in that establishing order – and particularly an order to benefit humans – intimately shapes the Science project for Bacon. That is, discovering truth and accumulating knowledge through the scientific method is not a neutral activity. Rather, Science becomes a normative task to improve human ends:

> Francis Bacon criticized the traditional Aristotelian sciences for having contributed nothing “to relieve the condition of mankind.” He proposed in their stead a model of science whose criterion of truth would be instrumental efficacy. You have discovered something when you can intervene to change things. Modern science is in essential continuity in this respect with Bacon. (Taylor 1991, 104)

Thus, to take both ontological and epistemological premises together, Humans, as distinct from Nature, can now use their sensory perceptions to observe and conduct experiments so as to measure Nature with the goal of identifying generalizable laws. However, this pursuit of knowledge is not simply for knowledge’s sake. Instead, it is also to order
Nature for Man’s purpose, and to improve Man’s life. From this epistemological standpoint, “one can, in principle, master all things by calculation” (Weber 1981, 139), and “knowledge itself is power [Lat. *ipsa scientia potestas est*]” (coined by Bacon in 1597; quoted in Rodríguez-García 2001, 110), a power exemplified in the mastery of Nature by Man.

**Moral and Political Philosophy**

From these ontological and epistemological groundings, several political theorists propose moral and political philosophies. There is, of course, much variation within and across these theories. However, the relationship between Man and Nature, and the notion of Science and reason, remains a pervasive theme in the body of work that constitutes modern political and moral philosophy. To demonstrate, consider the work of John Locke, and his discussion of the bases of political community. He writes:

> God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. (Locke)

**Notes:**

11 Importantly, and as made evident below, ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ (which appears shortly) refer to very specific understandings of reason and rationality. As Enrique Dussel writes, “We have become accustomed, in the context of explanations of the transition from *mythos* to *lógos*, to understand this process as a leap from the *irrational* to the *rational*, from the concretely empirical to the universal, and from the realm of the senses to the realm of concepts. This is false. They are both rational” (2009, 502, emphasis in original). That is, Dussel points out that all systems of thought “that are proffered with some kind of underlying foundation, regardless of its specific character” are rational within the confines of these foundations (Dussel 2009, 501). However, as developed below, rationality and reason refer to a specific system of thinking and understanding in the modern context, which are simultaneously asserted as the true, universal, and most advanced system of thinking. The normative implications of this are explicated more fully in the rest of this chapter.

12 This reference to God, on the face of things, may seem problematic within this argument, which stipulates that a turning away from God (a turning away from Nature, the cosmos, etc.) is key to modern thinking. However, it is possible that Locke may have simply invoked God to make his text acceptable at the time; indeed, Strauss (1952) argues that many philosophers have had to do this throughout history. Further, for Locke and for the discussion here, whether God literally exists or not is somewhat irrelevant in the sense that Man is on earth and Man has reason and Man can use it to manipulate Nature (i.e., Man is thus an orderer in his own right).
Here, the world has been given to Man, who can exercise his (scientific and empiricist) reason to make use of the world to fulfill his interests and desires; Man thus stands outside of Nature, and further, above it. The natural world is objectified for the comfort of Man. Implicitly, the ontological split between Human / Nature, and the epistemic-normative project of acting upon Nature for the betterment of Man, is again evident here.

From this orientation, Locke develops more fully his theory of political community, underpinned by the concept of ‘property.’ Locke writes:

[...E]very man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatevsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others. (1980, 19, emphasis in original)

For Locke, the individual is his own, belonging to himself (Man is an owner of things, first and foremost himself). Further, when he works on Nature (mixes his labour with Nature), he simultaneously makes it his property; in mixing his property (himself) with Nature, it is reasonable that this Nature becomes his property as well. Property, for Locke, is the key to commodious living;\(^{13}\) in fact, protecting an individual’s property becomes the reasoning behind and justification for the state and the corresponding

\(^{13}\) Strauss (1959, 49) argues that Locke’s concern with commodious living aligns him with Hobbes’ focus on man’s comfort and peace, noting that they differ in one respect: Locke “realized that what man primarily needs for his self-preservation is less a gun than food, or more generally, property. Thus the desire for self-preservation turns into the desire for property, for acquisition, and the right to self-preservation becomes the right to unlimited acquisition.”
political community ordered by government:

MEN being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any, that are not of it. This any number of men may do, because it injures not the freedom of the rest; they are left as they were in the liberty of the state of nature. When any number of men have so consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest. (Locke 1980, 52, emphasis in original)

For Locke (1980, 73), government becomes the means by which society enacts and protects the order of commodious living, where commodious living is most fully realized in private property, that is, the objectification of Nature as that which can be mastered and owned by Man.

Immanuel Kant is another key figure in modernity’s self-narrative, particularly in terms of his moral philosophy. The ontological and epistemological assumptions described above can, again, be seen in Kant. For instance, Kant’s (2005) aim is to affirm human freedom and autonomy in the face of the deterministic natural world. This goal clearly assumes that Humans can be above/apart from (i.e., free from the determinism found in) Nature. More significantly for this dissertation, however, are the ways in which Kant starts – and departs – from the empiricist epistemology (Rohlf 2016) articulated above to locate the source of order ultimately in the mind of Man in the most robust sense.

In particular, while Kant agrees that there is a material world ‘out there,’ he complicates the empiricist notion that Man perceives this external world through pure sensory engagement. Rather, for Kant, it is the role of reason to order said sensory
perceptions. Thus, epistemological processes do not unfold as sensory experiences which provide Man with the raw data that can then be used to inform how he will literally order the world around him. Instead, for Kant, there is an ordering of sense experience itself that occurs with Man’s engagement with the world. Therefore, while Science suggests that Nature is simply mechanistic, and can be known, measured, and ordered by Man, Kant’s critical philosophy says that even mechanistic order is, in a sense, a product of our minds.

Importantly, this theoretical move doubles down on the idea of Man as separate from/over and above the natural world. Order, in this theory, is not a literal mechanistic ordering produced by Man’s labouring on Nature (à la Locke); rather, order is derived wholly from reason located in Man’s mind which categorizes sensory experience, and thus all of Man’s encounters with the material world. As Michael Sandel explains:

[For Kant,] we must presume something further […]. This something further, which we cannot know empirically but must none the less presuppose as the condition of knowing anything at all, is the subject itself. The subject is the something ‘back there,’ antecedent to any particular experience, that unifies our diverse perceptions and hold them together in a single consciousness. It provides the principle of unity without which our self-perceptions would be nothing more than a stream of disconnected and ever changing representations, the perceptions of no one. And while we cannot grasp this principle empirically, we must presume its validity if we are to make sense of self-knowledge at all. (1998, 8)

Or in Kant’s own words:

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them a priori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an a priori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host revolves around the observer, tried to see if he might not have greater success if
he made the observer revolve and left the stars at rest. (1998, 110)

For Kant, “the onus of epistemological discovery [is therefore located] within the cognitive abilities of the individual” (Beattie 2013, 62). From this epistemological grounding, the world in its entirety is objectified by reasoning Man. Reason, for Kant, is universally “the precondition for humans having any sort of experience, morality, or conception of beauty” (Seth 2013, 140).

With reason as the center of knowledge/knowledge creation, Kant moves us from an empiricist epistemology to a rationalist epistemology, and employs this rationalism to formulate his moral philosophy, best outlined in The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals (2005). In particular, Kant argues that the moral law is an imperative of reason, and all human action must adhere to the moral law. The moral law, in other words, transcends particular and contextual concerns and interests. Instead, moral actions must eschew context, embodiment, experience, and emotion (Hutchings 2013, 27; Kant 2005, 72), and depart from a commitment to the moral law; this commitment, in essence, provides the action with its moral worth (Kant 2005, 55). This commitment to the moral law also ensures that Man is not determined by his Nature (not ruled or determined solely by his base interests, desires, needs, etc.); again, the separation of Human / Nature is normatively significant here. Indeed, for Kant, the fact that Man is able to reason and act morally (i.e., in accordance with the moral law) defines his Humanity as such.

The specific content of morality falls under what Kant calls the “categorical imperative” (2005, 74), which is a priori and deduced via the exercise of reason.

14 Amanda Russel Beattie (2013) notes that this is also characteristic of the work of René Descartes (1968) and G. W. Leibniz (1988), who are also key figures in the modern imaginary.
Specifically, the categorical imperative consists of three principles. The first principle asserts that any individual act must be universalizable, that is, justified as valid across all similar contexts (Kant 2005, 81). The second principle necessitates a recognition of Man as an end in himself, and never as a means (Kant 2005, 87). The notion of Man as an end is related to reason, the ability to order human experience into a cohesive consciousness, which according to Kant all men possess. To treat any man as a means is to deny him this capacity, and therefore his human dignity (Sandal 1998, 9). Finally, this second principle is intimately related to the third: the actions of individuals must be in “harmony with the ends of humanity” (Kant 2005, 92), a collective coming together that arises from the mutual treatment of all men as men on the basis of their reason.

Thus, Kant’s ethics, as exemplified in the categorical imperative, requires the disembodiment of reason from the contextual world so as to determine impartial, universal truths that apply to all similar contexts across time and space (mimicking the scientific commitment to repeatability of results) and posits an objective morality (as in, unbiased by context and subjectivity or personal interests, desires, and inclinations, once again mimicking the scientific commitment to impartiality). Adherence to the moral law, as so defined, is representative of the highest form of freedom, and thus constitutive of human dignity, which is the development of Man as an end in himself in the fullest sense.

Lastly, it is worth noting that even in upholding this commitment to impartiality and universalizability, this “thoroughgoing rationalism” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 1) is not purposeless. Rather, it is always underpinned by the axiological assumption of the value of order: rationalism “can help to create a world marked by predictability, order and stability” (Beattie and Schick 2013, 1). Indeed, Kant (2005, 92) ultimately asserts
that the categorical imperative, derived from a rationalist (moral) epistemology, results in “a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws.”

**Progress/History**

As a final point on ‘modernity as thinking,’ I wish to suggest that modernity’s self-narrative – as exemplified in part by the short exploration of the works of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bacon, Locke, and Kant above – can largely be represented in the idea of linear time and history as a progressive unfolding. G.W.F. Hegel’s (1977; 1991) work is perhaps the most widely cited as indicative of this narrative that modernity gives itself. To explain this understanding of history as progress more fully, it is useful to first discuss how Hegel reimagines Kant’s critical philosophy.

As Sanjay Seth (2013) notes, Hegel departs from Kant in that he contends that “there are no knockdown transcendental argument that will establish the truth of certain categories once and for all, only categories through which historical communities know their world and organize their place in it” (141). This historicist lens implies that the ontologies and epistemological approaches, concepts, themes, values, and morals of modernity are specific to modernity. This is a significant step in terms of demonstrating the historical situatedness, as opposed to transcendentality, of all thought:

As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a child of his time; thus philosophy, too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overlap his own time or leap over Rhodes (Hegel 1991, 21-22, emphasis in original)

At the same time, however, the significance of context does not lead Hegel to relativism. Instead, Hegel sees context as meaningful within a broader normative
understanding of the development of rationality; thus, while all thought is a product of its context, these contexts, for Hegel, are already normatively situated along a progressive timeline and can therefore be normatively judged against one another. In other words, the reason that Hegel avoids relativism is that situatedness for Hegel is always-already vertical – where some systems of knowledge/ways of being are located beneath others in the ladder of history. This, it is important to emphasize, is a very different orientation to the significance of context than in the case where situatedness is conceptualized horizontally (i.e., all contexts as creating their own systems of meaning making, with no prior judgements upon the validity or value of these different systems of meaning making in relation to one another).

Hegel describes this ladder of history in detail, positing the top of the ladder – constituted as the end goal that all of history is working towards – as absolute knowing or full self-consciousness (Hegel 1977), that is, consciousness that is in and for itself, or “Thought, quite freely determining itself” (Hegel 1988, 16). Importantly, however, part of full self-consciousness being in and for itself is that this consciousness must not reside solely in the mind; rather, it must be enacted in the world. That is, Thought cannot remain merely abstract; it must become concrete in the world. For Hegel, this concreteness is most fully manifested in the State: “the State is the realization of freedom, i.e., of the absolute end-goal, and that it exists for its own sake” (Hegel 1988, 41).

To summarize, then, modernity’s self-narrative – constituted by an ontological distinction between Man / Nature and a scientific, rationalist epistemology – leads to a conceptualization of “modernity as a privileged historical moment and a privileged site, one where the facts and processes that have always governed human history finally
become discernable, revealing what has always been true but could not be fully grasped until now” (Seth 2013, 142). With this full ‘grasping’ of consciousness, Man is cemented in his position as orderer, and order can be obtained. Man can reflect critically upon the world and his role in it, and via the establishment of institutions – particularly the state – enact order that maximizes human freedom. Indeed, “in the State […] freedom attains its objectivity, and lives in enjoyment of this objectivity” (Hegel 1988, 42), and in this world “human beings, individually and collectively, can and must make their own history” (Amin 2009, 13). As Seth (2013, 142) astutely points out, “modernity’s self-understanding is the self-consciousness of this fact [or narrative, as I have called it here].” For this reason, I would emphasize that Hegel’s observation that philosophy is its own time incapsulated in thought applies equally to his own work. Hegel’s philosophy, as outlined briefly here, can be understood as modernity’s progressivist narrative incapsulated in thought.

2.2 Modernity as Doing

The previous section, ‘Modernity as Thinking,’ outlined some of the key ontological and epistemological assumptions, concepts, and theories that shape the modern imaginary. In particular, the section argued that modernity can be thought of as underpinned by an ontological distinction between Man and Nature, a Scientific and rationalist epistemology, and a very specific axiological commitment to order, in which Man is the orderer of Nature. This axiological commitment emphasizes that, in addition to modernity as a world view or paradigm (a ‘thinking’), modernity also involves a strong normative orientation to ‘doing’ and enactment. Man as orderer must not simply think
and contemplate order; he must call it into being.

To explain more fully this component of modernity, what I am here calling modernity ‘as doing,’ this section moves away from modernity’s ‘self-narrative’ and towards an exploration of modernity ‘from elsewhere.’ That is, the self-narrative described above, as noted by Escobar (2008), is Eurocentric; the thinkers discussed were all European, and were writing in and of Europe. In shifting from Europe to a more global perspective, a different narrative – or more accurately, multiple narratives – of modernity emerge; these narratives complicate the Intra-European narrative of progress as located solely in the development of (Western-European) self-consciousness, reason, and the state. Instead, these perspectives reveal that which is hidden by modernity’s self-narrative. Specifically, this hidden side is “the modern colonial world system[,] the ensemble of processes and social formations that encompass modern colonialism and colonial modernities” (Escobar 2010, 39). Or, as Walter Mignolo succinctly summarizes, it turns out that “‘modernity [as thinking]’ is [in fact,] a European narrative that hides its darker side,15 ‘coloniality’” (n.d., 39). More precisely,

15 Mignolo provides the following note regarding his use of the term ‘dark’ in this way (used similarly in his book Darker Side of the Renaissance (2003)), given that it has been mobilized in racist and colonial ways in a variety of contexts:

I have been asked through the years if I feel comfortable with the word darker in the Darker Side of the Renaissance. The first time was by a student who pointed to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and to references to Africa as the "Dark Continent." While the argument in the Darker Side of the Renaissance lays ground for disputing common knowledge in which Africa is seen as "dark" and "dark" is seen as bad, I selected the adjective precisely in contradistinction to the image of the “Dark Age” that the Renaissance projected toward the Middle Ages. The “Dark Age” in Europe was that period between the white columns of Greece's Parthenon, the blue and sunny sky of Mediterranean Rome, and the light, of course, of the Enlightenment. But if that “darkness” was recognized by European men of letters, one of its “darker sides,” slavery, was not acknowledged as such, but portrayed as bringing “light” and civilization to the colonies, as a necessary step toward progress and civilization and good business for merchants from Portugal, Spain, France, Holland, and England. After pondering these issues and looking for alternatives, I realized that the image of Africa as the “Dark Continent” is indeed one of the many hypocrisies of Western modernity. It is, in terms that will become clear below, part of the rhetoric of modernity
“modernity” is a complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, “coloniality.” Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality. (Mignolo 2011, 3)

Engagement with histories and theories of colonialism, as well as with critical postmodern theories like Marxism and feminism which further emphasize the ways in which colonialism is co-constitutive of other systems of power (specifically racism, capitalism and patriarchy), reveals this ‘darker’ side, and illuminates how the doing of modernity has fundamentally involved violent oppression and domination of not only Nature (which is explicitly stated in the modern imaginary), but also of many different people.

This section seeks to engage with some of these histories and theories to illuminate these hidden aspects of modernity. Modernity is not only a thinking; rather, modernity is also characterized by doing, by which I specifically mean the (re)arrangement and (re)creation of a variety of social relations. These social relations, while complex and intertwined, may be analytically sorted into four systems of power: colonialism, racism, capitalism and patriarchy. The following discussion provides brief snapshots of historical moments related to one, or more, of these systems (as will become evident, these systems are co-constituted and mutually enforcing, albeit it in complex ways) to trace, and provide examples of, how these systems of power (re)ordered global (geographic racism) hiding the logic of coloniality (legitimization of either to disregard racialized places or to justify the "saving missions," implied in the rhetoric of modernity, from religious orders to philanthropic billionaires and institutions working to end poverty in Africa). After much debate with myself and consultations with Reynolds Smith, I decided to name this book The Darker Side of Western Modernity. (2011, xix-xx, emphasis in original)

In this way, Mignolo intends his use of the word to highlight the hypocrisy of the view that modernity is ‘enlightened.’
relations in the context of modernity.16

Colonialism, Racism, Capitalism and Patriarchy

While European historians and philosophers have located modernity as arising in “seventeenth century northern Europe (especially France, Germany, England), around the processes of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution” (Escobar 2010, 35), Enrique Dussel (1993) locates the ‘birth’ of modernity much earlier, in 1492,17,18,19 with the first colonial encounter between Spain and the Americas. His analysis, drawing upon a world systems theory approach (see, for example, Arrighi 2010; Wallerstein 2004) is worth quoting at length:

At the end of the fifteenth century, Spain was the only European power with the capacity of external territorial conquest, as it demonstrated in the conquest of the Kingdom of Granada from Islamic rule in 1492, the last phase in the centuries-long “reconquest” and colonization of Andalusia. Until that moment, Europe had been itself the periphery of a more powerful and “developed” Islamic world (just as, until Columbus, the Atlantic was a secondary ocean). The Iberian Reconquest,

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16 Importantly, and as with the preceding section, the review here is necessarily partial and incomplete. Further, I cannot emphasize enough that in this section I am not attempting to put forth any causal argument. I am not asserting, for instance, that capitalism could not have developed without colonialism, or that patriarchy exists only within the context of modernity. Instead, I am simply arguing that these systems of power either arose or took on a particular form in this historical moment (where moment refers to several hundreds of years and is unlimited by geography) and that the ways in which these systems of power (re)shaped social relations is a key part of modernity, which, as I alluded to earlier and as is developed in the next section, I define as a world. The only exception to this caveat is colonialism, which as stated above, has been theorized as key to the emergence of modernity (colonialism and modernity were born at the same moment). This argument is also developed more fully in the section below.

17 As Escobar (2007; 2008; 2010) notes, locating this earlier origin of modernity/coloniality is a key feature of the decolonial school; this school is outlined more fully below.

18 While I largely follow Dussel’s account of the origin of modernity/coloniality here, Dussel acknowledges that his account is one of many ‘views on modernity’ (2000, 470). Thus – while beyond the scope of this discussion to interrogate more fully – it is possible (and perhaps even to be expected) that aspects of Dussel’s account are contestable and debatable.

19 It is noteworthy that this date is several years before the publication of Machiavelli’s The Prince (originally published in 1532), which in some ways is framed as the starting point of modernity within its self-narrative (as described above). It is important, however, to emphasize once again that these two sections, ‘Modernity as Thinking’ and ‘Modernity as Doing,’ are not meant to map neatly or linearly onto each other. Rather, both sections provide necessarily limited and incomplete snapshots of key aspects of modernity which, as is ultimately argued in this chapter, is a complex world.
with the extreme sectarian violence it unleashed in its final stages (broken treaties, elimination of local elites, endless massacres and tortures, the demand that the conquered betray their religion and culture under pain of death or expulsion, the confiscation and repartition in feudal form of lands, towns, and their inhabitants to the officers of the conquering army) was, in turn, the model for the colonization of the New World. (Dussel 1993, 67)

With the ‘skills’ developed during the Iberian Reconquest – in particular, how to execute extreme violence, religious conversion, and the appropriation of land – Spain was equipped to set out and ‘conquer the Atlantic’ (Dussel 2009, 507):

Although our continent [Latin America] was already known to Europe – as the 1489 world map of Henricus Martellus in Rome demonstrates – only Spain, thanks to the political ability of the Catholic kings and the daring of Columbus, attempted formally and openly, with the corresponding assumption of rights and privileges (and in open competition with Portugal), to launch itself toward the Atlantic in search of a route to India. (Dussel 1993, 67)

This historical moment, when analyzed from a world perspective (Dussel 2000, 470), is significant for Dussel and other decolonial scholars because it marks the first time in history when “the whole planet became the space of one world history” (Dussel 2000, 470). That is, the conquering of the Atlantic and the emergence of Spain as the “first ‘modern’ nation”20 – characterized by a cohesive and unified peninsula (resulting from

20 As noted in footnote 18 above, Dussel’s account presented here can most certainly be debated. This point, in particular, may be contentious, as other scholars have located the emergence of the nation elsewhere. Benedict Anderson (2006, chapter four), for example, argues that the ‘imagined community’ of the nation was born somewhat later, specifically in the colonial context of South America in 1760-1830 (the idea was then exported to Europe). However, Dussel’s location of the emergence of modernity in 1492 is meant to challenge dominant (European) narratives of the rise of modernity (he specifically cites Jürgen Habermas’s (1988) account, in which Habermas argues that the key historical events for the creation of the principle of modern subjectivity are (starting in the 15th century) the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution). In challenging this narrative, and locating the emergence of modernity at an earlier date of 1492, Dussel’s account likewise locates the rise of the modern nation at an earlier point in time. More specifically, Dussel sees 1492-Spain as holding the following attributes “a state that unified the peninsula, a top-down national consensus created by the Inquisition, a national military power (since the conquest of Granada), one of the first grammars of a vernacular language (Antonio de Nebrija’s Castilian Gramática in 1492), and the subordination of the church to the state, thanks to Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros” (2000, 470); it is based on these characteristics that Dussel asserts that Spain in 1492 is the first modern nation.
the national consensus created by the Inquisition), a national military power, and the subordination of the church to the state – “allowed Spain to begin the first stage of modernity: world mercantilism” (Dussel 2000, 470). Within this world history, Europe (first Spain and Portugal, later Holland, France, and England) become the center, and the rest of world, starting with Latin America (Dussel 1993, 67), became the periphery. Thus, the idea of world history, and, more fundamentally, of an interconnected globe, could be conceived for the first time with the advent of colonialism (Quijano 2000).

Furthermore, because of these new global relations of power, the center was able to accumulate wealth through its expansion projects and the conquests (i.e., the silver mines of Potosí and Zacatecas allowed Spain to accumulate sufficient monetary wealth to defeat the Turks at Lepanto in 1571 (Dussel 2000)); 21 this accumulation of wealth, and world mercantilism, in part provided the early seeds for the eventual development of capitalism, another system of power which fundamentally restructured social and material life around the globe (Arrighi 2010, 86-129). In other words, this colonial encounter, and the subsequent ongoing colonialism, fundamentally reshaped social relations between societies across the globe, with some societies positioned as superior (the core, the powerful, the conquerors) and others positioned as inferior (the periphery, the less-powerful, those to be conquered). Significantly, this hierarchy also maps on to a subject/object distinction, whereby the colonizers were seen as agents, 

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21 Additionally, these expansion projects also provided the context in and through which the seeds of certain concepts key to the modern imaginary – social contract, private property, rights, and not least, international law – began to take shape. More precisely, the conquests, and the encounters of the ‘center’ with the ‘periphery,’ would provide historical material to justify aspects of the theories of key modern philosophers, including those discussed above (by corollary, these theories would also justify the violent and brutal practices involved in the conquests and colonial project). This is discussed more fully in the next section.
autonomous, independent) and the colonized were objectified as non-persons or non-agents.

Importantly, colonialism, and the consequences of this reordering of the global hierarchy, remain today, although its particular manifestations may have changed. For instance, Glen Coulthard (2014) demonstrates that while “colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence” in recent times, colonialism is still reproduced in the enticement of “Indigenous peoples to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society” (25, emphasis in original). In these cases, Indigenous peoples must internalize colonial logic, and must adopt the colonizer’s form of recognition, reproducing the colonial relation. “The terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power to bestow on their inferiors in ways that they deem appropriate” (Coulthard 2014, 39).

Humanitarian aid is similarly shaped by colonialism and serves to reproduce colonialism. For instance, David Rieff (2002) and Neta Crawford (2002) both illustrate the ways in which the moral and ideological foundations of colonialism underpin humanitarianism, which functions based upon a binary distinction between those who provide aid (generally white wealthy Westerners) and those who receive aid (largely people of colour from the Global South). This ‘us’ versus ‘them’ binary (Edkins 2003, 255) mirrors the subject/object distinction described above; those who receive aid “are treated as lives to be saved, lives with no political voice” (Edkins 2003, 256). Giorgio Agamben (1998) calls this ‘bare life:’ those who are the receivers of humanitarian intervention are conceptualized purely on biological terms (that is, the focus is always
only on meeting biological material needs). Those designated as bare life are never conceptualized regarding the potentialities of the lives they live in a more robust qualitative sense. As a result of this biological reductionism, the receivers of aid (again, largely people of colour from the Global South, or from the areas of the world that were made ‘peripheral’ in and through the colonial encounter) are also deprived of a sense of humanity, of being seen as lives beyond base material needs. As a result, the ‘us’/’them’ distinction is also hierarchized, with ‘us’ indicating a qualitatively robust life and ‘them’ indicating ‘bare life.’ It is up to the ‘us’ to ‘save’ the ‘them;’ this saving can be done without meaningful involvement of those receiving the aid, resulting in a paternalism which justifies this unequal exchange by claiming that it is in the best interests of the aid receivers (see, for example, Barnett 2012). Further, this distinction echoes “geographically, racially or ethno-culturally grounded models of a hierarchical scale of civilizations” (Kurasawa 2013, 202), a hierarchy produced by colonialism.

Even things that appear mundane – such as the ways in which modern maps are drawn, and the importance of boundaries to the nation state – are (in addition to having been among its key ‘technologies’) remnants of the colonial encounter, in which new lands were ‘discovered,’ renamed, redrawn, and claimed by the colonizers (Smith 2012, 52-55). The hierarchy between colonizer and colonized, and the global ordering that arose from and mirrors this hierarchy, continues to serve as a key axis around which our (global) social relations function.

With this global hierarchy of core-periphery/conquerer-conquered/colonizer-colonized also emerged a system of categorization based on race, and by extension, racism, the system which hierarchizes people based on race. As Aníbal Quijano writes:
At the same time, in the same historical moment, and for the first time in the history of humankind, along with America there was produced a new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations: the idea of ‘race,’ as biologically structural and hierarchical differences between the dominant and dominated. So these relations of domination came to be considered as ‘natural.’ And such an idea was not meant to explain just the external or physiognomic differences between dominants and dominated, but also the mental and cultural differences. And since both terms of such a relationship were considered, by definition, superior and inferior, the associated cultural differences were codified as well, respectively, as superior and inferior by definition. (2000, 216)

The construction of racial categories and the classification of peoples by these categories resulted in new social identities: whites, blacks, Indians, and so on (Quijano 2010, 250).

The creation of these social identities, and the ordering of these peoples into hierarchy based on these social identities, became possible in the context of colonialism, as racism served to justify the colonial project, and the conquering of some peoples by others.

In addition to justifying the colonial project, however, racism also led to particular manifestations of the conquering of peoples; for instance, the transatlantic slave trade, whereby black Africans were completely dehumanized, violently displaced and brought to the Americas to perform labour under the most brutal conditions, is intimately premised upon and tied to racism. In this way, racism also came to inform relations of production (Rawley 2005); the transatlantic slave trade involved a division of labour based upon race whereby people of colour were reduced to commodities and white people were the owners of the means of production (including labour and labourers).

Racism also became further entrenched through scientific racism, the belief that scientific evidence exists to justify racist beliefs. For instance, in the eighteenth century, the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, argued in his *Histoire Naturelle, generale et particulier* (2008) that all races had a single Caucasian origin, but
that other races came about from a ‘deterioration’ process – these races were thus framed as lesser, defective versions of the white race (Sloan 1973). Scientific racism was further developed based upon evolutionary theories and works such as Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (2003) and Herbert Spencer’s *The Principles of Sociology* (2004) which linked skin tone to ability and human behaviour (Dennis 1995). In particular, while Darwin focused primarily on evolution in the context of non-humans, Spencer applied evolutionary thinking to human sciences. In this application, Spencer stipulated that racial conflict was key to social evolution and progress as it was a central mechanism by which the ‘weaker’ were outrun and dominated by the ‘stronger’ (Greene 1963, 85; also discussed in Dennis 1995, 244). Other scientific racist practices, such as craniometry (the measurement of skulls to prove racial inferiority), the eugenics project (social engineering based on a perceived hierarchy of biological traits), and even in more recent times, IQ testing (Dennis 1995), flourished for many years, bolstering racism, and ultimately justifying many of the most heinous racial crimes, including slavery in the United States of America, South African apartheid, and the Holocaust.

While scientific racism has been (generally) rejected, racism as a system of power, and the ideological remnants of scientific racism, continue to shape social relations today. For instance, ‘white’ and ‘black’ now serve as signifiers of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ or ‘clean’ and ‘dirty;’ Ann McClintock’s (1995) analysis of soap advertisements in the Victorian era demonstrates how these meanings were mobilized to sell soap and other cleaning supplies. Specifically, in these advertisements, “the whitening agent of bleach promises an alchemy of racial upliftment through historical contact with commodity culture” (McClintock 1995, 220). Robbie Shilliam (2015) explains how racism is now
part of “the institutional bedrock” of criminal justice systems in the United States and New Zealand (and indeed, elsewhere); this can be seen in the bloated Black and Māori prison populations in these countries. Frantz Fanon’s (2004; 2008) work on how racism affects the psyche of both white people (who are, within the racist system, the superior group) and people of colour (the inferior groups) further demonstrates how racism permeates all aspects of our lives, even in seemingly mundane encounters. For instance, Fanon writes that “there is nothing more exasperating [as a black man] than to hear: ‘How long have you lived in France? You speak such good French’” (2008, 18). This seemingly quotidian exchange, according to Fanon’s analysis, in fact reveals that “the European has a set idea of the black man” (2008, 18) – this man cannot be European – and points to the burden the black man experiences as this ‘set idea’ is constantly projected onto him. Racism, like colonialism, fundamentally restructured, and continues to structure, social relations in complex and specific ways, but always according to a hierarchy with white people at the top.

The social relations of production also underwent a significant transformation in the context of modernity, with the development and expansion of capitalism. Capitalism is a political economic system in which the means of production are privately owned (by individuals, corporations) and workers – now divorced from the means of production and the outputs of their work – sell their labour to the owners of the means of production for a wage. According to Karl Marx’s (1977, 320-332) analysis of capitalism, this wage relation produces ‘surplus-value;’ labour-power is a unique commodity that can produce value greater than its own exchange-value (wage). The fact that the organization of production under capitalism produces surplus-value distinguishes it from other modes of
production (Mandel 1977, 32).

While the emergence of capitalism in the 16th and 17th centuries\(^{22}\) offered some new possibilities in terms of social relations (for instance, both the end of feudalism and the possibility of accumulating surplus-value created the potential for social mobility), capitalism also functions as a distinct system of domination.\(^{23}\) As a system, capital functions to produce ever more surplus-value; in this pursuit, capitalism reorganizes the relations of production to maximize the production of surplus-value. As surplus-value is created by the unique commodity labour-power, this reorganization involves separating the worker from their labour and product. For Marx, this separation violates “the species being (\textit{Gattungswesen}), the human essence of real humans – that is to say what separates them from animals, namely that they developed their potential and ability through labour” (Heinrich 2004, 21). Now, workers are alienated from their work, from that which is their essence, and thus from themselves. In this way, even the innovative aspects of capitalism – whereby technology and knowledge are greatly advanced in the pursuit of surplus-value – end up dominating the worker. As Marx writes:

> Factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; at the same time, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity. Even the lightening of the labour becomes an instrument of torture, since the machine does not free the worker from the work, but rather deprives the work itself of all content. Every

\(^{22}\) The origin of capitalism is much debated, and it is beyond the breadth of this dissertation to discuss this fully here. This view follows that of Giovanni Arrighi (2010) and other world-systems thinkers.

\(^{23}\) As Michael Heinrich (2004) emphasizes, this form of domination is unique in that in pre-capitalist societies, “exploitation rested upon a relationship of personal domination and dependency: the slave was the property of his owner; the serf was bound to his respective lord. […] Under capitalist relations, wage labourers enter into a contract with a capitalist. Wage labourers are \textit{formally free} (there is no external force that compels them to sign a contract, and contracts, once signed, can be annulled later) and are \textit{formally equal} to capitalists” (14-15, emphasis in original). However, substantively, the systematic nature of capitalism, and the divorcing of producers from the means of production, involves a particular form of domination, whereby labourers are obliged – in order to meet their material needs – to enter into these contracts and sell their labour for a wage.
kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour process but also capital’s process of valorization, has this in common, but it is not the worker who employs the conditions of his work, but rather the reverse, the conditions of work employ the worker. (1977, 548)

In addition to this dispossession of humans’ innermost potentiality, the pursuit of surplus-value under capitalism also involved direct physical harms. For instance, in chapter fifteen of *Capital Volume I* (1977), Marx discusses the working conditions in the factories in England during the Industrial revolution; these conditions included excessively long shifts, the employment of children, and the continual lowering of wages (thereby affecting the worker’s ability to provide for themselves). Together, these conditions led the factory to become a “House of Terror” (Marx 1977, 388; see also Harvey 2010, 148). While working conditions in some parts of the world have improved, under capitalism we still see workers struggling to survive on menial wages, working excessively long hours, and facing poor working conditions (see, for example, Ehrenreich 2001).

The emergence of capitalism was also violent and involved what Marx calls “primitive accumulation.” Primitive accumulation refers to the processes by which the means of production were seized from the producers, thereby creating the conditions by which people were forced to sell their labour for a wage.²⁴

The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker form the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the

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²⁴ While Marx discusses primitive accumulation as a now passed historical event, more recent scholarship has highlighted the ongoing nature of this dispossession. For instance, David Harvey (2004) discusses accumulation by dispossession, referring to ongoing processes of privatization of public goods and services, and the financialization of the economy. Silvia Federici (2004), as discussed in more detail below, highlights how primitive accumulation involved and continues to involve the disruption and destruction of communal knowledge practices as well as the policing of female bodies.
immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital. (Marx 1977, 874-875)

In other words, as David Harvey writes, primitive accumulation “is about the violent dispossession of a whole class of people from control over the means of production, at first through illegal acts, but ultimately, as in the enclosure legislation in Britain, through actions of the state” (2010, 293). Outside of Europe, primitive accumulation took an even more brutal form:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blacks, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. (Marx 1977, 915)

The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there. (Marx 1977, 918; also quoted in Heinrich 2004, 17).

The connection between primitive accumulation outside of the European context, on the one hand, and the colonial project and racism, on the other, is undeniable here; clearly, the violence of racist colonialism played a key role in the emergence of capitalism. As Marx (1977, 926) famously writes, “capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”

Capitalism, like colonialism and racism, continues to organize and shape our social relations – and particularly the social relations which most directly impact our material well-being – at a fundamental level. Workers are still deprived of the surplus-value they accumulate, while ownership of the means of production grows increasingly concentrated in the hands of a small group (Piketty 2017). Capital has also coopted new
markets, particularly the so-called knowledge economy, which “places the generation of ‘human capital’ at the center of its concerns, that is to say the promotion of the knowledge, aptitudes and experiences that convert a social actor into an economically productive subject” (Castro-Gómez 2007, 437). The commodity – which under capitalism, is fetishized and appears as the form of all value – shapes all aspects of social interactions; under consumer society, the suggestion is that “consumption itself can provide the meaning and identity that modern humans crave, and that it is largely through this activity that individuals discover who they are, as well as succeed in combating their sense of ontological insecurity” (Campbell 2004, 42; quoted in Vázquez 2010, 9). The class hierarchy inherent to the capitalist system – whereby workers face precarity and material insecurity due to the wage relation – is now a global hierarchy; even groups who have different economic systems (i.e., non-capitalistic economies) are constituted, in part, by being other than capital.

Finally, patriarchy – a system of power structured along gendered lines, with men holding the power and women subordinated to men – also manifested in particular ways within modernity. In particular, notions of masculinity and femininity became coded along a variety of binaries. That is, within the modern context, gender does not refer simply to ‘biological’ differences; rather, as V. Spike Peterson (2003) explains, “gender

25 Importantly, and as mentioned previously, I am not asserting that patriarchy originated in modernity (or that patriarchy was essential to the emergence of modernity). This is a debated topic. For instance, Maria Lugones (2007) argues that gender – along with race – is a colonial construct and thus never an organizing principle in tribal communities. Rita Laura Segato (2003), on the other hand, finds evidence of patriarchy amongst the pre-colonial Yoruba people, and argues that patriarchy thus exists outside of modernity (although in a distinct form) (see also de Lima Costa 2016). To review fully the debates on this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I am here emphasizing that within the context of modernity, relations of power were organized along gendered lines in particular ways. As is discussed below, this particular organization of gender is constitutive of modernity as it has historically unfolded.
is a systemic *social construction* that dichotomizes not only men – women but also identities, behaviors, and expectations as masculine – feminine” (31, emphasis in original). Those identities, behaviours, and expectations coded as masculine are then valued above those coded as feminine. For instance, J. Ann Tickner (1997, 614) notes the following gendered dichotomies, with the left column being more valued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine / Feminine</th>
<th>Power / Weakness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy / Dependence</td>
<td>Rationality / Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public / Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And to this I would add:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject / Object</th>
<th>Human / Nature</th>
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Of course, this gender system of codification is not merely symbolic; social relations were (and are) (re)organized along these lines. For instance, in Europe, women were relegated to the household (the so-called private sphere) and excluded from politics (the public sphere) (Towns 2013). As Anne Phillips explains:

Successive legislation in a range of countries closed off avenues for women’s political involvement. In 1778, the British House of Commons introduced a prohibition on women attending or listening to parliamentary debates; in 1832, it expressly closed off any future slippage into votes for women by introducing the language of “male person” (no longer just person) into suffrage legislation. In France in 1793, political organisations for women were dissolved; in 1848, decrees prevented women creating or belonging to political clubs or associations. In previous periods, female engagement in politics, including the not infrequent cases of women ruling as queens or queen mothers, had often generated anxiety,
but not been subject to explicit prohibition. It was in the so-called age of modernity that this came to be seen as at odds with advanced or civilized ideals. (2018, 845)

Labour was also divided according to gendered lines in modernity, with housework – or ‘social reproduction’ – falling primarily under the purview of women’s work. This work was not paid and was also symbolically devalued (as non-productive), despite the fact that, as many materialist feminists have shown, it is a key component of the capitalist system, as this social reproduction (re)produces and replenishes new and existing labour (see, for example, Federici 2012; Hennessy and Ingraham 1997; James 2012).

The restructuring of gender relations took on particular forms in the context of colonialism as well. For instance, Partha Chatterjee (1990, 249) discusses how women in Bengal were relegated to the home during the Bengali nationalist movement in the last decades of the nineteenth century because the nationalist agenda refused to make “the women’s question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state.” Here, the allocation of women to the ‘private’ sphere is situated and justified within the nationalist, anti-colonial project. In a different context, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2005) traces how the colonial encounter between Europe and Iran reshaped gender and sexual relations within Iran. In particular, Najmabadi notes that nineteenth century Iranians became acutely aware that adult man-amrad love

27 Iran was never colonized by European powers, although I would still describe the encounter between Iran and Britain in the late nineteenth century as a colonial encounter which resulted in a great reshaping of Iran, including the implementation of a modern Iranian state.

28 While gender and sexuality are distinct, the “cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (Butler 1990, 24). In other words, within the symbolic matrix of gender, sexuality is intimately linked to gender in particular heteronormative ways. Thus, within this matrix it is logical that attempting to assert a particular heteronormative sexuality will simultaneously involve asserting a particular gender performance, and vice versa.

29 This is a Persian term for young men without beards.
and sexual practices prevalent in Iran were considered vices by Europeans. As “another gaze” entered the scene of desire, Iranian men interacting with Europeans in Iran or abroad became highly sensitized to the idea that their desire was now under European scrutiny. Homoerotic desire had to be covered. (2005, 4)

Part of this ‘covering’ involved an entrenchment of gendered beauty norms. In early Qajar Iran, notions of beauty were undifferentiated by gender; by the end of the nineteenth century, beauty was feminized (2005, 26). Further, in eschewing homoeroticism under the European gaze, the nineteenth-century heteronormalization of love shaped other political and cultural relations. For instance,

feminization of the category “beloved” [to emphasize heterosexuality] made the figure of Iran as a female beloved available to the male national brotherhood. Heteronormalization of love thus performed patriotic labour, making the entire discourse of protection of women – a body that needs to be defended against alien designs, intrusion, and penetration – and the defense of honour available to nationalism. Iran as a female beloved, in turn, consolidated love as heteroeros. (Najmabadi 2005, 7)

Thus, even when modern gender norms and meanings were not directly imported or enforced, these norms, within the context of colonial encounters, shaped gendered relations in non-European societies as well.

While the particular form of these gender relations has shifted – for instance, women are increasingly gaining access to politics – the devaluing of that which is coded feminine remains pervasive today. For instance, care work, both coded as feminine and disproportionately done by women of colour, remains undercompensated and undervalued (see, for example, Duffy 2011; Waring 1999). Dependency and vulnerability, also coded feminine and positioned in opposition to masculine independence and autonomy, are likewise seen as something to be overcome and mastered, as opposed to an inherent quality of the human experience (Beattie and Schick
Emotion, coded feminine, is seen as less than – and even a hindrance to – rationality, coded masculine and seen as the ultimate form of moral reasoning (Gilligan 1993). Indeed, the devaluing of the feminine manifests in more directly material ways as well; violence against women, as Lee Lakeman and colleagues (forthcoming) argue, is both key to upholding the patriarchal system which subordinates women to men, and a consequence of this system, which normatively justifies the domination of women by men. Patriarchy, which organizes gender relations such that cis-gendered men are positioned above all other genders, continues to serve as a primary organizing principle of our social relations.

Finally, and as mentioned above, while describing these four systems of power – colonialism, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy – in isolation from one another is analytically useful, these systems were (and continue to be) unfolding, interacting, and indeed co-constituting each other all at once. Silvia Federici’s rich analysis in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), which explores the history of the body during the transition to capitalism, is an exemplary piece of scholarship that demonstrates (some of) the integral connections between these different systems of power.

In particular, Federici presents an analysis of primitive accumulation, centered around the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, and argues “that the persecution of the witches, in Europe as in the New World, was as important as colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry from its land were for the development of capitalism” (2004, 12). With this focus, she expands Marxian analysis of primitive accumulation to include not only the separation of producers from the means of
production and subsistence, the colonial conquering of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and the racist trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also the transformation of the body itself – and particularly women’s bodies – into a work-machine (Federici 2004, 63). This transformation, Federici argues, was achieved through the extermination of the ‘witches.’

Specifically, the colonial project, the violent expropriation of workers from the means of production, and the slave trade all resulted in mass death, and a subsequent economic and demographic crisis: “The peak of the demographic and economic crisis were the decades of the 1620s and 1630s. In Europe, as in the colonies, markets shrank, trade stopped, unemployment became widespread, and for a while there was the possibility that the developing capitalist economy might crash” (Federici 2004, 86).

In this context, Federici argues, reproduction and population growth were turned into a state matter (2004, 86). While a variety of initiatives were used by European states to drive population growth, Federici suggests that “the main initiative that the state took to restore the desired population ratio [and avoid economic collapse] was the launching of a true war against women clearly aimed at breaking the control they had exercised over their bodies and reproduction. [...] This war was waged primarily through the witch-hunt that literally demonized any form of birth-control and non-procreative sexuality” (2004, 88). Midwives, who supported women’s reproductive health, were cast as ‘witches,’ and women who practiced any form of reproductive control were charged with sacrificing their children to the devil. In this context, severe state penalties against contraception,

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30 Note that in this analysis, Federici takes a world-systems approach and locates the emergence of capital much earlier than the industrial revolution, similar to Dussel (1993; 2000) and other decolonial scholars.
abortion, and infanticide appeared (Federici 2004, 88-91), and women’s wombs became “public territory” (Federici 2004, 89).

The use of ‘magic’ and ‘witch-craft’ to justify the witch-hunts, as Federici argues, also demonstrates deep connections between colonialism, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy. As just noted, women who exercised reproductive control and autonomy were accused of consorting with the devil. In this way, the notion of ‘magic’ was employed to justify the European witch-hunts (and thereby control women’s reproduction in order to produce more workers). Yet, ‘magic’ also posed a broader challenge to capitalist logic:

Aiming at controlling nature, the capitalist organization of work must refuse the unpredictability implicit in the practice of magic, and the possibility of establishing a privileged relation with the natural elements, as well as the belief in the existence of powers available only to particular individuals, and thus not easily generalized and exploitable. Magic was also an obstacle to the rationalization of the work process, and a threat to the establishment of the principle of individual responsibility. Above all, magic seemed a form of refusal of work, of insubordination, and an instrument of grassroots resistance to power. The world had to be “disenchanted” in order to be dominated. (Federici 2004, 174)

Magic had to be mastered (again, Man must order Nature), as did everyone who was associated with or practiced magic (i.e., a deep relation with the natural world). In this way, magic became a useful symbolic device for the demonization of not only women (who practiced magic through reproductive health management) but also of Indigenous peoples (who practiced magic in their relations to nature) and people of colour. For instance, Federici uses images from European travel logs created during the conquest to show how the colonized Indigenous people were portrayed as ‘filthy’ and “demonic beings practicing all kinds of [magic-based] abominations” including sodomy, cannibalism, incest, and cross dressing; these abominations were “treated as signs that the ‘Indians’ were under the dominion of the devil and [therefore] they could be justifiably
deprived of their lands and their lives” (2004, 221-222; see also Williams 1986, 136-137). Race also became implicated in the negative symbolism of magic; “The Devil was portrayed as a black man and black people were increasingly treated like devils” (Federici 2004, 198). Equating women, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour with black magic located them closer to Nature (the natural, irrational, unpredictable world) and thus beneath ‘Man;’ this, in turn, justified their domination and naturalized their exploitation, and allowed for the (re)production of capitalism (and colonialism, racism, and patriarchy).31

Equally important to understanding the connections between these systems of power, however, are the ways in which the intersections between colonialism, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy also resulted in unique oppressions, dominations, and exploitations of certain groups. For instance, Federici points to some important ways in which the capital-based management of women’s reproduction was also differentiated along racial lines:

In [one] sense, the destiny of West European women, in the period of primitive accumulation, was similar to that of female slaves in the American colonial plantations who, especially after the end of the slave-trade in 1807, were forced by their masters to become breeders of new workers. The comparison has obviously serious limits. European women were not openly delivered to sexual assaults – though proletarian women could be raped with impunity and punished for it. Nor had they to suffer the agony of seeing their children taken away and sold on the auction block. The economic profit derived from the births imposed upon them was also far more concealed. In this sense, it is the condition of the enslaved woman that most explicitly reveals the truth and the logic of capitalist accumulation. But despite these differences, in both cases, the female body was

31 To be sure, other groups of people were also implicated in this system of domination and exploitation. For instance, people with cognitive disabilities were often conceived of as possessed or manipulated by the devil and accordingly oppressed and marginalized (Goodey 2012). Federici also connects these practices to the oppression of queer people, noting that the term ‘faggot’ comes from the Italian finocchio (fennel), which was scattered on the stakes on which homosexual people were burned to mask the smell of the burning flesh (2004, 197).
turned into an instrument for the reproduction of labour and the expansion of the work-force, treated as a natural breeding-machine, functioning according to rhythms outside of women’s control. (2004, 89-91)

Here, the connection between capitalism, patriarchy, and racism is demonstrated. Capitalism required more labour; the modern logic of the conquering of Nature (and the location of certain bodies closer to Nature and therefore conquerable) shaped the solution to this problem. Now, certain bodies (women, people of colour, indigenous peoples) could be mastered to produce more labour. At the same time, the intricacies of these systems of power also resulted in distinct differences in terms of this labour-producing project. White European women, for instance, were afforded more freedom than African women who were, quite literally, unfree as slaves. Thus, while the combination of colonialism-racism-capitalism-patriarchy ultimately rendered certain people as “the commons, as their work was defined as a natural resource” (Federici 2004, 97), meant to be exploited and plundered in the name of the economy, the particular form of this exploitation varied (as a result of the complex interactions between colonialism-racism-capitalism-patriarchy). Federici’s analysis demonstrates, either way, that capitalism is “necessarily committed to” sexism, racism, and colonialism (2004, 17).

As the many examples above demonstrate, the ‘doing’ of modernity was, in many ways, the (re)structuring of the world according to colonial-racist-capitalist-gendered hierarchies. Of course, the particular manifestation of these hierarchies, as demonstrated by Federici (2004), varied across contexts; it is for this reason that scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008), Chatterjee (1997), Amit Chaudhuri (2004), Dussel (1993), and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (2001) emphasize a multiplicity of modernities or narratives of modernity, “arguing that while these may share common ground with the
Euro-American versions, they also embrace distinctive values of their own” (Phillips 2018, 849) and contextual uniqueness. Nonetheless, the broad contours of the power relations that are the product of colonialism-racism-capitalism-patriarchy are evident in both the historical constitution, and present-day manifestation, of modernity.

2.3 The Collapsing of Thinking and Doing: Modernity as World

With this broad tracing of ‘modernity as thinking’ and ‘modernity as doing’ complete, I would now like to put forth my definition of modernity: that is, modernity is a world, a thinking/being/doing. Indeed, the axiological bent of modernity – towards Man as orderer of Nature – suggests that, from the modern point of view, thinking and doing must collapse. Man, as rational and self-conscious, can – and must – act to master Nature. Modernity is thus the (re)production of a world, i.e., the structuring of social relations and material relations of production based upon an ontological distinction between Man and Nature, and a Scientific epistemology and rationalist knowledge system, all of which are co-constituted of and by modern subjects.

Linking the two analyses above demonstrates this collapsing of thinking and doing. For instance, there are clear connections between Baconian Science (the scientific method and empiricism), on the one hand, and racism as a system of classification and hierarchy (insofar as it was located in biological and empirical ‘science’), on the other. Locke’s political theory and capitalism are intimately linked as both valorize private property. Kantian rationalism can likewise be connected to the patriarchal devaluing of emotion as feminine, whereby emotion is seen as something to be overcome in order to achieve true moral reasoning.
More specific examples demonstrate the co-constitutive nature of modernity’s thinking and doing as well. Cristina Rojas (2016), for instance, discusses how Hobbes has in mind the ‘savages’ of America in his contemplation of the state of Nature: “For the savage people in many places of America, except the government of small Families, and concord whereof dependent on natural lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner, as I said before” (Hobbes 1985, 187, emphasis in original; also quoted in Rojas 2016, 371). In this state of Nature, the people of America have no culture, no knowledge, no economy; rather, their world is the negation of modernity (Rojas 2016, 371):

[In the state of Nature] there is no place for industry; because their fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by the sea; no commodious Building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; […]. (Hobbes 1985, 185-186)

In other words, the people of America provided the historical and empirical evidence for the state of Nature for Hobbes, while at the same time, his theory constructed and located these same people in the state of Nature, and therefore as ‘less than’ modern subjects. In locating certain people closer to Nature, he simultaneously deprived their lives of value (Rojas 2016, 371); the ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ here are co-constitutive and mutually enforcing.

Anthony Pagden (2003) makes a similar point when he argues that Locke justified the destruction of aboriginal peoples who defended unclaimed land by dehumanizing them for not having claimed land (that is, private property):

Since the right to unclaimed land was a natural right, any attempt to prevent it from being exercised, by vicious aboriginals, constituted a violation of the natural law. As such they could, in Locke’s celebrated denunciation, “be destroyed as a
Lion or a Tiger, one of those wild Savage beasts, with whom Men can have no Society nor Security.” And under the terms of the *ius ad bellum* the would-be settlers might make war on such peoples, “to seek Reparation upon any injury received from them.”

Furthermore, it could also be argued that even if the aboriginals offered opposition to the seizure of their lands, by failing to exercise their natural rights to improvement, they have also failed as people. For on every account of the progression of human society, the steady improvement of the means of production, because it involved the exploitation of the God-given potential of the natural world, was held to be a defining characteristic of the human. Those, therefore, who do not avail themselves of the resources of nature, who chose to remain as hunter-gathers or even as pastoralists, once the conditions of agriculture are available, are failing in their duties to themselves. This is implied in Locke […]. (2003, 183; quoting Locke 1980, 11 and Locke 1963, 311 respectively)

In Locke’s justification that private property is key to being human – that is, failing to exercise this natural right to ‘improve’ upon the natural world indicates a fundamental failure of humanness – Locke also provides a justification for violence against those who do not hold private property, and locates these people as less-than human. Again, the thinking-doing relation is evident here, with the thinking justifying the doing and the doing serving as evidence to support the claims of the thinking.

Lastly, Dussel makes a related argument when he demonstrates how Hegel draws upon colonial encounters to justify and construct his notion of progress as history and linear time. For instance, when discussing the development of consciousness as world history, Hegel writes:

> Universal History represents […] the development of the consciousness that the Spirit has of its freedom and also the evolution of the understanding that the Spirit obtains through such consciousness. The development implies a series of stages, a series of determinations of freedom, which are born from its self-concept, that is, from the nature of freedom to become conscious of itself. (1955, 167; quoted in Dussel 1993, 68)

The world is divided into the Old World and the New World. The name of the New World comes from the fact that America […] has only recently come to be known by Europeans. But it should not be thought for that reason that the
distinction is purely external. It is essential. […] We have evidence of the development of America and its level of civilization, especially in Mexico and Peru, but as entirely particular culture, which expires the moment in which the Absolute Spirit approaches it. […] The inferiority of these individuals in all respects is manifest. (1955, 199-200; quoted in Dussel 1993, 69)

Among negroes it is the case that consciousness has not attained even the intuition of any sort of objectivity, such as, for example, God or the law, in which man is in relation with his will and has the intuition of his essence. […] The negro] is the man as beast. (1955, 218; quoted in Dussel 1993, 70)

What we understand properly as Africa is something isolated and without history, still mired in the natural Spirit, and therefore can only be located here at the entrance gate of Universal History. (1955, 231; quoted in Dussel 1993, 71)

Here, Hegel locates the Americas and Africa as in a state of immaturity, and therefore inferiority (Dussel 1993); Europe (specifically, Western Christian Europe), on the other hand, is the end of history, the full realization of self-consciousness, and “the path of Europe’s modern development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture” (Dussel 1993, 68). At the same time, as Dussel points out, Hegel uses this schematic – his locating the Americas and Africa as ‘less developed’ than Europe – to support his claim that world history is progressing in a linear way towards full self-consciousness. Like Hobbes – who constructs the state of Nature in part by locating certain people in the state of Nature – and Locke – who postulates private property as key to being human in part by arguing that those who do not treat Nature as property are failures as human – Hegel constructs progress as history, unfolding through linear time, by also positing certain cultures as at ‘lesser’ stages of development than Europe. More simply, in these cases, colonial encounters, and the European view of the Other, serve as evidence of those concepts which purport European superiority (self-conscious, industrious, rational, freed from the state of Nature) by simultaneously relegating non-Europeans to inferior positions vis-à-vis Europeans. Importantly, these concepts and theories at the same time
serve to recast the narrative of the colonial project and provide normative grounds and justification for the violence of colonialism. The thinking and doing collapse to create a singular project, with the thinking providing the epistemological justification for the doing, and the doing providing the empirical evidence to support this same epistemological stance.

In conclusion, the doing of modernity, as the above examples demonstrate, operates in/through concepts, and these concepts and ways of thinking are developed and justified in/through the doing of modernity. ‘Modernity as thinking’ and ‘modernity as doing’ cannot be separated; rather the two are intimately intertwined, and this intertwinement suggests that modernity is more than a paradigm or particular political project. Instead, modernity, as the collapsing of thinking and doing, is a world, characterized by an ontological distinction between Man and Nature, a Scientific and rationalist epistemology, and an axiology which orients this world to (re)enact this ontology and epistemology so that Man can master and order Nature according to his desires.

2.4 Power and Politics

In defining modernity as a world, I have discussed the axiological, ontological, and epistemological premises of this world, and pointed to some of the systems of power which shape the social relations of this world (colonialism, racism, capitalism, patriarchy). As a final component of sketching ‘modernity as world,’ I wish to discuss more fully what I mean by ‘power,’ and relatedly, ‘politics,’ in the context of modernity.

In political science, the study of power revolves around a series of related
questions, including: What role does power play in the ways in which social relations are organized and ordered? Who are the subjects of power, both in terms of exercising power and in terms of being subjected to power? Are there legitimate and illegitimate exercises of power? What are the criteria for these? How does power operate? Is it individual? Collective? Institutional? Is power distributed equally (or should power be distributed equally)? What are the means (material, ideational, cultural) of exercising power? Are there limits to power?

Many scholars, including those discussed thus far, provide various answers to these questions. For instance, Machiavelli and Hobbes locate power in the state or sovereign; the state can exercise direct coercion or even violence so as to order society as it deems fit. Power, here, is direct, hierarchical, and concentrated in the hands of the sovereign. Locke’s theory implies a juridical power, which is constitutional and arises from the social contract, in which individuals come together to form a political society and government. Power, in this theory, is based in law, as opposed to granted fully to someone with an inherent right to rule; in this way, Locke’s theory legalizes/constitutionalizes power. Kant discusses how we self-legislate, i.e., give freely to ourselves the laws that we will follow, according to the imperatives of reason. The legitimacy of these laws – and the corresponding organization of society according to these laws – is found in reason, which thus serves as a type of power. Hegel discusses how Spirit, in and for itself, determines the principles that will justly order society; these principles must become concretized in social and political institutions. In this theory, power is therefore governing norms made concrete in political institutions. Marx, on the other hand, locates power in the capitalist wage relation, which, because of the unequal
distribution of the ownership of the means of production, (indirectly)\(^{32}\) compels workers to sell their labour to sustain their existence. Thus, for Marx, power is structural and material.

All the above forms of power, I argue, are crucial to the (re)production of the modern world. For instance, direct violent coercion, state power, legal power, normative power and material power were all key to the creation of, and now the continuation of, colonialism, racism, capitalism, and patriarchy in a variety of ways (some of which are evident in the discussion of these systems above). However, the (re)production of modernity, as I define it, also involves a type of power that is more than just the sum of these systems of power.

In particular, as this chapter has argued, modernity is a world. More to the focus of this dissertation, which begins with the notion of the pluriverse (the idea that there are multiple worlds), modernity is one world amongst many. While these different understandings of power are thus all necessary for the (re)production and functioning of the modern world, they are not sufficient, I contend, for understanding the power of modernity in the pluriversal matrix. Rather, in this context, modernity is characterized by a particular form of power that is more than the sum of the parts; this power is the ability to assert itself as \textit{the} world (as opposed to \textit{a} world, one among many). Importantly, assertion here is meant both conceptually (i.e., through the ‘thinking’ of modernity described above, which stems from an epistemology that is Scientific, rationalist, and universal, and which conceives of modernity as the world, the universal end of history) as well as materially (i.e., through the ‘doing’ of modernity described above, by which

\(^{32}\) See footnote 23 above.
modernity, often violently, expands to incapsulate others into its purview). Politics for modernity, therefore, consists in this assertion; politics is the series of ideologies, practices, relationships, and institutions that are deployed to exercise this power and enact the order of modernity. The colonial project, as many decolonial scholars point out, and as discussed above, is exemplary of modernity’s power and politics (as just defined).

For example, Antony Anghie’s (1996) discussion of the colonial origins of international law helps to demonstrate this power, and the politics that assert this power. Noting that while Hugo Grotius is generally regarded as the founder of international law, Anghie argues that the works of Francisco de Vitoria, a sixteenth century Spanish jurist and theologian, are particularly important for understanding the colonial biases inherent in international law today. Vitoria, Anghie argues, was concerned with the “unique [legal] issues generated by the encounter between the Spanish and the Indians” (1996, 322). Specifically, he wanted to create “a system of law which could be used to account for relations between societies which he understood to belong to two very different cultural orders, each with its own ideas of propriety and governance” (Anghie 1996, 321-322). Vitoria thus acknowledged that the Indians had reason, politics, and political institutions (Pagden 1982), although their particular systems differed from those of the Spanish. However, in acknowledging the Indian’s capacity to reason, Vitoria also reduces the differences between the Indians and the Spanish, as he then locates the Indians as subjects of ‘universal’ natural law: that is, “because the Indians possess reason […] they are bound by jus gentium” (Anghie 1996, 325, emphasis in original). In this way, Vitoria concluded that natural law – as administered by sovereign states, and specifically the Spanish state – can become the source of law governing Spanish-Indian relations (Anghie
the Indian’s different system of governance disappears from the equation. As a result, “jus gentium naturalizes and legitimates a system of commerce and Spanish penetration” (Anghie 1996, 326): the particular system of the Spaniards takes on a universal appearance (it is the Truth, the one right way to be, and it applies to all) and the Indians seem to be able to participate in this system as equals. Further, as reasoning equals, the Indians, Vitoria postulates, should act according to this universal natural law (again, because it is the only possible law, the true universal law). If they do not, they are breaking the law, and this act would “justify Spanish retaliation” (Anghie 1996, 326).

Under this framework, as Anghie argues, the Indians are fractured, “both alike and unlike the Spaniard” (1996, 327). On the one hand, Vitoria acknowledges that indigenous peoples have their own political institutions and systems, and therefore have reason; it follows that they belong to the ‘universal’ realm of the Spanish. However, reason, for Vitoria, is understood in a particular way (although one which is purported to be universally true), i.e., “a means of ascertaining jus gentium which is universally binding” (Anghie 1996, 327). As a result, for Vitoria, the Indian is [simultaneously] very different from the Spaniard because the Indian’s specific social and cultural practices are at variance with the practices required by the universal norms, which in effect reflect Spanish practices and which are applicable to both Indian and Spaniard. […] The gap between the Indian and the Spaniard, a gap which Vitoria describes primarily in cultural terms by detailed references to the different social practices of the Spanish and the Indians, is now internalized; the ideal, universal Indian possesses the capacity of reason and therefore the potential to achieve perfection. This potential can only be realized, however, by the adoption or the imposition of the universally applicable practices of the Spanish.

The discrepancy between the ontologically ‘universal’ Indian and the socially, historically ‘particular’ Indian must be remedied by the imposition of sanctions which effect the necessary transformation. (Anghie 1996, 327)

Here, the Indians both belong to the universal world of the Spanish and are apart from
this world – or are ‘lesser’ manifestations of this world. In this way, the Indians form the constitutive outside of the Spanish; the colonial encounter indicates that the Indians are the same as the Spanish (they have reason, which according to modern ideology is the key to being a subject), but also, they are not quite the Spanish (their cultures and practices do not correspond to the systems of the Spanish, who also have reason; more specifically, their practices do not involve seeing themselves as the orderer of Nature).

This casts Indians as both Human and Nonhuman. Further, as Human/Nonhuman, they have the potential to be fully human/fully realized (like the Spaniards). Colonial interventions thus become normatively justified in the name of ‘civilizing,’ and later ‘developing,’ the Indians (even to the point of violence), as while the Indians are Human, they are located in earlier stages of development in history. As such, they need to be brought forward (they are not yet modern, although certainly on their way to becoming so, as the modern world is the only world and end of history). At the same time, if the Indians resist these interventions, they are breaking the ‘universal’ (Spanish) laws and are therefore Nonhuman and deserving of violent retribution. As this example shows, a variety of political tools – and the exercise of various forms of power – are justified to assert the world of modernity as the one true world, to bring others to the stage of ‘civilization’ and ‘development’ already embodied by modernity.

It is important to emphasize two consequences of asserting modernity as the world. First, if modernity is the world – the end of history, the full development of human potential – then it is superior to all other cultures, ways of thinking, and societal organizations, because it is the world, in its ‘highest form,’ realized. That is, the power of modernity to assert itself as the world implies a hierarchy in which different ways of
thinking or different ways of constructing social relations are necessarily devalued vis-à-vis modernity. More fundamentally, however, the assertion that modernity is the world also necessarily means that modernity cannot contend with radical alterity. That is, even social groups that are seen by moderns as non-modern are not viewed as radically different; instead, they are simply conceived of as in earlier stages of history, and the assumption is always that these societies will ultimately culminate in modernity. There is a reduction of difference here: if the whole of the world is moving towards a singular end point and reality, already embodied by modernity, different worlds are not possible, and fundamentally different ontologies and epistemologies are not possible. Rather, the whole of the world is, in essence, modern; it is just a matter of bringing everyone to the ‘highest’ form, or most developed stage of modernity, as exemplified by European modernity. From this vantage point, the horizon of possibility for seeing difference, and particularly for differences at their deepest and most robust (for instance, other worlds), is nonexistent. Modernity cannot contemplate deep and pervasive difference; difference, at best, is necessarily reduced to different paradigms, different cultures, or different practices which are conducted by people who are (or who will soon become) essentially modern. In other words, because of the ways in which modernity asserts itself as the world, fundamentally different onto-epistemologies, or different thinkings/beings/doings, are impossible to contemplate. It is also for this reason that I suggest that modernity is a fundamental barrier to contemplating ethics in the pluriverse.

In erasing these differences, in asserting itself as the world, modernity draws the lines and boundaries of what is ‘acceptable’ or ‘legitimate’ knowledge, social organizations, politics, and ways of being. For example, Rolando Vázquez (2011)
discusses modernity’s epistemic violence, particularly as it manifests in the practice of translation. The modern “operation of translation renders invisible everything that does not fit in the ‘parameters of legibility’ of its epistemic territory” (Vázquez 2011, 28). For instance, “the epistemological privilege granted to modern science [was…] instrumental in suppressing other, non-scientific forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges” (de Sousa Santos, Nunes and Meneses 2008, xix; also quoted in Vázquez 2011, 30).

Anything that cannot be translated directly into the epistemic frame of modern Science, which is positioned as the ‘right’ – and only real – knowledge, is devalued and delegitimized, framed as ‘belief’ or erased entirely (Vázquez 2010, 7). Similarly, the “demise of oral traditions and the institution of a scriptural economy of knowledge comes hand in hand with the erasure of the past as a living experience” (Vázquez 2011, 32); writing oral knowledge renders it static, and much is lost in this translation from oral narrative to written script. For example, indigenous notions like memory (ancestors/memoria), land (tierra) and language (palabra) are not, as Vázquez (2011) points out, translatable to text. Instead, in writing these terms, they are “divested of their temporal depth to enter modernity’s epistemic territory” (Vázquez 2011, 37), fundamentally harmed in this translation, and reduced to modern notions of chronology, space, and writing (Vázquez 2011, 32).

Modernity similarly draws boundaries around what is (and what is not) a legitimate conception of time. In particular, the linear notion of time and history as progress described in Hegel’s thought involves a rejection of the past (as backwards, something to move beyond), an orientation towards the future (progress, the development
of self-consciousness), and an emphasis on the objectivity of the present (the present is what is real) (Vázquez 2009). The consequence of this notion of time, and the assertion that this notion of time is the whole of the real, is that other understandings of time are rendered less legitimate. Furthermore, because the past is devalued in this linear conception of time, suffering and ‘past’ harms can be rejected as non-valuable, or dismissed as belonging to the now-gone past (Vázquez 2009, 3). This, like the entire narrative of history as progress, helps justify the colonial project and ongoing colonial violence (and, for that matter, other historical harms). In its assertion that its concept of time is the real, true concept of time, modernity both devalues and erases other notions of time and justifies material relations which have likewise dominated those who hold different notions of time.

Thus, as Vázquez (2012, 242) summarizes, modernity’s power and politics can be understood broadly through two modes of relation to the world: appropriation and representation. Each mode of relating to the world manifests itself in a wide variety of fields, discourses, mechanisms and practices. For example, the mode of appropriation is enacted in the privatization of land, the exploitation of workers, the extraction and patenting of knowledge, the plundering and manipulation of nature for the sake of profit, in the everyday shopping practices of the consumer among other processes and practices. In turn, the mode of representation finds its expression, for example, in the discourses of science or aesthetics that determine their own fields of validity and visibility. […] Together, these two modes of relating the world as presence (appropriation and representation) enable modernity’s rule over ‘the real.’ Indeed, my definition of power in the context of modernity – i.e., the ability to assert itself as the world – may be better stated as the ability to assert itself as all of reality.

This is because, from the perspective of European modernity, the politics involved in this assertion (the politics that enable modernity’s rule over ‘the real’) are invisibilized and naturalized. As a result, modernity need not even think of itself as the world (or in terms
of worlds at all). Modernity just *is* the totality of the real. The ideological and material ways in which modernity divides thinking/being/doing into existent and nonexistent, rendering certain thinkings/beings/doings valid and others as “not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of thinking,” is an ‘abyssal thinking,’ in which the invisible forms the constitutive-outside of the visible, and in which the co-presence of the two sides of the line is impossible (de Sousa Santos 2007, 1).

**Challenging Eurocentrism**

This view – that modernity is the world, and therefore effectively all of reality – has been termed ‘Eurocentrism’ by the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research program, or M/C/D school (Escobar 2008):

> Eurocentrism [is] the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality – a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself and that relies on a “confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe’s position as center.” (Escobar 2008, 168; quoting Dussel 2000, 471; see also Dussel 2009)³³

As a result of this ‘confusion,’ and modernity’s material hegemonic position, “the epistemic territory of modernity is such that it constitutes its field of visibility as the totality of the real” (Vázquez 2011, 33; see also Vázquez 2010). Eurocentrism hides the ‘dark side of modernity;’ it is only by “refracting modernity through the lens of coloniality” (Escobar 2010, 37) that the power of modernity – that is, the power exercised in its assertion that it is the whole of reality – is revealed.

For example, as noted above, postcolonial scholars, including Samir Amin (2009),

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³³ Significantly, Dussel emphasizes that while perhaps all “cultures have ethnocentrist tendencies, […] it is modern European culture that was the first whose ethnocentrism became globalized” (2009, 509-510).

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Chakrabarty (2008), Chatterjee (1997), Chaudhuri (2004), and Gaonkar (2001) emphasize a multiplicity of modernities or narratives of modernity. In so doing, they seek to “provincialize” Europe, that is, “to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity” (Chakrabarty 2008, xiii). This provincialization allows for post-colonial scholars to challenge the asserted universality of European modern thought, and “to explore the capacities and limitations of certain European social and political categories in conceptualizing political modernity in the context of non-European life-worlds” (Chakrabarty 2008, 20).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) can be seen as undertaking such a provincializing project when she explores the ways in which Western feminism constructs the category of ‘Third World woman’ as a singular composite. For Mohanty, the construction of this ahistorical monolithic category is completed through a series of universal abstractions, in which Western women are (at least implicitly but at times explicitly) portrayed as Subjects, in opposition to Third World women who are objectified, deprived of their material and historical heterogeneities (Mohanty 2003, 19), and “taken as a unified ‘powerless’ group prior to the analysis in question” (Mohanty 2003, 26). “By homogenizing and systematizing the experiences of different groups of women in these countries, [this mode of Western feminist analysis] erases all marginal and resistant modes and experiences” (Mohanty 2003, 40-41), locating only Western women as subjects with the autonomy and agency necessary to resist patriarchy and other systems of oppression. Edward Said undertakes a similar project in his influential text
Orientalism (1979), where he demonstrates that ‘the Orient’ is constructed by European modernity simply as that which is other than ‘the Occident.’ Again, the drawing of lines to create a binary between groups of people is evident here, with Europe located on the visible (‘right’, ‘superior’) side of the line, and all else deemed as ‘Other.’ By tracing how these lines are drawn, and (de)centering the perspective from the European to the ‘Other,’ Mohanty, Said, and other post-colonial scholars like them, reveal Eurocentric thought and demonstrate that “it is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center” (Mohanty 2003, 42).

From within Europe, critical scholars have also contributed to the project of dispelling the universal claims of (Eurocentric) modernity. Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge (1972) and The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (1970) discuss how each epoch has an episteme; these epistemes are not universal or essential, rather they arise from practices of power and should thus be understood historically. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002) demonstrate how rationality has become a dominating, instrumental rationality, and critique the ways in which modernity posits a false binary between what it calls ‘myth’ and ‘science;’ this again illustrates that rationalism is neither universal nor ahistorical. Martin Heidegger (1977) critiques the ways in which Western rationality forces an order onto the natural world through ‘enframing;’ in so doing, his analysis highlights the contingency of social interpretations and understandings of the natural world that are shaped by an instrumentalist view of nature. Of course, while these scholars cannot be said to escape the Eurocentric perspective, as they all belong to the local-history they are challenging, they nonetheless contribute to revealing and humbling modernity’s machinery from the
Lastly, decolonial scholars\textsuperscript{34} – and particularly the M/C/D school mentioned above – use ‘border thinking’ (Mignolo 2010) to counter Eurocentrism.

Decolonial thinking means to dwell and think in the border (the slash “/” that divides and unites modernity/coloniality); which means in \textit{exteriority}. \textit{Exteriority} is not the outside, but the outside built from the inside in the process of building itself as inside. (Mignolo 2012a, 26, emphasis in original)

Exteriority, in other words, is the place where those who are marked as outside of civilization dwell (Mignolo 2012a, 26) and border thinking is the logical consequence of the colonial difference – the difference which creates the exteriority in the first place (Mignolo 2012b, x). People in the border, as constituted by the modernity/coloniality relation, and modernity’s rule over the real, occupy a “fractured locus” (Lugones 2010, 754); at this locus, “the emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point of reduction, not in maintaining a hybrid (as a product, which hides the colonial difference), but in the tense workings of more than one logic, not to be synthesized but gone beyond” (Lugones 2012, 85). In other words, border thinking decenters the European perspective by foregrounding knowledge from the border (knowledge that is rendered invisible by modernity/coloniality) with the goal of identifying alternative modes of knowing and relating them to each other (thereby constructing ecologies of knowledge) (de Sousa Santos 2007, 18). In so doing, the universal claims of modernity are revealed to be one perspective among many.

\textsuperscript{34} Mignolo argues that “the radical difference between post-colonial theory and post-coloniality in general, on the one hand, and de-colonial projects, on the other, lies in the genealogy of the thoughts and experiences of the scholars and intellectuals engaged in each of them, and in which each project finds its energy and its vision” (2010, 16). For more detail, see Mignolo (2010, 16-19).
2.5 Conclusion: Towards the Ontological Turn

It may now be evident as to why I began this chapter by claiming that the central obstacle to rethinking approaches to global ethics in the context of the pluriverse is modernity. Modernity, as I have defined it here, is an onto-epistemology or a world, characterized by an ontological distinction between Human and Nature, a rationalist epistemology, and an axiology which valorizes and orients Man to order Nature through the use of Science and reason. Key to this world is also the idea that modernity is the one true world; that is, the modern world has the hold on the real. The political processes which have (often violently) ordered global social relations in the image of modernity have only served to bolster the belief that modernity is the one, true world. In fact, the ability to claim itself as the one world, and to hold the real exclusively, is one of the modern world’s greatest sleight of hands. In failing to see how the (re)making of social relations was/is very much the product of political processes and relationships of power, the modern epistemology mistakes modernity’s hegemonic position in the global order for abstract and universal rightness. This serves to bolster its claim that it is the right, true, and universal world, a claim which is a great source of power for modernity as the hegemon in the global political-economic-social order.

A variety of scholarship, some of which is outlined above, has critically interrogated this sleight of hand, demonstrating that Eurocentrism – the limited view of modernity from the modern standpoint (Dussel 2000; 2009) – is but one perspective among many. Postcolonial scholarship, decolonial literature, and even critical theories from within Europe have sought to illuminate this Eurocentrism and decenter modernity’s assertion of its reality as the whole of the real. By pointing to alternative
epistemologies (for instance, Lugones 2010; 2012; Mignolo 2010; Vázquez 2012) and highlighting the relations and practices of power through which universal claims emerge and are reproduced (for instance, Chakrabarty 2008; Foucault 1970; 1972; Mohanty 2003), these approaches destabilize modernity’s power (its ability to claim itself as the whole of the real) and critically reveal the practices (the politics) in and through which this power operates.

The pluriversal literature continues this decentring of modernity, although in an even more fundamental way. By illuminating multiple worlds, this literature completely severs modernity’s hold on the real. As John Law (2015, 134) writes:

If reals are contingent and relational enactments, if they are done in performances and rituals in specific locations [as the pluriversal literature shows], then there is no reason to suppose that those performances will all add up to generate a single reality. On the contrary, it seems much more likely that they will fail to fit together. If this is right then we do not live in a single container universe, but partially participate in multiple realities or a fractiverse.³⁵

While these multiple realities, or multiple onto-epistemologies, challenge one-world claims, they also reveal the catastrophe of “one-world metaphysics” (Law 2015, 134) in encounters with the Other. As Law (2015, 134) continues:

[One-world metaphysics] reduce difference. They evacuate reality from non-dominant reals. They turn other worlds into the mere beliefs of people who are more or less like you and me – and correspondingly more or less (probably more) mistaken. They insist, in the end, that there is a universe and that we are all inside it, one way or another.

Modernity, committed to a one-world metaphysics, is guilty of such reduction, in which non-dominant reals are reduced to beliefs, viewpoints, traditions, or erased entirely. As a result, the modern onto-epistemology poses two interrelated challenges to conceiving of a

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³⁵ Fractiverse is often used synonymously with pluriverse.
pluriversal ethics. First, modernity is unamenable to contemplating how to deal with ethical dilemmas across worlds, because for the modern onto-episteme, the very idea of multiple worlds or realities, and the humble acknowledgement that modernity is not the whole of the real, is unfathomable; instead, difference is conceived of in terms of economics, culture, communities, politics, religion, and so on, but not *worlds* (ontological and epistemological). Second, or perhaps more aptly, by extension, modernity, with its one-world metaphysics, then actually creates what may be thought of as the most pressing ethical dilemma in the context of the pluriverse as it is configured today: in its assertion and enactment of a one-world metaphysics, modernity actually disparages other worlds, to the point where other onto-epistemologies are not even acknowledged as worlds.

The co-constitutive nature of these two problems is clear. Modernity cannot contemplate other worlds or the ethical dilemmas between worlds; consequently, it erases other worlds as worlds (or equally, modernity cannot contemplate other worlds or the ethical dilemmas between worlds *because* it erases other worlds as worlds). If one accepts the normative challenge of the pluriverse, which, as the introductory chapter outlines, is a commitment to a multiplication of *worlds* as worlds (or to quote the Zapatistas, a commitment to a world in which many worlds are possible), modernity, as enacted today, is, in many ways, the most significant obstacle to realizing a pluriversal

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36 Modernity, like all worlds as conceived of in the pluriversal literature, is a world that is enacted through ongoing and shifting relations and practices. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that while I am suggesting that modernity, as characterized by key hegemonic practices outlined above, is the central obstacle to pluriversal ethics, this is also not to treat modernity as static, or to cast it ‘eternally’ as the central obstacle. Rather, from the understanding that onto-epistemologies are practices of worlding, this dissertation both locates the current dominant practices of modernity as a problem for conceiving of a pluriversal ethics, and then points to alternative practices and orientations that, while perhaps still fully
ethics.

‘modern,’ may allow for a more vulnerable and humble modernity that is able to contemplate multiple worlds as worlds.
3 Chapter: Mapping Global Ethics in the Context of the Pluriverse

Implicit in the pluriversal research program more broadly, as outlined in the introductory chapter, is the idea that research enacts worlds. More specifically, research, as a set of (ontological) practices, and as structured by a particular epistemology, is an act of worlding; research both reflects and (re)produces (or perhaps disrupts) the onto-epistemologies from which it comes. For this reason, research cannot be separated from the onto-epistemologies in/through which it emerges, nor can it be separated from the onto-epistemology of which the researcher is a part. This chapter begins from this premise: the literature that comprises the field of International Relations, and the field of Global Ethics, is (largely) a product of (or more precisely, co-constitutive of) the modern world. As a result, much of this literature, both explicitly or implicitly, reflects, (re)produces, and is premised upon some of the key characteristics and assumptions that shape modernity; for this reason, I argue that many of the dominant approaches in the field of Global Ethics prove wanting when contemplating a pluriversal ethics.

This observation – about the modern-, Euro-, and Western-centrism of this literature – is not new. For instance, John Hobson (2012) provides a sweeping analysis of international theory from 1760-2010 to demonstrate its Eurocentric underpinnings. Using four variants of “generic Eurocentrism” (Hobson 2012, 5) – Paternalist, Anti-Paternalist, Offensive, and Defensive Eurocentrism – Hobson argues that a wide range of international theory (or theory which greatly informed international theory), including J.A. Hobson, Karl Marx, Hedley Bull, Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, Robert Keohane, Hans Morgenthau, Adam Smith and more, can be classified based on
the particular ways in which such theories celebrate and defend the Western world as the ideal normative referent and sole agent of world politics; this Eurocentrism mirrors (and upholds) the modern world’s view of itself as the owner of the universal right. Turan Kayaoglu (2010) argues that the ways in which International Relations scholarship recounts the narrative of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) has led to a framing and understanding of international history and politics that perpetuates a Eurocentric bias, in which Westphalian European states ‘solved’ the anarchy problem. Here again, the Western modern world emerges as the agent of history, with superior values and political systems that served “as the engine of the international system and as the source of enlightenment, modernity, democracy, sovereignty, and human rights” (Kayaoglu 2010, 213), and thus the site of theory-making. The rest of the world is devoid of legitimate agency, values, and politics; at best, the non-Western world can provide the data that is to be studied in the West’s knowledge building projects (Connell 2016, 304).

Others make similar critiques, drawing out the intimate ties between International Relations scholarship and the modern world, but this time focusing on the ways in which difference has been glossed over, assimilated, or erased, resulting in an intellectual project that upholds modernity’s one-world metaphysics. Robert Vitalis (2015) contends that International Relations, as a field of scholarship, has specifically erased racial difference as an object of inquiry, despite the fact that race was a central concern for the field during its emergence. For instance, Vitalis (2015, 1) notes that in the early decades of the twentieth century in the United States, “international relations meant race relations. […] The problem of empire or imperialism, sometimes referred to as ‘race subjection,’ was what preoccupied the first self-identified professors of international relations.” Even
the discipline’s first specialized journal, the *Journal of Race Development*, created in 1910, was clearly concerned with race. Yet, as Vitalis demonstrates, this history has been erased from International Relations scholarship, much as it was erased from the journal’s title when, in 1919, the journal was renamed the *Journal of International Relations* (2015, ix).¹ This finding, as David Blaney and Arlene Tickner (2017a) note in a review of Vitalis’ book, demonstrates how the field of International Relations “has sustained its modern-, White-, masculine-, state-, and Western-centric identity by invisibilizing some of its key facets” (73), such as racism (which, as argued in the previous chapter, is a key facet of modernity as well). Blaney makes a similar argument with Naeem Inayatullah in their book *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (2004). The theory and practice of International Relations, these authors show, is in many ways bound up in the erasure of difference through various practices (both theoretical and concrete) that draw particular notions of space and time, and that construct boundaries that alternatively assimilate and erase alterity. In particular, these authors draw clear linkages between International Relations as a field of inquiry and colonialism (Bleiker 2006, 128). Here, again, it is made clear that the historical enactment of modernity/coloniality – and the theoretical and epistemic justification and groundings for such practices, such as the ways in which the modern world draws binaries and boundaries – is reflected in and bolstered by much of the literature that comprises the field of International Relations.

Anna Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling (2009) provide perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of the relationship between the field and scholarship of International Relations and the modern world. Mobilizing an extended metaphor of “The

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¹ In 1922, the journal was again renamed, this time to *Foreign Affairs*. 
House of IR” (2009, 49), Agathangelou and Ling systematically show how the International Relations’ literature and theoretical traditions are co-constitutive of the complex systems of power which shape modernity, including colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and racism. For instance, at the head of the House of IR stands the ‘founding father,’ Pater realism:

Abstract individualism pivots realism’s understanding of the world. Primordial individual units (states) struggle in eternal competition over resources that confer power and wealth. In this way, realists justify instrumental reasoning and behaviour. (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 49)

Theorists like Machiavelli and Hobbes are key to this intellectual lineage which has so shaped the field of International Relations, as they provide the ontological groundings which dominate the field, and which conceive of individual units of states as the key actors in the international sphere. Mater liberalism, on the other hand, makes a fine complement to Pater realism, albeit with a conceptual division of labour: “Whereas realism commands the House of IR by focusing on the state (“power”), liberalism organizes, manages, and reproduces it by emphasizing the market (“interests”)” (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 50). Importantly, Agathangelou and Ling trace this tradition to theorists like Locke, whose empiricism, as argued previously, was a crucial steppingstone to the emergence of modernity’s rationalist epistemology. Simply put, the same theory which forms the foundations of the House of IR are also foundational to modernity’s onto-epistemology, as argued in the previous chapter.

Agathangelou and Ling continue through the House of IR, drawing compelling links between the hierarchies which situate various approaches in the field and the hierarchies which shape global social relations (both within modernity and between the modern world and other worlds). The prodigal son, or Heir apparent, neorealism, takes
after his father but adds a thoroughly capitalist bent; Kenneth Waltz’s (1979) work is exemplary of this approach. The *Caretaking daughters* (neoliberalism, liberal feminism, and standpoint feminism) occupy a space of lesser importance in the house, as while they generally uphold the principles of *Pater* and *Mater*, they add some basic critiques of patriarchy (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 52). Martha Nussbaum’s (2013) “capabilities approach,” for instance, appears to attend to gender concerns while upholding individualism, market solutions, and reproducing a Eurocentrism which cannot conceive that other values and philosophy may have something to offer. The *Rebel sons*, including Marxism, Gramscian International Political Economy, Constructivism-Pragmatism, and Postmodern International Relations, are on the borders, relegated to the upstairs of the House, for their disruptive nature (for interrupting the modern self-narrative).

Nonetheless, these too “share with realism considerable similarity in form, such as an exclusive reliance on Western intellectual traditions, concepts, and methods” (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 54). The *Daughters deemed ‘fallen,’* postmodern feminism and queer theories, are similar to their rebel brothers. Meanwhile, in the basement dwell the *Servants,* area studies and comparative politics experts, who “gather ethnographic, ‘thick descriptions’ (‘low politics’) so that the ‘upstairs’ members may theorize grandly about the world (‘high politics’)” (Agathangelou and Ling 2009, 57).

And of course, outside the house all together, stand the colonial Others, the critics of modernity, colonialism, and Eurocentrism. Thus, as Agathangelou and Ling (2009, 45) conclude, the House of IR excludes certain knowledges and ways of being in the world as legitimate sites of inquiry and sources of knowledge; these exclusions reflect colonial, racist, and patriarchal logics that so fundamentally characterize the modern world.
This observation, then, begs the question: Can existing approaches in the field of
Global Ethics – so implicated in the modern world – offer us tools or normative
orientations from which to contemplate or build a pluriversal ethics? While this question
was explored in a preliminary fashion in the introduction of this dissertation, this chapter
aims to engage more seriously with this question by analyzing in depth three approaches
to ethics in the Global Ethics literature – moral cosmopolitanism, discourse ethics, and
(variants of) postmodernist ethics – and by assessing whether these approaches may offer
us a useful vantage point from which to contemplate ethical horizons in the pluriverse.

To this end, this chapter begins with an exploration of moral cosmopolitanism,
undeniably one of the most prominent approaches in Global Ethics. At its most basic,
moral cosmopolitanism is an approach to ethics premised on the assumption of a
common humanity; this common humanity provides the basis or grounding for moral
obligations which we owe one another (Brown and Held 2010, 1). Intuitively, then,
cosmopolitanism seems incompatible with the pluriverse, which posits multiple onto-
epistemologies (and subjectivities); this was pointed out previously in the introduction.
Nonetheless, I start this exploration with moral cosmopolitanism for three reasons. First,
Global Ethics, as outlined by Kimberly Hutchings (2010) and as has been presented in
the dissertation, is characterized by a debate between two approaches: the rationalist
approaches and the alternative approaches (Hutchings 2010). While Hutchings does not
include cosmopolitanism explicitly in her schematic, the philosophical foundations of
moral cosmopolitanism tend to be either utilitarian, contractualist, and/or deontological,
three of the specific rationalist approaches Hutchings attends to in her analysis. Moral
cosmopolitanism therefore provides a useful example from which to evaluate the
rationalist approaches more broadly in terms of their compatibility with the pluriverse.

Second, the significance of moral cosmopolitanism in the fields of Global Ethics and International Relations, and in the ways in which global ethics are practiced and addressed in real-world global politics, cannot be over-stated. Moral cosmopolitanism, as the normative-philosophical basis for human rights and various global institutions, is the dominant approach to ethics as both theorized and practiced in global politics today. To omit moral cosmopolitanism from this analysis would therefore be a glaring omission that fails to acknowledge the present-day reality of global politics. Lastly, there have been attempts to reconcile moral cosmopolitanism with difference, to reorient moral cosmopolitanism so that it can attend to differences between and across people. It is therefore useful to assess some of these attempts in the context of the pluriverse. In particular, I engage with the work of two notable moral cosmopolitan scholars, Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) and Onora O’Neill (2000), both of whom have attempted to reconceptualise moral cosmopolitanism so as to attend to difference. Finally, this section also briefly touches on human rights, and deliberates on whether or not human rights can provide an ethical orientation for the pluriverse. Ultimately, I argue that moral cosmopolitanism is unsuitable for the pluriverse, as it is committed to a pervasive and unshakeable one-worldism.

Next, I turn to an evaluation of discourse ethics. While discourse ethics was formulated by Jürgen Habermas (see, for example, 1987; 1990) as a procedural approach to ethical deliberation for members who share a common lifeworld (Lebenswelt) – and therefore it is again intuitively an inappropriate approach to pluriversal ethics, where multiple ‘lifeworlds’ are at stake – discourse ethics has been posited as a useful ethics for
the international sphere by scholars like Andrew Linklater (1996a; 1998; 1999; 2005), and is worth attending to for two reasons. First, as a procedural ethic which rejects questions of metaphysics, discourse ethics “involves shifting the grounding of all kinds of claims about the world, scientific as well as normative, from an extra-linguistic foundation (empirical, logical or metaphysical) to the procedure of communication itself” (Hutchings 2010, 44). In other words, for discourse ethics, the assumption of successful communication (apparently) allows us to detach moral deliberation from particular ways of life without thick metaphysical assumptions, claims about human nature, or pre-formed opinions about right or wrong (see also Warnke 1995). It seems possible that an approach to ethics which attempts to sidestep metaphysical claims might be useful in the pluriverse. Second, as Hutchings (2010, 49) also notes, discourse ethics also serves as a sort of bridge between the rationalist and alternative approaches (although she ultimately includes it with the rationalist approaches); in challenging the possibility that an impartial and apolitical moral philosopher can derive substantive ethical principles, discourse ethics can be seen as beginning to move us into a kind of ethical theorizing that is distinct from the purely ‘rationalist’ approach. Nonetheless, despite discourse ethics’ attempt to sidestep metaphysical assumptions, I argue that this approach is unamenable to the pluriverse, given its assumption of knowability. That is, discourse ethics assumes that through dialogue one can come to know the other; however, in the pluriverse, where differences are at their most robust, there will be limits to knowing and commensurability. Discourse ethics, for this reason, can provide little guidance in terms of navigating moral dilemmas where such limits to knowing are present.

Lastly, this chapter then turns to an exploration of postmodernist ethics, one of the
alternative approaches in Hutchings schematic. While there are a variety of specific conceptualizations of and approaches to postmodern ethics – for instance, poststructuralist ethics, postfoundational ethics, antifoundationalism, and pragmatism – these various approaches are generally united in their rejection of the idea that ethics can be given a rational grounding (thus they are an ‘alternative’ to the rationalist approaches), and that there are transcendental features or qualities associated with being ‘human’ (Hutchings 2010, 67). Without these foundational claims, postmodernist ethics seem to be the most compatible with the pluriverse, for this approach does not assert or require a one-world metaphysics or epistemology. At the same time, however, I argue that while this broad approach provides a vantage point from which to think the possibility of the pluriverse, it ultimately does not offer much in terms of theorizing and ethically contemplating the moral relations and dilemmas between temporally-simultaneous worlds. Therefore, I conclude that it is not conducive to the task of building a pluriversal ethics. For purposes of scope, this chapter focuses on one particular postmodern approach, postfoundational cosmopolitanism (see, for example, Caraus and Paris 2016; Mignolo 2002), while also briefly addressing related variants such as void universalism (see, for example, Prozorov 2014) and pragmatism (see, for example, Rorty 1989; 2010).

In sum, as the arguments below substantiate, I find that all of these approaches are unable to offer a moral understanding of ethics in the pluriverse, albeit for different reasons. Yet, in demonstrating why these approaches fail to offer us tools for a pluriversal ethics, the normative challenge of the pluriverse is further illuminated and delineated. In particular, I assert that a pluriversal ethics is characterized by a distinct combination of (1) the need to attend to our shared and entangled material existence while
simultaneously (2) foregrounding the multiple and actually existing ‘universals’ or onto-
epistemologies which comprise the pluriverse through partial connections. Furthermore,
pluriversal ethics is also characterized by (3) the problem of incommensurability across
difference, and the limits of knowing when differences are at their deepest and most
pervasive, or onto-epistemic. To attend to these three attributes, I suggest, requires a
different orientation to ethics, and a different set of tools than those offered us by moral
cosmopolitanism, discourse ethics, or postmodernist ethics. Beginning to theorize such an
orientation and toolkit, drawing upon feminist ethics and particularly the ethics of care, is
the task of the next chapter.

3.1 Moral Cosmopolitanism

Moral cosmopolitanism, and particularly moral cosmopolitanism as presented in the
Global Ethics literature, can most broadly be thought of as “any form of moral
universalism that takes the human individual as the foundation of moral value”
(Hutchings 2010, 10-11). Moral cosmopolitanism in this literature is most often traced
back to Kant’s moral philosophy.² Certainly, some scholars have relied on other figures
to explore cosmopolitan ideas, including the Stoics (for example, see Nussbaum 1997),
the works of the Egyptian Anhnaton, Francisco de Vitoria (whose philosophy on
international law, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, was an important part of

² As noted previously, moral cosmopolitanism can also come in utilitarian and contractualist forms, in
addition to the deontological form (particularly as represented by Kant) focussed on here. Utilitarianism,
for instance, can be seen as satisfying the criteria of moral individualism, the equal worth of all moral
subjects, and impartial concern when interpreting these criteria in a way that articulates the human good
and strives for its maximization (Jones 2010). Contractualism can similarly meet these criteria when
principles are accepted globally if no one could reasonably reject them as the basis of informed and
uncoerced agreement (Scanlon 1998). These two approaches, it is worth mentioning again, still fall under
the rationalist approaches in Hutchings (2010) schematic.
the modern/colonial project), John Locke, and more (Brown and Held 2010). However, it is generally acknowledged in the literature that “the Enlightenment’s strongest link to contemporary cosmopolitanism” comes from Kant (Brown and Held 2010, 7). Kant’s basic goal, as Garrett Wallace Brown (2009, 33) argues, is to provide philosophical meaning to both material experience (the realm of Science and empiricism) and to metaphysical concepts such as the notion of morality. As described in the previous chapter, Kant achieves this via independent principles of reason that precede experience and therefore make sense of experience. The fact that humans individually possess reason becomes crucially important for Kantian morality; “For Kant, the idea of morality starts with the transcendental deduction and the inherent assumption that individuals are free to make moral decisions” (Brown 2009, 34). The ability to self-legislate, via reason, is what renders us autonomous moral agents, and therefore represents the ultimate source of human dignity (Brown 2009, 34).

Stemming from this fundamental assumption, cosmopolitanism, in its most basic form, “maintains that there are moral obligations owed to all human beings based solely on our humanity alone, without reference to race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, culture, religion, political affiliation, state citizenship, or other communal particularities” (Brown

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3 This dissertation has not focused on the Enlightenment or the Enlightenment Project as such, although I believe it is undeniable that the Enlightenment Project is a key part of the modern world. Nicolas Capaldi defines the Enlightenment Project as “the attempt to define and explain the human predicament through science as well as to achieve mastery over it through the use of a social technology” (1998, 17). Clearly, this project aligns completely with the broader ontology, epistemology, and axiology that I have argued defines the modern world in the previous chapter. My reason for focusing on the broader scope of modernity, as opposed to the Enlightenment Project specifically, is to take seriously the decolonial literature’s location of the emergence of modernity/coloniality much earlier than the 18th century, when the Enlightenment Project is generally thought to have emerged.

4 Of course, some scholars note that cosmopolitanism cannot be defined by “a clear genealogy from the Stoics to Immanuel Kant” (Pollock et al. 2002, 1), or by a clear narrative at all. However, as this is the dominant way in which the cosmopolitanism literature in Global Ethics traces its lineage, I start with Kant nonetheless.
and Held 2010, 1). More simply, individual human beings, as autonomous moral agents, are the ultimate unit of political and moral concern (Hayden 2005, 11; Held 2003, 470). All human beings possess equal moral status (Held 2003, 470); “no morally relevant distinctions can be made between persons as moral beings” (Hayden 2005, 11). Lastly, and stemming from the two statements above, human status has global scope; “persons are subjects of concern for everyone” (Hayden 2005, 11). More simply, humans belong to a single moral sphere in which all people are of equal worth; this status of equal worth should be acknowledged by all (Held 2003, 470; see also Beitz 1994). Thomas Pogge (1994) summarizes these points as individualism (individual humans as the unit of moral concern), universality (this status of moral concern attaches to all humans equally), and generality (this status is of concern for everyone).5

From this general grounding, scholarship on cosmopolitanism in Global Ethics has been concerned with attempting to define which or what moral obligations we owe one another, and which factors exist and should exist to foster a cosmopolitan condition6 (Brown and Held 2010, 9). For instance, Charles Beitz (1994) defines institutional cosmopolitanism as the conception of cosmopolitanism that is concerned with which political institutions should be set up (and in which ways) to form a sort of ‘world government,’ with states and state-like units exercising less authority than they do

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5 As David Held (2003, 472) argues, testing generalisability involves “‘reasoning from the point of view of others’” (quoting Benhabib 1992, 9-20). The idea of adopting another’s viewpoint – and the problems with this idea in the context of the pluriverse – are explored more fully in section 3.2 (and to a lesser degree, in chapter four). This section instead focuses on the problems of asserting a universal notion of subjectivity, ontology, and/or epistemology in the context of the pluriverse, as outlined shortly.

6 Kant identifies a similar problematique when he declares in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1970) that “the greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society which can administer justice universally” (45).
presently due to yielding some of that authority to some supranational institution. Legal cosmopolitanism investigates how international law may be grounded and/or constrained by cosmopolitan principles (Brown and Held 2010, 11; see also Brown 2008). The literature on global justice focuses on determining the condition of global justice and exploring which responsibilities, be they moral, political, or economic, are owed to all people everywhere (Brown and Held 2010, 10). For instance, Beitz (1975) argues that redistributive obligations and responsibilities must extend beyond national boundaries. Pogge (2008) discusses how the global institutional order causes great harm to citizens in poorer countries while benefiting wealthier countries and asserts that, as a result, everyone who participates in this unjust order has a responsibility for global poverty (although not all share this responsibility equally) (see also Jaggar 2010). Nussbaum’s capabilities approach starts ethical contemplation by asking the question “What is each person able to do and to be?” (Nussbaum 2013, 18) and then asserting that ‘good’ societies must provide the conditions necessary to allow people to pursue what they want to do and be, based on their individual freedom. Clearly, this approach is similarly concerned with identifying the responsibilities institutions and societies owe to all individuals (and particularly concerned with identifying those responsibilities that will allow individuals to develop their capabilities). Most pertinent for this dissertation is ‘cultural cosmopolitanism’ (Brown and Held 2010), which refers to the literature that explores how to cultivate global justice in a culturally pluralistic world. This literature, in other words, attempts to foreground difference within the cosmopolitan framework.  

7 There are many other themes in cosmopolitanism. For instance, Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held (2010) also discuss ‘civic cosmopolitanism,’ global governance,’ ‘cosmopolitan sociology,’ ‘cosmopolitan education,’ and ‘political cosmopolitanism.’ Nonetheless, the central questions tying these themes together
Attend-ing to Difference: Appiah and O’Neill

One of the most prominent scholars who has attempted to reconcile the universalizing claims of cosmopolitanism with difference is Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006; 2008). In particular, Appiah is concerned with cosmopolitans who deny the significance of cultural difference. According to Appiah, cultural difference and ‘difference in context’ is important because it is a fact of the world. “Huge differences in behavior flow from differences in circumstances that seem of little or no normative consequence” (Appiah 2008, 91). These differences are of particular moral salience for Appiah, as from a cosmopolitan perspective, “each human individual is charged with the ultimate responsibility for his or her own life” (2008, 93). Recall Kant’s account of reason: the ability to self-legislate through reason is the source of human dignity and of the individual’s status as a moral agent. Respecting this ability to self-legislate (or as Appiah writes, to be responsible for one’s own life) in part requires a respect for difference: “It’s important that human beings live by standards they themselves believe in, even if those standards are wrong” (Appiah 2008, 93).8 In other words, in attempting to achieve a cosmopolitan community, both cultural and contextual differences – which give rise to different hopes, interests, desires, and moral standards – are something to which we must attend. Appiah argues that fostering a cosmopolitan conversation and cosmopolitan

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8 Appiah does not actually engage with Kant in this discussion, but rather draws upon John Stuart Mill, another key theorist in the modern political theoretical tradition. In particular, Mill writes “If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode” (2001, 63; quoted also in Appiah 2008, 93). The clear privileging of reason (common sense) and a singular epistemology is notable here.
curiosity can be the way to maintain, and even manifest, the universalizing claims of cosmopolitanism while also attending to difference:

Toleration means interacting on terms of respect with those who see the world differently. We cosmopolitans think we might learn something even from those we disagree with. We think people have a right to their own lives. (Appiah 2008, 97)

Learning about differences and respecting difference is thus key to the cosmopolitan vision for Appiah; defaulting to universalizing truths and claims without foregrounding the significance of difference is insufficient from a cosmopolitan perspective as it fails to grasp the importance of the individual’s right to their own life. Appiah summarizes this perspective when he writes, “cosmopolitanism is a double-stranded tradition: in a slogan, it is universality plus difference” (Appiah 2008, 92).

While Appiah attests that this is not the case, it is clear that universality ultimately trumps these differences, however, because it is universality itself that provides the grounds on which discussions about/on difference occur. “The point of entry to cross-cultural conversations are things that are shared by those who are in the conversation. […] Once we have found enough we share, there is the further possibility that we will be able to enjoy discovering things we do not yet share” (Appiah 2006, 111). In other words, it is our sameness which comes first; throughout his work, Appiah provides numerous examples of our shared humanity, ranging from the biological (for instance, biological traits that we apparently all share, like we all need food) (Appiah 2006, 96), to less tangible characteristics, like the notion that all cultures, no matter how distinct they are, have practices of music making, poetry, dance, reciprocity, language, and so on (Appiah 2006). The slogan universality plus difference is apt, for it is that which is common to us which provides the means through which difference can be explored, probed, and
understood.

While Appiah can be commended for attempting to take difference seriously, his account of cosmopolitanism as universality plus differences does not hold up as a viable approach to ethics in the context of the pluriverse. For one, Appiah ultimately foregrounds sameness; cultural differences are important to moral deliberation because culture is important to individuals, yet at the end of the day, all of these individuals have some inherent sameness. This stance, clearly, is unable to grasp the depth of differences that are illuminated in the pluriverse, where differences are onto-epistemic.

Appiah’s account of difference is also oddly de-politicized. While difference, he claims, is an empirical fact of existence, his portrayal of difference is apolitical. “Cosmopolitans,” he writes, “suppose that all cultures have enough overlap in their vocabulary of values to begin a conversation” (Appiah 2006, 57). Yet, what constitutes ‘enough,’ which types of things need to overlap, and how to approach scenarios when this overlap is insufficient are topics that are glaringly missing from his discussion. Difference as a political category is absent from Appiah’s formulation of cosmopolitanism as universality plus difference. There is no real acknowledgement that the nature of difference itself may be up for debate, that difference (in a variety of forms) is often the source of ethical quandaries, and that differences between social groups are often shaped by relations of power. While Appiah asserts difference is of moral import, as people should be free to live their lives according to their own desires, it is very unclear if, how, or why difference may be of moral import beyond unencumbered individuals pursuing their interests. For this reason, Appiah’s discussion resembles notions of multiculturalism, in which cultural diversity (difference) operates within a
framework of nation-states (a sort of sameness) in a way that tends to be descriptive and apolitical, “thus suppressing the problem of power relations, exploitation, inequality, and exclusion” (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2008, xxiii) that operate in and through axes of difference.

It is this last point which is, in fact, ultimately the problem with Appiah’s cosmopolitanism as a potentially pluriversal ethic. Implicitly underpinning his approach is a thick assumption of subjectivity, in which all people are first and foremost individuals who navigate their different circumstances to meet their ends. This subjectivity, as he conceives it, applies to all people everywhere. While people live in different contexts, subscribe to different beliefs, have different familial relations, and different experiences, these subjects are not constituted in and through these forces; rather, Appiah’s understanding of humanity subscribes to a modern (specifically, liberal) ontology of free, atomistic, and reasoning individuals who just happen to live in different places, and who therefore may have different interests and desires – but none so different that it challenges their commonness in any fundamental sense. In other words, difference, for Appiah, is vacated of any political and ontological import.

Onora O’Neill (2000; 2010) approaches the problem of difference in the

9 Notably, Appiah does not actually discuss a theory of subjectivity in his book, nor does he assert thick ontological assumptions beyond asserting that there is something commonly “human in humanity” (2006, 134). However, these assumptions are implicitly scattered throughout his writing. For instance, while much of his text tries to emphasize value pluralism and difference, he dismisses the notion of cultural imperialism: “Talk of cultural imperialism structuring the consciousnesses of those in the periphery treats Sipho [a Zulu man discussed previously in the book] and people like him as tabulae rasae on which global capitalism’s moving finger writes its message, leaving behind another homogenized consumer as it moves on. It is deeply condescending. And it isn’t true” (2006, 111). While of course the point about how the West often problematically constructs non-Westerners as passive people without agency (while Westerners somehow have agency) is important, the broader sentiment of this statement is that capitalism does not impose upon and shape subjectivities. Rather, from Appiah’s standpoint there is some pre-existing individual or essence who can navigate these systems of power; the notion of subjects as constituted in and through relations (of power) is implicitly rejected here.
cosmopolitan context from a different vantage point. She argues that Kant

[...] combines a strong view of human capacities for action and autonomy with insistence that human beings are finite and mutually vulnerable, dependent on material resources and not always well disposed to one another. If humans were not vulnerable and needy, they could not damage, destroy, coerce and deceive so successfully (or perhaps at all), and the need for justice would be gone. On Kant’s view, the combination of agency and vulnerability constitutes the circumstances of justice. (O’Neill 2000, 138)

The finitude and vulnerability of humans, under this conceptualization, points to difference. People are different because they are differently located in contexts which render them vulnerable in different ways. It is this very fact through which the universalizability of a claim can be tested. O’Neill continues:

The picture of human life which Kant assumes is one in which agents with limited capacities and varied vulnerabilities interact; this picture is required if a universalizability criterion is to identify obligations of justice. The easiest way to see why certain principles cannot be universally adopted among finite and interacting beings is by a simple reductio ad absurdum thought experiment. If certain sorts of principles could (per impossibile) be universally adopted by mutually vulnerable interacting beings, then even moderate success in acting on them (at a level any rational being must expect on the assumption that the principle is universally adopted) will render some others victims, and so unable to adopt those principles, which therefore (contrary to hypothesis) cannot be universally adopted. Examples of principles which can be identified as non-universalizable by this strategy include principles of injury, violence, coercion and deception. If (per impossibile) any of these principles were universally adopted among interacting but vulnerable beings, even a moderate success rate in acting on them (at a level any rational beings must expect on the assumption that the principle is universally adopted) would create at least some victims who (contrary to hypothesis) would be unable to adopt that principle. On a Kantian account, it is therefore a matter of obligation not to rely on fundamental principles of injury, violence, coercion, deception and the like [...]. (2000, 138, emphasis in original)

Importantly, what constitutes violence and coercion, for O’Neill, is not just literal physical violence, coercion, and harm; rather, “cultures of intimidation, insecurity, deference and evasiveness” (2000, 139), relations of power, and power distributions are also crucially significant. That is, in incorporating vulnerability – and understanding
vulnerability as being differently positioned in various contexts with different access to power – O’Neill includes difference in her cosmopolitan theory, and in such a way that difference has direct ethical-political significance.

O’Neill demonstrates the importance of this type of difference in her discussion of gender and justice. Noting that abstracted notions of justice – including cosmopolitanism – often rely on a conceptualization of moral subjects that reflects a masculinist bias, O’Neill argues that women’s lives have not been captured by this literature; poor women’s lives, in particular, are not well-conceived as the lives of abstract individuals (2000, 143). This is, in part, because women are positioned differently in systems of power, made responsible for different types of labour (reproductive labour specifically), and thus experience particular vulnerabilities not captured in the masculinist moral subject who is abstracted, individualistic, and fully autonomous. In other words, O’Neill puts forth a different understanding of moral subjects as finite rational agents as opposed to free and equal individuals (Flikschuh 2000). As finite and vulnerable, the scope of difference between and amongst people becomes much greater, and these human differences – such as those produced through gendered social relations – matter both politically and ethically. In conceiving of and foregrounding human vulnerability, O’Neill attempts to capture the dynamics and effects of being positioned differently in various systems of power, and amend cosmopolitanism so that it can more practically attend to the political and ethical consequences of difference.

Despite this attention to vulnerability, context, and difference, and her critique of the masculinist bias inherent in abstracted notions of moral subjects, O’Neill maintains, however, that abstraction is important. Abstraction, she writes, is necessary for justice to
be global in scope (i.e., to apply to humanity); the problem is when “idealized conceptualizations of certain crucial matters” (O’Neill 2000, 145) are imported or smuggled into the abstraction – like the idealized masculinist subject critiqued above. “Idealization masquerading as abstraction yields theories that appear superficially to apply widely, but which covertly exclude those who do not match a certain ideal, or match it less well than others” (O’Neill 2000, 152). Instead, O’Neill writes, we must try to abstract without idealization, thereby allowing us to develop principles of justice that allow for a wide range of human agents and institutions.

This seems like a more promising approach to global ethics in the pluriversal context, given that O’Neill attempts to foreground a range of human difference, and to show why human difference is politically and ethically significant. However, while O’Neill arguably allows for greater difference across moral subjects, she ultimately relies upon a single epistemology: rationalism. Her discussion of consent will help to demonstrate this. Once again foregrounding vulnerability and differently positioned moral subjects, O’Neill suggests that principles of justice can be tested for universalizability based upon whether or not the arrangement in question is one in which “a plurality of interacting agents with finite capacities could consent” (O’Neill 2000, 162). Put differently, ensuring that moral agents are not coerced by a given institutional arrangement is a key test of whether or not said arrangement is just; an arrangement is only just if all affected by it or implicated in it could consent to it, and consent must be considered in the face of unequal vulnerabilities (O’Neill 2010, 76-77). But how do we identify when consent is legitimate? O’Neill provides the following answer, “If those affected by a given set of arrangements that could in principle be changed can in fact
refuse or renegotiate what affects them, their consent is no mere formality, but genuine, legitimating consent” (2000, 163, emphasis in original). The problem with this, however, is that the issue of who gets to decide that an arrangement could, in principle, be changed is not addressed. How do we know that we know an arrangement is negotiable? On what epistemological grounds is something deemed changeable?

O’Neill does not really engage with such questions; rather, a rationalist epistemology is presumed, one which can abstractly answer these questions. It is also in this problem that one can see the limits of O’Neill’s attempt to foreground difference in a cosmopolitan framework. While difference is important in the sense that subjects are differently situated – and therefore differently affected by injustices and coercions – differences at the epistemic level are inconceivable. Lois McNay’s (2000) distinction between immediate and extended intersubjectivity is useful for understanding this more generally. On the one hand, McNay (2000, 12) notes there is “intersubjectivity understood primarily as immediate interpersonal relations;” on the other hand, “extended intersubjective relations […] refer to] relations that are mediated through impersonal symbolic and material structures.”

While O’Neill can be thought of as attempting to attend to relations and differences which are of concern to immediate intersubjectivity – the ways in which direct social relations impede one’s ability to enact agency – she is unable to attend fully to extended intersubjectivity, which is shaped through a given symbolic and material socio-political order and that often operates at the level of sub-consciousness. One can easily conceive of ethical dilemmas in which, when extended intersubjectivity is factored in, O’Neill’s test for consent proves wanting. For instance, many women in violent
relationships feel they are unable to leave their partner – even when they may have
familial support, financial means, and the legal protections to do so. By O’Neill’s test of
consent, in choosing to stay in such a situation, which could in principle be changed
(particularly when only considering immediate relations), such women are freely
consenting to their abuse. However, this reading of the scenario ignores the ways in
which the socio-linguistic order shapes notions of what is possible in complex, often sub-
conscious, ways. Affects, feelings of love and obligation, and gendered systems of
meaning making which implicitly valorize loyalty to one’s spouse all shape whether or
not someone feels they can reasonably change the situation.

Thus, when O’Neill (2000, 167) concludes that “the most significant features of
actual situations that must be taken into account in judgements of justice are the security
and entitlements, or insecurity and vulnerability, that determine whether people can
dissent from or seek to change alterable aspects of arrangements and activities which
structure their lives,” she may be attending to difference in terms of vulnerabilities and
positions within systems of power, but she fails to engage with the dilemma of how these
same systems shape subjectivity beyond one’s literal subject-position. Instead,
differences stemming from relations of power also affect the enactment of subjectivities,
epistemologies, and ontologies in a much more fundamental and co-constitutive way.
O’Neill is unable to contemplate this fully given her subscription to a singular rationalist
epistemology.

A (Most Obvious) Pluriversal Critique: The Challenge of Multiple Universals

As should now be evident, cosmopolitanism – even in its variants that attempt to attend to
difference – is unamenable to the task of building a pluriversal ethics, as difference is ultimately conceived of in such a way that it can be subsumed by universal ontological claims about human nature (we share some common humanity), or overcome by an appeal to a universal rationalist epistemology which will (universally) guide moral action and deliberation on moral principles (even when people with different vulnerabilities are involved). In the pluriverse – where differences are at their deepest and most pervasive, when different onto-epistemologies are at stake – commitment to this one-world metaphysics is insufficient. Indeed, the fact that cosmopolitanism fails to hold up as an approach to pluriversal ethics should come as no surprise, given its clear roots in the philosophy of thinkers like Kant, who, as argued in the previous chapter, reflect and (re)produce the very onto-epistemic assumptions that structure the modern world in its current configuration.

While this may be obvious, however, the preceding discussion nonetheless points to the first challenge to conceiving of global ethics in the pluriverse: What might global ethics look like when one onto-epistemology cannot be assumed? What orientations allow us to contemplate multiple universals, or worlds, or onto-epistemologies? How do such orientations allow us to deliberate on ethical dilemmas that involve multiple worlds without defaulting to a universal ontology or epistemology? How can modern subjects – subjects of a one-world world – contemplate the ethical implications of multiple worlds?

A Note on Human Rights

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been said to represent “the symbolic moment of ‘arrival’ when all humankind came to acknowledge the reason of
rights” (Evans 1998, 3; citing Raphael 1967), human rights have been the central mode of actualization of moral cosmopolitanism. Through legal institutions, human rights have come to occupy a hegemonic position within global politics as the central mode of moral action. As such, before turning to an examination of discourse ethics, a brief note on human rights is necessary.

Human rights are also a type of moral cosmopolitanism:

Human rights, following the manifest literal sense of the term, are ordinarily understood to be the rights that one has simply because one is human. As such, they are equal rights, because we either are or are not human beings, equally. Human rights are also inalienable rights, because being or not being human usually is seen as an inalterable fact of nature, not something that is either earned or can be lost. Human rights are thus “universal” rights in the sense that they are held “universally” by all human beings. (Donnelly 2007, 282-283)

Human rights – like all variants of moral cosmopolitanism – are premised on the universal equal moral status of human subjects. 10 Because of this, the critique presented above regarding whether or not moral cosmopolitanism can serve as a fruitful ethics for the pluriverse applies to this form of cosmopolitanism as well. Human rights are premised on a singular ontology; hence, they are incompatible with the pluriverse. To be sure, critiques regarding the problems of the universality of human rights have been well-attended to in the literature (see for example, Pin-Fat 2000).

This declaration may, on the face of things, seem odd, given that in the introductory chapter, I provide an example of a pluriversal ethical dilemma that is

10 Some scholars link human rights to the Kantian tradition specifically, largely because of Kant’s emphasis on the equal moral status of humans as rational beings, and his concern with how this becomes actualized in moral and political life. Others suggest that human rights are more accurately linked to thinkers like Grotius and Hobbes, who assert natural rights; in this tradition, duties arise due to others’ rights to their performance (Baier 1995, 231). This is a different understanding of duty than that in the Kantian tradition, in which an act is deemed morally good when it is done for duty’s sake (Robinson 1998). For the sake of scope, these debates are not reviewed in full here. Rather, the salient point is that human rights assign every individual human a status of equal moral worth.
resolved (or at least appears to be resolved) via human rights. After years of struggle, the Māori people received recognition of the river Whanganui as a being and their still living kin; this recognition, in particular, came in the form of extending human rights protection to the river by the New Zealand State. If human rights served as an effective solution to this pluriversal ethical dilemma, might they not have broader potential for reorienting the field of Global Ethics to the pluriverse more generally?

In short, no. There are a few reasons why human rights – despite their apparent success in this example – are severely limited as an approach for contemplating pluriversal ethics. These reasons are, of course, implicitly tied to the problem of the assumption of a singular ontology and epistemology that limits the moral cosmopolitan approach more generally. Additional rationales as to why human rights is not compatible with the task of contemplating ethical horizons for the pluriverse, however, further illuminate some of the challenges the pluriverse poses to the ways in which we understand and approach global ethics. These are therefore worth exploring briefly now.

First, human rights are anthropocentric. The issue of who is the subject of human rights is uncritically predetermined and pre-decided in mainstream human rights discourse and practice; ‘humans’ are universally the holders of rights. Yet, such (depoliticized) framings ignore the fact that in the past, who was considered ‘human’ was (and continues to be) a deeply political determination, often reflecting and reproducing patriarchal, racist, and colonial structures of power which denied certain people status as people. For instance, the transatlantic slave-trade completely dehumanized Africans and African Americans, as they were treated as property and denied personhood. Women were also denied legal personhood, excluded from the political sphere, and again
conceived of as their husbands’ or fathers’ property. Given that determining who counts as human has historically been shaped by problematic power dynamics, it seems likely that these issues will reoccur in the pluriversal context. For instance, in the context of the pluriverse, where earth-beings like Ausangate and Whanganui are made visible as beings (as opposed to simply ‘beliefs’ held by other cultures), it is unclear how human rights – and their anthropocentric assumptions – will be able to grapple fully with non-human actors.

Even in the example of Whanganui, for instance, it is clear that the river is not treated or seen as a human; rather, it is granted an exceptional status which allows it to hold the same rights as a human. In this way, the anthropocentrism of human rights goes unchallenged; the fundamental assumption that rights belong exclusively to humans (and that by focusing on humans alone, we can attend to all moral dilemmas) is held intact, while certain exceptional cases are added as postscripts. This is, of course, not to undermine the potency of including non-humans under human rights protections, nor is it to suggest that we should attempt to conceive of earth-beings as humans. Rather, my point ultimately is that such integrations may at some point be insufficient. Even in the case of Whanganui, where this status has been granted, it is very unclear what this means in practice. While the New Zealand Government has appointed two guardians to act on behalf of the river (one representing the Māori and one from the Crown), and invested a

11 As pointed out in the previous chapter, these dehumanizing practices were key to the enactment of modernity more generally.
12 In fact, I am fundamentally against the idea that we subsume earth-beings under the umbrella of ‘human,’ as I believe this will erase, obfuscate, or reify earth-beings in a way that does harm to the earth-being itself (for they are not, in fact, human, although they are beings), and the onto-epistemologies which know earth-beings. The ways in which we name earth-beings has direct implications for the relations between the earth-being and the world of which it is a part of (Salmond 2012, 132).
NZ$1 million contribution towards establishing a legal framework to accommodate the inclusion and protection of Whanganui, the ways in which Whanganui’s rights will actually be enforced and respected are unknown (Roy 2017). If we are going to attend seriously to some of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the pluriverse, such as those regarding the protection of earth-beings, it seems likely that we will ultimately require a rethinking of the anthropocentrism of human rights, and a rethinking of the implicit assumption that humans are the sole area of concern for global ethical deliberation.

Second and relatedly, the human rights approach does very little to acknowledge or attend to relations of power in and through which rights are constructed (Evans 1998; Stammers 1993; 1995). As Neil Stammers (1995, 448) writes, “ideas and practices concerning human rights are created by people in particular historical, social and economic circumstances.” Who gets to determine who is the subject of rights? Who gets to determine which things count as rights? Can there be positive (for example, the right to food), as well as negative (the right to non-interference), rights? The act of deciding, constructing, and implementing rights is a deeply political act; rights are not transcendental or natural, but rather operate in and through relations of power. Yet, mainstream human rights discourse and practices often fail to acknowledge and foreground this reality, instead treating rights as self-evident and universally held. It is in part because of this depoliticized framing of rights that the historical (and ongoing) denial of rights to certain people can fade into the background. Undoubtedly, the very fact that the Māori people had to fight for over 140 years to receive this recognition of Whanganui’s rights attests to the political and power-laden nature of the determination and construction of rights.
This last point leads to the final, and most concerning, reason as to why human rights cannot, I believe, serve as a fruitful starting point for building an ethics for the pluriverse. Without attending to the relations of power which shape both the construction and implementation of rights, human rights fail to provide the tools required to assess and challenge the relations of power which currently uphold the world order. Why is it that some have the power to grant, recognize, and implement rights (in this case, the New Zealand government), while others (the Māori) must fight for their rights (or for certain subjects of rights) to be acknowledged at all?13

At the heart of this question is a critique of recognition more generally. Charles Taylor (1992) conceives of recognition as “a vital human need” (26) because of the idea “that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (25, emphasis in original).14 More simply, recognition is necessary for the formation and maintenance of flourishing subjectivities, and as a result, is of great political import. The importance of recognition for this reason also generates practical implications. For instance, in the colonial context of Canada, Taylor (1992; see also 1993) argues that Indigenous people are threatened

13 This unequal relationship between those who grant rights and those who must fight to receive them mimics the unequal relations presented in much of the global justice literature which, as Margaret Kohn argues, is based on a problematic “narrative structure of victims, predators, and saviours” (2013, 197), and which can be grafted on to the subject/object binary that is so key to the modern world’s ontology, as argued in the previous chapter.

14 While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an overview of the rich literature on the socio-political significance of recognition, it is worth noting that this is a perennial theme in political theory, with roots tracing back to Hegel’s (1977) dialectic of the master and the slave, in which self-realization as an autonomous and self-determining agent is rooted in both the self-recognition that one is a self-determining agent, and the recognition of oneself by another self-determined and self-recognizing agent.
minorities that should be recognized for their cultural distinctiveness; this might require allowing Indigenous groups various types of self-determination or autonomy over governance structures.

At the same time, however, critical scholars have pointed out that recognition itself can be problematic. For instance, as noted in the previous chapter, Glen Coulthard (2014) expands upon Frantz Fanon’s (2008) critique of the ways in which the maintenance of settler-state hegemony – particularly when force is not used – requires the production of what Fanon calls ‘colonized subjects.’ These colonized subjects are ‘recognized’ by the settler-state when/if they produce and reproduce specific modes of colonial thought and behavior. In such a context, recognition itself is actually harmful.

“In Fanon recognition is not posited as a source of freedom and dignity for the colonized but rather as the field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained” (Coulthard 2014, 17, emphasis in original). That is, recognition, when conceived of as something that is ultimately granted to a subaltern or marginalized group by a dominant group “prefigures its failure to significantly modify, let alone transcend, the breadth of power at play in colonial relations” (Coulthard 2014, 31). Other scholars have made similar critiques of recognition; for instance, Kelly Oliver (2001) and McNay (2008) both point to the limitations of recognition, which cannot attend to the relations of power in and through which recognition operates.

While human rights are not, of course, equivalent to recognition, human rights as an approach to ethics in the pluriverse suffers from this same limitation. Human rights tell us very little about why some are protected, or granted rights, while others are not. Human rights also fail to address adequately questions regarding who gets to decide who
is the subject of rights, and who is responsible for ensuring that the rights of others are respected and upheld. Without providing tools for exploring and critically examining these questions – and the ways in which these questions play out ‘on the ground’ – human rights, like other cosmopolitanisms, will be unable to grapple fully with ethical dilemmas in the context of the pluriverse.

3.2 Discourse Ethics and Linklater’s Post-Westphalian Communities

At its core, discourse ethics, as formulated by Jürgen Habermas (see, for example, 1987; 1990), stems from the idea of pure argument, “where actors hope to come to an uncoerced understanding [\textit{verständigungshandeln}] [sic]\textsuperscript{15} with each other” (Crawford 2009, 111). Opposing the ‘philosophy of the subject’ which occupied the intellectual thought of his Frankfurt school predecessors (particularly Adorno) (Baynes 2004; Haacke 2005; Habermas 1990), Habermas moves from a monological approach to enlightenment, whereby individual self-reflection provides the key to emancipation, and thereby refocuses “the thrust of critical theory onto epistemological problems” (Weber 2005, 196). In so doing, Habermas develops an intersubjectivist epistemology (Anievas 2005, 140), in which “the (normative) resources for coordinating social action can be derived from the pragmatic suppositions of ‘mutual understanding’ or communicative action” (Baynes 2004, 212). In other words, Habermas “attempt[s] to locate emancipation in processes of argumentation and consensus” (Haacke 1996, 260) based on the assumption that “the resources for assessing the growth of knowledge are reflexive and can be

\textsuperscript{15} Habermas’s phrase is ‘\textit{verständigungsorientiertes Handeln}.’
apprehended, not in the authority of expertise, but in the practices of ordinary language use” (Weber 2005, 197).

More precisely, Habermas claims that in communicative action, agents are engaged in the assessment and subsequent validation of claims made by other agents. Neta Crawford elaborates:

In discourse ethics, the arguments are logical (coherent), actors’ claims are open to challenge, and if challenged, their claims can be supported. All competent subjects are allowed to participate by making any assertion and expressing their attitudes, desires, and needs. Actors come to understand each other through dialogue and the participants are willing to take on the obligations that result from reaching consensus. Of course each participant must be willing and able to back up their assertions, and revise them if they are proven ill-founded. The focus of discourse ethics theory is [therefore] the process by which normative arguments become understood as valid […]. (2009, 111)

Habermas identifies three basic validity claims that are at stake in communicative action: a) the claim that the speech act is sincere, truthful, and authentic; b) the claim that the speech act is socially appropriate or right, and thus the norms of the underlying arguments are right; and c) the claim that the speech act is factually true based on the perceived facts (Bohman and Rehg 2017; Risse 2000). Habermasian discourse ethics is premised on these validity claims as “the universal rationality structures underpinning communication” (Anievas 2005, 136). Discourse ethics suggests that when agents with the ability to reason (that is, the ability to assess, critique, and validate these claims) and empathize (to see things through the eyes of another) are freed from relationships of power, force, and coercion and share a common lifeworld (Lebenswelt)\textsuperscript{16}, they can reach

\textsuperscript{16} Lebenswelt is “a ‘culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretative patterns’ constructed through individual abilities, intuitive knowledge, socially accepted practices and underlying beliefs” (Anievas 2005, 137; quoting Habermas 1987, 124). The significance of this lifeworld assumption is explored more fully below.
normative consensuses based on the force of the better argument. In so doing, the agents together uncover the normative resources for strategizing and organizing social action, which may lead to emancipation.

On this basis, discourse ethics is a universalist procedural ethic, as opposed to a substantive ethic. It is based on the idea that all those affected by certain norms should have equal voice in the communicative procedures through which decisions and norms are (re)legitimized via rational justification (Linklater 1996a, 86). Discourse ethics “sets out the procedures to be followed so that individuals are equally free to express their moral differences, and able to resolve them, if this is possible, through the force of the better argument. It does not provide putative solutions to substantive moral debates, envisage end points or circulate blueprints” (Linklater 1996a, 87). Instead, discourse ethics is concerned with questions of the ‘right’ in the public sphere and attempts to avoid the thicker moral questions of the good life (Shapcott 2002).

There is a robust literature that draws upon discourse ethics to explore issues in international relations (see, for example, Crawford 2009; Diez and Steans 2005; Ellis 2002; Risse 2000; Samhat and Payne 2003). However, Linklater (1996a; 1998; 1999; 2005) specifically inserts discourse ethics into the international sphere by developing “the case for a multicultural dialogical cosmopolitanism modelled on Habermas’s discourse ethics” (Shapcott 2002, 222). According to Linklater, discourse ethics

defends the creation of dialogic communities at all levels of social and political life and clashes with sovereignty which severely restricts the capacity of outsiders to participate in dialogue regarding issues which affect their vital interests. Discourse ethics argues that human beings need to be reflective about the ways in which they include and exclude others from dialogue. It argues that they should

17 Note that while I do not distinguish between ethics and morality (see footnote 2 in the introductory chapter), discourse ethics is an approach to ethics which upholds such a distinction.
be willing to problematize bounded communities (indeed boundaries of all kinds) and that the legitimacy of practices of exclusion is questionable if they have failed to take account of the interests of outsiders. It provides additional normative support for the vision of cosmopolitan democracy. (1996a, 85)

Discourse ethics, for Linklater, provides a suitable model of dialogue for “post-Westphalian” forms of community in which radically different agents “are equally free to express their moral claims, able to explore the prospects for solving their moral differences and capable of reaching an appropriate compromise in the absence of consensus” (Shapcott 2002, 222; quoting Linklater 1998, 92). The consequence of using discourse ethics in this way, according to Linklater, is a dual questioning of “traditional modes of exclusion” – including the exclusions that result from the sovereign state system and its emphasis on national citizenship and boundaries – and an imagining of “new dialogic possibilities” (1996a, 88) which involve both a greater universality (in that all people are able to participate in the dialogue) and openness to difference than the modern state has allowed (1996a, 87). Because of this, Linklater sees discourse ethics as providing a fruitful and universal basis for a post-Westphalian cosmopolitan community. The procedure and universal structure of language allows all to be included, and as the theory is not based on a metaphysical postulation of the rational subject, discourse ethics is able to accommodate deep subjective differences.

Existing Critiques

Discourse ethics, particularly as applied to international politics, has been critiqued on a number of fronts. I have divided these various critiques into three broad themes. First, the potential to (in)validate empirically the tenets of discourse ethics has been debated; while some International Relations scholars have argued that a constructivist understanding of
international regimes can conceptualize these as fora for the type of dialogue envisioned by Linklater (Bohman 1999; Ellis 2002; Samhat and Payne 2003), Nicole Deitelhoff and Harald Müller (2005) find that their attempt to investigate the role and impact of arguing à la discourse ethics in international negotiations was inconclusive. Subsequently, they question the potential to verify claims purported by discourse ethics supporters in general.

Second, discourse ethics’ focus on the right over the good has been challenged and problematized. Discourse ethics is presented as a procedural ethic, concerned with determining the right in the public sphere, and without substantive moral underpinnings related to, or even concerned with, broader questions of the good life. Seyla Benhabib (1992) argues that this separation between the right and the good mimics the public/private divide which has excluded women’s issues, concerns, and knowledge from the political sphere. As a result, Benhabib argues that discourse ethics similarly excludes concerns often associated with women’s moral lives.18 Norman Geras (1999) takes a slightly different angle and questions whether the separation between the right and the good exists at all in discourse ethics. He argues instead that “an ethical principle concerning the proper constituency of the procedure (prime facie all human beings) undergirds the procedure” (159).19 Chantal Mouffe poses a similar critique (Kapoor 2002; Linklater 2005; Mouffe 1997; 1999).

Perhaps most significant of all, and most pertinent to the critique to follow, there

18 I return to Benhabib’s argument in greater detail in chapter four.
19 Linklater (1999) concedes this point, noting that “Geras is right that this procedural or thin morality is necessarily fairly thick” (173). At the same time, Linklater asserts that the strength of discourse ethics is that once the procedure has been initiated, discourse ethics provides the tools to validate these normative underpinnings retroactively (see also Anievas 2005).
have been numerous arguments that challenge the universalizing tendencies of discourse ethics, particularly when applied to international relations. Richard Shapcott notes that while “at first glance such a model fulfils the requirements of a model of communication in which radically different agents engage with each other as equals in a discursively constituted community” (2002, 222), there is a tension between the universal and plural in Linklater’s formulation that is not fully addressed. Shapcott, drawing on Stephen Hopgood (2000), elaborates:

[Linklater’s model requires] a degree of homogeneity amongst the participants in the conversation for it to be inclusive of the truly radically different. Stephen Hopgood, for instance, argues that a communicative cosmopolitanism “presumes persons are at least minimally liberal (other-regarding, egalitarian) in the first place.” More importantly, he argues that discourse ethics implicitly requires the “remaking” of those who do not fit the picture of the liberal self into agents who do. (2002, 223; quoting Hopgood 2000, 10)

The problem, then, is that despite the claim that this approach allows for plurality, in that equal voice is given to people despite differences in subjectivity, the fact that discourse ethics requires a common lifeworld – in that others must come to the conversation with an agreed-upon, pre-established notion of what constitutes an ethical conversation in the first place – serves only to undermine pluralism.

Hutchings (2005) addresses this tension more fully. One of the apparent strengths of using discourse ethics à la Linklater is that, in its procedural form, this model does not require pre-established agreement on substantive issues. However, as Hutchings points out, “Habermas’s discourse ethics presupposes a great deal about what morality must mean” (2005, 165) because what it means to communicate ethically with a “mutually intelligible cognitive content” (2005, 163) is pre-established before any such
communication takes place. For instance, Iris Marion Young (1997) argues that the type of dialogue in Habermasian discourse ethics is narrow, and excludes other types of discourse, such as greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling, that different people from different contexts may draw upon during dialogue. Nick Vaughan-Williams (2005) draws on Jacques Derrida to critique discourse ethics’ repression of anything that “bends, overdetermines or even questions, in theory or practice, this idea of language” (Derrida 1992, 54-55, emphasis added; quoted in Vaughan-Williams 2005, 173). From a poststructuralist stance, Diana Coole (1996) challenges discourse ethics’ very focus on, and prioritization of, discourse as the intersubjective site for emancipation, noting that discourse ethics “can offer no politics to deal with exclusions that remain stubbornly operative within the prediscursive” (239), such as affects, emotions, senses, desires, and imagination. Fred Dallmayr (2001) similarly critiques discourse ethics by advocating for a ‘thick dialogue’ that is open to vernacular experiences. Together these criticisms all center on the fact that discourse ethics “prescribes not only the procedure but also the content of dialogue, […] of what are acceptable statements and topics” (Shapcott 2002, 229).

Underlying these critiques, whether implicitly or explicitly, is the pre-established understanding which supposes that, as pointed out above, people are at least minimally liberal – they are equal, other-recognizing, and able to distance themselves from their own contexts so that they come to the discussion willing to be persuaded by the force of the better argument (even if, and particularly when, the ‘better’ argument is not their own). In other words, the theoretical promise that discourse ethics sidesteps questions of

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20 The gist of this point is also captured by Norman Geras (1999), who argues that discourse ethics is necessarily underpinned by thick moral assumptions (see above).

21 See section 3.1 for a critique of ‘recognition’ more generally.
subjectivity falls flat (Hopgood 2000, 12). As Hutchings notes, “in practice, it becomes clear that the conditions underpinning the discourses needed to agree on global moral norms are stringently liberal” (2005, 162), premised on a liberal “individualistic ontology whereby individuals are autonomous agents who are ‘free’ to participate in open dialogue” (Robinson 2011c, 847), and where ‘dialogue’ refers to a very specific form of human interaction.

The concern here, then, is that discourse ethics theoretically requires an assimilative universalism in which the plurality of being that exists globally becomes subsumed under a Western liberal model of what it means to be human (Hutchings 2005, 162). Put differently, discourse ethics presupposes liberal subjectivities and is premised on liberal notions of moral communication. While Linklater sees discourse ethics as obliterating exclusions and expanding boundaries by creating a more inclusive, open-to-difference, and universal dialogue (and by extension, political community), discourse ethics in fact draws its own boundaries, such that moral subjects must, in at least some broad way, be liberal subjects. The result is that deep ontological differences cannot, in fact, be accommodated under the discourse ethics framework.

Furthermore, given that liberalism is, itself, embedded in hierarchies of power, discourse ethics likewise reproduces these same hierarchies: the rules of the ethical dialogue are premised upon the ideologies (liberalism) that are most powerful in the global political economy today (Hutchings 2005, 165). In this way, even if subjects are ‘assimilated’ (Hutchings 2005, 162) and given equal status to participate in the dialogue,
the existing power relations may prevent meaningful equality and participation. For example, as Fiona Robinson (2011c) argues, even if people are ‘equally’ able to speak in political and ethical dialogue, this does not mean that all people will be equally heard, as those with power may not need to listen attentively to those with relatively less power. Clearly, discourse ethics, and its processes for giving all people equal voice in ethical and political dialogues, is an “abstract, universal response [that] skims too quickly over concrete human experience” (Schick 2009, 138), including the power relations which inform and shape all our lives. As Hutchings concludes, “in the end any ‘dialogue’ on Habermasian terms turns out to be one-sided and exclusive” (2005, 155).

A Pluriversal Critique: The Limits of Discourse (Ethics)

Consider another anecdote from the ongoing dialogue between de la Cadena and Nazario (who were introduced in the first chapter), in which de la Cadena, a Peruvian born anthropologist now living in the United States, asks Nazario, a Quechua man, to explain the meaning of the word *pukara*. She writes:

Suggesting that the word belonged to a speech regime different from the one I most commonly used, [Nazario] answered: *That way of speaking is very difficult […] You will not understand, and whatever you write on your paper, something else it is going to say*. He went on to tell me: *Pukara is just pukara. Rock pukara is pukara, soil pukara is pukara, water pukara is pukara. It is a different way of talking. Pukara is not a different person, it is not a different soil, it is not a different rock, it is not a different water. It is the same thing – pukara. It is difficult to talk about. Marisol may want to know where the pukara lives, what its name is – she would say it is a person, an abyss, a rock, a water, a lagoon. It is not. Pukara is a different way of saying; it is hard to understand. It is not easy. Pukara is Pukara!* His tone was impatiently emphatic about the connection; as if he wanted to delete the separation between the word pukara and the entity pukara habitual of my form of understanding. (2015 29-30, emphasis in original)

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22 One might even say that implicit coercion is present in such processes of assimilation, which goes against one of the core tenants of discourse ethics.
In this exchange, it is evident that two different onto-epistemological standpoints, or two different worlds, are confronting the limits of mutual intelligibility. De la Cadena, as a liberal subject, resides in an onto-epistemological space in which subject-object distinctions are made, as are distinctions between signifier and signified. In her ‘lifeworld,’ discourse is thus a distinct way of knowing: through dialogue, meaning and understanding about the world manifests. Nazario’s world, on the other hand, consists of an onto-epistemological being which he calls ayllu (de la Cadena, 2015, 101). Being in-ayllu is a deeply relational onto-epistemological state, in which there is no separation between tirakuna (earth-beings) – like Pukara and Ausangate – and runakuna (people), nor is there separation between these beings and place. In Nazario’s lifeworld, “they are all in-ayllu, the relation from which they emerge being” (de la Cadena 2015, 101, emphasis in original). In-ayllu, knowing and being emerge together and are inseparable.

As de la Cadena explains:

By saying ‘pukara is pukara,’ he indicated that pukara, the word, is always already with content and, thus, already the entity it names – not different from it. Of course I could understand the meaning of pukara. I could write it on paper, but that would not be the same; it would not be pukara. Something else it is going to say. […] O]n successfully crossing the linguistic barriers, [any] translation would leave the earth-being behind and move pukara into a regime where the word stands for the being and allows for its representation (of pukara, for example). […] What is lost is not meaning or the mode of signification; what is lost in translation is the earth-being itself, and with it the worlding practice in which runakuna and tirakuna are together without the mediation of meaning: naming suffices. (2015, 30, emphasis in original)

In Nazario’s lifeworld (to keep with the language of discourse ethics), knowledge is inseparable from practice: naming pukara is a worlding practice which enacts both pukara and Nazario, and indeed their entire onto-epistemology. In this enacting, Nazario simultaneously comes to know pukara. His knowledge is completely tied to his being,
and to the practices which bring his world into existence; he does not speak for the ayllu, he speaks from it (de la Cadena 2015, 45). De la Cadena cannot, therefore, ever know pukara – at least not in the way that Nazario knows pukara. She lacks the epistemic tools; as a liberal subject, her onto-epistemological world is one which speaks for objects, as opposed to from relations. Further, no amount of dialogue would allow her to know pukara; the onto-epistemological space between speaking for (de la Cadena) and speaking from (Nazario) is too great:

I could translate them, but that did not mean I knew them. And frequently not knowing was not a question of leaving meaning behind, because for many practices or words there was no such thing as meaning. The practices were what my friends did, and the words were what they said; but what those practices did or what those words said escaped my knowing. Of course I described them in forms that I could understand; but what I turned those practices or words into what I could grasp, that – what I was describing – was not what those practices did, or what those words said. (de la Cadena 2015, 3, emphasis in original)

It is this unknowability – this dialogical limit – which I wish to point to in this critique of discourse ethics (and which, I believe poses a broader challenge to the field of Global Ethics for thinking pluriversally more generally). While others have made forceful critiques of the limitations of the particular type of dialogue espoused in discourse ethics, the critique I put forth here is of discourse ethics’ primordial reliance on discourse, language, and dialogue – in whatever form – as the source of reason, the way to settle normative disputes, and the way to accumulate knowledge for emancipatory purposes. As outlined above, Habermas locates “practical reason in the medium of language” (Haacke 2005, 183). In so doing, discourse becomes the tool through which understanding is debated, and, by extension, knowledge claims are validated. This epistemic axiom has a twofold effect. First, it erases or devalues other epistemes, such as the deep relational epistemology of Nazario’s world. For Nazario, knowledge is not obtained (exclusively)
through dialogue. Knowledge comes from being in-\textit{ayllu}. Discourse ethics, in locating reason in intersubjective language exchange, renders different knowledges and knowledge claims – such as those based on deep being-in relation – as less-than rational. This epistemic move, in which reason is equated with modern ways of knowing alone, has long been a pillar of Eurocentrism (Amin 2009) and the colonial project (Said 1978), as argued extensively in the previous chapter.

By extension, given that Habermas locates the development and exercise of reason, and therefore the potential for emancipation, in discourse, subjects like Nazario are rendered unintelligible as subjects of emancipation. The politics these subjects invoke based on being in-\textit{ayllu}, such as Nazario’s demonstration to protect Ausungate from the mining development project described in the introductory chapter, are likewise rendered unintelligible. By this I mean, the motivation for what is, by all liberal accounts, clearly a political act – a social movement, a protest, a strategic claim-raising against the state – is unintelligible within the modernist onto-epistemological framing at work in Habermasian discourse ethics. Nazario’s motivation for his politics comes from a deep being in-relation; the knowledge that he, and his community, must protect Ausungate was not realized through dialogue alone. Yet this knowledge, and the subsequent political action towards emancipation, does not fit within a discourse ethics framework. By extension, Nazario, and subjects like him, are not intelligible as valid subjects of emancipation either. In this way, Habermasian discourse ethics can be thought of as a ‘partition of the sensible,’ that is, an order that defines certain activities as visible and others as invisible.
This observation should come as no surprise – the existing critiques reviewed previously allude to this problem. More concretely, Habermas’ discourse ethics is premised on a moral psychology that distinguishes between pre- and post-conventional morality. As Linklater explains:

Pre-conventional morality exists when actors obey norms because they fear that non-compliance will be sanctioned by a higher authority; conventional norms are observed because actors are loyal to a specific social group; post-conventional morality occurs when actors stand back from authority structures and group membership and ask whether they are complying with principles which have universal validity. (1996b, 286)

Under such a scheme, Nazario and his world would be deemed pre-conventional; Habermas argues that such lifeworlds are comprised of a ‘mythical’ worldview, and asserts that discourse ethics is thus not applicable (Rustin 1999). However, as de la Cadena (2015) emphasizes, *tirakuna* (earth-beings) are not a belief for Nazario – they simply *are*. Reducing them to a myth or belief loses sight of the fact that belief does not mediate the relationship between Ausangate and Nazario; rather, Ausangate is a presence enacted through everyday practices in-*ayllu* (de la Cadena 2015, 26). Second, in the context of international relations, and particularly in relation to Linklater’s proposal that discourse ethics provide the basis for a universal community in which all actors have a place at the table, this hierarchy of lifeworlds and moral frameworks – a hierarchy which would deem Nazario’s world as less than or ‘behind’ the modern onto-epistemology – is deeply problematic. Beate Jahn (1998) captures this concern when she writes: “How, one

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23 The relationship between Habermasian discourse ethics and Rancière’s thought is explored more fully in section 3.3.
24 I discuss moral psychology, and this system of classifying moral psychological development, in greater detail in chapter four.
wonders, do the Critical Critics\(^\text{25}\) expect to establish any kind of equal communication with peoples whom they have told beforehand that they, unfortunately, are morally backward?” (641).

Second, the axiomatic status of language as rationality also implicitly asserts that if we just dialogue enough, then we can come to know the other. As Linklater (2005) writes, discourse ethics invites moral agents to “think from the standpoint of others, to place themselves in other’s shoes and to test their preferred ethical principles by asking if they would accept them if roles were reversed” (151). The problem here lies in the assumption that if we just adopt the right disposition, we can place ourselves in others’ shoes.\(^\text{26}\) Put differently, even in the seemingly-humble assertion that above all else, discourse ethics means that “there is no certainty about who will learn from whom” (Linklater 1996a, 86; see also Linklater 2005, 149), lies the grand assumption that someone can (always or necessarily) learn from the other. Indeed, attempts to amend discourse ethics by employing a thicker definition of dialogue (see, for example, Dallmayr 2001; Young 1997) still assume, at some level, that knowability is guaranteed.

This assumption, I suggest, reflects a failure to recognize the limits of knowing when differences are deep and pervasive – when differences are onto-epistemological, when they involve multiple worlds. The literature on the pluriverse, including the example presented above, highlights the limits of knowability, and thereby deeply challenges the assumption of unfettered mutual understanding and knowing that

\(^{25}\) Jahn (1998) uses the term ‘Critical Critics’ to refer to “the enterprise of Critical Theory in International Relations” (613, footnote 1).

\(^{26}\) I discussed this point in relation to empathy (and ethical approaches which valorize empathy) briefly in the introductory chapter, and I elaborate on this theme more extensively in chapter four.
underpins discourse ethics. To put it differently, from a pluriversal perspective, the metaphor of stepping into someone else’s shoes falls incredibly short. What is at stake in the pluriverse is not removable footwear but rather the feet themselves. How can we wear another’s feet (knowledge), when they are not separable from the body (the ontology)?

Perhaps even more significantly, in assuming ultimate knowability, discourse ethics provides us with little guidance on how to navigate moral dilemmas when knowing the other fully is not possible, as demonstrated in the case of de la Cadena and Nazario. How do we proceed when concepts central to moral dilemmas are not translatable? What do we lose in translation? Are such losses significant enough to matter in terms of navigating moral dilemmas? Perhaps most importantly of all, how do we know when the losses are significant enough? Who gets to determine when the limits to knowing across difference are surmountable and when they are not? How does power shape and impact the answers to these questions, both theoretically and in practice?

Of course, in raising these questions, I do not wish to suggest that we must descend into relativism, in which knowledge across difference is completely inaccessible. In fact, I believe that the literature on the pluriverse, the notion of multiple worlds, and the specific examples of de la Cadena and Nazario all provide evidence to reject such a relativist conclusion: while there are multiple onto-epistemologies, the pluriverse emphasizes the connectedness of these onto-epistemologies, the fact that we reside in a common present. The pluriverse is a world of relations, albeit ones which do

27 In chapter four, I return to the antinomy between universality and relativism, discuss why it is significant for moral philosophy, and use the ethics of care to demonstrate how we can move beyond this. However, the point for now is that while this discussion highlights the limits to knowing, I am not ultimately suggesting that this means a pluriversal ethics can only be relativistic.
not always map out neatly. Yet the fact that these worlds are related means that navigating moral dilemmas and attempting understanding, even across complex differences, is not only possible but necessary. The example of de la Cadena and Nazario demonstrates this; mutual dialoguing, knowing, and understanding is clearly unfolding in their sustained conversation. However, the type of knowing that results from this dialogue is a far humbler, more vulnerable, and limited knowing than that which is espoused by discourse ethics. It evades one-to-one translation; were de la Cadena to make smooth equivalences between tirakuna (earth-beings) and nonhumans (nature), for instance, she would “be ignoring the ontological excesses between each pair” (de la Cadena 2014, 256). These excesses, however, are crucially important; they render tirakuna as tirakuna unknowable to de la Cadena, and nonhuman nature as an object unknowable to Nazario.

At the same time, however, in prioritizing these excesses, de la Cadena does not abandon attempting to know tirakuna. Rather, she simultaneously pays particular attention to the part of tirakuna that she cannot know. The result, as de la Cadena explains, is that by highlighting these incommensurabilities – the same incommensurabilities that exceed the type of dialogue envisioned by discourse ethics – she is able to bring to the fore the onto-epistemological differences between her and Nazario, allowing them “to be acknowledged even if not known” (2015, 31). In this way, de la Cadena takes difference seriously while still pursuing cross-cultural meaning making with Nazario; she is able both “to attend to fractures [the excess] and entanglements [the shared]” (Pratt 2002, 25, emphasis added). In this way, this discussion of discourse ethics, and this pluriversal critique of the assumption of knowability, points
to another facet of the challenge of building a pluriversal ethics: What tools do we have for ethical deliberation when knowing fully is not possible, when we cannot step outside of our world, when dialogue and knowledge has limits, but when we nonetheless occupy the same present and material reality?

### 3.3 Postmodernist Ethics

As previously introduced, postmodernist ethics, in Hutchings’ (2010) schematic, encompasses a variety of specific conceptualizations of, and approaches to, ethics. Most broadly, however, these various approaches are united in their rejection of the idea that there are essential features or qualities associated with being ‘human,’ and relatedly, that ethics can be given a rational, universal, transcendental grounding (again, this is why they are one of the ‘alternative’ approaches to the rationalist approaches) (Hutchings 2010, 67). In fact, postmodernist ethicists not only assert that such groundings are impossible, but also foreground the dangers of relying on such grounds as providing ultimate authority, as every assertion of a ground necessarily excludes or marks something else as outside the realm of reasonable or politically significant. For this reason, postmodernist ethics prioritize a deconstructivist approach to ethics, in which the assertion of any and all normative grounds must continually be examined and interrogated: “the task is to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations *authorizes*, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses” (Butler 1992, 7, emphasis in original). Through such interrogation, postmodernist ethics seeks to “relieve the category [of ‘universal grounding’] of its foundationalist weight in order to render it as a site of permanent political contest” (Butler 1992, 8). Significantly, and is discussed more fully below, the
term ‘political’ here connotes something very particular in this tradition.

As noted in the introductory chapter,\(^{28}\) it is important to emphasize that while Hutchings uses the term ‘Postmodernist Ethics’ to encompass numerous schools of thought and approaches to ethics, including poststructuralism, postfoundationalism, and pragmatism, there are significant differences between these approaches, despite their mutual commitment to questioning transcendental and universal normative groundings. For purposes of scope, this section focuses on one particular variant of postmodernist ethics, postfoundational cosmopolitanism (see, for example, Caraus and Paris 2016), and assesses whether a postfoundational cosmopolitanism can orient us to contemplate the ethical landscape of the pluriverse.\(^{29}\) In order to undertake such an assessment, however, it is important first to discuss the meaning of ‘postfoundationalism.’

**Marchart’s Post-Foundational Political Thought**

The term ‘post-foundational political thought’ was coined by Oliver Marchart (2007) to refer to the collective works of scholars like Jean-Luc Nancy, Ernesto Laclau, Alain Badiou, and Claude Lefort who focus on the political difference, and in so doing, seek to move beyond the antinomy between universal foundations and antifoundationalism.\(^{30}\) Foundational thought, according to Marchart, refers to “all theoretical approaches for which the social is grounded on principles that transcend politics and society” (2016,

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\(^{28}\) In particular, see footnote 20 in the introduction.

\(^{29}\) Further, while I focus on this one particular variant of postmodernist ethics, for pragmatic reasons, I also explore only a sample of the work that could be considered ‘postfoundational cosmopolitanism.’

\(^{30}\) Of course, these scholars are not the only ones who have worked to move beyond this antinomy. For instance, Marc Doucet (1999) intervenes in this debate on foundations in the field of international theory by suggesting that it is more fruitful to view “foundation as (im)possible” (294, emphasis in original). This idea is similar to the understanding of ‘foundations’ in postfoundational thought, as outlined below.
for foundational theories, principles of politics and the social are immune to revision or undeniable (Marchart 2007, 11). The rationalist approaches, including moral cosmopolitanism and discourse ethics, fall under this definition. Antifoundationalism, on the other hand, is the rejection of foundationalism and groundings. As Richard Rorty (2010, 151) writes, “On this view […] nothing grounds our practices, nothing legitimizes them, nothing shows them to be in touch with the way things really are.” However, as Marchart (2007, 12) points out, this antinomy between foundationalists and antifoundationalists leads to a particular contradiction. Are not antifoundationalists making a foundational claim in their assertion that there are no grounds or universal and transcendent principles? Furthermore, both sides of this binary point to particular, albeit distinct, dilemmas. If one accepts foundations, questions arise regarding who or how these foundations are determined, the ways in which power shapes such determining, and how to deal with contestations over the nature of grounds. This has (if somewhat implicitly) been pointed out in the preceding chapter on modernity and the sections above outlining the limitations of the rationalist approaches to Global Ethics: claims regarding universal truths and principles are exclusionary and come to mask the fact that such claims are always made from a particular locatedness that does not reflect or capture different ways of knowing or being in the world. Antifoundationalism, and the denial of any and all grounds, on the other hand, has its own problem, as it can lead to a sort of nihilism or radical relativism in which normative claims can never be asserted or contested meaningfully.

To resolve this bind (or at the very least, to help us move beyond it), Marchart points to several political theories which could “be rightfully called a post-foundational
constellation” (2007, 12, emphasis in original). These theories, according to Marchart, posit neither a universal grounding nor do they deny groundings all together. Rather, they assert what Judith Butler has called “contingent foundations” (1992). This position, according to Marchart, allows for the foregrounding of the revisability of grounds, while also accepting “the necessity for some grounds” (2007, 14, emphasis in original). That is, postfoundational thinkers, “even as they refute the idea of a single, ultimate ground, […] still seek to account for the dimension of grounding” (Marchart 2016, 184, emphasis in original), the ways in which the “social world is characterized by incessant – yet ultimately unsuccessful – attempts at constructing foundations which sooner or later will crumble under the increasing weight of competing attempts at constructing alternative foundations” (Marchart 2016, 184).

While intuitively this makes sense (particularly for those of us who subscribe to relational or social constructivist – which I mean in the broadest sense – understandings of the social and political world), this postfoundational standpoint raises several other questions, most significant of which is: What, then, is the ontological status of foundations? If foundations are neither ‘existing’ nor ‘not existing,’ what are they? Marchart compellingly argues that this question calls for a shift in the analysis – “from ‘actually existing’ foundations to their status,” where their status is their condition of possibility (2007, 14). Ontologically, what accounts for the condition of possibility through which several (infinite) contingent foundations may emerge?

According to Marchart (and other postfoundational political theorists), the condition of possibility for contingent foundations is (perhaps somewhat ironically) the lack of any ultimate or final grounding. More specifically, it is the impossibility of the
final achievement of a totality that makes pluralization itself possible (Marchart 2007, 17); the constant interplay between the grounding and ungrounding of contingent foundations can only emerge from the impossibility of any grounds at all (that is, from “the abyss-like foundation, the groundless ground, the ground that is present only in its absence” (Paris 2016, 71)). From this theoretical vantage point, it is this interplay, and this splitting between a purely negative foundation and plural contingent foundations, that becomes significant. Marchart argues that an array of scholars, including those mentioned above, have attended to this split, which can be conceptualized based on a distinction between ‘the political’ and ‘politics.’³¹ ‘The political,’ according to Marchart, refers to the primordial or ontological absence of an ultimate ground – this ultimate absence is itself the grounds of possibility for (contingent) grounds to emerge, as just noted.

‘Politics,’ on the other hand, refers to the “empirical existence” (Marchart 2007, 15) of grounds (Marchart 2007, 13-18), “a specific discursive regime, a particular social system, a certain form of action” (Marchart 2007, 8), that is, most broadly, the socio-symbolic order which structures our lives.³² Or, as Slavoj Žižek (1991) summarizes, politics is “a positively determined sub-system of social relations in interaction with other sub-systems” while the political is “the moment of openness, of undecidability, when the very structuring principle of society, the fundamental form of social pact, is called into question” (193-195, see also Edkins 1999, 2-6).

Before turning to how this distinction between politics and the political (and

³¹ This distinction was also outlined briefly in the introductory chapter.
³² Marchart derives this distinction between the political and politics from Martin Heidegger’s corresponding one between ontology and the ontic, and he also owes much debt to Heidegger’s notion of the ground without ground or abyss. See pages 1-34 of Marchart (2007) for a detailed description of this lineage.
postfoundational political thought more generally) has been mobilized in the context of ethics, a few other conceptual notes are necessary. First, the impossibility of grounds (often called the abyss or the void) conceptually leads to a notion of radical equality: if there are no groundings, then everything is equally possible; this applies to subjects as well. This is similar to Heidegger’s notion of freedom, wherein the positive freedom to do anything is made (equally) possible by the very bottomlessness of the ground on which it is based (Marchart 2007, 22). Or to state the other side of the same coin, this equality and freedom are the negative grounds which create the possibility of any grounds emerging at all. “The void of human freedom represents nothing more than a moment of radical possibility, from which might emerge a new principle or a distinctive set of values, and through [these] an opening up of the world” (Wenman 2016, 42).

Second, postfoundational thinkers have often mobilized different terms to capture the moment of the political, including ‘moment’ or ‘event.’ This moment refers to “those instances in which the abyssal character of the social – the contingency of its very own foundations – surfaces and is reactivated or ‘enacted’ by theoretical and political practice” (Marchart 2007, 21). The political moment is the de- and re-grounding moment, a “double movement whereby the mode of institution of society appears and is obscured” (Lefort 1988, 11). This moment of both radical openness and then closure as a new order is instituted helps in part to understand why deconstruction becomes so important from a postfoundational perspective. Deconstruction is not anti-foundational; instead, it is “a repeated staging of attention on the construction of foundations presupposed as self-evident” (Spivak 1993, 153). In other words, deconstruction is a critical inquiry into the moment of the political, and the foundations which appear as always-already present at
such an instituting moment.

Lastly, postfoundational thinkers, in addition to being concerned with the interplay between grounding (politics) and ungrounding (the political), have also been preoccupied with the nature of the political itself. More precisely, “this shift in analysis from the ‘actually existing’ foundations to their conditions of possibility, that is to say to their ontological status, marks the ‘turn to ontology’ in post-foundational political theory” (Caraus 2016b, 13). According to Marchart, the moment of the political has three elements: it refers to the specific quality of politics as such; it must be independent of other criteria, and thus autonomous with respect to other spheres of the social, including morality, culture, and economics; and lastly, when the ungrounded nature of any social foundations becomes apparent, the political “assumes primacy over the social” and indicates the double movement in which society is de- and re-institutionalized (2007, 48).

The nature of this moment of primacy has been debated by those Marchart identifies as postfoundational thinkers. In particular, Marchart argues that some scholars – particularly those in the Arendtian tradition – theorize the political as ‘associative,’ as a moment of acting in concert or acting together (2007, 39). That is, the political moment, from an associative perspective, may manifest when a plurality of people freely associate within the public realm, motivated by a care for and a sense of respect and responsibility for the common life (Marchart 2007, 40). To be clear, this associative-ness is not to be confused with consensus; rather, these ‘associative’ scholars are committed to maintaining the political difference, and do not wish to obfuscate either the (im)possible

33 I return to this point more fully below, but it is worth highlighting that throughout his book Marchart reiterates that the political is a unique domain, separate from morality.
interplay between abyss and contingent groundings or the plurality of beings that may emerge from this interplay. Rather, in the associative tradition, it is the specific criterion of acting in concert together with responsibility for our collective life that gives the political its autonomy from other spheres of social life, such as the economic, social, and moral spheres (Marchart 2007, 41).

In contrast to the ‘associative’ thinkers, Marchart (2007, 41) notes that some postfoundational theorists in the Schmittian tradition instead emphasize the ‘dissociative’ trait of the political moment. The dissociative trait emphasizes antagonism “because of the existence of a form of negativity [the void] that cannot be overcome dialectically” (Mouffe 2013, xi). More simply, this trait, and those postfoundational thinkers that subscribe to this understanding of the nature of the political, emphasize the irreconcilability of the grounding/ungrounding (i.e., of the assertion of foundations without foundations) and the fact that every political moment, in so far that it disrupts ‘actually existing’ politics, is a rupture that must be antagonistic by nature.

**Postfoundational Cosmopolitanism(s)**

Recently, Tamara Caraus and colleagues (Caraus 2015; 2016a; 2016b; Caraus and Paris 2016; Caraus and Pârvu 2015) have posited ‘postfoundational cosmopolitanism’ as an approach to ethics based most generally on “the legacy of the practice of contesting, questioning, challenging or rejecting existing unjust political regimes or forms of power” (Caraus 2015, 1) while also recognizing “the contingency of its own conceptual, normative and empirical foundations” (Pârvu 2016, 87). From this broad definition, postfoundational cosmopolitanism may therefore best be thought of as spectrum of
cosmopolitanisms\textsuperscript{34} that are loosening the hold on the universal claims and foundational groundings inherent to moral cosmopolitanism (as discussed above).

For instance, at one end of the spectrum are cosmopolitan variants like ‘cosmic cosmopolitanism’ (Burke 2013), ‘comparative cosmopolitanism’ (Robbins 1992), ‘practical cosmopolitanism’ (Dallmayr 2012), ‘cosmopolitan ethnicity’ (Werbner 2002), ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ (Delanty 2006; Mignolo 2002; 2010), ‘working class cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner 1999), ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner 2006), ‘rebellious cosmopolitanism’ (Hayden 2013), ‘cosmopolitan patriotism’ (Appiah 1998), and ‘cosmopolitics’ (Cheah 1998; Ingram 2013; Robbins 1998). These approaches to cosmopolitanism all emphasize that “any cosmopolitanism’s normative and idealizing power must acknowledge the actual historical and geographic contexts from which it emerges” (Robbins 1998, 2), while equally arguing that these local attachments and contexts need not preclude the possibility of universal obligations. These approaches have been conceived of as “new radical cosmopolitanisms from below” (Cheah 1998, 21), whereby particular and situated normative commitments engage in and interact with global relations, vernacularizing both universal normative commitments and more local ethical processes. According to Caraus (2015; 2016b), because these critical ‘cosmopolitanisms from below’ destabilize, contextualize, and contest the myth of a singular universal foundation for ethics, thereby also destabilizing the power relations which uphold such a universality, they fall under the postfoundational cosmopolitanism umbrella.

\textsuperscript{34} Caraus sometimes refers to this ‘spectrum’ as ‘cosmopolitanism in the postfoundational condition’ (2016b).
While such tempered cosmopolitan visions provide a more nuanced and located approach to ethics than the traditional moral cosmopolitanism approach, my fear is that these approaches often suffer from the same shortcomings identified above in my discussion of cosmopolitan approaches that seek to attend meaningfully to difference. For instance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006, 397) calls for an ‘insurgent cosmopolitanism,’ which “consists of the transnationally organized resistance against the unequal exchanges produced or intensified by globalized localism and localized globalisms.”\(^{35}\) This approach seeks to forge a universal struggle against injustice where various locally situated groups act in solidarity with one another. Different ways of being in and knowing the world can, in this vision, act together for a common good.

De Sousa Santos’ approach is similar to Walter Mignolo’s ‘decolonial cosmopolitanism’ (2010).\(^{36}\) The “spine of decolonial cosmopolitanism,” according to Mignolo (2010, 125), is the “links between the commonality of colonial experiences between people with uncommon local histories.” As discussed in chapter two, the unfolding of the modern/colonial world involved the creation of the colonial difference, which categorized some people as ‘civilized’ (those who colonize) and others as ‘barbarians’ (those who are colonized) (Mignolo 2010, 122).\(^{37}\) By corollary, an interior

\(^{35}\) Elsewhere, de Sousa Santos, with João Arriscado Nunes and Maria Paula Meneses (2008) refer to an ‘emancipatory cosmopolitanism’ in a similar vein. This approach, however, suffers from the same limitations that I identify in relation to insurgent cosmopolitanism.

\(^{36}\) Previously, Mignolo refers to his approach as ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ (2002; 2010). In later works he seems to prefer ‘decolonial cosmopolitanism.’

\(^{37}\) It is also worth reiterating (as pointed out in the previous two chapters) that for Mignolo, the colonial difference is “mainly and foremost epistemological” (2010, 122, emphasis in original). For instance, recall Antony Anghie’s (1996) discussion of the colonial origins of international law, which argues that in the colonial encounter, the Spaniards saw the Indians as ontological equals (as the Indians had reason). At the same time, however, because the Indians did not employ this reason to govern themselves according to (European) human law, they were viewed by the Spaniards as epistemically inferior (ergo different) (Mignolo 2010, 121-122); it is this epistemological difference that is linked to the colonial difference.
and an exterior were created.

The construction of the colonial difference goes hand in hand with the establishment of exteriority: the invented place outside the frame (barbarians) that is brought into the frame in order to secure the control of the frame (civilized) and to legislate. Exteriority, in other words, is the outside, invented in the process of building the inside. (Mignolo 2010, 122, emphasis in original)

For Mignolo, decolonial cosmopolitanism “dwells in the borders, in exteriority, in the colonial difference,” “connecting (rather than uniting) many projects and trajectories in a global process of de-colonial cosmopolitanism, toward the horizon of pluri-versality as a universal project” (2010, 125).

However, it is unclear from both de Sousa Santos’ and Mignolo’s discussion as to how this organized resistance or ‘global process of de-colonial cosmopolitanism’ would adjudicate amongst competing claims, identify ally and foe, and determine actions to struggle against (an apparently agreed upon understanding of) global injustice. The identification of ‘progressive’ struggles, for example, seems self-apparent in de Sousa Santos’s formulation; as a result, it appears that despite the local differences that may unite in this struggle, a universal notion of the ‘good’ is taken as given and largely agreed upon. In the most extreme reading of this approach, then, difference here is secondary to, or subsumed by, a universal common struggle. A more generous reading, in which this universal common struggle is one that emerges (as opposed to being assumed), still suffers from limitations, I believe, as the ways in which an emergent universal common struggle may be/is limited or shaped by the given universality (i.e., the current configuration of our global social relations) is not sufficiently addressed. Similarly, in Mignolo’s approach, the assumption that “all human beings confronting […] the consequences of modern/colonial racism and patriarchy have something in common”
(2010, 125) – namely, an epistemological position that is a “privileged source of cosmopolitan orientations” (Leinius 2014, 47) which will help ‘materialize’ the decolonial option (Mignolo 2010, 125) – is problematic. Theoretically, as Johanna Leinius (2014, 48) argues,

[the general tendency of the advocates of [decolonial cosmopolitanism…] to attribute cosmopolitan consciousness to people perceived as subaltern creates its own exclusions that, in the end, endanger their emancipatory project. By focusing on those groups that have been able to express political agency, they do not take into account the subaltern – those who have internalized their condition of disenfranchisement as ‘normal’, [and/or] who, lacking the resources to form a political consciousness, do not participate in struggles for emancipation.

In practice, it is also evident that the ‘commonality’ between all those confronting the consequences of modern/colonial racism and patriarchy is often not sufficient for building connections across global struggles. For instance, trans people have been excluded, neglected, and even villainized in (parts of) the feminist movement, men who are themselves marginalized and oppressed perpetuate or are ‘indifferent’ to the violent domination of women (Lugones 2008), and the World Social Forum (often identified as a privileged cosmopolitan space in the vein of the approaches discussed here) has been critiqued for “the numerous ways in which indigenous movements, dalits (the so-called ‘untouchables’ in the Indian caste system), slum dwellers, and women’s movements feel sidelined, silenced or excluded from the events of the [World Social Forum] process” (Leinius 2014, 52; see also Conway 2011; 2013; Ylä-Anttila 2005).

Lastly, it is unclear as to how these ‘cosmopolitanisms from below’ draw upon or relate to the postfoundational intellectual tradition reviewed above, or even mobilize the
political/politics distinction that characterizes postfoundational thinking. Thus, despite nodding to these various approaches in her own overview of postfoundational cosmopolitanism, Caraus aptly concludes that these cosmopolitanisms, while attempting to avoid the “foundationalist figures of universalism […] by putting the anchor in both the global and the local [or particular,] may not be enough to rid ourselves of foundational thinking” (2016b, 5).

Moving along this spectrum, scholars like Caraus (2016a; 2016b) and James Ingram (2013) articulate a more explicitly postfoundational cosmopolitanism. Caraus specifically links her postfoundational cosmopolitanism to postfoundational thinkers like Badiou, Nancy, Lefort, Laclau, Butler, and Jacques Rancière, arguing that cosmopolitanism cannot be anything other than post-foundational: it cannot be advanced without assuming a universal ground, although the assumed universal ground will fail or will be contingent. At the same time, cosmopolitanism cannot be reduced only to this failed ground; it is co-substantial freedom that makes possible the plural attempts to offer an ultimate cosmopolitan foundation. (2016b, 2)

In this rethinking of cosmopolitanism in the image of postfoundationalism, Caraus identifies several elements that are worth reviewing here. First, she argues that cosmopolitanism is part of the postfoundational process that demonstrates the contingency of all grounds. “As a tension between the ideal order of the cosmos and the current order of society, cosmopolitanism reveals the contingent grounds of society” (Caraus 2016b, 14). Second, and following from this, cosmopolitanism, according to Caraus, performs and instantiates the moment of the political (which becomes the

38 Mignolo (2010, 118, emphasis in original) even explicitly attempts to distance his approach from (the Schmittian or dissociative approach to) postfoundational political thought when he writes “one of the first steps of de-colonial cosmopolitanism is to get rid of the idea of friends and enemies, in which the political finds its raison d’etre.”
cosmopolitan) by reminding society “that it does not fully live up to the condition of the possibility in terms of inclusion, equality or justice” (Caraus 2016b, 14). Third, given the previous element, and combined with the fact that the cosmopolitan vision can never be realized fully in politics, cosmopolitanism instantiates the political difference – that is the difference between politics and the political (Caraus 2016b, 14). Fourth, cosmopolitanism is a political ontology – an ontology of ‘the political’ – because it refers to the conditions of possibility for humans in circumstances of contingency: other world structures are always possible (Caraus 2016b, 15). Lastly, the cosmopolitical, as the instantiating of the moment of the political, regrounds society, although it is only able to do so because of the radical freedom that comes from the abyss, the absence of any final grounds (Caraus 2016b, 15). This freedom allows for cosmopolitanism itself to be revisionary.

From these elements or theoretical points, Caraus argues that practices in the realm of politics are the means through which postfoundational cosmopolitanism is actualized and instantiated. The possibility of contestation and critique, opened up by the postfoundational perspective, rethinks cosmopolitanism as “a dynamic vision in a certain agonistic relation with the current order” (Caraus 2016b, 16) – this is in contrast to the vision of a unified world posited in moral cosmopolitan visions. More specifically, the critique of grounds facilitated by postfoundationalism allows for the “cosmopolitan stance [to emerge] in a certain context and time as an act of distancing from current local practices and in confrontation with the established meanings, requiring a subtraction from one’s place and a dis-identification from one particular identity, thus enhancing radicalism” (Caraus 2016b, 16). These last two points are significant, as they help to explain why Caraus sees postfoundational cosmopolitanism as cosmopolitan at all. For
Caraus (2016a, 109), cosmopolitanism is the interplay between the ideal cosmos and the current order of the polis. This opposition between the cosmos and polis, Caraus claims, is evident in all theories of cosmopolitanism and global justice (2016a, 109). What distinguishes her cosmopolitanism as postfoundational, then, is the antagonistic nature of this interaction. The recognition of the absence of grounds and radical contingency of all foundations allows for the very assertion that the world could be otherwise, that the cosmopolitical is possible; this, in turn, creates the possibility for contestation and radical critique of actually existing politics. This contestation, however, is of a more antagonistic nature than the more ‘peaceful’ coming together of the world based upon common principles that is envisioned in moral cosmopolitanism. Ingram’s (2013, 217) reading of Rancière leads him to a similar formulation of postfoundational cosmopolitanism (which he calls “radical cosmopolitics”), noting that this approach allows us to recognize “normative reflection as not antagonistic to political action but rather an essential part of it.” It is through normative assertions that antagonistic politics may give rise to the political moment.39

I have several concerns, however, about this approach to ethics. First, it is unclear to me as to why these scholars insist upon maintaining the word ‘cosmopolitanism’ to demarcate this approach, particularly when postfoundationalism is in many ways antithetical to cosmopolitanism.40 On the one hand, if we take the definition of

39 This formulation reveals why Caraus (2015) refers to the precursor to her postfoundational cosmopolitanism as a ‘cosmopolitanism of dissent,’ as this approach is premised on a presupposition of an antagonism between polis and cosmos.
40 While attempts to reclaim words can be fruitful, and may even constitute a sort of resignification of relations of power, there are times when such ‘reclamations’ seem counter to the task at hand. For instance, Daniel McLouglin (2016) argues that retaining a language of human rights – given its meaning and status in current political relations – is actually a barrier preventing a more expansive re-imagining of radical political praxis. Mouffe briefly makes a similar point vis-à-vis cosmopolitanism, and the various
cosmopolitanism that Caraus puts forth – that is, cosmopolitanism as the literal conflict between the ideal cosmos and the actually existing unjust polis – at face value, I think that what she is actually referring to is ‘critical thinking,’ plain and simple. To assert that something ‘ought to be’ different is always a disruption or critique of the ‘actually is.’ When authors like Caraus speak of cosmopolitanism as the conflict between ought and (an unjust) is, I am puzzled as to why they would hold on to such a loaded word (with a very particular and locatable intellectual history) simply to describe critical thought more generally.

On the other hand, if these scholars use cosmopolitanism because they are in fact maintaining some hold on universal principles (that is, the ‘ought’ of which they speak actually holds some pre-existing content for them), then I do not see how these scholars can assert so fully that this is simultaneously a postfoundational approach. For instance, Caraus begins the introductory chapter to her edited volume on postfoundational cosmopolitanism (with Paris 2016) with the statement that “the contingency of grounds opens the potentiality of contestation of the current order towards a more inclusive cosmos, with its cosmopolitan ideals of justice, equality and freedom” (2016b, 1). Cosmopolitan ideals of justice, equality, and freedom, however, are given no explanation. The grounds on which these are asserted as the normative goals to strive towards are not interrogated. Rather, Caraus links these values and ideals to moral cosmopolitan thinking and presumes that these foundations are self-explanatory. As opposed to interrogating approaches (including those mentioned above) which seek to retain the term while foregrounding alterity, locatedness, particularity, and contingency. In her words, “I do not really see the usefulness of trying to redefine the notion of cosmopolitanism so as to make it signify almost the opposite of its usual meaning” (2013, 21).
these moral cosmopolitan foundations, it appears that the grounds that need to be shown to be contingent, for Caraus, is the social order itself (not the grounds on which we would assert that a particular value or idea is the vision towards which we should strive).

Focusing on the contingency of the grounds of the existing social order while neglecting to interrogate critically the grounds upon which one would claim that we should strive towards cosmopolitan ideals of justice, equality, and freedom involves an odd separation (a very un-postfoundational position in my opinion) of the ways in which the content of ideals of equality, justice, and freedom have come to shape the social-political-economic order, and the ‘injustices’ therein (and vice versa). As the previous chapter demonstrated, for instance, many harms were instituted in the name of particular notions of justice, or visions of the good or right way to order society. To assert that there are no grounds more generally, and that this groundlessness allows us to implement normative change, while also mobilizing particular universal values without interrogating their particular groundings strikes me as a disjointed theoretical move which suggests that values and principles somehow emerge from outside a given socio-symbolic order.

Ingram (2013, 222) similarly mobilizes equality and freedom in a problematic way. He argues, for instance, that we should prioritize and support political struggles to overcome particular forms of unfreedom and inequality. However, what constitutes freedom and equality are unclear, and questions about who gets to decide what is ‘unfree’ or ‘unequal’ are side-stepped. Instead, we are told that we should generally align ourselves with those “from below, defined first and foremost by the efforts of political agents themselves to overcome obstacles to freedom and equality” (Ingram 2013, 222). Yet, as my critique of de Sousa Santos and Mignolo above points out, it is not always
clear who ‘is below,’ nor is the navigation of more complicated ethical dilemmas (in which multiple groups from ‘below’ have competing claims and contestations, for instance) self-evident. Ingram actually foresees this concern, although offers no way through it, when he writes:

It is not necessary to imagine that we can simply align ourselves with the underdog in every one of the world’s disputes – not only because history has shown that movements on behalf of the underdog are not always reliable vehicles for promoting freedom and equality, or even because emancipatory projects and interests may conflict, but also because it may not be clear who the underdog is. (2013, 222)

Without tending to this issue further, it seems that in this cosmopolitical theory, some unspoken understanding of equality and freedom will simply help us adjudicate and navigate such scenarios.

For these reasons, I suggest that the postfoundational cosmopolitanism of scholars like Caraus and Ingram end up in a theoretical bind. Drawing upon postfoundational thought, they argue that the socio-symbolic order is ungrounded and therefore revisable. The very notion of the cosmos points to this revisability. However, the content of the cosmos, in these theories, is taken as given. The grounds for claims of equality and freedom, and what it means to be equal and free, are presented as largely self-evident and beyond contestation. In other words, the cosmic vision of postfoundational cosmopolitanism serves as a sort of (unexamined) ground. This type of grounding, as Camil Alexandru Părvu argues, is in fact necessary if one is to retain the ‘cosmopolitan’ in this approach:

There is, I maintain, a constitutive, structural limit within cosmopolitan theory, regarding the degree of contingency that it admits for its foundations. In other words, it cannot renounce a commitment to some universal dimension of human
worth⁴¹ without ceasing to be cosmopolitan. (2016, 97)

Such commitments, I believe, are evident in the postfoundational cosmopolitanisms presented by Caraus and Ingram, if only because of their own turning away from any critical inquiry about the values which are to guide our contestations of the ‘actually existing’ social order and our identification of possible allies in such struggles. In fact, as Mouffe (2013, 21) notes, preoccupying oneself wholly with the recognition of allegiances and lines of solidarity may in some ways actually ignore the political – the radical contingency of the socio-symbolic order – particularly in its antagonistic dimension.

These postfoundational approaches prioritize a solidarity-based global justice movement whereby identifying allies and visions of justice are guided by cosmopolitan principles that are not scrutinized. While such an approach seems to hold promise in terms of disrupting ‘actually existing’ politics, it simultaneously seems to preclude the possibility of contesting and revising, in the political sense, the meaning of justice as such.

Second, there seems to me to be a fatal misunderstanding of the postfoundational approach to political theory in the formulations of postfoundational cosmopolitanism reviewed above, particularly with regard to theories of the subject. As Jenny Edkins (1999, 6) reminds us, in postfoundational thought, “the constitution of the subject entails and is inextricably linked with the constitution of a particular social or symbolic order.” However, in these approaches to postfoundational cosmopolitanism, there seems to be some pre-existing subject, with a pre-existing notion of the ideal cosmos, that will enact contestations and dissent to change the existing socio-symbolic order, ultimately in the

⁴¹ Anthony Burke (2011) makes a similar point when he argues that the idea of humanity must be salvaged in the broader project of rethinking the politico-philosophical basis of cosmopolitanism.
hopes of bringing about the political moment. In other words, this formulation of postfoundational cosmopolitanism, I contend, can only make sense if the subject is a liberal subject, i.e., independent, unencumbered, autonomous, and pre-existing social relations. Such an assumption belies the ‘postfoundational’ nomenclature of this literature and demonstrates how close this approach actually is to moral cosmopolitanism.

I believe that this theoretical slippage (in essence, from postfoundationalism to cosmopolitanism) comes from a misunderstanding of the term ‘contestedness’ as it is mobilized in postfoundational thought, on the one hand, and a separation between the subject and the socio-symbolic order, on the other. As Pârvu (2016, 94) explains, we can distinguish between “contestability as based on contingency and contestedness. Contestability is a structural property; contestedness is an empirical attribute.” That is, contestability means that the structure itself is revisable and contingent, while contestedness refers to a claim of contestation made in the ‘empirical’ world. The postfoundational cosmopolitanism presented in the works of Caraus and Ingram conflates these two notions. Contestedness, as a practice, may not necessarily lead to a structural shift, or a political moment (contestedness may not illuminate the contestability of a socio-symbolic order). Overstating contingency, and separating the socio-symbolic from the subject, such that pre-existing subjects can ‘contest’ any foundation to enact change, is to underestimate grossly the co-constitutive nature of subjects and social-economic-political structures (or perhaps more pertinent for this dissertation, onto-epistemologies).

Susan Marks (2009) employs the useful term ‘false contingency’ to refer to the ways in which contingency is sometimes mobilized without restraint, or, as I suggest here, without accounting fully for the relationship between subject/agency and structure:
For just as things do not have to be as they are, so too history is not simply a matter of chance and will. The concept of false contingency refers to this idea, and to the limits and pressures, tendencies and orientations, over-determination and determination in the last instance, that shape both realities and possibilities. (Marks 2009, 10)

Without attending to the relationship between the subject and the socio-symbolic order, and by mobilizing a notion of contingency that seems to suggest that the theoretical fact of revisability corresponds equally to empirical revision, the postfoundational cosmopolitanism explored here presents itself as a sort of domesticated postfoundationalism, verging on the simply cosmopolitan, and loses the radicalness of the postfoundational framework in general.

**Postfoundational Political Theory as Ethics**

Lastly, in her discussion, Caraus (2015; 2016b) notes that there are radical and agonistic political theories at the far end of her spectrum of postfoundational cosmopolitanism. As Caraus acknowledges, the theorists here would be unlikely to identify in any way with cosmopolitanism – for that reason, I abandon the term now. However, in moving through postfoundational cosmopolitanism, I am able to turn more fully to postfoundational political thought so as to consider what it can offer us in terms of moving towards a pluriversal ethics. While Caraus highlights numerous postfoundational thinkers in this part of the spectrum, I focus on the work of Mouffe (2013), Rancière (1999), and Marchart (2016).

Mouffe perhaps offers the most fully-fledged articulation of a postfoundational approach to world politics (in the International Relations sense) in her book *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (2013). Arguing that because of the gap between the
political and politics – that is, the negative which can never be overcome fully to form a totality – “antagonism is an ever present possibility” (2013, xi):

Society is permeated by contingency and any order is of an hegemonic nature, i.e. it is always the expression of power relations. In the field of politics, this means that the search for a consensus without exclusion and the hope for a perfectly reconciled and harmonious society have to be abandoned. (Mouffe 2013, xi)

In other words, radical negativity, as the condition of possibility for difference, means that divisions based on difference cannot be overcome; there can be no final unity in a ‘pure’ sense. Any order is thus an order based on power relations. This leads Mouffe to critique cosmopolitanism directly: “Undoubtedly, the illusion of a cosmopolitan world beyond hegemony and beyond sovereignty has to be relinquished” (2013, xiii), both because it is impossible and because of the ways in which “current attempts to homogenize the world are provoking violent reactions from those societies whose specific values and cultures are threatened by the enforced universalization of the Western model” (Mouffe 2013, 28).

Instead of such a ‘unipolar’ or single-hegemon cosmopolitan world, Mouffe contends that we should strive towards an agonistic pluralism, facilitated by a democratic politics which will provide “political channels for (fundamentally) dissenting voices and conflictual representations of the world” (Jaeger 2014, 210). This multipolar world order or “pluri-verse”42 (Mouffe 2013, 40), constituted by a “pluralization of hegemonies” (Mouffe 2013, 22), would allow for radical difference – an inescapable consequence of the ground without ground – and for agonistic political conflicts as these multiple hegemons interact. Such a world structure is normatively preferable to a unipolar world,

42 Mouffe borrows this term from Carl Schmitt (2008).
according to Mouffe, as it is “less likely to foster the emergence of extreme forms of antagonism” (2013, 29) without attempting to stifle agonism all together. That is, the goal of democratic politics in a multipolar world is to transform antagonism (where opponents are enemies) into agonism (which is still contestatory but where opponents are instead seen as adversaries) so as to ensure that citizens can engage in legitimate contestation (as opposed to attempting to eradicate conflict altogether) (Lowndes and Paxton 2018).

At first glance, this may seem like a fruitful way to begin to think about a pluriversal ethics. Mouffe is concerned with attempts to homogenize the world, and her notion of hegemony is inherently attuned to the ways in which orders are always predicated upon relations of power. She sees agonism as a respectful form of conflict in which differences can confront one another, multiplying the possibility of a political moment in which socio-symbolic orders themselves may shift and create new possibilities. Her radical democracy, as an attempt to enhance such moments of agonism, could be read as an ethico-political call for pluriversal contestation.

Upon closer examination, however, there are a few significant issues with Mouffe’s proposal, particularly when examined from a pluriversal perspective. First, as scholars like Ingram (2013) and Marchart (2016) point out, Mouffe’s multipolar world sometimes performs a cultural-essentialism, in which certain ways of life are essentially non-democratic or anti-democratic. This framing of the problem is in some ways strikingly similar to the theories of right pluralists like Samuel Huntington (1996), as it relies on “pre-existing regional, cultural-civilisational, or functional identities” (Jaeger 2014, 222) which are treated as entirely distinct and incompatible.

Second, as Hans-Martin Jaeger (2014) argues, Mouffe’s multipolar world order
suffers from certain Eurocentric assumptions that (perhaps ironically) align it with the cosmopolitan approach she aims to critique. For one, her “advocacy of the well-worn balance of power (or ‘equilibrium’) as an alternative to cosmopolitanism overlooks the fact that, despite all differences and ruptures, both of these visions share a European history that has moved from a juridico-political logic of sovereignty towards more calculative and economic modes of governance” (Jaeger 2014, 211). In this way, Mouffe’s equilibrium “contains traces of the very depoliticising tendencies (for example, technical, expert forms of governance)” (Jaeger 2014, 211) that she critiques in the cosmopolitan approach. Relatedly, Jaeger (2014, 212) notes that Mouffe’s approach is similar to realist and neorealist theories of the balance of power in International Relations (see, for example, Waltz 1979), an approach that is “rooted in an abstract individualism and instrumental rationality (transplanted to the state level) no less implicated in Western modernity than liberal cosmopolitanism.”

These Eurocentric/Westerncentric underpinnings point to a further issue with Mouffe’s theory, one which makes me skeptical that this approach could provide us with a normative orientation for rethinking ethics in the context of the pluriverse. While Mouffe is attuned to difference, it seems to be cultural, or ethnic, or economic, or religious, or linguistic difference. That is, Mouffe’s theory still strikes me as committed to a one-worldism; the theory does not conceive of a pluriverse in the sense that this word is mobilized in this dissertation. There is some common world, in which different social groups contest one another, but not a plurality of actually-existing heterogenous worlds. Janet Conway and Jakeet Singh (2011) point out this Westerncentric one-world assumption in an indirect way in their critique of Mouffe’s radical democracy. As they
note, Mouffe’s entire theory is state and regional-centric; the units of her framework are states and regional blocs (2011, 702). In prioritizing these units, Mouffe “occludes the pluriverse as it exists within and across [these units]” (Conway and Singh 2011, 702).

That is, in the pluriverse, the state (or regional blocs) cannot be the ultimate unit of concern; rather, as I have argued above, the form of political community that is important in the pluriversal context are onto-epistemologies or worlds. As Conway and Singh further note, many times these worlds are actually resisting states and state-logic, or at the very least, trying to operate outside/alongside them. For instance, “for indigenous peoples seeking to reground their communities in their own traditions, the modern state is rarely the central point of reference for their political languages, frameworks and aspirations” (Conway and Singh 2011, 700), even if/when the modern state is that which they are struggling against. Conceiving the multipolar world along statist lines obfuscates such struggles, politics, and ethical and political discourses as outside the field of legitimate political contestation. Indeed, in Mouffe’s schematic more generally, it seems that political contestation is reduced almost entirely to achieving some sort of (regional) hegemony.

It is here that I think Mouffe’s postfoundational approach to world politics proves itself untenable in the context of the pluriverse. Onto-epistemologies may not be concerned with occupying a hegemonic position. In fact, much of the literature on the pluriverse indicates that such is the case. Consider, for instance, Nazario’s political actions to protect Ausangate, or the Māori people’s struggle to protect Whanganui. While they may have been struggling against the Peruvian and New Zealand state respectively, they are not struggling for hegemony as such, nor do they require the “dogmatic
signifier’ of hegemony in order to articulate themselves politically” (Conway and Singh 2011, 698). Instead, as these examples show, many onto-epistemologies are “oriented towards defending localised ‘life projects’ and life spaces, not towards gaining hegemony over the whole of society, certainly not at the pre-given scale of the nation-state and even less so at the scale of the global” (Conway and Singh 2011, 698). Theorizing the establishment of hegemony at the centre of our political imaginaries “involves a significant suppression of difference” (Conway and Singh 2011, 698), and reduces the political to a singular political and ethical grammar and way of being. Mouffe’s theory of multiple hegemons continues to operate in such a singular (or one-world) logic, and for this reason, does not prove a useful way to contemplate ethical horizons in the context of the pluriverse.

Turning now to Rancière’s work (1999), I suggest that the ethical dimensions of his theory may usefully be understood in relation (or rather, in contrast) to Habermasian discourse ethics. Generally, both Habermas and Rancière “theorize a democratic politics

43 To be sure, Rancière (and Mouffe, for that matter) is not developing an approach to (global) ethics. When I refer to ‘the ethical dimensions’ of Rancière’s work, I mean to suggest that underpinning his political theory are (necessarily) some normative assumptions. In this discussion of Rancière’s work, I seek to draw out these normative underpinnings, and from there consider what these may mean or imply for thinking about ethics in the context of the pluriverse. While it may seem odd that I include Rancière here given that he does not develop an explicitly normative or ethical theory, I include him in this argument for two reasons. First, his particular iteration of the postfoundational distinction between politics and the political (police and politics, as outlined below) is employed in the pluriversal literature to theorize interactions between/across different onto-epistemologies (or to return to Blaser’s term, to theorize and understand the ‘political’ in political ontologies) (see, for example, Blaser 2019; de la Cadena 2010; Jaeger 2018). Given that this distinction between politics/the political (police/politics in Rancière’s terms) is key to postfoundational cosmopolitan approaches (as defined above), I feel it is useful to explore what Rancière’s particular iteration of this distinction may possibly imply or suggest for a postfoundational ethics in the pluriverse. Second (but relatedly), in thinking through and ‘expanding’ Rancière’s theory in this direction, I believe that important facets of the pluriversal challenge to Global Ethics are revealed – particularly, as elaborated upon below, in relation to the ethical import of the care and maintenance of worlds. In this way, this discussion lays important groundwork for themes that I take up in greater detail in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.
that is grounded in the presupposition of the equality of humans as speaking beings and
that consists in a procedure of argumentation and demonstration” (Russell and Montin
2015, 543).44 However, as Matheson Russell and Andrew Montin (2015, 543) argue,
what is fundamentally different between the two is their conceptualizations of the
“procedure of contestation that is proper to politics.” Habermas, as outlined above, is
cconcerned with consensus; given this focus, disagreement takes on specific significance:

On the one hand, the freedom of interlocutors to say no, to reject speech-act
offers, is a necessary prerequisite for any rational, non-coercively achieved
consensus. On the other hand, a heightened risk of persistent or capricious
disagreement would undermine the suitability of communicative action as an
effective means of coordinating action. (Russell and Montin 2015, 544)

Habermas’s theory, however, ‘manages’ this risk with his assumption of a shared and
common lifeworld, which forms a background consensus or pre-understanding that
interlocutors bring to the speech situation.45 Russell and Montin (2015, 544) provide an
excellent example which helps demonstrate. In a common lifeworld, an employer can
order an employee to carry out a task, as both participants recognize that the current
speech situation authorizes the employer to do so. Thus, there exists an unequal relation

44Of course, and as should be evident from the discussion that follows, I do not mean to equate Habermas’
and Rancière’s understanding of speech or their respective understandings of the relationship between
politics and speech. Indeed, a key difference between the two is that Habermas takes speech for granted
(and thus grounds politics in speech), while Rancière takes a step back to demonstrate that what we count
as speech in the first place is politics (see also Jaeger 2018, 231). Yet in this way, I believe that Rancière’s
theory is still grounded in speech (albeit a meta-grounding that revolves around and is focused on the
constitution of speech, as opposed to starting with a predetermined notion of speech).

45 As noted above, this precondition of a shared and common lifeworld has been generally glossed over by
those in Global Ethics who suggest using Habermasian discourse ethics in the international realm.
(Although there are notable exceptions. For instance, Thomas Risse (2000, 16) tackles the issue of the
possibility of a common lifeworld in international sphere by suggesting that “the degree to which a
common lifeworld exists in international relations varies considerably according to world regions and
issue-areas. Even ‘anarchy,’” he argues, “constitutes an, albeit ‘thin,’ common lifeworld from which actors
can move on to refer to common experiences, develop shared understandings of history, and, thus, to
develop a collective culture.”) However, as this point and following discussion make evident, this
assumption is a key part of Habermas’s theory more generally.
between the employer and employee, albeit one that is sanctioned within the lifeworld. Despite this inequality, if the employee asks the employer to justify the authority they claim as employer, Habermas’s account would require the employer to do so. For if the employer refuses to justify their claim of authority, they would find themselves in “a performative contradiction” as they simultaneously assume the normative validity of their speech (that their commands are legitimate and that the employee must therefore obey) while at the same time refusing the practice of justification on which the very “rational acceptability of the command depends” (Russell and Montin 2015, 544).

Rancière’s theory, on the other hand, would provide a different analysis of the scenario when an employer (for example) gives an employee an order. If the employer, upon issuing the instruction, were to ask “Do you understand?”, Rancière argues that the employer falls into a “‘performative contradiction’ that undermines the force of their utterance” (Rancière 1999, 45; quoted in Russell and Montin 2015, 544). The employer’s question restricts the employee’s response to one of two possibilities: either the employee does not understand what the employer has said, or the employee understands only insofar as they accept the employer’s formulation of the problem (Russell and Montin 2015, 544). As Rancière (1999, 45) writes, then, “‘to understand’ means two different, if not contrary, things: to understand a problem and to understand an order.” From this vantage point, as Russell and Montin point out, “there is no dissenting view that does not, in some sense, constitute a misunderstanding” (2015, 545, emphasis in original). In this way, those in positions of authority are able to exclude subordinates “from participating as equal communication partners if they wish, by construing disagreement as a failure of understanding” (Russell and Montin 2015, 545). The employee must either “understand”
(agree) or they “do not understand” – there can be no dissent.

From this point emerges a crucial conclusion: because the power dynamics set up the speech act in such a way that one interlocutor is unable to offer a rational contribution to the dialogue (as a dissenting view can always be construed by the other as a ‘misunderstanding’), “then properly speaking one is not denied access to discourse since one is thought to have nothing to say that could count as a relevant contribution in the first place” (Russell and Montin 2015, 546). That is, there is a particular “partition of the perceptible” (Rancière 1999, 45) or “partition of the sensible” shaping the dialogue:

The partition of the sensible is the dividing-up of the world (de monde) and of people (du monde), the nemein upon which the nomoi of the community are founded. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation. A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (un commun partagé) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. This latter form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of part and shares (parties), itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot. (Rancière 2010, 36)

Within a given partition of the sensible (i.e., a matrix of contingent assumptions that organize the speech situation, including the space, object, and subjects of speech), there is a divide or order which (unevenly) distributes those recognized as speaking beings and those who are not (i.e., those who have no part in the speech act at all) (see also Rancière 1999, 45).

This partition of the sensible in many ways brings us back to the postfoundational distinction between politics and the political and illuminates how this distinction is crucial to Rancière’s thought, although he does employ different terms for these concepts. In particular, he uses the term ‘police’ akin to the way ‘politics’ has been defined in the postfoundational literatures reviewed above. Police, for Rancière, is the “system of
distribution and legitimation” which organizes and authorizes powers and distributes places and roles (1999, 28). Rancière’s politics, on the other hand, is akin to ‘the political.’ Politics is reserved “for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration – that of the part of those who have no part” (1999, 29-30). In other words, police refers to the actually existing socio-symbolic order and politics refers to activities that break with this order in a radical and antagonistic manner. Political speech, then, is disagreement; contra Habermas, disagreement, in the radical and antagonistic sense of a break within a police order (or what Habermas might call a lifeworld) is the point of politics.

So what of ethics? For Rancière, I suggest that the normative dimensions of his theory can be most fully developed through his understanding of the relationship between the police and politics. The police, as a particular order, is always-already contingent, and politics as such is only possible because of the contingency of the police. There is no foundational order, only infinite possibilities of police orders that may emerge in and through – or perhaps more precisely, after – politics. A related point, somewhat ironically, is that this same contingency points to a sort of universal assumption of equality, or what Rancière calls an “egalitarian contingency” (1999, 71), as “all speaking beings are able to construct meaning and so give rise to alternative subjunctive spaces” (Russell and Montin 2015, 548; see also Rancière 1999, 30). Whenever a speaking being who, under a particular police logic, is a part of the part that

46 See footnote 43 above.
has no part asserts and demonstrates their “equal capacity to imagine a world and their equal capacity for the critical evaluation of speech” (Russell and Montin 2015, 550) – that is, they act as though their actions are not constrained by the inequality of a police order that allocates them as part of the part that has no part – the axiom of equality is demonstrated. Such demonstrations of equality constitute politics, or what other postfoundational scholars call ‘the political,’ as they “make visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise” (Rancière 1999, 30). As a result, equality for Rancière takes on an axiomatic quality (Myers 2016). As Ella Myers (2016) argues, equality is both the underlying assumption of every human relationship and social order, despite apparent hierarchies, as well as an act that is performed temporarily whenever the part that has no part asserts themselves as the equal of all others.

In some sense, this axiom of equality appears to provide a departure point for ethics in the pluriverse: infinite orders are possible because of radical contingent egalitarianism (because there is no ultimate foundation, only the ground without ground), and when those who are a part of the part with no part assert themselves as equals, this equality is made apparent in practice, and there is the possibility of a political moment in which the unequal police order itself is shifted or reconstituted. For example, the Māori and their struggle to protect Whanganui, which I have returned to throughout this dissertation, can be easily conceived of in such terms: the Māori’s assertion that their relationship with the river (which was unthinkable from the perspective of the modern world, from the partition of the perceptible of the modern ‘police’) is equally valid as any
other relation can be thought of as a radical assertion or demonstration of contingent egalitarianism, which led to a political moment and a reconfiguration of the partition of the sensible, such that a river as kin is now thinkable (and even institutionalizable via legal human rights frameworks). On the face of things, such a theoretical framework may prove useful in analyzing (and perhaps even navigating) other ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse. Despite the usefulness of this language to describe such a scenario, however, there are a few important critiques that have been raised vis-à-vis Rancière’s work that make me less confident that this orientation can help us contemplate ethical horizons in/for the pluriverse.

First, there appears to be a particular temporality involved in Rancière’s theory that I believe renders this approach somewhat problematic as an answer to the problem at hand. Badiou aptly captures this temporality when he refers to Rancière’s equality as “a lightning bolt of meaning” (2009, 50; quoted in Bassett 2016, 282), which only appears during sporadic moments of fleeting politics. Myers (2016) describes this in a slightly different way when she argues that Rancière’s equality is both a revealing and a concealing. On the one hand, equality is a momentary event, made evident through politics; on the other hand, it is a hidden – albeit ever present – condition (Myers 2016, 54), continually concealed and reconcealed by the police (which is (re)instantiated – even if in a different form – in the political moment). This has a limiting effect on the normative potency of Rancière’s equality; “the prospect of creating lasting relations of equality […] seems to be foreclosed” and serves “to deny the possibility of a socio-political order even partially characterized by relations of equality” (Myers 2016, 55). Instead, police – in whatever historical variant, but always the name for unequal and
regulated society – “verges on the universal and timeless” (Myers 2016, 55). And while it is worth noting that Rancière does indicate in passing that there are better and worse police logics (1999, 30-31), Myers notes that very little attention is paid to such a distinction in his work; instead, police marks continuity rather than variation (2016, 56).

The nature of the police takes on an added significance, I think, in the context of the pluriverse. It would seem to me that in Rancière’s schematic, what I have called ont-epistemologies, or worlds, would each be different forms of police. What does it mean for two police orders to conflict or contest ethical dilemmas from a Rancièrean perspective? Can this be politics at all? It almost seems to me that we would have to return to a one-worldism for Rancière’s theory to carry any explanatory, let alone normative, value. To demonstrate, let us once again return to the case of the river Whanganui. This example can be read as a political moment in which radical equality is demonstrated only if one begins from the premise that the Māori world is not a world; rather, the Māori must constitute the part that has no part. Such a reading makes sense from the ‘perspective’ of modernity – which as I have argued in the previous chapter, conceives itself as the whole of the real – but not if one begins from the premise of the pluriverse, of a matrix of connected yet distinct worlds. That is, while I believe that the very notion of the pluriverse can be considered a political moment47 in the postfoundational sense, as it shatters the socio-symbolic order in which modernity is the only world, this project, which aims to build a pluriversal ethics, begins in the aftermath of this moment. The question of ‘how do we contemplate ethics in the pluriverse?’

47 I wish to thank Sacha Ghandeharian for the many fruitful conversations which led me to this idea that the pluriverse is a political moment or ‘event.’
inherently recognizes multiple worlds; it emerges within a socio-symbolic, or police order, in which such a notion is thinkable and speakable. Yet to reduce differently situated worlds to simply competing police logics – and therefore outside the realm of the political – feels reductive, especially when one considers the limits of knowing across worlds. Might there always be something unspeakable or unknowable between worlds? Is that not the very point of the pluriverse, where differences are so deep and pervasive that they are, to some degree, unknowable? As Nazario so clearly demonstrates to de la Cadena, she cannot know or think or be with *pukara* – even when she can speak or think *pukara*. In some sense, one of the normative challenges of an ethics for the pluriverse is grappling with the extremely difficult task of thinking and speaking something that you cannot truly think and speak. For instance, the ethical dilemma of how to protect the river Whanganui requires people in the modern world to speak and think Whanganui as kin (it is in speaking and thinking this that the modern world comes to concede that Whanganui has a legal personality), when of course, we do not *speak* or *think* (in the sense that this is an ordering principle of our onto-epistemology) Whanganui as kin.

This leads to a related concern. One could respond to this point by noting that much of the modern world does not, in fact, ‘think’ or ‘speak’ the pluriverse – a fact I would not deny (this is, in many ways, a central argument of the previous chapter).\(^{48}\) However, this raises an alternative question regarding Rancière’s notions of politics (and

\(^{48}\) At the same time, however, I think it is important to emphasize that parts of the modern world are speaking and thinking the pluriverse. At the very least, there is a growing literature on the pluriverse; even granting organizations are funding research on this topic – this could perhaps be viewed as a sort of institutionalized acknowledgement of the pluriverse (or of the importance of thinking with the pluriverse). Rather, the point I am trying to make is that politics here seems to involve a bit of a critical mass problem – must it be made intelligible to the whole of the part that has a part? – or an authority problem – must it be made intelligible to a part of the part that has a part that is particularly powerful? When or how do we know that a political moment has occurred, that something has been made speakable and thinkable?
equality): How does one know when a political moment has truly occurred, in the sense of reorganizing police? As just mentioned, in the pluriverse, I may now speak and think Whanganui as kin, but this is not a fundamental reordering of my socio-symbolic world (modernity, I would suggest, continues to be premised on an ontological distinction between human and nature). So, speaking Whanganui as kin, in this sense, could not constitute a political moment, although I am uncomfortable with the idea that the successful struggle for Whanganui’s protection by the Māori people would simply be defined as a reorganization of ‘police.’ The very inflection of ‘speakable’ and ‘thinkable,’ I believe, is fundamentally changed when operating in the pluriverse, when different worlds are at play.

The question of how to know when the political moment has occurred can also be critiqued in a similar vein but from a ‘non-pluriversal’ perspective. The political moment, for Rancière, is when something unintelligible is made intelligible. Yet, as Holloway Sparks (2016, 432) asks, “intelligible to whom?” Sparks demonstrates this point skillfully by departing from Rancière’s (2006, 61) discussion of Rosa Parks’ refusal to move from her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, which he suggests is an example of his politics:

[…] casting Rosa Park’s refusal to move and the subsequent boycott as a Rancièren moment of disruption that produced the protestors as newly intelligible political subjects again prompts a question – newly intelligible to whom? The act of refusing to sit in segregated sections on buses was already utterly intelligible as a challenge to the extant logic of domination to most if not all African Americans living in southern U.S. states. Park’s act and the yearlong boycott it inspired instead made the African American community’s challenge to the white supremacist logic of domination intelligible to many whites who had neglected or refused to confront the issue before. […] These are not new ‘wrongs’ to the communities of colour experiencing them; it’s just that they could never be seen by whites before. (Sparks 2016, 432).
Read this way, Rancière’s theory veers dangerously close to recognition politics,\(^{49}\) which I have already critiqued above.

Perhaps, in response to this point, one may argue that the point is also that, in addition to making this equality intelligible and speakable to whites, Rosa Parks’ actions allowed her to enact her equality, and thus served as a process of subjectivation.\(^{50}\) It was through her act of disobedience that her existence as an equal was brought to the consciousness of her oppressors.\(^{51}\) However, as Sparks (2016, 432) again notes, there were other African American women in Montgomery who disrupted segregation on city buses, including Mary Louise Smith and Claudette Colvin, and who were arrested for

\(^{49}\) One might argue that the staging of the presupposition of equality is a demonstration to oneself as much as, or more so than, to the other, and thus it is an act of self-recognition rather than mutual recognition (and therefore distinct from recognition politics). However, as Mario Blaser (2019, 78) argues, in order for the political to be “perceived as properly political and not as ‘noise’” there must be a “political sequence” following an event “whereby others embrace [the event]”. That is, Blaser argues that a political moment is seen as political “only if the political sequence is successful; and this depends on the fidelity to the egalitarian event contributing to its universalization and realization” (2019, 83). Blaser specifically draws upon an ethnographic example of the Yshiro community’s fight to reclaim their territory in the Chaco region of Paraguay to demonstrate that “the challenge to the established order implied in the Yshiro attempt to regain control of their territory must intensify by enrolling others to the point that it can no longer be contained without a thorough re-partition of the existing order” (2019, 83). This ‘intensification’ and ‘enrollment of others’ “implies that, at least to some extent, the political sequence builds on an initial moment of recognition (by an outsider) of the ‘egalitarian event’ that can then be expanded” (Blaser 2019, 88). Recognition by an outsider, according to Blaser, is necessary for a potentially political event to manifest in a political sequence (which therefore allows the event retroactively to be identified as political). And of course, such recognition seems somewhat paradoxical, as Blaser (2019, 88) points out: “How can [an outsider] recognize an egalitarian event that, given [their] vantage point within a given order, is initially illegible as such?”

\(^{50}\) Like Habermass, Rancière does not subscribe to a liberal notion of subjectivity; rather, it is through the democratic practices of radical equality that subjectivation arises. Subjectivation and politics are thus intimately intertwined: it is in politics that we become subjects. Rancière writes, “The essence of politics resides in the modes of dissensual subjectivation that reveal a society in its difference to itself” (2010, 42).

\(^{51}\) This may also be a good point to raise briefly Clare Woodford’s (2015) note that within Rancière’s framework, it is also always the oppressed that must bring about the political. In practice, this may serve to absolve oppressors or those who benefit from relations of power of any moral responsibility to amend ethical issues resulting from a police order; if this framework is to be deployed as an ethical orientation (which as noted above, is not Rancière’s intent, but rather my own exploration of Rancière so as to investigate the fruitfulness of using his theory as a point of departure for rethinking Global Ethics in the context of the pluriverse), it would seem that only the oppressed could be moral subjects, which also places the full burden of progressive political change on those who are marginalized and oppressed.
their actions before Rosa Parks’ stand. Were they not enacting a subjectivation as politics? Was this not an “act of performatively staging equality” (Swyngedouw 2011, 374)? And if not, why not? Why were Rosa Parks’ actions different? Further, might there not be some relation between Smith and Colvin’s actions and Parks’ own actions, as well as a relation between these earlier attempts to disrupt bus segregation and the ways in which Parks’ action was viewed and intelligible to African Americans? Does not Rancière’s account “discount and sometimes even […] dismiss any form of subjectivation that works by slow accretion, reiteration, and citation rather than surprising rupture” (Sparks 2016, 430)?

Now perhaps the distinction between police and politics is not so clear cut; Samuel Chambers (2011) makes this exact argument, noting that there is no such thing as ‘pure politics’ in the Rancièrean sense; politics is always enacted within a police order, and therefore it cannot be taken as external to it (see also Jaeger 2014, 223). In this way, one could explain the fact that Parks’ action is ‘political’ while Smith and Colvin’s are not due to the particular police order in which they occur, and the ways in which police and politics are impure and tied. Yet, as Myers compellingly argues, this seems in thorough opposition to Rancière’s own work, where he reiterates that while “politics may signal a ‘disturbance’ within the police order, […] the egalitarian presupposition that animates the disturbance ‘has no place’ in the police configuration. ‘Politics is specifically opposed to the police’” (2016, 55; quoting Rancière 2010, 36).

Ultimately, I think that what these concerns collectively point to is the ‘lightning bolt’ issue I mentioned earlier. The political moment, in some ways, has no rhyme or reason, it can only be identified retrospectively as when something that was
unfathomable becomes ‘speakable’ and ‘thinkable’ (but again to whom? and to what degree?). Politics seems to occur out of nowhere in Rancière’s work, and as a result, it provides very little to go on from a normative standpoint, other than to posit radical equality and infinite possibilities. As Clare Woodford writes, Rancière says as much when he emphasizes that “a reaction to a staging of equality cannot be guaranteed, since a break of the sensory order ‘can happen anywhere at any time’ but ‘can never be calculated’” (2015, 819; quoting Rancière 2008, 12). Rancière’s vagueness on this point, I believe, results in a dual normative stance, which could go one way or the other. That is, on the one hand, there seems to be no ethics – as the political moment of contingent egalitarianism is based, in some fundamental way, on chance. This reading aligns with Marchart’s (2007) claim, mentioned previously, that the political is a sphere distinct from morality; in its radical negativity, the political has no (positive) ethics. On the other hand, it seems that almost everything or anything can be ‘political’ in so far as it ‘deconstructs’ existing foundations, and then all such acts are potentially normative, in that they may rupture an unjust order. This second pathway is apparent in the works of scholars, like Caraus (2015; 2016a; 2016b), who equate the political with any normative vision that deviates from the existing order. For example, Viktorija Kalonaityte (2018, 523) uses Rancière’s framework to valorize a variety of acts because they may result in political moments, in so far as they challenge and “transcend the taken-for-granted divisions and categories of the order of the police;” such acts include insurrectionist movements, alliances, protests, art, scholarly, literary, and artistic work, and processes of

52 Again, as noted in footnote 44 above, I am not suggesting that Rancière’s goal is to development a normative theory in the prescriptive sense. Rather, I am attempting to think through the implications of the normative underpinnings of Rancière’s theory for thinking about ethics in the pluriverse.
While perhaps some such acts may result in a political moment, as the above discussion has highlighted, it is entirely unclear which ones will, and when, and under what circumstances.

Perhaps Chambers provides a more tempered middle ground, in terms of positing a Rancièrean orientation to ethics. Rancière’s theory, according to Chambers, orients us to hope, “not the hope that politics will save us, but that democratic politics will change what is, will alter what is given” (2011, 318, emphasis in original). In other words, change, disruption, and newness, resulting from politics, becomes that which to hope for, that which to orient ourselves towards. But the concerns highlighted above continue to haunt this approach when thinking ethically in the pluriverse. Change for whom? That is, the wholesale “valorization of newness” (Sparks 2016, 431) and disruption seems less clearly desirable to me in a pluriversal context without considering newness and disruption for whom and in what ways. Many onto-epistemologies, as Conway and Singh (2011) point out, are striving to protect what they are: their practices, ways of knowing, their socio-symbolic order. Of course, I am in no way attempting to suggest that certain onto-epistemologies are inherently ‘static’ or ‘unchanging,’ nor am I suggesting that members of certain onto-epistemologies uncritically wish to be ‘unchanging’ or ‘unchangeable.’ Instead, I am simply pointing out that maintenance and reproduction is also of ethical import, especially in the pluriversal context.

For instance, within the capitalist-patriarchal-racist-colonial power relations which currently configure the pluriverse, members of certain worlds are concerned with litigation.\(^5^3\) This last one – processes of litigation – strikes me as particularly un-Rancièrean, as systems and technocratic legal processes are undeniably part of police logic.
“seeking to reground their communities in their own traditions” (Conway and Singh 2011, 700). In such cases, certain disruptions, ruptures, or reorderings to these onto-epistemologies may not be normatively desirable. Instead, in the context of the pluriverse, constituted by partially entangled worlds, there are scales of change that are significant, but perhaps not always perfectly aligned. There may be times, for example, when a change in the pluriversal matrix (i.e., a change in the relative positions and configurations of worlds) may be morally desirable precisely because it helps to preserve the ‘internal’ consistency of a particular world, and thereby enhances the ability of said world to reproduce (I say this without precluding the possibility that a change in the relations between worlds may necessarily change the relations which comprise a given world, but rather to demonstrate the complexity of valorizing disruption and change in the context of multiple onto-epistemologies). Or to use a different language, the political moment in the pluriversal context may necessarily – and perhaps paradoxically – be a simultaneous dissociative moment (in which the pluriversal matrix is reconfigured and ruptured, thus inherently agonistic) and an associative moment (in which a world within that matrix is able to come together to partake more fully in the care and (re)production of their world), although not equally so for all worlds involved. In this scenario, the disruptive dynamics are not so clear cut: Is it disruptive if it affirms a police order (an actually existing world)? Disruptive for whom? From the pluriversal meta-perspective, perhaps this is disruptive, in that the relations between worlds are shifted. But from a more localized perspective, the disruption may not be a disruption at all, but instead be marked by continuation and maintenance of a particular world. What part are we valorizing in such a case? The disruption to the matrix or the continuity of a particular
While Rancière’s theory is definitively not in opposition to pluriversal thinking, I also believe that it is not quite aligned. The language in Rancière’s work has particular intonations that leave me with lingering questions as to what may be lost or obfuscated if one were to use it to contemplate ethics and ethical horizons in the pluriversal context.

Lastly, this focus on change – i.e., the possibility of the emergence and instantiation of infinite possibilities – is prevalent in Marchart’s (2016) own attempt at articulating a postfoundational ethics. While he maintains that the political is distinct from ethics, Marchart agrees with de Sousa Santos (2006) and Ingram (2013) in their conceptualization of a cosmopolitan democracy of movements (Marchart 2016, 192), which can be understood as a multiplicity of “partial struggles against particular forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (Ingram 2013, 143). According to these scholars, these partial struggles, and the multiplied enactment of postfoundational democratic equality, may result in political moments and change. At the same time, Marchart is attuned to the problem I highlight in my critique of de Sousa Santos above: How does one know when a particular movement is an ally, when a movement is indeed ‘democratic’? Put differently, Marchart is concerned that not every democratization movement – that is, police order that this disruption facilitates/results from?

54 Importantly, these ‘two moments’ may be completely co-constitutive: the dissociative moment may be the cause and effect of the associative moment (a world can (re)produce more easily due to the reconfigured pluriverse) and the associative moment may equally be the cause and effect of the dissociative moment (the successful (re)production of a world causes the reconfiguration of the pluriverse). In other words, in the pluriverse it is possible – and perhaps often necessary – to think of the political as (dis)associative. I use the language of ‘facilitates/results from’ here to maintain this possibility. I return to this idea in greater detail in chapter five.
55 Especially those of a universalization of the ancient Greek experience (albeit rethought somewhat by Rancière’s particular interpretation).
56 As may be implicit in this discussion of postfoundational political thought, ‘democracy’ in this literature refers to the informal practices and enactments of radical equality, as opposed to institutionalized democracy or liberal notions of democratic institutions and procedures.
performance and enactment of democracy – is necessarily a democratic movement (one which instantiates and seeks to make visible the radical equality of all) (2016, 192). This, according to Marchart, is where ethics comes in. An ethics of democracy allows us to distinguish between non- and anti-democratic politics (Marchart 2016, 193) based on the criteria of self-alienation:

Constant reflection upon the ultimately ungrounded nature of one’s own project and objectives is precisely the sign of an ethics of democracy. The latter stands in an antinomic relation towards the political because from a purely political perspective it would be considered self-defeating to engage in a process of eternal self-questioning. Attesting, in the face of an enemy, to your own weakness and the ungrounded nature of your project is not a political move, it is an ethical move which has nothing to do with pragmatism and a strategic approach to political affairs. […] Democracy, from a purely ethical perspective, would mean the unconditional acceptance of the un-grounded nature of the social. (Marchart 2007, 193-194)

More simply, “struggles for democratization are fully democratic only if their political impetus is supplemented, and baffled, by an ethical acceptance of their abyssal nature. […] Cosmopolitan democracy confronts every given community with the unconditional demand of self-alienation, i.e., of accepting the impossibility of ever attaining a state of full self-identity” (Marchart 2016, 195, emphasis in original). One consequence of this, as Marchart highlights, is that democracy can only ever be a secular affair – we can only recognize a movement as democratic if it is void of any and all transcendent markers and certainty (2016, 196).

From a pluriversal perspective, this ethics, I suggest, reads almost as a form of

57 Or perhaps a non-secular movement can be recognized as democratic if it is self-reflexive about its transcendent elements, as suggested by Jaeger (2018, 237-238), who writes about political theology as a mode of Western self-estrangement.
neocolonialism. One’s political practices can only be considered democratic, and by extension, normatively valuable, if one first accepts the notion of radical contingency, and, specifically, the radical contingency of one’s own onto-epistemology. One can only be a moral subject if one is self-alienated, which itself is a very particular notion of subjectivity with a long history in modern political thought. Of course, once again, I am not suggesting that people in other worlds cannot self-alienate, or do not have conceptualizations of the contingent nature of their own socio-symbolic orders or worlds. Rather, my point is that to require this condition, and to use it to judge whether or not a political act is ethical, i.e., democratic in the postfoundational sense, erases or subsumes the possibility that there are other ways of approaching ethics, other ways of being, other onto-epistemologies, including those that may be deeply rooted in transcendental foundations.

Consider once again the example of Nazario’s protest against the development of the mining industry on one of the peaks of the earth-being Ausangate (described in the introductory chapter). Nazario’s motivation to protest the mining project is that he is afraid that Ausangate will get mad, and may even kill people, should mining proceed. Yet, from Marchart’s perspective, Nazario’s act could only be considered ethically valuable, an act of democratization, if he first admitted that his world – the very thing

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58 Jaeger (2018) draws upon Sergei Prozorov’s (2014) void universalism to develop a notion of self-estrangement for Euro-modernity; the locatedness of this claim, I believe, means that this approach avoids my critique of Marchart’s ethics of democracy (2016). Instead, I see self-estrangement as similar to feminist reflexivity and vulnerable judgement (which is a key part of my methodology in this dissertation, as describe in the introductory chapter, and which is also central to the ethics of care, as described more fully in the next chapter). That is, it is not that I have a problem with the notion of self-alienation or self-estrangement as such; rather, my concern is with Marchart’s universal requirement that we judge all political acts and enactments as ‘democratic’ or ‘not’ based on whether those enacting said acts self-alienate.
which motivates his political action – is contingent, and that Ausangate may not be what the Quechua people claim it to be. Nazario would need to be attuned to, and even foreground, the possibility that that which motivated him to act politically – that is, to avoid Ausangate’s ire – is a contingent social construct, an unfounded consequence of his socio-symbolic order. While Marchart notes that there is a strategic risk to admitting the contingency of one’s own project to ‘the enemy,’ there seems to me to exist another risk in terms of negating the motivation for said project to begin with. To require all moral subjects to admit the contingency of their onto-epistemologies, and to self-alienate, seems almost perverse in the context of the pluriverse. That is, while Habermasian discourse ethics misses the point – and asks us to swap shoes, when it is, in fact, our feet (our onto-epistemologies) that are at stake – Marchart’s postfoundational ethics seems to require subjects to cut off their feet (onto-epistemologies) and offer them to us to show that they know they can ‘remove’ them (they are contingent, changeable, not transcendental) before we will even begin to contemplate and acknowledge that what they are fighting for – specifically in this case, the protection of Ausangate, an earth-being key to the (re)production of Nazario’s world – is morally salient and worthwhile.

Such a requirement (were it posited for the pluriverse), I believe, both asserts a

59 I also think that in Marchart’s (2016) analysis, he fails to grapple with embodied ideology. For instance, even if Nazario admitted the contingency of his world, he may still be motivated to act, because of the co-constitutive nature of his subjectivity and his world, and the ways he embodies his socio-symbolic order. (To be certain, I think this is true for anyone in any world. Consider, for example, the modern proletarian who knows capitalism is not transcendental or real, but who still participates in and organizes life around the capitalist mode of production and money fetishism). However, this self-alienation ends up then being so thin that it does not feel very relevant at all. If, on the other hand, self-alienation refers to something thicker (i.e., a constant pushing up against that which constitutes you and your world, a continual denial of your grounds (which, in the context of the pluriverse, may in fact be what you are trying to protect and assert)) – and I think this thicker notion must be the case for the claim to have any real significance – then I fear it requires a certain universal subjectivity or sameness, which is not amenable to thinking pluriversally.
level of homogenization across worlds and subjects of worlds (all subjects must be self-
alienating), and also fails to acknowledge that there is a privilege associated with being able to foreground the revisability of one’s onto-epistemology. The risk, for example, for a modern subject to assert that modernity is not ‘real’ seems far less than the risk associated with this same move by subjects who are members of onto-epistemologies that are already marginalized in the global political economy (who are already fighting for their worlds to be taken seriously as worlds). I inherently feel that there is a certain privilege in being able to dwell in contingency when colonial relations of power are at play, when some onto-epistemologies have the power to hold on to their claim on the real without even trying. For these reasons, I ultimately find that this democratic ethics is antithetical to the pluriversal project of contemplating different worlds and giving weight to worlds as worlds (particularly those that have been rendered invisible as worlds by the power relations that uphold the narrative of modernity as the whole of the real).

Postfoundational Thought: Theorizing the Pluriverse but Not an Ethics for the Pluriverse

In sum, based upon this survey, I wish to assert that Rancière’s work, and the postfoundational literature more broadly, provides one possible theoretical framework\textsuperscript{60} from which modern scholars can theorize the pluriverse, but not an ethics for the pluriverse. That is, the postfoundational literature offers a set of concepts that hypothesize the possibility of infinite possibilities for our socio-symbolic orders, or onto-epistemologies, arising from the ground without ground. Sergei Prozorov (2014)

\textsuperscript{60} Although perhaps, to keep thinking pluriversally, not the only possible framework.
summarizes this framework nicely in his term ‘void universalism;’ it is the universal void (the ground without ground, the impossibility of final foundations) that creates the condition of possibility for an infinite horizon of possible foundations, orders, police, or worlds (albeit ones which can never fully totalize because of the impossibility of foundations). While this theory thus makes an important contribution, in that theorizing radical and infinite possibilities for worlds and orders is particularly significant from a normative standpoint (if things were unchangeable, the very idea of contemplating ethics and morality would be nonsensical), this approach, as the preceding discussion suggests, ultimately offers us little guidance in terms of theorizing and orienting ourselves ethically to the temporally simultaneous existence of multiple worlds as stipulated by the pluriverse. That is, theorizing the condition of possibility for multiple worlds, while deeply important, is not the same as attending to and caring for those worlds which exist, and the ethical quandaries that relate and shape them. And positing the radical contingency of all social orders, while certainly relevant, is not quite the same thing as realizing “other truths also exist and have the right to exist” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009, 18, emphasis added).

Put differently, I think that the ways in which contingency and universalism (or particularism and universalism) have been framed, defined, and debated in the postfoundational thought literature is limiting in the context of the pluriverse. Speaking of multiple worlds as worlds, attending to the ways in which we can give weight to these worlds as worlds, and orienting ourselves to the challenge of traversing the political-ethical relations as worlds interact, involves a different orientation to ‘universality’ and ‘contingency’ than is present in postfoundational political theory. I think this different
orientation is evident even in the ways in which postfoundational thinkers use terms like ‘alternative universals’ or ‘multiple universals’ or ‘worlds.’ While linguistically, it may seem like these scholars are speaking pluriversally, their use of these words in the context of their work strikes me as possessing a qualitatively different meaning than that which is signified by the ways in which the words ‘universal,’ ‘world,’ or as I propose, ‘onto-epistemology,’ are mobilized in the pluriverse literature. For instance, Prozorov (2014) speaks of multiple “situations or ‘worlds’,” implying that worlds are equal to situations. However, it is easy to think of situations that are not worlds in the pluriversal meaning of the word. Likewise, Butler (1992) refers to “alternative universals,” but her discussion focuses on different discursive framings of ‘rape’ in a legal case in the United States. Again, while different universals may be at play in that example – as in, different normative and socio-symbolic systems which locate and construct rape in different ways – I am not so sure that there are different worlds (in the most robust sense, different onto-epistemologies) at play. In part, this is why I mobilize the term onto-epistemology to signify the qualitatively unique nature of worlds as more than ‘universals’ (in the particular modern connotation of the word) and also why I believe that the anthropology literature, which grounds the notion of the pluriverse (and I do use the word ‘ground’ here purposefully), is so crucial to the investigation at hand. It is through this anthropological work that we come to identify different worlds from a bottom-up, deeply relational, and very material vantage point; it is also through this grounded work that we are reminded that what is at stake here are actually existing worlds, and sets of practices

61 Of course, I maintain the use of the word ‘universal’ when engaging with those who employ the term in this way.
and ways of knowing, and the subjects constituted therein.

For this reason, I suggest that from a pluriversal standpoint, the very intonation of words like ‘universal’ and ‘grounds’ is shifted (in much the same way that I believe ‘knowable’ and ‘speakable’ carry different meanings in the pluriverse). More exactly, in the pluriverse such words come to signify something *in excess of their meaning within the modern socio-symbolic order*. While undoubtedly postfoundational thought provides useful tools for political theorists like myself who seek to theorize the condition of possibility of a pluriverse (some of which I draw on throughout this dissertation), I also think that, in its current configuration, its own discursive tools limit the horizons of possibility for thinking through all facets of the pluriverse. In particular, postfoundational thought is not, perhaps, fully amenable to the part of the pluriversal project which seeks to ‘multiply universality,’ in the sense of giving full ontological weight to worlds, and of then orienting ourselves to living relationally with multiple actually existing and ‘grounded’ onto-epistemologies.

As a final point, while deconstructing normativity, norms, and other foundational claims is often an important task for challenging hierarchies and relations of power, the focus on contingency that so characterizes the postfoundational literature also sometimes results in an approach that is entirely unable to contemplate ethics, “as it tends to forget that while there certainly are normative limits we need to criticize and transgress, there are others we need to endorse and refine” (Ruti 2015, 206). In other words, postfoundational thought can suffer from the limitations of a negative ontology, in which one can only assert what is not. Yet, as Mari Ruti (2015, 206) states, “there are times when we need to make decisions about right and wrong, and to act accordingly.” These
moments are positive; a decision has to be made (for even not making one turns out to be an ethical decision). Given that the goal of this dissertation is to contemplate and develop tools that can help orient us towards dealing with and thinking through ethical dilemmas that arise between and across worlds, deconstruction (or always foregrounding radical contingency) – while an important tool, which I mobilize throughout this dissertation – cannot be all that we rely on lest we forgo the ever-important moment of decision and action.

A Note on Pragmatism: Ethics without Grounds

While I focus mostly on postfoundational thought in this chapter, a brief reflection on antifoundational ethics is merited. Antifoundationalism is often realized in its ethical form as pragmatism. If there are no foundations, then “instead of accepting the imperatives and laws of traditional epistemology and moral philosophy, one should finally come to understand that our only responsibility is to our fellow human beings in the world of practice (there is no other)” (Schulenberg 2017, 276). Pragmatists try to bypass disputes that may be unresolvable, particularly those regarding questions of ontology and epistemology, and instead focus on possible consequences in concrete situations (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 416-417). In a recent essay, Hutchings (2019, 123) has alluded to a pragmatist approach to global ethics in the context of the pluriverse:

I am suggesting, therefore, that taking pluriversality seriously means shifting our understanding of global ethics away from seeing it as a route to determining answers to questions of global justice and toward seeing it as an embodied, reflective practice contingently attached to specific goals and contexts. This means learning how to live with bracketing ontological and ethical commitments, and learning how to discriminate ethical priorities within complex and power-laden situations. In this respect, it is helpful to remember that such bracketing and discrimination are part of everyday ethical practice everywhere.
On the one hand, I am, to some extent, sympathetic to this viewpoint, in that it does ‘ground’ our ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse (in the anthropological sense that I use the term above). I am ultimately motivated by the actually-existing dilemmas and relations between onto-epistemologies, and I am concerned with developing tools to navigate these relations ethically within/from my onto-epistemology, the modern world. However, I am unsure if a full pragmatic turn is conducive to the pluriverse. Bracketing ontological, ethical, and epistemological commitments, in some ways, seems to miss the very challenge of the pluriverse; in fact, it seems to me that a huge part of the pluriversal challenge to existing approaches in Global Ethics is that it foregrounds different ontologies and epistemologies (and therefore ethical commitments) in the most robust sense. Different onto-epistemologies, and the ways these worlds relate and are related through relations of power, constitute the very landscape in and through which practical and grounded ethical dilemmas emerge. Attempting to sidestep such issues strikes me as somewhat impossible, and potentially dangerous. So very often, a commitment to pragmatism ends up as a commitment to the status quo, as what is seen as ‘doable’ and which consequences are judged to be ‘good’ is shaped by prevailing logics, epistemes, and ontologies, and particularly those that occupy privileged positions in relations of power.

To be fair, Hutchings highlights that such bracketing is a part of ethical practices that occur everywhere and every day. I agree with this claim – sometimes (perhaps even frequently) the moment of ethical decision ends up being pragmatic, and not premised on some deep onto-epistemic commitment. At the same time, I maintain that it is important to hold a healthy skepticism to the potentiality of a pragmatist pluriversal ethics; in the
case of earth-beings, like the Whanganui river, the competing ontological commitments between the moral agents (on the one hand, the Māori people who know nature as relational kin, and on the other hand, the modern New Zealand state which constructs nature as property or nature as distinct from humans) form the very basis for the ethical dilemma itself. Sidestepping these issues – pragmatically bracketing onto-epistemic concerns and commitments, and their moral salience – would greatly impede one’s ability to understand the moral dilemma, the power relations at play, and the nature of the contestation in ethical quandaries like this.

3.4 Conclusion: The Pluriversal Challenge to Global Ethics

This chapter has sought to review existing approaches in the field of Global Ethics in order to parse out their compatibility with the pluriverse: Can prominent approaches to global ethics, including moral cosmopolitanism, discourse ethics, and ethical approaches related to postmodernist thought, provide useful vantage points from which to contemplate the ethical landscape of the pluriverse, and the particular ethical dilemmas that arise therein? The first two approaches – which fall under the rationalist approaches to global ethics – do not hold up to the pluriversal challenge. Moral cosmopolitanism is unable to contemplate difference at its most deep and pervasive, as is the case in the pluriverse, where there are multiple onto-epistemologies. Discourse ethics is unsuited as a pluriversal ethics due to its implicit assumption of knowability across difference; as the pluriversal anthropological literature demonstrates, knowing fully in the context of the pluriverse is not always possible. There are sometimes ontological and epistemological ‘gaps,’ ‘excesses,’ or ‘intranslatabilities’ between worlds; no amount of dialogue will
close these gaps fully. The last approach, which I have most broadly called postmodernist ethics, offers more potential – in that certain notions like the political, or radical equality, provide tools for theorizing the very possibility of a pluriverse – but ultimately fails as an approach to ethics in the pluriverse, a landscape which requires contemplating the existence of a multitude of temporally simultaneous and existing worlds.

Nonetheless, interrogating the literature in this way is a necessary step in addressing the pluriversal challenge to Global Ethics. One cannot orient oneself to the pluriverse, as a political landscape, from the perspective of one universal truth, and from the impoverished understanding of difference that such a stance implies (à la moral cosmopolitanism). The pluriverse is the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of worlds, or onto-epistemologies, and differences here are at their most pervasive. The pluriverse is not simply a new multiculturalism; it does not refer to different viewpoints, interests, or claims in a singular world. Rather, the pluriverse refers to multiple worlds in the most robust sense, and difference cannot be glossed over or bracketed away.

Relatedly, the pervasiveness of these differences means that we cannot assume knowability or translatability in the context of the pluriverse (à la discourse ethics). There may be an ‘excess,’ or an incommensurability, in terms of dialoguing and understanding between and across worlds. Dealing with such unknowability is a particular challenge in the pluriversal context, when the very ontological, epistemological, and/or axiological significance of someone/something (a river, a mountain, for instance) may be inaccessible to certain groups of people or moral subjects involved in the dilemma.

Lastly, while differences are primary in the pluriverse, these differences are not fully contemplatable when the focus is on contingency (postmodernist ethics); they are
actually-existing, and onto-epistemologies constitute their own internal truths. In this way, the pluriversal project not only orients us towards the idea that there are multiple truths, but further articulates that these truths have the right to their status as truths.

Thinking of onto-epistemologies in the pluriversal context as voidal (emerging from the negative, the ground without grounds) or unfounded, even if in terms of a complex interplay between universality and contingency, is not quite in the spirit of the pluriverse. The (modern) intonation inherent in the terms ‘contingency,’ ‘universal,’ ‘ground,’ and ‘foundation’ is insufficient, or at the very least limiting, when seeking to imagine ways to grapple with the pluriverse and a pluriversal ethics.

In some ways, to return to the beginning of the chapter, it is perhaps unsurprising that these approaches – so rooted in modernity and its commitment to one-worldism (albeit to varying degrees) – are unable to grapple fully with the political-ethical landscape of the pluriverse. Nonetheless, I believe that there is one approach in the Global Ethics literature that can provide a vantage point from which to contemplate a pluriversal ethics. In the next chapter, I turn to this approach, and begin to present my hypothesis that a critical, political, feminist ethics of care can help orient (modern) ethical theory and (modern) subjects towards the pluriverse in a way that facilitates ethical reflection and action across worlds, thereby building a pluriversal ethics.
Another alternative approach in Global Ethics in Kimberly Hutchings’ schematic is feminist ethics (2010, 61), which most broadly can be understood as arising from a critique of the patriarchal assumptions and traditions underpinning mainstream Western approaches to ethics. This dissertation argues that a particular approach to feminist ethics – the ethics of care – provides a useful vantage point from which to build a pluriversal ethics.\(^1\) The purpose of this chapter is thus to introduce the ethics of care, highlight key debates, developments and advances in the literature on care ethics, and describe precisely how I understand the ethics of care as an approach to moral thinking that is both critical and political. In this way, this chapter lays the groundwork for the next and final

\(^1\) It is worth noting here that, as will become apparent in this chapter, the ethics of care shares terrain with the postmodernist approaches to ethics reviewed in the previous chapter. In some sense, this is to be expected, given that in Hutchings’ (2010) framework, both feminist ethics and postmodernist ethics are ‘alternative approaches’ which critique the universalizing assumptions of the ‘rationalist approaches.’ In particular, these two approaches share a critical orientation to relations of power and the ways in which power operates in/through categorical and binary thinking. Despite these similarities, I maintain a distinction between these two approaches here for a few reasons. First, the intellectual histories of the ethics of care and postmodernist approaches to ethics are distinct. The ethics of care, as outlined below, comes from American moral developmental psychology, while postmodernism is generally associated with continental political thought. While I do not wish to reify these disciplinary boundaries or traditions, I do think that these different histories matter and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to draw lines between/across these traditions in order to develop fully the linkages between these two approaches (although I do, perhaps, contribute in a small way to such task in section 5.3 below, in which I put ‘the political’ in direct conversation with the ethics of care). Second, as care ethicist Maurice Hamington (2015b, 287) writes, while care ethics “can accommodate the deconstructive analysis of postmodernism which challenges categorical thinking that can separate self from others, identity from morality, subject from object, etc.” (these points are developed more fully below), the ethics of care differs markedly from postmodernism in that it does not “conclude[e] in a deconstructed state” (Hamington 2015b, 287). Instead, and again as is developed more fully below, care ethics “provides an organizing trajectory around attentive/responsive living” (Hamington 2015b, 287) that prioritizes relations of care, materiality, embodiment, and vulnerability. Thus, on the one hand, I certainly think that postmodernism (and perhaps more specifically postfoundational political thought) and the ethics of care can be thought of as ‘allies’ (and that there is great potential for (further) fruitful conversations between these two theoretical orientations). On the other hand, I also believe that the ‘reconstructive’ (Hamington 2015b, 287) or, as I write below, ‘productive’ aspect of the ethics of care both distinguishes it from postmodernist ethics more generally and is of great import when thinking about ethics in the context of the pluriverse.
(substantive) chapter of the dissertation, in which I rethink global ethics along pluriversal lines using a critical ethics of care.

In order to introduce the ethics of care, it is helpful to first begin with a broader discussion of the feminist critique of moral philosophy and ethics, and to give a general introduction to feminist ethics. As feminists like Seyla Benhabib (1987, 158) have argued, dominant moral epistemologies, like the rationalist approaches to global ethics, define the moral domain based on a strong distinction between justice (the right) and the good life (the good). This distinction – and the ways in which this distinction is intimately intertwined with other binaries that constitute the modern world, including the public/private divide, the binary between reason and emotion, and the patriarchal dichotomy of masculine/feminine – “lead[s] to a privatization of women’s experience and to the exclusion of its consideration from a moral point of view” (Benhabib 1987, 158, emphasis in original).

More specifically, Benhabib argues that “questions of the good life,” including questions about kinship, love, friendship, and virtue, were key to moral thinking in ancient and medieval systems; “in such moral systems, the rules that govern just relations within the human community are embedded in a more encompassing concept of the good life. This good life, the telos of man, is defined ontologically with reference to man’s place in the cosmos at large” (1987, 159). However, modernity – which is characterized by an axiological shift in which Man sees himself as the master of Nature, as argued in chapter two – fundamentally alters this understanding of morality. Now, Man is “emancipated from cosmology and from an all-encompassing world view that normatively limits man’s relation to nature” (Benhabib 1987, 160); Man, as the ‘orderer’
of the universe, is separate and above Nature and the cosmos, and Man is now responsible for organizing social life. With this separation between Man and Nature, another bifurcation manifests: the distinction between justice and the good life emerges to protect the autonomy of the self as distinct from the cosmos (Benhabib 1987, 160). More simply, justice – as that which will provide the legitimate basis for the social order – becomes the focus of moral theory as atomistic individuals ‘become’ orderers of their universe.

This shift in orientation to the relationship between Man and Nature, and corresponding bifurcation of justice and the good life, is evident in the discussion in the previous two chapters, where morality (and answers to questions of what ‘ought’ to be done) is either “defined as what all would have rationally to agree to in order to ensure civil peace and prosperity (Hobbes, Locke); or […] is derived from the rational form of moral law alone (Rousseau, Kant)” (Benhabib 1987, 160). Questions of the good life now belong to the individual, who can define the good life for himself because of justice, i.e., so long as the social contract and rights-claims of individuals are upheld and respected (justice), autonomous moral subjects can pursue their own interests, desires, and live well (the good life). In this way, moral autonomy and personal autonomy are also made distinct; “people gain moral autonomy when they use their reason to discern which principles ought to be followed; personal autonomy is their entitlement to pursue their own visions of the good in their own way” (Meyers and Feder Kittay 1987, 4).

One of the consequences of this separation between justice and the good life is that a hierarchy emerges, in which justice became the whole of moral theory, while questions of the good life are personalized and relegated to the ‘private sphere.’ The
private sphere – in contrast to the ‘public sphere’ – is a related dichotomy that is of particular significance in dominant Western political thought. The private sphere is the realm of familial relations, while the public sphere is the realm of politics and economics. These spheres, conceived of in this dichotomous manner, are separate and distinct; issues of the home have no place in the public. As feminists have long pointed out, however, the public/private divide is related to another binary, masculine/feminine, which is fundamental to the patriarchal gender-sex system, that is, “the social-historical, symbolic constitution, and interpretation of the differences of the sexes” (Benhabib 1987, 157).

Under patriarchy, notions of masculinity and femininity serve as a powerful system of codification, which organizes our social lives discursively and materially, and which shapes embodied identity.

Importantly, and as noted in chapter two, this coding of the world is not neutral; rather, under patriarchy, that which is coded masculine is valued above that which is coded feminine. Mapping the masculine/feminine binary on to the binaries of justice/good life (the right/the good) and public/private reveals a pattern, where those on the left-hand side of the divide are valued above those on the right-hand side:

| Masculine / Feminine | Justice / Good Life |

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2 These binaries were, in fact, already introduced in chapter two of this dissertation, which argues that modernity as a world is constituted in part by particular gendered relations and particular binary thinking; in this discussion, my aim is now to demonstrate specifically how moral philosophy in modernity is characterized by these same relations.

3 As noted in footnote 2 of the introductory chapter, some literature distinguishes between ethics and morality – with ethics representing the ‘right’ and morality representing the ‘good’ (Benhabib 1992) – thereby pointing to this distinction between justice and the good life. Following Hutchings (2010, 8), I have used, and continue to use, these terms interchangeably as I reject this separation. Rather, I assert that a conception of what is right is necessarily underpinned by a conception of what is good and vice versa (Geras 1999). Nonetheless, my argument here, following Benhabib (1987), is that mainstream moral
These intimately related binaries create a series of boundaries which serve to exclude women (and other feminized actors) from moral thinking and public life. In this way, these binaries, and related boundaries, are not simply conceptual; rather, they come to shape social relations in very concrete ways. As Benhabib summarizes:

> The sphere of justice, from Hobbes through Locke and Kant, is regarded as the domain wherein independent, male heads-of-household transact with one another, while the domestic-intimate sphere is put beyond the pale of justice and restricted to the reproductive and affective needs of the bourgeois *pater familias*. […] An entire domain of human activity, namely, nurture, reproduction, love, and care, which becomes the woman’s lot in the course of the development of modern, bourgeois society, is excluded from moral and political considerations, and confined to the realm of ‘nature.’ (1987, 160)

In addition to excluding women (and the issues that women are often responsible for given our particular social and political arrangements) from moral and political considerations, these binaries – and the systems of codification which value one part of the dichotomy over the other – also serve to devalue and even exclude whole ways of moral thinking and deliberation from moral philosophy. For example, Benhabib discusses how the dominant approach to moral thinking, based on rationalism, relies on taking the standpoint of the ‘generalized other.’

> The standpoint of the generalized other requires us to view each and every philosophy separates justice and the good life, hierarchicalizes them (in that questions of justice and the right is for the public domain while questions of the good are for the private sphere), and in so doing, fails to see how particular notions of the right limit visions of the good (and vice versa). In presenting this binary, I do not mean to gloss over the fact that I believe that the right and the good are relationally dependent (just as masculine and feminine, and public and private, only make sense relationally, as the definition of one side of the binary forms the constitutive outside – and thereby demarcates – the definition of the other). Instead, I am simply trying to present the ways in which mainstream moral theory is premised upon a series of related, and as I argue below, problematic, binaries.
individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from their individuality and concrete identity of the other. We assume that the other, like ourselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires, and affects, but what constitutes moral dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common. (Benhabib 1987, 163)

This decontextualized, abstracted, and rationalist approach to moral thinking is evident in many of the approaches in Global Ethics discussed in the previous chapter.

In privileging the rationalist approach to ethics, which sees taking the standpoint of the generalized other as the highest form of moral thinking, Western moral philosophy also suppresses other moral voices and lines of moral inquiry. For instance, Benhabib draws our attention to another approach to moral thinking which requires taking the standpoint of the ‘concrete other.’

The standpoint of the concrete other, by contrast, requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution. In assuming this standpoint, we abstract from what constitutes our commonality. We seek to comprehend the needs of the other, his or her motivations, what he or she searches for and desires. (Benhabib 1987, 164)

Thinking about the generalized versus the concrete other draws our attention to additional binaries in Western moral philosophy, like the separation of mind and body, and reason and emotion. For instance, contemplating concrete others and their embodied needs, interests, and desires means tending to their embodiment, their emotions, and our embodied and emotional relation to them. This type of moral thinking, however, is pitted against (and seen as less morally valuable than) moral theorizing which is concerned with tending to the abstract other, who can only be a disembodied other, abstracted from their context and contemplated using abstracted reason. Concerns about affects, emotions, bodily needs, and particular hopes and desires – the very fabric of everyday interactions –
are coded feminine (as are approaches to moral thinking which foreground such things), relegated to the private sphere, and removed from discussions of justice, moral life, and other public concerns. As Sophie Bourgault (2014, 4) writes, from the standpoint of dominant moral political theory, meeting needs (be they emotional or corporeal) and attending to people’s different hopes, desires, and interests are “the plain stuff of everyday life, crude matters tied to necessity. As such needs do not inspire our loftiest theoretical ambitions, nor does their fulfillment seem to represent a fitting (read noble) goal for the sociopolitical creatures that we are.” Through these foundational binaries, it is not just particular gendered bodies which are excluded as legitimate moral agents in dominant approaches to Western moral philosophy: entire ethical concerns and ways of moral thinking are deemed irrelevant or insufficiently sophisticated to constitute morality as such.

Joan Tronto (1993, 6-11) similarly demonstrates how binaries that are foundational to the modern world create separations and draw moral boundaries. For instance, Tronto notes that a boundary is drawn between morality and politics, as moral concerns and political issues are conceived of as distinct affairs belonging to two different spheres. The ‘moral point of view’ boundary stems from the idea that moral judgments must be objective, and relatedly, that all subjective concerns must be bracketed when making moral claims. While Tronto does not discuss this, I suggest that together, these two boundaries – that is, between morality and politics, and between

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4 Notably, as Hutchings (2013, 27) points out, this distinction “between morality as such and its realm of application in practice” also serves to “bifurcat[e] the task of the ethical or political theorist,” who, in keeping this distinction intact, must either attempt to access moral principles (through objective rationalism) or figure out how to apply these principles to the non-ideal world.
objective and subjective knowledge claims – also inherently involve a boundary between the ideational and the material, as morality is conceived of as universal principles or ideals which can be accessed by pure thought only, and then applied to the messy and subjective realities of our material lives. Finally, Tronto (1993) also notes that the boundary between public and private life, as discussed above, serves to relegate certain concerns to the world of politics and the market, and others to the private sphere of close relations.

Like Benhabib, Tronto argues that the problem with these boundaries is that they serve to legitimize certain people as moral agents, certain concerns as worthy of political and moral deliberation, and certain rationalist and objective approaches to moral thinking; in so doing, these boundaries also marginalize or dismiss other actors, issues, and ways of moral understanding. For example, because of the ‘objective point of view’ boundary, women’s morality is not taken seriously, as “any account of morality that draws upon emotion, daily life, and political circumstance, will necessarily seem corrupted by non-rational and idiosyncratic incursions within this world” (Tronto 1993, 10). Instead, from the standpoint of dominant Western approaches to moral thinking, the job of the moral philosopher is to ‘discard’ their contexts and any earthly considerations to philosophize ‘impartially’ (Hutchings 2013); moral philosophers must “learn to position [them]selves as observers or analysts of, not actors or participants in, morality” (Walker 2007, 5).

The list of binaries at the heart of the feminist critique of mainstream modern moral philosophy could therefore be expanded to include:

Masculine / Feminine
Men / Women
Justice / Good Life
The Right / The Good
Public / Private
Reason / Emotion
Ideational / Material
Abstract / Contextual
Absolute / Relative
Generalized Other / Concrete Other
Independent / Dependent
Objective / Subjective
Production / Reproductive
Human / Nature

These binaries, and the boundaries they draw, not only dictate which approaches to morality are considered legitimate, and which actors can be conceived of as moral agents; rather, they come to define moral theory as such. Operating at the level of the very conception of morality, these binaries constitute understandings of morality as separate from everyday concerns and the material and relational activities which comprise our interactions. More simply, this means that morality is segregated from concerns most fundamental to living healthy and happy lives. These moral boundaries also co-constitute and come to define what it means to be a moral agent; masculinist notions of objectivity,

5 I mean theory to be understood in the widest sense as “an internally consistent, fairly comprehensive account of what morality is and when and why it merits our acceptance and support” (Baier 1993, 20).
reason, and autonomy define moral agents as unencumbered individuals who can access universal truths and principles via abstracted reasoning. They mark certain concerns – such as issues related to care, reproduction, kinship, family, and friends – and certain knowledges – such as those derived from contexts, relations, and emotions – as inferior approaches to moral deliberation. In other words, these binaries shape what is seen as legitimate moral epistemology, by which I mean “the nature, source, and justification of moral knowledge” (Walker 2007, 4).

Notably, feminists have used different terms to refer to this dominant approach to Western moral thinking. As described throughout this dissertation, Hutchings (2010) refers to these dominant Western approaches as the ‘rationalist’ approaches in Global Ethics. Other feminists, like Diana T. Meyers and Eva Feder Kittay (1987) and Virginia Held (2006; 2015) speak of the ‘Justice Tradition;’ others still speak of the ‘Rights Tradition’ (see, for example, Meyers 1987). Margaret Urban Walker (2007) provides a particularly useful term when she describes this dominant approach, constructed according to such boundaries and binary thinking, as the theoretical-juridical model of morality and moral theory. This model⁶ is not a moral theory, but rather is a “kind of template for organizing moral inquiry into the pursuit of a certain kind of moral theory” (Walker 2007, 7-8) that prioritizes intellectualism, individualism, and impartiality. It is an intellectualist approach, as it assumes that morality is to be accessed and understood

⁶ In other words, Walker is not attempting to denote particular moral theories or particular approaches to moral deliberation; instead, she is describing a particular enterprise of moral philosophy, which comes to define both morality and moral philosophy. Thus, while I have used Hutchings’ term of ‘rationalist approaches’ throughout the dissertation so far, I now adopt Walker’s description of the ‘theoretical-juridical model’ to move the analysis to a meta-theoretical level: in this discussion, I am scrutinizing the very ways in which ‘morality,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘moral understandings’ are defined, as opposed to focusing on critical assessments of specific approaches to ethics.
through logical and rational reflection and analysis undertaken by the impartial moral philosopher. It is individualist in that it assumes that moral concepts are meant to equip individuals with a guidance system that they can then use (or not) to construct and guide their life and life decisions. It is impersonal because the ‘right’ moral equipment is meant to work universally; it “tells one what is right to do (or explains why something 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 one inhabits and one’s station within it” (Walker 2007, 9).

Thus, as Walker summarizes, this template

[...] prescribes the representation of morality as a compact, propositionally codifiable, impersonally action-guiding code within an agent, or as a compact set of law-like propositions that ‘explain’ the moral behaviour of a well-formed moral agent. [...] It is also a distorting view of the kinds of understanding that are at work in the parts of morality that do consist in knowledge or thought. It demotes a great deal of what is known, felt, and acted out in moral relations to ‘nonmoral’ – merely factual or collateral – information. It shrinks morality proper down to a kind of purified core of purely moral knowledge. [Of course, this] assumption of a pure core of moral knowledge fits conveniently with the idea that moral philosophers can gain access to morality by mostly or entirely nonempirical reflection on conceptual and logical relations or on the deliverances of ‘intuition.’ (2007, 8)

Morality, according to the theoretical-juridical model, consists of universal principles or truths, separate and independent of culture, history, and material conditions, that apply to all contexts in all times, and that can only be accessed by the impartial and objective moral philosopher. Morality is wholly removed from social life – it neither reflects nor reproduces our social worlds. Instead, morality exists ‘out there,’ and it is up to individuals to determine if, and how, they will use these principles to guide their lives. As feminists have long pointed out, this particular model of morality assumes a lot about the nature of morality and the ways in which moral thinking occurs, and in so doing, excludes different moral understandings as legitimate sources of ethical knowledge.
In summary, while feminist philosophers have argued that women have been, quite literally, excluded from moral philosophizing and from being seen as moral agents, the feminist critique of dominant Western moral theory (theory that is a product of the theoretical-juridical model), as the above discussion demonstrates, runs much deeper. Feminist ethics emerged as a field of study dedicated to revealing and critiquing the patriarchal biases and binaries inherent in key theoretical assumptions in moral philosophy, including assumptions about “the sources and content of moral principles, the process of moral deliberation, and the concept of moral agency” (Meyers and Kittay 1987, 4). Feminist ethics seek to challenge the ways in which these assumptions and binaries shape moral deliberation and impact how decisions unfold in the world. And feminist ethics strive to uncover and critique the exclusions that result from the theoretical-juridical model of morality and moral philosophy. Carol Gilligan’s (1993) ground-breaking work on moral developmental psychology, largely acknowledged to be the origin of the ethics of care, is exemplary of such feminist scholarship.

4.1 Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice*

Prior to the publication of Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* ([1982] 1993), the dominant understanding of moral development in the field of psychology was Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1981) model of moral development. This model describes moral maturity as a process which can be broken into six-stages, where the first stage is the most juvenile stage of moral reasoning, and the sixth stage is the highest or most advanced stage of
moral reasoning. ‘Preconventional’ moral thinking, according to Kohlberg’s schematic, can be distinguished as that which defers to authority (Stage 1) or that which considers one’s own needs and the needs of intimate others as the basis for moral decision making (Stage 2). The conventional level of moral thinking is reached when individuals make moral decisions to seek other people’s approval and conform to social norms (Stage 3). When individuals obtain a sense of value and meaning from conforming to and upholding social norms (and therefore social order), they can be characterized as Stage 4 conventional moral thinkers. The postconventional stage of moral development is reached when persons associate morality with rights, and particularly rights endorsed by the social group (Stage 5). And finally, full moral maturation is realized when individuals reach Stage 6, characterized by the self-chosen subscription to universal principles of justice (as exemplified in the rationalist approaches to global ethics). “Plainly, Kohlberg’s theory identifies moral progress with ever closer approximations to the justice tradition’s idea of the person” (Meyers and Feder Kittay 1987, 6).

In her now famous study, Gilligan challenged this model of moral development. Noting that women consistently scored as ‘less morally developed’ according to Kohlberg’s scale, she conducted interviews with women and men of a variety of ages in which she posed moral dilemmas (including some which Kohlberg used in his studies) and then listened to their moral reasoning. In so doing, Gilligan identified a ‘different voice,’ mostly spoken by her women participants, which approached moral decision-

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7 Recall in section 3.2 that discourse ethics relies on a hierarchy of moral thinking, where some lifeworlds are at the preconventional stage while others are at the postconventional stage. This schematic comes from Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, explicated (and critiqued) here.

8 Recall that, broadly speaking, the ‘justice tradition’ refers to the same tradition as the theoretical-juridical model, the rights tradition, or the rationalist approaches, as noted above.
making not as an objective and analytical analysis of ‘justice,’ but as a problem of
relationships and responsibility. An oft-cited example helps demonstrate this different
voice. Jake and Amy are two eleven-year-old children who are presented with the Heinz
dilemma:

In Europe, a woman was near death from a very bad disease, a special kind of
cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form
of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was
expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost
him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charges $2,000 for a small dose of
the drug. The sick woman’s husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow
the money, but he could get together only about $1,000, which was half of what it
cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper
or let him pay later. But the druggist said, “No, I discovered the drug and I’m
going to make money from it.” Heinz got desperate and broke into the man’s store
to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg
1981, 12)

Jake is clear and decisive in his response to this moral problem: Heinz should steal the
drug. Jake articulates a mathematical and rationalist logic, noting that a human life is
worth more than money, and that while the druggist can make more money, “you
couldn’t get Heinz’s wife again” (Gilligan 1993, 26). He also acknowledges that while
the law might see Heinz’s actions as wrong, the law might be mistaken. In fact, he thinks
judges would agree with his logic – which is rationally derived and therefore accessible
to anyone else with reason (Gilligan 1993, 26) – and let Heinz off for his crime. This
logical approach to moral deliberation, as Gilligan notes, would score Jake highly on
Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. Jake brings deductive logic to bear on the
moral dilemma, uses it to access a principle (a life is worth more than money), and

9 For an excellent critique of the gendered-nature of this dilemma, see Marilyn Friedman (1987). In
particular, Friedman asks us to consider how this dilemma, and our responses to it, would change if Heinz
was instead Heidi.
distinguishes morality from social relations like the legal system (prioritizing morality as right and the law as potentially fallible).

When posed with the same dilemma, Amy, however, provides a very different answer. In response to the question ‘Should Heinz steal the drug?,’ Amy is hesitant and unsure:

Well, I don’t think so. I think there might be other ways besides stealing it, like if he could borrow the money or make a loan or something, but he really shouldn’t steal the drug – but his wife should not die either. (Gilligan 1993, 28)

When asked to elaborate, Amy continues:

If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn’t get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money. (Gilligan 1993, 28)

Amy approaches the moral problem differently. She frames the problem as a “narrative of relationships that extends over time” (Gilligan 1993, 28); she is concerned with the long-term repercussions of Heinz stealing the drug. She is unsure of how to proceed, but she does identify that there is a moral problem stemming from a failure to respond to a need. Unlike Jake, who weighs the ‘right’ to life against the ‘right’ to money, Amy sees the problem as one in which someone is appealing for the help of another, and she suggests that more communication may be the key to resolving the dilemma. Yet, as Gilligan notes, when Amy’s responses are analyzed according to Kohlberg’s model of moral development, she scores a full stage lower in maturity than the boys like Jake (1993, 30); Amy’s “reliance on relationships seems to reveal a continuing dependence and vulnerability, so her belief in communication as the mode through which to resolve moral dilemmas appears naïve and cognitively immature” (Gilligan 1993, 30).

Based on observations like this, Gilligan comes to question fundamentally
Kohlberg’s model and its masculinist biases towards individualism, abstraction, and rationalism. Noting that morality and moral thinking are conceived of in a very particular way within Kohlberg’s model, Gilligan listens for – and hears – alternative conceptions of morality in the answers of her women participants. From these different voices, Gilligan identifies an approach to ethical deliberation that differs from the theoretical-juridical model, an approach which she calls an ethic of care:

In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as concerned with the activity of care centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules. (Gilligan 1993, 19)

While the theoretical-juridical model conceives of morality as individualist, this ethic of care approach begins with the notion that relationships are primary, and foregrounds the moral salience of connection, activities of care, and the fulfillment of responsibilities that are “based on a bond of attachment, rather than a contract of agreement” (Gilligan 1993, 57). This approach to moral thinking thus also involves a different understanding of morality. Morals are not principles to be accessed individually through rational thought. Rather, morality consists of the activities and practices of care and relationship-maintenance that sustain webs of connections and minimize harm as best as possible.

It is crucially important to emphasize that while Gilligan identified a different approach to moral reasoning, this different voice was not one that could then be added to or subsumed by the justice approach. That is, while some scholars have presented the
ethics of care as a separate approach to moral deliberation,\(^\text{10}\) one that should either come before justice approaches or one that can be used interchangeably with the justice approach depending on the context (see, for example, Held 2006; 2015), a more critical reading of Gilligan’s discovery of a different voice offers much more than just an ‘alternative’ to the theoretical-juridical model. More fundamentally, the different voice heard by Gilligan challenges the hierarchy of moral philosophy which privileges the theoretical-juridical model and suppresses other ways of moral knowing. As Sara Ruddick (1987, 244, emphasis in original) writes, “There are many techniques of exclusion. One common to intellectuals is the placing of difference within a governing theory without recognizing its challenge to the theory’s fundamental assumptions.” In hearing this different voice, Gilligan did not simply place this difference in the governing theory; instead, she challenged the logic of the theory itself. She revealed the masculinist biases and assumptions that underpin Kohlberg’s model, and illuminated the ways in which his notion of moral maturity was defined by a particular understanding of and approach to morality (the same approach which dominates Western moral philosophy, which Walker calls the theoretical-juridical model). Further, Gilligan drew attention to the ways in which treating that particular understanding as the ‘whole’ of morality excluded some – namely women – as legitimate and sophisticated moral thinkers. More simply, in hearing a different voice, Gilligan uncovered moral boundaries which exclude some as moral agents and render certain epistemologies and practices as non- or less-

\(^{10}\) In later editions of his work, Kohlberg, for example, modified his claims by renaming his model the “justice reasoning” model, as opposed to the “moral maturity” model (its original name), in response to Gilligan’s findings, thereby framing the care ethical voice as a different moral point of view (see Gilligan 1987).
moral. This, as is discussed in more detail below, opened space for other moral voices to be heard, and for other moral practices and understandings to be taken seriously.

4.2 The Ethics of Care

Since Gilligan’s trailblazing work, the ethics of care has ballooned into a full interdisciplinary research agenda (Leget, van Nistelrooij, and Visse 2019) with both theoretical and empirical (Nortvedt and Vosman 2014) work on the ethics of care covering a variety of topics, issues, and avenues of inquiry. A related body of work on care practices and care labour in a variety of contexts (see, for example, Barnes et al. 2015a; Gabriel 2011; Jordan 2018; Kelly 2017; Mullin 2011; Onuki 2011; Peters et al. 2010; Ward 2011) has also grown alongside the ethics of care literature.\(^\text{11}\) So significant is the body of work on care theory and care ethics that Klaartje Klaver, Eric van Elst, and Andries J. Baart (2014) have argued for the demarcation of the ethics of care as a discipline in its own right (although such a move is, of course, debated (see, for example, Leget, van Nistelrooij and Visse 2019)).

Despite the increasing scholarship on the ethics of care, care ethics is not easily distilled into a set of rules or a ‘slogan’ (Collins 2015). However, there are some characteristics of the ethics of care that unite the varied scholarship in this field. The purpose of this section is first to provide a brief introduction to the ethics of care. Then, in the following three sections, I explore more fully three debates in the ethics of care literature: the debate on the ethics of care as essentialism; the debate regarding the

\(^{11}\) I return to this distinction between care ethics literature and the literature on practices of care in section 4.3 and 4.5 below.
possibility of the ethics of care to serve as a ‘global’ ethic; and the debate over the political nature of care. Through this introductory section and by reviewing the aforementioned debates, I develop and explore my particular understanding of the ethics of care as a critical and political theory.

A Relational Ontology

First, and foremost, the ethics of care is premised upon a relational social ontology. As Maurice Hamington writes, “we are the product of our relationships and cannot shed our social existence” (2018, 310). More specifically, the ethics of care

 [...] starts from the premise that people live in and perceive the world within social relationships; moreover, this approach recognizes that these relationships are both a source of moral motivation and moral responsiveness and a basis for the construction and expression of power and knowledge. (Robinson 1999, 2)

From a care ethics perspective, we are all (re)produced and sustained by our relations, including both close, personal relationships (such as those with family and friends) and broader social relations, such as systems of power and other public, social and institutional arrangements (Hankivsky 2004, 34). Significantly, this claim is an ontological claim. The relational ontology inherent in an ethics of care is not simply

12 It may be of interest to note that some care ethics scholarship has demonstrated linkages between this relational social ontology and non-Western ontologies, like “the African concept of Ubuntu; suma qamaña, a collective concept of well-being that was adopted as a central value in the Bolivian constitution of 2009; and the Māori principles of whanaungatanga or relationship building” (Barnes et al. 2015b, 11; see also Boulton and Brannelly 2015). This affinity lies in the ways in which these different ways of relational thinking and knowing challenge the binary thinking and individualistic rationalism that constitute modernity. At the same time, however, I do wish to foreground that I see the ethics of care as a product of the modern world. While some scholarship links care theory more fundamentally to non-Western philosophical traditions, such as Confucianism (Li 1994), the development of the ethics of care is most generally accredited to American feminist theorists – many of whom are cited in this chapter – who were writing in the early 1980’s (Engster and Hamington 2015b, 4), and who are themselves subjects of the modern world and trained in an academic tradition that is shaped by modernity. Care ethics, in this sense, is undoubtedly ‘modern’ – although, as should become apparent throughout the remainder of this dissertation, the ethics of care also poses a fundamental challenge to the modern onto-epistemology.
saying that we ‘have’ relations (although this is of course true); rather, the relational claim at the heart of the ethics of care refers to our very being. In a useful distinction, Kelly Oliver uses the terms “subjectivity to mean one’s sense of oneself as an ‘I,’ as an agent, and subject position to mean one’s position in society and history as developed through various social relationships” (2002, 326, emphasis in original). From a care ethics perspective, both subjectivity and subject position are (re)produced through relations.

Because we are “inextricably interdependent” (Feder Kittay 2015, 57), the ethics of care also understands humans as vulnerable. “The relational ontology of care ethics claims that relations of interdependence and dependence are a fundamental feature of our existence” (Robinson 2011b, 4); as a product of relations, we are always vulnerable to changes in/of relations. That is, our very moral selves only emerge through a relational processual becoming which is always vulnerable in its becoming. Selves do not exist outside of the shifting and fluid relations that constitute them; selves are only always a vulnerable unfolding through relations (which are themselves vulnerable). From this vantage point, then, (inter)dependence and vulnerability are not qualities possessed by some, such as the sick, poor, or weak, or something to be overcome to achieve the ideal of ‘independence.’ Rather, vulnerability and dependency are ontological conditions (albeit ones that manifest differently for different people across different contexts).

Notably, the relational ontology of an ethics of care therefore differs drastically from the

13 Gilligan and Snider (2018) make this point by using a distinction between ‘relationships,’ which we have with others, and ‘relationship,’ which refers to an ontology/state of being in which we exist relationally.
14 Of course, subject position and subjectivity are intimately related.
15 I return to a more thorough discussion of the relationship between a relational ontology and vulnerability, as well as the significance of the ontological claim that we are vulnerable, in section 5.2 below.
ontological assumptions underpinning mainstream approaches to Western moral philosophy, in which humans are atomistic and independent beings who can (and should) abstract themselves from context.

To summarize, I see the ethics of care as making a twofold socio-ontological claim. First, we are relational beings. Second, this fact makes us vulnerable. If our very existence is relational – dependent on others – we are all susceptible to harms that may emerge through our relations. Our embodied well-being and our very identities are vulnerable and shaped by the shifting and unequal relations that comprise our lives.

A Situated Epistemology

As Fiona Robinson notes, while the relational ontology of an ethics of care is generally agreed upon, “there is rather less agreement regarding epistemological and methodological questions in care ethics” (2011a, 134). However, following Robinson, I assert that because of this relational ontology, the ethics of care also “eschews the epistemological certainty of moral foundationalism” (Robinson 2011a, 128). Instead, like our subjectivity and subject position, knowledge, from a care ethical perspective, is relational, “an intersubjective product constructed within communal practices of acknowledgement, correction, and critique” (Code 1991, 224; quoted in Walker 2007 63). “All would-be knowers are situated in (typically multiple, overlapping) epistemic communities” (Walker 2007, 64, emphasis in original). The resources for making knowledge claims, interrogating knowledge claims, and validating knowledge claims can be found in language, symbolisms, and practices which relationally tie us together.

Accordingly, then, our judgement – and particularly our moral judgement – is also
dependent and vulnerable. There are not principles ‘out there’ that need to be accessed through rational thought; instead, moral thinking from this vantage point requires understanding how morality is situated and (re)produced in and through different relational webs. It requires critically examining the “background assumptions working alongside or loaded into the cognitive instruments and practices of communities of inquiry” (Walker 2007, 64). It demands deep examination and consideration of the world we live in, including political, economic, and other social relations and arrangements which are so often ‘kept separate’ from moral philosophizing. As care ethicists agree, context matters, and we must critically examine contexts in order to understand moral dilemmas and practices (see, for example, Engster and Hamington 2015a; Hankivsky 2004; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993). And finally, a care ethics approach to moral thinking means we must foreground the riskiness and vulnerability of our own moral judgement (Hutchings 2013), which is itself always only the product of our own relational being and knowing. The “multiple and ambiguous moral self […] must be] aware of his or her own limitations, dependencies, vulnerability and finiteness, and […be] prepared to accept responsibility for these things” (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 57).

**Morality as Practices**

Beginning with this relational ontology and critical situated epistemology thus recasts ethics and morality in radical ways. Instead of the theoretical-juridical approach to and understanding of morality (which sees morality as comprised of universal and transcendental truths that can be accessed by the impartial and rational moral philosopher, and then applied to the messy ‘real’ world), *morality is now understood as*
practices – including knowledge practices – which make up the very fabric of our everyday lives.

Of course, simply to say that morality is practices is a sweeping statement; there are many practices, and surely not all of them are about living well and doing right. Yet, by starting with a relational ontology, the ethics of care suggests more specifically that morality is practices, and particularly the practices of responsibility that allow us to maintain and repair our world and relations as well as possible. That is, because we are relational and vulnerable beings, care activities – the “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40, emphasis in original) – are the substance of moral practices and are the ways in which we attempt, often through many iterations, to live well, to respond to needs, and to minimize harm and suffering. Responsibility in this sense is therefore distinct from rationalist notions of responsibility or duty, which are conceived of in “terms of obedience to some higher abstract ideal” (Prattes 2020, 28). Instead, responsibility in care ethics refers to “who gets to do what to whom and who is supposed to do what for whom” (Walker 2007, 16), and the ways in which these responsibilities are already woven, and (unequally) distributed, in the fabric of our lives.

In this way, the ethics of care is also a “material ethics” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, 7), concerned with the practices that allow for human and nonhuman flourishing. Specifically, it is through material practices, and attentiveness to others, that the vulnerable moral thinker comes to make moral claims. Practices of care and responsibility require attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs and vulnerabilities of
others (Robinson 1999, 30), particularly when others are very different from ourselves. From a care ethics perspective, the process of care thus becomes a form of enquiry (Hamington 2018), in which ongoing attentiveness involves a “conscious effort at de-centering the self and then centering it again” (Confortini and Ruane 2013, 79) as one listens to the other and then responds to their needs. As Catia Confortini and Abigail Ruane (2013, 79) write, “this weaving practice between self and other is a condition of knowing;” it is through attentive and responsive (and often material) practices that moral knowledge emerges. Indeed, when I include knowledge practices as a moral practice in my care ethical definition of morality above, it is this intimate relation between our practices and our knowledge that I am pointing to: “knowledge practices are those collective, routine socio-material ways of carrying on that enable people to say ‘we know’ with at least some degree of certainty” (Verran 2013, 155).

From a care ethics perspective, it is also by paying attention to our practices that we can see if the ways in which we organize and live our lives align with our stated values and reflect on whether or not our practices and morals make sense to all those involved (Robinson 2011b, 26). More simply, it is through practices of care and responsibility that morality is produced and negotiated relationally. In this way, as Riikka Prattes argues, ignorance is an epistemology “that structurally and violently fails to perceive existing connections” (2020, 40, emphasis in original). That is, because moral knowledge and moral practices are so fundamentally intertwined, to be inattentive to practices of care is to ignore and neglect our relationality and the moral responsibilities that emerge through it.

Lastly, care ethics is, as noted above, a materialist ethics as it
asks after the effects on recipients of our care. It demands to know whether relations of care have in fact been established, maintained, or enhanced, and by extension it counsels us to consider effects on the whole web or network of care. (Noddings 2002, 30)

The effects of our caring practices and knowledges are significant, not only because the outcome of care practices matter (which, of course, they do (Hankivsky 2004, 38)), but also because it is through assessing the outcomes of practices of responsibility and care that moral knowledge (and deed) is tested, evaluated, and revised. From a care ethics perspective, caring is much more than a concern or sentiment for another; caring entails practices and actions in and through which moral knowledge is evaluated, challenged, and adapted. Accordingly, embodiment and performativity, as the material resources for action and practices, are of great moral significance for the ethics of care (Hamington 2010; 2015a).

A Critical Ethic

For these reasons, the ethics of care completely challenges the moral boundaries that shape the theoretical-juridical model of moral thinking. Treating morality as a sphere separate from politics or social relations makes no sense if morality is the practices that emerge in and through our relations; “the impossibility of ‘purifying’ morality or moral knowledge or practical reason” (Walker 2007, 17) is revealed by the care ethical approach. Similarly, the ‘moral point of view boundary’ (Tronto 1993), which insists that moral philosophizing requires one to eschew their context and embodiment and employ objective and decontextualized thinking, does not make sense. A relational epistemology acknowledges that knowledge emerges through relations. Understanding and evaluating knowledge claims requires foregrounding our situatedness, the background assumptions
and biases that are at play, and adopting epistemic humility. Importantly, this epistemic humility, as discussed more fully below, does not mean we devolve into relativism, or a scenario in which any subjective ‘truth’ holds equal authority. Instead, shaking “the certainties of judgement elicits a demand for an extension and intensification of the responsibilities of the scholar [or any moral thinker], not the abandonment of the claim to authority in judgement” (Hutchings 2013, 38). One must attend fully to one’s own privileges and biases, to the assumptions that shape our thinking, to the power dynamics that permeate all of this, and to the material outcomes of our moral thinking, when making moral judgements. In this way, the ethics of care also overcomes the ideational and material binary, as it is through situated, embodied, and material practices of care and responsibility that our moral knowledge emerges, is assessed, and revised.

Questions of what is ‘right’ and questions of ‘the good life’ also cannot be separated from a care ethics perspective, as what is right is in part determined by our notions and practices of the good life, and vice versa. Instead, the ethics of care obliterates this boundary by “requir[ing] us to change the terms of the discussion” (Tronto 2017, 37). Care ethics asks different questions: Who is responsible to whom and for what? How are responsibilities distributed? Why are some responsible for certain activities – particularly care activities – and why do some have a ‘pass’ from worrying about such things (Tronto 2013)? How do our practices of responsibility change in response to changing vulnerabilities? How do relations of power shape all of this? How can we be morally responsible to others so as to foster living well? And crucially, how do our forms of life shape our answers to all of these moral questions?

Lastly, the ethics of care also destabilizes the public/private moral boundary,
which relegates certain activities, generally feminized activities of care, emotion, and reproduction, to the private sphere. In conceiving of morality as practices of responsibilities to meet caring needs, things like care, needs, and vulnerabilities become central moral-political concerns, and understanding the ways in which politics, economics, and our other social relations arrange our caring relations becomes an important moral task.

It is for these reasons that the ethics of care is also a critical ethic. While the moniker of care ethics may conjure up images of sentimental caring, the ethics of care does not prescribe caring in some idealized form. The ethics of care is a critical ethic which “traces the processes through which patriarchy serves to stifle this relational ethic,” (Robinson 2019b, 3), and which reveals the harms and exclusions that result from the moral boundaries that constitute the dominant theoretical-juridical approach to morality and moral philosophy. It provides a different model from which to approach and understand morality, one which conceives of humans as relational and vulnerable beings, enmeshed in relational webs. This approach is not thickly prescriptive or based on rules and calculations. “Care entails a more organic approach to normativity […] a context driven emergent trajectory of moral standards” (Hamington 2015b, 278). The ethics of care asserts that ethics emerge, are judged, and are revised accordingly, in and through our relations and practices. As a result, care ethics understands moral life “as a continuing negotiation among people” (Walker 2007, 67, emphasis in original; also quoted in Tronto 2011, 165), a “cooperative engagement in producing habitable communities, environments, and ways of life” (Code 2002, 160; quoted in Tronto 2011, 165).

In sum, the ethics of care, as I see it, requires a radically different
conceptualization of the entire enterprise of morality and moral philosophy, particularly in comparison to the understanding of morality and moral thinking that emerges from the theoretical-juridical model. It is also for this reason that the ethics of care resists reduction to a set of principles; the ethics of care is a rejection of the approach to moral philosophy which valorizes such abstract principles. A critical ethics of care, instead, orients us to attend continually to the ongoing negotiations and relational engagements in and through which different moral understandings and practices emerge.16

16 To return momentarily to the brief discussion of the relationship between the ethics of care and postmodernist ethics from footnote 1 of this chapter, it is this critical aspect of the ethics of care which, I believe, aligns it with postmodernist approaches to ethics. However, the ethics of care differs also from postmodernist approaches in terms of their respective orientations to normativity. That is, if normativity refers to questions of living well (in the most lay sense), then it can be useful to think of normativity as involving a spectrum, ranging from thick (perhaps even prescriptive) visions of what should be (as exemplified in the theoretical-juridical model) to very thin (or, perhaps more accurately, negative) normative orientations, which generally only articulate what should not be. As evident in my critique of the postmodernist ethical approaches reviewed in chapter three, my (primary) concern with postmodernist ethics is that the almost exclusive focus on critique/deconstruction, while extremely useful for destabilizing static, asymmetrical and hierarchical relations of power (what Michel Foucault (1997, 283; discussed in Allen 2015) might call ‘states of domination’), is ‘too thin’ in its normativity. Specifically, I believe that we also need normative theories that orient us to contemplate more productive ways in which relationships could be constituted or organized (i.e., normative orientations that may help give us a sense of what we want our relations to look like, as opposed to ending with a more formal notion of “transforming a state of domination into a mobile, reversible, and unstable field of power relations” (Allen 2015, 517; Allen is again drawing from Foucault (1997)). The ethics of care differs from postmodernist ethics because unlike the postmodernist approaches, which all share this very ‘thin’ or ‘negative’ normativity, the ethics of care also prioritizes consideration of more productive normative questions. Of course, I do not mean to overstate the robustness of this productive aspect of the ethics of care either – it should be clear from the discussion above that the ethics of care, as I conceive it, is premised upon vulnerable judgement, ongoing critical and reflexive moral practices, and revisability. Yet, I believe that the ethics of care’s thin normativity – stemming from the ways in which “it makes claims about the nature of morality and about what is valuable to and for human [and, I would add, non-human] beings” (Robinson 2015, 309) – renders it a more useful ethics than the postmodernist approaches reviewed previously, particularly in the context of the pluriverse (I develop my argument of the ways in which the ethics of care can help us build a pluriversal ethics in the next chapter).
As a final note on normativity, it is also worth mentioning that there is no single approach to normativity in the ethics of care literature. Some care ethicists and care scholars have a much ‘thicker’ normativity than the ethics of care as developed and presented in this dissertation. This is discussed, to some extent, in section 4.5. In fact, the ways in which postmodernist approaches generally all share a thin, or ‘negative,’ normativity, while various care ethicists start with different conceptions of normativity, also distinguishes these two approaches.
4.3 Care as Anti-Essentialism

One of the earliest concerns regarding the ethics of care rested on the perceived essentialism of care ethics. That is, the ethics of care has been charged with essentializing women as caring, and reifying gender roles by aiming to replace the ‘masculine’ approach to ethics with a competing (or perhaps complementary) feminine approach.\textsuperscript{17} Gilligan’s work, in particular, has been accused of such essentialism, with critics arguing that Gilligan overstated the differences between the moral development of women and men (Brabeck 1983; Broughton 1983; Senchuk 1990; Walker 1984), and in so doing, naturalized women’s supposed affinity for care or ability to maintain relations and provide caregiving (Kerber 1986). Relatedly, many feminist scholars have also expressed concern that Gilligan’s work (and particularly her earlier work) lacks engagement with other perspectives and fails to consider the experiences of women from a variety of positionalities (Fraser and Nicholson 1989; Spelman 1988; Stacey 1990; Stack 1986), thereby essentializing white women’s experiences as the experience of all women.\textsuperscript{18}

“Thus,” as Robinson (2015, 303) writes, “the ethics of care was damned on both sides – it was seen to reify and essentialize women’s roles as carers, […] and second, it ignored or willfully washed over differences among women.”

Let us consider each of these charges in turn. The first charge of essentialism is that Gilligan naturalizes women as caregiving and caring. However, as Gilligan writes in a response to this critique:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17}To some extent, this charge has been addressed in section 4.1 above. However, the question of whether or not the ethics of care is an essentially feminine ethic merits further discussion here.
\textsuperscript{18}For an excellent overview of these accusations, see Cressida Heyes (1997).
women’s voices that I trace its development. But this association is not absolute, and the contrasts between male and female voices are presented here to highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex. […] 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; see also Gilligan 1986; 1987)

That is, a close reading of Gilligan’s work reveals that she does not in fact make any biologically reductive claims regarding women’s capacity to care; instead, Gilligan simply identifies a “different voice,” a different approach to moral thinking. While within her study, this “care reasoning” (Friedman 1993, 270) voice was associated with and most often articulated by women – which, as Tronto (1987) points out, may make sense given that women are socialized and socially positioned in particular ways under patriarchy – this does not definitively tie this voice to women as a whole, nor does it preclude the possibility that men may also deliberate morally in this different way.

More importantly, however, in focusing on the ‘apparent’ sex difference of the different voice, these critiques miss the more radical aspects of Gilligan’s work. As Susan Hekman (1995, 5) argues, while one reading of Gilligan may seem to suggest that women have an essentially different voice, and that this is somehow a ‘truer voice’ than that of men, a second – and in my opinion, more accurate – reading of Gilligan sees her work as challenging the construction of morality as such, and providing a different vantage point

19 While beyond the breadth of this dissertation to discuss, more recent scholarship has, however, made some attempts to locate the ‘origin’ of the capacity to care (see, for example, Engster 2015a; Hollway 2006). From a different vantage point, Gilligan’s later work (Gilligan and Snider 2018) does offer a theory as to why people, more generally, do not care, drawing linkages between co-constitutive psychological (individualized) and cultural (patriarchical) norms which deny relationality. See section 6.1 for a more detailed explication of this theory.
from which to understand morality. While this ‘second reading’ was already introduced in the section above, it merits further discussion now.

Again following Hekman (1995, 6), this second reading of Gilligan’s work hinges on “the claim that selfhood and morality are intimately linked.” The relational voice Gilligan heard both constructs selves as fundamentally beings-in-relations; “relationships are constitutive of the self, […] there is no given core that is definitive” (Hekman 1995, 16). This different voice also understands moral problems as problems of responsibilities in relationships. From this relational standpoint, both ontology and epistemology are deeply intertwined; “the relational self produces knowledge that is connected, a product of discourses that constitute forms of life” (Hekman 1995, 30). This knowledge, in turn, forms the subjects’ sense of identity and connection to the world. Moral reasoning, from this vantage point, is situated, revisable, and contextual (Robinson 2019b, 3), as opposed to disembodied and universal. Furthermore, and crucially important for this dissertation, the understanding of moral selves as relational also implies a plurality of heterogenous moral voices. The relational self, as constituted in/by their unique sets of relations, must be heterogenous and plural; the moral knowledge, and the epistemologies which produce such knowledge, held by these plural subjects must likewise be heterogenous and multiple. For an ethics of care, morality and moral theorizing is not about abstracted, individualized pursuits of universal knowledge ‘truths;’ instead, it is about the ways in which multiple moral voices (and selves) are constituted and interacting (Hekman 1995, 33). As Hekman summarizes, the “logic of voices and discourse, of relational selves, belies the possibility of a single theory. It suggests multiple moral language games rooted in multiple subjects” (Hekman 1995, 32).
In this way, the ethics of care neither locates women as essentially caregiving or relational (held in opposition of ‘autonomous’ and ‘independent’ men), nor does it seek to replace the masculinist rationalist voice with a feminine caring one. Care ethics does not ask that emotions ‘replace’ reason; it does not claim that we should look for ethical guidance in the private sphere instead of the public sphere. And the ethics of care does not suggest a relativist morality, in which ‘anything goes,’ in replacement of a singular universal moral truth. In short, the ethics of care does not move us from one binary extreme to the other. Instead, the ethics of care operates in a different theoretical space (Hekman 1995, 25), incompatible with the moral tradition of Western thought that is premised upon the binaries and moral boundaries outlined above. It moves beyond binaries and seeks to uncover critically the ways in which these boundaries are hierarchical and exclusionary. The ethics of care highlights the ways in which patriarchy, and the hierarchical binary of masculine/feminine, codes and values our world, specifies how men and women should act, and shapes “how we think and feel, how we perceive and judge ourselves, our desires, our relationships and the world we live in” (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 6; also quoted in Robinson 2019b, 3). It rejects the Cartesian mind-body dualism that shapes modernity, and emphasizes that how we know and how we feel – our reason and our emotions and embodied locatedness – are co-constituted (Hamington 2015b, 280). It challenges the public/private divide, by interrogating the ways in which care – both as a value and as the material and emotional work we do to maintain ourselves as best as possible – has been feminized and devalued. More simply, care ethics points to the ways in which care is a public and political concern (Robinson 2011b;
Sevenhuijsen 1998; Williams 2001). And, lastly, the ethics of care “does not define knowledge as either absolute or relative, but, rather, as situated, connected, and discursively constituted” (Hekman 1995, 32, emphasis in original).

As may now be evident, it is also from this second, and far more radical, reading that the second charge of essentialism – that is, the claim that the ethics of care essentializes all women’s experiences as the experience of white middle class women – can be shown false. As Robinson argues, “the assumption of difference inheres in the very core of the relational subject of care ethics” (2019b, 4, emphasis in original). As relational beings, the self in the ethics of care is conceived of as multiple and heterogeneous. Moreover, as a ‘model’ for moral thinking and a framework for rejecting and critiquing moral boundaries, the ethics of care requires us to foreground difference and investigate the ways in which moral selves and different moral epistemologies are constituted in and through relations.

Robinson (2019b) articulates this point well in a recent article, where she distinguishes between two types of care scholarship: the ethics of care scholarship which sees care ethics as a critical feminist political theory, and the broader scholarship which focuses on practices of care. This latter scholarship, Robinson notes, does sometimes focus primarily on Western, white, bourgeois practices of care – a concern which has been rightly raised by scholars like Parvati Raghuram (2012; 2016; 2019). This is a problematic bias, of course, and should be addressed. However, the understanding of the ethics of care as a critical feminist political theory – as a challenge to dominant Western moral thought and the related boundaries which create hierarchies of power and exclude

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20 This point is developed more fully in the next section.
certain moral voices – is fully attuned to difference. In fact, the ethics of care prioritizes difference in two related ways.

First, as Hekman argues, as an approach to moral thinking, the ethics of care, in starting from a relational moral self, necessarily implies a multiplicity of moral voices, “and counters the hierarchicalization and marginalization that characterizes modernist moral theory. It gives these ‘different’ voices equal standing and imagines a world in which they would be granted the status ‘moral’” (1995, 159). And second, as Robinson argues, even when considering the psychic and practice-based aspects of the ethics of care, the ways in which care ethics is attuned to difference is clear:

Responding morally to others in the register of care is an act of critique in that it requires a ‘conscious resistance to a world that is preoccupied with separation and with creating and maintaining boundaries between people.’ It means resisting the forms of patriarchy that value separation, independence and autonomy in ways that cast concerns about relationships as ‘women’s problems.’ This does not preclude the possibility that these forms of patriarchy are multiple and that they are constructed and enacted in different ways in different times and places. Nor does it preclude the possibility that these forms of patriarchy are themselves constituted by various forms of racism and by neo-colonial logics. On the contrary, it presupposes this. As a critical ethics, care ethics reveals the relational self, which resists the hierarchical binaries of Western modernity, and opens the door to ethics as plural, resistant of the dichotomies that divide us and always open to revision. (2019b, 4; quoting Gilligan 1993, xiv; emphasis in original)

The ethics of care, as a framework for critiquing Western modern moral philosophy and the binaries that constitute it, as a different approach to moral theorizing, and as a series of (contextual, attentive, and revisable) moral practices, challenges binary thinking, exclusionary categories, and the ways in which power operates through these to marginalize and even erase difference and different moral voices. In this way, the ethics of care is inherently anti-essentialist. It does not locate ‘women’ as essentialized caregivers; instead, it seeks to provide a lens from which to question and uncover the
ways in which women are positioned (both socially and through internalized patriarchy) as caregivers, and to focus on how other axes of oppression, like class and race, further shape the distribution of caring responsibilities. Care ethics also does not treat ‘women’ as a homogenous category; instead, the ethics of care works in the opposite vein and understands that as relational selves, “each subject will possess a particular moral voice, a voice rooted in her social, historical, linguistic, and cultural situation” (Hekman 1995, 129-130). Understanding these contexts – in all their rich and complex difference – and the ways in which they are constitutive of both the moral self and their moral thinking, is a primary task for the ethics of care.

There are two final points I wish to make about the ethics of care and difference. The first pertains to the potential critique that in conceiving of multiple moral selves, with multiple moral voices and understandings, the ethics of care descends into relativism, an approach to morality where ‘anything goes’ and where no moral judgement can be made. However, such a critique, as Hekman points out, relies on staying in a theoretical terrain which values binaries – such as the one between absolute and relative knowledge/judgement – and thus fails to offer an alternative to modernist moral theory (1995, 44). As Donna Haraway (1991, 191) writes, “Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective […]. Relativism and totalization are both ‘god-tricks’ promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully.” The ethics of care is not (simply) a rejection of universal and absolute moral claims, and it certainly does not assert that we move to the other ‘end of the pole’ and adopt a relativistic approach to moral thinking. Care ethics instead takes us to a different epistemological
space, in which knowledge is always situated (Faur and Tizziani 2018), contextual, and therefore partial. It rejects the binaries of objective/subjective, universal/contextual, and absolute/relative and instead asserts that “thought does not transcend its social origins” (Ruddick 1989, 15). Knowledge, as well as subjects, emerge in and through the relations that comprise them.

How, then, does one make judgements from an ethics of care perspective? As discussed above, because a care ethical perspective understands morality as practices, moral judgements can only be made by looking at the practices which sustain (or alternatively harm) ourselves, our communities, and our relations. As Ruddick (1989, 16) writes, “It is only within a practice that thinkers judge which questions are sensible, which answers are appropriate to them, and which criteria distinguish between better and worse answers.” It is through our practices, and particularly our practices of care, that we can come to judge whether something may be morally worthy. On the flip side, it is also through examining our practices, and reflecting upon them, that we are able to examine whether certain practices are worth reproducing (Walker 2007, 257). Notably, this iterative process in which practices and knowledges are simultaneously reflected upon must be just that – iterative and ongoing. Because practices themselves are revisable, dynamic, and changing, moral judgement – evaluated in relation to contingent sets of practices, and always-already situated – must also be revisable. Likewise, care practices must be revised when our moral understandings shift.

To be sure, such moral judgements are not easy. While care practices serve as a form of inquiry (Hamington 2015b) and an “epistemological resource” (Dalmaiya 2016, 7), the multiplicity of practices, ways of being, and caring relations that comprise
different forms of life mean that judgement on these relations – while necessary lest a caring need go unaddressed – will always be difficult. It may not be clear which pathway is best, there may be times when harm will result no matter the course of action, and we must maintain an openness to being responsible for the consequences that will sometimes arise due to the uncertainty of moments of decision. We must be open to revising our decisions and judgements when necessary. The consequence of the moral act, the ways in which needs change, and the various shifting contextual factors that comprise moral dilemmas mean that while we can make moral judgements via ongoing and reflective attention to our practices of care, we must also always foreground the vulnerability of said judgement. “Care-knowing” requires both attending to the needs of others (trying to understand them, their contexts, etc.) and self-reflection (uncovering our own biases, “looping back to investigate whether we have investigated enough and adequately, and the readiness to change our conclusions once we realize that we have not” (Dalmiya 2016, 22). As Robinson (2019a) highlights, it is this very quality of revisability that renders the ethics of care as ‘critical,’ i.e., a critical lens from which to interrogate the ways in which moral boundaries and other, often hidden, norms and values reproduce exclusionary social practices, behaviours, and sentiments. “Critique is premised on the impossibility of a definitive answer to the conditions of its own possibility and can only content itself with the acknowledgement of the revisability of any grounds on which its specific claims are based” (Hutchings 2001, 90; also quoted in Robinson 2019a, 13).

It is for this reason that the ethics of care is distinct from feminist standpoint epistemology. Standpoint epistemology also sees knowledge as located and situated, but asserts that the marginalized have a privileged standpoint vis-à-vis the dominant from
which to know and judge injustices due to their social positions. The problem with this, however, is that it means that the marginalized are largely responsible for bringing forth the knowledge to right the injustice; this functions in some ways to absolve those with power (and those who may be responsible for the harm) from having to attend to and address the injustice in a meaningful way. Furthermore, it is unclear what will “motivate those in power to look beyond their own world views” (Dalmiya 2016, 19) and listen to those who are critiquing the very systems of power which benefit and privilege the dominant. Care ethics, on the other hand, does not suffer the same pitfalls. Because “practices of caring are part of the lived worlds of the dominant and marginal alike” (Dalmiya 2016, 19) (albeit in different ways), the epistemological resources and tools for adopting an ethics of care approach to attending to injustices, interrogating systems of power, and addressing moral harms and caring needs, are accessible to both those with and without power.

The second point I wish to address here pertains to empathy. Some care ethicists, like Michael Slote (2007; 2015), argue that an ethics of care requires empathy, a process involving the contemplation of another person; internalizing that other person’s experience; experiencing that experience while also experiencing your own in that moment; and moving away from that moment of merger to respond and act (de Meriche 2015, 100). I think there are some problems with the use of empathy here, as the process of projecting oneself21 into the other’s position contradicts the care ethical assertion of a

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21 To be fair, and as Slote (2007) points out, the term ‘empathy’ refers to many different things, and there are other types of empathy that are not premised upon projection. While it is beyond the breadth of this dissertation to review comprehensively the moral development literature on different notions of empathy, I focus specifically on the meaning of the word that is perhaps most colloquial: the idea of feeling for someone else as if you were in their situation (also called projective empathy in that one projects oneself
relational self, i.e., a moral subject constituted by relations ‘all the way down.’ As Nel Noddings argues, advocating the use of ‘empathy’ in care ethics, which she describes “as projection into a work of art or another’s mind in order to understand it” (2015, 78; see also Noddings 2010), seems to suggest that one can project into another, and then cognitively absorb that experience in order to know what must be done. This sort of projection seems to involve, for instance, a mind/body split, a subject who can shed their own relations and contexts and step into the ‘shoes’ of another, and the erasure of difference (how you would feel in a situation might never approximate how another might feel in that situation). In other words, this type of empathy requires a subject more akin to the subject theorized in dominant Western moral theory.

To avoid the connotations associated with empathy – connotations which do not align with an ethics of care approach – I prefer to use the concept of ‘attentiveness’ (see, for example, Robinson 1999; Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993) or ‘receptivity’ (Noddings 2015). Attentiveness and receptivity both denote an openness to the other, a thorough-going attempt to understand their (different) needs, desires, and point of view, and a willingness to listen actively to their moral voice and take said voice seriously as a moral voice. They do not, however, purport to know the other fully or in some final and ultimate sense, particularly through a self-projection which will only ever allow us to ‘know’ the other as filtered through our own situatedness. Being attentive and receptive means that while “we listen for expressed needs […] we do not assume what the other needs by reference to our own experience” (Noddings 2015, 78). As a result,
attentiveness requires a much more difficult – perhaps even agonistic\textsuperscript{22} – process; “if difference is to emerge, there must first be silence, a willing suspension of habitual speech, and then a patient struggle requiring of speaker and listener an attentive respect for different reasonings” (Ruddick 1987, 245, emphasis added). Care ethics, as anti-essentialist through and through, is committed to such ‘patient struggle.’

\subsection*{4.4 Care as Global}

Another recurring debate in the ethics of care literature hinges on the usefulness of the ethics of care as a global ethic. Can care ethics respond to global problems? Does an approach to ethics which centers on attentiveness, and which stems from relational thinking and concern for concrete and intimate others, offer a way to contemplate and navigate moral dilemmas at the global scale? As Robinson writes, “Care does not, at first sight, seem to respond well to distance” (1999, 43), especially in comparison to theoretical-juridical approaches to moral thinking which valorize ‘distance’ by abjuring context and employing impartial reasoning.

Following the work of care ethicists like Robinson (1999), I argue that the ethics of care is undoubtedly useful as an ethic for the global sphere for two reasons. First, we are already intimately connected – that is, embedded in relational ties – at the global level via social structures. According to Iris Marion Young (2006), social structures are constellations in which different social positions are connected; these social positions are distributed within a given group of people. “The ‘structure’ in social structures consists in the connections among these positions and their relationships, and the way the attributes

\textsuperscript{22} This idea is expanded in section 4.5 below.
of positions internally constitute one another through those relationships" (Young 2006, 112). Importantly, given that the structure “exists only in the action and interaction of persons” (Young 2006, 112), structures are not monoliths or static; rather, they are processes. Several social structures – including patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and racism – today intertwine and enmesh the global population (even as these same social structures have particular manifestations in and through particular contexts, as noted in chapter two). In this way, certain social structures can be thought of as global, or perhaps can be understood as “universality as reality” (Balibar 2011). Universality as reality, as Cinzia Arruzza (2017) writes, does not refer to transcendental universal truths (a notion of universality that characterizes modernity). Rather, universality as reality acknowledges the ways in which we are entangled in a ‘universality’ that is socially and historically produced;23 it “indicates the actual interdependency between the units that build what we call the world” (Arruzza 2017, 848). Foregrounding these connections is not, of course, meant to obfuscate the deep and pervasive differences that also comprise our world. To be sure, our current global context requires us to “confront the unique paradox of increasing interrelatedness in the context of profound difference” (Robinson 1999, 45).

Second, and relatedly, care and care relations are now transnational and global, and care and reproductive work, including emotional and affective labour, are now a fundamental component of the global political economy (Robinson 2011b, 134; Tronto 2015). As the rich literature on global care chains and migrant care labour (see, for example, Chang and Ling 2011; Hochschild 2003; 2012; Mahon and Robinson 2011; 23 Parvati Raghuram, Clare Madge, and Pat Noxolo (2009, 9) make a similar point when they argue that a postcolonial lens likewise alters the notion of distance by demonstrating how, through colonial relations, we “are already implicated in each other’s ‘presents’ in complicated ways.”
Parreñas 2015; Rivers-Moore 2016; Peterson 2003; Prattes 2020; Yeates 2012) has demonstrated, care has been increasingly commodified – in highly gendered, racialized, and classed ways – in the wider neoliberal order (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015). Migrant labourers from the Global South increasingly provide care and reproductive work in the Global North, and ‘menial’ or ‘dirty’ reproductive labour is increasingly outsourced from the Global North to the Global South. Care chains can now be traced globally; for instance, Arlie Hochschild (2000, 132) describes a typical chain as “an older daughter from a poor family who cares for her siblings while her mother works as a nanny caring for the children of a migrating nanny who, in turn, cares for the child of a family in a rich country.” Many other examples of these global care linkages exist (see, for example, Parreñas 2015). The provision of caring needs now increasingly relies on global care networks. Care work and reproductive labour are global in this very literal sense.

Yet, there is a related, but even more primary, way in which care and reproductive work is now intertwined in the global political economy. As Kimberly A. Chang and L.H.M. Ling (2011) argue, recent global restructuring of the global political economy has also occurred along a gendered, racialized, and classed division of labour, a division which has had specific consequences for the ways in which care work is organized and valued globally. On the one hand, the rise of ‘technomuscular capitalism’ refers to the ways in which global finance, technology, production, and trade have been restructured along the lines of “norms and practices usually associated with Western capitalist masculinity – ‘deregulation,’ ‘privatization,’ ‘strategic alliances,’ ‘core regions,’ ‘deadlines’” (Chang and Ling 2011, 30). This is the face of global capitalism; finance markets, tech industries, and trade comprise the visible sectors and valued relations of
production in the context of the global political economy today. On the other hand, upholding technomuscular capitalism is a ‘regime of labour intimacy,’ a deeply racialized, sexualized, and class-based set of (re)productive relations which restructures care and reproductive work as low-wage and low-skilled, to be provided by female migrant workers (Chang and Ling 2011, 30). This restructuring devalues care and care work and relegates care work and care workers to the margins of the global political economy, at times ‘erasing’ them from sight all together. This devaluing is done despite the reality that it is this very care work which creates the conditions of possibility for technomuscular capitalism, in that it is this care labour that cares for, reproduces, and sustains the bodies who labour in the technomuscular sectors. According to this understanding of the global political economy, care work has not just become global, in the literal sense that much care labour is now provided through migrant labour or via large scale outsourcing of ‘menial’ care work from the Global North to the Global South (although this is, of course, true). Care is also global in that the current configuration of global capitalism is upheld by and demarcated according to its constitutive outside, its ‘intimate other,’ (Chang and Ling 2011) the economy of care and reproductive labour.

Given these realities – that we are increasingly connected via social structures at the global scale, that care and care work is quite literally a transnational affair, and that the global political economy, in its current configuration, is upheld by particular gendered, racialized, and classed relations of care which are simultaneously devalued and denigrated – I assert that the ethics of care can absolutely prove useful as a global ethic. More strongly, I believe that the relational, contextualized, and vulnerable approach to ethics inherent in the ethics of care is actually necessary if we are to assess and address
adequately the types of moral dilemmas that arise in this interconnected and global world. For instance, structural injustices arise when social structures, and the processes that (re)produce social structures, oppress, marginalize, or exploit whole categories or groups of people, while allowing others to dominate (or at the very least, be free from such domination and thereby able to pursue their desires and interests) (Young 2006, 114). Without a relational understanding of such injustices – of the ways in which social structures, and the injustices therein, emerge in and through relations between differently situated people – it becomes impossible to understand how these injustices arise structurally.

It also becomes all too easy for those with the power to address such injustices to ignore their role in the situation. That is, ‘distance’ enables us to ignore our interconnections, and the ways in which we (re)produce and benefit from social structures that harm others. Global problems are easily dismissed as ‘problems out there,’ belonging to other people, and of little concern to us. However, in taking a relational view, the ethics of care foregrounds our (already existing) connections; this allows us both to examine critically the causes and sources of structural injustices, and to take responsibility for these injustices. As Young (2006, 114) writes, “all the persons who participate by their actions in the ongoing schemes of cooperation that constitute these structures are responsible for them, in the sense that they are part of the process that causes them.” While this does not mean that people are responsible “in the sense of having directed the process or intended its outcomes” (Young 2006, 114), this understanding of relational responsibility means that it is a moral failing to ignore the harms caused by social structures, even when these harms are directed towards seemingly
distant others. It is only in viewing these issues relationally that responsibility can be (re)distributed so that those with relatively more power, or those who benefit most from the social structures, can adopt a sense of responsibility to those who are oppressed by these structures.

In this way, an ethics of care for the global sphere is a critical and political ethic. A global ethics of care is not a plea for benevolent care for distant others;\textsuperscript{24} it is an ontological claim about the world we inhabit – we are deeply relational and interdependent – and a normative orientation towards assessing those relations and taking responsibility for the harms that emerge through these connections. Understanding these harms, similarly, requires a relational approach, in which we attend patiently, carefully, and with humility to the needs of others. In other words, we must foreground that how others experience harms, and the things that others need and desire, may be very different from our own experiences and understandings of harm, need, and want. We must account for these differences in our moral judgements, and this requires attentiveness and learning how to listen carefully (Robinson 2011c).

There is a final reason why I believe the ethics of care is well-suited to attend to ethical issues in the global sphere. The ethics of care, as described above, sees “the very foundation of morality [as] rooted in our body and our bodily practices” (Hamington 2004, 5; quoted in Robinson 2018, 327). While the above discussion highlights the ways in which our practices of care are global, it is equally important to emphasize that the

\textsuperscript{24} As Robinson points out, such benevolent caring approaches are already covered by liberal humanitarianism, “which call upon the benevolent, autonomous global north to keep peace, build security and ‘develop’ the dependent, impoverished global south” (2013, 133; see also Robinson 2011b). The dangers of romanticized notions of care and paternalism (as often exemplified by humanitarianism) are fleshed out more fully in the next section.
very fact of our vulnerable bodies is also salient for global politics. As Tiina Vaittinen (2015, 104) argues, “the body in itself is politically powerful, even when incapable of articulating itself as a subject.”

Care and its need constantly draw bodies towards each other. This latent movement creates unavoidable relations between human bodies, and these relations are political. […] The political relations of care derive from human vulnerability and our concrete, corporeal need of care from embodied others. […] Within the structures of political economy, however, the corporeal relations of care are never only about the two persons directly involved in the practices of care. Care always cuts through entire institutional structures […]; it is constrained by the structures, but also challenges and shapes them. Thereby, through corporeal relations of care, the allegedly apolitical ‘bare life’ influences, challenges and shapes the structures of the political economy. (Vaittinen 2015, 112)

In other words, our corporeal vulnerabilities – our bodily limitations and finiteness – draw us together and demand response; moral practices and political relations are mobilized to address our bodily needs. Global social arrangements arise in response to bodily vulnerabilities, and global political decisions can lead to bodily harm or, alternatively, can address such harms. Importantly, however, while all vulnerable bodies have the power to exert pressure on social relations – including relations at the personal, state, and global political economic level – not all bodies elicit the same response. “Even as ‘bare life,’ some bodies have more leverage vis-à-vis the sovereign power than others” (Vaittinen 2015, 112). The vulnerable body itself thus also becomes a site from which to investigate and interrogate existing relations of power and practices of exclusion in the global political economy. Why do particular bodies in particular encounters demand and manifest political relations of care, while others only receive neglect (Vaittinen 2015, 113-114)?

The ethics of care, as an approach to moral thinking which foregrounds the
vulnerable body, positions us to pursue such inquiry. Care ethics urges us to focus on “the openings that the needy body continues to provide, forcing us to make choices of whether or not to respond, and if so, how. These are choices that the vulnerable body obliges us (and the sovereign) to make, over and over again, incessantly” (Vaittinen 2015, 113). At the same time, however, these choices are not simply about minimizing harm, which tends to be a more central focus in mainstream approaches to global ethics, and which is distinct from the more positive notion of caring (Fierke 2014, 788). Nor is the goal of making such choices to ‘overcome’ the limits of the body. Rather, ascertaining how to respond to bodily vulnerabilities and needs involves harm minimization, but also broader questions of what it means to live as well as possible given our unique vulnerabilities, needs, hopes, and desires. Paying attention to the choices we make (on a personal scale, community scale, national scale, and international scale) regarding such responses allows us to glean valuable information about who counts, and who is excluded. Given the great disparities between the ways in which different groups of people ‘matter’ globally, such undertakings are of great moral import for a global ethic.

For these reasons, as Robinson (1999, 46, emphasis in original) writes, “an era of global interdependence demands a relational ethics which places the highest value on the promotion, restoration, or creation of good social and personal relations and gives priority to the needs and concerns of ‘concrete’ rather than ‘generalizable’ others.” While the ethics of care may have emerged from listening closely to moral thinking characterized by prioritizing, maintaining, and repairing healthy and flourishing relationships between intimate others, the ethics of care provides us with an approach to moral thinking which
can attend meaningfully to moral dilemmas in the global sphere. By foregrounding the reality of our global interconnectedness, the ways in which care is now transnational, and the power exerted by vulnerable bodies, the ethics of care is well positioned to attend to the moral dilemmas that arise through our global interdependence, material embodiment, and the ways in which power relations distribute, and respond to, human suffering in unequal ways.

### 4.5 Care as Political

Finally, the ethics of care has been critiqued, particularly by critical disability studies scholars and postcolonial scholars, for valorizing a specific notion of ‘care’ as normatively valuable, or for uncritically romanticizing care as a panacea. From this vantage point, as Fiona Williams (2001, 478) writes, “the very concept of ‘care’ embodies an oppressive history in which the practices and discourses of paid (particularly professional) and unpaid carers have maintained disabled and older people in a position of, at worst, unwanted dependency, abused and stripped of their dignity, and at best, patronized and protected from exercising any agency over their lives.” Other disability scholars similarly point out that care has historically, and continues to be, an oppressive practice (see, for example, Kelly 2013; 2020). It has been argued that the scholarship on the ethics of care fails to grapple with this reality, and even reproduces related harms by focusing on the caregiver in the care relation, constructing the care receiver as dependent and without agency (see, for example, Kröger 2009; Watson et al. 2004), and by romanticizing care by granting moral weight only to those who supply care (see, for example, Simplican 2015).
Postcolonial scholars raise similar and important concerns. Uma Narayan (1995), for instance, points out that “in general terms, the colonizing project was seen as being in the interests of, for the good of, and as promoting the welfare of the colonized – notions that draw our attention to the existence of a colonialist care discourse whose terms have some resonance with those of some contemporary strands of the ethic of care” (133-134, emphasis in original). Raghuram (2012; 2016; 2019), as noted previously, also notes that the ethics of care literature sometimes focuses on particular practices of care (white, bourgeois practices from the Global North), and presents them as the whole of ‘care,’ thereby marginalizing and obfuscating other practices and relations of care from other contexts.

In some ways, the preceding sections have, perhaps, already implicitly addressed these concerns. For instance, as argued in the discussion regarding care and essentialism, the ethics of care, as conceived of and employed in this dissertation, conceives of moral selves as relational all the way down, and therefore theorizes a multiplicity of heterogenous moral selves and moral practices of care. Therefore, while Raghuram’s critique may apply to some discussions of care ethics, or some scholarship on particular practices of care, it does not apply to care ethics as a whole. Additionally, while it is true that sometimes the ways in which care scholars speak of care emphasizes caregiving and the care giver, and thereby reproduces a dichotomous view of self and other (van Nistelrooij and Leget 2017), the ethics of care as a critical feminist political theory, as the above discussion has emphasized, repudiates dichotomous thinking and rejects binaries.

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25 See, for example, Mary Daly (2002, 252), who defines care as “looking after those who cannot take care of themselves.”
by asserting a relational ontology. From this standpoint, to talk of a care giver and care receiver, while linguistically useful, does not make sense; rather, there is a care relation, and the ways in which those in the relation respond to each other’s vulnerabilities (even if unequally) is what is important from a care ethical perspective.

Yet, taken more holistically, these critiques raise an important concern. Care, clearly, is contextual and heterogenous. When faced with competing practices of care, how do we know which practices of care are morally worthy? Who gets to determine which care practices should be reproduced and which should be revised or disposed of? What happens when one normative vision of care conflicts with another? While the answers to these questions have been alluded to above, Kristin G. Cloyes (2002) provides more explicit guidance on these questions when she argues that a truly political theory of care requires agonizing care. Recall from the previous chapter that agonism refers to a struggle against a worthy opponent. An agonistic theory of care means that care – how it is constructed, how power operates through it, and other related questions – must be agonized. Further, agonizing care is a political act, which seeks to disrupt the current configurations of power and discourse that ‘naturalize’ certain care practices. In Cloyes’ words:

Agonistic, or political, feminists not only argue that the construct(ion) of care is ideological, and that ‘care’ is itself implicated in power relations, but also frame their critique as a political intervention […]. Any description of care, critical or otherwise […], is a political move. (2002, 210)

For a critical and political ethics of care, care itself is contingent, i.e. particular practices of care and understandings of care are always-already situated, the products of social relations, multiple, and revisable. This means that as these multiple and contingent practices and conceptualizations of care come into contact, the potential for conflicting
versions of care, struggles over what constitutes care, and the emergence of other productive tensions, is an ever-present reality. When such conflicts and struggles arise, a central task for a critical political ethics of care is to stick with the tension, to consider carefully the different versions of care at stake, to contemplate the ways in which specific practices of care constitute particular moral subjects and their ways of life, and to be open to the possibility that one’s vision of ‘good’ care may, in fact, need to be revised in light of the needs and ways of life of the other. We also need to be attuned to the power relations at play in such circumstances.

In this way, the ethics of care does not uphold a particular version of ‘good’ care as the normative ideal towards which we all should strive; care ethics is not a thick, prescription of a certain type of care. It is a moral orientation which “forces us to think concretely about people’s real needs and to evaluate how those needs will be met” (Robinson 1999, 31). In so doing, care “introduces questions about what we value into the public, and ultimately the international, sphere” (Robinson 1999, 31). These questions are political and will involve struggle. Questioning practices of (non)care, weighing different caring practices against each other, uncovering the ways in which our hidden assumptions, biases, and privileges increase others’ suffering and hardship, being responsible to others, and foregrounding the vulnerability of our moral judgement – all of which are primary moral tasks from a critical ethics of care perspective – will sometimes (perhaps even often) involve conflict. As Amanda Russell Beattie and Kate Schick (2013, 12) argue, these moral tasks take us down “a difficult path: the journey towards vulnerability and accountability is one beset by agon, by struggle.”

Given this, the ethics of care as a critical and political ethic does not attempt to
valorize a sanitized care relationship. In fact, conceiving of care in such a way, from an ethics of care perspective, would be morally irresponsible, creating its own exclusions and drawing boundaries between different life-affirming practices of care. A critical and political ethics of care, I suggest, instead “allows the frequently conflict-laden, intense, gritty, and fleshy character of relationships to surface as care” (Cooper 2007, 257, emphasis in original); it is only through agonizing care, working through the conflicts that so often arise from our relations, and practicing epistemic humility (an often difficult undertaking) that ‘good’ care can emerge. “Considering the question of ‘how to act [or care] well’ means being prepared to examine the awkward aspects and ambivalences of human existence” (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 62). For these reasons, the ethics of care is a “tough ethic” (Noddings 2003, 99) and requires hard work.

This understanding of the ethics of care also refutes some claims that the ethics of care is anti-feminist. More precisely, some readings of the ethics of care posit that care ethics requires moral subjects, and particularly women, to maintain certain relations at all costs – even when these relationships are harmful. Such readings rely on an understanding of care as a symptom or negative outcome of patriarchy, as opposed to a critical and political challenge to patriarchy (as it has been presented above). From the standpoint of the former, patriarchy has shaped care and women’s subjectivities so fundamentally that care is seen as (strictly or largely) oppressive for women. An example of this type of thinking would argue that because of patriarchy, women “have not learned to discriminate well between good [relationships] and bad ones but have learned instead to assume responsibility for maintaining whatever relationships ‘fate’ seems to throw [their] way” (Card 1995, 86). This suggests that women lack autonomy, and the ability to
judge whether a relationship is harmful or not, as they have instead been positioned to always ‘self-sacrifice’ for the good of the relationship. In other words, this reading of the ethics of care as ‘self-sacrifice’ (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 58) seems to suggest that because care ethics is premised on a relational ontology, and because the ethics of care has been associated with women’s voices, it strips women of autonomy and agency. However, as scholars like Grace Clement (1996) point out, the ethics of care argues that we are all constituted in and through our relations and, by extension, it is only through our relations, and “only as a result of the care of others,” that one can become autonomous (Clement 1996, 32). This, when combined with the fact that a critical, political ethics of care requires us to agonize care, to interrogate when relations are ‘caring’ or not, and to reflect on the messiness of relations, means that sometimes ‘good’ care may, in fact, mean ending a relation.

Put differently, the ethics of care, as presented here, is a political ethic in that it politicizes care; it renounces the public/private distinction which locates care as a personal concern between intimate others and, in so doing, demonstrates how care is a political concern. How we organize our lives to care (or not), our understandings and practices of care (and the ways in which dominant notions of care marginalize and erase other practices of care), the distribution of the responsibility for care (often along gendered, racialized, and classed axes), and the ways in which we meet the needs of some groups of people and not others are deeply political concerns that must be deliberated upon collectively and continually. Further, our caring arrangements (whether formal or informal), the distribution of caring responsibilities, the ways in which our needs are viewed socially, and which people, groups, and institutions have a ‘pass’ from worrying
about care (Tronto 2013) are all intimately tied to social, political, and economic relations of power. Power shapes care, care practices, and caring relations in a fundamental way; the relation between care and power only serves to heighten the political nature of care. A critical and political ethics of care orients us to contemplate and attend to the ways in which care, politics, ethics, and power are all intertwined.

Lastly, there is a second and related way in which the ethics of care is political, one which has again been alluded to in the preceding discussion. As mentioned above, alongside the ethics of care literature (and often in conversation with the care ethics literature) is a broader literature on care. Again, as has previously been noted, this second literature, particularly when tied to discussions of the ethics of care, often seems guilty of the faults that critical disability and postcolonial scholars have identified. In focusing exclusively on certain care practices, this literature conceives of “care ethics as providing the normative basis for prescriptive arguments and policies” (Robinson 2018, 2). In mobilizing such an understanding of care ethics, it becomes easy for thick descriptions of care to be asserted as the ‘only’ or ‘right’ way to care, often at the expense of marginalizing other ways of caring and other forms of care relations. More significantly, as Hanna-Kaisa Hoppania and Tiina Vaittinen (2015) point out, such care research can also take the dominant discourses and terms of care for granted; without critical and ongoing commitment to interrogating care practices, conflicts between care practices, and the ways in which relations of power shape these, “the hegemonic discourses’ definition of the politics of care goes unchallenged:”

Consequently, the politics of care becomes presented as a struggle over the resources of care, and care itself appears as a battleground for politics, rather than a field of life that affects and partakes in politics on its own terms, and in its own logic. (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 76)
In other words, the broader care literature often domesticates care, in that it frames the politics of care as a series of debates regarding how to integrate more caring practices into institutions and how to better allocate resources for care. This is a subjugated and integrated care; care, from this perspective, does not challenge existing systems of power nor does it offer tools for social transformation. Rather, the politics of care centers on the assertion that care is something that should be better integrated into existing social orders.

This, as should be clear by now, is not how I understand the ethics of care. My understanding of the ethics of care aligns with that of Hoppania and Vaittinen (2015), who make a useful distinction between care as ‘politics’ and care as ‘the political,’ and which aligns with the ways in which these terms have been used throughout this dissertation. In particular, drawing upon the work of Edkins (1999), Hoppania and Vaittinen argue that politics can be defined as the “bureaucratic conduct of politics” (2015, 76, emphasis in original) while the political “represents the moment of openness or undecidability, when a new social order is on the point of establishment, when its limits are being contested” (Edkins 1999, 126, emphasis added; also quoted in Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 76). The political is about the very moment in which a given social order is established, drawing lines between what counts as politics and what does not (Edkins 1999). Mapping this distinction onto the two aforementioned understandings of care (care as practices and care as a critical political theory (Robinson 2019b)), Hoppania and Vaittinen argue that the ‘politics of care’ refers to concerns regarding the organization of the resources and relations of care within the present social order, while ‘care as the political’ “refers to the latent forces of disruption that are imbued in the corporeal
character of care relations that challenge the logics of the present order” (2015, 77-78).

For instance, while care has been increasingly commodified and reorganized within the global political economy, as pointed out in the previous section, care also evades full co-optation by the dominant logic of capitalism. This logic seeks to translate care into a series of linear transactions, in which a need can be unidirectionally met via a quantifiable market exchange.

The logic of care, by contrast, does not perceive care in terms of singular transactions. Instead, caring means that we interact and shift our actions around, so as to best accommodate the exigencies and specificities of the situation at hand, recognizing the corporeal capacities and limitations of both the one in need and the one who cares. (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 84)

Care is an ongoing process; it takes time, it requires ongoing attentiveness, response, and it must be revised and assessed as needs shift. In this way, care resists capitalist logic, according to which work and production are for profit instead of use (Hall 1960, 67). In contrast, care is about the consequences of meeting the needs of vulnerable bodies which cannot, in the end, be controlled or tamed (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015). Care also challenges modern-capitalist notions of time, in which ‘progress’ is seen as the linear unfolding of time towards an ‘end of history,’ and in which the efficient ‘use’ of time towards capitalist ends is valorized. “Care has its own trajectory that encompasses not only the present but the individual and shared histories of those involved in caring relationships, and anxiety, fear, anticipation or hope about the future” (Barnes 2015, 40). In this way, care involves a more layered notion of time, in which the past, present, and future are all bound up, shaping the caring needs, and the ways in which the needs are or are not addressed. Subsequently, care requires us to be simultaneously responsible for the past, present, as well as for the future (Adam and Groves 2011): we cannot effectively
tend to our caring needs without thinking through past harms, contemplating current
unmet needs and suffering, and (at least) considering the unknowable and uncertain
futures that are yet to come. Care thus evades linear temporality and does not (always) sit
well with logics of efficiency.

Similarly, care cannot be subsumed totally by patriarchal logic. Patriarchy codes
the world according to a series of binaries that suggest that certain people are dependent
and in need of care, while others are independent and autonomous. As noted above, this
binary is mapped on to the gender binary and is also intimately related to the binaries that
sustain colonial logic, which is premised upon a clear distinction between Human/Nature,
and which locates certain racialized people closer to Nature (and therefore as less than
Human):

Independent / Dependent
Masculine / Feminine
Human / Nature
Subject / Object

The logic of care, on the other hand, is premised on the fact that we are all dependent and
vulnerable, both in terms of our corporeal vulnerability, and also in the fact that we are
relational selves, subjects who only come in to being in and through our relations. The
world cannot be segmented and sliced into those who are independent and those who are
dependent, and the thick distinction between subject and object makes no sense when
thinking relationally. Care cannot be relegated to the private sphere or located only in
certain feminized or paternalistic relations. In the same way that the relational voice
heard by Gilligan resists rationalist binary moral thinking, care cannot fully be
demarcated, suppressed, or neglected. Care is a defining feature of our life, and our political existence, and “when care is not adequately accounted for in some sphere of life, it starts to challenge that very sphere – it demands to be noticed, thereby opening up a space for ‘the political’, calling for change in the very order in which it is being governed” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 87).

In sum, then, the ethics of care is political in the fullest sense. It is political, in that as an approach to moral thinking premised on relationality and epistemic humility, it challenges the dominant theoretical-juridical model which touts rationalism and abstraction as the superior form of moral thinking while marginalizing other moral voices. It is political because it does not assert a thick normative ideal of care, but rather locates conflicts and contestations over the meaning of care and ‘good’ care practices as a collective and political concern. And it is political in that care – as an ever-present corporeal need, as an articulation of the relation moral subject, and as an approach to an epistemology premised on revisability and vulnerable judgement – cannot be mastered or totalized by existing relations of power. Care cannot be divided or sorted into the atomistic categories that constitute modern-patriarchal-colonial-capitalism. Care points to the limits of our current modern-patriarchal-colonial-racist-capitalist social order, and thereby orients us continually towards the possibility of a different social order, towards the possibility of a political moment of openness.

4.6 Conclusion
This chapter has sought to outline my understanding of the ethics of care as a critical and political feminist ethics. The ethics of care, as I define it, is premised upon a relational
ontology, a situated epistemology, an understanding of morality as practices, and a devastating feminist critique of the moral boundaries that constitute the dominant Western (or theoretical-juridical) approach to morality and moral philosophy. Because of these premises, the ethics of care is anti-essentialist and attuned to difference. Care ethics conceives of moral subjects as multiple and heterogeneous; accordingly, there are multiple moral epistemologies and moral practices of care. A central task for ethics, from an ethics of care perspective, is to examine the ways in which our relations constitute moral selves, and to respond to the particular and unique needs of (sometimes radically) different others.

The ethics of care is also a global ethic, because in addition to being attuned to difference, a critical care ethics is well-positioned to illuminate our global relations and the ways in which care and care practices are shaped fundamentally by global relations of power and the global political economy. Using a care ethics lens allows us to assess and address the moral dilemmas that arise in and through the nexus of our messy and complex global interconnections, on the one hand, and the fact of our deep and pervasive differences, on the other.

Lastly, the ethics of care is political, because it orients us collectively to agonize care and to deliberate on (often competing and conflicting) notions of care and care practices in an ongoing way. It is also political because care operates in a logic of its own; care is a life-sustaining and life-affirming activity that continually resists domination by modern-patriarchal-colonial-capitalist logic. In resisting these dominant logics, care points towards the limits of these hegemonic systems of power, and towards the possibility of new social orders. The ethics of care orients us towards this fact,
provides us with the tools to critique the existing social order, and positions us to prioritize care practices that evade and challenge dominant logics. In this way, the ethics of care, as a productive ethic concerned with creatively building new relations and social arrangements to manifest different visions of the good life, operates at the level of ‘the political.’

As a final note, I wish to acknowledge that there may seem to be some circularity between my arguments that the ethics of care is anti-essentialist, global, and political. Emphatically, that is the point. Just as the binaries that construct the theoretical-juridical model of moral theorizing – and the modern world more generally – are mutually reinforcing, in shifting to a different meta-ethical vantage point, and a different meta-theoretical space, the ethics of care completely changes all aspects of morality in an interrelated way. The ethics of care, as presented and described here, can only be a critical, global, and political ethic attuned to difference – each of these terms inherently implies the other.

To return, then, to the central concern of this dissertation, my research question asks: How can we rethink (global) ethics in the pluriverse, where differences are at their most deep and pervasive? I believe that the characteristics of a critical and political ethics of care, specifically as outlined in this chapter, provide a unique meta-ethical orientation that can help us rethink global ethics in the image of the pluriverse. Undertaking such a rethinking, and demonstrating how the ethics of care positions us to contemplate better the distinct moral landscape of the pluriverse, is the task of the next chapter. My hope is that this chapter, in developing my understanding of the ethics of care, has laid the necessary theoretical groundwork for the discussion that follows.
At the beginning of this dissertation, I introduced the field of Global Ethics and, following Kimberly Hutchings (2010), described the various approaches to global ethics as divided into two broad categories: rationalist approaches and alternative approaches. A key distinction between these two categories pertains to the ways in which they conceive of difference, and the significance of difference, for moral deliberation. Relatedly, these two approaches also differ in their stance over the (im)possibility of universality. On the one hand, rationalist approaches in Global Ethics assert some universal foundation for ethics, be it in the form of an appeal to a transcendent authority, such as ‘natural law,’ or to a more immanent rationality, which is seen as common to all of humanity. For the rationalists, then, difference does not go ‘all the way down,’ as there is always something common or universal on which to ground moral claims. The alternative approaches, on the other hand, reject the possibility of universal truths, and foreground the moral salience of differences, be they cultural, economic, religious, political, and so on.

The pluriverse, however, casts difference in a deeper and more pervasive way than has been previously conceived of in the Global Ethics literature. In the pluriverse, differences are at their most robust; pluriversal difference refers to different worlds and worldings, and operates at an ontological (and as I have argued, by extension, a co-constitutive epistemological) level. The notion of the pluriverse thus opens up space for radical difference in the fullest sense. Difference as ontological – “i.e., as a matter of what things, including alterity itself, may be” (Holbraad 2013, 563, emphasis in original) – leaves open the question of what may in fact be different in any particular situation.
(Holbraad 2013). This means that difference in the pluriverse may ‘appear’ in surprising forms, forms which exceed the limits of the categories used to capture difference in Global Ethics today (for instance, difference is often conceived of as cultural, economic, political, and so on).

Furthermore (but again, relatedly), while these multiple worlds, or what I have called onto-epistemologies, exceed one another due to their radical differences, they are also intertwined and connected. For this reason, the pluriverse has been described as more than one and less than many (de la Cadena 2015), or as “the partially connected unfolding of worlds” (Blaser 2013, 552). The notion of ‘partial connections’ is particularly useful for understanding the pluriverse. As Marilyn Strathern (2004) argues, we need to problematize the very idea of ‘wholes’ and ‘parts.’ The logic of wholes and parts traps us between an “atomistic view (a totality is constituted by the aggregation of independent elements) and a holistic one (where elements have no existence apart from a total structure or system)” (2004, 26). The pluriverse cannot be conceived of along such lines; multiple worlds are not independent of one another but they also “do not share an overarching principle that would make their entanglement a universe” (Blaser 2013, 553). Because of this, the pluriverse also recasts the very idea of ‘universality.’ Each world may have its own ontological and epistemological premises/practices, but it is not an independent unit. Neither is the constellation of worlds – which are connected but often in excess of each other – a universal whole. Instead, the pluriverse entreats us to begin to think about multiple universals (worlds that exist as universals in their own right) that are connected, but that never come together to form a cohesive universal (or universal-universality).
The central premise of this dissertation is that Global Ethics must begin to think through/with/in the pluriverse. The pluriversal literature fundamentally challenges the ways in which difference and universality have been conceived of in/by the Global Ethics literature. Grappling with this challenge is an important task for Global Ethics for several reasons (which have, to varying degrees, already been discussed throughout this dissertation). First, in offering new conceptualizations of difference, the pluriverse opens theoretical space to think about the challenge of ethical contemplation and action in and across differences that are radical and that cannot be presumed. What is ‘different’ and which ‘differences’ are significant in an ethical dilemma cannot be taken for granted, and disagreements themselves may not be easy to recognize (Blaser 2016). Difference itself must instead be approached with openness and seen as a possible source of contestation. This both complicates and enriches the very idea of ethical dilemmas and conflicts, and the ways in which such dilemmas are constituted in/by difference, and thus merits attention in the Global Ethics literature. Second, the pluriverse, as a world of many worlds or multiple universals, also moves beyond, or perhaps thoroughly displaces, the antinomy of ‘universal’ and ‘particularity’ that currently characterizes, and limits, much thinking in Global Ethics. Theoretical work is required to think about global ethics in a way that does not reproduce this binary. Third, there are a growing number of ethnographies which make visible ontological differences and conflicts – that is, (ethical) conflicts between/across worlds (see, for example, Blaser 2018; de la Cadena 2015; Green 2013b; Omura et al. 2019; Oslender 2019; Salmond 2012). Global Ethics, as the field of study that is concerned with addressing the ethical dilemmas that arise out of our interconnectedness, cannot ignore such conflicts and moral quandaries.
Lastly, as described in the introductory chapter, the pluriverse is also a critical decolonial project, which seeks to destabilize the relations of power that currently uphold the modern world as the entirety of reality and, in so doing, make space for different life projects and worlds to flourish. I believe that there is a growing concern with the colonial legacies of our field,¹ and a growing normative commitment to moving towards addressing and amending these legacies (see, for example, Blaney and Tickner 2017b). In thinking in/through/with the pluriverse, the field of Global Ethics would make important strides towards such a goal, in part by giving ontological weight to different ways of being in and seeing the world (i.e., different onto-epistemologies) and in part by casting (or perhaps more accurately, acknowledging) certain ethical dilemmas as ethical conflicts across worlds. For these reasons, I argue that Global Ethics must engage with the idea of the pluriverse and begin to think through the pluriversal challenge to the ways in which we currently think and do global ethics.

In this final chapter, I present some tools to begin this task. In particular, I argue that three features of a critical and political ethics of care provide useful conceptual tools from which to contemplate ethical horizons in the image of the pluriverse: first, the ways in which care ethics reconceptualizes morality and foregrounds the vulnerability of moral judgement; second, the centrality of ontological ‘vulnerability’ in the ethics of care; and third, the ethics of care as a political ethic, which can help us think ‘the political’ in the context of the pluriverse relationally, and in a way that illuminates the political significance of both cooperative and agonistic relations.

To make my argument, section 5.1 begins with a brief reiteration of the notion of

¹ See the beginning of chapter three.
the pluriverse. Specifically, I build on the existing pluriversal literature to argue that the pluriverse can fruitfully be conceived of as a world, or more accurately, a meta-world, defined by a co-constitutive relational ontology, situated epistemology, and axiology of partial connections. Thinking of the pluriverse in this way is important, I argue, because it holds together the ontological, epistemological, and normative components of the pluriverse without privileging one at the expense of the other, as tends to happen when the discussion is overly focused on ontology, or when ontology is divorced from epistemology.\textsuperscript{2} Further, in explicitly emphasizing the normative dimensions of the pluriverse (which are, to be sure, already implicit in the pluriversal literature), I argue that the pluriversal project must also be concerned with normativity, morality, and ethics.

Rethinking global ethics in the image of the pluriverse, and rethinking the pluriverse such that the always-already normative dimensions of the pluriverse are foregrounded, would mutually benefit and expand both the pluriversal and Global Ethics literatures.\textsuperscript{3}

I conclude this section by demonstrating how the ethics of care aligns with, and usefully expands, thinking about the pluriverse as a meta-world defined by a co-constitutive relational ontology, situated epistemology, and axiology of partial connections. More exactly, the ethics of care, defined by a relational ontology and

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\textsuperscript{2} See section 1.1 for a brief discussion of the ways in which the decolonial research program is conceived of as two moments: an epistemological moment and an ontological moment (Rojas 2016).

\textsuperscript{3} Through the course of my research on these issues, I have noticed that the pluriversal literature often engages with issues pertaining to morality and moral understandings across worlds (see, for example, Blaser 2010); relational ontology and epistemology (see, for example, Escobar 2018); and care and reproduction, particularly of worlds (see, for example, Arora 2017; Blaser 2018). However, I am also disheartened to find that save from some engagement with the work of Donna Haraway and a few others, feminist literature on these issues is rarely consulted. Part of my goal in this chapter is to begin to amend this and demonstrate how many of the pluriversal themes share lines of connection with feminist ethics, feminist epistemology, and feminist care theories. The pluriversal literature, I believe, would be enriched by engaging with and building on the insights of such scholarship.
situated epistemology,⁴ is well-positioned to serve as a lens for understanding the pluriverse (which shares these same ontological and epistemological premises). Furthermore, the ethics of care normatively values repairing and maintaining our relations of care that allow us to (re)produce ourselves and our worlds as well as is reasonably possible. This normative vantage point, I suggest, amends the pluriversal axiology of valuing partial connections⁵ by encouraging us to consider critically which connections are worth maintaining and extending, and which ones are not. In this way, I suggest that thinking about the pluriverse as a meta-world, from an ethics of care perspective, involves rethinking the normative commitment implicit in the pluriversal project so that it is focused on valuing partial relations of care, where care in the most general sense contributes to a world’s ability to flourish as a world.

In section 5.2, I continue my argument regarding how the ethics of care can help us think in/through/with the pluriverse by demonstrating how care ethics, with its focus on vulnerability, can also help us develop tools for contemplating and addressing moral conflicts between the particular worlds that comprise the pluriverse. Specifically, I use the ethics of care to develop a conceptual distinction between vulnerability and precarity. I then demonstrate how these concepts can be used to orient us to the relations of power that comprise the configuration of the pluriverse. This meta-orientation is important, I contend, because the configuration of the pluriverse, and the relations of power which shape the relations between worlds, comprise the backdrop against which ethical dilemmas and conflicts between worlds always unfold. Understanding this background,

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⁴ As argued in detail in section 4.2.
⁵ As I outline in detail in section 5.1 below, I argue that this axiology is implicit (if not explicitly stated) in the pluriversal literature/project.
and the ways in which this background shapes ethical dilemmas and conflicts, is, I argue, a crucial task for a pluriversal ethics. The ethics of care, with its focus on vulnerability and relations of power, can help orient us to this ethical task.

In developing this meta-orientation, and contemplating this ‘background,’ I also attend to the pluriverse as political, and suggest that the ethics of care can help us understand better the nature of the political in the pluriversal context. To develop this argument, I contend that the relational ontology of the pluriverse, described in section 5.1, is the condition of possibility for the pluriverse to be contemplated as a meta-world (as worlds are interconnected) as well as the simultaneous condition of possibility for that meta-world to be reordered or shifted (as relations are fluid and changing). Or, to put it slightly differently, the relational ontology of the pluriverse means that the relations between worlds are the condition of possibility for evoking a political moment – a simultaneous ungrounding and grounding – which shifts the pluriversal matrix. In this way, the pluriverse, as I argued in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, is always-already operating at the level of the political. At the same time, however, each world comprised in and by the pluriverse is also constituted by its own socio-symbolic order, its own onto-epistemology, which delimits and enables what is thinkable, doable, and speakable, and which defines what counts as politics within that world. And, of course, because these worlds are themselves interconnected with other worlds, the possibility of a political moment is ever-present from the vantage point of particular worlds as well.

This layered ‘politicality’ – by which I mean, the ever-present potential for a political re-ordering at multiple levels (within a world, or at the level of the pluriversal matrix more broadly) and across multiple worlds – has some unique implications,
however, when contemplating the nature of the political moment(s) that may arise in the
pluriverse. As alluded to in chapter three, it is conceivable that a shift in relations will
change the socio-symbolic order of one world, but perhaps not radically reconfigure the
pluriverse itself (i.e., not result in a political moment for the pluriversal matrix).
Similarly, it is conceivable that a world could evoke a shift in relations in the pluriverse
without resulting in a political moment of its own. In this way, the
grounding/ungrounding of the political in the pluriverse can only be conceived of as
partially connected. There is no guarantee that a political moment will manifest for one
world in the same ways it does for another; there is no guarantee that a reconfiguration of
the pluriverse will constitute a political moment for all worlds or all worlds equally.
Depending on where one is situated in the pluriverse, it is conceivable that a political
moment will be experienced as either an ungrounding and grounding moment, or as
nothing at all. In fact, some pluriversal reconfigurations (a political moment at the level
of the pluriverse) may in fact ‘solidify’ the existing onto-epistemic grounding or socio-
symbolic order of a particular world. This is, in part, why maintaining a focus on
epistemology is important in the pluriverse. Conceiving of the pluriverse as constituted
by a situated epistemology foregrounds how the political moment will look different –
indeed, manifest different relations and practices – depending on where one is already
positioned within the pluriversal matrix.

To contemplate this ‘layered politicality,’ I suggest that we must move beyond the
debate in the postfoundational literature regarding whether the political is
(predominantly) associative or dissociative. Instead, I suggest that it is more fruitful to
conceive of the political as (dis)associative. Because the pluriverse involves sets of
relations (worlds) that are connected (partially) via sets of relations, political moments may be both associative and dissociative, depending on where one is situated. Put another way, while the political moment will always be both dissociative (in that an order is ruptured) and associative (another order is instantiated), the dissociative- and associativeness may not be equally distributed across the particular worlds that comprise the pluriverse or in relation to the pluriversal structure itself. The co-constitutive relational ontology and situated epistemology of the pluriverse reveals that the ungrounding/grounding dynamics of a political moment may be unevenly distributed across worlds. Correspondingly, I suggest, ‘bringing about’ political moments may also be (dis)associative, i.e., the result of both cooperative and agonistic political action.

To begin to think through the political as (dis)associative, I suggest the ethics of care is again useful. The ethics of care, as described in chapter four, positions us to agonize care; what it means to care, and to live as well as reasonably possible, is not pre-determined. In fact, the ethics of care, with its relational social ontology, implies that notions of care, needs, and living well must vary radically, as multiple relational selves will necessarily come to understand care, living well, and meeting needs in different ways. As a result, a political and critical ethics of care understands that care itself is often a conflictual and difficult process that involves agonism, confrontation, and conflict. At the same time, however, the ethics of care also theorizes care as associative, in that the ethics of care orients us towards the political task of collectively (re)organizing care, the distributions of caring responsibilities, and the ways in which we meet vulnerable needs – even though (or perhaps particularly because) what it means to care, who is responsible for care, and what needs are worthy of redress, are all questions that are up for political
Developing more fully a (dis)associative theory of care, and demonstrating how this theory helps us contemplate the political in the pluriverse, is a key goal of this section. This (dis)associative theory of care, I ultimately argue, also demonstrates why the care ethics literature benefits from engaging with the pluriversal literature. A recurring debate in the ethics of care literature focusses on the ethics of care as political (see, for example, Robinson 2019b; Tronto 1993), and deliberates on how the radical transformative potential of an ethics of care can be realized (see, for example, Stensöta 2015). Thinking with care in the pluriverse – a landscape that is always-already operating at the level of the political – helps to develop further the ethics of care as a political theory.

Lastly, in section 5.4, I move from the preceding meta-ethical discussion and begin to outline other ways in which the ethics of care can help us deliberate and navigate specific ethical conflicts between worlds. I draw upon another example from the pluriversal literature regarding a conflict over caring for what the modern world calls caribou and the Innu Nation calls atiku (Blaser 2016; 2018). Using this example, I demonstrate how the meta-orientation developed in the previous sections orients us to contemplate this ethical conflict, and I also draw out other ways in which the ethics of care can help build a pluriversal ethics. This example is particularly useful for this dissertation because it involves a conflict which centers on what some decolonial scholars have called “earth-beings” (de la Cadena 2015), and which have been introduced in the other pluriversal examples discussed in this dissertation so far. The existence of earth-beings – nonhuman living beings or subjects (de la Cadena 2014) – is one of the most
prevalent claims demonstrating ontological multiplicity in the pluriversal literature. Demonstrating how the ethics of care can orient those in the modern world to contemplate ethical dilemmas involving earth-beings is necessary if the ethics of care is going to help build a fruitful ethics for the pluriverse.

Through this discussion, my hope is that this final section therefore brings my argument full circle: by starting with the ethics of care, it becomes clear that the pluriverse is always-already a moral landscape. An ethics of care for the pluriverse thereby reveals that building a pluriversal ethics is much more than the ‘application’ of ethics to this ‘new’ pluriversal landscape. Instead, building a pluriversal ethics simply is the very means by which the pluriverse may flourish.

5.1 Worlding the Pluriverse: Ontology, Epistemology, and (Crucially) Axiology

In chapter two, I argued that modernity is a world, characterized by a particular ontology, epistemology, and axiology (which are themselves co-constituting). Here, I suggest that it is similarly useful to conceive of the pluriverse – the world in which many worlds are possible⁶ – as a meta-world defined by a particular ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Notably, while I attend to the ontological and epistemological aspects of the pluriverse here, this section in particular aims to foreground the axiological and normative aspects of the pluriverse. Specifically, I argue that the pluriverse as a concept implicitly involves a variety of axiological questions. Axiology, as an umbrella term for what is of value, therefore also points to moral and ethical concerns, particularly when morality is understood in the care ethical sense, which (as developed in section 4.2 above) conceives

⁶ To once again paraphrase the well-known project of the Zapatistas.
of morality as the practices and values that constitute, repair, and maintain different forms of life. Because of these axiological dimensions, I suggest that the literature on the pluriverse needs to engage with moral questions and moral philosophy. Indeed, while this dissertation begins with the premise that the Global Ethics literature needs to begin thinking in/through/with the pluriverse, it is equally important, I believe, that the pluriversal research program include ongoing engagement with ethical and moral questions.

To begin this argument, I propose that the pluriverse is a meta-world defined by a relational ontology, a situated epistemology, and an axiology that values partial connections. It is a relational ontology, because multiple worlds are connected through relations of power, which themselves emerge and exist only in and through relations and practices. Significantly, relationships here are not things that “somehow exist outside or between” (Strathern 2004, 53) worlds, connecting pre-existing ‘units.’ The worlds that constitute the pluriverse are, in contrast, enacted, as is the pluriverse itself, through relations all the way down. A world is not connected to other (pre-existing) worlds; worlds, and the pluriverse, emerge in and through relations. The pluriverse is thus an animated world (Blaser 2012, 3), a worlding (Blaser 2013, 552), and particular worlds come in to being, in part, through their relations with other worlds (as well as through the ‘internal’ relations and practices that enact a particular world). This ontology stands in

7 Notably, the ethics of care, as outlined in chapter four, shares these ontological and epistemological premises. However, the axiology of the pluriverse as one of ‘partial connections’ is, perhaps, distinct from the axiology that could be identified in care ethics, which could be thought of as a normative orientation towards maintaining and repairing relations so as to live as well as possible in the world. Below I return to this distinction, however, and show the ways in which care ethics’ (thin) normativity aligns with this pluriversal axiology.
stark contrast to the modern ontology, premised on a strong Human / Nature divide, in which Nature is an external world ‘out there,’ separate from atomistic Man.

The pluriverse is, I suggest, also constituted by a situated epistemology, as knowledge claims and knowledge practices always emerge from some place, from particular ways of life; knowledge (knowledge practices) and worlding practices emerge in and through each other. How we (and by this, I mean any ‘we’) know, and how we know that we know, is always “partial [and] locatable” (Haraway 1991, 191), emerging in and through our relational lives. From this perspective, how we know that we know must always involve taking responsibility for the generative components of knowledge – that which is enacted in/through/by our knowledge claims and practices (Haraway 1991, 190). Again, this epistemology differs from the modernist rationalist epistemology, which prioritizes transcending context, splitting subject and object, and appealing to universal truth claims.

Lastly, the pluriverse, I suggest, is a world that is also constituted by an axiological commitment to partial connections. This commitment to partial connections is partial not in the sense of some sort of ‘negative’ bias or flawed ‘incompleteness’ – certainly, conceiving of partiality in negative terms only makes sense when tied to the modernist celebration of completeness, totalization, and objectivity. On the contrary, an axiology of partial connections means that we value the (necessarily incomplete) connections between worlds. Partial connections are important, necessary and inevitable; learning to live well together – in and across all our radical differences – requires multiplying connection in non-hierarchical ways. At the same time, however, these connections are always only partial, in the sense that worlds can never wholly ‘know’ one
another or be reduced to one another. Valuing partial connections in this way means that one world can never appropriate another world in full, reduce it to its own, or – and this is crucially important – capture other worlds in a singular hierarchy constituted by one onto-epistemology. “Partial connections create no single entity; the entity that results is more than one, yet less than two” (de la Cadena 2010, 347).

The term partial is also important here because it helps us avoid the uncritical valorization of all relations; some relations are harmful and it may be desirable to change these. Partial connections are themselves evolving and animated, and resist closure. Once again, this illustrates how the pluriverse differs from the modern world, as the modernist axiology values totalizing order. Modernity seeks completion and closure via the ordering of Nature. This ordering can only ever result in hierarchy, as subject/object distinctions (pre)determine who/what can be ordered and who/what can do the ordering. The pluriverse, instead, is premised on an axiology which rejects closure, and therefore resists hierarchy. An axiology of partial connections emphasizes the impossibility of closure – it is an “animated world” (Blaser 2012, 3) – and thus always-already implies openness to new partial connections that are yet to emerge.

Now, in asserting the pluriverse as meta-world, one could argue that I am falling into the modernist trap of a one-world ontology. From this perspective, “the claim of multiple ontologies is turned into a sort of meta-ontology, the statement of fact, the really real ultimate nature of reality” (Blaser 2012, 4-5). Mario Blaser raises this concern about different work in the ontological turn literature (2012; 2013), arguing that some assert the

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8 I expand on how the ethics of care provides an orientation from which to investigate and deliberate on relations between worlds below.
9 I return to hierarchy, and relations of power, in the pluriverse in section 5.2 below.
pluriverse as a new foundational claim (Blaser singles out Philippe Descola (2005) in particular). This strikes me as a challenging problem. In asserting the pluriverse, are we just replacing one ontology with another (even if it is a meta-ontology)? Blaser’s own attempt to avoid this dilemma is to emphasize that ontology is a worlding, a reality in the making. He emphasizes the fluidity of worlds, the ways in which they are storied, and therefore aims to avoid making more foundational claims about multiple worlds.

However, as Martin Holbraad (2013, 564) points out, it is unclear “how this is not ultimately yet another argument that operates by grounding the possibility of difference in a prior story of how the world(s) must work, namely, in this case, the world(s) as a terrain in which ontological differences are ever-emerging, fluid, and tentative.” Even the assertion that the pluriverse is fluid and emerging is an ontological and grounding claim.

To further complicate this, at other times, Blaser also speaks of actually existing multiple ontologies; for instance, his ethnographic work with the Yshiro people of the Paraguayan Chaco (2010; 2013) and the Innu Nation (2016; 2018) articulates multiple worlds as worlds. There is a bit of a tension then, between the assertion that there are multiple “actual worlds” (Blaney and Tickner 2017b, 298, emphasis in original) – as evidenced by ethnographies of multiple worlds – and the hesitation to assert that there are multiple worlds as some sort of ontological claim. This tension is evident in other writings on the pluriverse. For instance, Arturo Escobar writes:

> For the pluriverse proposal, there are multiple reals, yet it is not intended to ‘correct’ the view on a single real on the grounds of being a truer account of ‘reality.’ *The pluriverse is a tool to first, make alternatives to the one world plausible to one-worlders, and, second, provide resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one-world story.* (2016, 22, emphasis in original)

There are other worlds that interrupt the one-world story, but acknowledging these other
worlds is not meant to provide a truer account of ‘reality.’ Perhaps, then, the point of this distinction is to trouble the notion of ‘reality,’ such that reality is not to be taken as an externally given ‘out there’ but rather as socially constructed. So while we can point to other worlds that interrupt modernity’s one-world story, we are not asserting any of this as transcendental or prior to the relations in and through which they emerge. But this, I believe, leads to another issue, especially if and when the pluriversal literature makes a distinction between epistemology and ontology.

In particular, as outlined briefly in the introduction, the ontological turn emerged as a response to the prioritization of epistemology as a way to contemplate difference. When one begins with epistemology, according to scholars like Blaser (2013), difference is conceived of as different perspectives (knowledges, epistemologies) on one world or reality. The problem with this is that some perspectives are more likely to be judged as right/truer/or better than others; this judgement is, of course, shaped by relations of power that marginalize certain ways of knowing as culture, belief, or tradition, while other ways of knowing – namely, rationalism and science – are ‘true.’ Asserting other worlds as worlds, and focusing on ontology over epistemology, is meant to provide a better way to conceptualize difference, one which does not depend on hierarchies of knowledge, and which ‘interrupts the one-world story’ which holds up such hierarchies.

However, there is an epistemological problem that remains here. How do we know there are other worlds interrupting the one-world story? On what epistemological grounds do we come to see or know these worlds? In bracketing epistemology, or

10 The radical contingency of social reality is widely accepted in critical social sciences now, and as is made evident below, is also inherent in my claim that the pluriverse is a meta-world.
perhaps more softly, in prioritizing ontology over epistemology, certain claims by pluriversal scholars become difficult to absorb. For instance, Blaser writes that the pluriverse is not meant as a meta-ontology but is instead concerned with new pluriversal possibilities that may emerge to address political problems. “Central among these problems,” he writes (2013, 554) “is the extent to which those of us (person and institutions) who have been shaped by an ontology that postulates/perform a ‘one-world world’ are ill prepared to grapple with its increasing implausibility.” On what epistemological grounds is Blaser asserting that a one-world world is implausible? It seems to me that some subjects of a one-world world (modernity) will likely have strong arguments that the one-world world is, indeed, plausible, in part because their epistemology provides criteria – and therefore constructs evidence and knowledge claims – that support its plausibility. As Claudio Briones (2013, 560, citing Blaser 2013, 551) writes, “Is the awareness of the ways in which ‘peoples distribute what exists and conceive their constitutive relations’ (ontology) divorced from acknowledging the means by which they acquire and approve such conceptualizations (epistemology)? […] Can we grasp ontological differences by using our modern epistemology or must we also consider epistemological differences?”

This is a complicated issue, that seems to always end where we start. On the one hand, pluriversal scholars are not willing to assert that there are multiple worlds as a primary ontological claim. On the other hand, they also claim and evidence multiple worlds based on ethnographic data, which are meant to point to the implausibility of a one-world world, and the fact that “the hegemony of the story of modernity (or the modern ontology) is in crisis” (Blaser 2013, 554). At the same time, they (often) fail to
attend meaningfully to epistemological issues, the ways in which they come to know that there are these multiple worlds (as opposed to just different perspectives on a single reality out there), and by extension, the ways in which they know that the one-world world story is implausible. It is for this reason that I insist it is more fruitful to conceive of worlds – including the worlds which produce pluriversal scholars – as onto-epistemologies, as co-constitutive ontologies and epistemologies. Our practices and our knowledges emerge together, and asserting there are multiple ontologies requires, at the very least, a situated epistemology or a sincere acknowledgement of the vulnerability of all judgement (Hutchings 2013). Otherwise, one’s commitment to a particular epistemology may prevent one from contemplating ontological difference other than that already acknowledged in said epistemology.

But what, then, of the original problem which sparked this discussion? Is the pluriverse as world simply a (meta-)ontological claim to replace the modern one-world world? I believe that explicitly bringing axiology to the fore of this discussion, and thereby foregrounding questions of what we value, what is right, and what is beautiful, can help provide a way to navigate this conundrum. More acutely, conceiving of the pluriverse as a world defined by a co-constitutive relational ontology, situated epistemology, and an axiology of partial connections allows the pluriverse as world to emerge as a meta-ontological claim, albeit a weak one. Stephen White’s distinction between strong and weak ontologies is useful here:

Strong are those ontologies that claim to show us “the way the world is,” or how God’s being stands to human being, or what human nature is. It is by reference to this external ground that ethical and political life gain their sense of what is right; moreover, this foundation’s validity is unchanging and of universal reach. (2000, 6)
Weak ontologies respond to two pressing concerns. First, there is the acceptance of the idea that all fundamental conceptualization of self, other, and world are contestable. Second, there is the sense that such conceptualizations are nevertheless necessary or unavoidable for an adequately reflective ethical and political life. (2000, 8)

Conceptualizations of ontologies in the weak sense are, for White, necessary to live a meaningful ethical and political life. It is clear from the pluriversal literature that the pluriversal project is committed to “the partially connected unfolding of worlds” (Blaser 2012, 7). This axiology of partial connections, as I have called it, is a normative commitment to a particular type of ethical and political life in which many worlds as worlds can flourish. In this way, then, thinking about the axiology of the pluriverse foregrounds the pluriverse as a world in the making, a normative commitment to something other than the modern world as the whole of the real.

For this reason, while I assert that the pluriverse is a meta-world, this claim is not a strong ontological claim about an external reality. Instead, the pluriverse as meta-world is a weak ontology. As a weak ontology, thinking about the pluriverse as meta-world does not attempt to locate some transcendental reality out-there; weak ontologies accept the radical contingency of all claims. At the same time, as White points out, weak ontological claims are necessary to manifest ethical and political life adequately and reflectively. If the pluriverse is the type of ethical and political meta-world we are committed to building/enacting/performing/storying, then this project will require some ontological and epistemological premises.

My argument, then, is that by explicitly identifying this axiological aspect of the pluriverse – one which is certainly already inherent in pluriversal literature, but perhaps not identified with such strongly normative language – the justification for asserting such
claims is explicitly brought to the fore. As a result, the ‘pluriverse as world’ is a (weak) meta-onto-epistemic claim that does suggest a ‘one-world’ (meta-)ontology, but it is one that is very different from the strong one-world ontology of modernity. The axiology which in part constitutes the pluriverse keeps the ontological and epistemological premises of the pluriverse from slipping into some sort of transcendental grounding because it is the normative goal of valuing partial connections (as opposed to some sort of transcendental truth) that justifies making such claims. Relatedly, it seems unlikely that this normative goal can be achieved without making such weak ontological and epistemological statements.

At the same time, the relational ontology and the situated epistemology of the pluriverse means that this axiology is not transcendental either. As worlds continue to interact, different value claims will be asserted, different practices will confront each other, and different understandings will clash. A situated epistemology, as is characteristic of the ethics of care and described more fully in section 4.2 above, means that we must continually pursue the difficult and messy task of looking at these different value claims and the practices they are constituted in/by in order to justify – and if necessary, revise – any and all normative goals, including the normative goal of the pluriverse.

In sum, then, the pluriverse as a concept which foregrounds ontological multiplicity – and as I have been arguing, therefore also epistemological multiplicity – is always-already normative; more precisely, this ontology, epistemology, and axiology are co-constitutive, with each justifying/constructing the other, albeit in a way that is open to revision. One of my central arguments in this chapter is that the axiological aspect of the
pluriverse must therefore be attended to and foregrounded; questions of what we value, what is normatively desirable or good, and how to enact a vision of multiple worlds are at the heart of the very notion of the pluriverse. Ethical and moral tools and concepts will not just help us navigate actual conflicts between worlds, as I argue below; they also provide us with language, concepts and tools for contemplating – and crucially, committing to the normative building of – the pluriverse itself.

**On Moral Practices and Ethical Conflicts**

I believe that the concept of the pluriverse is normative, ethical, and moral in other ways as well, particularly when morality is again understood in the care ethical sense. That is, in the last chapter, I argued that from the perspective of the ethics of care, morality is now understood as practices – both knowledge practices and actions – which make up the very fabric of our everyday lives. As Susan Hekman\(^\text{11}\) (1995, 115-116) elaborates, morality is “inseparably linked to our conception of ourselves as subjects and our conceptions of the world in which we live.” What we know, what we do, and what is moral, together constitute “forms of life” (Hekman 1995, 125). For this reason, morality cannot be separated from the world of which it is apart and in which it is enacted.

Morality is so fundamental to a world that a change in moral beliefs would entail “inhabiting a new world;” “I cannot fully understand what my form of life would be if I had a different set of moral beliefs, because moral beliefs are so central to who I am”

\(^{11}\) It is worth highlighting that while I draw upon Hekman’s work (1995) extensively here, Hekman would not likely identify as a care ethicist, although she did see Carol Gilligan’s work as revolutionary. In her book, *Moral Voices Moral Selves* (1995), Hekman undertakes an extensive examination of Gilligan’s work on the ethics of care to deconstruct rationalist approaches to moral theory and to draw out in detail the ways in which the ethics of care necessitates a reconceptualization of the moral self as a relational subject.
(Hekman 1995, 128). Similarly, “moral values and practices are inseparable from the broader social and political context within which they operate” (Hutchings 2003, 130).

By extension, the care ethical understanding of morality implies that particular worlds are also fundamentally moral; to speak of forms of life is to speak of “forms of moral life” (Walker 2007, 105). Just as I have argued that contemplating ontological differences and different ontologies requires thinking about epistemology, thinking of morality as a form of life means that moral contemplation is also inherent to and necessary for understanding, exploring, and engaging with multiple worlds. To be sure, some of the types of fundamental differences that emerge in the pluriverse – and that the pluriversal literature attempts to grapple with – might, in fact, be moral. Neglecting to investigate the morality of worlds (that is, worlds as always-already moral forms of life) and moral difference(s) may obfuscate some of the deep and pervasive difference that the pluriversal project seeks to take seriously. Drawing upon moral philosophy, like the ethics of care, and engaging with the literature on global ethics more broadly, can help conceptualize these dynamics and possibilities and broaden the scope of the pluriversal research project.

Second, worlds as always-already moral also means that conflicts between worlds fundamentally involve morality and ethics in (at least) two senses. First, the moral practices and understandings that enact particular worlds form, at minimum, part of the background in and through which conflicts between worlds emerge and unfold. “Critical moral ethnography” (Walker 2007, 246) becomes an important task for understanding the moral worlds in and through which conflicts emerge, and the ways in which these moral forms of life shape the conflict itself. Second, related to this, conflicts between worlds
very often tend to be moral and ethical. For instance, in Marisol de la Cadena’s (2015) account of her protest (with Nazario) to protect Ausangate, the difference that she focuses on pertains to the ontological status of Ausangate (as mountain and earth-being).

However, I believe that the political protest that she and Nazario participate in to protect Ausangate also points to a clear moral problem. Nazario is not protesting the mine to assert that Ausangate is an earth-being (and therefore participate in an ontological contestation); he is protesting the mine to avoid harming Ausangate, who might then harm people out of anger. In this way, Nazario is contesting the proper treatment of Ausangate, or, to use the language of the ethics of care, he is concerned with how to care best for Ausangate (where what it means to care is, again, not predetermined). Of course, Nazario’s ontological relationship with Ausangate deeply shapes his motivation for participating in this contestation – and in no way do I mean to diminish the significance of the fact that an ontological difference shapes this entire situation (or, as I described it at the beginning of this paragraph, this ontological difference in part forms the ‘background’ in and through which the conflict emerges). My aim is rather to emphasize that often ontological difference only becomes meaningful across worlds when there is an ethical dilemma regarding what ought to be done in any given situation. Engaging more thoroughly with and drawing upon tools in moral philosophy, and particularly the ethics of care as I argue below, would again allow pluriversal scholars to attend more fully and explicitly to these moral and ethical dynamics.

As a final point, the pluriversal literature also frequently emphasizes the importance of “world-making effects” (Blaser 2013, 552). In so doing, this literature also often (implicitly) points to the fact that sometimes judgements regarding such world-
making effects need to be made.\textsuperscript{12} Blaser’s development of ontology, which has been well-rehearsed in this dissertation so far, is again useful to demonstrate this. Ontology, for Blaser (2013, 552), can be conceived of as “storied performativity,” sets of practices and narratives which enact worlds, and therefore are world-making (as opposed to claims about what exists ‘out there’). He writes:

One implication of this is that the stories being told cannot be fully grasped without reference to their world-making effects, for different stories imply different worldings; they do not ‘float’ over some ultimate (real) world. The corollary is that, indeed, some ethnographic subjects (or stories/worldings/ontologies) can be wrong, not in the sense of a lack of coincidence with an external or ultimate reality, \textit{but in the sense that they perform wrong: they are/enact worlds in which or with which we do not want to live}. (Blaser 2013, 552, emphasis added)

Judging which worlds in which or with which we do not want to live, I believe, is in fact a key part of the pluriversal project – although perhaps the term ‘judge’ connotes a stronger and more decisive stance than I intend for two reasons. First, in the context of the pluriverse, what it means ‘to judge’ is an enormously complicated and nuanced task because of the differences that are at play. Onto-epistemologies involve their own sets of practices and knowledge claims that limit our ability to access and therefore deliberate on other onto-epistemologies; it is the very complexity of such normative deliberation across

\textsuperscript{12} Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2013a, 275) provides one notable exception when he writes “we [pluriversal scholars, particularly anthropologists] strive to connect different ontologies, but we are not in the business of ontologizing. We are especially not in the business of judging other people’s ontologies – either ‘our own’ people, or other peoples.” However, I do not see how this claim can hold in the context of the pluriversal project. For one, the pluriversal project departs from, at the very least, requires, a critique (and ergo judgement) of one world, namely modernity as the ‘one-world world.’ Second, the pluriversal project, with its axiological dimensions, is about ontologizing – it is a commitment to enacting a world in which many worlds can flourish, i.e., a commitment to connecting worlds and thus enacting a more-connected world. Third, if we are to be responsible for the worlds we enact through our research, at the very least, we must be in the business of judging our own onto-epistemologies, and \textit{the ways in which our world shapes how we connect worlds}. To act otherwise is to fall back on an impossible ‘objectivity,’ in which the pluriversal scholar simply observes, analyzes, and acts without any contemplation of how their own onto-epistemology shapes their analysis, their storytelling, and the connections invoked therein.
worlds that motivates this dissertation in the first place. Second, as the ethics of care
foregrounds, moral judgement itself is always vulnerable, difficult, and messy. As
relational beings, moral agents and moral judges are produced in and through relations
that sustain various worlds, and that are deeply intertwined with complex values systems,
norms, institutions, and systems of power (Walker 2007, 19-28). Accordingly, moral
judgement does not stand on some sort of transcendental and authoritative grounds; moral
judgement can only ever be vulnerable, risky, and revisable, as outlined in more detail
below.

At the same time, questions of what it means to live well and to live well together
(despite these very differences) are central to the pluriversal project. Investigating such
questions, considering what kind of world(s) we want to build (Escobar 2018), being
accountable for the world(s) we already enact, and reflecting on which worlds we do not
want to live in/with are pressing questions in the context of the pluriverse. Exploring
these questions inherently involves critically interrogating our own worlds in an ongoing
way, as well as coming to know (as well as possible, but always imperfectly) other
worlds and moral forms of life so as to scrutinize collectively and collaboratively what
types of worlds we want to live in and with. Judgement, albeit a thin, tentative, deeply
contextual, and revisable judgement, is unavoidable here, as “actual moralities, or parts of
them, are indeed comparable, if only piecemeal, for purposes of reflective testing and
comparative justification” (Walker 2007, 260). In turning our attention to these types of
concerns, I suggest that the notion of the pluriverse and the pluriversal project is, again,
imimately intertwined with moral and ethical questions, and specifically, the moral and
ethical questions that emerge from an ethics of care understanding of morality.
Connecting the Pluriverse and the Ethics of Care: Preliminary Steps

To conclude, the above discussion is, first and foremost, meant to demonstrate that the pluriverse is, in fact, always-already a moral landscape (and as such, the pluriversal literature needs to begin to contemplate moral questions). At the same time, this section also begins the central task of this dissertation, which is demonstrating how the ethics of care provides a useful starting point for contemplating the moral and ethical dimensions of the pluriverse. Thinking of the pluriverse as a meta-world, defined by a relational ontology, situated epistemology, and an axiology of partial connections, draws out important lines of connection between the pluriversal vision and the ethics of care. First, the ethics of care, as described in the previous chapter, is premised upon a relational social ontology, and conceives of moral subjects as constituted in and by their relations. In this way, the ethics of care is well-positioned to theorize and contemplate the relations that constitute (not simply connect) worlds in the pluriverse. Moral theories underpinned by an atomistic and individualist ontology, on the other hand, are unable to attend to the political and ethical nature and consequences of the deep relationality of the pluriverse, because the ontological premise of individualism means that such approaches either deal with ‘ones’ or with “a multiplicity of ones brought together for some purpose. Relationships [from this vantage point] must somehow exist outside or between these phenomena, for it is gathering the phenomena together that makes the connections” (Strathern 2004, 53). More simply, beginning with ‘ones’ “creates problems for the conceptualization of relationships” (Strathern 2004, 53), which are primary in the pluriverse. The ethics of care does not begin with ‘ones;’ its relational social ontology
attunes the ethics of care to relations all the way down. Such an orientation is necessary for a pluriversal ethics, where different onto-epistemologies, and the ethical conflicts that arise between them, emerge in and through (that is, are constituted by) complex sets of relations.

Second, the ethics of care also implies a situated epistemology; this is another connection with the pluriverse. As moral selves are constituted in and through relations, their epistemologies and knowledge claims are likewise constituted in and through relations and context (and equally, their knowledge claims, and particularly moral knowledge claims, constitute moral selves). As Hekman writes:

moral voices are constitutive of, not peripheral to, subjects. Each subject will possess a particular moral voice, a voice rooted in her social, historical, linguistic, and cultural situation. Although she may be able to employ other moral voices for specific purposes, forcing her to adopt a moral voice not her own, a voice that is not a product of her situatedness, would be like forcing her to speak a foreign language. (1995, 130)

Knowledge, from an ethics of care perspective, can only be situated. Knowledge claims, including moral and ethical judgements and values, cannot be deliberated in abstraction from the world in which they arise and unfold. Instead, the ethics of care requires that any and all moral judgements be understood as contextualized and situated, and therefore vulnerable. ‘Truth’ does not exist ‘out there;’ it can only be found within the sets of relations and practices from which a particular knowledge claim (and particular moral self) emerges.

For this reason, the ethics of care asserts that all moral judgement is vulnerable.¹³

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¹³ This discussion draws heavily upon the work of Kimberly Hutchings (2001; 2003; 2013) and Margaret Urban Walker (2007). It is important to note that both Hutchings and Walker are writing about a broader approach to moral philosophy – what Walker calls ‘the expressive-collaborative model’ – and their respective discussions are not specifically in relation to the ethics of care. That said, both do include the
Care ethics understands that there is a plurality of moral voices and contends that moral deliberation will only be meaningful if subjects are allowed “to speak in the moral voices that define them as subjects” (Hekman 1995, 130). Relatedly, the ethics of care also emphasizes that there are multiple “forms of moral life” (Walker 2007, 105), which, like moral subjects, are intrinsically tied to and produced through “the complex of values, practices, relations and institutions which sustain collective experience” (Hutchings 2003, 129). As a result, moral judgement (including the moral judgement of the global ethicist) can only be a tentative, difficult, and risky undertaking, which is understood to emerge from a unique moral self who is embedded in a particular form of moral life. And understanding, as best as possible, different forms of moral life (which serve as the ‘bedrock’ that justifies any given moral claim) becomes an ongoing and pressing ethical task for moral philosophy. From this vantage point,

the crucial question [must] not be how we know what is ethically necessary, but how certain values or practices come to be seen or experienced as ethically necessary. The point is not to establish in advance what is to count as moral, but to gain a deeper knowledge of the ‘forms of moral life’. This deeper knowledge does not take any manifestation of moral values and relations as simply given, but looks at how it has come to be and, crucially, at how interests are constructed and served by the ‘bedrock’ character of any particular moral practice. (Hutchings 2003, 130)

At the same time, in focusing on the ways in which certain practices come to be seen as ethically necessary, and prioritizing the vulnerability of all moral judgement, the ethics of care also does not suggest that we abandon all ethical prescription. We cannot “allow the acknowledgement of vulnerability to let [our]selves off the hook of judgement” (Hutchings 2013, 26). Instead, vulnerable moral judgement means that we

ethics of care in this broader approach to moral philosophy, and as such, their description of this broader approach, I believe, can apply specifically to the ethics of care also.
must take responsibility for the worlds we create through our moral judgements, and prioritize “the reflective articulation of ethical prescriptions which acknowledge the conditions of their own meaningfulness” (Hutchings 2003, 130). In acknowledging the assumptions underpinning ethical judgement, indicating clearly the “explanatory benefits and costs” (Hutchings 2001, 87) of a position, and recognizing the taken-for-granted moral imaginary that a moral agent operates within (Hutchings 2013, 37), moral agents can assert (vulnerable) moral claims, although they must always include a reflective articulation of “the conditions of their own meaningfulness;” such articulation increases the likelihood that a given claim will “become intelligible and persuasive to others” (Hutchings 2003, 130).

This latter point is significant, in that it again demonstrates why morality is a collective undertaking from an ethics of care perspective. Not only is morality a form of life (i.e., a socially situated and enacted part of living together), but it is also social and collective in that the very significance of a moral claim lies in the ways in which a moral judgement speaks to the experiences of the moral actors to whom the judgement is presented (Hutchings 2003, 131). To put it differently, the ethics of care understands that moral judgement is only authoritative “within existing forms of ethical life” or if its authority is “collaboratively built” (Hutchings 2003, 129). As either already existing within forms of ethical life, or as something to be collaboratively built, the assertion, critique, and justification of a moral claim is always a collective undertaking. And as collective, moral philosophizing and moral judgement “must make explicit the fundamental assumption[s] on which it rests” (Hutchings 2001, 90) so that the moral agents we are engaging with can assess (as best as possible) the claim, the world it
(re)produces, and the conditions of possibility for that claim. Reflectively specifying the conditions in and through which we produce ethical knowledge, and the conditions in and through which ethical knowledge becomes meaningful, “expands possibilities of engagement and critique, and holds the theorist to account beyond the world of his/her own epistemic community and historical present” (Hutchings 2013, 40). Collectively engaging in this on-going, messy, and (to some extent) impossible task of attempting to understand different forms of moral life, and the different claims to moral authority therein, while always foregrounding the ways in which one’s own contingent moral form of life constitutes one’s moral knowledge and judgement is, from a care ethical perspective, the iterative and challenging process in and through which (vulnerable) moral judgements are agonized.

It is because of this understanding of moral judgement that the ethics of care is also well-positioned to deal with the particular epistemic challenge of the pluriverse regarding the limits to knowing. As demonstrated through my discussion of discourse ethics in section 3.2, communicating across worlds can sometimes involve an excess – something that cannot be translated across worlds, and something that therefore points to the limits of one’s epistemic resources (which are themselves ‘bounded’ by the ontoepistemology of the moral subject). The ethics of care, premised upon a situated epistemology, inherently understands such limitations, particularly as they apply to moral claims:

When I make a moral argument, I am making a claim to correctness; I am asserting that my moral statements are not arbitrary. This claim is rooted in the centrality of my moral beliefs to my status as a person: I am the kind of person I am because I have certain moral beliefs. Neither my subjectivity nor my morality is arbitrary; both are my way of being in the world. But they are not ‘correct’ in a universalist sense, because, quite obviously, other kinds of persons and other
kinds of moral beliefs exist in the world. My understanding of my own world, however, is substantially constituted by my necessary moral subjectivity; I cannot fully understand any other kind of world. (Hekman 1995, 129)

For the ethics of care, the inherent limitations involved in understanding the knowledge claims that constitute/arise in and through another world are foregrounded; as subjects of one world, we cannot ever fully understand a different world. At the same time, however, the ethics of care does not descend into moral relativism. Moral claims are not arbitrary, even when they cannot be made fully comprehensible across worlds. Instead, moral understandings are fundamental to the (re)production of worlds and ways of being and knowing. They may be plural, but they provide “standards of truth” (Hekman 1995, 139) within the worlds in which they are enacted and emerge. More to the point, “the justification of the moral understandings that are woven through a particular lifeway rests on the goods to be found in living it” (Walker 2007, 7).

For this reason, moral judgement across worlds, it is worth repeating, must attend as well as possible to understanding where certain moral values and claims come from, while acknowledging that comprehending these values and claims fully may not be possible. The ethics of care, with its relational social ontology and situated epistemology, thereby recasts moral deliberation as the difficult and messy task of attempting to decenter one’s own judgement (never fully possible) in an attempt to know the other (never fully possible) in an ongoing and iterative way. This understanding of morality, and the continual recognition of the vulnerability of all moral judgement, is amenable to building a pluriversal ethics, and to attending to the normative and moral tasks inherent in the pluriversal project. Indeed, given the deep and pervasive differences in the pluriverse, I believe that pluriversal moral deliberation could be no other way.
Lastly, as I have argued above, the pluriverse is constituted by an axiology of partial connections. While in the previous chapter I did not describe an ‘axiology’ for the ethics of care, I did discuss how the ethics of care is premised upon a normative valuation of care – that is, the maintenance and reparation of relations so as to live as well as reasonably possible given our vulnerable embodiment (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40). This ‘axiology of care’ serves as an “organizing trajectory around attentive/responsive living” (Hamington 2015b, 287). As emphasized in section 4.5, this ‘organizing trajectory’ is, to be sure, only thinly normative; how to be attentive and respond to a plurality of situated needs and heterogenous vulnerable moral selves cannot be predetermined or prescribed, only gleaned through tentative (and sometimes agonistic) practices of care which are continually assessed and revised. Nonetheless, what is of moral value from an ethics of care perspective is care,\(^\text{14}\) and the substance of moral practices is found in the ways in which we attempt, often through many iterations, to live well, to respond to needs, and to minimize harm and suffering.

This axiology of care, I suggest, aligns with, and perhaps even amends, the axiology of partial connections in the pluriverse. As I described it above, an axiology of partial connections in the pluriverse is a commitment to multiplying the partial connections between worlds. As I have also noted, these connections are not to be multiplied at all costs, however: some connections will be harmful and prevent certain

\(^{14}\text{As argued throughout this dissertation, and particularly in section 4.5 above, ‘care’ is not something that is uncritically valorized from an ethics of care perspective; rather, the meaning of ‘care’ is understood to be deeply political and competing versions of ‘care’ must be agonized in an ongoing way. This is, in part, why this normative orientation is thin; while ‘care’ is what is valued, the meaning of care is understood to be something that will differ across forms of moral life, and different forms of care must be scrutinized. For this reason, the ethics of care points to multiple forms of moral life, each constituted by its own version of care – a key care ethical task is to uncover these different caring voices, and the forces which suppress them, so as to reveal different possible moral worlds.\)}
worlds from flourishing. Or, to borrow from Blaser, there will be some worlds (and some connections between worlds) that are not worlds/do not manifest worlds and connections that we want to live in and with. The ethics of care, I suggest, thereby amends, or perhaps articulates more accurately, the pluriversal commitment to partial connections in a small but significant way. From an ethics of care perspective, a pluriversal ethics must be attuned not simply to ‘connections’ and relations more broadly, but rather, to *partial relations of care*, where care refers in the most general sense to a world’s ability to flourish as a world. Crucially, the ‘content’ of this care (i.e., what, exactly, a world needs to (re)produce and maintain itself as best as possible) is open for contestation. Debates and possibly conflicts will necessarily result as worlds require different – and sometimes directly competing – practices and resources in order to assert and maintain themselves as worlds. In fact, I suspect that ethical conflicts in the pluriverse will frequently take this form (as evidenced in my discussion in section 5.4 below); this is, in part, why I believe that we need an ethics for the pluriverse, and why I believe that conceiving of ‘connections’ as (the more precise) ‘relations of care’ articulates more fully the normative project of the pluriverse.

At the same time, while amending the word ‘connection’ to the more specific ‘relations of care’ provides a clearer articulation of the normative project of the pluriverse, maintaining the word ‘partial’ is equally important. Maintaining the term ‘partial’ emphasizes that valuing relations of care – while necessary if we are to enact a pluriverse in which multiple worlds can coexist, in which “the world is more than one socionatural formation” (de la Cadena 2010, 361) – does not mean building a common ‘care’ world. Practices of care are ‘partial’ in that they are not meant to homogenize or
totalize the worlds that comprise the pluriverse; they will be multiple, heterogeneous, and they will at times conflict and other times align. Care ethics, with its situated epistemology and relational ontology, foregrounds radical difference and the futility—and dangers—of attempting to homogenize this difference. Indeed, Carol Gilligan’s (1993) work, in which she hears the different ‘care’ voice, illustrates this forcefully. Defining the moral realm as constituted by only one moral voice “severely restricts the dimensions of moral discourse,” silencing the care voice (and others), and rendering the issues raised by other voices as outside the concerns of morality (Hekman 1995, 130).

For this reason, the ethics of care does not seek to homogenize or totalize the world into a singular care community.15 Rather, it is by engaging with difference (and importantly, engaging with difference in a non-hierarchical way) that different caring practices can be enacted, evaluated, and revised when necessary. It is by engaging with difference, and by understanding how different forms of moral life give rise to different values and ways of being, that conflicts between caring practices can be investigated, weighed, and amended if needed. The ethics of care sees difference as integral to a relational ontology (as opposed to something that must be overcome to live in relations together). As a result, attending to and deliberating on different forms of life, different moral voices, different practices, and different knowledge claims becomes the means by which we can reflect on whether or not the ways in which we organize and live our lives align with our stated values. Dwelling in difference becomes the means by which we can

15 It is also for this reason that the ethics of care differs from Isabelle Stenger’s cosmopolitical proposal, a commonly cited proposal in the pluriversal literature, which is oriented “towards the composition of the common world as the horizon to be pursued (even if never quite reached)” (Blaser 2018, 48). I expand on this point below.
work through ethical conflicts regarding how to live well, that is, how to care. For these many reasons, the ethics of care is well-situated to build a pluriversal ethics, where differences are deep and pervasive.

Finally, it is also by foregrounding difference that the ethics of care again reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the vulnerability of all moral judgement, and, in so doing, holds the moral judge accountable for the claims they make. Because care ethics conceives of morality as practices that unfold and enact forms of life, and moral knowledge as situated and emerging in/through such forms of life, “the impossibility of ‘purifying’ morality or moral knowledge or practical reason” (Walker 2007, 17) is accentuated. In asserting that all knowledge claims are vulnerable, as discussed in detail above, the care ethicist is always inherently responsible for the effects of their claims, for the world(s) their (vulnerable) ethical judgements enact:

In so far as any moral theorist articulates ethical prescriptions, he or she must take responsibility for also articulating the conditions within which those prescriptions are meaningful and therefore the kind of world[(s)] they imply. Acknowledging that judgement is a risky business, and being honest about its partiality, enables judgement to be oriented to the present and future rather than to preoccupation with its anterior conditions. The meaningfulness of moral judgement and prescription is not in the hands of the moral judge, but in the degree to which the judgment speaks to the experience of the audience to which the judgement is addressed. (Hutchings 2003, 131, emphasis added)

In short, an ethics of care for the pluriverse is not about constructing a single world structured by a singular set of caring practices. The ethics of care, as I see it, provides a reconceptualization of morality that is amenable to the pluriversal project as it foregrounds the moral salience of our everyday practices and relations of care that comprise our moral lives and moral selves, and that allow for the continuation and repair of worlds. The ethics of care provides important tools with which to think about how to
connect worlds via partial relations of care, and from which to deliberate on conflicts that emerge through these partial relations of care. And of equal significance, the ethics of care also holds the ethicist responsible for the connections they make (or do not make), and the worlds they enact (or do not enact). Vulnerable moral judgement, for the ethics of care, is a complicated business that we must always take responsibility for, but that we also cannot ultimately control. The actual effects of our moral philosophizing cannot be known in advance; the best we can do is return to our moral judgements and scrutinize them collectively time and time again.

For these reasons, the ethics of care, I believe, does not just provide us with tools for contemplating ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse; more fundamentally, it provides us with an orientation from which to build a pluriversal ethics. For the remainder of this chapter, I further develop my argument supporting this claim, and seek to demonstrate how the ethics of care can help us enhance partial relations of care – and attend to ethical conflicts between worlds in a way that likewise enhances partial relations of care – across worlds in the pluriversal matrix.

5.2 Care Ethics, Vulnerability, and Precarity: A Meta-Theoretical Orientation for the Pluriverse

One of the great challenges for thinking about ethics in the pluriverse is understanding the ways in which relations of power between worlds always-already shape ethical dilemmas across worlds in every way. What, exactly, counts as moral and ethical knowledge and practices; what differences are at play in a given interaction between worlds; how an ethical dilemma is framed, understood, or ignored; what resources are
available to moral agents and how these resources are unevenly distributed; and the consequences of various responses to ethical dilemmas are all deeply shaped by relations of power between worlds. Further, as scholars like Escobar (2016) and Blaser (2010, 102) note, power relations between worlds are not symmetrical; worlds must “strive to sustain their own existence in their interaction with other worlds” (Escobar 2016, 21) and relations of power will render such sustenance more difficult for some worlds than for others.

That is, while of course every interaction between/across worlds may mean that all worlds involved are susceptible to change due to the influence of another (or many others), asymmetrical relations of power better position some worlds to reproduce and sustain themselves as worlds. As argued in chapter two, the current configuration of the pluriversal matrix is shaped fundamentally by the hegemony of the modern world (Blaser 2013, 554), which sees itself as the one-world, and which, through colonial relations of power, is able to “convert Western realities into the reality and demote ‘other’ realities to differing representations of the world the colonisers have made” (Blaney and Tickner 2017b, 298-299, emphasis in original). The “(corpo)realization of modernity” and the subsequent invisibilization of other ways of being (the invisibilization of other worlds as worlds) narrows the space in which these other lives can unfold (Blaser 2010, 79). By corollary, the ways in which ethical dilemmas unfold across worlds is also narrowed, or perhaps more accurately, flattened; ethical dilemmas are often only deemed dilemmas from the ‘point of view’ of the hegemon, modernity. Modernity (and by this, I mean, the onto-epistemic framework of modernity) also often then dictates which moral responses are legitimate or possible. The ways in which ethical dilemmas may unfold in many
dimensions and directions, and involve actors and issues unknowable to the modern world, are obfuscated by the relations of power that allow modernity to claim the whole of the real.

As a result, if we are to build a pluriversal ethics, attention must be paid to the relations of power which configure the pluriverse, and that relegate certain worlds – and their moral knowledges, practices, and concerns – to the margins for two reasons. First, as the decolonial project underpinning the entire pluriversal scholarship foregrounds, the ethical question of why some worlds are rendered invisible as worlds, while other worlds (in this case, modernity) are taken as a given, is pressing. The pluriversal project, as articulated in section 5.1 above, involves normative questions regarding how worlds connect all the way down. Or to put it more simply, I believe that, from a pluriversal perspective, attentiveness to the ways in which certain worlds are disparaged emerges as a critical, pressing, and ongoing ethical concern. Second, as the ethics of care reminds us, moral deliberation can only begin by paying attention to the contexts in and through which ethical quandaries emerge. In the pluriverse, the relations between worlds form the very background conditions in and through which ethical issues arise, are attended to, or alternatively, are ignored. In order to understand ethical dilemmas across worlds, it is thus necessary to also understand the relations between the worlds involved, and to investigate critically how uneven relations of power are at play in constructing and responding to any given moral dilemma.

The purpose of this section is to develop a meta-theoretical orientation from which to analyze and explore the relations of power between worlds that always-already shape ethical conflicts in the pluriverse. Drawing upon the ethics of care, I argue that a
relational ontology inherently implies vulnerability. Given the relational ontology of the pluriverse, and of particular worlds in the pluriverse, I claim that, by extension, both the pluriversal matrix and the worlds therein are vulnerable. I then mobilize a conceptual distinction between vulnerability and precarity in order to highlight the processes and the material relations of power that shape the configuration of the pluriverse and render certain worlds or onto-epistemologies more vulnerable – that is, precarious – than others. This provides a useful framework for contemplating the pluriverse, because the ontological assumption of vulnerability allows us to focus on the simultaneous contingency of all worlds while also pointing to the possibility of new pluriversal configurations. At the same time, the lens of precarity attunes us to the ways in which material relations of power also affect the configuration of worlds, often with the effect of marginalizing certain worlds and stabilizing others. Together, these two lenses of vulnerability and precarity, I suggest, foreground the interplay between stability and instability that is central to the configuration of the pluriverse, and better orients a critical political ethics of care to understand the nature of the pluriverse and the ethical issues that arise as onto-epistemologies evolve and conflict.

**Relational Ontology and Vulnerability**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the relational social ontology of the ethics of care implies vulnerability. If moral selves are constituted in and through relations, then our very subjectivity is vulnerable and inextricably dependent on those relations. As Hekman (1995) makes clear, we are the product of relations; should those relations change, our vulnerable subjectivity would also change. There is not some transcendental self that can
traverse different relations and contexts; “individuals are no longer seen as atomistic units with a pre-determined identity, who meet each other in the public sphere to create social ties” (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 55). In contrast, the self emerges in and through relations and contexts, and is thus susceptible to changes in these relations and contexts. Our subjectivity is vulnerable in that it must constantly be (re)produced in and by the relations that constitute it. Moral subjectivity, from this vantage point, is vulnerable because the moral self is

a processual self, a self which is continually in the process of being formed; moral identity is continually being developed and revised through this process. The construing of moral identities is thus, in this sense, inherently a social practice, something which we do and make within human relations and within specific social and political contexts, and the narrative conventions reflected in these. (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 56)

A relational ontology, as espoused by the ethics of care, implies vulnerability in the sense that the moral subject is never complete or whole, but always a relational becoming.

At the same time, however, vulnerability, and particularly our corporeal vulnerability, also points to relationality. Our embodiment, and our embodied needs, mean that we are vulnerable. As Tiina Vaittinen (2015, 104) writes in her article in which she theorizes about the “body rather than the subject,” “corporeal vulnerability is part of our very embodiment.” We are finite beings, “a living organism that is internally and persistently vulnerable to life itself: to aging and decay and, ultimately, to death” (Vaittinen 2015, 104, emphasis in original). This vulnerability implies – or perhaps more accurately, demands – relatedness. “There are no autonomous subjects without needs, only degrees of embodied vulnerability that continue to elicit political relatedness” (Vaittinen 2015, 104). Relations, including political relations, arise from (or fail to arise from) and respond to (or fail to respond to) our vulnerable embodiment, that is, the fact
that bodies need care. In other words, just as relationality implies vulnerability, vulnerability necessarily implies relationality. The two are inextricably intertwined. Our lives are vulnerable and relational in terms of both our selfhood and our embodied being (which are themselves inextricably intertwined, as our vulnerable embodiment, and the relations that result from that, shape our vulnerable subjectivity, and vice versa).

As Estelle Ferrarese (2016a, 150) points out, however, “what is vulnerable is not only our lives [or our ‘selves’] but also our world and our links with others, which have to be repaired and supported continuously.” That is, if, as the pluriversal literature suggests, worlds are enacted and performed through practices and relations, then worlds themselves are vulnerable too. Practices, enacted by relational and vulnerable subjects, are processual; they are ongoing, shifting, and fluid. The worlds enacted by vulnerable subjects may shift as these subjects change; when worlds come to be enacted differently, vulnerable subjects of those worlds will likely also change. The relational ontology of worlds in the pluriverse means that worlds are also not transcendental or invincible. Worlds, as ongoing sets of practices and relations must be vulnerable too, as such relations and practices require either constant tending to, or at least always hold the possibility of being changed. Lastly, this same logic applies, then, to the structure of the pluriverse itself, and the connections between worlds. As Ferrarese (2016a) points out, links with others – to which I would add, links with other worlds – are also vulnerable and require continuous support and attention. Connections between worlds (like worlds themselves) are not monolithic or indestructible. They are shifting and vulnerable to be other than they are. Because of this, I suggest that the relational ontology of the

16 See footnote 24 in the introductory chapter.
pluriverse, and the relational ontology of the worlds that comprise the pluriverse, also inherently implies that the pluriverse, and the multiple worlds therein, are vulnerable.

But what of the political? Can vulnerability serve as a fruitful concept for contemplating the political? And if not, is it useful for the pluriverse, which, I have argued throughout this dissertation, operates at the level of the political? While I attend more fully to rethinking ‘the political’ below, I believe that the relationship between vulnerability and the political merits some attention here. For, as Ferrarese (2016a, 152) points out, “the political scope of vulnerability is almost unanimously denied; [...] vulnerability seems inevitably to be relegated to the sphere of ‘good sentiments’”, and therefore cannot be ascribed any real political role.

More specifically, Ferrarese (2016a) reviews several reasons as to why vulnerability often appears to fail to provide a useful vantage point from which to think about the political. First, she notes that some scholars see vulnerability as a private and individual concern that does not merit political deliberation in the public sphere (Ferrarese 2016a, 152). Second, and relatedly, it is argued that vulnerability is incompatible with the political grammars that comprise the political sphere as we know it today (Ferrarese 2016a, 156). Third, Ferrarese notes that there appears to be a tension in asserting a ‘vulnerable political subject,’ as vulnerability implies powerlessness (2016a, 157-158). And finally, vulnerability is associated with the body, which is deemed unworthy of consideration as a political object (Ferrarese 2016a, 152). At the heart of this critique is the notion that our vulnerable embodiment is an obstacle to freedom (a finiteness that cannot be overcome), and the reality that there is a “repetition that characterizes the needs of the vulnerable body” (Ferrarese 2016a, 152). Such repetition is
again antithetical to the political, as the political is concerned with initiating something new, i.e., a moment of instantiation of something that had not existed before, an unexpected beginning or new socio-symbolic order. The body, in many ways, has consistent needs that, at base, vary little through time-space (thereby evading political change), and that cannot be overcome (thereby impeding freedom).

The first of these two critiques are easily addressed. As outlined in great detail in the previous chapter, conceiving of vulnerability (and need and care) as a private concern, or as incompatible with our political discourse, only makes sense if a series of related binaries hold: a distinction between public/private, morality/ethics, and so on. It is only within such moral boundaries, as Joan Tronto (1993) calls them, that vulnerability, need, and care can be relegated to the private sphere, or deemed outside the scope of the political. Further, by beginning with relationality, vulnerability, and care, the ethics of care highlights the detrimental effects of these boundaries and shows how whole sections of common life are systematically ignored and denigrated in political discourse and life as a result (Laugier 2016, 216). In pointing this out, the ethics of care, and vulnerability, “implies the invention of new categories, and a new way of doing politics” and in this way, “the discourse of vulnerability has already shown itself to be fully political” (Ferrarese 2016a, 157).

The third concern, which relates to the idea that vulnerability implies powerlessness, has also been addressed in this dissertation already (see, in particular, section 4.4). As Vaittinen (2015) argues, vulnerable bodies are powerful, and exert great political pressure on the state, in that they demand that their bodily needs be met. For example, as outlined in detail in sections 4.4 and 4.5 above, the power of the vulnerable
body is so great that it confronts and resists the logic of control and mastery that is so fundamental to modern capitalism. In so doing, vulnerable bodies point to the limits of the modern order, and point to the possibility of a political moment in which the dominant order is ruptured by that which it cannot totalize or overcome: our corporeal vulnerability and caring needs.

Similarly, when starting with a relational ontology, it is clear that vulnerability does not prevent autonomy; instead, autonomy – the ability to act, to say and do, to exert power – only comes in and through our relations of dependency (Clement 1996). Judith Butler (1997, 2) refers to this as an ‘enabling vulnerability,’ in which we come to be in and through our dependencies on others and the ways in which they address our needs. Vulnerability, and the ‘supports’ it demands (Castel 2016, 165), are empowering. Lastly, in understanding that all subjects are vulnerable (or, as I argue below, all worlds are vulnerable), “it is worth insisting not only on the fact that exposure to another’s power does not signify one’s own powerlessness, but also on the idea that a large part of our capacities are deployed against, or set out from, a vulnerability” (Ferrarese 2016a, 158, emphasis in original). That is, our own vulnerabilities (and the vulnerabilities of those that we are in relations with) motivate us to act as political subjects. The political subject cannot be anything other than vulnerable, and conceiving of worlds as vulnerable does not void them of power.

The final critique noted by Ferrarese (2016a) pertains to the vulnerable body and its repetitive needs that cannot be overcome. These repetitive and constant needs that cannot be conquered seem to be at fundamental odds with the political moment, which
suggests newness and a different socio-symbolic order. How can a socio-symbolic order radically change if always tethered to a constant fragile body? Once again, I suggest – and this follows Ferrarese (2016a) – that this framing of the relationship between vulnerability and the political only makes sense if certain binaries are upheld. In particular, locating the vulnerable body outside the political requires a distinction between the social world (the socio-symbolic), which is seen as susceptible to change, and nature, which is conceived of as timeless (unable to be overcome or altered). As a political theory which rejects such boundaries, the ethics of care and its emphasis on vulnerability insists that

the task of theories of vulnerability is to recall the inseparability of the two levels [the socio-symbolic and nature]. It is worth dwelling on the fact that it is the nature-social circle, and the impossibility of opening it, which makes it possible to grasp the stakes of vulnerability. Nature and society can no longer constitute explanatory terms, but instead presume a conjoint explanation each time anew. It is just as necessary to shed light on what the perpetual erection and shoring up of that boundary enables, forgets and dissimulates, as it is to perform a displacement. Social world and ontological vulnerability must be thought of conjointly in order to show how they engender and co-produce each other. (Ferrarese 2016a, 154)

Put differently, vulnerability requires us to hold on to the inseparability of the socio-symbolic order and nature; the ways in which embodied and organic vulnerabilities are understood, distributed, dialogued, addressed, and therefore experienced, cannot be separated from the socio-symbolic order in which they exist and unfold. Likewise, socio-symbolic orders have always-already been established in intimate relation to vulnerabilities and nature. The question of knowing how to live – including how to live in and with vulnerabilities, which cannot be escaped – “cannot be addressed without taking

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17 I also use vulnerability and care to problematize the idea that the political is only to do with change and newness in the pluriverse in the next section. These points lay some theoretical groundwork for that argument.
into account the fact that any social formation always has already responded to it, whether implicitly or explicitly, and its response is embedded in an extremely material and concrete reality” (Ferrarese 2016b, 236). A particular distribution of care, a specific “taking charge of vulnerabilities” (or not taking charge of vulnerabilities), is always the result of a socio-symbolic order and social-political relations of power (Ferrarese 2016b, 237). A focus on vulnerability implores us to (re)engage with questions regarding the efficacy of how such socio-symbolic orders respond to and address vulnerabilities (Ferrarese 2016b, 238); such questions will also involve exploring and perhaps rethinking what it is to be vulnerable in the first place.

In this way, a focus on vulnerability as political also adds to the literature on ‘the political,’ which tends to privilege the discursive and socio-symbolic above Nature. In so doing, this literature also implicitly upholds an ontological split between Human/Nature which, as chapter two argues, is key to the modern world and which has proven so problematic for contemplating the pluriverse and ontological difference. By contrast, in starting with relationality and vulnerability, the ethics of care recasts the political so as to foreground the inseparability of our finite and material being (Nature) and the ways in which we socially come to understand and meet our collective needs (Social). More simply, the ethics of care locates understanding the ways in which “our constitutive vulnerability materializes in differentiated vulnerable states” (Ferrarese 2016a, 153) through a complex interplay between Nature and the Social as a task of great political import, one which can point to the limitations of existing socio-symbolic orders and possibilities for new ones. Thinking about vulnerable worlds in the context of the pluriverse is therefore useful because it captures the relationality between worlds and the
fluidity (vulnerability) of worldings, and because vulnerability allows us to see how the political in the context of the pluriverse – that is, the establishment of a world or onto-epistemology – is not simply the establishment of a socio-symbolic order; Nature is always-already implicated too.

**Precarity**

The concept of precarity has also gained currency in the last decade.\(^{18}\) Coming from the Latin root *prex* or *precis*, meaning ‘to pray or to plead’ (Casas-Cortés 2014, 207), it has been used in a growing literature on precarious labour and work to mean “insecure, dependent on the favour of another, unstable, exposed to danger; with uncertain tenure” (Breman 2013, 134), particularly in relation to recent changes in the economic relations of production (see, for example, Fudge and Owens 2006; Kalleberg 2009; Vosko 2006). Kathleen Millar (2017) describes two main trends in this literature: first, drawing particularly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1998), Millar discusses precarity as a labour condition (insecure, un-regulated, flexible, and low-paying), and second, drawing upon the work of Guy Standing (2011), Millar points to the related literature which views precarity as a class category (the precariat). These two literatures, while differing in the object of analysis (the labour activity or the labouring subject), both focus on the particular characteristics of labour under neoliberal capitalism. For instance, Standing (2011) emphasizes that the contingency of work and employment in the current neoliberal order has created a new class, ‘the precariat.’ The precariat is, according to

\(^{18}\) It is beyond the breadth of this dissertation to give a complete genealogy of the term precarity; instead, I focus on two broad themes in the precarity literature, as outlined below. For a more detailed overview of the concept, see Ronaldo Munck (2013).
Standing, largely feminized and racialized, comprised in particular of migrants, and “can be defined in three dimensions: distinctive relations of production (patterns of labor and work), distinctive relations of distribution (sources of social income), and distinctive relations to the state (loss of citizenship rights)” (Standing 2018, 4-5). The insecure and fluid nature of work for the precariat means that those in this ‘class in the making’ are left with “a feeling of being in a diffuse, unstable international community of people struggling usually in vain to give their working lives an occupational identity” (Standing 2011, 23).

As Millar notes (2017, 3), however, several scholars have criticized this class and labour centric approach to precarity. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008, 54), for instance, argue that precarity only “appears as an irregular phenomenon,” apparently unique to this historical neoliberal moment, when set against a particular Western norm of a robust welfare state and strong citizen rights – a norm that is tied to the valorization of waged work as a social and ethical good. In this way, as Franco Barchiesi (2012a; 2012b) argues, precarity fails to problematize the centrality of work in our neoliberal order; discussions of the ‘new’ precarity of labour relations (re)produce a nostalgia for a better time, when labour relations were (apparently) ‘secure’ and ‘stable.’ Further, as scholars like Ben Scully (2016) and Ronaldo Munck (2013) highlight, such a narrative is decidedly Westerncentric. On the one hand, conceiving of ‘stable’ wage labour as the norm against which precarious work is measured fails to engage meaningfully with the ways in which the forceful imposition of the capitalist system (and therefore, so called ‘decent work’) on other ways of being through colonial and imperial expansion was, in no way, ‘decent’ to those that were colonized. As Munck (2013, 758) succinctly writes,
“there was nothing liberatory about being torn from traditional communal modes of production to become a ‘wage slave’.”

On the other hand, casting precarity as negative simultaneously masks the ways in which precarious work has allowed certain people, particularly in the Global South, to continue to resist or evade full capture by capitalism.19 For instance, in an ethnographic study of catadores, those who collect and sell recyclables from a dump in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Millar (2014, 34) demonstrates that “paradoxically, the deeply painful and precarious work that catadores continually return to on the dump enable them to contend with insecurities in other dimensions of their lives.” Without romanticizing the very challenging work of scavenging these landscapes, Millar demonstrates that the precarity of this very work provides a relational autonomy for these workers. The flexibility of this work gives these workers control over their schedule, allows them to meet important caring and community needs, manage everyday emergencies, and “pursue life projects amidst these disruptions” (Millar 2014, 46). Many other ethnographies tell similar stories from other parts of the Global South, including Africa (Barchiesi 2012a), China (Zhan and Huang 2012) and Guatemala (Goldín 2011). Standing’s articulation of precarity fails to attend to the ways in which precarity, from these vantage points, also offers and maintains a challenge to capitalist hegemony (in no small part, by reminding us that subsumption into the wage relation is not necessarily desirable).

It is also notable that Standing’s (2011) schematic maintains a distinction between

19 It is for this reason that Simon During (2015, 20) suggests that precarity can also be thought of as work which “serves the interest of ethical orientations that cannot be smoothly aligned to the instrumental values that have come to reign over global capitalism. The arts and the humanities figure largely among these”, as the aesthetic nature of these areas cannot be fully captured for instrumental profit gain.
work and labour, where work can be thought of as social reproduction, and labour is work that is done for wages; in so doing, Standing aims to demonstrate how the precariat class must spend many hours doing work in order to labour:

As welfare systems are restructured in ways that force claimants to go through ever more complex procedures to gain and to retain entitlement to modest benefits, the demands on the time of the precariat are large and fraught with tension. Queuing, commuting to queue, form filling, answering questions, answering more questions, obtaining certificates to prove something or other, all these are painfully time consuming yet are usually ignored. A flexible labour market that makes labour mobility the mainstream way of life, and that creates a web of moral and immoral hazards in the flurry of rules to determine benefit entitlement, forces the precariat into using time in ways that are bound to leave people enervated and less able to undertake other activities. (2011, 207)

However, these hours of work spent to undertake labour only appear as a ‘new’ phenomenon when the gendered division of labour is ignored. As feminist political economists have long pointed out, ‘productive’ labour is only made possible by continual (and most often invisibilized) socially reproductive labour, largely done by women in the household (see, for example, Federici 2012; Hennessy and Ingraham 1997; James 2012). Hours of work to prepare for labour is not a new feature of precarity, but rather a key element of the functioning of the capitalist system. In this way, Standing’s work also fails to engage meaningfully with feminist insights regarding labour relations more broadly.

Given these critiques, I believe it is fair to assert that in the literature focusing on the precariat, precarity as a concept does little to challenge the centrality of labour already constitutive of capitalism, including in its neoliberal manifestation. This concept of precarity also fails to challenge patriarchal and colonial systems of oppression, and the ways in which these systems interact with capitalism. Instead, this literature tends to reproduce uncritically masculinist and Western norms and understandings of capitalism and work. For this reason, I contend that the concept of precariousness in these literatures
can be thought of as pertaining to politics – that which is already incorporated in the existing social order – and provides little inspiration for thinking through the political, the negative effects of the current social order, and the possible social orders that are yet to be.

In contrast to these understandings of precarity, Millar (2017, 4) also identifies a third literature which focuses on precarity as an ontological experience. While the word ‘precarity’ does not appear in her collection of essays, this literature is most often traced back to Butler’s book *Precarious Life* (2004). As Millar argues, this book, and the growing research that has picked up on the idea of ‘precarious lives,’ mobilize precarity as a term to capture the inherent vulnerability of our being that stems from a relational social ontology. In starting with the notion that humans are fundamentally constituted through relations, this concept of precarity foregrounds interdependency and the vulnerability that arises through our exposure to the other (Han 2018, 337). This notion of precarity operates at the level of the political because it is concerned with the ways in which certain socio-political orders create the conditions of different experiences of precarity. Butler writes:

> [Precarity] describes a few different conditions that pertain to living beings. Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed. As a result, social and political institutions are designed in part to minimize conditions of precarity, especially within the nation-state, [...]. Political orders, including economic and social institutions are to some extent designed to address those very needs, not only to make sure that housing and food are available, but that populations have the means available by which life can be secured. And yet, “precarity” designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. [...] Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized

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20 Notably, Butler does employ these terms in subsequent related work (see, for example, Butler 2009; 2011; 2016; Butler and Athanasiou 2013).
vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection. (2009, ii)

Precarity, according to Butler, is so intimately shaped by a given social order that it is always-already operating at the level of the political. In this way, I suggest that the notion of precarious life à la Butler parallels the social ontological assumption underpinning the ethics of care. Constituted in and by our relations, we are all mutually vulnerable. As discussed above, this vulnerability cannot be conceived of as only pertaining to the ‘natural’ world and therefore outside the scope of the political. Instead, vulnerability/precarity is an analytically useful concept because of the ways in which basic vulnerability shapes an existing order (given that social organization is, at base, created to respond to needs). At the same time, that order likewise shapes the experience of our particular vulnerabilities and distributes vulnerabilities in different ways by determining caring arrangements and responding to certain vulnerabilities (and vulnerable bodies) while neglecting others.

**From Vulnerability to Precarity**

While the emphasis on mutual vulnerability in the ethics of care literature, or ontological precarity in the ‘precarious lives’ literature, operates at the level of the political – and as I show below, can therefore be usefully applied to the context of the pluriverse – some scholars note that this emphasis can lead to some conceptual muddiness. Kelly Oliver (2015), for example, argues that conceiving of ethics as premised on shared vulnerability is limited because it does not provide us with much guidance on how to recognize and foreground the ways in which social and political conditions and relations of power
render some more vulnerable than others. Put differently, in the ontological claim that all subjects are vulnerable, it can become easy to conflate this basic ontological premise with the ways in which the uneven distribution of material relations of power shapes lived experiences of vulnerability. Similarly, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2005) criticize Butler’s discussion of precarious life (2004) for failing to provide tools to analyze the uneven distribution of basic (ontological) human vulnerability. Speaking only of vulnerability (or precarity) can make it challenging to interrogate how “our constitutive vulnerability materializes in differentiated vulnerable states” (Ferrarese 2016a, 153).

To help overcome this limitation, and to provide greater conceptual clarity, I wish to put forth a conceptual distinction between vulnerability and precarity, whereby precarity is intensified vulnerability resulting from unequal distributions of power that render certain subjects more vulnerable than others. In this way, vulnerability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for precarity.

This distinction, I suggest, is particularly useful in the context of the pluriverse, where we are faced with the significant task of understanding how and why certain worlds or onto-epistemologies are marginalized. It is here that I think the ethics of care, when combined with the distinction between vulnerability and precariousness, can make a contribution toward building a meta-theoretical orientation for contemplating ethical issues in the pluriverse. As care ethics emphasizes, all subjects are vulnerable. I believe that this ontological claim, as suggested previously, can be applied to worlds more broadly, given that worlds are themselves constituted by relations and enacted by

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21 Some scholars employ a distinction between precarity and precariousness (see, for example, Butler 2011; Feder Kittay 2018); here I am using these terms interchangeably.
relational practices, and given the relationality between worlds. More simply, as argued above, the pluriverse is characterized by a relational ontology; as I argue above, a relational ontology necessarily implies an ontological vulnerability. Worlds are vulnerable in that they must be (re)produced; changes in the relations and practices that (re)produce a world will change that world, and such changes may be the consequence of internal dynamics (as worlds ‘evolve’) or external dynamics (interactions with other worlds). By foregrounding that relationality necessarily implies vulnerability, the ethics of care highlights the mutual vulnerability of all worlds.

By extension, the ethics of care also reminds us that the hierarchy of worlds (that is, the pluriverse) is contingent. The relations between worlds are necessarily unstable, open to change, and vulnerable. Of particular import for this dissertation, in emphasizing the contingency of the pluriversal hierarchy, a care ethics lens also opens space for a critique of the current configuration of the pluriversal matrix: If all worlds are inherently vulnerable, why do we give credence to some and not others? Why are certain onto-epistemologies relegated to the margins of the global political economy, currently dominated by modernity?

Although this opening is an important first step, I contend that we also need a lens of precarity\(^{22}\) to then answer these questions, and to investigate the practices and relations of power that render certain worlds more vulnerable – and hence, precarious – than others.

Therefore, the distinction I put forth here between vulnerability and precarity is

\(^{22}\)Again, precarity here is now meant to denote ‘intensified’ or increased vulnerability, or the specifically unequal distribution of vulnerability.
meant to bolster both the literatures on the pluriverse and the ethics of care in a mutually supporting way. If the ethics of care is to serve as a truly global political ethic, it must contend with the political landscape that is the pluriverse, a landscape where differences are deep and pervasive, i.e., operate at the onto-epistemological level. The distinction between vulnerable and precarious worlds helps with this task and facilitates a more robust political ethics of care by focusing on the ways in which vulnerabilities – and relations of power shaping (or, more acutely, intensifying) these vulnerabilities into precarity – operate at the onto-epistemological level in the political landscape that is the pluriverse. The uneven distribution of vulnerability – that is, the differentiated precariousness of various worlds – is the ever-present backdrop against which ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse unfold. As a potential ethics for the pluriverse, the ethics of care must therefore contemplate this backdrop. The ethics of care understands the importance of context in all ethical deliberation; the notion of vulnerable and precarious worlds is an analytical tool for contemplating the pluriversal context. At the same time, conceiving of the pluriversal landscape as one of vulnerability and precarity demonstrates how the ethics of care provides important ways to think about relations of power in the pluriverse, and therefore contributes to the pluriversal literature. The next section turns to a more robust discussion of what I mean by precarity and demonstrates the analytical usefulness of this meta-theoretical ethical orientation for the pluriverse.

**Expanding Precarity through the Pluriverse**

Even though Standing’s (2014) conceptualization of precarity focuses on wage labour – and thereby offers us a criticism of ‘politics’ instead of a site of ‘the political,’ as argued
above – I suggest that his articulation of three dimensions of precarious work nonetheless provides a fruitful starting point to think about the configuration of the pluriverse given its materialist focus on the relation between precarity and the means of production. First, Standing argues that precarity is marked by particular relations of production (2014, 969). Those involved in precarious work experience a condition of insecure labour, are ‘in and out’ of jobs, and must continually contend with a sense of insecurity. Second, precarity is marked by distinctive relations of distribution. The flexibility of the wage in precarious work, and the instability of economic resources, “means that [members of the precariat] have chronic income insecurity, experiencing volatile earnings and chronic economic uncertainty” (2014, 970). Finally, for Standing, precarity also involves particular relations to the state, characterized by a lack of citizen rights (2014, 971), including the right to a secure economic, social, cultural, political, and civil existence.

These three dimensions of precarious labour, I suggest, can be usefully applied to the pluriverse as they point to a broader understanding of precarity when reconsidered at the level of onto-epistemologies. That is, if we rethink this articulation of precarity at the level of being-in-the-world (as opposed to focusing on labour relations alone), we can see that a precarious existence is characterized by unstable subjectivities, unequal and insecure material well-being, and denigrated political potentiality.

My decision to draw upon Standing’s notion of precarity – despite the aforementioned critiques of his concept as engaging only with ‘politics’ – is therefore purposeful. Precarity, as developed here, is meant to capture the ways in which certain worlds are rendered more vulnerable than others in the global political economy. Thus, on the one hand, this analysis operates at the level of ontology and the enactment of
worlds. On the other hand, this analysis also operates at the level of the global political economy, as it is concerned with the ways in which material and ideational relations of power shape the configuration of worlds in the pluriverse. Retaining Standing’s (2014) understanding of precarity, rooted in material relations of work, while rethinking it at a more fundamental ontological level, is amenable to both of these tasks: this expanded understanding of precarity captures the relationship “between precarity as a socio-economic condition and precarity as an ontological experience” (Millar 2014, 35; see also Millar 2017). That is, the understanding of precarity developed and mobilized here is meant to link the study of the global political economy with questions of subjectivity, existence, and experience.

This linkage also amends Standing’s work such that it no longer contributes to the invisibilization of social reproduction and the gendered relations which constitute the global political economy. Rethinking precarity at the onto-epistemological level emphasizes that “production and reproduction are so interwoven that it is no longer possible to speak just about precarious labour, but rather precarious life” (Casas-Cortés 2014, 220, emphasis in original). Reconceptualizing Standing’s precarity in this way is thus significant because it also moves this concept from the realm of ‘politics’ to ‘the political.’ The concept of precarity is untethered from a nostalgic notion of labour relations that upholds and reproduces the centrality of masculinist labour in the neoliberal socio-symbolic order, and instead is reoriented towards interrogating the relations of power that position worlds in hierarchical relations in the pluriverse. This reorientation thereby locates precarity as a tool to critique the political order, as opposed to a tool that serves to reform a particular given order.
To demonstrate this more fully, consider Standing’s first dimension, the precariousness of relations of production. If we begin with the concept of ontoepistemologies, I argue that the idea of precarious relations of production, as described by Standing, can be expanded to include not just the relations of material production, but rather the relations through which worlds are produced. Certain worlds face greater instability than others. The existence of these worlds relies upon practices that are marginalized by relations of power and knowledge that legitimize some acts and relations while rendering others ‘outside’ what is acceptable or reasonable politically (Blaser 2016). For instance, as Cristina Rojas (2016) illustrates, the division between the modern and non-modern renders some things thinkable and others unthinkable (that a river could be living kin, or that a mountain could have subjectivity, for instance). The relations of power which shape the modern/non-modern binary create limits to what is considered valid, to which practices and ways of being are legitimate. These limits point to the precariousness of the production of (certain) worlds.

The idea of precarious relations of distribution can similarly be expanded to refer to the uneven distribution of resources across worlds. This includes material resources, which, due to colonialism, primitive accumulation (see, for example, Federici 2004), and on-going dispossession of land have been unevenly and violently redistributed across worlds. Importantly, however, from a pluriversal perspective, the relations of distribution must also refer to the distribution of more intangible resources, like political power, and the dignity of having one’s epistemic and ontological stance seen as valid. In other words, political potentiality is also unevenly distributed across worlds, as some worlds are able to mark the boundaries of ‘legitimate’ politics (that is, reflect and (re)produce a given
Finally, precarious relations to the state, when confined to a discussion of precarious labour, are linked to the Western idea that citizenship, and citizen rights, should be (or indeed are) linked primarily to employment and market relations. Social safety nets, membership in political collectivities, and access to political and economic rights are deeply tied to employment status and participation in the labour market in a variety of ways (Esping-Andersen 1985). However, if we begin with the idea of onto-epistemologies (as opposed to labour), we can move to a broader analysis of the ways in which citizen rights, and the relation between people and the state, are shaped far beyond the relations of production. Rather, members of certain groups are denied rights simply because of their onto-epistemological status.  

To help illustrate this broadened notion of precariousness, consider the example of the Whanganui river introduced previously. Using the lens of precarious onto-epistemologies, the three dimensions of precariousness just discussed can be located in the Māori’s struggle to protect Whanganui. First, throughout the struggle to gain meaningful recognition of the river Whanganui as still-living kin, the Māori’s world experienced precarity in terms of the relations of production necessary to produce their world. The river, as co-constitutive of the human community, is necessary for the

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23 When I use words like ‘citizen,’ ‘rights,’ and even the ‘state,’ I am not attempting to assert that other worlds would also use these words or concepts to articulate their desired forms of social and political organizing. For instance, certain worlds may not have a conceptualization of the state or may reject the state as the ideal form of social and political structuring all together. Similarly, when I say members of certain worlds are denied rights, I am not asserting that they necessarily want rights in the thick, liberal sense. Rather, I am using these words – constitutive of my (modern) world – as empty signifiers, meant to indicate, albeit imperfectly, whatever conceptualization of the good life is inherent to different onto-epistemologies. As noted in section 1.4, this imperfect use of words reflects the fact that I am, to some extent, bounded by the limits of the discourse of my own world, and acknowledges that translation between worlds can never overcome equivocation (see, for example, de la Cadena 2015; Strathern 2004).
(re)production and resilience of the Māori’s world. Without protection for Whanganui, the relations of production necessary to (re)produce their world were rendered precarious; indeed, preventing harm to Whanganui was the Māori’s motivation for initiating and sustaining a 140-year struggle with the New Zealand state. The Māori’s world also faced precariousness vis-à-vis the relations of distribution, as their relation to Whanganui was not validated by the logic of modernity or the government constituted by this logic. The distribution of who (and what) was seen as a legitimate political agent and issue was uneven, such that the Māori’s world faced instability as a valid political standpoint. In other words, the distribution of authority across these two worlds was uneven, with the Māori’s onto-epistemology receiving ‘less’ legitimacy as a world within the pluriversal matrix, currently dominated by modernity. Finally, the Māori’s world was also characterized by a precarious relation to the state. For the Māori, Whanganui is an ancestor and still-living kin, and the state’s 140-year long refusal to acknowledge this further marginalized the Māori’s world by denying certain agents (like Whanganui) the rights that the Māori onto-epistemology deems appropriate.

Putting the Pieces Together: Vulnerable Relations and the Power of Precarity

24 To reiterate, what is of significance for this example is that the Māori world requires certain relations for it to be (re)enacted through time-space. Their world is constituted by/with their relationship with Whanganui. It is the very fact that the relationship is threatened (i.e., Whanganui was not protected, and so the relationship was rendered precarious), and, equally importantly, that the terms of the relationship (i.e., whether or not Whanganui is acknowledged as living kin, as opposed to property) are reframed by another world, that is of moral salience. To frame the conflict as a problem because threatening Whanganui means that a certain practice, ceremony, or tradition cannot be conducted would reduce the significance of this relationality, and is too instrumental of a reading of the ways in which worlds are practiced, enacted and (re)produced.

25 In particular, the relationship is either ignored all together (and Whanganui is framed as property, as opposed to still-living kin), or it is reduced to a ‘belief’ or ‘tradition,’ as opposed to given ontological weight as an actually existing part of the Māori world.
Thus far, this section has made several conceptual moves. First, drawing upon the ethics of care, I asserted that worlds, or onto-epistemologies, are vulnerable. This is an ontological claim about the nature of the worlds that comprise the pluriverse, stemming from their relationality. Second, I then developed a distinction between this understanding of vulnerability – as a basic ontological premise – and precarity, which, I suggest, can be understood in the context of the pluriverse as intensified vulnerability. More specifically, precarity refers to the ways in which the (re)production of certain worlds is rendered more insecure and unstable as a result of the uneven distribution of material and ideational power in the global political economy, currently dominated by modernity. Together, this framework, as I now show, opens up analytical space for the study of the pluriverse and the relations between worlds. In particular, I suggest that this framework allows for a more robust analysis of the simultaneous stability and instability of the relations between worlds and the unknowable potentiality of the relations that comprise the pluriverse.

First, the assertion that all onto-epistemologies are vulnerable emphasizes that the pluriverse is not a static assemblage; rather, worlds co-constitute each other, albeit in complex ways, and this contentious, unequal, and fluid entwinement means that worlds are always susceptible to change. The assertion that all worlds are vulnerable highlights the relatedness of these worlds, and the ways in which worlds are performative and require on-going processes of legitimation and enactment. Second, the idea of precarious onto-epistemologies then allows us to foreground the dynamics that affect the enactment of worlds and to pay closer attention to the relations of power that allow certain worlds to be enacted more easily than others.
For example, Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) demonstrates how the onto-epistemology of which the sovereign state is a central figure (what I have here called modernity) is built on the back of ‘the prior,’ the worlds of the indigenous as filtered through the modern lens. As Povinelli explains, the prior, as an onto-epistemology, only comes into being when the modern onto-epistemology comes into being. Indigeneity and the sovereign state – and the worlds of which these concepts are a part – were (re)constructed together. The modern (and its corresponding system of governance) could only be delineated by simultaneously marking the ‘pre-modern’ or prior; these onto-epistemologies – the binary of the modern and pre-modern – only make sense relationally. If there was no pre-modern, there could be no modern, and vice versa. At the same time, however, this process of mutual construction was not equal or symmetrical; the prior (as in, pre-modern) was constructed so as to be governed by the modern (Povinelli 2011, 24).

Povinelli’s discussion here points to a significant analytical challenge related to the study of the pluriverse and the relations between worlds: How do we explain and understand “the persistence of the occupying ontologies” (Escobar 2016, 21) without treating this persistence as given? How do we understand the current configuration of onto-epistemologies without reifying this configuration? It is here that I think the concepts of vulnerable worlds and precarious worlds can make a further contribution. The ontological claim that all worlds are vulnerable reminds us that even seemingly ‘stable’ worlds are dependent and insecure, and that a reconfiguration of the political is always-already possible; in other words, the very concept of vulnerable worlds renders current configurations of power ‘unstable.’ The precarity lens developed here extends this by further foregrounding the reality that the precarity of subverted worlds is directly
linked to the stability of the occupying worlds, therefore pointing to the precarity (or at least, vulnerability) of the occupying worlds as well. The precarity of one world, due to the mutual dependency and vulnerability of all worlds, always renders other worlds, including the dominant world, as at least always-already potentially precarious as well. The idea of precarious onto-epistemologies allows us to focus on the ways in which unevenly distributed material and ideational relations of power render certain worlds precarious, while also locating power in that very precarity.

Returning once again to the example of the Māori and their struggle to protect the river Whanganui, one can see the power of precarity at work. As the previous section demonstrated, the configuration of the pluriverse, dominated by modernity, involved a distribution of power which rendered the Māori’s world precarious. At the same time, however, the precarity of the Māori’s world rendered the modern world of the New Zealand state precarious, thereby illuminating the mutual vulnerability of the two worlds. Although in this example the Māori world faced (and perhaps continues to face) a more onerous struggle for legitimacy than the modern world, modernity was (and continues to be) fundamentally challenged by the existence of the Māori world. A focus on precarious onto-epistemologies not only helps uncover the particularities of the ways in which certain worlds are marginalized in the current order, but also keeps the relationality between onto-epistemologies at the fore of our analyses.

In other words, precarity, as developed here, highlights those worlds at the margins of the global political economy, specifically those which have been colonized, excluded, purposefully re-shaped, devalued, and even erased, while also equally emphasizing that even apparently ‘stable’ or ‘hegemonic’ worlds are vulnerable and
unstable, dependent upon marginalized worlds, and susceptible to falling precarious themselves. This second point is important, for just as Vaittinen (2015) has located political power in vulnerable bodies which exert pressure on the state, a focus on the precarity of worlds also locates power in precarity: those worlds which are precarious, and therefore to some extent, not subsumed wholly by the dominant onto-epistemology, wield a particular type of power, one which, in demonstrating the limits of the dominant or occupying world, can pose a challenge to the logic of said world (and a challenge to the hierarchy which upholds the dominant world in the pluriversal matrix).

It is because of this understanding of precarity – as both intensified vulnerability and a source of power – that this framework avoids uncritically reproducing Western norms. Ritu Vij (2019), for instance, argues that Butler’s work on ontological precariousness upholds a liberal subject as the norm. Asking “by what measure do we apprehend equality in shared vulnerability and the unequal distribution of precarity?,” Vij (2019, 516) argues that Butler’s account maintains an “unwitting (default) attachment to a liberal analytic” (2019, 517) because the liberal subject is “taken to be the unexamined norm against which vulnerability is measured” (2019 517, emphasis in original) in Butler’s tracking of precaritization.26 As Vij argues, when the liberal subject is upheld as the norm, then there will be a tendency to measure precarity according to such norms, and as a result, those in the Global South, and particularly those “living within alternative ontological landscapes” (2019, 517), will most frequently be seen as precarious and abject.

26 Vij in particular draws upon examples from Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) that focus on things like unemployment and health insurance, which, as Vij points out, are seen as precarious in relation to particular liberal norms.
However, the notion of precarity developed here does not see precarity as unidirectionally intensified vulnerability, where some worlds are rendered powerless and undignified, while other worlds are powerful and invincible. Neither is vulnerability itself seen as something that is ‘bad.’ Instead, vulnerability, as an ontological claim that applies to all worlds (and subjects) is the condition of possibility for ‘alternative ontological landscapes;’ it is only through vulnerable relations that different selves and worlds emerge. At the same time, vulnerability then also implies a riskiness; some worlds may not be able to (re)produce due to the relations in which they unfold. But these two sides of vulnerability – as condition of possibility for being and as ‘threat’ to being – cannot be separated. For instance, concepts like resiliency only make sense in relation to vulnerability; the ability to persevere and persist is meaningless if something is invincible or unchangeable. Because of this dual nature of vulnerability (which is intimately tied to a relational ontology), a key part of this framework, and of employing vulnerability as a political concept – as the ethics of care does – is to attend to the ways in which vulnerabilities are experienced, understood, and constructed in and through relations of power and onto-epistemologies. Vulnerability as defined by one set of norms (be they liberal or otherwise) cannot serve as a useful concept for the pluriverse, and the ‘quantification’ or measurement of vulnerability is not the goal here. Instead, this framework is meant to help us understand and uncover different forms, experiences, and meanings of vulnerability. In so doing, this framework allows us to attend to experiences of both instability and resiliency (as both are always-already an inherent part of vulnerability).

Precarity, as intensified vulnerability, can likewise move in multiple directions.
and complex ways; precarity can be a source of power as much as it is a source of marginalization. For example, as the previously mentioned ethnographies of precarious work in the Global South highlight, precarity can be a source of relational autonomy, as certain ways of being and ways of knowing evade capture by dominant logics, and it can also be experienced as a source of insecurity and instability. In this way, the analytical framework developed here is committed to “provincializ[ing] universalizing claims about precarity” (Muehlebach 2013, 298). The point of focusing on precarity, and of developing conceptual lenses to explore the ways in which vulnerabilities manifest concretely as precarity, is to engage with and understand “the context-specific variation both in the processes that give rise to precarity and how precarity is engaged” (Ettlinger 2007, 321). Understanding that precarity is something that can be engaged – as opposed to a static experience or identity category – means that precarity can be deployed in many ways, including as a source of power which points to the limits of any given onto-epistemology, or the limits of the relations of power that uphold one onto-epistemology at the expense of others. Vulnerability and precarity in this theoretical framework are not a static condition; they are conceptual tools that help us investigate and interrogate complex relations of power that position worlds in the pluriverse, that render certain worlds more unstable, and that explain the persistence of worlds even in the face of ever-present vulnerability.

By reminding us of the interplay between the stability and instability of different worlds, the idea of vulnerable and precarious onto-epistemologies, I believe, provides analytic space not only to explore the (unequal) relations between worlds (that is, the relations that allow some worlds to be enacted more easily than others), but also to foster
meaningful dialogue on new political configurations of the pluriverse. Vulnerability, as an analytical tool, has the potential to highlight the mutual instability of all worlds, while precarity, in the context of the pluriverse, foregrounds those worlds at the margins of the pluriversal political order. These same worlds, in part because of their marginality, have the power to expose and challenge the limits and logic of dominant worlds. In so doing, precarious worlds foreground the vulnerability of the pluriversal configuration, and thus the unknowable constellations of vulnerable worlds which may emerge as worlds conflict. These unknown constellations have the potential to ‘fracture’ (Rojas 2016) current systems of power; by allowing us to focus on this potentiality, the concepts of vulnerability and precarity, when applied to the political landscape that is the pluriverse, provide a useful starting point from which to contemplate this pluriversal landscape from a care ethics perspective, and help us begin to move towards new configurations in which a multitude of worlds can flourish.

In closing, my argument in this section is that the ethics of care, when supplemented with a distinction between vulnerability and precarity, reorients Global Ethics to accommodate better the political landscape that is the pluriverse as it provides a meta-theoretical framework that helps us locate the interactions between worlds as always taking place against the backdrop of the ever-present potentiality for precarity. This allows us first to attend to the pressing ethical issue of why certain worlds are rendered more or less vulnerable (that is, precarious) than others in the current political order, in the current configuration of the pluriverse. Second, this framework also allows us to be attentive to how our ethical deliberations regarding particular dilemmas further constitute the conditions for the reproduction (or not) of specific worlds. I demonstrate
this second point more fully in section 5.4 by engaging with an example of an ethical conflict regarding the management of atiku /caribou. But first, I return to the notion of the political, and build on my previous discussion regarding the political potency of vulnerability, so as to demonstrate how the ethics of care also develops a more robust understanding of the political as it pertains to the pluriverse.

5.3 Thinking the Political and the Pluriverse with a (Dis)Associative Theory of Care

Throughout this dissertation, I have mobilized a distinction between politics and the political, and described the pluriverse as always operating at the level of the political. I particularly follow Jenny Edkins (1999, 2, emphasis in original), who defines ‘politics’ as that which can be understood as the political reality as it is already described and acknowledged, whereas

‘the political’ has to do with the establishment of that very social order which sets out a particular, historically specific account of what counts as politics and defines other areas of social life as not politics.

I suggest that this definition of the political – as having to do with the establishment of a particular socio-symbolic order – encompasses three (necessarily related) points (which were introduced in chapter three). First, the political has to do with the groundless ground (or as Oliver Marchart (2007, 15) writes, “the primordial (or ontological) absence of an ultimate ground”), which is the condition of possibility for the establishment of a particular (and always contingent) social order. Second, the political also entails a moment in which a particular order is established (sometimes called ‘event’), in which the groundless ground is made visible, as one social order is ruptured and another is
grounded. In this sense, as Slavoj Žižek writes, the political thus also refers to “the moment of openness, of undecidability, when the very structuring principle of society, the fundamental form of social pact, is called into question” (1991, 195, see also Edkins 1999, 2-6). Lastly, the political as a concept is also concerned with actions that enact (or not) the political. And, of course, these three components are intricately intertwined. The political, as the establishment of a social order, depends equally on the conditions of possibility for an order to emerge; the moment in which an order does emerge; and other contextual actions and factors that bring rise to a political moment (for even if we cannot determine beforehand which actions will bring rise to a political moment – as Rancière’s theory implies – it is undeniable that actions, practices, and relations ultimately give rise to shifts in a socio-symbolic order).

This ‘last’ aspect of the political (that is, action that may bring about the political), as noted previously, has been the focus of a debate in postfoundational political theory regarding the political as ‘associative’ or ‘dissociative.’ Marchart argues that some scholars – particularly those in the Arendtian tradition – theorize the political as ‘associative,’ as a moment of acting in concert or acting together (2007, 39). From this perspective, the political moment may manifest when a plurality of people freely associate within the public realm, motivated by a sense of care, respect and responsibility for the common life (Marchart 2007, 40). This coming together, it is important to emphasize, is not ‘consensual;’ the goal is not to do away with the political difference (an impossibility given the endless groundings that may emerge from the abyss). Instead, associative-ness may be better understood as “inclusive agonism:”

Inclusive agonism perceives citizens as necessarily interconnected, reliant upon others to be complete […]. Endorsing political engagements that increase the role
of citizens (such as norm formulation and grassroots politics), the focus is on identifying agonistic behaviours that render society more inclusive. (Lowndes and Paxton 2018, 699)

Understanding the political as associative prioritizes the interconnections between people, and values agonism in so far as it leads to a more inclusive society.

On the other hand, postfoundational theorists in the Schmittian tradition emphasize the ‘dissociative’ trait of the political moment. The dissociative trait is premised on a distinction between ‘friends and enemies’ or ‘us and them’ and thus conceives of the political as antagonistic/conflictualcontestatory in nature. Chantal Mouffe’s (2005; 2013) work – reviewed in detail in chapter three – is characteristic of this scholarship. For Mouffe, the emphasis on the dissociative aspect of the political means that the “goal of democratic politics is not to eradicate conflict but rather to transform antagonism (enemies) into agonism (adversaries), in order that citizens can engage in legitimate contestation” (Lowndes and Paxton 2018, 698).

In this section, I would like to contribute to rethinking the political in the pluriverse using the ethics of care. Specifically, starting from Edkins’ definition of the political – which, as I am using it here, refers to all three components just reviewed (the political, the political moment, and political action) and the relations between them – and thinking through these components with the ethics of care, I contend that instead of devolving into debates over the associative and dissociative qualities of the political, it is more fruitful to think the political relationally, and to focus explicitly on the relationality between associative and dissociative political action. In so doing, I wish to put forth an understanding of the political as (dis)associative, and demonstrate how the ethics of care – as a (dis)associative theory itself, as I suggest below – is well positioned to contemplate
the political in the context of the pluriverse.

**On the ‘(Dis)Associative’**

What do I mean by (dis)associative, particularly in relation to the political, meaning the political as condition of possibility, as political moment, and as political action (three components which cannot be separated out)? First, to think about the groundless ground and the political moment as anything other than both associative and dissociative is to lose the very potency of these concepts, which seek to hold in tension both the impossibility of finality and closure and the inescapable reality that groundings do emerge, social orders arise, and that these orders serve – at least for some finite time and space – as groundings. In other words, the political, in these two senses, is (dis)associative; thinking relationally, as the ethics of care implores us to do, demonstrates that these concepts only make sense by focusing on the relation that holds together the ungrounding and grounding.

The third component of the political, that is, acts which bring about changes in a given socio-symbolic order, can, I believe, also be thought of as (dis)associative, particularly in the context of the pluriverse. Changes in the pluriversal matrix, I suggest, may come about through associative political actions (in which people – including people and non-human actors from different worlds – come together to care for a common and collective life) and/or through dissociative political actions which are agonistic in nature; privileging either associative or dissociative political action is insufficient in the context of the pluriverse. Consider, again, the example of Nazario and de la Cadena, and their protest to protect Ausangate. Despite being from different worlds, and holding very
different understandings of what was at stake, both Nazario and de la Cadena (and numerous other people, including members of the Catholic brotherhood and other Peruvians) collectively came together to protest the mining of Ausangate. This collective coming together across ontological difference (across worlds, across ontological understandings of the mountain) did not require consensus; it did not stifle the different onto-epistemologies at play. Difference was maintained while a common goal was pursued. The example of the Māori people, and their decades long struggle to protect Whanganui, on the other hand, is an example of a dissociative political action; what was at stake in that case was a direct ontological conflict over the status of the river. This agonistic (and perhaps for a long time, antagonistic) conflict challenged the social order of the modern world (as represented by the New Zealand state), and eventually required that order to shift, rendering something thinkable and speakable that was not thinkable or speakable before (that a river could be kin, or merit ‘subject’ status).

Yet, perhaps one could argue that the example of Nazario is not an example of the political. What social order changed as a result of this protest? Resource development, for example, is debated all the time within the modern world; is it not likely that Nazario’s different onto-epistemology was lost or translated into such terms and hence effectively subsumed by a modern logic? Unlike the case of Whanganui, it seems likely that neither Nazario’s world, nor the world which is constituted in/by the Peruvian state, nor the relations between these two worlds, were fundamentally reconfigured as a result of this protest. The various socio-symbolic orders involved in this example do not appear to have shifted fundamentally.

Before arriving at this conclusion, however, it is crucially important to recall that
in the context of the pluriverse there is a scalar component – or perhaps more accurately, an issue of relations upon relations – at play. The pluriverse, as a meta-world, is one socio-symbolic order, comprised\(^{27}\) of several other social orders (that is, worlds or onto-epistemologies). For this reason, I suggest that within the pluriverse, the (dis)associative effects of the political (in all three senses of the term used here) may not be evenly distributed across worlds, and they may not be instantaneous. That is, thinking relationally – as the ethics of care and the very concept of the pluriverse enjoins us to do – means that we must abandon the ‘lightning bolt’ approach to identifying the political, for as relations (upon relations upon relations) change or reproduce, the political – i.e., a shift in a given social order – may come about slowly or in unexpected ways and places. Equally importantly in the context of the pluriverse, the ‘lack’ of a political moment (by which I mean, the absence of a change in a particular social order) may still be politically significant depending on where one is positioned within these relations.

To return to the example of Nazario, while perhaps neither the modern world nor Nazario’s world is re-ordered as a (direct) result of the protest, protecting Ausangate allows Nazario’s world to (re)produce and maintain itself more easily. This collective and associative political action of protesting the mining development, and protecting Ausangate, can enable the reproduction of Nazario’s world (his onto-epistemology, his socio-symbolic order). At first glance, this reproduction seems antithetical to notions of the political which focus on a ‘lightning bolt’ of change in which one order is ruptured and a new order emerges, and by extension, which valorizes ‘newness’ and ‘change’

\(^{27}\) Recall that even when I use terms like ‘comprised,’ I do not mean to imply a totality; the pluriverse is more than one but less than many. I am, again, just working within the limitations of an imperfect language.
uncritically. But in the context of the pluriverse, where certain worlds are rendered precarious through relations of power, the ability to reproduce a given order can be deeply meaningful, ethically desirable, and I would argue, political. If struggling to maintain a multiplicity of partial connections is the goal of the pluriverse, *then acts which allow relations to reproduce are as important as acts which change relations that are preventing other sets of relations from flourishing.* Or to put it differently, if we conceive of worlds as vulnerable, then the reproduction of a world (the re-establishment of an order) is as political(ly significant) as a shift in that world/order. Moreover, because these vulnerable worlds are relationally tied, the maintenance and reproduction of a world may eventually result in a rupture and restructuring of a world elsewhere.

For example, because of the partial connections between worlds, various practices that preserve the relations which allow for the continuation of Nazario’s world may later prove politically significant as Nazario’s world – in its precarity and corresponding resiliency – poses a challenge to the very limits and logics of the modern world, which is currently hegemonic in the pluriverse matrix. In persisting in/through its precarity, Nazario’s world may bring about a political moment, in that a re-ordering of the pluriversal matrix may eventually occur as modernity’s hegemony is continually challenged by the existence and persistence of other worlds. And of course, this political moment may not re-order and re-structure Nazario’s world at all. The deep relationality of the pluriverse means that there are scales of change (of political rupture and re-grounding) that are not necessarily aligned or equally distributed, but that are nonetheless significant. That is, while the political will always be both associative and dissociative, the distribution of these traits may not be equal; as a result of protecting Ausangate,
Nazario’s world may experience a greater associative effect – as this world is able to come together and reproduce more easily – while (eventually, if not instantaneously), this same ‘regrounding’ of Nazario’s world may result in a greater dissociative effect from the vantage point of the pluriverse. The maintenance of Nazario’s world – perhaps now more easily enacted as a result of the associative political protest – may eventually come to disrupt the hegemony of modernity so fundamentally that modernity experiences a more disruptive and dissociative political moment, and/or the configuration of the order of the pluriverse itself may be shifted. In this way, the associative political act that is the protest can be thought of as political in the other two meanings of the term as well. The preservation of Nazario’s world in spite of the dominating forces of modernity reminds us that a multiplicity of grounds is always possible (the political as the groundless ground). At the same time, the continued reproduction of Nazario’s world points to the limitations of the modern world, and in so doing, poses a challenge to modernity’s narrative as the one-world, a challenge that may one day manifest in a shift in the social order of modernity or the order that is the pluriverse (a political moment).

The point I am trying to make here might be most easily grasped by returning again to Edkins’ definition: the political has to do with the very establishment of a social order (a world, or an onto-epistemology). But in the pluriverse, where there are multiple vulnerable worlds co-existing and interacting, the notion of ‘establishment’ needs to be expanded. If we begin from the premise of a single world or social order, then establishment can be singular and momentary: an order is established, and then all other practices reproduce that order (until that order is ruptured and regrounded anew). However, if we begin with a care ethical reading of the pluriverse, the partial connections
between vulnerable worlds means that related, and perhaps competing, vulnerable worlds must constantly be (re)established in the face of each other. The political, as such, can no longer be conceived of as only a moment (although we can still talk of a moment in which a particular order shifts), nor can it be thought of only in terms of newness. Instead the political must be thought of relationally and as a process, i.e., an ongoing relational becoming, in which the order of the pluriverse and particular vulnerable worlds are constantly enacted and/or disrupted. Indeed, vulnerability points to both the possibility of rupture and to the value of repair and maintenance. As vulnerable, a world is always potentially susceptible to change and rupture; simultaneously, as vulnerable, a world must be re-enacted, repaired, and maintained. Understanding the pluriverse as comprised of partially connected vulnerable worlds, as the ethics of care suggests, allows us to reconceptualize the political as a relational process in which vulnerable worlds, and the pluriverse as such, are continually becoming.

Furthermore, such a relational becoming will always be both associative and dissociative, although the associative and dissociative effects may not be evenly distributed; in any given context, some orders will be relatively (re)grounded, others will be relatively ungrounded. These ungroundings and regroundings may come from agonistic conflicts, or from meaningful collective action and working together, or both. A key task for thinking about the political in the pluriversal context, then, is developing tools that can tend to both facets of the ongoing establishment of worlds in the pluriverse. On the one hand, vulnerable worlds are vulnerable – they are subject to change and rupture – and particularly so given that they are intertwined and interacting with other worlds. This side of vulnerability (the side that cannot be mastered or overcome)
highlights the dissociative nature of the political, and the establishment of worlds, which can never be totalizing or complete. On the other hand, vulnerability also means that worlds must be maintained; worlds are continually (re)established and reproduced. This side of vulnerability (the side that demands care) highlights the associative nature of the political, i.e., the establishment of worlds, which always involves a ‘coming together’ so as to enact particular visions of the good life. As the next section argues, the ethics of care can provide tools to contemplate the (dis)associative nature of the political, that is, the establishment of worlds as both continually (re)produced and yet always vulnerable to change.

**A (Dis)Associative Theory of Care**

To help us contemplate this reconceptualized notion of the political – in which the ‘establishment of a given order’ refers to either the establishment of a new order or the re-establishment of an existing order – I would like to put forth the ethics of care as a (dis)associative theory of care. It is associative because it starts from a relational social ontology and understands that moral selves only emerge in and through relations. As such, the ethics of care foregrounds the ethical significance of being attentive and responsive to the mutual interdependency and vulnerability of all. Significantly, as discussed in chapter four, the ethics of care sees such attentiveness – i.e., attending to and seeking to understand as well as possible the needs of others – and responsiveness – i.e., responding to and addressing these needs as well as reasonably possible – as a collective and political activity. (Re)distributing caring responsibilities, ensuring caring needs are met as well as possible, and maintaining, continuing, and repairing our worlds (to

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paraphrase Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40) is a collective task that arises because of our fundamental interconnectedness and mutual vulnerability. Further, meeting needs requires an ‘acting in common,’ and is inherently collective because needs (and the ways in which we address them or not) are always-already shaped by the political order (the world, or the onto-epistemology) in which they arise. Even if or when the actual practice of care is done by an individual or group of individuals, the social meaning, significance, and organization of care is inescapably collective and political, and shaped by the complex interaction of nature and the social.

Accordingly, care is necessarily “a form of political relatedness” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 87). Every world inherently organizes care; “any social formation always has already responded to it, whether implicitly or explicitly, and its response is embedded in an extremely material and concrete reality” (Ferrarese 2016a, 236). For the ethics of care, coming together to deliberate on care, its meaning, and how is has been (and could be) organized, is of great political significance. In fact, it is in such coming togethers that the (re)establishment of an onto-epistemology is possible (recalling that establishment in the context of the pluriverse refers to both the establishment of a new order or world, as well as to the (re)establishment and constantly-enacted continuation of a world). Shifts in the political may be possible through associative political acts, as new social orders may emerge as we work together to respond to and address caring needs and enact different versions of what it means to live well. Likewise, existing orders or worlds may be able to reproduce more easily through associative political action (as is the case of Nazario and de la Cadena, and the protest to protect Ausangate). Care as a collective and political activity therefore clearly aligns with the understanding of the political as associative. For
instance, Sheldon Wolin (1996, 31; quoted in Marchart 2007, 40), whom Marchart locates in the associative paradigm, describes the political as “the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the well-being of the collectivity.” This associative aspect of the political is clearly aligned with the ethics of care.

At the same time, the ethics of care understands care as dissociative and agonistic. As described in chapter four, the relations which constitute infinitely different moral selves and the perpetual neediness of our corporeal vulnerable bodies mean that care is an ongoing process that can never be completed. At the same time, however, our particular caring needs will shift and change throughout our lives, and they will differ greatly across differently constituted and situated moral selves. In acknowledging this, the ethics of care emphasizes differences all the way down (Robinson 2019b), as relational moral selves are always unique, and therefore have unique needs which arise from their relational complexity. The continuity of our caring needs, held in tension with the ways in which our caring needs shift and change, and the differences that emerge through our relationality (thereby constituting a multiplicity of moral selves), points to care as dissociative in two ways.

First, care cannot be controlled (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015) and it is never ‘complete’; it is a continual unfolding that evades closure or finality. Because of this, care continually confronts the “endlessly totalizing tendencies” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 87) of a social order. “When care is not adequately accounted for in some sphere of life, it starts to challenge that very sphere – it demands to be noticed, thereby opening up a
space for ‘the political,’ calling for change in the very order in which it is being
governed” (Hoppania and Vaittinen 2015, 87; see also Ferrarese 2016b). As Hanna-Kaisa
Hoppania and Tiina Vaittinen (2015, 78) argue, the “latent forces of disruption that are
imbued in the corporeal character of care relations” point to the limits of, and thereby
challenge, a given social order. This challenge is agonistic, that is, dissociative, in
character, as it involves the disruption of the existing order which cannot ever tame in full
our caring needs. In other words, the ways in which vulnerability can never be mastered
fully confronts and disrupts the tendencies of a social order toward closure and
completeness in an ongoing way, and thereby points to the dissociative aspects of the
political. The establishment of a world will never be totalizing or complete – this is, in
fact, why we must think about the political as it pertains to (re)establishment in the
context of multiple vulnerable worlds.

Second, because “we are all constituted as selves through a multitude of different
historical and contemporary relations on a variety of scales that work together to
construct our subjectivities, there is no limit to the scope or nature of how these relations
will shape our moral voices” (Robinson 2019b, 4). The radical and infinite differences
that emerge through relational selves, by extension, imply radically different and infinite
versions of ‘care,’ types of needs, moral voices, and most broadly, forms of life. These
differences will unavoidably confront each other in agonistic ways – particularly in the
pluriverse – both because they are by nature different (and perhaps irreconcilable) and
because the relations that constitute moral selves and forms of life are themselves rife
with power. These power dynamics and the inescapable differences that emerge through
our relationality mean that ‘care’ will be agonistic; competing claims of how to care and
the relations of power that shape how we meet caring needs (or not) will at times conflict and confront each other.

In fact, the situated epistemology of the ethics of care, which understands all knowledge claims to be contextual and partial, is committed to such agonism. As noted previously, a central task for a critical political ethics of care is to attend carefully to the different versions of care at stake, to consider the ways in which varying practices of care constitute particular moral subjects and their ways of life, and to be open to the possibility that one’s vision of ‘good’ care may, in fact, need to be revised in light of the needs and ways of life of the other. Such deliberation must also be attuned to the power relations at play in our (agonistic) interactions. For the ethics of care, the ever-present potential for conflicting moral understandings and visions of living well, and the commitment to confronting these conflicts in a way that foregrounds the vulnerability of one’s own judgement (one’s own moral voice, one’s own onto-epistemology), points to the dissociative and agonistic aspects of the political. The (re)establishment of a world may involve (often will involve) agonism; dissociative political action may bring about a ‘new’ world or may allow an existing world to reproduce itself more easily (as is the case of the Māori and their struggle to protect Whanganui).

Put differently, because the ethics of care is premised upon a relational social ontology and situated epistemology, it implies a (dis)associative theory of care. The relational ontology of the ethics of care points towards the associative aspect of care: our mutual vulnerabilities and interdependencies emphasize that we only emerge through our relations, and in this emergence, we are a political collective. Further, in its thin normativity regarding care, the ethics of care also foregrounds the political and ethical
significance of responding to others via attentive and responsive practices of care. The ethics of care departs from the thin normative premise that where relational and vulnerable beings – and in the case of the pluriverse, relational and vulnerable worlds – are concerned, maintaining and repairing relations is a very important moral task, one which can be thought of as associative, and one which is crucial for the (re)establishment of worlds (the political).

At the same time, it is also through our relationality that deep and pervasive differences emerge; sets of relations construct different moral voices and different forms of life, different onto-epistemologies. These differences will, at times, confront each other agonistically. Our different caring needs will disrupt a particular order and organization of care; our different moral voices will involve conflicting moral understandings; our different visions of care, of living well, will be at odds. The ethics of care, with its situated epistemology, does not shy away from such agonistic encounters, or from agonizing what it means to live well, to care. Instead, the ethics of care notes the impossibility of a singular truth or singular moral voice, and “challenges the disciplinary power that circumscribes those [other] voices by denying the moral legitimacy of relationality” (Robinson 2019b, 4). In so doing, the ethics of care is committed to agonizing care, agonizing different versions of living well, and to the revisability of all judgement. Through such agonism, the dissociative aspect of the political is evident, as agonistic encounters between worlds may result in the reconfiguration or reordering of certain onto-epistemologies.

This argument regarding care as (dis)associative can be articulated with a different set of terms (which are more common in the care ethics literature). The ethics of
care, I suggest, can be understood as simultaneously *critical* and *productive*. It is *critical*, in that it is an ethic which seeks to uncover critically the relations of power, norms, and exclusionary social practices which oppress groups of people and cause harm and suffering. It is also critical because the ethics of care is committed to the revisability of all (moral) judgement and knowledge claims. Departing from a relational ontology, the ethics of care foregrounds difference, and the ways in which these differences manifest different notions of and practices of care. Living well together means taking these differences seriously, understanding the situatedness of one’s own knowledge claims, and thereby maintaining an openness to revising moral judgements, and correspondingly, our caring practices. The critical aspect of the ethics of care is well positioned to attend to the dissociative aspect of the political in the context of the pluriverse, where multiple, relational, and therefore, vulnerable worlds are susceptible to conflict, agonism, and rupture.

On the other hand, the ethics of care is a ‘reconstructive’ (Hamington 2015b, 286) or *productive* theory, because “care claims a tangible moral idea” (Hamington 2015b, 286): “rather than concluding in a deconstructed state, care provides an organizing trajectory around attentive/responsive living” (Hamington 2015b, 287). Of course, this ‘organizing trajectory’ is only thinly normative – how to be attentive and respond to heterogenous, complex, shifting, and situated needs cannot be predetermined or prescribed, only gleaned through tentative (and sometimes agonistic) practices of care which are continually assessed and revised. Yet, this thin normativity nonetheless renders the ethics of care productive and constructive because “claims about what ought to be the case are never abandoned entirely” (Robinson 2011b, 28). Care – which in the broadest
sense, refers to everything we do to repair, maintain, and continue our worlds as best as possible (Fisher and Tronto 1990) – is productive in that it provides us with a normative orientation from which to understand and address harms and sufferings. This aspect of care is therefore well suited to attend to the associative aspects of the political in the pluriverse, in which vulnerable and interacting worlds must also be reproduced and maintained.

In short, the messy moral life of care renounces the thick normativity of universal and transcendental morality but – and this is crucial – it also does not leave us in the ‘void.’ Instead, the ethics of care locates the moral subject with “both feet in the real world” (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 59) and orients us towards the (always political) task of attempting to live well together given our (paradoxical) interconnectedness and radical differences.

**Putting the Pieces Together**

As both a productive and critical theory, the ethics of care, I argue, conceives of care as (dis)associative; as a result, care ethics can provide a framework from which to analyze the (dis)associative nature of the political in the context of the pluriverse. Specifically, I assert that in the pluriverse, the political must be thought of as having to do with the establishment – and, crucially, the ongoing establishment – of (vulnerable) worlds or onto-epistemologies. That is, in the pluriverse, it does not make sense to speak of the establishment of a world as a singular moment; instead, because worlds are vulnerable, they must continually “strive to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other” (Blaser 2009, 877). Simply put, the establishment of a world is ongoing
and requires reproduction and reestablishment. Of course, in this ongoing reestablishment, the possibility of a ‘new’ world, or an onto-epistemic reordering, is also always possible: because worlds are vulnerable, interactions between worlds (be they conflictual or cooperative) can cause the relations of one world (or multiple worlds, or the relational symmetry between worlds) to shift. In this way, the political – as the (ongoing) establishment of a world or onto-epistemology – cannot a priori prioritize either the grounding (associative) or ungrounding (dissociative) aspect of the establishment of worlds, nor can the political be conceived of as singular or momentary. Instead, the political must be conceived of as an on-going process in which worlds are established (over and over again, or alternatively, as they change anew). And because of the partial connections between worlds, the ‘regrounding’ of one world may fundamentally disrupt the order of another world or shift the entire pluriversal matrix (and vice versa). The dissociative (disruptive, ungrounding) and associative (coming-together, regrounding) traits of the political may be unevenly distributed across worlds as they interact in the pluriversal matrix. The political, in the pluriverse, can only be conceived of as (dis)associative, in which neither trait is abstractly or theoretically prioritized above the other.

By the same line of thinking, political action – by which I mean action that brings about the political – can also only ever be thought of as (dis)associative. Establishing and reestablishing a world (that is, the political, the establishment of an onto-epistemology) may happen through agonistic conflict or through associative cooperation and action. Likewise, agonistic political action and/or associative political action may allow one world to reestablish itself, while it disrupts another, leading to a political moment...
elsewhere (or perhaps even a shift in the pluriversal matrix more broadly). If we are committed to the pluriversal project of a world of partial connections in which many worlds are possible as worlds, then both conflict and cooperation may prove fruitful means by which to change the relations between worlds, establish new worlds, and maintain existing ones. The key analytical challenge to understanding the political in the pluriversal sense, then, is to be able to hold both the associative and dissociative traits of the political at the fore, and to analyze how both agonistic political action and cooperative and collective political action can contribute to the pluriversal project.

For instance, in some cases, the key task for enacting the pluriverse will be ensuring the maintenance of a world. Precarious worlds, as defined in section 5.2, struggle to maintain their own existence in the pluriversal matrix. In this case, we do not want these worlds to experience the political as rupture; the goal is to reproduce that which already is, to make the ongoing reestablishment of that onto-epistemology easier. On the other side of the coin, a key task for enacting the pluriverse will be disrupting certain worlds (here I am thinking particularly of modernity, which has asserted itself as the whole of the real). In this case, we may require an onto-epistemology to rupture and shift, to think and be differently. Working to achieve these tasks may involve deconstructing and disrupting relations of power that render some worlds precarious (indeed, the proposed meta-theoretical orientation towards vulnerable and precarious worlds is meant in part to provide a framework for this very task). At the same time, working to facilitate the maintenance of precarious worlds may also involve associative political action that involves working together without overcoming or subsuming the differences at play. To move towards a symmetrical, dehierarchalized pluriverse, will
likely require both of these things, although in different ways in different times and places.

The ethics of care, as a critical and productive theory, prioritizes the (dis)associative nature of the political in the pluriverse. On the one hand, the ethics of care is committed to agonizing care and engaging attentively and reciprocally in contestations over what it means to live well. It understands that all knowledge claims are vulnerable (situated, contextual, contingent) and it is therefore committed to revising (moral) judgement when necessary. And the ethics of care, as critical theory, is committed to interrogating critically the relations of power which divide the world into a series of hierarchical binaries that privilege certain people and parts of life at the expense of others. In this way, the ethics of care is attuned to the dissociative (the ruptural, the deconstructive, the revisable, the contingent, the situated) aspects of the establishment and reestablishment of worlds.

On the other hand, the ethics of care is also committed to responding to caring needs, to (re)producing and maintaining relations that allow us to live well (whatever that may mean in particular). The ethics of care orients us towards the importance of enacting care iteratively and continually. It foregrounds relations – which take particular significance in the context of the pluriverse – and implores us to think and act relationally. (To be sure, it is only in and through such relational thinking that the inseparability of the (dis)associative traits of the political in the context of the pluriverse is revealed.) In this way, the ethics of care is attuned to the associative (the collective, the connected, the continuous, the common, the caring, the reproductive) aspects of the establishment and reestablishment of worlds.
As Fiona Robinson (2018, 331) summarizes, “a caring moral life is never decided, never finished, never tidy – it is a life of impossible decisions and constant struggle to know, understand and respond to others.” Care is never finished, never totalizing, always revisable, always difficult, but nonetheless focused on response, attentiveness, repair, maintenance, and living well. For these reasons, care provides us with tools to contemplate the political, rethought in the context of multiple partially-connected vulnerable worlds, as (dis)associative, involving relational layers of onto-epistemic rupture and conflict, on the one hand, and onto-epistemic continuity and cooperation, on the other.

5.4 Building an Ethics for the Pluriverse/Building the Pluriverse

For this final section, I wish to introduce one last example of a conflict between two worlds and use it to show how the ethics of care, and the concepts and theoretical tools developed above, can help provide a fruitful way to contemplate ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse. In so doing, I demonstrate how the ethics of care helps us build a pluriversal ethics. To this end, I draw upon the work of pluriversal scholar and anthropologist Mario Blaser (2016; 2018), who has spent the last several years documenting a conflict regarding how to care for what the modern world (and specifically in this case, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador) calls caribou and the Innu Nation calls atîku. To begin this discussion, it is worth outlining this example in some detail.

Caring for Atîku/Caribou: A Political, Ontological, and Ethical Conflict
On January 28th, 2013, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador imposed a five-year hunting ban on caribou (Blaser 2016). This ban was meant to help address the decline in the George River Herd caribou population, which had decreased by over 96% in just over a decade (from approximately 800,000 individuals in 1990 to 27,000 in 2012) (Blaser 2016, 545). While the reasons for the decline of the herd’s population were unclear, the provincial government was sure “that a continued caribou harvest was not sustainable, even for the Innu and Inuit indigenous communities that live in Labrador” (Blaser 2016, 545). Immediately after the ban was announced, however, the Innu Nation grand chief, Prote Poker, said that the ban was a threat to the Innu way of life; the Innu would continue their hunting practices as they always had (Blaser 2016, 545):

Among other concerns, the Innu refusal to accept the ban was based on the insistence of knowledgeable hunters and elders who saw the decline in population as a symptom of the deteriorating relationship between the Innu and Kanipinikassikueu, the master of atiku (the word Innu use to refer to what Euro-Canadians call caribou). The extent to which established protocols for hunting are followed – such as the treatment of bones and the sharing of meat, among other prescriptions – determines the health of that relationship and the willingness of Kanipinikassikueu to keep giving animals to, and generally bless, the Innu. Hunters and elders had been complaining for several years by then that younger generations of Innu were not following these protocols, calling on the young people to recommit to them. In this context, for hunters and elders, the hunting ban would make it impossible to repair the relationship with atiku and its spirit master. In short, while for the wildlife managers in the provincial government hunting could mean the disappearance of the caribou, for the Innu hunters and elders, being prevented from hunting according to protocol almost assuredly would mean the disappearance of atiku. (Blaser 2016, 545-546)

A common reading of this scenario, informed deeply by the modern onto-epistemology, would cast this conflict as one that involves respecting traditional Innu beliefs and

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28 Newfoundland and Labrador is a province in Canada; Newfoundland is an island, and Labrador is the portion of the province that is part of the continent, bordering Quebec and (less expansively) Nunavut. The George River Herd migrates an area that includes Northern Quebec and Labrador.
practices while trying to manage (master, control) caribou, which is treated as a passive material resource. In such a reading, it is clear ‘who’ has the hold on the real: caribou is what actually exists, while atîku is downgraded to a belief or tradition that is part of Innu culture. However, thinking pluriversally recasts this conflict as an ontological conflict. As Blaser (2016; 2018) argues, this conflict is not about competing understandings of atîku/caribou and divergent perspectives on how to manage atîku/caribou. Instead, the very ontology (the being) of atîku/caribou is at stake, as atîku/caribou is, itself, the product of different relations and practices. “Atiku emerges from an assemblage that involves atanukan, hunters, the sharing of meat, generosity, a spirit master, and so on; caribou emerges from an assemblage that involves the discipline of biology, wildlife managers, predictive modeling, calculations to balance environmental and economic concerns, and so on” (Blaser 2016, 558). In this way, “atiku/caribou is multiple; it is more than one and less than many” (Blaser 2016, 557). There is, of course, a being, but that being is multiple; “various practices associated with caribou and atiku encounter each other in the flesh of a being (so to speak)” (Blaser 2018, 56, emphasis added). Both atîku and caribou are real; indeed, atîku/caribou is in some ways the literal embodiment of the entanglement of two worlds.

Undoubtedly, then, this is an ontological conflict – a conflict over what is. By extension (or perhaps coterminously), it is also a political conflict. Reading atîku/caribou as the embodiment of the entanglement of worlds, it is clear that this conflict is unfolding and located at the level of the political and has to do with the (ongoing) establishment and reproduction (or disruption) of worlds. The Innu world – co-constituted by its relationship with atîku – and the modern world – represented here by the Government of
Newfoundland and Labrador – are struggling over which world-enacting should be continued, and which world-enacting may be impeded as a result. Put differently, these two worlds, which are themselves vulnerable and in need of continual re-enactment, are engaged in a conflict regarding which re-enactment/re-establishment should prevail, and which world(ing) will be rendered precarious as a result.

Lastly, however, I would also like to foreground that this is equally an ethical conflict. While there are ontological and political disagreements at play here (Blaser 2016, 551), it is the normative question of how to care appropriately for the declining atiku/caribou population that draws out these ontological and political disagreements, that makes it necessary to contemplate and tend to these disagreements. The ontological difference between atiku/caribou, and the competing (re)establishment of the Innu world and the modern world that lies at the heart of this conflict, are not meaningful in the abstract or as theoretical and conceptual debates. These ontological and political conflicts gain meaning because of the moral stakes involved in addressing the moral dilemma of caring for atiku/caribou. It is the competing understandings and practices of caring for atiku/caribou in this example that draw out the ontological multiplicity of atiku/caribou and the ways in which atiku/caribou is enacted through different forms of (moral) life.

Vulnerable and Precarious Onto-Epistemologies

How can we approach this moral dilemma using the ethics of care? First, as described in detail in chapter four, the ethics of care understands morality as the very practices of care that form the fabric of our lives. The purpose of moral philosophy, from a care ethical perspective, is not to locate abstract and transcendental rules in order to apply them to a
given scenario; the purpose of moral thinking is to look at our practices of care, and to use these practices to engage in an ongoing critical dialogue regarding how we wish to organize our lives so as to live as well as reasonably possible. However, understanding concrete moral practices involves paying attention to the context in and through which our moral practices emerge and unfold. In the context of the pluriverse, understanding context involves foregrounding continually the relations between worlds. The distinction between vulnerable and precarious onto-epistemologies, developed in section 5.2, provides a meta-theoretical orientation from which to begin this task.

To return to the example, I argue that the relations of power that connect the world of the Newfoundland and Labrador Government (modernity) and the Innu world are asymmetrical, such that the Innu world is rendered precarious. That is, while both the modern world and the Innu world are vulnerable (and both require continual enactment and maintenance), the history of colonialism and relations of power therein make the continuation and/or revitalization of the Innu world more precarious than the modern world. For example, the relations of production for the Innu world are precarious; the Innu articulate that the relationship with atîku and its spirit master Kanipinikassikueu is in need of repair (Blaser 2016, 546). This relationship, as a key relation in the Innu world, is required for the continuation of the Innu way of being and knowing. Yet, as Blaser notes, the relationship had been rendered precarious due to several factors. For instance, when asked about the declining herd, Innu elders and hunters explained that the “decrease in the frequency of atiku giving themselves to hunters is a symptom that [indicates that] Kanipinikassikueu is angry” (Blaser 2018, 54, emphasis added):

[…] Elders and hunters said that the disrespect of younger generations for atiku was rampant. They spoke of atiku remains being carried away by dogs, of the
people selling meat, and of a general lack of interest about life on the land by younger people. But they were not angry; they were worried. For most of them the consequences of all this were obvious not only in the decline of the herds but also in the epidemic of addiction, suicide and diabetes that has plagued younger generations of Innu for the last twenty years. […] The elder Ponas Nuke expressed the problem thus: ‘Without atiku we are nothing. If we are not in the land, hunting, it will come the day Kanipinikassikueu will not know us, it will ask ‘who are you people?’ […] and if we do not have its blessing, things will get worse.’ (Blaser 2018, 55, emphasis added)

The disrespect of younger generations towards atiku, and most acutely, the hunting ban (implemented and enforced by another world), make the Innu relationship with atiku precarious, and therefore, as the elder Ponas Nuke points out, renders precarious the Innu’s entire way of being and knowing. The relations necessary to produce the Innu world are more vulnerable due to the hunting ban.

Second, the Innu world also faces increased vulnerability, that is, precariousness, vis-à-vis the relations of distribution, as their relation to atiku is not validated by the dominant logic of modernity (or the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador which operates in/through this logic). The latter casts the Innu’s relationship with atiku, in accordance with the terms of the “modernist assumption of one world with multiple perspectives on it” (Blaser 2016, 549), as ‘mere’ belief. And as a belief, the Innu’s “claims are automatically disqualified as being unreasonable or unrealistic” (Blaser 2016,

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29 Without speculating too much, it seems plausible to me that the lack of respect for the atiku by younger generations of Innu likely can be linked to colonial relations in Canada, in which the disruption of indigenous ways of life were violent and have had ongoing consequences. However, I also think it is significant to include this as a reason for the precarity of relations of production of the Innu world because it emphasizes that worlds must be reproduced; when members of a world no longer reproduce and maintain said world, that world can be rendered as precarious as when a confrontation with another world is forceful and violent. To put it differently, politics (as opposed to the political) is also important in the pluriverse as politics can be the ways in which a world is re-produced (re-established as a world) or not. Furthermore, noting that some members of the Innu world do not participate in Innu practices also highlights that worlds are not complete and consistent wholes; “ontological inconsistency” (Salmond 2012, 125) is to be expected because of the partial relations between worlds, and the ways in which worlds have interacted and shaped each other historically.
The distribution of political authority, and the legitimation of different knowledges, is uneven as a result. The Innu’s knowledge is translated into and thereby mutilated by the discourse of modernity; government consultations re-write Innu concerns, splitting them “according to supposedly commonsense criteria that distinguish reliable environmental information from cultural beliefs” (Blaser 2016, 560). The relations of distribution are asymmetrical between worlds, such that the modern world determines what counts as “reasonable politics” (Blaser 2016) and the knowledge and political stance of the Innu is granted less (if any) legitimacy. As a result, the Innu world is rendered precarious.

Lastly, the Innu world is characterized by a precarious relation to the state. Neither the Innu nor atiku are recognized meaningfully by the state. While Innu leaders and hunters were consulted about how to respond to the declining numbers of atiku/caribou, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador translated their knowledge and concerns, and made it clear that such knowledge and concerns were less valuable than scientific knowledge (Blaser 2016). This, in effect, downgraded their contributions and insights on the moral dilemma at hand. Furthermore, atiku is not recognized by the state; atiku can only ever be contemplated as caribou by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Consider the following recollection from a related ethnography:

One day, while I was in the Innu Nation office, a very experienced hunter who had been recently charged with illegal hunting came to the office where I was working and told me ‘they found a Red Wine [protected herd] collar close to lake Kamistastin; see, atiku wants to go there.’ Lake Kamistastin is located about 400 kilometers north of Sheshatshiu, very far from the Red Wine Herd range, and right in the migration area of George River herd. This information, as he and other Innu argue, shows that the Red Wine woodland herd and the George River migratory herd intermingle, therefore, there is no point in declaring the hunt
illegal on the basis of the assumption upheld by government scientists that the herds are different: for the Innu there is only atîku. Furthermore, the words of this hunter obliquely indicate differences in how the collar information is used. The government uses it to obtain the information the scientists need to learn about caribou behavior, such as their whereabouts, while the Innu use this information to know what atîku wants. In other worlds, while the government administer the collars to satisfy their will to learn, the Innu use it to learn the will of atîku. Like human beings, atîku has will. (Castro 2015, 54-55; also quoted in Blaser 2018, 63, emphasis in original)

Atíku’s relationship to the state is precarious, as the state cannot contemplate atíku at all. For the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, atíku can only ever be caribou, something to be studied through science. Atíku is not thinkable as having “full personhood and will of their own” (Blaser 2018, 54) from the vantage point of the modern world. As unthinkable, atíku is made precarious by the state, and by extension, so is the Innu world which is reliant upon its relationship with atíku.

This analysis illustrates how the ethical dilemma of how to care for atíku/caribou unfolds within a particular context that is already deeply shaped by relations of power between the worlds involved. These relations of power render, in particular, the Innu world precarious; the Innu world faces a more formidable struggle to be seen as a world, and to reproduce and sustain itself, than the modern world. In order to understand this ethical dilemma, these dynamics, as the ethics of care emphasizes, need to be brought to the fore. Moral dilemmas have to be understood within the contexts in which they emerge.

For instance, without paying attention to the relations of power between these worlds, and without understanding the mutual vulnerability of both these worlds, it becomes easy to construct the moral dilemma along modern terms only. By starting with the notion that all worlds are vulnerable, the ethics of care foregrounds the impossibility
of a single truth or reality. Just as the relational social ontology of the ethics of care points to multiple different moral selves, understanding worlds as relational and therefore vulnerable means that multiple onto-epistemologies – ways of being in and seeing the world – are possible; accordingly, one’s own world may be fallible. And, of course, acknowledging the vulnerability of one’s own world means acknowledging the vulnerability of the knowledge and practices that emerge through that world. Prioritizing the vulnerability of judgement, as inherent in the claim of multiple vulnerable worlds, creates space to consider seriously other onto-epistemologies. It creates space for us to attempt to decenter our own assumptions and reflect on how they shape the ethical quandary.

Furthermore, the notion of precarity as ‘intensified vulnerability due to relations of power’ draws attention to the fact that not only is one’s own world vulnerable (and therefore contestable and revisable), but also that relations of power already shape the contestations and conflicts between worlds. Using precarity as a lens to uncover these relations of power, and to bring them to the fore of the ethical discussion, is an important way to see how unexamined hierarchies and moral understandings shape the terms of the ethical dialogue, often in asymmetrical ways. Taken together, vulnerability and precarity, as conceptual tools, can help attune us to two types of epistemic injustices that often discredit certain knowledges and practices: “testimonial injustice [which] occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word: [and] hermeneutical injustice [which] occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007, 1; see also Bourgault 2019).
Acknowledging the vulnerability of our onto-epistemology, and the multiplicity of worlds that exist, helps us foreground the possibility (and likelihood) of hermeneutical injustice. Because of the differences between worlds, and because we are products of a particular world with a particular socio-symbolic order, ethical dilemmas across worlds will involve gaps in collective interpretive resources. The limits of knowing, or the impossibility of knowing another world fully, have already been described throughout this dissertation, and are evident in the example of how to care for atiku/caribou. The modern world, premised on a thick distinction between Human and Nature, in which Nature can only ever be an object, does not have the epistemic resources to understand the will of atiku. However, understanding one’s own world as vulnerable and, by extension, one’s practices and judgements as vulnerable, as the ethics of care proposes, orients moral actors towards the ongoing task of decentering their assumptions and beliefs so as to try to learn the other’s needs while also foregrounding the vulnerability of this very task. Vulnerable moral thinking does not attempt to gloss over difference, nor does it involve a hubristic assuredness that difference can be translated; instead, vulnerable moral thinking involves acknowledging the vulnerability of one’s own judgement (including acknowledging the vulnerability of asserting a particular understanding of ‘vulnerability’ itself) and the riskiness and difficulty of attempting to dialogue across difference.

A lens of precarity likewise helps attune us to the possibility of testimonial injustice, which occurs when prejudice allows some to discredit (or give less credit to) the knowledges and practices of others. For instance, the precarity of the Innu world, described above, points to such prejudices in the example at hand. Because the modern
world fails to acknowledge its own vulnerability, and because of prejudices and relations of power that render the Innu world precarious vis-à-vis modernity, the Innu knowledge, Innu hunting practices, and Innu relationship with *atiku* are discredited as ‘not real,’ downgraded to belief or tradition, and seen as less valuable than the knowledges and practices of science. However, by orienting the moral actor to these pre-existing relations of power, and revealing the ways in which these power dynamics shape the ethical dilemma, the conceptual tools of vulnerability and precarity can together position the moral actor to contemplate the vulnerability of their own world and judgement in order to try and suspend (or even amend) their prejudices.

In other words, in addition to providing a conceptual lens from which to understand the relations between worlds – and therefore understand the context in and through which any given ethical dilemma is unfolding – thinking about vulnerability and precarity allows moral actors to emphasize continually their own vulnerability while also interrogating critically how relations of power mask the vulnerability of some worlds/practices/judgements by discrediting other worlds/practices/judgements. As a meta-ethical orientation, understanding the pluriversal landscape as vulnerable and precarious serves as both a critical tool (in that it uncovers relations of power between worlds and investigates how these relations of power shape the ways in which the moral quandary is understood and discussed) and a reflexive tool (in that vulnerability and

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30 To some extent, the modern world may be acknowledging its vulnerability in this case, in that it is acknowledging the vulnerability of the caribou herd (a sort of ecological vulnerability). However, it does not acknowledge that its own understanding of vulnerability (in terms of biodiversity and sustainability, for instance) is vulnerable (i.e., one understanding of vulnerability amongst many, including the Innu’s understanding of vulnerability, which relates to the ways in which their relationship with *atiku* has been rendered precarious).
precarity urge the moral subject to critique and destabilize the biases and assumptions that shape their moral judgements and response. In so doing, vulnerable ethical dialogue and judgement aims to dehierarchalize the relations of power that shape the ethical dilemma; vulnerability and precarity (as a critical tool) allow moral subjects to identify and interrogate relations of power and then seek to address those relations of power (and how they shape the construction and response to the ethical problem) through vulnerable and revisable judgement (as a reflective tool). Vulnerable judgement rejects pre-existing moral hierarchies that render some moral voices precarious, and allows for a more symmetrical relation between moral selves to develop.

Of course, engaging in vulnerable judgement is difficult. It requires a constant decentering of the self to try and contemplate the needs of the other; it requires an ongoing commitment to moral judgements and practices as iterative processes; it may require contestation and conflict. For instance, given the limits of knowing, I believe it is impossible for the subjects of the modern world to know atîku. As Hekman (1995) reminds us, we are constituted by our onto-epistemologies, our moral forms of life; as such, to know atîku, I suggest, would entail inhabiting a new world. Yet, in deciding how to care for atîku/caribou, the ethics of care would suggest that the actors representing the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador must try to decenter their assumptions and biases and learn about the world of the Innu. This is not, of course, to suggest some sort of romanticized adoption (cooptation) of Innu knowledge and practice. Instead, I believe that care provides a language that can help us with the great task of translating across worlds without losing sight of the difference(s) at stake. As Mary Louise Pratt (2002, 29) notes, one of the most interesting things in terms of translation is the ways in which
worlds31 “can at one and the same time be so deeply, utterly, and particularly distinctive and yet be comprehensible to those outside them.” Care shares this quality; what, exactly, constitutes good care is contextual, based in a particular moral form of life, and therefore, heterogeneous and changing. At the same time, we often (although not always) recognize care when we see it; care can be comprehensible to those outside the caring relation, and we can find connections of understanding when we talk about care, even if ‘care’ itself means something different to the moral subjects involved in the discussion.

Because of these qualities, I believe that care can provide a language to talk about moral concerns even when differences are at play, particularly because, as the ethics of care requires, care itself must be agonized. To return to the example at hand, Blaser (2016, 561) notes that because the “spiritual connection with caribou did not translate into what Euro-Canadians would recognize as care, then there was no such connection.” If care was instead agonized, if the modern subjects involved in this dilemma were willing to acknowledge their own vulnerable judgements and the ways in which relations of power rendered the care of atîku precarious (precarious as in difficult to think and precarious as in making the practices of care difficult to reproduce), the Innu practices of care would not be erased. Inversely, care itself would be expanded, and the ethical dialogue would be enriched as other possible solutions for caring for atîku/caribou are put forward and contemplated in meaningful ways. For this reason, the language of care can prove useful in the pursuit of “translation as a process of controlled equivocation” (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 5; also quoted in Blaser 2016, 565). Translation in this vein is

31 Pratt actually writes this quote in reference to ‘cultures.’ However, in reading her article, I believe substituting ‘world’ for ‘culture’ is appropriate because her understanding of culture and irrepressible difference aligns with the concept of worlds in the pluriversal literature.
not about reaching equivalence through either an existing or new referent. Instead, the
goal of translation as a process of controlled equivocation is to address multiple
things/achieve multiple goals simultaneously (Blaser 2016, 565).

For example, Blaser (2016, 564-565) describes how his research team worked to build a proposal to intervene in the dilemma of how to care for *atîku*/*caribou*. In particular, the team proposed (and continues to propose) that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador support a limited hunt, “allowed to the Innu communities under their strict ‘traditional’ protocols” (Blaser 2018, 61). This, the researchers suggest, would likely generate support from the Innu community, and as a result, they would take fewer animals (therefore decreasing hunting without stopping it fully). In this way, both *atîku* and caribou are cared for: “Promoting and enforcing proper *nataun* protocol (caring for *atîku*) also meant hunting for fewer animals (caring for caribou); neither the Innu hunters nor the wildlife managers had to subordinate their own practices of caring. In fact, in this translation, caring for caribou and *atîku* would have reinforced each other” (Blaser 2016, 565). In this solution, the language of care provides a way to address the moral problem of the declining population of *atîku/*caribou without requiring that *atîku* be translated to caribou or vice versa.

Relational thinking – a key part of moral deliberation from an ethics of care perspective – is also evident in this solution; the goal is to preserve the relations (both with *atîku* and with caribou) that are at the heart of this ethical dilemma, and to meet everyone’s caring goals. This type of solution is, I believe, central to the type of moral thinking/doing inherent in the ethics of care. Recall, for example, Amy, the young girl in Gilligan’s (1993) study who insisted that there must be a way to satisfy the demands and
needs of both the pharmacist and Heinz. The ethics of care prioritizes the enhancement and preservation of relationships as a moral good; resolving moral dilemmas is to attend to the relationships involved, to engage with them critically, and to respond to the ways in which the relationships are rendered precarious. The point is not to get it perfect. Care can never be finished; it can only be engaged in over and over again to the best of our abilities and revised when necessary.

It is for these reasons (as may now be evident) that I suggest that the language of care and relational thinking makes the ethics of care a useful lens for modern subjects to deliberate on ethical dilemmas involving earth-beings. For instance, María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses an ethics of care approach to analyze the ethical practices involved in composting. Specifically, she argues that the ethics of care, with its relational ontology, decents morality from human subjects by focusing on relations of care; for instance, the relation between soil and humans, by which people contribute to the maintenance and rejuvenation of the soil via composting, and by which soil provides nourishment for the food which sustains people. This decentering ‘de-objectifies’ non-human worlds and entities “by exposing their liveliness and agency” in the relationship, and ‘de-subjectifies’ humans “by trying to think of [human moral] agency as a form of ontological agency among others” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 141). The ethics of care, by prioritizing relations – and particularly, caring relations – can contemplate earth-beings without knowing earth-beings.

For instance, as pointed out above, modern subjects, such as the wildlife agents involved in the management of the caribou herd, cannot know atiku; however, they can think relationally, and understand that the relationship between the Innu people and atiku
is of great importance to the maintenance and continuation of the Innu world. They can contemplate how to enhance that relationship, and grapple with how their own relationship with caribou interacts with the Innu relationship with atiku. They can understand that agency comes from our various relations (even if they cannot conceive of agential earth-beings); preserving these relations is therefore of moral value. In this way, the ethics of care avoids a romanticized engagement with earth-beings (in which modern subjects now ‘know’ or ‘revere’ earth-beings) while also not disregarding their significance. A language of care, and relational thinking, helps provide both discursive tools and different vantage points to account for many different types of subjects, relations, forms of agency, and practices of care that comprise heterogeneous worlds.

Ultimately, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador ultimately did not accept the researchers’ proposal (Blaser 2016); instead, they implemented (and maintained) the hunting ban. This moral dilemma was addressed by a more rationalist approach to morality; the caribou population was declining, ‘science’ tells us that banning hunting will stop the decline, so the solution is to universally implement a hunting ban. However, it is worth highlight that the ban has proven largely ineffective. As of 2018, the herd population had dropped significantly again, to a low of 5,500 individuals (CBC News 2018).

The ethics of care, I suggest, again provides a useful vantage point from which to contemplate this aspect of the dilemma, as the ethics of care requires that moral actors continually pay attention to how an ethical conflict unfolds and evolves in light of different interventions. In particular, the ethics of care, as an iterative and materialist
ethics,\textsuperscript{32} would compel us to revisit this situation given the consequences of the hunting ban.

A material ethics entails […] that we can compare the very real material consequences of ethical positions and draw conclusions from those comparisons. We can, for example, argue that the material consequences of one ethics [are] more conducive to human and nonhuman flourishing than that of another. Furthermore, material ethics allows us to shift the focus from ethical principles to ethical practices. […] Ethical practices – as opposed to ethical principles – do not seek to extend themselves over and above material realities, but instead emerge from them, taking into account multiple material consequences. (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, 7-8)

For the ethics of care, applying a principle cannot resolve an ethical dilemma, because the ethics of care sees ethics as an ongoing task of tending to caring responsibilities. For the ethics of care, we must instead be attentive to the outcomes of our moral practices of care and take account of whether or not caring needs are addressed. In this case, the continuing decline of the caribou herd would suggest that the ethical practice (the hunting ban) is insufficient and failing to address the needs of the vulnerable herd. As a result, the ethics of care would demand that we revisit the question of how to care for atîku/caribou, pay attention to how atîku/caribou have responded to the first intervention (the hunting ban), and revise this intervention given the results. Again, the ethics of care reminds us that care is never complete or over with; we cannot shed our caring responsibilities, nor can we ignore them. Instead, an ethics of care orients us towards the ongoing and iterative process of responding to vulnerability and precarity through revisable and contestable practices of care. This is how our worlds are maintained and made better.

There is a second reason, however, that the ethics of care would demand that we revisit the question of how to care for atîku/caribou. First and foremost, as just noted, it is

\textsuperscript{32} Section 4.2 reviews this aspect of the ethics of care.
evident that the caring needs of the herd have not been met; the way in which we have addressed the caring need has not been effective. Second, as the meta-orientation developed above reminds us, understanding vulnerable and precarious worlds is ethically significant because in addition to allowing us to attend to the pressing ethical issue of why certain worlds are rendered more or less vulnerable (that is, precarious) than others in the pluriversal matrix (and thereby understand how the unequal vulnerability of worlds shapes the ways in which we construct, understand, and address moral dilemmas between worlds), this framework also allows us to be attentive to how our ethical deliberations regarding particular dilemmas further constitute the conditions for the reproduction (or not) of specific worlds. That is, the ways in which we address and respond to moral dilemmas also (re)create the conditions in and through which worlds (re)produce.

According to this point, the ethics of care would thus also demand that we revisit this moral conflict because of the ways in which caring for atiku/caribou is implicated in the reproduction of both the modern world and the Innu world. As Blaser (2016, 564) writes, “what the atiku/caribou case shows us is that worlding a common world does not always produce just an externality; sometimes it interrupts and destroys other worldlings: caring for caribou in certain ways endangers the existence of atiku” and the world of which atiku is a part. The modern world’s enactment of a common world (via the enactment of a common caring practice for atiku/caribou) disproportionally impacts, and renders precarious, the reproduction of the Innu world. It is for this reason that this ethical dilemma, like all ethical dilemmas across multiple worlds, is also a political dilemma. The political in the pluriverse is about the ongoing (re)establishment of an onto-epistemology; the ways in which a given ethical dilemma is understood and
addressed (or not) further forms the conditions of possibility for a world (or worlds) to (re)establish themselves. More simply, how we address ethical dilemmas in the pluriverse has political implications for the (re)production of worlds.

In this case, the ways in which the ethical dilemma of caring for atiku/caribou has been resolved (a hunting ban) is insufficient in at least two ways: atiku/caribou have not responded well to the intervention, and the herd continues to deplete; and the world which requires a particular relationship with atiku is rendered precarious by the intervention. That is, even though caring for atiku/caribou has been associative (if not symmetrical), as both groups have dialogued on the issue and recognize that atiku/caribou need to be cared for, the outcome of the ways in which this issue has been addressed is dissociative for the Innu world. The hunting ban interrupts and destroys the Innu worlding practices and renders their world (more) precarious. The ethics of care, as attuned to vulnerable/precarious worlds, would require, then, that these caring practices be revised, as they not only fail to meet the direct caring need, but they also hinder the reproduction of the Innu world.

(On the other hand, of course, the fact that the modern intervention has continued to fail to address the problem sufficiently may yet come to destabilize the modern world and point to the limits of modern science. The pluriverse is always unfolding through complex (dis)associative practices and relations. Practices of care and caring knowledge

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33 While I have been unable to find research as to why the hunting ban has been ineffective in terms of addressing the declining population, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador maintains that the herd’s decline is generally related to “deterioration in habitat and food resources, predation and climate change” (MacEachern 2016). One could posit, based on this, that the reason for the continuing decrease in the herd’s population suggests that the other factors – habitat and food resources depletion and climate change – are having a much more significant impact on the herd’s overall health than ‘predation,’ which was meant to be addressed through the ban.
can deconstruct and produce relations (and worlds) in surprising ways.)

Lastly, I suggest that thinking about this ethical dilemma of how to care for 
*atiku*/caribou also illustrates why I believe that building a pluriversal ethics with the 
ethics of care and thinking ethical horizons in the pluriverse along the lines of 
vulnerability and precarity is a more fruitful pluriversal project than the “cosmopolitical 
proposal” (Stengers 2005), which is oft-cited in the pluriversal literature. The 
cosmopolitical proposal is a commitment to building a common world more slowly. “The 
idea is precisely to slow down the construction of this common world, to create a space 
for hesitation regarding what it means to say ‘good’” (Stengers 2005, 995). In this way, 
the cosmopolitical project is a normative and axiological project, that is committed to 
building a common world or vision of the good, although what that vision may be is 
undecided beforehand. The cosmopolitical proposal focuses on two mechanisms for 
building this common world: slowing down reasoning and equality. Slowing down 
reasoning means discarding or suspending one’s onto-epistemic commitments as best as 
possible so as to focus on whatever exists in common, and equality means that “all have 
to be present in the mode that makes the decision as difficult as possible, that precludes 
any shortcut or simplification, any differentiation a priori between that which counts and 
that which does not” (Stengers 2005, 1003). In this way, “cosmopolitics remains oriented 
to the composition of the common world, even [as] it insist[s] on the lack of guarantees 
for such a project” (Blaser 2016, 548).

However, as Blaser (2016, 563) argues, “sometimes different worldings may 
coexist – enabling each other or without noticing each other – but at other times they 
interrupt each other. Not being reducible to each other’s terms, when and where
worldings interrupt each other, the multiplicity at stake might not be amenable to the kind of singularization that […] the constitution of the common world seems to require.”

Indeed, in the case of atiku/caribou, the hunting ban interrupts the Innu world and renders their relationship with atiku (and hence their worlding practices) precarious. As Blaser (2016, 2018) argues, when different worlding practices are not amenable to singularization (i.e., stringing together in common; in this case, the impossibility of simultaneously hunting and not-hunting atiku/caribou), and given the colonial relations of power that already constitute relations between worlds, relying solely on building a common world may end up reproducing the power hierarchies that already exist. The more-powerful world can dictate what, exactly, is ‘common,’ and thereby erase differences that are not comprehensible to its logic.

The ethics of care, as a pluriversal ethics, is not premised on, nor committed to the prospect of, such a common world. Instead, the ethics of care is an open-ended and continually unfolding project, which orients us to the “ethico-political significance of doings of care that make the substrate of everyday life” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 204). These doings of care require continual attentiveness to the other and to difference; they are ongoing, iterative, and revisable. Care is not a theory for building a common world based on thick prescriptive caring practices; care does not seek “a separate cozy realm where ‘nice’ relations can thrive” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 204). The ethics of care, conversely, orients us to the difficult task of challenging relations of power that impede relations of care while simultaneously fostering relations that maintain lives in and across worlds as well as reasonably possible. Of course, there will be competing caring needs; vulnerabilities do not neatly align, and often require very different responses. The ethics
of care does not shy away from such conflicts. Rather, the ethics of care demands that we
dwell in the messiness of care and acknowledges that while we must always respond to
vulnerable needs, such response will never be ideal. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro writes
(2013b, 37, emphasis in original), “the ‘good life’ is a good enough life. There is no
better than enough.” The ethics of care, which understands that responding to caring
needs, repairing relations, and living as well as reasonably possible, is a difficult, messy,
and often conflictual business, would agree.

5.5 Conclusion

This final section, in which I use the example of atiku/caribou to demonstrate how the
ethics of care provides a useful vantage point from which to contemplate an ethical
dilemma across worlds, therefore brings my argument full circle. By starting with the
ethics of care, I argue that the pluriverse is always-already constituted by morality,
understood as the practices of care by which we reproduce and maintain our lives and our
worlds as well as reasonably possible. Moreover, the ways in which we attend to ethical
dilemmas in the pluriverse further constitutes the very political conditions for the
(re)production (or not) of the multiple vulnerable worlds that comprise the pluriversal
matrix. Thinking about the ethics of care, and employing key concepts such as
vulnerability, precarity, and developing a (dis)associative theory of care, helps us to
understand better the relations between worlds and the ways in which power permeates
these relations, situating worlds differently, and shaping the ethical conflicts (and
consequences) that emerge as worlds co-mingle.

To recapitulate, the notion of vulnerable worlds reminds us that all worlds – even
seemingly stable ones – are contingent and vulnerable to change (whether or not this is acknowledged in/by a particular world). At the same time, certain worlds are rendered more vulnerable, that is precarious, by relations of power that legitimize certain ontoepistemologies while devaluing others. Of course, there is also always a modicum of empowerment in this precarity; precarious worlds are not wholly subsumed by the logic of the dominant onto-epistemology, and therefore point to the limits (and vulnerability) of that occupying world. In tracing the ways in which certain worlds are rendered precarious, this meta-theoretical orientation towards vulnerable and precarious worlds allows us to attend to several pressing ethical tasks in the context of the pluriverse.

First, the pluriverse as I have described it is characterized by an axiological commitment to partial relations of care and to the multiplication of worlds as worlds. Given this, a pressing ethical concern for the pluriverse is attending to the ways in which certain worlds face a greater struggle to reproduce than others. Investigating precarious worlds, and the ways in which certain worlds experience precarious relations of production, precarious relations of distribution, and/or precarious relations to the state, helps with this ethical task. Second, understanding the relations between worlds, and the ways in which some worlds are rendered precarious, helps to foreground the background conditions which shape ethical dilemmas across worlds. That is, looking at the relations between vulnerable and precarious worlds helps to uncover how power dynamics and moral-epistemic hierarchies operate to shape the ways in which ethical dilemmas are understood, debated, and addressed. This is a crucially important task because, as the ethics of care emphasizes, moral dilemmas always emerge in and through some context; they cannot be abstracted from the relations of power in and through which they unfold.
Furthermore, understanding the relations of power that uphold some worlds in hegemonic positions while relegating others to the margins of the global political economy encourages moral subjects to interrogate their own onto-epistemic assumptions and biases, and to be open to revising their own (vulnerable) moral judgement when necessary. Lastly, an orientation towards vulnerable and precarious worlds also orients moral selves towards the fact that in the pluriverse, the ways in which we deal with ethical conflicts across worlds is also implicated in the very production (or disruption) of worlds. Moral practices and moral understandings are intimately intertwined with the reproduction of particular forms of moral life.

 Relatedly, the ethics of care, starting from a relational and vulnerable ontology, is also well-positioned to reflect on the particular characteristic of the political in the context of the pluriverse. Again, by starting with the ethics of care, I argue that in the pluriverse, the political – as having to do with the (re)establishment of a particular world – can only be conceived of as (dis)associative. As worlds intermingle and interact, and as worlds maintain or break partial connections, certain worlds will experience degroundings and ruptures more impactfully than others, who may in fact experience regroundings, and thus greater stability of their onto-epistemic orders. By extension, dissociative and associative political action can also both lead to the political in the pluriverse; sometimes collective coming together to care for a common world will result in a political moment (for some but perhaps not all of the worlds involved), while other times the political moment will be brought about by conflict and agonism. The ethics of care, as a critical and productive ethic, is well-positioned to theorize the political as (dis)associative, as agonistic and ruptural and as collective and cooperative. Care ethics
sees care as something which normatively binds us, given our relational and vulnerable being, but it also sees care as something which is conflictual and open to agonistic deliberation. Likewise, the ethics of care sees the importance of deconstructing relations of power that suppress certain relational practices and knowledges, as well as the value of maintaining and reproducing relations of care that allow us to live well (indeed, these two tasks are often two sides of the same coin). In this way, the ethics of care sees critique and collective response as both politically significant. Such a vantage point is useful when contemplating the political in the pluriverse, which refers to the ways in which worlds are established and continually reestablished as they interact in complex ways. In fact, it is this very vantage point (which sees disruption and reproduction as equally politically significant) that returns us to the normative project of the pluriverse (i.e., a dual commitment to disrupting the one-world story and building a world in which multiple vulnerable worlds can flourish in/through partial relations of care).

In this way, this chapter demonstrates that rethinking global ethics in the context of the pluriverse is a much greater task than ‘applying’ a particular approach to ethics to this ‘new’ landscape. Instead, this chapter uses the ethics of care to rethink the pluriverse (as a meta-world), to rethink ethics (as practices that constitute and emerge from forms of life), to rethink the political in the pluriverse (as (dis)associative), and to demonstrate that the pluriversal project is ethical all the way down. An ethics for the pluriverse is not something to be ‘added’ to pluriversal considerations. Building a pluriversal ethics, from an ethics of care perspective, is to build the pluriverse itself.
The field of Global Ethics strives to address the “ethical questions and problems arising out of the global interconnection and interdependence of the world’s population” (Hutchings 2010, 1). However, the pluriverse – which foregrounds multiple ways of being in and seeing the world, and thereby illuminates both our interconnectedness and our radical differences – poses a fundamental challenge to the ways in which the field of Global Ethics approaches ethical questions. In the pluriverse, differences are at their most robust; the onto-epistemic differences across worlds can manifest in surprising places and in surprising ways, and they may not be translatable or fully conceivable to subjects from different worlds. At the same time, worlds – as relational unfoldings and enactments – are also deeply interconnected and intertwined. We share a material reality, and our onto-epistemologies are inescapably intertwined through ‘partial connections’ (Strathern 2004).

This apparent paradox, in which worlds are at once intimately intertwined and also radically different, constitutes a particular political landscape with unique implications for conceiving of global ethics and deliberating and addressing global ethical dilemmas. Addressing global ethical questions cannot rely on universal grounds and principles, à la the rationalist approaches in Global Ethics, as the pluriverse orients us to multiple universals, that is, a multiplicity of heterogeneous worlds which are ‘true’ in their own right. There is not an ultimate foundation, structuring principle, or common trait that we can assume will ground and unite moral thinking across these multiple worlds. Instead, differences in the pluriverse are onto-epistemic, and cannot be
subsumed, circumvented or made commensurable. Relying on transcendental and
universal truths, accessed by a particular form of rationalism, is not efficacious when
contemplating ethical dilemmas where such deep and pervasive differences are at play.
Indeed, the ways in which rationalist approaches to Global Ethics purport one right
approach to moral thinking often smuggle in unexamined hierarchies (Beattie and Schick
2013, 9) which reflect and reproduce existing relations of power; in so doing, rationalist
approaches to Global Ethics fail to engage seriously with different ways of being in and
seeing the world, different “forms of moral life” (Walker 2007, 105).

At the same time, neither can global ethical issues in the pluriverse be
contemplated purely by emphasizing the contingency of all grounds – as is the case with
some alternative approaches in the field of Global Ethics, like postmodernist ethics – as
worlds exist, and persist, through time (although perhaps not evenly so). Focusing on
radical contingency alone does not provide much guidance when attempting to theorize
and address ethical dilemmas across actually-existing worlds. A primary goal in the
pluriversal context (which is firmly rooted in the decolonial project) is to create space, or
reorder relations of power, so as to allow for multiple worlds as worlds to flourish.
Deconstructing worlds – while useful for challenging any specific world’s claim to be the
only world – is not amenable to the task of treating worlds as real. Navigating ethical
issues in the context of the pluriverse in part requires giving weight to the groundings of
multiple particular worlds (as opposed to undermining such groundings). Worlds, as
enacted and unfolding and as co-constitutive of subjects, are actually-existing, and a key
part of the pluriversal project is to treat them as such.

Because of this, the pluriverse poses a particular challenge to Global Ethics, in
that the pluriverse demands *a multiplication of universality*, as opposed to either a single universal or a multiplicity of (contingent) particularities. Such a challenge requires displacing several of the binaries that shape many approaches to Global Ethics (and that have been reviewed in detail throughout this dissertation). It demands that we, as global ethicists, undertake a different kind of theorizing project.

For instance, the antinomy of universality versus particularity is an insufficient theoretical space for thinking pluriversally: the pluriverse is neither a universal nor is it composed of multiple contingent particularities. Instead, the pluriverse asks us to contemplate temporally simultaneous actually-existing onto-epistemologies, and the ethical-political conflicts that arise as these actually-existing worlds interact. These worlds exist – and are therefore unique ‘universals’ in their own right – but are also vulnerable, and susceptible to change, as the relations and practices that constitute a world may shift, evolve, or even be rendered precarious through relations of power. Holding on to either end of the universal-contingency pole is untenable for contemplating ethical horizons in the pluriverse, which requires focusing on the unfolding relations that make and remake worlds time and time again (for it is these very unfolding relations that make worlds both real and enacted and, somewhat paradoxically, particular, contingent and vulnerable).

Relatedly, the pluriverse requires moving beyond epistemic binaries like objective/subjective, impartial/biased, and absolute/relative. In the pluriverse, all knowledge is situated: all knowledge is partial and subjective in that it comes from a particular world, a particular co-constitutive and enacted ontology and epistemology. At the same time, however, this situatedness does not mean that we descend into relativism,
a scenario in which we can never contemplate right or wrong. In contrast, it is the very situatedness of all knowledge that allows us to pursue moral criticism and debate, although this is a very different kind of moral philosophizing than that which is found in many dominant approaches to Global Ethics. Rather, this type of moral thinking involves detailed examination of worlds, critical moral ethnography (Walker 2007, 246), and the investigation of moral forms of life that are co-constitutive of worlds, so as to understand as best as possible (although never perfectly) where moral knowledge, ethical practices, and different sets of values come from. And of course, this task equally involves critically examining one’s own world, one’s own onto-epistemology, and the situatedness of one’s own moral claims. The pluriverse requires an approach to global ethics that rejects attempts to find universal and ‘objective’ moral truths, on the one hand, and moral apathy, on the other. Instead, as I have argued in this dissertation, building a pluriversal ethics requires that we pursue the relentless task of examining over and over again the ways in which different moral voices, and different moral knowledges, are formed, and the conditions in and through which certain moral claims and judgements gain authority and meaning.

And lastly, the binary of wholes and parts, in which we are either talking about a part of a whole, or the whole as formed by all the parts, is not a useful framework for contemplating a pluriversal ethics. The pluriverse is not a totalizing whole, comprised of units that come together to form a structure; it is a partially connected matrix of worlds that overlap and yet exceed each other in meaningful ways. Yet, Global Ethics is again often trapped by this kind of thinking. Commonly, approaches to Global Ethics begin with a conception of individuals (atomistic units) who come together to form political-
ethical communities (perhaps in the cosmopolitan vision of a global community and common humanity, or in the form of states or other political communities, which themselves are treated as individual units that together comprise the international sphere or some other whole). It is very difficult to think pluriversally from such a conceptual space. The pluriverse, which I have argued is premised upon a relational ontology, demands that we focus on the continually enacted, (re)produced, and unfolding relations which bring worlds in to existence (in contradistinction to conceptualizing pre-existing parts that seamlessly come together via relationships to form a totalizing whole).

Thinking through this challenge, thinking in/through/with the pluriverse, and attempting to contemplate global ethics in a way that does not rely on or reproduce such binaries, has been the core task of this dissertation. More specifically, I have sought to develop theoretical tools, drawing upon the ethics of care, to understand better this pluriversal landscape, and to develop an orientation from which to build a pluriversal ethics.

The ethics of care, as presented here, is a critical political moral theory which starts from a relational social ontology, and which conceives of moral subjects as constituted in and by their particular relations. As a result, moral subjects are both heterogenous – emerging from unique sets of relations – and vulnerable. The moral subject, for the ethics of care, is not an atomistic individual, but rather a vulnerable processual self (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 56), who is always a relational becoming. Because of this relational ontology, the ethics of care is normatively oriented towards repairing relations of care, i.e., relations that minimize harm and suffering, meet the needs of vulnerable moral subjects, and allow us to reproduce our worlds as well as is reasonably
possible. From this vantage point, morality does not refer to principles that can be applied to a given context in order to know what is the right thing to do; morality is instead recast as moral practices, in and through which we repair and maintain our vulnerable selves, and our vulnerable worlds. It is also through these moral practices, and our forms of (moral) life, that moral knowledge emerges. The ethics of care sees moral knowledge as emerging from the complex sets of relations that constitute our lives, from our practices of care which allow us to respond to the needs of others iteratively and in an on-going way. As such, the ethics of care also understands all moral judgement to be situated, vulnerable, and therefore open to revision; our particular moral voices, our particular moral practices, and our particular moral knowledge emerge in and through our co-constitutive relations. As these relations change and evolve, and as other moral practices are brought to the fore, the ethics of care contends that moral selves must continually pursue the messy and difficult task of attempting to decenter themselves (never fully possible) so as to learn attentively about other forms of moral life and other moral selves (again, never fully possible). In so doing, moral selves come to agonize their moral response and revise their moral practices when necessary.

For these reasons, the ethics of care, as argued extensively in chapter four, critiques and rejects binary thinking – including the universal-particular, objective-subjective, absolutist-relativist, and whole-part binaries mentioned just now – and positions the ethicist to think relationally, to focus on relations and practices of care that repair and maintain vulnerable moral selves and vulnerable worlds, and to understand that all knowledge is uncertain, and thus open to revision. In so doing, I argue that the ethics of care is well-positioned to serve as a starting point from which to build a
pluriversal ethics.

Specifically, and as argued more fully in chapter five, these care ethical premises reorient Global Ethics to contemplate better the political landscape that is the pluriverse because the ethics of care foregrounds how a pluriversal ethics is an ethics of vulnerability and precarity. An ethics of care perspective, I have suggested, implies that worlds, as relational sets of practices that are in need of continual (re)production, maintenance, and repair, are vulnerable: they are contingent, and open to change and restructurinig as relations of power (re)shape worlding practices. The implications of conceiving of worlds as vulnerable, for a pluriversal ethics, are threefold.

First, understanding how certain worlds are rendered more vulnerable – that is, precarious – as worlds conflict and co-mingle emerges as a pressing ethical task for the pluriverse, which is, itself, a normative commitment to building a world in which multiple worlds as worlds can flourish. ‘Multiplying’ worlds, in this sense, means that we must attend to the ways in which the reproduction of certain worlds is made precarious. Interrogating critically the relations of power which impede the maintenance and reproduction of particular worlds, and striving to amend those relations so that many worlds can co-exist, is a primary ethical task in the pluriverse – one which is made visible by understanding that, as the ethics of care with its relational social ontology suggests, worlds are vulnerable.

At the same time, it is also against this background of vulnerable and precarious worlds that specific ethical quandaries unfold and are addressed (or not). Again, understanding this background is of moral import here, as it forms the very conditions in and through which ethical issues across worlds unfold and are understood. The ethics of
care emphasizes the moral salience of context; all moral dilemmas and ethical practices emerge from and unfold within particular sets of complex relations. A pluriversal ethics, from an ethics of care perspective, must likewise be attuned to context, where the context of the pluriverse, as argued above, is one of vulnerable and precarious worlds which are striving to sustain their existence as they confront each other continually.

Lastly, the ethics of care, by understanding the configuration of the pluriverse (and the multiplication of worlds within) as always-already vulnerable also highlights the importance of paying attention to how the specific practices that constitute particular ethical deliberations in the pluriverse can render some worlds more vulnerable – that is, precarious – than others. The ways in which we address and respond to moral problems constitutes further the conditions of possibility for worlds to reproduce (or not). The ethics of care, as a materialist ethic that is concerned with the consequences of all moral practices, and as a revisable ethic, in that all moral judgement is always acknowledged to be situated, partial, vulnerable, and therefore open to revision, positions us to pay attention to the ways in which our moral practices and moral responses impact the reproduction of certain worlds in a given context.

In these ways, an ethics of care for the pluriverse, as developed here, is not simply the application of care ethics to the pluriversal context. Rather, building a pluriversal ethics, from an ethics of care perspective, is building the pluriverse itself. It is through our moral practices of care that we can agonize our different values and forms of moral life, as well as collectively strive to maintain, repair, and reproduce our different ontoepistemologies as well as is reasonably possible.
6.1 Why Should We Care?

I wish to conclude this dissertation with two final reflections. First, it is worth addressing the question of “Why should modern subjects care?” Why should modern agents think relationally – particularly when their world, as I have argued, is constituted by various mutually reinforcing binaries that obfuscate relationality? Why should modern subjects acknowledge the vulnerability of their judgement, especially if modernity occupies a hegemonic position in the pluriverse and holds so much power? The literature on the ethics of care has grappled with these questions, and in so doing, has sought to illuminate the political reasons why many modern subjects suppress relationality and vulnerability, and do not act on their caring responsibilities.

Joan Tronto (2013), for example, argues that certain people are given a ‘pass’ from thinking about or thinking with care because of the ways in which patriarchy codes the world and upholds certain masculinist norms and values while devaluing feminine norms and values. Under patriarchy, “what it means to be masculine is to be given a ‘pass’ out of thinking about ‘girl things’ including the caring responsibilities assigned to women” (Tronto 2013, 68). More exactly, hegemonic masculinity, which “can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 2005, 77),\(^1\) dictates that men are responsible for concerns other than caring. These other concerns are

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\(^1\) Importantly, the literature on masculinities also highlights that there are multiple masculinities, which vary by context, and which are differently related to each other (Connell 2005).
related to things like protection and production, and these concerns, it is worth noting, are seen as more valuable than feminized concerns like care.

For instance, protecting the political community from enemies and threats (either internal or external) is coded as masculine work, to be pursued by ‘strong’ and ‘independent’ subjects who can use violence, if necessary, to ensure good order (Tronto 2013, 74-76). This coding is important, because protection is, of course, a form of care work. If care is everything we do to maintain and repair our world(s) as well as possible (Fisher and Tronto 1990), then protection is a type of care labour. However, under patriarchy, protection is coded in a way that separates it from care – which is seen instead as the narrower activities of caring for needy and dependent people (Tronto 2013, 75). As a result, this splitting of care and protection (or perhaps more accurately, this hiding of the caring dimensions of protective work) “allows those who are in control of protective work to earn themselves the ‘protection pass’ out of responsibility for other, more feminized forms of care work” (Tronto 2013, 79). Those involved in protection have a ‘pass’ from caring or thinking with care, and are able to shirk their caring responsibilities.

The production pass functions in a similar way. Particularly within modern capitalism, work that produces a monetary outcome is viewed as the only socially valuable work (Tronto 2013, 84). This valuation of work depends on a split between the public and private, in which ‘private’ care work done in the home is devalued while work in the formal economy is valorized. And of course, as noted throughout this dissertation,

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2 Tronto (2013, 186) notes that while she focuses on protection and production, one could identify other forms of passes that disproportionately let some people off the hook for care. For instance, in certain religious communities, male religious leaders are given a pass from thinking about daily caring responsibilities.
this dichotomy is coded masculine (public) and feminine (private). The system of
codification and valuation inherent to patriarchy upholds certain forms of work – ‘men’s
work’ – and provides those who do such work with a pass from thinking about care.

Much like protection, it is important to note, production is again a form of care.
The point, however, is that the ways in which protection and production have been
gendered, the ways in which care has been narrowly defined under patriarchy as women’s
work for vulnerable individuals, and the ways in which the caring dimensions of
protection and production have been obscured, has resulted in a situation in which those
involved in protection and production are able to recuse themselves from discussions of
care and caring responsibilities. The allocation of protective and productive work is not
“part of any discussion of the proper allocation of caring responsibilities” (Tronto 2013, 94). Instead, the reverse is apparent: those subjects who are involved in protection and
production are able to ‘pass’ on thinking about, thinking with, and attending to caring
responsibilities. In other works, Tronto (1993) refers to this as “privileged
irresponsibility,” that is, the privilege not to care.

Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider (2018) provide another explanation for why
modern subjects do not think relationally or act with care, although this time from a
different vantage point. While Gilligan and Snider note that patriarchy has a strong socio-
cultural component, in that it “exists as a set of rules and values, codes and scripts that
specify how men and women should act and be in the world” (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 6),
they also argue that patriarchy “exists internally” (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 6). This
internalized and psychological functioning of patriarchy helps to explain why patriarchy
persists – and why it is so difficult for subjects to think relationally.
Specifically, Gilligan and Snider argue that we (meaning modern subjects) eschew our ability to think relationally and repair relationships in response to the trauma of loss that (inevitably) arises from relationality. As has been well rehearsed in this dissertation, our relational being renders us vulnerable, and open us up to harm. In order to avoid this harm, we repress our relationality, and sacrifice “relationship” – by which Gilligan and Snider mean an authentic connection to self and other. At the same time, suppressing our relational selves allows us to act and behave such that we can “have ‘relationships,’ meaning a place within the patriarchal order” (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 14). Because patriarchy values independence (and codes this as masculine), men are ‘rewarded’ for repressing their relationality, for achieving what Gilligan and Snider call pseudo-independence (2018, 72). Conversely, because patriarchy codes care as feminized, women are ‘rewarded’ for repressing their relationality (their connection to their self and their authentic connection with others) and ‘caring’ for others through inauthentic and anxious attachment, for enacting what Gilligan and Snider call pseudo-relationships (2018, 72).

The loss of trust in the possibility of relationship following an experience of separation […] can lead to two defensive patterns: symbiosis-like attachment and detachment from relationship, what we have called pseudo-relationships [which is feminized, in which women are rewarded within the patriarchal system for turning away from their relational self to preserve relationships] and pseudo-independence [which is masculinized, in which men are rewarded within the patriarchal system for turning away from their relational self to achieve independence]. These defensive styles of relating, moving from the fused and enmeshed to the distant and detached, are ultimately concerned with defending against the same unbearable threat of irreparable loss. Both defenses rest on the sacrifice of authentic connection as protection against the pain of a loss that has come to seem inescapable. (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 71-71)

In both cases, the suppression of relationship feels rewarding because it provides a defense against the trauma of a loss of relationship, albeit in different, gendered ways.
‘Real men,’ by disconnecting from their need for love and tender care, avoid experiencing betrayal and the pain they have come to associate with intimacy as their relationships become increasingly insensitive to expression of their emotional needs and vulnerabilities. ‘Good women,’ by detaching from their real thoughts and feelings, avoid the pain that comes from being in relationships that are unresponsive to their desires and concerns. (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 88)

At the same time, this detachment also reproduces men and women according to the gendered roles that patriarchy assigns (men as independent and women as caring). Fitting into these roles allows people to have relationships, a place in the broader social system (even if we might critique those systems, like patriarchy).

Yet, in moving away from our relationality, and detaching from ourselves and therefore from meaningful relationship with others, Gilligan and Snider (2018, 14) suggest that we also lose our capacity to repair relations. Without this ability – without thinking relationally and ‘with care’ – we are unable to dismantle hierarchies and repair relations which oppress some and privilege others. In forcing the loss of relationship (which psychologically feels rewarding as it helps us to avoid the trauma of loss), “the gender binary and hierarchy that are foundational to patriarchy undercut human relationality and, which is perhaps most essential, subvert our ability to repair ruptures and resist injustice” (Gilligan and Snider 2018, 101-102). Thus, on the one hand, the pathological component of shunning relationship (authentic connection with oneself and others) serves as a defense mechanism from the trauma of loss and also allows people to fit their gendered roles under patriarchy (which feels rewarding given the socio-cultural function of patriarchy). At the same time, this pathological component also upholds hierarchies, such as patriarchy, as we lose the capacity to think relationally and thereby repair and address unjust relationships. In this way, shunning relationship to avoid the trauma of loss also ensures (in a sort of tragic irony) that we cannot have relationship, the
very thing we are afraid of losing. The psychological and socio-cultural aspects of patriarchy play in a feedback loop, suppressing relational thinking, preventing us from acting to repair our relations, and impeding our ability to respond to unjust relationships.

Taken together, these arguments demonstrate that there are many reasons as to why people do not care. As a result, it seems likely that (certain) modern subjects will resist the meta-ethical orientation I have developed in this dissertation. They may resist relational thinking and they may refuse to acknowledge the vulnerability of their moral judgement.

These are thorny issues, and while it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop fully an argument as to how we can change the ways in which people reject relationality, I wish to conclude by pointing to some reasons as to why modern subjects should care (in the care ethical sense described throughout this dissertation).

First, as pointed out in chapter four, we are already implicated in relations of power via the historical unfolding and present-day manifestation of social structures (Young 2006). Several social structures – including the systems of power that I have discussed throughout this dissertation, like patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and racism – are intimately intertwined and structure social relations for the world’s population (albeit in particular ways in particular contexts). Given these relational ties, I believe that subjects of the modern world should think relationally and seek to engage with the responsibilities that we owe one another in/through this interconnectedness (especially the responsibilities we owe others given the privileges that we modern subjects hold and that can be directly linked to the ways in which modernity was historically – and
continues to be – enacted). Importantly, thinking relationally here, while important, is also insufficient. Focusing on the practices of care and responsibility that we owe others also requires an acknowledgement of the vulnerability of our moral judgement, and an openness to the fact that our ‘way’ may not be the right way. Thinking relationally, and foregrounding the vulnerability of judgement, I suggest, would allow us “to focus on what we really owe according to our values to others who do not live as we live” (Walker 2007, 244-245, emphasis in original). For example, “more than assistance or intervention in what they do, [...] we may owe [others who are very different from ourselves] changes in our own way of life” (Walker 2007, 245). A willingness to think relationally so as to uncover what we owe others (particularly given the ways in which we moderns are implicated in and benefit from social structures of power), and a commitment to revising our own practices and beliefs when necessary, are key here.

Second, given that worlds, as argued in this dissertation, are connected through partial relations, changes in the relations and practices that form a particular world can also have direct implications for our world. That is, the layers of ‘politicality’ that comprise the pluriverse and tie our worlds together mean that the modern world is always-already vulnerable because of its relations to other worlds. Ignoring this fact, and neglecting to attend to the power of precarity – that is, the ways in which worlds that are marginalized in the global political economy can wield a particular type of power that points to the limits of our own world, or the ways in which a reordering of one world may reorder another in surprising ways – can only result in a failure to understand and grapple

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3 See chapter two for a brief overview of some of the violence and harms related to the enactment of modernity.
with the consequences of the partial connections between worlds. We can only, however, grapple with such interconnectedness by thinking relationally and by acknowledging the vulnerability that necessarily arises from relationality.\textsuperscript{4} Even if modernity occupies a hegemonic position in the current configuration of the pluriverse, modernity is not invincible; precarious worlds exert power in their precarity, in the ways in which they exceed the onto-epistemology of modernity, and in ways that can have implications for the modern world. These implications, and the potential ‘loss’ of aspects of our ways of being in and seeing the world that may result as worlds interact in complex ways, cannot be avoided through a suppression of our relational being.

Lastly, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, and as Margaret Urban Walker (2007, 261) writes, “Morality is truly a collective and collaborative work.” Morality emerges in and through practices and forms of life; “these forms of living acquire their authority (as distinct from, but not opposed to, what other powers hold them in place) by its being and seeming worthwhile to live like that:”

What is in question here are the general contours of a shared life, not anything one person does now, but a set of practices that keep people mutually accountable and important things accounted for. Is it worthwhile to live as we, or as others, do? Is how some of us live ‘how to live?’ (Walker 2007, 247-248)

Certainly, pursuing such questions will always be an enormous undertaking, particularly in the pluriverse, constituted by radically different ways of being in and seeing the world. Yet, I contend that this undertaking is nearly impossible if we refuse to think relationally, if we deny the vulnerability of our moral judgement, and if we fail to attend to the ways in which power, politics, and morality are intertwined. The ethics of care provides an

\textsuperscript{4} See section 5.2 for a more detailed explanation of the relationship between relational ontology and vulnerability.
orientation which attunes us to these three things.

The ethics of care critically uncovers relations of power that suppress certain moral voices and moral practices, that create hierarchies, and that sustain unjust relations. In so doing, the ethics of care helps us to expand the network of those with whom we collaborate as we pursue moral philosophizing; it helps us to repair relations with others so that they can be heard and taken seriously as moral voices. Care ethics also requires us to think relationally, to understand the ways in which moral selves and moral forms of life emerge from particular contexts, and thereby orients us to explore how certain moral practices arise, and to understand and interrogate the conditions under which they are meaningful. The relational ontology of the ethics of care likewise positions us to attend to the responsibilities we owe one another as a result of the relations that connect us. And the ethics of care is premised upon a situated epistemology, which understands that all knowledge claims, including moral claims, arise from some context, and are therefore fallible. From this orientation, we can begin the collective and collaborative task of moral philosophy, which is reflecting on the moral orders we participate in, asking when certain practices stand scrutiny, when they are worth reproducing, and under which conditions (and limitations) one can claim to have made a sound moral judgement (Walker 2007, 257). Such an approach to moral philosophy “sets an agenda for moral criticism to lead or guide us in slow, often puzzling, and sometimes painful and costly tasks of mutual correction” (Walker 2007, 257).

More simply, it is by thinking relationally, thinking ‘with care,’ and recognizing the vulnerability of our judgement that we can engage with others – including others who may be very different from ourselves – so as to pursue the collective task of moral
philosophy: contemplating whether our values are the values which we want to (continue) living by, scrutinizing whether our moral forms of life reflect the ways in which we want to live, and in so doing, collectively enlarging the “possibilities and the goods of shared lives” (Walker 2007, 258). And as I have emphasized throughout this discussion, enlarging these possibilities includes interrogating, revising, and (of significant import in the context of the pluriverse) expanding our understandings of care more generally. For instance, in putting the feminist ethics of care in conversation with the pluriversal literature, forms of care that have largely been rendered invisible by the colonial logic of modernity – and here I am specifically thinking about care for earth-beings, or what Marisol de la Cadena describes as ‘uyway,’ “the always-mutual care (the intracare) from which beings (runakuna, tirakuna, plants, animals) grow within […] place-taking networks” (2015, 103)5 – are brought to the fore. Continuing to nurture this ‘partial connection’ between the ethics of care and the pluriversal literature, and continuing to expand and explore different understandings of/practices of care so as to broaden the horizons of possibilities for our shared lives, is an important task for future research.

Lastly, in the introduction to this dissertation, I noted that while I here focus on building a pluriversal ethics using the ethics of care, taking the pluriverse seriously suggests that pluriversal ethics is most likely plural in the fullest sense: just as there are multiple worlds in the pluriverse, there will be a multiplicity of pluriversal ethics, of moral understandings that can help build the pluriverse and navigate ethical dilemmas across worlds. For this reason, I wish to end this dissertation with a call for Global Ethics

5 As explicated in section 3.2, runakuna refers to people while tirakuna refers to earth-beings. Uyway is a Quechua word that is generally translated as “to raise, to nurture” or “to rear” (de la Cadena 2015, 103).
to think pluriversally, and grapple with the challenge of the pluriverse. Despite certain limitations (as outlined throughout this dissertation), I believe that the field of Global Ethics has much to offer in terms of thinking about the pluriverse, and for enriching the dialogue I have tried to foster here between moral philosophy and the pluriversal literature. Many different approaches to Global Ethics, for instance, may provide additional (partial) knowledges for contemplating ethical horizons in the pluriverse. Global Ethics has the potential to enhance our webs of partial ethical knowledges and to help us pursue the type of agonizing philosophizing required to deliberate on what it means to live well in a world of many worlds.

At the same time, however, there is one thing that global ethicists can no longer do. We can no longer claim to be outside of the worlds we study, outside of the ethical dilemmas we contemplate, or outside relations of responsibility. Arturo Escobar (2018, 33) asks us to consider “What world do we want to build?” While many global ethicists (and approaches to Global Ethics) have (somewhat ironically) shied away from such queries, building pluriversal ethics requires that we confront this question head on, time and time again. In this sense, global ethicists must care. We are complicit in the building of the pluriverse; we must take responsibility for the worlds we choose to enact and disrupt, for the fallibility of our moral knowledge, and for the consequences of our theorizing. Ethics in and for the pluriverse can proceed no other way.
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