

**On Relationality in Virtue Ethics:
Accounting for Injustices in a Global Context**

By

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Abstract

This thesis utilizes a virtue ethics framework to engage with the effects of global oppression and injustice on the selves of moral agents to provide an account of how to be virtuous in our non-ideal world. I outline several virtue ethics frameworks and highlight Lisa Tessman's account in *Burdened Virtues* (2005). Her account analyzes the harms of oppression in new ways. I outline four criticisms of her account and respond to each by arguing for an enhanced virtue ethics framework that incorporates a relational conception of the self. Through the understanding of human beings as fundamentally relational and interdependent, I provide an account of virtue ethics that moves beyond Tessman's. I argue for the sorts of virtues that emerge from this account, including the virtue of responsibility and an enhanced practical reasoning. These virtues assist agents to respond to others in morally appropriate ways and ensure collective well-being.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an account of being a morally responsible agent in our non-ideal world. I use a virtue ethics framework because it provides an agent-focused account of how a person ought to exist in the world. I will argue that a virtue ethics framework is enhanced by a relational conception of the human self. This task is accomplished by highlighting the fundamental relationality and interdependence of human beings and connecting it to the conceptions of virtue and collective flourishing found in certain virtue ethics accounts. By utilizing an agent-focused normative ethical account and an understanding of the human self as fundamentally and necessarily relational, I present a framework that provides a possible way for moral agents to be in the world and respond to others in morally responsible and appropriate ways. I accomplish this task in the six chapters that follow.

Chapter 1 is dedicated to explanations of Aristotle's account of virtue ethics, including certain additions from contemporary virtue ethicists. It provides an overview of virtue ethics as a normative ethical system, explaining its agent-focus and its ultimate goal of providing an account of a moral agent who is able to lead the best human life. Chapter 1 explains Aristotle's necessary conditions for becoming virtuous and for pursuing flourishing, as well as the role of external goods in fulfilling these conditions. I highlight the role of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning and its need for understanding appropriate moral action. Importantly, I highlight the relationality inherent in Aristotle's account, and how human beings are social animals who necessarily live in groups and communities. I also argue for an interpretation of Aristotle that sees the flourishing of the individual and that of the social collective as necessarily interdependent

and interconnected. This view also explores how moral agents need others to learn and develop virtue, and how communities are developed and made better by the continued virtuous activities of its members.

Chapter 2 turns to a discussion of Lisa Tessman's book *Burdened Virtues* (2005). Tessman utilizes a virtue ethics framework to explore the effects of privileges, oppressions, and structural injustices on the very selves of moral agents. She uses this virtue ethics account to examine whether it is possible for both privileged and oppressed agents to habituate virtue and flourish given our unjust world. She argues that Aristotle's conception of the social collective is exclusive and does not acknowledge the suffering and oppression of others. Instead, Tessman argues, through her inclusivity requirement, that moral agents should only be understood to flourish within inclusive social collectivities that address the suffering and ensure the well-being of all its members. Additionally, she argues for an account of *burdened virtues*, virtues that allow a moral agent to survive or act appropriately given non-ideal or oppressive circumstances. These virtues are "burdened" because they have an emotional, physical, and psychic remainder or burden on the moral agent that will actually prevent them from flourishing. Tessman's account exposes the serious effects that oppression and injustice have on the very selves of moral agents as they exist in the world. This uncovers serious problems with the long-held assumptions in virtue ethics that particular virtues are necessary for flourishing.

Chapter 3 turns to a discussion of the accounts of Martha Nussbaum, Julia Annas, and Rosalind Hursthouse in order to highlight the benefits and complexities of Tessman's account over those of other contemporary virtue ethicists. This chapter discusses the liberal-individualistic conception of the moral agent inherent in these

contemporary accounts. I will argue that this conception overlooks the necessarily interdependent and relational nature of human beings, a conception that is already present in Aristotle. Aristotle argues for a more relational conception of human beings, one in which flourishing is conditional and dependent upon the flourishing of those in one's social collective. Tessman will also adopt this condition in her discussion of inclusive social collectivities. Annas and Nussbaum provide an account that views individual moral agents as pursuing their own individual flourishing in conjunction with rather than by attending to others. Ultimately, these accounts do not view moral agents as living in necessary and interdependent relations. Instead they maintain a more liberal view of virtuous agents as individual and autonomous choosers who pursue their own well-being through the pursuit of their individual rational plans of the good. Sections on Hursthouse and Annas explain how contemporary virtue ethicists have tried to side-step addressing the effects of oppression. They do this by claiming that, even within our unjust world, agents who are truly virtuous would not find themselves in circumstances where oppressive or unjust moral dilemmas could occur. On this account, by the very nature of their virtuous characters, these agents would not be limited by the serious effects and dilemmas created by the oppressive and unjust circumstances of our current world.

Chapter 4 outlines four specific criticisms of Tessman's account from Marilyn Friedman, Cheshire Calhoun, and Christine Koggel. The first criticism argues that Tessman's account is too focussed on the role of moral agents themselves to effectively challenge the oppressive forces of unjust structures. Instead, it is suggested that Tessman ought to shift her focus to the political project of organizing and correcting structures through collective actions and pay less attention to the moral project of exploring how

agents ought to act given present conditions. The second criticism questions the scope of Tessman's inclusivity requirement and burdened virtues. It challenges whether her inclusivity requirement and, in particular, the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering is able to extend into a global context. This criticism argues that Tessman is unclear about how far our obligations to others extend and who we should be virtuous towards. This criticism asks if we have responsibilities to the inclusivity and suffering of others across the globe.

The third and fourth criticisms come from Koggel, who argues that Tessman's burdened virtues ought to be understood as even further burdened by moral agents acting not only within current unjust structures, but by acting in ways that are congruent with the norms and assumptions of our oppressive society. Koggel explains that we act according to our assumptions about what it is to be virtuous and to flourish, which are conceptions that are embedded in the liberal tradition and reflect an unjust status quo. Therefore, Koggel argues that Tessman's account needs to look not only at how virtuous agents are burdened as a result of unjust structures, but also at how their actions are only deemed virtuous, or understood as achieving an assumed conception of flourishing, within the accepted structures and norms. Koggel then calls for an uncovering and challenging of these norms and assumptions to understand their damaging role and negative effects – especially in a global context.

I separate the consequences of this criticism into two parts. The first part, constituting the third criticism, asks how we ought to understand who the virtuous agent is, how they ought to be conceived, and how they should live in our unjust world. This includes questioning what it will mean to be a virtuous person given the complexities of

our current conditions. The second part, constituting the fourth criticism, asks how it is that we should respond to others – especially to their unjust suffering – and how we can do so in morally appropriate ways. This criticism asks how we are to be virtuous towards others in ways that effectively address the harms and suffering they experience as a result of systemic oppression and injustice. It also calls for an account of how to respond to others in ways that take their particular needs and experiences into consideration so as to ensure appropriate and responsible responses.

In sum, these four criticisms identify possible limitations of Tessman's account. They ask whether her account can effectively enact changes to unjust structures through a focus on moral agents. They draw attention to the scope of how far an agent's obligations ought to extend and question whether Tessman's inclusivity requirement and burdened virtues will need to extend into a global context. Additionally, Tessman underestimates the role of prevailing norms and assumptions embedded in our structures and how they affect moral agents and their assumptions about what virtue and flourishing entail. This leads us to question how we ought to understand the virtuous agent and how they ought to be in our current world of great suffering and injustice. Moreover, we need to know how they ought to respond to the needs and suffering of others and whether they are capable of doing so in an appropriate way.

In Chapter 5 I provide an argument for incorporating a relational conception of the self into a virtue ethics framework in order to respond to the first two criticisms of Tessman's account outlined in Chapter 4. I select relational theory because it provides insights that immediately challenge the liberal-individualistic norms that I want to address in my response to these criticisms. Relational theory provides a direct and

explicit lens through which a relational conception of the self challenges the individualism found in most liberal theory and informs my account of responsibility and practical reasoning found in Chapter 6.

For relational theorists Jocelyn Downie, Jennifer Llewellyn, Susan Sherwin, and Christine Koggel, human beings are understood as necessarily and fundamentally produced in and through complex webs of relations, which are in turn situated within systems of power. Relationships become the unit of moral concern for relational theorists, who understand human beings as fundamentally interdependent. By focusing on relationships, this account highlights how power relations shape the needs, dependencies, and responsibilities we have to those we are in relations with. It also shows how these relations of power are often the product of assumed liberal norms. This can then provide a framework for analyzing and challenging how these generally accepted and detrimental norms shape our conceptions of virtue and flourishing.

I argue that these relational accounts are compatible with virtue ethics, and inform our understanding of social collectivities and collective flourishing. Through this enhanced account, I argue that my virtue ethics framework provides Tessman with a way of understanding how the well-being of moral agents is necessarily dependent upon the well-being of inclusive social collectivities. Such an account shifts the focus of virtuous action towards our relationships in order to be responsible to the needs of our complex webs of relations. We can then understand virtuous action as directed towards creating more inclusive social collectivities.

This account can respond to the first criticism from Chapter 4 by eliminating the sharp distinction that has been drawn between moral and political approaches for

undermining structural injustices. Instead my framework views moral and collective actions as interconnected. Additionally, I can respond to the second criticism from Chapter 4 by arguing that a relational conception of the self exposes how Tessman's inclusivity requirement and virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering need to be understood as having a global focus. A relational approach allows moral agents to understand how their complex webs of relations extend into a global context. Therefore, our social collectivities will need to be global and we will need to be responsible to the needs of global others.

In Chapter 6 I provide an account of the sorts of virtues that emerge from a relational conception of the self found in my virtue ethics framework. I draw from the accounts of Joan Tronto, Iris Marion Young, and Laurence Thomas, who also conceive of a human self that is more relational and interdependent than that in liberal theory. These frameworks provide an understanding of how we can and ought to be responsible to those with whom we are in relation. They also inform the types of virtues that can emerge from the complexities of this relational account of virtue ethics.

Tronto provides an understanding of relational responsibilities that looks to the needs and necessary responsibilities we have to those we are in relation with, as well as the harms and negative consequences that come from being irresponsible towards our relationships. I use Tronto to inform my account of responsibility as a virtue. Exercising this virtue requires that agents understand and balance their complex and competing responsibilities as they attend to the needs of their global social collectivities. Meanwhile, utilizing Young's social connection model provides a framework for virtuous agents to understand how they are responsible for the unjust actions that emerge from

structures they participate in. This informs my account of responsibility as a virtue and provides an understanding of our shared responsibilities in undermining structural injustices.

I go on to develop an enhanced conception of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning that can account for the relational complexities of my framework. Utilizing Young's parameters of reasoning, allows virtuous agents to engage and effectively undermine unjust structures. Meanwhile Thomas' conception of moral deference and modes of moral learning provide virtuous agents with ways of responding to the experiences of oppressed others that allow us to learn about oppression and the particular needs of the oppressed. Such an account of practical reasoning provides virtuous agents with methods for engaging with and responding to others in appropriate and virtuous ways.

I then respond to the last two criticisms from Chapter 4 by arguing that virtuous agents, who understand themselves as fundamentally relational, will come to understand the complex webs of relations they are in and the responsibilities they hold to fulfilling the needs that emerge from their relationships. Virtuous agents will see how their passive acceptance of the status quo perpetuates the functioning of unjust structures, as well as how generally accepted norms and assumptions function to maintain systems of privilege and oppression. Ultimately, I will argue that a virtuous agent existing within our non-ideal world will be someone who focuses on being responsible to the needs of the relationships they are in, and utilizes their practical reasoning to fulfill the needs of their webs of relations and ensure the well-being of their social collectivities. In these ways, I respond to the final two criticisms outlined in Chapter 4 by providing an account of how

a virtuous agent ought to be in our unjust world and how they are able to respond to others in morally responsible and appropriate ways.

In summary, throughout this thesis I argue for the incorporation of a greater relational conception of the self into Tessman's virtue ethics framework in order to provide a fuller and more complex account of what it will mean to be a virtuous agent in our non-ideal world. I try to demonstrate how such an agent-focussed account can provide a way of being in our unjust world that allows agents to be morally responsible and to act in appropriate ways. I try to enhance this account to provide insights into how moral agents can embrace life in ways that allow them to challenge and work to undermine structural injustices.

Ultimately, I hope to accomplish a part of what Tessman hoped for at the end of her project. For Tessman "the spirit of eudaimonism [is] preserved in a phenomenon that is the opposite of hopelessness" (Tessman 2005, 168). Through what she calls "the affirmation and embrace of life" we can choose to persist through the worst sorts of oppression and injustices in order "to insist upon life – with its sufferings and its joys" (168). This choice, she argues, "captures something crucial about eudaimonism" (168). I hope to capture what this embrace of life can look like, and a possible way in which virtuous agents can better understand what it might mean to find a sense of flourishing in a world burdened by unjust suffering.

Chapter 1: Aristotle and Virtue Ethics

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the basic structure of virtue ethics and provide an explanation for why I have chosen it as my framework of analysis. After providing a cursory explanation of virtue ethics more generally, I provide a detailed explanation and analysis of Aristotelian virtue ethics. For my purposes, I focus on the inherent relational conceptions of the moral agent in Aristotle's account, and the understanding of the necessity of flourishing collectively within a *polis*. I will also provide an explanation of the need for practical reason in virtue ethics accounts, as it will be imperative to my analysis in later chapters.

1.1 Why Virtue Ethics

My project chooses to utilize a virtue ethics framework because it looks directly at the character of a moral agent. Virtue ethics asks how the very character of a person is formed and developed, as well as how that character comes to be in the world. We can focus on the actions of moral agents in our unjust world, but these actions come from moral agents who are severely affected by the systems of power and the social norms that shape them. Instead, I want to look directly at the character of moral agents; and those character traits that are habituated, in order to determine how to effectively exist in our unjust world. This is why I turn to virtue ethics, because its foundation is where I want my foundation to begin: with the character, the habits, and dispositions of the moral agent itself.

Because virtue ethics is not action-focussed we look to the agent who acts. We are concerned with their intentions, motivations, and goals; it is not only *what* an agent

does, but also *how* and *why* they perform that action. Virtue ethics is also able to take into account the contextual and situated complexities of the circumstances a moral agent will be faced with. There is no universally correct action for a virtuous agent to follow in all circumstances; instead they ought to apply the virtues appropriately given the context and the situation they are presented with. This attention to situational particularities allows for the virtue ethicist to deal with complex issues, issues that involve historical, social, and structural contexts in ways that allow for moral action, but do not exclude the needs of the parties affected by these actions.

A virtuous agent, says Rosalind Hursthouse, is a person who “gets things right” (Hursthouse 1999, 13); a person who possesses certain dispositions of character that simply make their possessor good, admirable, and able to react rightly and well in a given circumstance. The goal of virtue ethics as an ethical theory is to sketch how to become the sort of person who does the right things for the right reasons. In our non-ideal and unjust world, this quality and ability is not only extremely rare, but also extremely difficult. However, the possibilities that virtue ethics provides are encouraging. The framework of virtue ethics offers a hopeful starting point in providing a way for agents to be in the world in morally responsible and appropriate ways; ways that can allow an agent to be good and live a good life, despite the injustices they experience or the circumstances they find themselves in.

For my purposes, the type of virtue ethics I am going to utilize for my framework comes from the Aristotelian tradition, and ought to be considered eudaimonistic. This category of virtue ethics creates a very simple equation for a moral agent: if you are a good, moral person and develop and exercise virtues through action, you will live well.

The promise of virtue ethics is that being a good person will provide a flourishing life. The promise of flourishing comes from Aristotle's discussion of *eudaimonia*, which as Alasdair MacIntyre explains, is often translated as "blessedness, happiness, prosperity" (MacIntyre 2007, 148). However, we ought to understand Aristotle's conception of *eudaimonia*, explains MacIntyre, as "the state of being well and doing well in being well" (148). Though I will use the term synonymously with happiness, flourishing, and well-being, the utilization of the concept of *eudaimonia* seems left largely open to interpretation within contemporary virtue ethics literature. Though not universally or clearly defined across the canon, one of the enticing things about virtue ethics is the promise that living a life of virtue, and being a virtuous person, will allow a moral agent to live a good and flourishing life.

In sum, virtue ethics provides an agent-focused normative framework that analyzes how the character of moral agents is developed. It provides an account of a way to be in the world that guides virtuous agents towards acting and reacting appropriately in given contexts, and thereby also provides these agents with the ability to flourish or live well. In our current world filled with oppression and injustice, such an account provides a framework for uncovering how certain character traits and habits are developed and encouraged, and how the very character of agents is formed. That it is agent-focused provides a framework to look at how moral agents exist, and ought to exist, in our current circumstances, and it gestures towards an account of these agents living a good human life.

1.2 Aristotle on Virtue, Practical Reason, and Virtuous Action

Aristotle's ethical framework begins from his teleological conception that the function of human beings is to live a life of activity in accordance with our ability to reason. Good functioning for human beings, says Aristotle, is to perform noble actions in accordance with the appropriate excellences of character, or virtues (*EN* 1098a13-19). For Aristotle a virtue is an excellence of character; a disposition or trait that a person comes to possess as part of their character. A virtue is determined by establishing the mean state between the two extremes of that disposition. This excess or deficiency then constitutes what Aristotle considers to be a vice, or vicious character trait (*EN* 1109a20-24). These traits are developed into the very character of a person through their habitual and accurate exercise. Just as someone can learn certain skills, such as building a house or playing a musical instrument, we become virtuous through the exercise of virtuous acts (*EN* 1103a23-b2). According to Aristotle, these virtuous actions are in themselves pleasant for the moral agent. Being virtuous and performing actions that are in accordance with excellences of character is not only externally good and noble, but also provides the moral agent with an inner happiness or flourishing; which Aristotle identifies as *eudaimonia* (*EN* 1099a21-24).

Imperative for Aristotle's framework is the necessity of practical reasoning for the moral agent. Practical reasoning, for Aristotle, is the rational faculty human beings have that allows them to pursue noble actions in accordance with excellences (*EN* 1144a6-9). While acting in accordance with a virtue will make a choice right, says Aristotle, it is practical reason that provides proper guidance for a person to carry out virtuous acts accordingly (*EN* 1144a20-22). Practical reason is then an intellectual virtue that allows

human beings to evaluate and determine what the appropriate utilization of other virtues will be in a given context (*EN* 1107a1-3).

Practical reasoning is what Hursthouse describes as the “knowledge of what one should do” (Hursthouse 1999, 59), and what Annas explains as “the virtue we need for coping with the complexities of decision and action in varying and complicated situations” (Annas 2011, 98). Practical reason is the knowledge and experience needed to exercise our virtues appropriately, and to determine the appropriate course of action in complex situations. It is based upon the human capacity to reason, but also upon our experiences, and the experiences of those virtuous agents who have come before us. It is molded through the guidance of virtuous and respected experts and learned through our social development within communities (Hursthouse 1999, 35). An account of practical reasoning will be very important to the virtue ethics frameworks I discuss and develop throughout this thesis. For current purposes, practical reasoning ought to be understood as an intellectual virtue for gaining knowledge of how to exercise other virtues in order to act appropriately and as required.

For Aristotle, determining what constitutes a virtuous action requires that a person utilize their practical reasoning to obtain proper knowledge of the circumstance, that a person choose to act for that action’s own sake, and that a person perform the action from a steady and consistent character, “as a condition of the possession of the excellences” (*EN* 1105a30-b6). Acting rightly requires the virtuous agent to use their practical reason to determine the intermediate and balanced utilization of a virtue for a particular circumstance (*EN* 1109a20-23). This ensures not only that the virtuous agent acts rightly and appropriately, but does so for the right reasons and from a consistent and unchanging

character. For Aristotle, acting virtuously, means exercising virtues through the performance of actions “to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way” (*EN* 1109a27-29). Behaving in this way will not be easy, but will be the noble and admirable thing to do. Determining this behaviour will require proper knowledge and will be instilled through habit.

Habituating the virtues requires that an agent behaves appropriately by using their practical reason to determine the best and intermediate exercise of a virtuous disposition. For Aristotle, acquiring knowledge and virtuous dispositions is achieved through consistent and accurate actions that are in accordance with the proper exercise of a virtue. A virtuous person will then act from a disposition, understood as a sort of skill that will help them to properly reason about the appropriate and intermediate form of action in a particular circumstance. Being virtuous then involves coming to understand what it is to find the appropriate balance in situations that require us to be courageous or temperate or generous or just, and allow us to act appropriately. For Aristotle, these appropriate actions will be the best possible ones. Achieving these consistent dispositions requires constant effort and actions on our parts; it is an activity that must be repeatedly performed for it to become effectively habituated.

Virtue also involves emotional sensitivity. Aristotle explains that acting virtuously requires a moral agent to be affected in a certain way (*EN* 1105b35-1106a1). Similar to action, there is an excess, deficient, and intermediate form of emotional responsiveness to virtuous action. As such we are to feel the appropriate emotion in a given context “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way” (*EN* 1106b20-24). Feeling the

appropriate emotional response in these circumstances will also be the intermediate and best thing, and ensure that we are affected in an appropriate and virtuous way. Therefore, it is not enough that we perform actions in accordance with the appropriate virtues, we also must have the right feelings for why we are performing that action and what we are aiming to do. This emotional sensitivity ensures that a moral agent is acting for the right reasons, is sensitive to the contextual details of a situation, and is emotionally prepared to provide appropriate and engaged responses. Being virtuous is not only about performing the right actions, but it is also about being emotionally motivated in the right way, for the right reasons, to the right people, etc. The importance of being emotionally sensitive within virtue ethics will be important for Tessman's account in Chapter 2, as well as for my account developed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Ultimately virtue, according to Aristotle, "is a state concerned with choice, lying in a mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (*EN* 1106b29-1107a2). Therefore, a part of being virtuous is behaving according to the needs demanded in specific contexts, and this is done by finding the intermediate relative to the circumstances of a given situation (*EN* 1106a27-32). This means that being virtuous and acting appropriately in a given context is dependent not only on the particular needs and contextual sensitivities of a given situation, but also upon the circumstances of the virtuous agents themselves. Aristotle explains that virtuous action is also "relative to the giver's substance," and therefore if the material, external, or internal circumstances of a virtuous agent are such that they cannot, say, be as generous as a millionaire in donating to charity, then it will not prevent that person from being equally virtuous (*EN* 1120b6-10). This contextual sensitivity in

Aristotle's account requires that agents not only act according to the particular needs and circumstances of a given situation, but that they also take into account the material realities of a moral agent so that they are not excluded from virtue.

1.3 Aristotle on Flourishing, Relations, and the *Polis*

At the heart of Aristotle's virtue ethics is the promise that if we become virtuous, and live a virtuous life, then we will achieve *eudaimonia*; a flourishing life. Though Aristotle is not always clear about what flourishing is supposed to look like, he does explain that flourishing ought to be understood as living a happy life of "prosperity combined with excellence" or virtue (*Rhet* 1360b14-17). Flourishing should be understood as the best human life that is desirable for itself; that "is the life of excellence, when excellence has external goods enough for the performance of good actions" (*Pol* 1232b37-1324a1). For Aristotle, the understanding of *eudaimonia* entails understanding what it is to be virtuous. Human beings perform virtuous actions because they are the noble things to do; they are desirable for their own sake (*EN* 1176b2-7), and the pleasure of performing these actions contributes to creating the flourishing human life. Human beings are to find activity in accordance with virtue noble, pleasurable, and desirable in and of itself, and it is this sort of active life that will be the flourishing one for Aristotle.

Importantly, however, Aristotle's account of flourishing does not focus on the individual living well in isolation from their *polis* or city-state. Instead, Aristotle understands our individual flourishing as intertwined with the flourishing of our collectives or community. Aristotle's assertion that human beings by nature are political animals (*Pol* 1253a2-3) has him focus on how we understand human flourishing as

something that necessarily occurs within a collective or community (*Pol* 1252a1).

Aristotle observes that human beings are not self-sufficient beings; they are not capable of living and developing in isolation and without the help and assistance of others.

Therefore human beings ought to be understood as parts of the whole of their communities (*Pol* 1253a25-29). Even if a human being has everything necessary to live independently from other people, Aristotle argues, they will still choose to live with others in a community. This cements Aristotle's belief that human beings are necessarily social beings who are in relations with other people. For Aristotle, human beings are political animals who live together in communities (*Pol* 1278b20-30).

In his chapters on friendship, the relation between individuals and their communities is further explored. In these chapters Aristotle explains that virtuous agents need other persons to behave virtuously towards and with them. They need other people in order to share the life of virtue, to engage in noble actions and to think and act among them. Having good and trusted friends within their communities is key to achieving this life (*EN* 1155a10-15). In becoming a person's friend, Aristotle explains, the virtuous agent is good to their friends (*EN* 1157b32-1158a1). When we act virtuously towards our friends, we act out of love and "it is those who love their friends that are praised" (*EN* 1159a33-b1).

Furthermore, Aristotle's discussion of friendship reveals how moral agents need others in order to mirror virtuous action and habituate the virtues. We cannot develop the virtues in isolation, and so we need other people to be virtuous to and develop virtue with. According to Aristotle, we learn to become virtuous through our friendships with other members of our communities. When we are young, our friendships with older

members correct us when we commit errors and guide us towards virtuous actions. We learn to compensate for our individual deficiencies and differences by learning to administer aid and fulfilling the needs of friends and members of our communities in order to build and strengthen our friendships (*EN* 1155a10-12). Performing virtuous actions with and to our friends stimulates the habituation of the virtues, and strengthens the ability of agents to develop practical reasoning and act virtuously (*EN* 1155a12-16).

The pursuit of virtue is made stronger through our friendships with those in our communities. As Aristotle explains, “those who live together delight in each other and confer benefits on each other” (*EN* 1157b7-8). Moral agents are provided with greater opportunities to become noble and virtuous people through their friendships with other people who are also pursuing the virtues, a bond that is strengthened through the communities in which we live (*EN* 1175b18-24). The virtuous agent then requires other people with whom to develop close relations, to help them in the habituation of virtues. These relations strengthen and create better communities from which agents can act virtuously and pursue virtue with others. For Aristotle, our friendships are invaluable to our pursuit of virtue, as we need others to help us in our development of virtuous traits and we need good communities to be virtuous in. I will return to a discussion of friendship in Chapter 6, where I develop the virtue of responsibility in similar relational terms.

For Aristotle, human beings are fundamentally political animals who need to live in communities, where they can exercise the virtues among their fellow members and friends. Therefore, the understanding of what it means for the individual agent to flourish will necessarily include the flourishing of the community itself (*Pol* 1324a3-7). The

virtuous individual will then need to live in what is understood to be a virtuous community. Since each individual agent is conceived as a part of the *polis*, Aristotle explains, the care and flourishing of all those individual agents is going to be tied to the flourishing of the community as a whole.

It would then seem as though a necessary external good for flourishing will be a virtuous, well-functioning community in which to live and habituate the virtues. This stipulation raises serious concerns for Aristotle's account, as an agent "will not have the excellence of a good man, unless we assume that in the good state all the citizens must be good" (*Pol* 1277a1-4). Therefore, according to Aristotle, "[i]n the perfect state the good man is absolutely the same as the good citizen; whereas in other states the good citizen is only good relatively to his own form of government" (*Pol* 1293b6-8). Either Aristotle is making a distinction between the good citizen and the good person, or the two ought to be understood as one and the same; being a good person involves being a good citizen within your community. It then seems that if the state is not perfect, or at least not good enough to be virtuous, then the people living within that state will not be capable of achieving virtue fully. Instead these agents will only be capable of habituating a relative sense of virtue given the deficiency of virtue in their communities. If this is the case, then it might mean that an unjust or deficient *polis* denies agents the ability to habituate virtue proper, or that they must be born within a community in which all of the people are already virtuous for them to then become virtuous.

When people come together who are at varying levels of goodness, or varying accomplishments of virtue, Aristotle argues that the sum of their goodness is greater collectively than is their lack of goodness individually. As each individual comes

together with their share of virtue they become greater than the sum of their parts within the collective. They then achieve a greater collective life of virtuous character and thought (*Pol* 1281b1-15). If this is the case, then in Aristotle's framework, we can understand that an imperfect community is made collectively better through the pursuit of virtue by its individual agents.

If, for Aristotle, we need a virtuous community in order to become virtuous ourselves, then the process for a community to become virtuous ought to be understood as similar to the active process that individuals pursue in habituating the virtues.

Therefore the community would get better as the members of that community become better agents. As such the external conditions necessary for achieving a virtuous life – a virtuous and well-functioning community – become more and more possible.

Understanding that living the good life is tied to the communities in which we are a part, the virtuous actions we perform towards others within our community can contribute to the benefit and to the betterment of the external conditions of that community. With an improved community that contains better people, our own individual ability to pursue the life of virtue is enhanced. The pursuit of the virtuous life then appears to be reciprocal in Aristotle's framework: we are benefited by those we benefit through virtuous action by creating a better environment in which to pursue our own virtue. As individual agents contribute to the virtue and goodness of their community it creates conditions that come closer to achieving a virtuous community and making collective flourishing possible.

According to Aristotle, the exercise of virtue and the achievement of flourishing cannot be achieved in isolation. Instead it is a reciprocal and collective effort that involves being

virtuous towards others and creating better external conditions that contribute to the collective flourishing of the community.

1.4 Phillippa Foot on Flourishing

Phillippa Foot echoes Aristotle when she argues that since human beings are social animals who depend on each other, “we do things that will benefit others rather than ourselves” and therefore we cannot assess “the goodness of human action by reference only to good that each person brings himself [sic]” (Foot 2001, 16). Foot’s conception of what it means to be a flourishing human being entails understanding that we cannot look at the flourishing of individual moral agents on their own. Instead we must look at what an individual’s actions do to contribute to the collective. Therefore, the understanding of what it means to flourish will also involve how that person lives – how that person exists in the world – in relation to others. For Foot, then, character traits that reinforce positive relations within communities are essential not only to the survival of those communities, but to the flourishing of those communities themselves.

Like Aristotle, Foot argues that “[i]t matters in a human community that people can trust each other, and matters even more that at some basic level humans should have mutual respect” (49). What matters for human beings as we live in communities is to develop positive character traits that allow us to better form healthier and long-lasting relations with other members of our community. Ultimately, Foot explains, “[i]t matters, not just what people do, but what they are” (49).

For both Aristotle and Foot, it matters what kinds of persons are going to make up our human communities, what character traits and dispositions they develop and how

those character traits function in allowing for a healthier, happier, and ultimately more flourishing community. Mutual respect and trust are such character traits for Foot precisely because they are needed to ensure that human beings can continue to function as social animals in a way that not only makes survival, but flourishing possible. These conditions mean that moral agents are not just content within their communities, but that their perceptions of what it means to be a good person among others within a community extends to their thoughts and attitudes: what it means for them to be and understand themselves as being good persons. I will return to this topic later, but for now will note that this perception of who and how one is a good person is a relational one, one that focuses on developing traits to strengthen and support the functioning of relationships within those in our communities. As we cannot understand our own flourishing apart from the flourishing of our communities, we need to understand what virtues are going to create better communities and strengthen the relationships between members of our communities.

1.5 Aristotle on External Goods and Luck

Yet for Aristotle, the virtuous agent will only flourish if they act “in conformity with complete excellence and [are] sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life” (*EN* 1101a14-16). Therefore, Aristotle explains, virtue is the best way for coming to live a flourishing life, but it is not enough; there is a need for the consistent availability of external goods and of circumstances that are conducive to living a virtuous life. The range of what counts as necessary external goods for Aristotle is fairly vast; from being attractive and from a good and wealthy

family, to having friends, to being lucky, to living in a good state (*EN* 1099a31-b6, 1153b17-19, *Rhet* 1360b19-30). However, we can understand Aristotle's stipulation for external goods to include those basic goods that make a good life attainable. These include sufficient food, shelter, clothing, income, education, security, and leisure.

At the same time, Aristotle argues that the greatest of external goods, and the greatest award for our actions, comes from the honour bestowed upon us from others (*EN* 1123b17-20). When we perform noble actions in accordance with virtue, Aristotle argues, it is the honour that comes from others that is the greatest of goods we can receive. As much as we need basic goods for living and for being able to behave virtuously, Aristotle wants to make clear that it is the positive recognition that we receive for doing the right thing for the right reasons that is the greatest reward for being a virtuous person.

Thus far, what is clear in Aristotle's account is that we cannot be said to flourish through virtue alone. The virtues are necessary, but not sufficient for flourishing, and therefore we need external goods to make flourishing possible. The life of virtue, explains Aristotle, requires certain levels of good fortune to ensure that we are not impeded in our endeavors. Those who argue that "the victim on the rack or the man who falls into great misfortunes is happy if he is good, are ... talking nonsense" (*EN* 1153b17-20). Intuitively what Aristotle says here seems true; it does not seem possible to consider a person to be living a good human life if they are denied certain basic conditions for living or are living under great adversity. How can we understand a person to be flourishing if they lack basic material goods for even subsistence living, or live under constant threats to their lives? Aristotle is clear that a virtuous person will not need many

or great things, but that there is a need for “moderate advantages” so that they can act excellently (*EN* 1179a1-90). Because the flourishing life is one of activity for Aristotle, there is a need for the external goods and virtues necessary for a moral agent to attain and maintain an active life, unhindered by extreme hardships or deprivations.

Aristotle does stipulate that a good person may be able to make the best of a bad situation (if, for example, they must live with a disease or in periodic poverty) but it is only under the opposite conditions of possessing necessary external goods that they are able to flourish (*Pol* 1332a15-22). The possession or acquiring of these external goods is often the product of chance, explains Aristotle, and often outside the control of the moral agent themselves (*Pol* 1323b24-26). Some moral agents, Aristotle explains, are denied access to attaining these external goods “from some accident or defect of nature” which, based on the luck present in their lives, determines the degree to which these external goods are needed for that person to be able to pursue their own flourishing (*Pol* 1331b39-1332a3). For Aristotle, then, luck determines both “the acquisition or possession of all or most, or the most important, of those good things” *and* luck determines when good things “happen contrary to reasonable expectations” (*Rhet* 1362a1-9). Therefore, according to Aristotle, the moral agent should then “possess resources and luck, in order to make his life really secure” (*Rhet* 1360b19-30).

I want to argue that the need for good luck in order to have the necessary external goods and conditions for flourishing is a limitation in Aristotle’s account. Though a good person may be able to live a flourishing life with just a few of these necessary external goods, the very fact that virtue is not sufficient for flourishing leads to several limitations of this account, particularly in our current context where deprivation is so widespread.

How many people will be excluded from well-being or flourishing, because of the absence of necessary external goods? Are the accidental or natural defects that Aristotle outlines sufficient for describing and explaining the extent of what these external goods entail? Because so many of Aristotle's external goods are the product of luck and are undecided or unaffected by the moral agents themselves, the necessary external conditions for flourishing seem random; only a select few will have the ability to flourish. Regardless of how good these agents' characters may be, they could be excluded because of their social standing or even physical attractiveness. This is a criticism that I will return to in my discussion of Tessman in Chapter 2.

1.6 Concluding Remarks to Chapter 1

Aristotle's account provides an ethical framework that is useful for understanding what it means to be a good moral agent in the world. He provides an account that focusses on the development of practical reasoning and virtuous character traits in order to provide a moral agent with the ability to act appropriately and well in any given circumstance. Aristotle's framework also promises us that if we become good, noble, virtuous people we will be able to live a good life. However, Aristotle is quick to point out that this good life is not dependent on virtue alone, and that there is a need for external goods that may be denied or be unattainable for many moral agents. Luck plays a large role in what external goods we have access to and therefore the opportunities that we have to flourish. For Aristotle, virtue is a necessary condition for flourishing, but it is not a sufficient one. The importance of luck and external goods in Aristotle's account is a significant point for Tessman's criticisms of Aristotle that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

For my purposes, the importance of Aristotle's account lies in his development of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning and his understanding of flourishing as something that an individual cannot do in isolation. I argue that his focus on the need for human beings to flourish collectively makes his account at least somewhat relational. Meanwhile, practical reasoning provides moral agents with the ability to critically analyze and gain knowledge about their particular contexts and circumstances. This allows virtuous agents to determine how to best exercise the virtues and act appropriately. In Chapters 5 and 6 I return to these topics and argue for enhanced accounts of relationality and practical reasoning in a virtue ethics.

Additionally, Aristotle's account of flourishing is also somewhat relational. For him, the ability for a person to flourish is dependent upon the flourishing of their community. As we develop virtue with others, we need friends and close relations in order to understand how to be virtuous and to act virtuously toward others. Importantly, for Aristotle's account, we cannot flourish alone. Our own virtue and flourishing is connected to the virtue and flourishing of those who are in our communities. Aristotle then understands the moral agent as relational to the extent that we need others and need strong relations with the members of our *polis* for our own well-being. In the next chapter the limitations of his view will be explored through a discussion of Tessman's account. We will see that Aristotle's framework does not account for the complications of our non-ideal world. Tessman highlights how the presence of oppression and structural injustice globally seriously diminishes the effectiveness of many aspects of his virtue ethics account.

Chapter 2: Lisa Tessman and the Introduction of Oppression into Virtue Ethics

This chapter outlines the virtue ethics framework from Lisa Tessman in her book *Burdened Virtues* (2005). In order to provide clarity to Tessman's analysis, I begin this chapter with an explanation of 'oppression' and 'structural injustice' from accounts by Iris Marion Young and Laurence Thomas. These definitions highlight the importance for a virtue ethics account to address the realities of our current non-ideal world. Tessman argues that Aristotle's accounts of external goods and luck are not capable of addressing the preventable harms caused by systems of oppression and injustice. Her concern is with the effects of oppression on the very self of the moral agent, and how the damages and harms of oppression affect their ability to habituate virtuous character traits and perform virtuous actions. Therefore, she provides a much different account of virtue ethics than Aristotle. Tessman argues that Aristotle's account of flourishing is exclusive and instead presents her 'inclusivity requirement' to ensure the flourishing of all members of our social collectivities. Additionally, I discuss her account of the burdened virtues and particularly the burdened virtue of 'sensitivity to unjust suffering.' This burdened virtue will be important in later chapters for acknowledging and responding to the suffering of oppressed others. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the tension that Tessman's account creates between the ability for a moral agent to become a virtuous person and for that virtuous person to actually live a flourishing life given the oppressive circumstances of our non-ideal world.

2.1 Defining Oppression

While Aristotle did not recognize these phenomena, from here on in this thesis I utilize the terms ‘privilege,’ ‘oppression,’ and ‘structural injustice’ to categorize the positive and negative ways that moral agents are affected by the current conditions and structures of our present day world. In what I mostly refer to as “our non-ideal world” basic structures function in ways that affect different agents and their ways of being in the world. To add clarity to what is meant by these terms that I now use, I will attempt to provide clear definitions through accounts by Young and Thomas.

In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), Young explains that “all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings” (Young 1990, 39). She describes oppression as stemming from structural forces whose “causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (41). Oppression then ought to be understood as referring to “the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions” (41). She includes among these “media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short the normal processes of everyday life” (41). Therefore, Young explains, the effects of oppression permeate our everyday lives and create norms that work to shape our understandings, opinions, and perceptions of those we live with. These norms remain unquestioned and perpetuate and reproduce negative conceptions of groups of people, seriously affecting the ways we interact with them and they live their lives.

Young goes on to characterize oppression occurring with respect to five features, what she refers to as ‘faces’ of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (43). When these factors are present within relationships between peoples and groups, then we ought to understand that a form of oppression is present. In *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), Young further defines structural injustice, as “large groups of people under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities” (Young 2011, 52). The domination and deprivation of one group of people will necessarily entail that other people are privileged, or enabled by this deprivation to exercise and develop their own capacities (52). Young, therefore, identifies oppression and structural injustice as a certain type of moral wrong, “distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent” (52). It is the type of moral wrong that “occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms” (52). Oppression functions to constrain groups of people “more indirectly and cumulatively as blocking possibilities,” where constraint to these groups “occur[s] through the joint actions of individuals within institutions and given physical conditions” (55) that affect the possibilities for members of these groups. Oppression then ought to be understood as a force that directly and indirectly limits the ability of members of certain groups to have access to certain opportunities and develop certain capacities.

Thomas explains how certain agents become privileged by others’ oppression. He identifies victims of oppression as members of what he calls “diminished social categories.” He describes these agents as “constituted, in both masterfully subtle ways

and in ever so explicit ways, so as not to see themselves as full and equal members of society” (Thomas 1998, 365). Members of diminished social categories become “downwardly socially constituted” in ways that prevent them from participating in society as equals. When certain groups are oppressed, Thomas explains, there will be corresponding “privileged social categories, the members of which are favored and have full access to the goods of society” (365). Therefore, when one group is oppressed there will be a corresponding group that is unfairly and unjustly benefited by the other’s downward social constitution. Thomas explains that in our non-ideal world “downward social constitution is an ongoing and pervasive phenomenon” (365). Oppression is constant and continually diminishes the ability for oppressed agents to become equal members of society. Conversely privileged agents continue to receive unjust benefits as a result of the harms and limitations oppressed agents must face. It is as a result of these continued benefits that privileged agents have a vested interest in allowing oppression and injustice to continue. Privilege is then a serious barrier to eliminating oppression.

Since Aristotle does not address these issues, for virtue ethics to be relevant in our non-ideal world it will need to provide an account that considers the effects of oppression and structural injustice on moral agents. It will need to take into consideration the role that oppression plays for privileged and oppressed agents and their opportunities and abilities to become virtuous. As oppression permeates our accepted norms, conceptions, and understandings of others, groups of others, and our social world, a virtue ethics account will need to consider how oppression and structural injustices influence our very understanding of what the virtues are. Additionally, we will need an account that provides a conception of flourishing that takes into consideration the harms caused by

oppression and the lives of those who live under unjust structures. These are topics addressed by Tessman, whose virtue ethics account will be discussed in the remaining sections of Chapter 2.

2.2 Introduction to Tessman

In *Burdened Virtues* (2005), Tessman utilizes an Aristotelian virtue ethics framework to descriptively analyze moral agents themselves and the ways in which systems of privilege and oppression affect their character and possibilities for developing virtuous character traits. Of central importance to Tessman's analysis is the idea that an agent living under oppression can be morally damaged in ways that can prevent them from developing and exercising what we consider to be the virtues, and ultimately be unable to live well; to achieve *eudaimonia* (Tessman 2005, 3-4). Those moral agents who live under conditions of structural injustice and oppression, argues Tessman, exist in conditions that seriously neglect and inhibit the chances and opportunities for them to develop virtuous character traits and live what could be considered a flourishing life (12). Tessman argues that this is something Aristotle's account greatly neglects, since "Aristotle lacks any way of seeing that the social and political positions of people such that they have unequal chances for developing the virtues is itself an injustice" (36). Instead her analysis focuses upon "the hardships of oppression" (9) that Aristotle overlooks, and the barrier to virtue and flourishing that it creates. This results in a certain pessimism emerging from her account. In the end, Tessman does not provide much hope that either the privileged or the oppressed agent will live well. However, she does work

towards developing a critical and revised virtue ethics that will allow moral agents to survive and resist their oppressive circumstances (26).

2.3 Tessman on the Moral Damage Caused by Oppression

Tessman explains that how a person's character is formed, and whether or not that person has the ability to change their character, is limited and influenced by the role of a type moral luck distinct from Aristotle's. Regardless of our personal desire, Tessman explains, "one does not entirely control one's character" (12), because the conditions of our birth, identity, and status play a large role in shaping the selves we develop and become. Utilizing Claudia Card's analysis of "constitutive moral luck" in her *Unnatural Lottery* (1996), Tessman explains that systemic bad luck impacts a moral agent's ability to take responsibility for the kind of person they become (Tessman 2005, 20). Tessman argues that different social and systemic forces work to influence, limit, and often damage the very character of persons in ways that are beyond their direct control. Systemic bad luck then functions in a "specific and identifiable way in which a self is constituted by forces beyond his/her control" as a result of "oppressive social forces as a causal factor in moral damage" (29).

Tessman, like Aristotle, acknowledges the role luck plays in how our character is formed. And similar to Aristotle, Tessman's account begins with an understanding that a person's character is not constituted independently of social and political systems. However, she departs from Aristotle in arguing that when systems are oppressive or unjust – racist, sexist, able-ist, classist, etc. – they are "already at work in the formation of character" (36). In understanding that a person's character is shaped by the very luck

and condition of their birth, Tessman argues, we should also understand that certain aspects that affect an agent in morally important ways are beyond the agent's own control (38). Oppressive and systemic forces function to shape and influence a moral agent simply by the bad luck of their circumstances at birth. These are forces that continue to shape and influence their character throughout their lives. Unlike Aristotle, for Tessman luck affects the character of moral agents beyond the external goods with which they are born.

Tessman argues "that the location of responsibility for selves constituted through systemic bad luck is complex" (48). This is because character is shaped, formed, and damaged as a result of oppressive systems and structures. The responsibility for a person's character, according to Tessman, ought not to be understood as solely the responsibility of that person themselves. Tessman rejects the individualist and voluntarist notion that we can will our own character to change or repair itself from moral damage (46). As systemic forces constantly affect, influence, and shape the very character of oppressed moral agents, their ability to individually choose or will themselves from being effected by oppressive forces is quite limited.

Though the oppressed person should not be blamed for their damaged character, Tessman maintains that they still retain a sense of agency and responsibility (38). While the complex relationship between systemic oppression and the construction of an agent's character entails that the agent can be both responsible for who they are and can become, it also does not excuse systemic forces from the significant role they play in damaging the moral character of agents. Tessman is therefore primarily focused on the suffering and moral damage that is tied to and caused by structural injustices such as oppression,

domination, and exploitation. While these cause serious damage to what she refers to as the very selves of moral agents, they are caused by human actions that are largely preventable (84). Since structural injustices, the form of negative moral luck that Tessman wants to address, is preventable, it becomes an important part of understanding how different moral agents, both privileged and oppressed by these structural injustices, are prevented from flourishing and living well. Yet, Tessman still wants to show how they can be in the world in a way that will allow them to live a good human life.

In sum, according to Tessman, systems of oppression function to cause certain moral damages to the very character of moral agents, simply as a result of their social positions. Being born a particular gender, race, ethnicity, or within a certain financial position, for example, creates certain conditions that are a product of luck, and beyond our direct control. These ultimately function to shape, change, limit, and damage our character and our very sense of self. By rejecting the conception that we independently shape, form, and develop our character, Tessman argues that these same oppressive systems bear a great deal of responsibility for constructing the very selves of certain agents who are morally damaged in some way. This is a problem for a virtue ethics framework because it limits agents from developing certain character traits that can lead to a conception of living well or flourishing. Since Tessman is focused on the negative systemic luck from preventable oppression and injustice, her analysis goes beyond Aristotle's focus on luck for necessary external goods.

However Tessman does not want to reject the idea of agency or a person's ability to be responsible for who they are, even in the face of deep systemic oppression. The virtue ethicists' agent-focused understanding of developing and habituating character

traits allows Tessman to explain the interconnectedness of systemic forces. This allows her to maintain a balance between the responsibility of oppressive systems that limit virtue and the moral agent's responsibility for their very self. Ultimately, Tessman utilizes Card's conception that "[o]vercoming and resisting our own oppression requires us to *take* responsibility for situations for which others could not reasonably hold us responsible... despite our complicity" (Card 1996, 41).

2.4 Tessman on the Exclusion of Oppressed Agents from Flourishing

Tessman argues that Aristotle takes for granted that necessary background conditions for virtue are met, that "luck has been sufficiently good, material needs have been fulfilled, enough leisure time has been available, no great adversity is presenting itself" (159).

Tessman is concerned that Aristotle's conception that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for flourishing cannot account for the reality of oppressive conditions in our non-ideal world. If we need more than virtue to flourish, as Aristotle believes, then certain external goods are going to be needed by the moral agent. For Tessman, we should view living under injustice and systemic oppression as the privation of necessary external goods that allow for flourishing (159). Tessman is therefore going beyond Aristotle's account of external goods with her focus on structural injustice and systemic oppression. Aristotle would not have considered such systemic barriers to virtue as relevant to his account.

Aristotle's external conditions for flourishing then excludes a great number of people in the contemporary world, far more than Aristotle initially intended to exclude. Tessman explains that, for Aristotle, some people have a better chance of becoming

virtuous and living a flourishing life than do others. These advantaged few must be male citizens who have the necessary leisure time for practicing virtues, can participate in political life, and are living in a well constituted and governed *polis*. These are necessary conditions that significantly eliminate the majority of people from being able to achieve flourishing lives (37).

Tessman's criticism of Aristotle is that he does not pay enough attention to the systemic forces of oppression and how they support dominant values that neglect, badly distort, and damage the very character of oppressed agents (16-17). It is through a deeper acknowledgment and explanation of moral damage, Tessman argues, that we can come to understand how oppression and structural injustices function as "systemic barriers to human flourishing created by conditions of oppression" (23). An important insight in Tessman, then, is that virtue ethicists have overlooked the scope of the effects of systemic oppression and the "less obvious ways in which oppression interferes with flourishing" (34).

If we have an analysis of systemic oppression and structural injustices, Tessman argues, we will need to see "social and systemic forces as responsible for the fact that members of some social groups are deprived of these external resources" (35). This will then require expanding Aristotle's list of things that are understood as interfering with a moral agent's flourishing under conditions of oppression. Instead, the barriers to flourishing presented by systemic oppression will require a different effort, approach, and analysis to ensure that a great many people will actually have the opportunity to flourish as human beings.

Tessman then uses the conception of *eudaimonia* to get a more complex understanding of how oppression and structural injustice function as a set of barriers to flourishing for a broad category of moral agents. She provides a framework that requires that we look at the role of political resistance as a way of undermining or eradicating these systemic barriers and creating access to flourishing for oppressed agents (3). Tessman explains that a “morally healthy self is crucial for flourishing” (5). However, the moral and psychic damage that is caused by injustice and oppression works to interfere with a moral agent’s ability to flourish by creating “circumstances external to the oppressed agent (whether that agent be virtuous or not) that limit options” (26). This damage also creates barriers to acquiring necessary material resources and external goods that are needed to live well. It also affects the very character of oppressed moral agents in such negative ways as to prevent these persons from being able to develop those virtues that are going to be instrumental to, and an intrinsic part of, living well (27). However, as Tessman has shown, we must not attribute an oppressed agent’s inability to flourish to their being unable to develop, or because they lack, virtue (35).

Additionally, Tessman explains that those character traits that have traditionally been thought of as virtues may only be considered so because of “status quo social arrangements” (48). The traditional lists of virtues may only be thought to contribute to our flourishing because they allow us behave in ways we consider to be appropriate given the unjust circumstances of our current world. These character traits may in fact be morally flawed, but currently they are valued because we live in unjust circumstances. If conditions were more just, these traits may not be considered virtues at all. Therefore, the thought that oppressed agents simply lack virtue is misplaced, since “the virtues that

subordinated people characteristically lack may not really be praiseworthy traits at all” (48). Instead, Tessman suggests that the virtues we simply assume ought to be habituated may not actually contribute to our flourishing. This causes Tessman to suggest the possibility that there are virtues that will not lead to their bearer’s flourishing (49). We can then understand oppressed agents as possessing virtues, but virtues that do not allow them to flourish. These virtues will have been overlooked by traditional virtue ethicists who are only concerned about those traits that lead to flourishing under favourable conditions, like those found in Aristotle (51). I will outline her account of specific examples of these traits in Section 2.7.

2.5 Tessman’s Ordinary Vices of Domination

Though Tessman is primarily concerned with the effects of structural injustice on oppressed agents, her analysis of its effects on beneficiaries of oppression raises interesting problems for understanding flourishing in our non-ideal world. It also leads Tessman to a deeper discussion of community than was evident in Aristotle, which she later explores in her account of an inclusivity requirement. When we look at those who benefit or are privileged by systems of oppression, we are not likely to view these people as negatively affected or limited by their experiences. However, Tessman argues “that it is primarily the beneficiaries rather than the victims of oppression who should be understood as morally damaged” (6). For Tessman, the moral agents who benefit from structural injustices are morally deficient in some way because they hold unjust social positions (7). According to Tessman, “those enjoying unjust economic advantage are popularly believed to be living the good life, regardless of the moral flaws that lead them

to accept, develop, or maintain their unjust position” (54). Those moral agents who hold dominant positions and exercise power, because of the injustices in our non-ideal world, are often assumed to be living what we could interpret as a flourishing life. However, Tessman wishes to challenge that position, and suggests that these privileged agents are actually morally flawed and damaged as a result of the benefits they receive from unjust structures and their privileged positions.

If we accept the Aristotelian claim that connects being a morally good person with flourishing, Tessman explains, then we have to challenge the interpretation that unjustly privileged agents, those who have external goods and seemingly live good lives, are actually morally *good* (54). The claim that those who seem to live well and have social and economic advantages are not living good or virtuous lives seems counterintuitive to our generally accepted conceptions of living well. When we see wealthy and powerful people, there is the assumption that they have been successful in their life and deserve these benefits. This is the sort of account of flourishing that Aristotle provides.

However, Tessman wishes to challenge this view and argue that those who are privileged from unjust social positions are actually morally flawed in ways that help them to “accept, develop, or maintain their unjust position[s]” (54). Those who unjustly benefit from current oppressive social structures, she argues, are at the very least complacent and perhaps complicit in the perpetuation of systems of oppression. These privileged agents can and ought to be understood as actively helping to maintain, develop, and perpetuate these very same injustices. The character of these moral agents then ought not to be thought of as virtuous, but instead as possessing deep moral flaws.

We should consider, explains Tessman, that those people who are generally thought to be living well actually exhibit certain moral vices “such as callousness, greed, self-centredness, dishonesty, cowardice, in addition to injustice” (55). At the very least these agents lack specific moral virtues that would acknowledge their role and complacency in accepting the status quo.

Additionally, this lack of acknowledgment helps to maintain oppressive and unjust structures. This is because these structures – that damage and harm oppressed agents – also function to socialize privileged agents in such a way that they habituate the negative (and vicious) character traits that function to perpetuate current unjust systems (55). Tessman’s analysis draws attention to the “pervasive injustice of oppression” and illustrates how often and consistently privileged agents participate in maintaining oppressive structures, particularly through the vicious characters that they have developed and habituated from being socialized as privileged members of an oppressive and unjust society. Tessman argues, therefore, that these sorts of moral agents who possess vicious characters and benefit from unjust social positions ought to be understood as being very ordinary and common-place people in our non-ideal world (56). A great many people fall into this category; many of whom have yet to realize how they are privileged and have benefited by their unjust circumstances. These agents, Tessman explains, exhibit what she labels *ordinary vices of domination*.

Therefore, if moral virtue is understood as necessary for flourishing, and privileged moral agents do possess Tessman’s ordinary vices of domination, then we are to understand that “despite the appearance to the contrary, [privileged agents] are far from ever attaining the good life” (56). It is as a result of this analysis that Tessman

argues that oppression functions to equally, yet in different ways, “affect everyone’s chances at developing the virtues, and ... thus negatively affects everyone’s chances at leading the good life” (57). Ultimately, her analysis of the effects of oppression on persons who benefit by these unjust structures comes to the counterintuitive conclusion that “oppression is similarly harmful in this particular respect to its victims and to its perpetrators” (57). This conclusion causes Tessman to make the claim that it may be “wrong to assume that virtue is required for flourishing, or perhaps virtue is indeed necessary for flourishing but the people exhibiting the ordinary vices of domination are not really leading the good life” (57).

Tessman’s analysis raises a serious question for virtue ethics. In our current world we see privileged members of society benefiting from oppressive structures. They possess material wealth and external goods, and they exhibit uninhibited agency and leisure. Tessman asks us to question whether they are capable of flourishing because they possess the ordinary vices of domination. It would seem that these privileged agents are living what many want to understand as the good life, and are doing so by not possessing virtue, or at least possessing a distorted view of virtue as acquiring goods. However, there is a deep dissatisfaction in thinking that these vicious agents are actually flourishing as the term has been understood; they are not living a noble or admirable life. This point leads to Tessman’s introduction of her inclusivity requirement as discussed in the section that follows.

2.6 Tessman's Inclusivity Requirement

If we accept Aristotle's conception that as political animals human beings are necessarily social, then we ought to understand that any conception of flourishing will be somewhat dependent upon relationships with others. It is this conception within virtue ethics that Tessman turns to when trying to alleviate the tension that privileged agents cannot be said to flourish because they possess ordinary vices of domination. These persons who unjustly benefit from oppression still require that others flourish in order to flourish themselves (58). Drawing from Aristotle, Tessman explains that we must have unity and harmony within our social collectives – for Aristotle the *polis* – in order for successful flourishing to be achieved (58).

It is this focus on collective flourishing, argues Tessman, that creates a greater bond between virtue and human flourishing, because “one person's moral virtue is understood in the context of a collectivity that depends on the virtue of its members in order to flourish as a whole” (59). If the conception of flourishing is limited solely to the life lived by an individual, we may say that a privileged person can hold the vice of selfishness, and yet still conceivably be said to live a flourishing human life. However, if we understand that our individual flourishing is connected to those within our social collective, we need our collective to be strong and virtuous in order to provide all with the possibilities for flourishing: a “flourishing *polis* is partly constitutive of leading a good life for any particular member of the *polis*” (59). For Aristotle, virtue and flourishing are interconnected and “the sociality and interdependence of humans makes *eudaimonia* impossible to achieve outside of a social collectivity (such as a *polis*)” (72).

As discussed earlier in the chapter on Aristotle, it is easier for a moral agent to flourish when they live with people and in communities that are morally good and virtuous. Additionally, living in a flourishing collective creates an environment that is conducive to an agent becoming a morally good and virtuous person. The relationship between virtue and flourishing is interdependent. When we understand flourishing as something that we necessarily do with others as part of a collective or community, it is easier for a person to become virtuous and to flourish when they live in virtuous or flourishing communities and among other virtuous and morally good people. Therefore, as Tessman explains, “the well-being of any agent depends upon the well-being of a social collectivity” (73).

Tessman therefore agrees with Aristotle that “humans are social beings who depend upon the well-being of a social collectivity for their own well-being” (73). Not only is it in a good social collectivity that a moral agent “can become properly trained in virtue” but it is only within what Tessman calls a “successful sociality” that a moral agent has the necessary conditions for flourishing (73). However, Tessman is quick to point out that the exact criterion of how a collective is and ought to be conceived and established is not present within Aristotle’s framework. She is critical of Aristotle, because to him “there is no built-in requirement for the social collectivity (the *polis*) to be inclusive, and Aristotle is notoriously exclusive” (74). Tessman argues that because Aristotle’s conception of who is included in a social collectivity excludes women, slaves, foreigners, and landless labourers, Aristotle leaves room for the political nature of human beings to be fully satisfied in an exclusive *polis* (74). Therefore, Aristotle leaves room for the possibility that “[t]he flourishing of one does not require the flourishing of all; it

just requires the flourishing of some particular others” (74). On Aristotle’s account agents are then able to exercise and habituate virtue in exclusive social collectivities, and it is within these exclusive social collectivities that agents can be said to flourish; our virtue is not tarnished if we direct our virtue at certain specified others (74).

Therefore, Tessman argues, Aristotle allows for the possibility that privileged agents can flourish by exercising the virtues towards others, but only to those others within their own social position or collectivity; that is with other privileged agents (74n35). Tessman explains that this caveat exists for Aristotle precisely because the *polis* was an exclusive state with a very small population, with clear definitions of who counted as citizens with certain rights and privileges. This allows Aristotle to establish the need for an understanding of flourishing, relational though it might be, that ultimately excludes those who are subordinated within a society. For Aristotle, a privileged social collectivity can have members exercise virtues in relation to each other and come to live a flourishing life simply by excluding and ignoring those moral agents who do not fit into the narrow definition of who counts within the *polis* (74n35). This view fits with Aristotle’s view that we are to treat equals equally and unequals unequally, and therefore “unequal treatment for much of the population does not constitute a vice” (75).

Those who are subordinated within society – or at least excluded from our collectivity – need not have our moral concern; allowing us to meet Aristotle’s stipulation that we treat unequals unequally. However, Aristotle’s formulation of the city-state as a small, exclusive, and homogeneous collectivity is inaccurate in our current globalizing world, with many multicultural, imperial, and colonial countries and societies. As Tessman explains, “Aristotle never pondered the moral problems associated with great

and far-reaching suffering” (86). Aristotle’s conception of collective flourishing simply ignored those who were subordinated or outside the limited conception of who were considered equals. These limited conceptions are inadequate for addressing the communities, collectivities, and societies that most of us live in, in the twenty-first century.

Tessman therefore makes an inclusivity stipulation part of her conception of what a social collectivity must entail, which she entitles the *inclusivity requirement*. Tessman writes “one must stipulate that the pursuit of one’s own flourishing cannot qualify as morally praiseworthy (and what one attains cannot count as flourishing) unless one is engaged, as part of that pursuit, in promoting the flourishing of an inclusive social collectivity” (76). This inclusivity requirement has serious consequences for the understanding of what it will mean to flourish in our non-ideal world. The eudaimonistic framework of Tessman’s virtue ethics will need a very particular conception of flourishing in order for the inclusivity requirement to be met, and for a moral agent to understand how they will be able to pursue their own flourishing (76).

Importantly, then, the global implications of structural injustice and oppression entail that the inclusivity requirement look at all of those who are affected and involved in our pursuit of well-being. Therefore Tessman argues, “moral goodness requires a pursuit of not just my own well-being, and not just the well-being of those whose well-being I depend on, but also the well-being of those whose very lack of well-being may have been a condition of my privileges” (76). If we accept the need for Tessman’s inclusivity requirement, then we must accept that our own well-being is intrinsically tied to the well-being of extensive and far-reaching social collectivities. Unfortunately, then,

Tessman's inclusivity requirement would ultimately mean that "none of us will ever live well in any foreseeable future, for it is inconceivable that across the globe unjust suffering will be eradicated" (87).

Therefore, if we as moral agents understand that our own flourishing is connected to the flourishing of an inclusive social collectivity, then, as Tessman's analysis has shown, "the present level of suffering seems to undermine everyone's potential [for] virtue in [our non-ideal world]" (86). Therefore the inclusivity requirement presents an unattainable requirement: that we end global suffering, especially the suffering caused by structural injustice and global forms of oppression, to ensure that there is an inclusive global collectivity that takes into account the flourishing of all people. For the inclusivity requirement to be met, it appears we will need to live in a world where no one is subordinated in such a way that would allow their well-being to be ignored. This ideal state of the world does not seem possible given the current oppressive conditions and injustices, as Tessman explains, and therefore "even the best choices fail to enable flourishing and may even fail to preserve virtue itself" (87), for any and all moral agents.

2.7 Tessman's Burdened Virtues

As Aristotle argues, virtue is necessary but not sufficient for flourishing. However Tessman diverges from Aristotle's account when she argues that there is room in a virtue ethics framework for character traits that enable a moral agent to act appropriately in a given circumstance, even though this will disconnect that action from the agent's ability to flourish. According to Tessman, "[a] virtue ethics such as Aristotle's that denies that virtue is sufficient for flourishing leaves room for there to be virtues that do not, at least

in certain circumstances, contribute to their bearer's well-being" (4). These character traits are what Tessman calls *burdened virtues*, "a set of virtues that, while practically necessitated for surviving oppression or morally necessitated for opposing it, carry with them a cost to their bearer" (4). Tessman explains that these burdened virtues are in fact damaged character traits that are typically developed as "survival mechanisms under oppressive circumstances" (19). Given the effects of oppression and injustice and the way in which these systemic factors affect moral agents and the way that they exist in the world, Tessman explains that the character traits that are developed in order to survive and resist injustice are not only damaged in themselves but also cause pain or further burden to their bearer. It is only because a moral agent's responses are shaped by "the bad luck of moral damage under oppression" that these virtues are considered praiseworthy; given ideal, or even better, circumstances these character traits may have no role to play in assisting a moral agent in being good (29). Burdened virtues are certain traits or dispositions that, through their exercise, fail to straightforwardly connect a moral agent to the good life. These are virtues that are fundamentally insufficient for flourishing, especially under adverse conditions caused by oppression. However, they remain virtues by their tendency to enable a moral agent to survive or live as a virtuous agent ought, in our unjust world, even if these "virtues may fail to manifest any connections to a good life" (162).

An example of a burdened virtue that Tessman provides is anger. According to Tessman "the self who has sustained moral damage under oppression may properly experience anger about this damage and may be angry *at* the sources of the damage" (30). In this circumstance, Tessman explains, anger may be a necessary character trait that

allows the moral agent to function in their oppressive circumstances. However the greatness of the anger that they experience – or need to experience – may significantly affect the health and well-being of that moral agent herself, or psychically damage their ability to find joy, comfort, or relaxation in other aspects of their life (30). The anger that this moral agent experiences may even be the appropriate emotional disposition along the lines of aiming for the mean in the circumstances. However, the seriousness of the agent’s moral circumstances may necessitate that the appropriate level of anger is such that it causes serious physical, moral, or psychic damage to that very agent and their character (30). Being appropriately angry at the injustice present in the world may require a moral agent, acting in accordance with virtue, to be so angry that it causes serious health risks to that agent herself. At the same time anger can be incredibly motivating and provide a moral agent with the force and direction they need to face their oppression and resist it. The burdened virtues then function as necessary features for surviving oppression. However this comes at a serious cost to their bearer with respect to them living well. Again we face the disconnection between the ability to behave appropriately through virtue and to live well as a human being who can flourish. This is precisely because, as Tessman explains, a burdened virtue is an “intrinsically painful disposition” (90), and a very part of how one is habituated to being in the world.

Therefore, for Tessman, burdened virtues “include all those traits that make a contribution to human flourishing – if they succeed in doing so at all – *only* because they enable survival of or resistance to oppression” (95). The only benefit or nobility that a burdened virtue plays in the character and life of a moral agent is in their ability to help the agent survive the horrid conditions of oppression. However, the physical, emotional,

psychic, or moral consequences of possessing one of these dispositions ultimately “detract from their bearer’s well-being, [and] in some cases so deeply that their bearer may be said to lead a wretched life” (95). Therefore, explains Tessman, burdened virtues may contribute to a conflictual sort of life for a moral agent. These traits may contribute to an agent’s flourishing because they allow them to fulfill the noble end of surviving or resisting their oppressive circumstances, but at the same time they can also detract from their bearer’s ability to flourish, by undermining their ability to acquire necessary external goods for flourishing or by causing great pain or burden (95). Burdened virtues then seem to paradoxically help a moral agent to be a good person in an unjust world, and yet simultaneously do not allow that moral agent to live well, by causing them pain, burdens, and wretchedness.

Moral agents can be said to accept the benefits of these virtues for the same reason that they accept the burdens, “out of necessity or out of a lack of a better alternative” (95). An oppressed agent, Tessman explains, may accept the burdens of these virtues because they are committed to the struggle for undermining and eliminating structural injustices, and these very dispositions are going to be necessary to that struggle. The burdened virtues are therefore “valued as the appropriate traits in response to unjust conditions” (96). And this is so even though their habituation and exercise will create tension and dissonance for a moral agent who aims to live well. Ultimately, Tessman argues that an explanation and understanding of the burdened virtues shows the disunity between virtue and flourishing, displaying “that there are virtues whose exercise is due to bad (including unjust or oppressive) conditions, not conducive to or constitutive of their bearer’s flourishing” (111). However, these traits remain virtues by the very fact that

they enable their bearer to perform appropriate actions in given circumstances; actions that are considered noble. These traits provide moral agents with the dispositions to tackle and effectively engage with resisting and undermining structural injustices and oppressions. An example of such a burdened virtue is Tessman's sensitivity to unjust suffering, discussed in the section that follows.

2.8 Tessman's Burdened Virtue of Sensitivity to Unjust Suffering

For Tessman, one of the greatest vices that privileged agents bear is their "indifference to the (preventable and unjust) suffering of certain others" (77). For Tessman, those privileged agents who exercise great power within our world are able to become selectively indifferent to the suffering of oppressed others and their current unjust conditions. The indifference persists in spite of the constant and incredibly visible suffering of oppressed others, Tessman explains. This is because an acknowledgment of the unjust suffering of others would disrupt privileged agents' conceptions of themselves as morally good. Instead, these agents would be forced to realize that their complacency and participation in the perpetuation of injustices is detrimental to the well-being of others. This realization would seriously challenge their status or conceptions of themselves as good, moral people.

Tessman identifies this indifference to unjust suffering as a dominant vice because it facilitates other vices, by permitting "its bearer to think of her/himself as a good person by masking the effects of her/his unjust, cruel, callous, dishonest, and so on actions" (78). It is a part of these vicious agents' ability to perceive themselves as morally good people, explains Tessman, that contributes to their own sense of living well.

Once this perception is revealed to be fallacious, privileged moral agents will no longer be able to clearly perceive themselves as being good people, which, Tessman argues, will limit their ability to perceive themselves as living good lives (78).

Privileged agents who exercise the vice of indifference to unjust suffering then have an inaccurate self-perception that allows them to believe that they are good people living good lives. However, we do not want to say that privileged agents' who are indifferent, ignorant, and complacent are living good human lives. This would mean that virtue ethicists must concede the point that virtue is not necessary for flourishing, and that being vicious creates the possibility to flourish nonetheless. However, Tessman does not want to concede this point. It does not seem possible for insensitive and indifferent people to say they are living a good human life. Instead, their complacency and selfishness reinforces an epistemic isolation that denies that they are connected with and responsible to others.

The virtuous disposition to the vice of indifference is Tessman's burdened virtue of sensitivity to the unjust suffering of others. The extreme manifestation of this disposition occurs when "[o]ne finds a self so immersed in the boundless pain of others – and so exhausted with the efforts of ameliorating that pain – that no piece of the self is left free to experience joy or to flourish" (84-85). According to Tessman, a person who becomes too sensitive to the unjust suffering of others, through the exposure to and efforts for the elimination of this suffering, are subject to detrimental emotional and psychological effects to their very self. This particular virtue is not Aristotelian because it lacks a mean state between excess and deficiency. Tessman explains that there is no

intermediate state of this virtue, instead an agent exercising this virtue will be “characterized as both excessively anguished and excessively indifferent” (85).

Tessman explains that being sensitive to the unjust suffering of others “breaks the model precisely because of there being so much suffering in the world that one could potentially face” (85). The suffering that is caused by oppression and structural injustice in our non-ideal world is so vast that it is impossible for virtuous agents to find an ideal mean when exercising such a virtue. The pervasiveness and extreme levels of suffering entail that we will always be indifferent to some unjust suffering and at the same time overwhelmed by the excessive levels to which people suffer. For Tessman, there is no point at which we are sensitive to the unjust suffering of others in an intermediate or appropriate way. This is what makes this virtue so burdensome.

Additionally, as we live in our non-ideal world, situations where we will need to exercise this burdened virtue are far from rare. Tessman explains that “under current conditions of pervasive injustice and suffering there is a steady stream” of situations that will mar, damage, and prevent a moral agent from flourishing, or conversely prevent a once virtuous agent from continuing to be virtuous (89n12). These are common circumstances where “taking on the anguish of others’ suffering” creates conditions that prevent the habituation and exercise of virtue, and make flourishing impossible (87).

However, Tessman argues, “[s]ensitivity and attention to other’s suffering is morally prescribed under conditions where unjust suffering is widespread” making the exercise of such a virtue both valuable and painful (96). Being sensitive to the unjust suffering of others creates a tension between an agent’s ability to be a good person in an unjust world and their ability to ultimately live a good human life. Therefore, according

to Tessman, “[t]he background conditions of the world we live in make it impossible to escape both the horror of indifference and the psychic pain (and perhaps exhaustion) of sensitivity and attention [to the unjust suffering of others]” (85).

This is what makes Tessman’s virtue of sensitivity to others’ suffering so unique as a character trait, and so distinct from the virtues of Aristotle. There is an inherent pain that persists as a necessary aspect of being virtuous, where the pain inherent in the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering “ought *not* to be eliminated” because “the feeling of the pain is itself morally prescribed” (93). Exercising the burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering requires that we take on another person’s pain, and feeling pained by the pain another person experiences is part of being able to perform the appropriate and virtuous response. Feeling pained by another’s suffering is the “morally recommended responsive action” (93) to exercising the burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. Therefore, being a good, moral agent in an unjust world is going to have to entail feeling pain and burden at the pain of other people who are damaged and oppressed by structural injustices.

Tessman compares this burdened virtue to Aristotle’s view that it is impossible to say that a person being tortured on a rack is flourishing (*EN* 1153b19-21). Regardless of how virtuous their character may be, these moral agents lack the external goods – especially the absence of great pain – that are required for living a flourishing life (Tessman 2005, 94). The extent of the pain that moral agents experience by appropriately exercising Tessman’s burdened virtue creates such negative circumstances for the moral agent that being a good, moral person in an unjust world becomes like

being tortured on a rack; these people cannot be said to flourish while under such great pain and duress.

Whereas Aristotle's conception of the man on the rack is an infrequent or temporary experience, Tessman's analysis reveals the need to exercise the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering by a great many people most of the time. The pervasiveness of injustice, and the extent to which people suffer, make it a requirement of this virtue and of being a good person to constantly experience the painful suffering and anguish of others. On the one hand, being a good person, Tessman seems to argue, means being in serious moral, emotional, and psychic pain consistently; pain that reasonably and conceivably prevents a virtuous moral agent from living the good life. On the other hand being, sensitive to the unjust suffering of others without the accompaniment of pain is even more unacceptable.

Tessman argues that there is something very appalling about a moral agent who experiences the anguish and suffering of others without feeling burdened, or without feeling some sort of psychic, emotional, or moral pain (105-106). It should be of concern to us that people could be sensitive to the pain and anguish of oppressed others and not be seriously affected by it, in a way that left them neutral or, even more appalling, uplifted by these experiences. It is this added emotional aspect that makes Tessman's virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering so "burdensome and questionable as a virtue" because "it functions poorly to motivate the right sorts of actions. Yet muddy as it is, its absence is immeasurably worse" (106). The pain that the virtuous agent feels through the exercise of sensitivity and attention to the unjust suffering of others is then a "morally worthy and

necessary accompaniment to actions aimed at ending injustice” (105), despite its disconnection from allowing a moral agent to flourish.

2.9 Tessman On the Disconnect Between Virtue and Flourishing

Against Aristotle’s account, Tessman argues that structural injustice and oppression interferes with a moral agent’s ability to flourish in three key ways. The first, “directly by creating adverse external circumstances” (95) that limit access to the goods necessary to allow a moral agent to flourish. The second, “indirectly by undermining the possibility for some of the virtues” (95); creating conditions that prevent a moral agent from having the ability or opportunity to habituate virtues that are going to be a necessary part of being a good person that is ultimately able to live well. And thirdly, by creating circumstances whereby moral agents living under oppression need to develop certain character traits that are atypical of the Aristotelian framework (95); those burdened traits that may allow a moral agent to survive, navigate, or be a good person under conditions of oppression, but are not traits that conceivably or effectively provide a moral agent with the ability to flourish, and in fact could cause pain or further harm to their bearer. However, Tessman explains, these character traits do meet the Aristotelian condition of being virtues, precisely because there is something pleasurable or noble in the exercise of these virtues (95).

And, Tessman explains, it is a result of oppression and its consequent suffering, that “there is a constant pressure to exercise the[se] intrinsically painful virtue[s]” (95). Ultimately for Tessman, oppression interferes with flourishing because “it calls for certain virtues that are painful precisely because they are responses to the effects of

oppression” (95). It is because we live in such an unjust world, Tessman explains, that these sorts of virtues are the predominant dispositions that moral agents come to habituate. Therefore, explains Tessman, the eudaimonistic aspect of traditional virtue ethics is going to change shape, because “one who is inordinately burdened cannot flourish” (97). Those agents who are oppressed and experience continual intrinsic pain through the application of their virtues will not be said to live well.

Tessman explains that we should understand flourishing as a contingent aspect of being a virtuous person, because the oppressive and unjust aspects of our world create deprivations of the material conditions and external goods that are necessary for our living well (97). Instead, those agents who live under constant traumatizing or devastating experiences cannot be said to be able to flourish by merely becoming virtuous; virtue is then understood as “insufficient for securing the well-being of oppressed people” (109). Tessman’s analysis of the effects of oppression and injustice on the very selves of moral agents “pushes to the foreground the insufficiency – rather than (just) the necessity – of virtue for flourishing” (160). Therefore, Tessman’s framework goes beyond Aristotle’s account by arguing that the relationship between virtue and flourishing is a contingent one. She thereby emphasizes the effects of an analysis of oppression and how “the insufficiency of virtue for flourishing is often more salient than it is necessary” (160). As a result of the burdened virtues that allow moral agents to resist and exist under unjust and oppressive circumstances, there is a tension and disconnect between the agent becoming virtuous and flourishing. The burdened virtues that are necessary for a moral agent to act appropriately in non-ideal circumstances “disable a good life for their bearer” (115).

2.10 Concluding Remarks to Chapter 2

Tessman provides a virtue ethics framework that takes into account the negative and damaging effects of oppression on the very selves of moral agents and their ability to habituate virtue and to flourish. Her account utilizes an Aristotelian framework; however, in immediately engaging with questions of oppressions Tessman moves beyond what Aristotle's account provides by acknowledging the ways in which agents are damaged morally by their oppressive and unjust circumstances and experiences. Her inclusivity requirement poses serious problems for the Aristotelian conception of flourishing within social collectivities. Her account acknowledges the need for a greater understanding of the moral agent as relational, yet does not quite make that jump. This criticism of Tessman will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Additionally, her account of the burdened virtues that are needed to engage with the injustices of our non-ideal world, but cause pain and damage to their bearer, further challenges Aristotle's conception that being virtuous will allow us to live good, flourishing lives. This tension is demonstrated clearly in her burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. Ultimately, Tessman's account reveals the limitations of Aristotelian virtue ethics for addressing the consequences of living in our non-ideal world, with so much suffering, pain, injustice, and oppression. In the next chapter, I highlight the weaknesses of other contemporary virtue ethics accounts that do not achieve what Tessman's account does in addressing oppression and structural injustice, and in acknowledging the need to respond to the suffering of others. Importantly, these

accounts do not recognize the need for an understanding of flourishing that involves flourishing *in relation with others*.

Chapter 3: The Inadequacy of Contemporary Virtue Ethics Accounts

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of Tessman's project by exposing the weaknesses of contemporary virtue ethics frameworks with respect to taking into account the effects of privileges and oppression on the selves of moral agents.

Throughout this chapter, I will show how accounts by Martha Nussbaum, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Julia Annas are inadequate for taking into account the effects of oppression on the virtuous moral agent and the agent's ability to habituate virtue and act virtuously in our non-ideal world.

Additionally, this chapter will highlight the limitations of these accounts for assuming the inherent liberal-individualism in their understanding of the moral agent. As with liberal theories more generally, each of these frameworks views the moral agent as an autonomous and independent individual and rational chooser. These virtue ethics frameworks do not provide a relational or collective conception of flourishing. And they do not adequately take into account the interdependence of human beings as political, social animals as found in Aristotle's or Tessman's accounts. Ultimately, this chapter will show the inadequacies of these accounts for addressing issues of oppression and injustice. What emerges is a fuller account of human beings as fundamentally relational, which will be the topic of Chapters 5 and 6. In this chapter I will argue that for virtue ethics accounts to be effective ethical frameworks in our non-ideal world, they will need to adopt a more relational conception of the self.

3.1 Martha Nussbaum, Liberal Individualism, and the Capabilities Approach

The weakness of Nussbaum's account comes from her focus on the moral agent as an individual and autonomous chooser, one that is typical of liberal theories. Sarah Clark Miller explains that at the heart of liberal theory is the view that "the individual is the ultimate unit of moral concern" (Miller 2010, 148). Such liberal accounts see the individual moral agent as possessing an "atomistic, disconnected social ontology ... where individuals somehow separated from the relationships in which they are intertwined function as primary normative units" (148). Though Nussbaum views individual moral agents as highly influenced socially, ultimately her view is focused on the individual, a view that does not pay enough attention to the very nature of human interdependence.

This view is characterized in Nussbaum's explanation of the relationality found in Aristotle in her earlier book, *Fragility of Goodness* (2001). She remarks that for Aristotle "all true excellence of character has a relational nature," because the exercise of virtue in the person "whose conception of the ultimate good made mention only of his own good would not be able to possess any of these items in the true sense" (Nussbaum 2001, 352). The true exercise of Aristotelian virtue, according to Nussbaum, is not to benefit yourself alone, but also the other members of your community. In this way, Nussbaum explains, Aristotle argues that the flourishing person will need to live together with other virtuous agents, "sharing activities both intellectual and social, sharing the enjoyment, and the mutual recognition of enjoyment, that comes of spending time with someone whom they find both wonderful and delightful" (357-358). Even though Nussbaum recognizes the social nature of human beings, and how virtues can be exercised towards members of our

community, I argue that she provides an account that is still largely individualistic. She describes virtuous agents as those persons who enjoy sharing aspects of their individual lives with others. This sharing is a voluntary action that is supposed to create flourishing communities, but does not capture the fundamental interdependence of human beings. She then seems to provide an account where virtuous agents pursue their own individual good as it consequently helps their community. This appears to be a subtle distinction, but one that I believe has serious consequences for our fundamental responsibilities to others, which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

In *Creating Capabilities* (2011), Nussbaum explains her version of the capabilities approach. She argues that both the internal abilities of a person and the opportunities one has are achieved through “a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment” (Nussbaum 2011, 20). For Nussbaum, capabilities are what allow a person to do and be who and what they choose. Her account of *internal* capabilities are those particular character traits and abilities that are developed in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environments of the moral agent (21). Nussbaum’s account could then be considered compatible with a virtue ethics framework, as her explanation of capabilities, and especially of internal capabilities, could conceivably be viewed as the kinds of virtues that are habituated through our interactions within specific social collectivities. Additionally, Nussbaum’s *combined* capabilities, the combination of internal capabilities with relevant social, political, and economic conditions in which a moral agent exists, provides an account of how agents form and make choices (22). In the language of virtue ethics, according to Nussbaum’s

account, moral agents make their own choices in accordance with the virtues and the external conditions in which they live.

For Nussbaum, then, individual moral agents form and make their own choices through the development of capabilities which are heavily influenced and shaped by social structures and forces. These social structures function to shape the character traits and choices of otherwise autonomous moral agents. Nussbaum's account then does not provide a sharp contrast between those combined capabilities that allow a moral agent to have the opportunities to act as they choose and those capabilities that form the character traits of a moral agent. These are interconnected based upon the way social structures affect a moral agent (23).

Nussbaum's capabilities approach accounts for oppression and its effects on the moral agent by explaining how oppression affects both the external functionings of human beings and also the internal damage that shapes the way the moral agent makes choices and develops their internal and combined capabilities. Nussbaum's account thereby acknowledges the effects of oppression through the ways structures function to shape the individual choices of moral agents who act. In contrast, Tessman's account of moral damage is less focused on the choices of moral agents, and more focused on the psychic, emotional, and moral harms done to the very selves of moral agents. Where Nussbaum seems focused on how oppression shapes our choices as autonomous agents, Tessman is concerned about how oppression damages our conceptions of ourselves, how we perceive what it means to be virtuous and to flourish, and how we live with others in our social collectivities. Since Nussbaum is focused on moral agents as individual and

autonomous choosers, Tessman claims that “her overall aim is a liberal one” (Tessman 2005, 51n15).

This liberal focus on moral agents as individual choosers is also revealed in Nussbaum’s account of flourishing, where she argues that the political goal for all human beings ought to be the same: “all should get above a certain threshold level of combined capability, in the sense not of coerced functioning but of substantial freedom to choose and act” (Nussbaum 2011, 24). For Nussbaum, the purpose of our social structures is to organize them in ways that promote and insure that all members are raised above a certain threshold of the ten fundamental capabilities identified on her list (33-34). Our governments and basic structures ought to provide the opportunities for all citizens to make choices that enhance an individual’s chosen functionings. The capabilities on her list are meant to organize social structures in ways that provide all citizens with the ability to live a dignified and minimally flourishing human life (32-33). All people are understood to be entitled to these ten core capabilities on the basis of their humanity alone, and governments have a duty to respect, support, and provide the means for citizens to develop these (62).

For Nussbaum, social structures have the affirmative task of providing people with capabilities, and not just the negative task of removing barriers or obstacles to achieving capabilities. Capabilities ought to be understood as positive human liberties that empower a person to do and to be what they choose, and social and political structures are required to prevent interferences from others (65). The focus on capabilities, Nussbaum argues, protects the pluralism necessary in allowing for all people to live a flourishing life according to their own particular contexts and needs (109).

Nussbaum's account is then not relativist, but it respects pluralism as it requires all societies to "take a stand on some overarching values that protect all citizens in their choices" (111). Nussbaum's account of flourishing is also universalist as it focuses on protecting certain basic freedoms that are so central for all human beings that their removal or nonexistence would be understood as having one live a life that is lacking in human dignity; living a life that Nussbaum considers not worth living (31). For Nussbaum, moral agents ought to be empowered with the capability to live a life of their own choosing and based on their particular needs, but within the dictates of certain universal values. Nussbaum's list provides these necessary capabilities for living a good human life (31).

Nussbaum provides an account that is characteristic of the limitations of the individualism found in liberal accounts of virtue ethics. Nussbaum focuses on providing the basic background conditions for moral agents to become individual rational choosers who, despite the influences of external forces, will be able to achieve the good life through their choices in conjunction with a set of universal values. This account overlooks the effects of moral damage to the very selves of moral agents that I highlighted through Tessman in the previous chapter. Tessman characterizes Nussbaum's account as one that "uses an account of human nature that assumes that humans engage in choices as autonomous individuals (though highly influenced socially) and privileges the preservation of an individual's capability to *choose* to develop and maintain certain human functions" (Tessman 2005, 51n15). Tessman's account exposes the ways in which oppressed moral agents cannot simply make choices that allow them to individually remove themselves from oppressive systems. As Koggel explains, the

limitations of Nussbaum's account comes from having a conception of human flourishing that she believes to be attainable by "providing resources and opportunities that thereby allow individuals to 'lift' themselves out of oppression" (Koggel, 2008, 201). What Tessman's account has demonstrated is that eliminating the suffering and harm caused by structural injustice and the ways in which it affects the very selves of moral agents and their ability to live well in our unjust world will be more than "a matter of believing that human beings are equal and that justice demands resources be provided so that all have an opportunity to pursue their goals and develop their capabilities" (Koggel 2008, 201)

Even Nussbaum's seventh capability of *affiliation* highlights a liberal-individualist conception of moral agents that views individuals as atomistic beings who exist among other individuals. Nussbaum describes this capability as the ability for human beings "to live with and towards others" in ways that allow them to recognize and show concern for other human beings as they engage in various forms of social interaction (Nussbaum 2011, 34). Included in her conception of human interaction is the ability to imagine the situations of others as well as "being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others" (34). The capability of *affiliation* seems to provide a sense of relationality within her capabilities approach, but it is one that views individual agents as interacting and being owed equal respect. It is not one that recognizes the fundamental relationality and interdependence inherent in human beings. Though Nussbaum seems to acknowledge the social nature of human beings through this capability, ultimately it is an understanding that sees individual moral agents as pursuing their individual flourishing and well-being in the course of interacting with others. Such

a view maintains the atomistic ontology of liberal theory, and does not see the interdependent nature of human beings that was discussed even in Aristotle's account.

Ultimately, Nussbaum provides an account that exemplifies the individualism typical of liberal theory that Tessman is trying to avoid. By focusing on the individual choices of moral agents and how choices can be better enabled through social structures, Nussbaum avoids the issue of moral damage to the very selves of moral agents. As well, her ontological focus on moral agents as individual units of concern limits the role of human beings as necessarily social and interdependent beings. Though she allows for the influence of unjust structures, Nussbaum's focus on individual and autonomous choice is inadequate for addressing the way moral agents are damaged and burdened by oppression. This is a benefit of Tessman's account, as she recognizes the damaging effects of oppression to the selves of moral agents. Moreover, Nussbaum may acknowledge and allow that human beings live collectively, but her account describes human beings as individuals who choose to pursue their own goals and well-being as they live among others. This undermines the importance of understanding individual flourishing as a necessary and consequent part of collective and shared flourishing as is found in Aristotle, and especially in Tessman's inclusivity requirement. Human beings are interdependent and not just individuals who live in and among other individuals.

3.2 Annas' Individualistic Accounts of Flourishing

Annas' conception of flourishing in *Intelligent Virtue* (2011) is similarly individualistic, even though it involves the need for communities in order to flourish. Annas suggests that "[l]earning to be virtuous can pull us away from our original contexts and

communities” in order to join other virtuous agents in “forming part of another community” (Annas 2011, 56). Annas argues that by habituating and exercising a certain virtue we are actually becoming part of a new community of people who are also habituating and exercising that virtue. Providing the example of honesty, she explains that developing this virtue pulls me away “from the context of my [dishonest] family but also from the community I share with my fellow [dishonest] citizens. I am not only on my own, however, for I still share a community with the honest, with people who think and react as I do about honesty” (56). Annas seems to suggest that through the development of virtues we are in fact joining and strengthening our bonds to a new and positive community that is “wider than that of my society” (56). For Annas, better communities are established and developed through the virtues, as relations and connections with other virtuous agents are developed and strengthened through the exercise and development of specific virtues.

However, Annas’ account is not relational in a full sense because it also focuses on the liberal conception of the moral agent as an individual and autonomous chooser. Annas argues that you can detach yourself “from the existing support you get from relations with our fellow-citizens” (58), which seems to suggest that our relations with other moral agents are not a necessary condition of being a human being, but something that is a product of individual choice. Annas seems to be suggesting that we can detach from our relationships with our family, for example, simply by our will to form different connections with other persons or communities. However, we do continue to be in relations with our family, regardless of our choice. We may neglect those relationships – for our own well-being or not – but we do continue to be in relation with these others,

and those relations necessarily entail certain needs and responsibilities – a point discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The suggestion that we can detach from certain relationships seems somewhat implausible. Rather in terms of moral responsibility we can strengthen more positive relationships and neglect other more damaging or harmful relationships.

Annas' focus on the individual also seems to tie into her conception of flourishing as ultimately individualistic. For Annas the understanding of flourishing is that of each specific individual's happiness, "the way *you* achieve living your life well" (126, her emphasis). For Annas understanding your own flourishing is not a relational conception that includes others – even within your own community or society – but is about the "ways of organizing *your* goals and aims in life, and seeking to live a life that achieves them overall" (126, my emphasis). Though, one could assume that the individual's aims, goals, and well-being could entail the flourishing of others in our communities, Annas' focus on the specific individual's conception of well-being and goal fulfillment seems to neglect the relationality found in Aristotle's or Tesson's accounts of flourishing. Therefore, the individualistic conception of flourishing found within Annas' account seems to suggest that an inclusive relational conception of flourishing was not a goal of her project.

3.3 Hursthouse on Tragic Dilemmas

Hursthouse's discussion of moral dilemmas connects well with Tesson's conception of moral damage. However, for Hursthouse, her understanding of what it will mean to be virtuous will have certain consequences that prevent her from a deeper understanding of the effects of structural injustices and systems of oppression, and their effects on the

moral agent and how that agent will live in the world. Tessman's analysis has demonstrated the complex ways in which oppression and structural injustice affects the very self of the agent, how that agent is formed and developed, and the types of virtues that they are able or unable to habituate. However, Hursthouse instead suggests ways in which moral agents can be said to be virtuous in less than ideal circumstances. Given oppressive conditions, she suggests that the virtuous agent will find a way to be virtuous. Regardless of the limitations of what an agent can do to act well, Hursthouse argues that the virtuous agent would still find a way to be virtuous, or perhaps more problematically, would not find themselves in such tragic circumstances to begin with.

Hursthouse describes certain tragic dilemmas that moral agents can come to experience. She describes these dilemmas as “genuinely irresolvable, that there *are* no moral grounds that favour doing the one thing rather than the other” (Hursthouse 1999, 70). According to Hursthouse, a moral agent can come to face a moral decision in which both (or all) options for action cannot be considered morally good. Therefore, whichever action the agent takes cannot be said to be the right thing to do and instead we want to say “that both do what is *wrong*. So it looks as though I am going to be forced to say that both agents act *badly*” (72). For the virtuous agent the cost of acting in a moral dilemma – being forced into a situation where they will act badly no matter how they choose to act – will have a certain moral remainder for that agent, what Hursthouse describes as a feeling of “distress or regret or remorse or guilt” (44). When facing these dilemmas, Hursthouse explains, the virtuous agent “acts with immense regret and pain,” and as a result the virtuous agent acts not with “the impossibility of virtue but the possibility of some situation from which even a virtuous agent cannot emerge with her life unmarred”

(74). Hursthouse explains, the “only feasible emotional remainder is that the agent deeply regrets the circumstances that made doing x necessary” (76). For Hursthouse, the virtuous agent feels regret at the circumstances that made the regrettable action necessary, and also the fact that the circumstances made *her* – the virtuous agent – necessarily perform that action.

Similar to the effects of Tessman’s burdened virtues, Hursthouse’s analysis of tragic dilemmas leaves a virtuous agent marred in some fashion for acting in a circumstance that has no right result or action. However, the fact that Hursthouse is concerned that the life of the virtuous agent is marred reveals the liberal-individualism in her account. Her virtuous agent is concerned that their individual ability to flourish is marred in tragic circumstances. The concern is with the acting agent and not those who are affected by the actions. The virtuous agent is not concerned more broadly about those others with whom they are in relation and affected by their choices. The well-being of those who may be harmed or negatively affected by their actions is not of concern for the virtuous agent. Instead, on Hursthouse’s account, the virtuous agent is mostly concerned for herself.

3.4 Individualistic Virtue Ethics and Oppression

What I find most problematic about Hursthouse’s account is her expectation that a virtuous agent, when faced with the circumstances of these sorts of dilemmas, is to find a third way out. For Hursthouse, a condition of being a virtuous agent is not to find themselves in these circumstances in the first place. She explains that in circumstances of resolvable dilemmas “no virtuous agent would have *got* himself into these

circumstances in the first place” (51). Therefore, a condition of being a virtuous agent is not being in any circumstances in which all options of action could be considered morally bad.

As a result of this condition, Hursthouse makes several assumptions about what it means to be a virtuous agent. The first assumption is that a virtuous agent could never be in circumstances that are beyond their control. This includes circumstances that are oppressive or the result of systemic forces. This means that a great many people in our non-ideal world, who are oppressed and have such experiences, are excluded from becoming virtuous. The second assumption is that a virtuous agent would have such a mastery of practical reason that they would be able to avoid any external circumstances that would put them in such a dilemma. Furthermore, when it comes to tragic dilemmas, Hursthouse claims “that it will be the mark of someone lacking in virtue that they too readily see a situation as one in which they are forced to choose between great evils, rather than one in which there is a third way out” (86). Though it is perhaps plausible that a virtuous agent will be able to use their practical reasoning to discover the “best” way to act in the circumstances of a tragic dilemma, the external and uncontrollable conditions of a tragic dilemma necessitates that any option or choice of action will be immoral.

Given Tessman’s account of the effects of oppression and structural injustice on the very selves and character of moral agents, we see that persons are put in circumstances of tragic dilemmas all the time because of the oppressive and unjust structures of our non-ideal world. If virtuous agents cannot find themselves in irresolvable dilemmas, as Hursthouse argues, then a great many oppressed agents are

prevented from ever becoming virtuous simply by the unchosen conditions of their birth. And if there are irresolvable circumstances in which there are no *right, good, or moral* choices for a virtuous agent to make, Hursthouse still suggests that a virtuous agent will be able to choose a ‘third way’ that will allow them to act without regret or moral remainder.

Though, the usefulness of the virtues – especially practical reasoning – for behaving well in all circumstances is plausible, Hursthouse’s account is insufficient for addressing how a virtuous agent can act in circumstances in which the external and oppressive conditions are beyond their control. Ultimately, Hursthouse’s claim that a virtuous agent would avoid or find a third and virtuous way of acting in dilemmas lacks the explanatory force to account for oppressed agents and how they are able to be in our non-ideal world; and especially to be virtuous in this world. Additionally, such an account is so focussed on individual virtuous agents and *their* ability to flourish that it provides no account of what virtue would dictate under oppressive circumstances. This individualism is even seen in the way that Hursthouse approaches these dilemmas, where individual virtuous agents are encouraged to come up with resolutions on their own. The virtuous agent of Hursthouse’s account would not think in terms of Tessman’s inclusivity requirement, and the need to understand flourishing collectively. Hursthouse’s account does not provide the normative force that is required for virtuous agents to address oppression. This is something that Tessman’s account of the burdened virtues is capable of providing.

Annas presents a similar argument to that of Hursthouse. She begins by explaining that “[m]ost people fail to become virtuous because of the difficulties of their

situation, not because they are not capable of it” (Annas 2011, 31). Similar to Tessman, Annas concedes that the environment in which a person develops can severely limit and prevent a moral agent from habituating virtue, not because of a lack of internal capability, but because of the absence of necessary external goods and conditions. However, when it comes to being in the sort of tragic dilemmas that Hursthouse describes, Annas echoes a similar response. She argues that “[i]t would be problematic to say that a truly virtuous person could be in this position, since the truly virtuous person has the understanding not to be in the situation in the first place” (44). In circumstances in which a moral agent must do “wrong things that you have to apologize for” (44), Annas explains that there is nothing good or virtuous about those situations, and the virtuous agent is someone who does the right and exemplary thing. For accounts like Tessman’s that analyze virtuous agents who live in an unjust world, Annas argues that “[w]hat has emerged is that being *fully* virtuous does seem to be an ideal that we aspire towards but can never achieve. At best we can be virtuous in a less than full way, one marred not only by our own deficiencies but by the point that the structures of our societies preclude us from being fully virtuous” (64). Again, Annas’ aim is for a moral agent to become fully virtuous on their own, and does not seem to involve a way of responding to and interacting with others in morally appropriate ways given the oppressive conditions of our non-ideal world. This is something Tessman, and especially her inclusivity requirement, seems more able to provide.

3.5 Concluding Remarks to Chapter 3

The accounts described by Nussbaum, Annas, and Hursthouse highlight how the limitations of individualistic accounts of virtue ethics still continue to reflect values of some liberal theories. Not one of the above accounts effectively deals with oppression or structural injustice found in our non-ideal world. As well, none provide an account of flourishing that acknowledges the relationality found in either Aristotle or Tessman. Though Nussbaum acknowledges the ways that basic structures influence agents, her conception of a virtuous agent, remains that of an autonomous chooser. Annas acknowledges the importance of communities for human flourishing, but views flourishing as individual goal fulfillment. Moreover, Hursthouse creates serious limitations for who can become virtuous, and provides an account of action that considers virtuous agents as lone actors. Tessman's account exposes the limitations of such individualistic frameworks and thereby provides an analysis that goes beyond what these accounts provide. However, there is a need for an even more relational and complex conception of the moral agent than what has been provided thus far. We will see that Tessman's account also has its limitations.

Chapter 4: Criticisms of Tessman's *Burdened Virtues*

The purpose of this chapter is to present four criticisms of Tessman's account as presented in the "Symposium on Burdened Virtues," in the journal *Hypatia*. Though the three authors, Cheshire Calhoun, Marilyn Friedman, and Christine Koggel, present varied approaches to analyzing Tessman's framework, their comments can be collected into four specific critiques. The first is questioning whether addressing structural injustice is best approached through a political and institutional account rather than an account that focuses on moral and ethical actions. The second challenges the scope of Tessman's analysis and, in particular, whether it can account for injustices in a global context. This critique questions how far moral agents ought to understand and extend their collectivities, fulfill the inclusivity requirement, and exercise the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. Thirdly, there is the concern that Tessman's account is limited by liberal assumptions and social norms for understanding what it is to be a virtuous person and live a virtuous life in our non-ideal world. This opens questions about the extent to which challenging our generally accepted norms and assumptions will need to be addressed. Lastly, there is the question of how a moral agent ought to respond to the unjust suffering of others in a global context. This criticism includes concerns about how a moral agent is able to respond to the suffering of others in morally appropriate ways. This chapter will present these four criticisms that I will then respond to in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.1 Criticism 1: Moral vs. Political Accounts for Addressing Structural Injustice

In her commentary on Tessman's *Burdened Virtues*, Calhoun expresses a concern about the focus of Tessman's framework. Calhoun charges Tessman with focussing on "the particularity of individuals," while neglecting "the systemic sources of suffering" (Calhoun 2008, 185). For Calhoun, Tessman's analysis is too focussed on the suffering and harm experienced by moral agents themselves, and is not sufficiently committed to addressing the systemic forces and structures that produce this suffering. Calhoun argues that Tessman's account is limited by her focus on the moral or ethical actions of agents and their role in challenging oppression, rather than on changing or undermining the basic structures and background conditions that produce and reproduce structural injustice and suffering. According to Calhoun, what makes the structural injustice and suffering that Tessman is focusing on "so awful is it occurs on such a massive scale, as a result of the collective action and inaction of people" (186). For Calhoun, oppression and injustice is caused and perpetuated by the collective action of people through systemic mechanisms and structures and, therefore, Tessman's focus on the "qualitative experiences of suffering" of moral agents themselves is inadequate for analyzing the collective and structural "features of unjust and systemically produced suffering" (186).

Calhoun claims that when the burdened virtues that Tessman describes are understood and practiced through collective or political means, much – if not all – of the negative burdens of these virtues will be alleviated. The systemically produced burdens caused by the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering, Calhoun argues, would be "better cultivated via *categories* of suffering that affect social *groups*," (186). Since human beings struggle to be appropriately affected by the suffering of abstract or distant others,

Calhoun claims that we ought to focus on alleviating the identifiable oppressions of specific groups (186). Alleviating this oppression is not performed through the actions of moral agents themselves, but through political and collective actions. By exercising the burdened virtues – like sensitivity to unjust suffering – collectively, Calhoun suggests, the moral agents themselves are better able to remove the emotional and psychic burdens of experiencing the actual suffering of others. Since virtuous moral agents are not directly experiencing the abject suffering of specific others, they are able to dilute the emotional and psychic impact through abstraction, thereby distancing themselves from the burdensomeness of these virtues as a result of collective action. This process makes the experience of others suffering more manageable to moral agents themselves and, therefore, according to Calhoun, less burdensome.

Furthermore, Calhoun also suggests that “the resister of oppression is not directly causally implicated in the continued suffering of those whose oppression she chooses not to attend to” (186). For Calhoun there is no causal connection between an individual’s actions, especially one who is resistant to oppressive structures, and the perpetuation of systemic oppression. Those individuals who choose to do nothing to prevent the suffering of agents who suffer as a result of structural injustice hold no *moral* responsibility for the perpetuation of structural injustice. This is because the systemically produced suffering that the resister is actually resisting is “not the sort of suffering that one can address effectively through individual action” and instead, Calhoun argues, the solutions to addressing systemically produced suffering needs to be collective and political (186). According to Calhoun, then, moral agents are not directly causally

implicated in the continued suffering of others, and only hold *social* responsibility “as members of a collective ‘we,’ which has failed to address a moral problem” (186).

For Calhoun, systemic oppression must be alleviated through collective action, and the collective burdens of attending to others’ suffering is diluted in ways that are “unlikely to be burdensome” (186). Calhoun therefore suggests that such a collective and political approach would eliminate the problem in Tessman’s account of burdensomeness on moral agents themselves. The burdens of attending to others’ suffering would be equally distributed among the members of the collective, which ensures that no one moral agent is unduly burdened in a way that is actually harmful to the agents themselves. It is then not a moral/ethical question of the actions performed by moral agents to adequately resist, confront, and undermine systemic oppression and injustice – or conversely how a moral agent herself needs to respond to the suffering of oppressed agents – but a question of choosing “which collective actions against suffering to join” (186).

Ultimately, Calhoun’s concerns with Tessman’s focus on the moral and ethical role of agents in confronting oppression, and attending to others’ suffering, comes from her understanding that addressing structural injustices through the actions of virtuous agents “will have a drop-in-the-bucket quality to it” (188). If structural injustice and oppression is to be undermined by the moral and ethical actions of agents, then they will only address “a symptom of oppression and that only in a minor way” (188). For Calhoun, focussing on the moral and ethical role of agents for resisting or undermining systemically produced injustices will only function as “symbolic gestures that do not in fact enhance social flourishing” (188).

The criticism of Tessman's account that will need to be addressed, then, is whether or not a moral/ethical framework can be effective at undermining and challenging structural injustice and oppression. This includes whether a conception of moral responsibility rather than social responsibility can be useful for undermining injustice. The alternative suggestion is that Tessman ought to change her focus from the moral/ethical role of the virtuous agent to a political account of how basic structures are organized, distributive principles are created, and collective action is accomplished.

4.2 Criticism 2: Inclusivity and Sensitivity to Suffering in a Global Context

Calhoun is also concerned that Tessman's framework is unclear with regards to the scope of both her burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering and her inclusivity requirement. The nature of this confusion stems from ambiguity about whether her framework addresses injustice and oppression in a global context, where dominant norms and values permeate the global sphere and frame our understanding of what it means to be a virtuous agent in our non-ideal world. For Tessman's account to be effective in an increasingly globalized world there will need to be a clear explanation of who ought to be included in our social collectivities. Tessman needs to provide us with defined boundaries for membership in our collectivities. In order to understand the extent to which we have obligations to others' suffering, for example, we need to understand how far our social collectivities extend. If we only understand our responsibilities to the collectivities of our nation-states, then we are avoiding or disregarding a great deal of global suffering; especially suffering that is a result of our nation-state's actions towards other nations. If we really understand an inclusive social collectivity in a globalizing

world, then we have a responsibility to address the suffering of others in a global context. This will make Tessman's inclusivity requirement even more demanding.

Since Tessman provides no clear boundary for her inclusivity requirement, there is no clear understanding of how far our social collectivities extend or the number of members they include. However demanding the inclusivity requirement may be, even in the context of the tiny Greek *polis*, the situation becomes exponentially more difficult when taking into account the diverse and multicultural collectivities in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century. Moreover, in recognizing the parameters of a globalized world and the persistent effects of structural injustice in a global context, the scope of the inclusivity requirement becomes quite blurred. If the goal of Tessman's inclusivity requirement is to ensure the flourishing of all members of all collectivities in which we are a part, then the scope of the inclusivity requirement will need to be global. We are in complex relations with many global others, constituting extensive global collectivities in which we are members. Therefore, if we are really committed to the inclusive flourishing of our collectivities, we must be committed to ensuring the flourishing of almost every person globally; a near impossible task.

Calhoun's concern also extends to the scope of Tessman's burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. She reiterates the Aristotelian conception that "the flourishing of the individual is never entirely distinct from the flourishing of the collective" (183). Therefore, for Tessman's virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering, "the liberatory scope of this virtue is necessarily limited to one's own collectivity" (184). Calhoun is then concerned that Tessman's burdened virtue will be limited to "the flourishing of the social collective *on which one's own flourishing depends*" (184).

If we accept Aristotle's condition that our own individual flourishing cannot and will not occur unless our social collective as a whole is flourishing along with us, then we need only be virtuous to those individuals from our own social collectives; those we depend on for our own flourishing. We can then understand the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering only to the extent to which "sensitivity contributes to *one's own* social collectivity" (184). The virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering is only useful as a virtue so long as it functions to contribute to the flourishing of our specific social collectives, and not to the extent that it can be used to address the suffering of more distant others outside of our specific collectivities. This realization causes Calhoun to argue that Tessman's "eudaimonistic framework will not generate a cosmopolitan metavirtue" (Calhoun 2008, 184). In other words, Tessman's framework is unable to extend into a global context. Therefore, Calhoun suggests that Tessman's account cannot address structural injustice and oppression that is produced at a global level or between nation-states.

Calhoun poses a serious challenge to Tessman's account. She seems to draw from the Aristotelian framework on which Tessman bases her analysis. On this account the social collective is understood as a nation-state or *polis*, and does not extend across borders or into a global context. If we only need to attend to the suffering of those moral others who are part of our direct social collectivities, then we overlook broader suffering at the global level; broader suffering that may be a result of the actions of the nation-states or direct collectivities of which we are a part. Therefore the specific extent and scope of both Tessman's inclusivity requirement and virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering remains ambiguous. When we consider the international or global context, we

cannot understand the extent of our responsibilities to attend to others' suffering or the global limits of our collectivities. And if our collectivities do extend globally, the inclusivity requirements entails that they must be inclusive, even in a global context.

Friedman has similar concerns as Calhoun about the scope and focus of Tessman's virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering and her inclusivity requirement. Friedman explains that the issue with Tessman's inclusivity requirement is that it is not a necessary condition for flourishing in a eudaimonistic virtue ethics. Instead, all a moral agent needs is "to be part of a flourishing interdependent community of some sort, exclusivity or not" (Friedman 2008, 193). This means that there really is no need for Tessman's inclusivity requirement given the framework she has presented. Tessman's interpretation of Aristotle remains true; it seems we can flourish in an exclusive community, even if it is oppressive to those others external to the community. Therefore, Friedman is not convinced that there is a way of justifying Tessman's inclusivity requirement. According to Friedman, there is no reason that we need to have inclusive collectivities in order to flourish (193).

Also for Friedman, Tessman's account needs greater clarity in identifying and defining who counts as part of a collectivity, and especially within an inclusive collectivity that needs to undermine structural injustice and oppression more generally. Though Tessman is clear that the requirement holds "when someone's oppression is in fact the condition of my privilege," it is not clear whether a moral agent is "off the hook," when someone is oppressed not because this is a direct result of our individual privileges (Friedman 2008, 193). Therefore, Friedman wants to suggest that even when there is no direct causal chain between an individual's suffering from one type of oppression and a

privileged agent benefiting from a different type of oppression, the privileged agent still bears “responsibilities to rectify the injustices that provided them with unearned privileges” (193-4). Even though a person’s suffering is not a direct cause of my privilege, the very fact that I possess certain unearned and unjust benefits entails that I have a certain responsibility to combat and rectify all structural injustices and oppressions, simply by virtue of unjustly benefiting from a certain system that is unjust and oppressive.

Friedman then argues that Tessman’s inclusivity requirement ought to account for those circumstances where, even though I may not directly contribute to a person’s suffering as a result of a specific and identifiable action of structural injustice, I do still have a responsibility to combat and undermine that injustice. As I benefit from an unjust system, Friedman wants to argue, I have a responsibility to change this system because I unjustly benefit from it in itself, regardless of my direct causal participation or involvement in perpetuating these injustices. The very fact that there are unjust privileges and I benefit from them means I have a responsibility to change the structures that permit unjust benefits. Since these unearned benefits and privileges appear globally, Friedman’s claim seems to suggest that the scope of the inclusivity requirement needs to be global and the demands of the inclusivity requirement need to include everyone who suffers from oppression.

In sum, this criticism argues that Tessman’s account does not extend into a global context. More specifically, it does not provide a clear conception of how the membership in social collectivities ought to be understood. Tessman does not explain whether these collectivities extend membership and responsibility globally. The same is true of her

burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. It is unclear whether there is an obligation to attend to the suffering of others in a global context. Additionally, Tessman does not provide a justification for the inclusivity requirement as a necessary condition for flourishing. In a globalizing world, the effectiveness of Tessman's account for responding to structural injustice and oppression will need to extend across borders, especially if, as Friedman argues, we are to respond to all those others who suffer from oppression. The need for Tessman's account to have a global scope significantly affects the plausibility of creating inclusive social collectivities that include global others, as well as the possibility of attending to all of the unjust suffering that occurs around the world.

4.3. Criticism 3: Challenging Assumptions of How to Be Virtuous in our Unjust World

Koggel then raises further concerns about Tessman's account. Though she commends many aspects of Tessman's analysis (Koggel 2008, 198-9), Koggel argues that the burdened virtues are even more burdened than Tessman realizes. Importantly, Koggel identifies that the consequence of Tessman's account is that "the very possibility of human flourishing depends on enduring and resisting oppression" and that ultimately, "human beings do not and cannot flourish by accepting existing, and prevailing conditions of oppression" (199). The important consequence of Tessman's framework, Koggel seems to argue, is that her analysis entails that we cannot understand human flourishing as a possibility while accepting the norms and structures of our current unjust society. According to Koggel, there is a need for further challenging and undermining

our assumed norms, including challenging our accepted understanding of what it means to flourish and be virtuous, given our current and non-ideal world.

Koggel explains that what is exposed through Tessman's framework, is that when we consider what it means for an oppressed agent to flourish, we are including within that conception a series of assumptions and norms from within "our all too familiar individualist, capitalist, and consumerist societies, as pursuing one's own interest, acquiring goods for oneself, and paying little or no attention to the systemic and systematic injustices and inequalities suffered by those around one" (200). Therefore, Koggel explains, when we question the possibility of oppressed agents being able to flourish, we do so with the understanding that the privileged life is considered to be the kind of good life that we *should* be pursuing. Under the prevailing conditions and accepted norms, we have a certain conception of what a flourishing life is going to look like, and this conception comes with the language of liberal, capitalist, and individualist baggage. Moreover, Koggel exposes how Tessman's account may challenge the liberal norm of individualism but also overlooks other damaging norms and assumptions found in liberal theories.

Koggel suggests that Tessman's analysis is telling us that there is an even deeper need for challenging the accepted norms and assumptions that function to produce and reproduce structural injustice and oppressions. Tessman's analysis exposes the ways in which oppression affects the very selves of moral agents, and how the virtues that agents ought to develop for surviving and challenging injustice carry deep burdens with them. However, when we turn to the concept of flourishing inherent in Aristotelian virtue ethics, we are presented with an account created using the accepted norms and

assumptions that are produced and reproduced through our current unjust structures. Oppressed agents who pursue virtuous action to challenge unjust structures are ultimately performing actions whose goodness is predicated on the norms and assumptions that come from these same unjust structures. The accepted virtues and accounts of flourishing that are utilized by virtue ethics frameworks are the products of the norms and assumptions produced by these current unjust structures. When we utilize certain virtues to undermine oppressive structures, we do so using virtues that are only considered good because they conform to accepted norms and assumptions. This then presents further challenges for Tessman's account.

Koggel suggests that Tessman's framework must go deeper in its analysis in order to challenge these norms – the inherent consumerist, capitalistic, etc. liberal assumptions that Tessman has overlooked. Koggel explains that “Tessman links the passive acceptance of and participation in structures of oppression to conceptions of the good life based on beliefs in the primacy of individual liberty” (200). Since Tessman critically challenges the dominance of individualism in our conceptions of human flourishing, Koggel sees her borrowing from Aristotle in a positive way that “offers an account of human beings as social, relational, and interdependent” (200). However, Tessman's account may not do this to the same extent as Aristotle or in a way that addresses all damaging liberal norms. This suggests that there is a need for greater relationality within Tessman's account.

Koggel commends Tessman because her framework does not easily accept “liberal assumptions about the fundamental value of human beings making ‘choices as autonomous individuals’” (201). What Tessman's framework is able to reveal, according

to Koggel, is that the achievement of “human flourishing will not be as simple as providing resources and opportunities that thereby allow individuals to ‘lift’ themselves out of oppression” (201) – as Nussbaum’s account outlined in Chapter 3 does. Tessman is critical of liberal individualism and provides an account that recognizes that flourishing will need to involve the fundamental interdependence of human beings. However, Tessman’s analysis needs to go deeper in order to challenge more of the liberal norms that negatively affect the understanding of virtuous agents themselves and shape our conceptions of how to be virtuous.

Koggel argues that Tessman needs to critically analyze how oppression and structural injustice “shape[s] who and how [virtuous agents] are in the world and the assumptions they make about what constitutes a good life” and “whether the assumed and underlying conception[s] of the good life should be accepted and valued” (201). It is not enough that we critically analyze individualism, as Tessman does, we must also challenge other liberal assumptions to come to know how they shape our current understanding of how a virtuous agent exists in the world and how they ought to understand the good life. Tessman’s account exposes some of the limitations of liberal conceptions and highlights the need for a more relational account of the virtuous agent. However there is still more work to be done in order to create an account of how a virtuous agent ought to exist in our non-ideal world. We need to critically analyze more of these liberal norms to form an understanding of how the virtuous agent ought to be and ought to conceive their role given unjust conditions. What is needed is an account of how a virtuous agent ought to live in our non-ideal world. And this account will require a more relational understanding of the self of the virtuous agent than Tessman provides.

Koggel's criticisms of Tessman's account asks us to further challenge and investigate the conceptions of virtue and flourishing that we hold in relation to generally accepted social norms and assumptions. What emerges is the need for an account of how we ought to understand the moral agent as they exist in our unjust world. It does not appear that Tessman's account of the moral agent is relational enough to address more of the ways that liberal norms shape an understanding of how we are to be virtuous and flourish. Responding to this criticism requires an account of practical reasoning to uncover negative social norms and assumptions and their damaging effects, as well as a more relational understanding of the self of the moral agent.

4.4 Criticism 4: Responding to the Global Suffering of Others Appropriately

Koggel is also interested in the consequences of extending Tessman's framework into a global context. Since we live in an increasingly globalized world, Koggel explains, where the "influence and acceptance of a sameness [is] spread across the globe," there is a role for Tessman's account in "broadening or enriching the analysis of oppression as it manifests itself in our global context" (202). It is as part of this "widespread proliferation and acceptance of norms of Western liberal beliefs and values around the globe" (203), that Koggel suggests that Tessman's conception of the burdened virtues ought to be understood as being further burdened. She explains that "there is a distinction to be made between the sensitivity to others' suffering displayed by those who assume and accept the norms that are in place and sensitivity to others' suffering displayed by those who reveal and question the norms" (203). According to Koggel, those virtuous agents who exercise the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering are burdened by experiencing the suffering of

others; suffering that is present given current conditions and norms. And then, even more so, there is the suffering experienced by those virtuous agents who are trying to confront and challenge our prevailing assumptions and norms. This is an added burden that a moral agent experiences while they try to address the current suffering of others and change current structures by also challenging and changing the accepted norms and assumptions.

The need to challenge accepted norms and assumptions is also present in Tessman's inclusivity requirement, explains Koggel. If we accept Aristotle's premise that our own well-being is tied up with the well-being of all others, then there is a need for "the kind of critical reflection (virtues of intellect) that can reveal and question the embedded assumptions and norms that perpetuate and sustain systems of oppression" (203-4). Therefore, we will not only need to be sensitive to the unjust suffering of others, but we must also use our critical reflection to reject "a norm of human flourishing that allows so many people to remain complacent in the face of great injustice and enormous suffering" (203-4). Koggel then urges the importance of expanding Tessman's analysis "beyond the burdens connected with choosing whose suffering to address to discussion of the burden of figuring out *how* who we are and what we do contributes to and connects with enormous suffering" (204).

For Koggel, Tessman's inclusivity requirement is going to have to be placed in a global context; one in which we view ourselves, our suffering, and our well-being as inherently interconnected to that of all other people. We need to know how our individual actions can contribute to the creation and perpetuation of further suffering and oppression around the world. As well, this criticism includes the need for understanding

how we ought to respond to the suffering of others given this knowledge of oppression and structural injustice in a global context. Responding to Koggel's criticism of Tessman's account will require enhancing Tessman's framework in order to provide an account of how moral agents become the sorts of people who can respond to the needs of others in morally appropriate and responsible ways.

4.5 Tessman's "Response to Critics" and Concluding Remarks to Chapter 4

In her response to the symposium on her *Burdened Virtues*, Tessman concedes that her framework is too limited in scope to account for the suffering and oppression of others in a global context. She explains that a moral agent might be 'off the hook,' regarding those whose oppression is not a direct condition of their specific privilege, since there is not "a wide enough scope of a virtue such as sensitivity and attention to unjust suffering" (Tessman 2008, 206), to extend beyond the limited borders of our specific collectivities. Even more so for Tessman, there is not a specific understanding of how far-reaching our collectivities may be – no matter how inclusive they are – as she explains, "even *with* the inclusivity requirement, the scope may be limited since it is implausible to think of all collectivities as global" (206).

Tessman is also sceptical of the plausibility of grounding her inclusivity requirement in any metaethical or epistemological framework. She explains that "there is no plausible human nature claim from which inclusivity would be derived" (207). Despite her affirmation that "one cannot flourish without the flourishing of any social collectivity of which one is a part" (208), Tessman is still concerned that this collectivity will not have to be inclusive for an individual agent to flourish. Additionally, Tessman

provides no clear way of determining which or how many social collectivities a moral agent is actually a part of. If we are to attend to the unjust suffering of others in an inclusive way, then we are going to need to be attending to an incredibly demanding amount of suffering. As we understand our collectivities extending outward into a global context, the greater the demands of the inclusivity requirement are going to be. Ultimately, for Tessman, “[t]he inclusivity requirement, one might say, is overdemanding, and the more so the greater the scope” (213).

However, I find Tessman’s responses to her critics largely unsatisfying. I also believe that she does not give enough credit to the possibilities that her account provides for responding to the four criticisms mentioned above. In her reply, Tessman suggests the development of an intellectual virtue that will enhance our critical reflection. She utilizes both Margaret Urban Walker (2007) and John McDowell (1996) to create a Neurathian process for analyzing and testing our accepted norms and assumptions (Tessman 2008, 209-213). I will not be discussing the details of Tessman’s responses or her account of critical reflection. Instead, I will suggest that these four criticisms of her account can be better responded to through the utilization of a more relational account of the self.

In the next chapter I will provide responses to the first two criticisms outlined above. I argue that a more relational conception of the self makes the moral versus political distinction more porous, and also extends a virtue ethics account into a global context. In Chapter 6, I respond to the last two criticisms by providing an account of the sorts of virtues that emerge from a relational conception of the self. These sorts of virtues inform an account of how to be a virtuous agent in our non-ideal world and how

to respond to the suffering of others in a morally appropriate ways. I argue that this virtue ethics framework has more far-reaching implications than perhaps Tessman realizes. There are great possibilities for Tessman's account, and I argue that it can provide a way of being in our non-ideal world for virtuous agents.

Chapter 5: Incorporating a Relational Conception of the Self into Virtue Ethics

In this chapter I outline accounts of relational conceptions of the self, incorporate them into a virtue ethics framework, and then use this framework to provide a response to the first two criticisms of Tessman's virtue ethics account found in Chapter 4. I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of Sarah Clark Miller, who provides a sketch of a relational account of the self and contrasts it with a fully autonomous, individualized, and atomistic moral self that is found in some traditional liberal theory. I wish to reject the use of this liberal-individualistic account when developing a virtue ethics framework and replace it with a relational one.

I go on to outline the accounts of relational theorists Jennifer Llewellyn, Jocelyn, Downie, Susan Sherwin, and Christine Koggel. These accounts view the moral agent as existing in complex webs of relations with others and necessarily existing in relationships. I argue for the compatibility of such a relational account of the self in virtue ethics. Incorporating a more relational conception of the self into Tessman's virtue ethics framework provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of how human beings live interdependently and in relations with others. I argue that the understanding of the moral agent as relational within a virtue ethics framework enhances a virtuous agent's practical reasoning and allows them to understand their role in global social collectivities. A virtue ethics account that holds the moral agent as relational provides a lens from which to respond to the first two criticisms of Tessman's account outlined in Chapter 4. Through this framework I provide a response to the criticisms that Tessman's account would be better focussed on political institutions instead of moral agents, and that her account cannot extend globally.

5.1 Feminist Relational Theory: Providing a Relational Conception of the Self

Miller explains that liberal theories tend to view the individual as “the ultimate unit of moral concern;” as part of an “atomistic, disconnected social ontology” that believes it is plausible to consider individual moral agents as “somehow separated from the relationships in which they are intertwined” (Miller 2012, 148). In short, they use individuals as the primary normative units (148). Relational accounts put their focus on what Miller refers to as “the primary moral importance of human interdependence and of the moral self-in-connection,” where “it is not possible to understand the moral self apart from the relationships in which it is embedded” (148). In exploring this necessary feature of the relationality of the human self, I argue that responses to the four criticisms against Tessman outlined in Chapter 4 can be appropriately formed and addressed. Responses to the first two criticisms from Chapter 4 will appear in this chapter, and responses to the final two criticisms will appear in Chapter 6.

Feminist relational theory takes the empirical claim that human selves are necessarily relational as the starting point for looking at the ways in which human beings live their lives. In their introduction to the anthology *Being Relational* (2012) Llewellyn and Downie explain that “humans enter into and live in a range of relationships with others that influence and shape the course of their lives directly or through socialization” (Llewellyn & Downie 2012, 4). For relational theorists the moral agent is understood as being “constituted *in and through* relationship with others” (4). Relational theory, therefore, “recognizes not only that we live in relationships with others but also that relationship and connection with others is essential to the existence of the self” (4). For

relational theorists, then, “relationships play a constitutive role because of the ‘inherently social nature of human beings’” (4).

Relational theory recognizes human beings as inherently and necessarily social beings who live in, are influenced by, and shaped through their relationships with others. From birth human beings are dependent upon the care of others to meet their needs and ensure their survival. Regardless of their attempts or desires for independence and autonomy, the importance of relationships does not go away for human beings as they live their lives with other people and in societies. Throughout our lives, at different points, and especially as we age and become elderly, our ability to meet our individual and ever-increasing needs diminishes, and once again we become dependent upon others for meeting these needs. If human beings have children, then these others have needs that must be met in order for them to survive, and as their own parents age they too become dependent on others to fulfill their needs. By focusing on relationships, then, relational theory acknowledges the conditions of human vulnerability and interdependence in the very lives and selves of moral agents. On this account, relationships are understood as the lens and constitutive framework that allows us to understand how individuals live and exist in the world, and “what is required of them to ensure well-being and flourishing” (6).

However, it is very important to acknowledge that relational theory “does not posit a self wholly *determined* by these relationships,” but “seeks to recognize the intrinsically relational nature of the self without denying the significance of the individual and agency of the self” (5, my emphasis). We are to understand the self as constituted *in and through* relationships in order “to reflect the presence of an individual self with

agency who is able to reflect and choose but who cannot do so alone” (5). Individual selves are still responsible for their actions and choices. However, how that individual is constituted and how their choices are influenced is better explained and understood by focussing on relationships. Relational theory is, therefore, critical of and “rejects the individualism of the traditionally liberal self,” and instead it “poses a challenge to the picture of the self traditionally identified with liberalism,” (7). Again, it is important to note that this is not to deny the self in the sense of having our own individuality or ability to pursue our own well-being and goals. Relational theory simply recognizes the role and influence of others and of our relationships as we shape our decisions, goals, and sense of well-being.

There seem to be deep parallels between the focus of relational theory and of virtue ethics in terms of understanding human moral agents as necessarily social beings. Tessman’s virtue ethics account focusses on moral agents existing in Aristotelian social collectivities, which has a parallel in relational theory’s understanding of the moral agent and their well-being as connected to their relations with others. However, even though Tessman recognizes the importance of human interdependence, she is still too focused on the autonomous individual and how individuals can be virtuous in our unjust world. In one sense, her inclusivity requirement seems to draw out a relational account of the agent as necessarily living in connection with others, at the same time the focus on individual agents who act and are affected by our non-ideal world remains largely individualistic.

By contrast, relational theory focuses on the relations between people themselves and is able to provide a more nuanced account of how moral agents can live and be together to secure a collective well-being. This is accomplished by being sensitive to

addressing the needs of others throughout a complete life. The incorporation of a relational conception of the self into a virtue ethics account then demands a constant focus on the individual moral agent as existing in and through their social collectivities. On such an account, we cannot understand the well-being of a moral agent in isolation from those with whom they live. A more relational and complex understanding of the moral agent provides a broader lens for a virtue ethics account to explore the effects of oppression. I want to argue that such a virtue ethics account provides a nuanced way for understanding flourishing and the well-being of social collectivities in our non-ideal world.

The compatibility of relational theory and virtue ethics can also be seen in Sherwin's account of moral agents "as embodied agents, situated in a particular social, economic, and historical time and place, whose identities are formed through personal and political (impersonal) relationships" (Sherwin 2012, 16). For Sherwin, human beings are embodied agents within specific contexts and their experiences produce very specific needs. These specific needs can then be uncovered through the lens of relationships. And despite the presence of liberal social norms, when we look at the contextual details of our relationships we are able to uncover the particular needs of agents that are overlooked by our general assumptions about how people ought to live (21). Therefore, by focusing on relationships, relational theory is able to "assign and assume the specific responsibilities associated with the various actual needs that arise within particular [relationships]" (21); needs that maybe hidden given our generally accepted liberal norms.

This compatibility can also be seen in Koggel's relational account, when she explains that "being able to respond in morally appropriate ways to these embodied realities matters to an account of autonomy and to an analysis of inequality" (Koggel 2012, 75). According to Koggel, the presence of the specific needs of those we are in relationships with calls for us to understand how to effectively engage with others to ensure that their needs are met. And by focusing on the embodied experiences of those we are in relationships with, relational theory allows us to discover how the specific needs of embodied agents arise and the importance of having an account for ensuring that these needs are met in appropriate ways.

As with the accounts of Aristotelian virtue ethics found in Chapter 1, relational theory is concerned with the contextually specific needs of embodied agents and circumstances, as well as necessity of acting appropriately within these contexts. However, relational theory's focus on relationships provides a better way of understanding needs and the necessity of meeting them in morally appropriate ways. Though virtue ethics provides an account of how to appropriately act in a given circumstance, it lacks the nuance and focus on needs found in relational theory. If we incorporate such a relational account of the self into a virtue ethics framework, we can see that virtue ethics is missing the same *way of knowing and identifying* others' needs found in relational theory. What is missing is a more complex account of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning.

By having a relational conception of the self, a virtue ethics framework is provided with an enhanced and more nuanced account of practical reasoning. If the virtuous agent exercises this intellectual virtue through a focus on relationships and the

descriptions and analyses that emerges from them, then they will be better able to understand the specific embodied needs of those they are in relationships with and will be better able to determine the appropriate actions to meet these needs. Not only are relational theory and virtue ethics compatible in the sense of engaging with contextual particularities and meeting needs, but through the lens of relationships a virtuous agent's practical reasoning can be *better* developed and utilized for understanding the needs of those within our social collectivities.

This enhanced account of practical reasoning will be especially important when we appraise the choices of moral agents and consider "the background conditions that structure those choices" (Sherwin 2012, 23). For relational theory, since all of our actions and choices occur within a specific relational context, we can understand how and why moral agents make certain choices by considering those factors that influence their reasoning and decision-making processes. This is important for Tessman's account of the moral damage that agents experience as a result of oppression, where a relational account can provide a way for understanding how an agent's relationships with these oppressive structures influences and shapes their possible choices and opportunities to develop virtues and to flourish.

A relational conception of the self enhances the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning within a virtue ethics framework. This practical reasoning provides a better account for identifying and understanding the specific embodied needs of those we are in relations with and for determining how we can appropriately meet these needs. Virtuous agents are then better able to exercise their practical reason in order to accurately and effectively perform the right action in the right way and at the right time. This ensures

that virtuous agents understand what is needed and appropriate in a specific context or circumstance. And when we understand the moral agent in relations with others we can see how their actions are influenced by these particular contexts.

There is thus deep compatibility between virtue ethics and relational theory in terms of accepting the situational particularities of being moral agents who can respond to the needs of particular others in specific situations. And utilizing the lens of relationships to describe and analyze the complex webs of relations we are in with others gives virtuous agents a better way to develop and utilize their practical reasoning. So, for example, by focussing on the relationships we have with oppressed others who experience the burdens of anger in Tessman's example from Section 2.7, we can understand how the oppressed agent's particular experiences of anger shapes their decisions and affects their health in ways that requires that we respond in particular and appropriate ways. Understanding the specific needs that emerge from these oppressed agents' embodied experiences helps to shape ways of appropriately responding to their needs. Importantly, the exercise of practical reasoning will reveal how and why these agents' health is negatively affected and the attention that needs to be given on account of this need. Thus the focus on relationships exposes the particular needs of others in specific contexts. In turn, when these are identified in this way, a virtuous agent has better opportunities to appropriately and virtuously fulfill these needs.

5.2 Feminist Relational Theory: Relations of Power and Challenging Social Norms

Koggel's relational account can also enhance practical reasoning to better analyze relations of power within our relationships. Koggel explains that a relational focus can

analyze the role power plays in and through our relationships so as to “uncover and challenge relationships of power that perpetuate various kinds of inequalities” (Koggel 2012, 66). Such an analysis, she explains, provides an “account [of] the inequalities in power and the role that power plays at the personal, local, institution, national, and global levels” (65). By focusing on relationships, we not only uncover the needs of different agents, but also the relations of power at play. Power is exercised within our relationships and works to create and shape the needs of those with less or no power. Virtuous agents who exercise their practical reasoning through the lens of relationships can come to understand how power operates in and through their complex webs of relations to create and shape the needs of others in their social collectivities. These aspects are described through Koggel’s discussion of social norms.

Since relational theory takes as its “starting point the fact that human beings exist in relationships and do not come into the world as the independent, fully autonomous, and self-sufficient agents” (70) that liberal theory upholds, relational theory provides an account that is critical of many of our liberal norms and assumptions about human beings and how they exist in the world. Relational theory examines “the networks of relationships beyond those of dependency” (71) to look at how the “workings of power and the ways in which factors such as race, gender, disability, and so on are entrenched in norms and institutions that limit one’s autonomy or determine the kinds of inequalities that one suffers” (71). Without the too exclusive focus by some care theorists on relationships of dependency, Koggel’s relational account can provide a framework that can “uncover the governing norms and practices that sustain various inequalities” (74), particularly for those who have less social power and advantage. By focusing on power

within our relationships, we are able to uncover and learn the sources of various kinds of inequalities, as well as the particular structures, norms, and assumptions that perpetuate and sustain these inequalities.

The learning and acquiring of this knowledge, I argue, is tied to the kind of practical reasoning that was already evident in Aristotle's virtue ethics account. However, for the purposes of creating a virtue ethics framework that can account for the effects of oppression and injustices in our non-ideal world, I argue that practical reasoning needs to be enhanced by these relational accounts. Practical reasoning will then be an intellectual virtue that when exercised through our relationships provides a way for virtuous agents to know what to do in the face of meeting the needs of others and addressing inequalities, even in unjust circumstances.

By turning the focus of a virtue ethics framework to relationships themselves, virtuous agents are provided with a better method for uncovering and understanding damaging social norms. These social norms influence what we value and shape how we understand virtuous action. Questioning and challenging why these norms and structures are so easily assumed will require investigating why accepted practices continue to result in detrimental consequences for different moral agents as they exist in relation with each other. Exercising their practical reasoning to uncover these norms and their consequences on different parties within a relationship allows virtuous agents to expose when they are detrimental to the well-being of moral agents.

I argue that if we accept the social norms assumed by liberal theory, we may value our individual autonomy over providing for others' needs. This in turn shapes how we understand what a virtuous agent ought to do or what virtuous action may entail. This

can be seen in Koggel's criticisms of accepted liberal assumptions about human beings; that they are autonomous individuals that can best pursue their own interests without interference from others (70). However, if the focus is on relationships and human interdependence, then the value can shift to understanding which agents have power and which have needs. And this understanding helps to generate an account of virtuous agents who know about and can ensure that those needs are met.

By focussing on relationships, virtuous agents can enhance their practical reasoning in order to better understand who has more or less power to act, who has needs that should be met, or who cannot pursue their own interests. In terms of structural injustice and oppression, we are able to see the power relations between oppressed and privileged others, and how each is affected by structural forces and the very nature of their interaction through these relationships. Focussing on relations, particularly relations of power, exposes who has their needs met, who does not, and ultimately why this is the case. This is because we can come to see that those without power are not having their needs met. The incorporation of a relational lens into a virtue ethics framework allows us to explore and understand the perspectives of oppressed others and how they are negatively affected by these unequal power relations. As well it can help us challenge the negative social norms that shape our values and actions and perpetuate these inequalities.

When virtuous agents are understood relationally, the exercise of practical reasoning happens in the context of an analysis of the complex webs of relations in which agents are situated. Virtuous agents need to understand themselves as fundamentally relational beings who have needs and also have responsibilities to address the needs of others in order to ensure their collective well-being. In Section 5.6, I will connect this

with Tessman's defence of the need for an inclusivity requirement. Furthermore, such a relational account entails that virtuous agents need to understand appropriate virtuous actions not only within the context of oppressive circumstances, as Tessman does, but also within the contexts of accepted norms. Virtuous agents will then need to challenge the liberal assumptions about the status quo; about how we think virtuous agents are and ought to exist in the world. This will be the topic of Chapter 6.

5.3 Understanding Social Collectivities through a Relational Account of the Self

When a virtue ethics framework makes relationality the central focus, we can see how virtuous actions will need to be for the fundamental betterment of our social collectivities. By utilizing the lens of relationships, virtuous agents are provided with a way of understanding how to ensure the well-being of their social collectivities by making sure others' needs are met. This can better ensure the well-being of those we are in relations with in our social collectivities, but it does not yet confirm the Aristotelian promise that the virtuous life is a flourishing one. A focus on relationships still raises the question of how such a relational conception can ensure the self-interested well-being or flourishing of the individual virtuous agent.

However, as discussed in the previous section, in this framework being virtuous will require challenging those liberal-individualistic norms that value independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. As virtuous agents, are we to act to pursue our own self-interested well-being? Well, we want to say 'yes,' but when we understand ourselves relationally we can see that our self-interested well-being is not about doing whatever we would like. To do so would be to assume the very damaging liberal norms that we have

been questioning. Instead, virtuous agents should understand their self-interested well-being as a collective flourishing that is dependent upon ensuring that those on whom we depend, and those who are dependent upon us, have their needs met. In having our needs met, and the needs of those we depend on or of those who are dependent on us, our own well-being is secured. This is how virtuous agents become responsible within their relationships and can help create Tessman's inclusive social collectivities.

These damaging social norms and assumptions come to influence how we understand the flourishing of the moral agent and the parameters of our social collectivities. However, with a relational conception of the self, virtuous agents are provided with a lens for challenging the damaging liberal norms and understanding their own self-interest and flourishing in a different way. The structures and norms that Koggel identifies as producing oppressions, inequalities, and injustices (71-74) can be challenged by a virtuous agent when they reason about relationships and the complex needs of others that emerge through them. It is in this way that virtuous agents can begin to create the more inclusive social collectivities that Tessman defends. Virtue ethics accounts are then highly compatible with relational theory. Using relationships as the lens for analysis enriches our understanding of human interdependence and social collectivities. For my purposes, it frames a virtue ethics account that goes well beyond those outlined by Aristotle, contemporary virtue ethicists, or even Tessman.

5.4 Feminist Relational Theory: Expanding Relations into the Global Context

Making relationships the focus of analysis allows my virtue ethics account to critically examine any circumstances in which there is a relation between persons or collections of

persons. Relationships are not limited by our geographical location or our nation's borders. From here we can come to understand and analyze the relationships that exist within the global sphere. It is important to note that relationships exist not only between individuals, but also between individuals and collectives, collectives and structures, and between two different collectives or structures, etc. Relationships exist and can be understood in a variety of different assemblages in which human beings are organized. Therefore, focusing on relationships does not limit the scope of this virtue ethics account to interpersonal relationships between near individuals. Instead, a focus on relationships also allows this account to analyze those relationships between communities, governments, organizations, corporations, nation-states, and an individual's connections with each of these apparatuses. In this way, a relational account is able to extend into the global sphere and possess a cosmopolitan focus that extends to respect for all human beings.

Koggel explains that a relational account is able to provide the same level of analysis, as I discussed in Section 5.2, at the global scale. She explains that by focusing on "the complex network of relationships in the global context," her relational account can still come to see how "power is enacted and fashioned in and through relationships of power" (Koggel 2012, 74). Furthermore, she argues that through the effects of globalization "relationships of power at local, national, and global levels that shape bodies disempowered by the very structures and relationships in which they are embedded" can be seen and understood (75). A relational approach can then uncover the particular global norms and conceptions "that shape and structure the social processes and global order in ways that determine the kinds of inequalities that people suffer" (76).

By focusing on relationships, we are able to explore, expose, and “pay attention to relationships of power both within and across borders” (76). By focusing on these relationships of power and “taking the perspectives of those less powerful positions seriously” (82), the norms and conceptions that function to produce and reproduce oppression on a global scale can be exposed. When we look at the power relations within certain relationships, especially unequal relationships between dominant structures and oppressed agents in the global sphere, we can understand the needs and perspectives of those with less power; how they are oppressed, and how this oppression affects how they live in the world in ways that shape their decisions.

Since our complex webs of relations extend globally, relational theory can be an effective framework for addressing global ethical concerns. The incorporation of a relational conception of the self into a virtue ethics framework allows for the utilization of the analysis of relationships to extend to global others. It also provides an account that allows virtuous agents to understand themselves in complex global webs of relations that construct their social collectivities across the global sphere. Often these global webs of relations create social collectivities with vested interests that only ensure the well-being of some individuals, groups, or nations. A relational account can provide virtuous agents with a way of understanding how they are in relationships with global others, as well as how extensive or inclusive their social collectivities are and can be. The incorporation of a relational conception of the self into a virtue ethics framework necessarily entails that my account has global applications and thereby supports a cosmopolitan ethic. This will become imperative for Tessman’s inclusivity requirement in the following sections of this chapter.

5.5 Response to Criticism 1: The Moral vs. Political Distinction for Structural Change

Whereas Calhoun encourages Tessman to take on a broader project of political theory for undermining structural injustices, I will suggest that through a relational account of the self the traditional distinction between moral and political philosophy is more porous and more difficult to delineate. This traditional division is highlighted by Sarah Clark Miller who views the role of ethical theory as utilizing “the point of view of individual moral agents making decisions about how to act and how to live” (Miller 2012, 138).

According to Miller, ethical theory is understood as approaching human needs and responses to circumstances at the individual level. Meanwhile, Miller argues that political theory “focuses primarily on the institutional level risks disregarding individual needs and/or individual obligations” (138). She presents a traditional understanding of the division of moral philosophy as concerned with how individual moral agents ought to respond, and of political philosophy as concerned with the social, institutional, or public organization, structures, responses, and actions (138). As discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.1, the first criticism is that in order for Tessman to adequately respond to institutional injustices she ought to shape her virtue ethics framework into a more political approach, one that analyzes how institutions ought to be established and organized to ensure improved responses and the elimination of structural injustices.

I instead propose that Tessman need not turn to a political project by focussing less on individual moral agents. Rather she should incorporate the moral relational account discussed throughout this chapter in order to eliminate the sharp distinction

between the moral and the political project and to view the two as far more interconnected and porous. Focussing solely on political structures would eliminate the strength of Tessman's account of the effects of oppression on moral agents themselves. If we were to turn her concerns to the specific organization and structures of institutions, the focus on the individual experiences, harms, and damages to particular moral agents would be lost. When we understand moral agents relationally we can identify and analyze the relations between moral agents and institutions, and the relations among the individuals within those institutions. Through a more relational account of the self, the strong distinction between needing to focus on either institutions or individuals can be eliminated. The solution to Calhoun's criticism is not to turn to a political project, but to have a fuller account of what it means to be a virtuous agent by providing an account of human beings as fundamentally relational.

Sherwin argues that the distinction usually drawn between ethical resolutions through individual actions and structural approaches through collective action is less of an issue for relational accounts. This is because focussing on the relationships between moral agents allows us to better understand that "the actions of individuals and those of the organizations they belong to are deeply intertwined" (Sherwin 2012, 23). Since relational accounts view individual actions and structural approaches as interrelated, the responsibilities and opportunities to make significant changes at different levels of involvement will be better realized through a relational account. By exposing how individual moral agents exist in relation to the types of institutions in which they live, relational accounts demonstrate how interrelated the moral and political arenas are.

In order to understand how relational agents are able to undermine unjust and oppressive structures, Sherwin argues that we need “to understand how it is that as individuals, and as members of collectives, we continue to participate in practices that serve powerful interests, but are, ultimately, contrary to our own deepest interest” (27). As individuals we need to understand how our actions, and our interactions with others, support and enable current structures to continue to unjustly exercise their power, cause harms, and oppress others. Part of being a virtuous agent will then need to entail an understanding of how we as individuals participate in practices and collective actions that allow unjust structures to continue to operate.

It is then important for the virtuous agent to understand individuals as being in relation to broader structures, as well as being members in collective actions that participate and perpetuate unjust structures. As individuals who participate in these structures, virtuous agents bear certain responsibilities for allowing these structures to continue to act against the interests of their social collectivities. They can do this by assuming and perpetuating the norms and structural injustices that allow people to be oppressed. Sherwin rightly points out that the dichotomous understanding of individual moral concerns and political structural concerns will ultimately be counterproductive to undermining injustices. Since, as Sherwin explains, “[n]ot every social problem can be resolved by appropriate legislation and enforcement” (31) there is a need for individual, collective, and structural approaches to undermining injustices. A relational account then provides a way for virtuous agents to understand how their individual actions are intertwined with the collectives and structures they participate in.

Focussing on the inherent relationality of moral agents allows a virtue ethics account to view moral action as always occurring in relation with others. These relations include those of individual moral agents with each other, but also those between individual moral agents and broader collectives and collections of people. When we understand individuals as necessarily existing relationally, it is easier to view institutions as comprised of networks of people in relation to each other. This can make the role of the individual virtuous agent as they act and interact with these institutions all the more apparent.

For my purposes, it can also reveal more about how a virtuous agent ought to be in relation to others. When we view the virtuous agent as working in relation with others and institutions, their individual role in promoting institutions that are unjust is demonstrated. Whether it is through their passive or active support of the status quo or their acceptance of features of our unjust world, understanding individual moral agents as being in relation to unjust structures reveals their individual and collective responsibilities in undermining injustices. Virtue is then understood differently on this account. Being virtuous will entail understanding our relationships to unjust structures and our role in allowing them to continue to oppress others. To be virtuous we will need to be responsible to those harmed in our relationships and to work with other virtuous agents to undermine and change these structures. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

When we view the virtuous agent as necessarily relational we do not need to make such a strong distinction between the political project of changing institutions and the moral project of determining individual actions. Instead we can see the two as

intertwined, and the role of virtuous agents as connected through their relations with other agents and institutions. Therefore, responding to Calhoun requires that Tessman incorporate an even more relational understanding of the moral agent. Committing to a deeper relational understanding of the moral self will allow Tessman to maintain her positive focus on the effects of oppression on moral agents, and provide a clear argument for understanding moral agents in their social collectivities. It will not simply be a matter of individual, autonomous moral agents who exist and interact with each other, but a deeper conception of moral agents as produced in and through the interdependent and complex networks of relations in which they exist.

I argue that responding to Calhoun's criticism that undermining structural injustice ought to be a political rather than an ethical project can be accomplished by viewing the virtuous agent as fundamentally relational. Since structures can be understood as collections of people existing in relations, I argue that we ought to understand individual moral action as intertwined with political collective action. Moreover I argue that even though structures, as collectives of many agents, are able to exercise greater power than most individual moral agents, a virtue ethics framework should not focus solely on political approaches to undermining injustices. Instead, through a relational framework, virtue ethics can analyze how our relationships to the structures create certain responsibilities on our part, both as individual moral responsibilities and shared social responsibilities for being part of collectivities involved in that structure. A virtuous agent will need to understand their role in relation to structures that produce harms and oppress others, in order to understand their individual and shared responsibilities for undermining this injustice.

By focusing on the individual agent understood relationally, we get a richer account of the moral and social responsibilities of agents than if we just focus on structures. We can come to understand how a virtuous agent ought to exist and interact with certain structures, including when they ought to end a relationship with a structure and when they ought to band together with other virtuous agents to work to undermine or change that structure. This will involve virtues like practical reasoning and responsibility that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

On my account, where Calhoun takes a wrong turn is not on the issue that Tessman's account is too focused on individual moral agents. Rather, it is that Tessman's account is not relational enough in understanding how moral agents exist in and through relationships that are embedded in structures that produce oppression and injustices. We can then look at the role of the virtuous agent without disconnecting it from the importance of structural changes and collective action. The key is to focus on the responsibilities that are produced through our participation in and relationships with structures and with respect to the harms, needs, and power relations that emerge from these relationships.

5.6 Response to Criticism 2: Grounding Inclusivity and Sensitivity to Suffering in a Global Context

Having a relational conception of the self as foundational to a virtue ethics framework will also allow me to respond to the second criticism of Tessman's account outlined in Chapter 4, Section 4.2. Calhoun and Friedman argue that Tessman does not provide a justification for her inclusivity requirement or for extending her account into a global

context. For Friedman and Calhoun, this means that Tessman is not clear as to whether our social collectivities extend globally or whether virtuous agents need to exercise the virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering towards global others.

I have argued that as fundamentally relational moral agents, we are necessarily in relationships with global others. Therefore, it is not only that we have relations to other people on the other side of the world, but that responsibilities to global others emerge from these relationships. Through our complex webs of relations we can come to see how we have responsibilities for the harms done to people who live not only in close proximity to us on the local or even national level, but also to the suffering and harm experienced by people in other countries or continents on a global scale.

If we are to provide a clear justification for Tessman's inclusivity requirement, I argue that we need a relational conception of the virtuous agent and an understanding that they necessarily exist in these globally expanding relationships. This relational conception of the self will also be incredibly helpful in understanding the demands and scope of both the inclusivity requirement and virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. Where Tessman seems willing to assume that certain global others ought not to be understood as necessarily part of our social collectivities (Tessman 2008, 206-207), the relational account of the self provides a more complex and demanding understanding of what it means to be a virtuous person in a globalizing world.

Additionally, I argue that a relational account of the self can make it possible to ground Tessman's inclusivity requirement. Tessman concedes that the need for inclusive social collectivities within her virtue ethics account is a mere stipulation (Tessman 2008, 206). However, if we understand the virtuous agent as fundamentally relational, we then

understand the virtuous agent as connected to and dependent upon other agents. This view seems akin to Aristotle's conception of the flourishing and virtuous *polis* discussed in Chapter 1. However, we now have a broader global scope and a need for a global justification for inclusivity.

Understanding the moral agent as relational and as existing in and through relationships, highlights the greater importance attached to our social collectivities, not only for our flourishing but even for our basic survival and well-being. For example, our relations with our parents and caregivers are the very relationships that allow us to exist beyond infancy. As infants we are dependent upon the care of those we are in relationships with for nutrition, health, and well-being; for our very survival. It is through our many relations with others as well as with certain structures – be they for education, health, etc. – that we are able to continue to exist. Understanding the need for positive social relations with others means understanding that the needs within these relationships ought to be met. This will ensure that we as agents are able to pursue our well-being and flourish. On my account we can do this by contributing to the collective project of flourishing in our social collectivities. Viewing agents relationally then demonstrates the importance of social collectivities for ensuring our survival, well-being, and ultimately our own flourishing. Being relational beings means that our necessary interdependence *requires* that we live in social collectivities. As with Aristotle, we have an account of human beings as necessarily social animals. I argue that if these collectivities are not at least somewhat inclusive, then we cannot have our needs met and in many cases we cannot survive. Such an account establishes Tessman's inclusivity requirement as more than a stipulation.

Additionally, I argue that with this understanding we cannot view Tessman's exclusive social collectivities as moral, nor can we view the privileged agents who choose to live within them as virtuous. This is because these privileged agents do not fulfill their responsibilities to those who exist within their social collectivities. They are not responsible to those agents who have not had their needs met or are oppressed by current structures. Since their relationships extend globally, and create broad social collectivities, we can understand these privileged (or vicious) agents as neglecting members of their social collectivities. By turning a blind eye to the needs of oppressed others with whom they are in relation, I argue that vicious agents inhibit the flourishing and well-being of their collectivities by preventing the development of conditions that could ensure everyone's flourishing. Denying or ignoring others with whom privileged agents are in relation does not eliminate the responsibilities that these privileged agents have to these others, responsibilities that emerge from the very fact of being in relationships with them. Privileged agents are necessarily in relationships with these oppressed others, relationships in which needs emerge and responsibilities are created. The continued suffering of oppressed agents prevents the social collectivities from flourishing. These are social collectivities that privileged agents are in and on whose well-being they depend for their own sense of collective flourishing.

When we turn to the question of who ought to be included within our social collectivities and, therefore, be subject to the demands of the inclusivity requirement, the relational framework I have appealed to can provide an answer. We must extend the inclusivity requirement to everyone with whom we are in relation, meaning that our social collectivities ought to be understood globally. This is because we live in complex

webs of relations – including international communities, organizations, corporations, and nation-states – that demand that we understand that our relations extend to all the global others. Contrary to the clear boundaries for our social collectivities that Tessman seems to defend in her inclusivity requirement, the view I have outlined argues that we ought to understand that our collectivities extend into the global context and can include almost anyone and everyone in the world.

Whether it is through the foreign policies of the nation-state in which we hold democratic citizenship or the multi-national corporation from which we purchase goods or find work, our responsibilities extend globally. As we will see in the next and final chapter, Iris Marion Young's discussion of sweatshops is useful for teasing out relationships and responsibilities that exist for people at all levels. However, the relational conception of the self allows us to understand how and why our social collectivities necessarily extend to include all of these global others.

5.7 Concluding Remarks to Chapter 5

To sum up this chapter, a relational conception of the self provides justification for Tessman's inclusivity requirement. It provides a clear definition of the scope of our social collectivities and, therefore, identifies the extent of unjust suffering that virtuous agents need to be sensitive to. According to my account, virtues need to be extended to those who are members of our social collectivities. Since these collectivities are extensive and global, the application of the virtues will have to be broad and global as well. This means that we will need to extend Tessman's burdened virtue of sensitivity to

unjust suffering to the suffering of oppressed others across the globe. Tessman's burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering must be global in scope as well.

With the virtue ethics framework I am defending, we can understand how privileges and oppressions affect members of our global social collectivities and their ability to flourish. Inclusivity within our social collectivities is then a necessary requirement because of the very nature of human need and interdependence. It is out of the relationships in our social collectivities that our responsibilities to the well-being of those oppressed others emerges. The inclusivity requirement that Tessman outlines is not arbitrary or wishful thinking, it is a part of living with others in our global context. As I have argued, Tessman's inclusivity requirement can be grounded in and through the relational conception of the virtuous agent.

Our social collectivities are then more broad and complex than Tessman initially would admit. However, her inclusivity requirement is incredibly valuable in understanding what it takes to achieve the well-being of our social collectivities; social collectivities that are (and need to be) broad, inclusive, and global. As we live in globally expanding networks of relations with others we hold responsibilities to these relationships, responsibilities that need to be met to ensure the well-being of all. Meeting the needs of oppressed others globally must entail that our virtues, however burdened, also need to extend globally to account for the suffering of those across the world. When we understand the virtuous agent as necessarily existing in and through complex webs of relations of power and privilege, we realize the global scope of our relationships and responsibilities. The usefulness of Tessman's inclusivity requirement lies in its ability to help us understand just how extensive our social collectivities are; social collectivities for

which we have responsibilities on which we depend to ensure our own collective well-being. In the next and final chapter I describe two of the sorts of virtues that emerge from the virtue ethics framework I defend. These will be the sorts of virtues that recognize the fundamental relationality and interdependence of human beings, and will better allow virtuous agents to meet the needs of others and create more inclusive social collectivities.

Chapter 6: Virtues for Being in an Unjust World and Responding to Others

In Chapter 6, I use the lens of relationships to discuss the sorts of virtues that emerge from a virtue ethics framework that has a relational understanding of the self. By focussing on relationships particular virtues emerge that virtuous agents understood relationally ought to habituate and develop. I will outline and discuss two specific virtues in this chapter, an account of responsibility as a virtue followed by the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning. My account of these virtues will be aided by the works of Joan Tronto, Iris Marion Young, and Laurence Thomas. Each of these authors provides an account that utilizes some conception of the self as interdependent and existing in connection with others. There is then compatibility with my virtue ethics framework, allowing me to utilize these authors' accounts in order to better develop these virtues.

After discussing the particularities and applications of these virtues, I provide responses to the final two criticisms of Tessman's account found in Chapter 4. I argue that the incorporation of a relational conception of the self into Tessman's virtue ethics framework provides an account of how to be a virtuous agent in our unjust world. The virtues that emerge from this account will then provide a clear framework for how virtuous agents can respond to the suffering and needs of others in morally appropriately ways. Ultimately, I argue for an account of virtue ethics that will provide a way of being in our unjust world that allows virtuous agents to be responsible to their relationships and works to create inclusive and flourishing social collectivities. In this way I respond to the final two criticisms of Tessman's account, and provide an enhanced conception of her virtue ethics that is able to account for how virtuous agents can embrace life and come to live well, even in non-ideal circumstances.

6.1 Tronto's Relational Responsibilities Approach and Responsibility as a Virtue

Tronto provides a framework for understanding the responsibilities that emerge from our relationships. Though her prominent work falls within an ethic of care, Tronto's framework from "Partiality Based on Relational Responsibilities" (2012) utilizes an account similar to those of the relational theorists discussed in Chapter 5. In this article Tronto's account of relational responsibilities emerges from an understanding of human beings as necessarily interdependent and relational. Additionally, her account is global in scope as, like Koggel, she is critical of the view that people's "common sense limit to their moral actions ... ends at a nation's borders" (Tronto 2012, 309). Therefore, Tronto views human beings as existing in relations that necessarily extend globally, making her account compatible with the virtue ethics framework developed in the previous chapter. As her relational responsibilities approach describes a global account of how human beings exist in relationships that necessarily produce certain responsibilities, it will be imperative for developing an account of responsibility as a virtue.

According to Tronto, relationships between agents exist when a relation is characterized by "either presence, biological, historical, or institutional ties, or some other form of 'interaction'" (306). For Tronto, "the fact of being alive and the nature of human vulnerability places one in relationships and thus already in the midst of relationships that produce responsibilities" (308). Her account argues that the existence of human need, vulnerability, and interdependence requires that human beings exist in relationships. The fundamental interdependence of human beings then causes our responsibilities to others to necessarily emerge through these relationships. As needy

being, human beings depend on their relationships for their needs to be met. The very fact of our being in relationships and having needs creates a responsibility to fulfill the needs of those in our relationships; as Tronto argues, “responsibilities *already exist* whenever caring needs have been met” (308, her emphasis). Such an account of relational responsibilities enhances the importance of social collectivities in a virtue ethics framework for ensuring collective well-being. Since it is through our relationships that our needs are met, the flourishing and well-being of our networks of relations, understood as social collectivities, is dependent upon our being responsible to our relationships. Responsibility takes on a greater importance for a virtue ethics account that views the self relationally.

The normative force of Tronto’s account emerges through the consequences of being irresponsible to needs of our relationships. Being irresponsible in relationships causes harms to others. As Tronto argues, it is “the consequence of acting irresponsibly that determines the degree of harm that comes from irresponsibility” (308). As moral agents we have a responsibility to fulfill the needs of our relationships. However being irresponsible to these needs causes various degrees of harm to those we are in relationships with. When viewed from a virtue ethics perspective, I argue that Tronto’s account of responsibility can emerge as a virtue. She describes responsibility as a necessary trait that emerges to ensure the well-being of our relationships. In terms of an Aristotelian virtue, there is also a corresponding vice; that of irresponsibility. Responsibility then emerges as a possible virtue that is similar to Aristotle’s description of friendship discussed in Chapter 1. Where friendship is described by Aristotle as a trait that creates more virtuous communities and relations, responsibility similarly fulfills the

needs of our relations in order to ensure their well-being. Responsibility can be understood as a necessary virtue when a virtue ethicist views the moral agent as relational. It is incredibly useful for understanding how a virtuous agent would approach fulfilling the needs of our relationships, and therefore ensuring the well-being and flourishing of our social collectivities.

However, for it to be an Aristotelian virtue I will need to provide an account of responsibility as a mean between an excess and deficiency. Here too Tronto provides valuable insights. She explains that “[b]ecause people and institutions exist within a complex, often competing, set of relations, responsibilities are also likely to be complex and competing” (310). She explains that because the extent of our responsibilities is so vast, “being irresponsible towards some of the responsibilities in our lives will be a matter of course for most humans, not a result of a rare fault” (310). Human beings live in such complex webs of relations that they could not possibly or feasibly fulfill all of their responsibilities. Instead, moral agents must determine the “different degrees of depth and different levels of social pull upon us, each person or group” in a relationship, in order to “make a more nuanced account of what any responsibility requires and the seriousness of its concomitant irresponsibility” (310). Since we are not able to be responsible to all of the needs of our relationships, we must determine which responsibilities we will fulfill and why. For this account, our being irresponsible toward one relationship “might also grow out of setting higher priorities on other responsibilities” (310).

Determining which relationships we will be responsible to requires us to understand the power relations of our relationships and the consequent harms of being

irresponsible. Tronto explains that since the majority of our relations are unequal in terms of need and power, “a relationship may have profoundly different effect for different parties within a relationship” (310). For example, “[t]wo friends may place different weight on the value of their friendship to themselves” (310). Therefore, the “failure to meet a responsibility within a relationship may affect the parties differently” (310) since one party of a relationship may be “more needful in that relationship than others” (312). If we are irresponsible to particularly needy others who possess less power in our relationships, as oppressed agents do, then the resulting harms of our irresponsibility can be devastating. A virtuous agent will then need to understand the consequences of their irresponsibility in order to determine which relationships they must be responsible to.

Tronto then provides an account of how to be appropriately responsible that can contribute the outline of responsibility as a virtue. Since we have far too many responsibilities for a human being to possibly fulfill, responsibility needs to be understood as a mean. As with Aristotelian virtues, being responsible will need to be understood in terms of acting appropriately given the particular circumstances the virtuous agent faces. We can understand responsibility as the mean state between the deficiency and excess of irresponsibility. To be deficiently irresponsible is to not pay enough attention to the dire consequences of the most needful parties in our relationships. It is neglecting these responsibilities to such an extent that it causes devastating harms to these others. This can be seen in Tessman’s discussion of how oppressed agents are harmed by the negligence of indifferent agents in Section 2.8. However through a relational approach, I argue that these oppressed agents are not having their needs met by

those negligent agents they are in relationships with. Vicious agents who are deficient in exercising the virtue of responsibility are then willfully ignorant of the needs of their relationships, and choose to be irresponsible to these relationships causing harms to these oppressed others and preventing the well-being of their social collectivities.

To be excessively irresponsible is to exercise responsibility by focusing on a few particular relationships at the expense of the needs of other important and needy relations. This can be seen when someone excessively focusses on being responsible to one very particular relation and ignoring the needs of their other relationships. Though these agents are responsible to some extent, they are not being *appropriately* responsible and so I argue that they should be understood as habituating the vice of irresponsibility. These agents are so focused on a few particular responsibilities that they do not have the time or resources to meet the needs of others, whose neglect results in even greater and more severe harm. By excessively focusing on a few relationships, or relationships that ought not to be as much of a priority, these agents should be understood as being vicious in terms of the virtue of responsibility.

The distinction between excessive and deficient is then one where the deficiently irresponsible agent could be said to have a *laissez-faire* attitude towards their relationships, meeting few to none of the needs of others. Meanwhile, the excessively irresponsible agent wrongly focusses on particular relationships in a way that seriously neglects their other responsibilities. It can also be seen when an agent is responsible to the needs of a relationship where the other party possesses a great deal of power already. In these cases the harms produced as a consequence of being irresponsible to these relationships are minimal, and yet the agent is dedicated to these relationships to the

detriment of their other responsibilities. When agents are responsible to the needs of powerful and unjust structures they are exercising this vice. The vicious agents are fulfilling the needs of unjust structures in a way that allows these structures to then continue to oppress and cause serious harms to others. In this way, they are being irresponsible because they have not appropriately determined which relationships they ought to be responsible to, culminating in the creation of greater harm and suffering of others.

What emerges from an account of responsibility as a virtue is the need for a balance of responsibilities between various relationships. A virtuous agent who exercises responsibility as a virtue will ensure that many different relationships have their needs met and that a minimal amount of harms will be created by their irresponsibility to other relations. Through such an exercise of the virtue of responsibility, I argue that these virtuous agents are capable of being appropriately responsible to their relationships, and capable of creating greater well-being within their social collectivities.

Since even the virtuous agent will be irresponsible to some of their relationships, responsibility as a virtue possesses much of the same burdens that Tessman's burdened virtues do. On this account, the virtuous agent will cause some harms through irresponsibility. However, it is their ability to appropriately determine that the least amount of harm is caused that will limit the burdensomeness of this virtue. Additionally, the focus on fulfilling the needs of relationships and ensuring the well-being of our complex webs of relations works to create more inclusive social collectivities that will produce collective well-being and flourishing. The very fact that this virtue emerges

from a relational account, and is committed to ensuring the well-being of our relationships makes it distinct from other virtues.

Where even Tessman's virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering is focused on the receiving of the experiences from oppressed others, the relationality inherent in responsibility as a virtue ensures an active and forward-looking approach to the exercise of this virtue. In being responsible, virtuous agents are necessarily *responding* to others and ensuring that their needs are being met. This is not solely the receptive task of experiencing the unjust suffering of others, as in Tessman's virtue. Instead I argue that responsibility can be exercised through our sensitivity to unjust suffering. Where Tessman identifies the *need* to be sensitive to others, my account of responsibility as a virtue combines this need to understand the experiences of oppressed others with an active component that ensures that the virtuous agent is actually creating a benefit to their relationships and, therefore, contributing to the well-being of their social collectivities. In this way, it seems less emotionally and psychically burdensome and even more effective for engaging with the needs of oppressed others.

Tronto's account of relational responsibilities then provides a strong foundation from which to develop a virtue of responsibility. She argues that such an account, "best allow[s] people to explore what they owe to others elsewhere in the world." (313). However, "[t]his claim requires a deep and wide knowledge of one's dealings in the world" (313), something that is missing in my account of responsibility as a virtue. To successfully habituate, develop, and exercise the virtue of responsibility, a better account for engaging in the world to acquire this knowledge is needed. For my virtue ethics account, what is required to effectively utilize responsibility as a virtue and understand

how virtuous agents can be appropriately responsible to their relationships, is a fuller account of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning. This is the topic of the following discussion of Young and Thomas in the next sections.

6.2 Young's Social Connection Model for Being Responsible in our Unjust World

Iris Marion Young's social connection model provides an account of responsibility and practical reasoning that is compatible with the relationality in the virtue ethics account I have argued for. Though Young is primarily focused on the role of the individual, her account remains critical of liberal-individualistic assumptions allowing for a more relational account of the self. This can be seen when she explains that she is "more concerned with the *relations* in which [moral agents] stand to other persons" (Young 2011, 57, her emphasis). Therefore Young's social connection model provides a framework for understanding what sorts of responsibilities we have as individual moral agents, as we exist in connection with others. She then extends these relations to the different structures, institutions, and collectives that moral agents participate in around the globe (73). Since Young's social connection model utilizes the relationships we have with others, and institutions, to show how our responsibilities extend into a global context, her account of responsibility is compatible with my virtue of responsibility first developed through Tronto in Chapter 5. Her model can then further inform my account of responsibility as a virtue and enhance an account of practical reasoning that recognizes a relational conception of the self.

Young argues that through our relations with others and our participation in certain structures, systems, collectives, or even businesses, we bear some responsibility

for the actions of these structures and collectives (96). As moral agents, we ought to be held accountable for being complacent towards the actions of those structures and systems in which we participate (96). However, we also need to understand that often our actions do not contribute to injustices directly, “but rather indirectly, collectively, and cumulatively through the production of structural constraints on the actions of many and privileged opportunities for some” (96). Through our complacency we allow and enable the structures we participate in to result in actions that are oppressive, damaging, harmful, and unjust to certain others, while at the same time benefiting and privileging more powerful others. Our participation in these structures means that, for Young, we have a responsibility individually, and as members of certain collectives, to prevent structures from continuing to create these harms (96). Young’s account confirms Friedman’s concern from Chapter 3 that even without a direct causal link, privileged agents have responsibilities for causing harms to oppressed others.

Where Tronto’s account of responsibility emerges from the very existence of our relationships, Young’s model argues that our responsibilities emerge because we participate in structures and collective actions that cause unjust harms. For Young we have responsibilities “to the extent that we participate in the ongoing operations of a society in which injustice occurs” (104). This does not mean we are specifically liable for the unjust actions of the institutions and collectives in which we participate, but it means that because we allow such institutions to continue to perform unjust actions we maintain a responsibility to change these institutions. Being responsible, according to Young’s account, entails that we as individual agents have a deep moral obligation to band together with others who share our responsibilities “in order to transform the

structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust” (96). Therefore the responsibilities we have for eliminating unjust outcomes and structural processes are “essentially shared” (110).

According to Young, it is not our individual actions in isolation that allows these structures to unjustly cause harm. Instead, we need to understand our individual role as part of the larger groups and collectives who act with us (110). Where Tronto’s account of responsibility entails that the moral agent fulfills the needs of their relationships to ensure well-being, Young’s account of responsibility looks to the role the individual plays, in-connection with others, in producing unjust harms. However, as Young’s account can inform how a virtue of responsibility can be exercised to undermine structural injustice, I will argue that Young’s and Tronto’s accounts are not antagonistic towards each other. Instead, I argue that Young’s account provides a way of understanding our shared responsibilities that emerge from the collective actions of agents, who exist in webs of relations. This can be understood in terms of Tronto’s relational responsibilities. Since Young still maintains a focus on relationships, her view that our responsibilities *emerge* from our participation in other structures does not rest on a voluntarism in the choice of relationships that Tronto wishes to reject. Instead where responsibilities emerge for Tronto when relations exist, Young’s shared responsibilities can be seen as emerging from our webs of relationships that connect us to collective actions.

Moreover, Young argues that those who are complacent in allowing unjust structures to cause harms share just as much responsibility to change these structures as agents who are actively involved in causing harms. The shared responsibility for the

actions of unjust structures emerges for the complacent and non-complacent alike. We can understand our shared responsibilities emerging from the relations we have to structures and collective actions, not our individual choices. If we understand our individual involvement in allowing unjust structures to harm and oppress others, we can see how the harm caused is not a result of our individual actions alone. Instead they are a result of the actions of collections of people in relation who are just as responsible as the individual agent, and share the responsibility for ending the injustice and changing these structures.

Young's social connection model then informs my conception of responsibility as a virtue by providing an account of shared responsibility through collective action. In the previous section my discussion of responsibility focussed on the responsibility a virtuous agent has to their relationships, but did not provide clarity for how such a virtue could be applied to unjust structures or collective actions. Here Young provides insights through the application of her social connection model. Virtuous agents can then understand their shared responsibilities emerging from their webs of relations. These webs of relations ought to be understood as those social collectivities that can and do act in the world. As virtuous agents depend on the well-being of their social collectivities in order to ensure their own flourishing and well-being, it is important to understand the shared responsibilities these virtuous agents have in order to meet the needs of others and make their social collectivities inclusive, as Tessman's inclusivity requirement demands. Young's focus on structures and collective actions enhances an account of responsibility as a virtue by expanding its scope to include an understanding of those responsibilities

that virtuous agents share with others, through the structures and communities that produce collective actions.

This can be seen when Young recognizes how our responsibilities emerge through the rule of international trade and commerce that functions to benefit corporations from the global north by utilizing the resources and labours of the global south. For Young the responsibilities that privileged agents have for ending this global injustice emerges through our relationships with the democratic nations of the global north in which we live. It is through our citizenship and interaction with our nations that our shared responsibilities emerge for ending the global harms that our nation directly or indirectly causes to global others (137). These democratic nations benefit from their relations with multi-national corporations and allow for the exploitation and oppression of people in the global south for their own benefit. In turn privileged agents living in these countries and purchasing goods from these corporations are also benefiting from the unjust structures. We can also see the complex webs of relations that connects oppressed global others to privileged agents in the global north. Citizens of wealthy nations have relations to their countries and corporations, who operate in ways that cause harms to oppressed global others. This connects privileged agents in one country to oppressed agents in another through their global webs of relations. What emerges is then a shared responsibility for privileged agents to change structures and end this unjust suffering through collective action.

An application of this account can be seen in Young's example of sweat-shops. She describes the production of clothing and the treatment of garment workers as an international system that is owned and operated by corporations from the global north

(126). In order to keep production costs low, these apparel companies and corporations contract the manufacturing of clothing out to poorer and often less-developed countries, whose wages are incredibly low and working conditions poor and unsafe (126). The majority of the workers in these shops are female, who experience sexual harassment and intimidation within these factories. They work incredibly long hours without breaks, safety standards, or the ability to unionize or improve their conditions (127). The corporations of the apparel industry avoid responsibility for these conditions by arguing that they contract out manufacturing of their garments to keep costs low for the consumer in the developed world and to maintain profits. How these contractors treat their employees is then a matter of concern for the manufacturers, and *not* the apparel companies themselves; they “have no legal responsibility for the policies and operations of the firms below with which they contract” (129). Therefore, these corporations allow for the injustices and harms to continue in order to receive their own political and financial benefits.

However, when a virtuous agent uses the lens of their webs of relations they can see the shared responsibilities that emerge from these global unjust structures. Privileged agents in the global north can understand their responsibilities to those oppressed garment workers through the webs of relations that exist between agents, apparel companies, manufacturers, and nation-states. The connection of privileged agents to these unjust structures can then be seen from the local level where they buy clothing in a store, to the national level of the ownership of these corporations, and even to the international level of production overseas. Out of these relations shared responsibilities emerge for eliminating this suffering by all involved and all who allow this injustice to continue.

Through the role they play, whether individually or as part of a collective, their participation in these systems and structures that perpetuate this injustice creates a relation and necessitates a responsibility for ending the injustice (137).

For the virtuous agent fulfilling their shared responsibilities requires ending this suffering and undermining these unjust structures. This can be actualized in the role that these virtuous agents play in collective actions. Virtuous agents will need to undermine the oppressive structures of the garment industry by banding with other agents in order to change practices and structures. This can occur in various ways. For agents who are not financially constrained, they can choose to only purchase garments that are made ethically and encourage others to do so as well. They can influence their elected officials to get governments to only deal with corporations that do not use sweat-shops for the manufacturing of their apparel. They can support international unions in helping to organize sweat-shop workers and establish safe employment practices. Importantly for Young, agents will need to band together to raise awareness and understanding about the suffering and injustices of sweat-shops (134) and the need to improve the conditions of these workers (131).

In exercising the virtue of responsibility in order to undermine unjust structures, virtuous agents will need to understand their shared responsibilities with others, and how as social collectivities they can work to change structures and fulfill the needs of oppressed others. However, the process of undermining these structural injustices requires that the virtuous agent have knowledge about the complex ways in which suffering occurs and about the experiences of oppressed others. Methods for undermining the injustices caused by sweatshops in appropriate ways will require having

Tronto's deep and wide *knowledge* of how the virtuous agent interacts with the world. This will require turning to the discussion of the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning, which will provide a way of knowing and interacting within relationships that provide a virtuous agent with an account of how they ought to exist in our unjust world. This discussion is the topic of the next sections.

6.3 Young's Parameters of Reasoning and a Relational Account of Practical Reasoning

In order to have the effective application of a virtue of responsibility a better account of practical reasoning is needed to take into consideration the consequences of a relational conception of the self. As discussed in Chapter 1, practical reasoning is an intellectual virtue that provides a virtuous agent with the understanding of what they ought to do given the context of particular circumstances. Practical reasoning allows a virtuous agent to understand what is appropriate in a given circumstance and directs the virtuous agent to exercise the right virtues appropriately. For a relational account of the self, practical reasoning will be invaluable to analyzing the needs of particular relationships, understanding the responsibilities that emerge from these relationships, and providing the virtuous agent with a way of responding to others that fulfills a virtue of responsibility. I argue that Young's *parameters of reasoning* will inform such a relational account of practical reasoning.

In Sections 5.1 and 5.2, I outlined how relational accounts can inform a virtuous agent's way of knowing and understanding the specific contextual needs that emerge from our relationships, and how the accepted norms and assumptions that shape these

needs must be challenged. Similarly, Young highlights how many of our accepted, normal practices or background conditions continue to produce structural injustices that should be considered morally unacceptable. She explains that because we contribute to the continuing injustices that exist through our every day and regular participation and production of the status quo, we are responsible for the structural injustices and harms that are produced by these norms within our communities and institutions. Young points to how individual moral agents bear responsibility for the perpetuation of injustices through their simple acceptance of the expected rules and conventions of the communities and institutions in which they act (107). Even though we may not specifically be at fault for the continuation of these injustices, Young explains, we still bear responsibility because our actions produce and reproduce structural injustices even when we are “minding our own business and acting within accepted norms and rules” (106).

Again, as with Koggel in Section 5.2, Young is very concerned with challenging our accepted norms, conceptions, and practices for determining and understanding how we as moral agents who act within the structures and institutions that perpetuate injustices allow these injustices to continue. From a virtue ethics perspective, if we are to ensure the inclusivity of our social collectives we have a responsibility to *know* how our generally accepted norms and practices contribute to perpetuating injustices within our collectivities. This requires a better account of knowing the consequences of these norms, challenging their very existence, and reasoning how to be appropriately responsible.

Young's *parameters of reasoning* provide a way of knowing and determining how agents ought to change and undermine unjust structures. These *parameters of reasoning* are a series of guidelines that should be taken into account when we, as virtuous agents, engage in collective action to undermine unjust structures (144). Her parameters include power, privilege, collective ability, and interest. Similar to the accounts of Koggel and Tronto, analyzing power and privilege requires that moral agents not only question the power relations that exist within our webs of relations, but also how the structures and systems are set up to privilege certain members and provide unearned and unjust benefits to certain people (144-145). Questioning and analyzing structures of power and privilege functions to expose how certain agents are benefited by systems in ways that they do not understand or have yet to acknowledge. Utilizing practical reasoning through the parameters of reasoning will require virtuous agents to understand how power and privilege operate in our relationships to gain knowledge about the ways *they* benefit from current structures and norms. The focus on relationships allows for virtuous agents to gain knowledge about their privilege in ways that would be overlooked by liberal-individualistic accounts that view the moral agent as an autonomous chooser.

In coming to understand how they are benefited, privileged agents will see that making structures more just can negatively affect their individual lives by reducing their privilege. Young's concern is that privileged agents may be attached to their privileges in ways that will cause them to do everything in their power to maintain injustices and unjust power relations, so that their unearned benefits will continue (148). However, through this more relational virtue ethics account, I argue that privileged agents can also come to understand how the elimination of suffering in their webs of relations can come

to benefit their broader social collectivities by ensuring the well-being of more members. And through the well-being and flourishing of their social collectivities, these agents can understand the different ways in which their lives are made better by living in more just social collectivities.

In terms of the parameter of collective ability, Young argues that we ought to look at the effectiveness of existing communities for the possible undermining of injustices (147). Time and resources are limited and so understanding what is possible, how, and why is going to be very important in creating effective and long-lasting change. For the virtuous agent utilizing collective ability in practical reasoning requires coming to *understand* which social collectivities will be most effective in undermining an injustice. In terms of the sweat-shop example, it may require that agents organize in ways to collectively “[push] authoritative and coercive political institutions in directions that remedy injustice” (168). Often within democratic nations meeting the needs of our shared responsibilities can occur through the promotion of more just political institutions by organizing collective actions for change (173). A virtuous agent can then work with others within a social collectivity to enact policies or elect political parties that are going to take the harms caused by the injustice of sweat-shops seriously. This could involve promoting anti-sweatshop legislation and working to create safe and fair labour practices globally. This will ensure participation in undermining an injustice at the local, national, and global levels in order to try to eliminate the suffering caused by an injustice. However, the specific role that the virtuous agent will play in undermining an injustice will vary.

Coming to understanding this role, Young argues, means that an agent needs to understand their motivations through the parameter of interest. As was seen with Tronto's relational responsibilities, our ability to meet all of our responsibilities is near impossible. So in order to effectively and adequately undermine certain injustices, virtuous agents are going to have to understand which injustices they have a vested and motivated interest in undermining, and also which injustices they really should be addressing because of their power and privilege. There are many circumstances where the injustices certain agents are most motivated to work to undermine are actually quite inappropriate for them to take an active role in. For example, it would be inappropriate for a non-Indigenous person to be leading the charge in the re-spiritualization processes of traditional knowledge and medicine within Indigenous communities. This does not mean that a non-Indigenous person cannot or should not be involved in supporting Indigenous communities in de-colonization— quite the contrary — they should just be aware of the role they play to ensure that further damage is not done.

In utilizing the parameter of interest, it is incredibly important for the virtuous agent to take into account and understand who is most affected by an injustice. It is these agents who are most oppressed that have a greater knowledge and interest in undermining oppression, and therefore Young argues, these agents ought to be the ones leading the change and process of changing these structures (113). This ensures that the embodied and first-hand perspectives of oppressed agents are taken into account when structures are being undermined; structures that have been harming them and causing great suffering. The insights, knowledge, and understanding of how oppressive forces and structures specifically harm oppressed agents are invaluable to the virtuous agent's ability to

eliminate this suffering and injustice (146). Having this knowledge allows a virtuous agent to understand *how* to play an *appropriate* role in undermining an injustice.

Reasoning through these relationships of power to understand the appropriate interest and role a virtuous agent ought to play in undermining an injustice not only allows the virtuous agent to fulfill their shared responsibilities, but also allows them to be responsible in the *way* they are engaging with their relationships to change structures. Virtuous agents can fulfill their shared responsibilities by changing unjust structures, and at the same time ensure that they are responsible to the needs of their specific contextually embedded relationships by gaining knowledge of and responding to others' suffering.

Again, we can see how this enhanced conception of practical reasoning can be exercised through Tessman's virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering. Where Tessman has highlighted to *need* to be sensitive to the suffering oppressed others experience, my relational account of practical reasoning provides way of acquiring and understanding the needs of others and how these needs can be appropriately met. In understanding the complexity of others' suffering, my account of practical reasoning provides a way to know *how* to respond to suffering in order to prevent it. The enhanced account of practical reasoning that I have developed is then able to move beyond Tessman's virtue to provide an account of knowing *how* to respond to others, and not just that we *should* respond to others.

The practical reasoning found in virtue ethics is then enhanced by the relational nature of Young's *parameters of reasoning*. Such an account provides a way in which virtuous agents can engage with their networks of relationships to understand their

responsibilities and the complexities of needs that emerge from their relationships. This framework then provides insights into how we can be virtuous agents in our unjust world, but it still requires further clarity and elaboration in order to respond to the third and fourth criticisms of Tessman's account outlined in Chapter 4. In the next section I will build upon my account of practical reasoning by incorporating Laurence Thomas' account of how to defer to others, which provides a way of learning about the experiences of oppressed agents in morally appropriate ways.

6.4 Thomas on Moral Deference and the Demand to Know Oppression

In his article "Moral Deference" (1998), Thomas provides an account that sees human beings as socially "constituted through others" and "inextricably tied to the way in which others think of us" (Thomas 1998, 365). Even though Thomas is focussed on the individual, his account of the interdependence of human beings as necessarily tied to others makes his account relational enough to inform my virtue ethics framework. More importantly, Thomas' focus on the need for knowledge of others' experiences, and the necessity of doing so respectfully and appropriately, deeply ties his account to virtue ethics. He argues that there are "appropriate and inappropriate responses to the moral pain of another" (362). For Thomas it is not just that we respond to the moral harms and pains of others, it is that we do so in a *knowledgeable* and appropriate *manner*. For my purposes, we can understand Thomas as saying that we ought to respond to the moral harms and pains of others in virtuous ways. These are ways that are going to require practical reasoning and responsible action.

Thomas explains that those who have suffered what he categorizes as “grave misfortunes” require a type of moral response that is sensitive to the specific and complex misfortunes that have affected their lives. This response will ultimately help and assist both the oppressed and those that oppress. When grave misfortunes have occurred – such as continual and prolonged suffering as a result of oppression – we must consider not just the physical damage this misfortune has caused but also how the person may be “haunted by painful memories” and “feelings of emotional and social vulnerability” (363). Understanding how to respond appropriately to these grave misfortunes, or what Tessman would identify as moral damages, is enabled through Thomas’ account of *moral deference*.

Moral deference is the respect and consideration afforded to a person “when they speak in an informed way regarding experiences specific to their diminished social category from the standpoint of an emotional category configuration to which others do not have access” (373-4). Those who are oppressed or subject to structural injustice, Thomas explains, are downwardly socially constituted in ways that have their experiences not intimately available to agents who come from socially privileged categories. Thomas’ moral deference then provides certain insights into the specific embedded “feelings and experiences of persons in diminished social category groups” (375). His account provides a way that other people can have access to the insights and experiences of oppressed agents. These experiences are usually not available to those others who live in very different circumstances than the oppressed. By deferring to the experiences of oppressed others, privileged agents are provided with access to knowledge

about their suffering and harm. They are able to gain some understanding of the experiences of oppressed others, while not being constituted by memories of them (375).

Moral deference then attempts to deconstruct the “emotional walls between others” that is constructed from the moral reality of our unjust world (375). Though the experiences of privileged and oppressed agents may not be accessible to each other, Thomas’ moral deference provides a way to bridge this gap in understanding. As we are socially constituted in different ways, Thomas explains, we form and experience different memories and emotional category configurations, which in turn entails that the memories and emotional experience of events are different between members of socially privileged or socially diminished categories (375).

Moral deference then enhances the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning by providing a possible *mode of moral learning*. This virtue provides a way for agents to understand the moral pain of another person with their authorization and with their confidence (376). Being able to understand the experiences of oppressed others allows virtuous agents to better understand how oppression harms and is perpetuated (377). Responding virtuously and appropriately “will entail being appropriately moved on account of these” experiences of oppressed other (378). Thomas then enhances an account of practical reasoning by providing a method that virtuous agents can use to gain “such insight as to be in as good a position as one can be to understand, while yet lacking a complete grasp of another’s moral pain” (378). Virtuous agents then do not have to have the exact experiences of those who are oppressed, but they do have to defer to oppressed others in ways that allow them to receive the *knowledge* of individual experiences in appropriate and responsible ways.

What moral deference provides is a further way to challenge our everyday norms, conceptions, and sensibilities, in favour of new ones; “a new set of moral lenses if you will” (378). This, I argue, will allow us to better understand how we can use practical reasoning to determine how virtuous agents ought to respond to the suffering of others. These new sets of sensibilities provide insight into how oppressed agents exist in the world, and how to appropriately “become affected in a direct interpersonal way by the injustices of this world” (378). This is why Thomas describes moral deference as “a mode of moral learning which those who have been oppressed are owed in the name of eliminating the very state of their oppression” (378). Moral deference provides a virtuous agent with the opportunity to understand the nature of an oppressed others’ pain and because this also involves the appropriate *emotional* response brings it closer to a virtue ethics account. Since there is an appropriate way in which a virtuous agent ought to be affected by the experiences of oppressed others, this account of practical reasoning further connects to the role a virtue plays in an Aristotelian framework. Virtuous agents must be affected by the experiences of others in the appropriate way and to the appropriate extent. This connects to Tessman’s virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering, but again goes beyond what her account provides to include a way for virtuous agents to not just be overwhelmed by others’ suffering but to be appropriately engaged with oppressed others so as to be better able to respond.

Moreover, Thomas’ account of moral deference also informs the way that relational agents can fulfill Tessman’s inclusivity requirement. Since Thomas provides a mode of moral learning that functions to bridge the gaps in knowledge, understanding, and experience of different moral agents, he provides a way for virtuous agents to

strengthen the relationships within their social collectivities. As virtuous agents come to know and appropriately respond to the oppression of others, their relationships to these oppressed others are strengthened. This contributes to the inclusivity of these collectivities and enhances their well-being. In deferring to the experiences of oppressed others, virtuous agents strengthen relationships within their collectivities by creating greater inclusivity, which then enhances the well-being of those collectivities.

Therefore, I argue that incorporating Thomas' mode of moral learning with Young's parameters of reasoning informs a relational account of what the intellectual virtue of practical reasoning will require for our unjust world. This account allows virtuous agents to come to know others' experiences of oppression and then respond to them in appropriate ways given the needs and contextual particularities of relationships. In order to habituate a relational account of practical reasoning, virtuous agents will need to defer to the experiences of oppressed others in order to gain the knowledge to respond to their needs appropriately. Through their exercise of the virtue of practical reasoning, virtuous agents will appropriately gain knowledge about how oppression causes harms and suffering to certain agents. Included within this process is the necessary challenging and coming to understand how those norms that perpetuate oppression affect certain agents. The virtuous agent will then be able to use the four parameters of reasoning to understand how they ought to respond and act in a way that respectfully and appropriately tries to eliminate this injustice and end this suffering.

Returning to Young's example of sweat-shops, the role of practical reasoning can be seen when virtuous agents defer to the experiences of garment workers in order to understand the ways they are affected by this injustice. Where one response to the

existence of sweatshops may be to shut them all down, such a reaction does not take into account the needs and experiences of the garment workers themselves; as Young explains, “[s]urely it cannot be better for the workers to have no jobs at all” (131). Through the exercise of practical reasoning in and through our relationships with these garment workers, virtuous agents may discover that these workers do not wish for the elimination of their employment, simply for safe and fair employment. This allows virtuous agents to work in conjunction with garment workers and other collectives to come up with strategies that effectively undermine these injustices, and meet the needs of these garment workers in ways that are appropriate for them. And by deferring to the experiences of these garment workers, I argue that virtuous agents not only gain important knowledge about their experiences, but also create more inclusive social collectivities that are going to better undermine the injustice of sweat-shops.

Now that I have provided an account of practical reasoning as an intellectual and relationally appropriate virtue, I have argued for a virtue ethics framework that is able to respond to the final two criticisms of Tessman’s account found in Chapter 4. This will be the topic of the following sections.

6.5 Response to Criticisms 3 & 4: Being Virtuous and Responding to Others in our Unjust World

Throughout Chapters 5 and 6 I have argued for an account of virtue ethics that views the self as fundamentally relational. This account views the self as necessarily produced in and through complex webs of relations. These relations extend globally and can include the collectivities, institutions, and structures in which we exist. What emerges from a

virtue ethics that focuses on relationships is the necessity for being responsible to the needs of our relationships in order to ensure the well-being of our social collectivities. This requires virtues that take into account the fundamental relationality of human beings.

I have presented an argument for two such virtues that I believe illustrate the sorts of virtues that will emerge from this relational account. The virtue of responsibility is needed to ensure that the needs of our relationships are met and to allow for the collective flourishing of inclusive social collectivities. The intellectual virtue of practical reasoning provides a way for virtuous agents to gain knowledge about the complex needs and experiences of those they are in relations with, and how they can appropriately and responsibly respond to these needs. What emerges is a virtue ethics account that I believe builds from Tessman's and is able to provide an account of how the virtuous agent ought to exist in our non-ideal world and how they can respond to others in morally appropriate ways. Throughout this section, I sketched how this account can respond to the third criticism of Tessman's account from Section 4.3, and the fourth criticisms from Section 4.4. These criticisms argue that Tessman does not provide a virtue ethics framework that can effectively challenge assumed norms and, therefore, she does not provide an account of how a virtuous agent ought to live in our unjust world nor of how a virtuous agent can appropriately respond to the suffering of others.

However, the virtue ethics framework I have argued for has provided both an account of how a virtuous agent ought to be in our unjust world and how they ought to respond to the needs of others, particularly the needs of oppressed others. Since the virtuous agent is understood relationally, they will understand themselves as

fundamentally produced in and through complex webs of relations. Their lens of analysis will be these relationships. Exercising their practical reasoning, they will gain knowledge of the needs, responsibilities, and power relations that emerge from these complex webs of relations.

It will be their focus on the power relations within our relationships that allows virtuous agents to expose the different assumed norms that function to provide certain agents with more power than others. It is through this process of practical reasoning that virtuous agents critically engage with these assumed norms so as to understand how they work to produce and reproduce oppression and injustice. With this knowledge virtuous agents can then reject these norms and understand how they shape conceptions of the virtues and the flourishing life that are fundamentally detrimental to a relational understanding of the self. This was not only seen in the discussions of traditional liberal values, but also in my discussion of the different sorts of virtues that emerge from relational approaches in virtue ethics, such as my virtue of responsibility. Therefore, my enhanced account of virtue ethics does provide a way of critically engaging with assumed norms.

As fundamentally relational beings, virtuous agents will understand how their complex webs of relations form their social collectivities. The interdependence of human beings provides the understanding that our needs and responsibilities emerge from these social collectivities, and so virtuous agents will understand that their own flourishing and well-being will be dependent upon the flourishing and well-being of their collectivities. These collectivities will then need to be inclusive and they will need to focus on fulfilling needs in order to ensure collective well-being. In the Aristotelian sense, these

collectivities will be imperative for providing all members with the necessary external goods for agents to habituate and exercise virtue, but on this enhanced account they will do so inclusively to ensure the flourishing of the members of broad social collectivities. And since our webs of relations extend globally, so will our social collectivities and the need for virtuous agents to meet the needs of these social collectivities and promote their inclusivity.

Therefore, as fundamentally relational beings, virtuous agents will need to habituate and exercise those virtues that better allow them to meet the needs of their relationships; the needs of those in their global social collectivities. This means they will habituate and exercise the sorts of virtues like my virtue of responsibility. The virtue of responsibility works in conjunction with practical reasoning to provide virtuous agents with a way to understand which relationships they ought to be responsible to and why. They will need to understand which relationships they ought to focus upon, and understand the negative consequences and harms from being irresponsible to other relationships. This will be a constant balancing that will require the virtue of responsibility as a mean that recognizes the possible excesses and deficiencies of irresponsibility.

Using my enhanced account of practical reasoning, virtuous agents will then utilize the parameters of reasoning and defer to experiences of others, in order to understand how they ought to respond to others and how to do so in morally appropriate ways. Through an understanding of their shared responsibilities for the perpetuation of structural injustices, these virtuous agents are provided with methods for collective action that can produce positive structural changes. Undermining injustices will then be a part

of exercising the virtue of responsibility, and doing so with other virtuous and responsible agents. This provides an account of how the virtuous agent ought to be in our unjust world, and therefore responds to the third criticism of Tessman's virtue ethics.

In terms of Tessman's account of the burdened virtue of sensitivity to unjust suffering, a relational conception of the self provides a lens from which the virtuous agent can understand how to engage with others' suffering and respond in a way that allows them to feel and be responsible. This account acknowledges that a virtuous agent's responsibilities may be vast and the needs of others may be great. However, by analyzing the power dynamics within relationships and deferring to others to better understand their experiences, virtuous agents are provided with ways of engaging and responding to the suffering of others that are appropriate and can produce positive outcomes.

The forward-looking aspect of a virtue like responsibility seems to make responding to others less burdensome. It is not simply that, as an individual human being, we must be sensitive to the extreme suffering of others, but as moral agents produced in and through complex webs of relations we understand that the elimination of others' suffering is a fundamental part of our shared responsibility with our global social collectivities. By exercising virtue towards our relationships we in fact promote the well-being of our collectivities simply by appropriately engaging and deferring to others to acquire more knowledge about their experiences. This knowledge is what will allow for positive and effective action that is appropriate and responsible to oppressed others and their embodied experiences. Therefore, a relational, global virtue ethics account, like the

one I have developed, is able to provide a way of responding to others in morally appropriate ways and responds to the fourth criticism of Tessman's account.

This global, relational account of virtue ethics provides the lens through which Tessman's framework can better account for how to produce more inclusive global social collectivities. A virtuous agent will focus on the needs of their relationships and understand how they can positively enact change by participating in different collective actions to make structures more just. Even though they will not be able to meet the needs of all of their relationships, or possess the power or collective ability to change all of the unjust structures, they will still be able to participate in producing more inclusive social collectivities, and understand how to do so in an appropriate and virtuously responsible way. Virtuous agents will need to habituate the sorts of virtues I have developed of responsibility and practical reasoning and direct the exercise of these virtues towards their networks of relations. Doing so will work to undermine unjust structures and eliminate the harms and suffering caused by oppression within their social collectivities.

Virtuous agents will need to understand that their social collectivities are not inclusive because of oppression. Their global social collectivities cannot be said to flourish when their members are oppressed and their needs have not been met. Virtuous agents are responsible to these global others in ways that prevent them from actually living good lives. We cannot view an agent as living a good life when they are not being responsible to their relationships and not ensuring the well-being of those they are in relationships with. When a virtuous agent ensures the well-being of their social collectivities they will be healthy, safe, and vibrant for all of their members. If virtuous agents live in inclusive and healthy social collectivities where people's needs are being

met, then they will have those necessary external goods that will allow for collective and inclusive well-being. Turning back to the Aristotelian conception that we ought and will need to flourish collectively, a more relational conception of the self provides a clear understanding of how it is in our best interests to ensure that our social collectivities are inclusive.

If we understand human life as necessarily involving living with others in a global context, then the more others' needs are met and the more they live in just and non-oppressive structures, the easier it will be to become virtuous and to have other agents to be virtuous with. When people around the world are not racially or sexually oppressed, and have their basic needs met, we are going to live in a world where there are lots of other virtuous agents who share a flourishing life. As ideal and farfetched as this may sound, the necessity of moral agents living relationally requires that our social collectivities are healthy and inclusive so that our own well-being can be achieved. As our relations and responsibilities extend across the globe, our ability to have the necessary conditions for living a flourishing life will entail that our global collectivities are healthy and inclusive; that the needs of global others will be met and the opportunities for them to flourish will be provided.

Ultimately, the account of virtue ethics that I have argued for provides a way of being in our unjust world, where the virtuous agent is always committed to a global understanding of themselves and their well-being as necessarily tied to others. It is then being responsible to these relationships that becomes the driving goal of the virtuous agent.

6.6 Connecting back to Tessman and Moving Beyond her Account

The discussions throughout Chapters 5 and 6 have revealed that understanding the moral selves of human beings as fundamentally and necessarily relational will have a much different focus for what it means to be a virtuous person than the one provided by Tessman. A virtuous person on this account is one who critically engages with norms, conceptions, structures, and assumptions that are unjust and oppressive, in and through their relationships with others. This virtuous agent is the type of person who puts their focus on being virtuous in their relationships with others at personal, local, national, and global levels. This entails being responsible to the needs that emerge from relationships and working to create more inclusive global social collectivities through their collective actions and shared responsibilities. Though the possibility for flourishing in global collectivities seems improbable, what such an account provides is a way for virtuous agents to be in our unjust world. This account provides a way for those virtuous agents who aspire to be and become virtuous to engage with an unjust world in productive and morally appropriate ways. This way of being in the world will be a constant and ongoing process as it is in Aristotle's account. However, this account can create better relationships for virtuous agents to live in and among; better relationships from which to be virtuous and live well.

What we then discover about Tessman's account is that incorporating a more relational conception of the self exposes how individual agents can act in relations with others for challenging assumed norms, responding to others' suffering, and undermining injustices. As well, it demonstrates how our relationships and responsibilities make global inclusive social collectivities for our own well-being necessary. We must then

understand the global scope of the virtues, such as Tessman's sensitivity to unjust suffering, through our responsibilities and relations to others. Tessman's virtue ethics account is then greatly enhanced by the incorporation of the relational approaches I have argued for.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have utilized a virtue ethics framework in order to produce an account that focuses on moral agents themselves as they live in our current and unjust world. The usefulness of an agent-focused account opens the possibility for understanding how it is that a person ought to exist in the world, no matter how they experience oppression and injustice. My approach has been unique since I have incorporated a relational conception of the self that views human beings as fundamentally interdependent and produced in and through complex webs of relations. What emerges from this relational approach is an account that focusses on the responsibilities we have to the needs of our complex relations and understands well-being as necessarily tied to inclusive social collectivities. By focusing on the particular needs of the members of our global social collectivities ways of knowing and understanding how to appropriately and responsibly respond to these needs emerges. My account is then able to build upon the work that Lisa Tessman has done and move beyond it to provide a framework that can be applied to issues of global injustice.

My account has been unique in that it provides a way for identifying different sorts of virtues that are unrecognized by traditional virtue ethics accounts. By focusing on relationships and meeting the needs of those in our social collectivities the sorts of virtues that emerge are going to create stronger, more inclusive, and more equal relations. This was seen in my virtue of responsibility that is useful for understanding what we owe to our different relationships and the consequences of our being irresponsible. What has been imperative to this framework is my enhanced account of practical reasoning. By incorporating relational approaches, Young's parameters of reasoning, and Thomas'

modes of moral learning, I have argued for an intellectual virtue that critically engages with assumed norms and the needs of others to better understand how we can respond to these needs and, most importantly, how this can be accomplished in morally responsible and appropriate ways.

Moving forward I see great possibilities for developing many other virtues that are not recognized by traditional virtue ethicists. Such virtues may include humour and patience. These sorts of virtues can help to bridge the gaps between people's understanding. In deferring to the experiences of oppressed others, humour can be understood as operating not solely as a coping mechanism, but also as a way of bridging gaps between people and their understanding. Humour and patience operate in ways that can strengthen relations between people. These sorts of traits create the possibility of strengthening the bonds between oppressed others who share similar experiences, and also cause those privileged others to reflect on just how different their own experiences are.

Yet the reflection of privileged agents does not have to be "guilt-ridden," but motivating and forward-looking, in Young's sense. Through humour and patience, privileged agents can be provided with ways of being "brought in on the joke" and recognizing the complexities of oppressed others' circumstances. Such virtues seem to provide the opportunity to strengthen relationships as members gain knowledge about the experiences of oppressed others and work to encourage greater inclusivity. Though such an account seems to put the bulk of the responsibility on the oppressed agent to create this bridge in understanding, there is still great possibility for this virtue. It remains underdeveloped and would need to explore the power dynamics involved in humour,

especially in regard to who can use humour, how they use it, and why something is funny. All aspects of this analysis require greater critical reflection through practical reason. However, I think this very complexity makes humour an interesting candidate for a virtue.

Additionally, I think virtues of persistence and accountability can assist privileged agents as they work to undermine injustices. Such virtues provide a way for agents to not be afraid of making mistakes or failing in their attempts to undermine oppression. Instead, such virtues provide agents with the fortitude to continue to be deeply committed to getting things right and ensuring that oppressed agents' needs are appropriately met.

These sorts of virtues have applications for broad global issues. The elimination of global poverty, for example, will not be accomplished in one attempt or one broad collective action. Instead through persistent collective actions by virtuous agents positive changes can be created. However this process will involve error. Virtuous agents are going to need to work to respond appropriately, but there may be unanticipated problems or consequences. Being virtuous will require being accountable for these problems, recognizing where and how they went wrong, and then being prepared and motivated to adapt and try again.

Therefore, I have argued for an account of how a virtuous agent ought to be in our unjust world and how they can respond to the needs and suffering of others. A virtuous agent will be the type of person who understands themselves and their responsibilities in complex and global webs of relations. They will be the type of agent who is committed to being responsible in and to their relationships in ways that are morally appropriate. They will work toward creating and maintaining relationships of equal dignity and

respect, to ensure the well-being of those with whom they are in relation. And they will be committed to undermining oppressive systems and structural injustices through collective actions with others.

A virtuous agent will be the type of person who understands that only through meeting the responsibilities of their relationships will inclusive social collectivities be created, and only through such inclusive collectivities will the possibility of flourishing be created. Virtuous agents will then be committed to the activity of producing better communities and collectives for the purposes of allowing other agents to have access to the external goods and opportunities necessary for them to also become virtuous agents. Through such a commitment a virtuous moral agent will understand how they are creating better collectives in which to be virtuous as well as greater opportunities for more virtuous agents to pursue morally responsible actions. The virtuous agent will be the type of person who understands the complexity and limitless extent of their responsibilities, and yet will continue to work towards creating more just structures and relationships whose needs are fulfilled. Through their commitment to an active and consistent process of pursuing virtue, they will be the type of person we understand as virtuous, even in our non-ideal world.

I recognize that my account does not provide a clear or universal understanding of flourishing in a virtue ethics account. Such an account would be counter-productive to the contextual and particular needs of different moral agents understood relationally within our social collectivities. However, I have suggested that we can understand human well-being as enhanced when the needs of our relationships are met and our social

collectivities made more inclusive. What flourishing will look like specifically, I have not said and do not wish to.

Additionally, throughout this thesis my virtue ethics framework has seemed to focus more on how privileged agents can be virtuous. There are two reasons for this. The first is that privileged agents have fewer needs and more responsibilities to their social collectivities and, therefore, have more work to do to fulfill these needs and to understand how to do so appropriately. The second reason is that I am a very privileged agent myself. And I desire to know how I can be a virtuous person in our non-ideal world. In a sense this project is a selfish one, but one that I believe to be important for many other types of agents as well.

The framework I have defended provides a way for virtuous agents to embrace life in ways that makes their lives and the lives of those around them better. It provides a way of understanding and interacting with the world that not only views changing unjust global structures as very possible, but also very necessary. The way the world is is not the way that it must be. And the way that my framework engages with the world captures this concept; a concept that I believe was important to Tessman's notion that there is a way for us to embrace life even in the face of harrowing global suffering and injustice.

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