Why care? On motivation in care ethics
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Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2009

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

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CHAPTER THREE: KNOWING CARE

Introduction

In this chapter I shall deal with a care ethical argument in favour of the normative power that caring adds to being able to knowing. This argument is based on the idea that what we know about the world has profound implications for knowing what we should do. I have argued that the two care ethical approaches discussed hitherto – Noddings’ phenomenology and Sevenhuijsen’s postmodernism – are lacking in explicit normative content. This chapter will examine a care ethical account that is explicitly normative: that the kind of knowledge generated by caring is not only basic (to social relations) but is indeed superior to other kinds of knowledge generated by other means.

What the claim amounts to is that caring generates a particular kind of knowledge – knowledge upon the basis of which the one caring is motivated to act. Those arguing from a care ethical perspective claim that caring produces and recognises certain kinds of knowledge: information that is not only factual and contextual, but also interpretative. The skills necessary for garnering such knowledge involve commitment, simulation and self-reflexivity, and, so goes the argument, such skills transform caring into an intellectual capacity that not only casts care out of the private sphere and into the public domain, but also designates caring tasks that have hitherto been ignored by traditional ethics. In other words, the claim is that caring knowledge is special or privileged knowledge. It is one of the tasks of this chapter to examine that claim.

I will draw on two sources to illustrate what an epistemological caring position looks like: the Indian epistemological and feminist philosopher Vrinda Dalmiya’s (“Why Should a Knower Care?” 2002) care ethics as a “responsibilist epistemic virtue” and the American feminist moral philosopher Margaret Walker’s “naturalised epistemology” (Moral Understandings. A Feminist Study in Ethics 1998). The first source is from a care ethics perspective; the second is from a general feminist ethical perspective (though notably care-friendly).

Perhaps the best statement of what epistemological (care) ethics is about is this one by Annette Baier, cited by both Dalmiya and Walker: “A reliable sign of real caring is the intolerance of ignorance about the current state of
what we care about.” Contained within this statement are several claims, I believe. I shall list them and use this list as a means to describe what Dalmiya means by a “caring epistemology”. There is the claim that, firstly, there is such a thing as ‘real’ caring (probably in contrast to bogus or bad caring); secondly, when a person or a cause is important to us, then we will want to know everything possible about the welfare of that person or cause. And thirdly, it must be ‘reliable’ knowledge that is generated, perceived and acknowledged by those who wish to engage in an open discussion of what we regard as important (‘what we care about’), free of ignorance but also free of subterfuge, falsity or the intention to deceive. In this perspective, thus, a caring attitude is an important sensor for generating knowledge: according to Baier it is directed at what we care about, it is critical and impatient and, I shall argue, it is profoundly normative.

This claim raises, to my mind, the question whether there is (special) knowledge that is only accessible to caring people? In order to answer them I shall firstly, examine Dalmiya’s concept of caring (which is in part based on that of Noddings). Herein she distinguishes five stages of caring including a ‘simulation heuristic model’ on the basis of which information can be gathered about the cared-for. I will pay special attention to her first-person, phenomenological-type model. Secondly, I will discuss what the consequences are of seeking verifiable and “simulated” caring knowledge and will mention certain problems with Dalmiya’s model. Thirdly, I will examine Dalmiya’s proposal for caring as the basis for a ‘responsibilist’ epistemology that she argues is superior to a reliabilist epistemology. And finally I will introduce Walker’s natural epistemology which offers a very different approach to gathering information about what we care about, in particular, her emphasis on the formation of collective “moral understandings”.

Simulated knowledge

Dalmiya bases her conception of care ethics on the existentialist phenomenology of Noddings and derives from it five stages or steps in the caring process: first, caring about; second, caring for; third, taking care; fourth, care reception; and fifth, caring about caring. Dalmiya uses what she

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1 Annette Baier “A reply to Frankfurt” 1982, 274
2 Nel Noddings Caring 1984, discussed at length in Chapter One: “Engrossed Care”.
3 Four of these steps are based on Tronto 1993
calls a “individualistic, dyadic model” in which she describes a caring relationship between two people. Walker has called this type of care ethics “personalist” meaning small-scale caring relations (usually one-to-one) in which other conditions, like intimacy, or familiarity, or responsibility are part of the caring relationship.

Firstly, caring about, this is the normative moment of valuing “particularised others”, says Dalmiya, irrespective of their instrumental values. I care about my children not because I hope they will support me in my old age but because they are my children. However, I cannot just care about anyone: whom I care about must coincide in some way with who I am and what I regard as important. If I care in this way, argues Dalmiya, I “succumb to the normative pull associated with making the cared-for important”. 5

Secondly, caring for, as Dalmiya applies it, is encapsulated in Noddings’ term “engrossment” with which I have dealt at length in Chapter One: it is the displacement of interest from the experience of the one-caring into that of the cared-for – as Noddings says: “when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care”. 6 Making something a “possibility” implies first and foremost a reorientation of interests. Caring for involves the displacement of interest which Dalmiya refers to as “the distinctive phenomenology of the attitudinal alteration involved in a caring for”. 7 Because Noddings herself says nothing more about how the “displacement” occurs or about the rather problematic notion of “the other’s reality”, Dalmiya offers the suggestion that displacement should occur in the manner of a “simulation”. 8 This is not a simple matter: since lives are lived in cultural contexts, she says, “the other’s reality” is a catch-all for (a) psycho-physical happenings, (b) first-person perspectives, and (c) the culture and community within which (a) and (b) are situated. And these three elements make for a complex whole.

Making this a “real” or “possible” world for the one-carer involves and requires therefore a complex imaginative projection called ‘empathy’ or even

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4 Correspondence 2006.
5 Dalmiya 2002, 35. Dalmiya also refers to Frankfurt’s “volitional necessity” model for explaining this ‘normative pull’.
6 Noddings 1984, 14, cited in Dalmiya op cit 36.
7 Ibid.
8 Dalmiya finds it useful to refer to Alvin Goldman’s analysis of the “simulation heuristic” in “Empathy, mind and morals” (in Mental simulation, Martin Davies and Tony Stone (eds.) 1995). Op cit 36.
just ‘imagination’. Dalmiya calls it “simulation heuristic”. This simulation involves (at least) two stages: the first is one in which the other is perceived – in as much detail as is necessary – in a process akin to modelling. The one-caring tries to come to understand the cared-for by constructing his situation, his ambitions, and his desires. This would be imagining his situation or “imaginatively entertaining certain mental states.”\(^9\) In the second stage, in a further act of imaginative identification, the one-caring adopts those states as if they were his own and pretends to be in the situation of the cared-for. In doing this, the one-caring will no doubt experience further emotions or other mental states but they are not self-ascribed in the sense that the one-caring does not feel these things on his own behalf. An important part of caring skill is to recognise that these feelings are not directly experienced by the one-caring, says Dalmiya, but they must be attributed to the cared-for. The one-caring must realise that the “displacement” of which Noddings speaks is simulated. This stage is of vital importance for Dalmiya’s epistemological enquiry: this is the stage in which knowledge is generated about the cared-for and in which the one-caring makes a decision how to act.

Thirdly, taking care involves motivational displacement as a crucial component of caring in which someone must be ready to take care of the cared-for by getting involved in his projects. At this point, the caring intention has to be placed within a context and decisions have to be made concerning the projects and/or behaviour of the cared-for and the specific situation in which they take place. Dalmiya argues that the action-orientated component of caring makes it very different from a simple desire, and links it to negotiations and manipulations of a social context in the attempt to get something done for those we care about. It is at this point that the explicitly social dimension of caring comes into play, even to the extent of individuals wanting to bring about social changes, reform society or affect political processes, in their attempts to provide the best care for those they love.

Fourthly, according to Dalmiya, to care is not simply to will that the other flourishes but to wish that his happiness be caused, in part, by my efforts to further his projects.\(^{10}\) Here again, as in Dalmiya’s second stage, caring is

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\(^{10}\) Dalmiya melds several care ethical accounts together: that of Tronto (the five stages of caring in 1993), that of Noddings (the phenomenological aspect, 1984) and that of Frankfurt (the second-order, reflexivity, 1988 and 1999). I believe that the addition of ‘happiness’ to the list of what the cared-for should ideally feel as a result of what the one-caring does is Dalmiya’s own. I limit my own list to well-being.
perceived as a “displacement of interest.” It is not, in the first place in Dalmiya’s model, the happiness of the one-caring that is at stake but the happiness of the cared-for. I want, says Dalmiya, the cared-for to recognise my effort and feel good about the fact that I care. Care reception thus involves an acknowledgement of efforts made by the one-caring. Care reception can serve as a built-in veracity check for the way in which the one-caring cares. False or unacceptable types of caring will (probably) not be well received by the cared-for and therefore sensitivity to the reception of care thus enables the one-caring to adjust his imaginative simulation.

In instances where it is imaginatively difficult to care for someone, instances in which the cared-for might be violent, or intractable, or racially discriminating, Dalmiya argues that even then the normative push to care for this person remains. In the process of caring for such a person, the one-caring might be forced to give up or at least suspend his ideals of pacifism, or of never using force, or of non-racialism. Not liking the cared-for, or being in disagreement with him, is not grounds for ceasing to care. Caring is not about liking (and neither is it about the one-caring ceasing to be a person with distinct preferences and opinions), concludes Dalmiya.

But this (may) result in a potentially acute problem for the one-caring. How can this very actual problem be solved? The answer lies, argues Dalmiya, in the “initial normative moment”, the moment prior to the heuristic understanding of the context of caring, the fifth stage of caring about. In this moment, the “care worthiness” of a person is most apparent and it brings with it a commitment, not just to him, but to caring itself. After all, she says, when someone is acknowledged as being worth caring about, it is hardly possible to remain indifferent to whether or not we do care about him. Therefore, as Dalmiya concludes in her fifth point about the caring process, in caring for the cared-for, the one-caring also cares about caring.

There are important differences between caring for an individual and caring for something abstract – like caring. Making the cared-for important, in other words recognising the care-worthiness of the cared-for, is concomitant with trying to understand him (and his ‘reality’) and understand him in caring for him, says Dalmiya. Understanding caring is not the same as understanding the cared-for or the context in which the cared-for operates - but there are parallels she argues. For example, caring for something abstract or for an object does not entail simulation to gain knowledge of that concept or object,

\[1\] Dalmiya 2002, 40
nor does it require the one-caring to recede in terms of biases and preferences.

The whole point of Dalmiya’s simulation is to break out of our egocentric perspective and imagine the world of another – to adopt a point of view different from our own. It could be argued that an imaginative role-playing during caring is a wilful stepping out of my perspective on it and looking at it from as many points of view as possible. This involves the construction of counterfactual possibilities, answering possible objections and asking the question (Baier’s question) “What sort of person must I be to care for…”

There is a distancing from and evaluation of desires that are already presupposed in the concept of taking care. Thus the third kind of self-transformation following the evaluation moment of care is the move to be self-reflective. One cannot, concludes Dalmiya, “really care without being self-critical”.

On examination of the caring relationship I might realise its futility or vapidity and the ambiguities involved in wanting to maintain it. This is the point at which caring can be terminated because it is the point at which the motivation of the one-caring is under critical examination. Dalmiya’s concept of caring is critical:

In summary: Dalmiya’s stages one and five (“caring about” and “caring about caring”) are similar – both rely on the aspect of ‘normative pull’ to be activated. In other words, the one-caring, though willing, is nevertheless involuntarily moved to care by the force of the appeal of the cared-for rather than because of the urge or impulse or intention to care. Stage two (“caring for”) is the phenomenological moment of simulation, a stage that involves the ‘displacement’ of the personality of the one-caring and the simulation of the predicament of the cared-for. This stage is an elaboration on Noddings’ vaguer concept of “engrossment”: Dalmiya specifies how the one-caring can perceive the cared-for’s reality, or world, by means of a “simulation” model. This model has two parts: imaginatively understanding the cared-for’s situation and imaginative identification – this is the moment when you pose the question, “what would I do/want if I were in this predicament?”

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12 Baier 1982, 274.
Stage three is the actual taking care of the other and it is at this point that the one-caring can critically consider his motivations for caring. Stage four is care reception in which, hopefully, the “epistemic vigilance” of the one-caring will be justified and his decision to care will be confirmed by the cared-for. But, according to Dalmiya’s stage four, only if the one-caring’s motivations are found lacking may the caring relation be terminated. It may not be terminated if the cared-for is found to be a difficult or awkward character. Having accepted the commitment to care (the fifth stage), the one-caring’s personality must recede altogether in order to make the cared-for “care worthy” - especially in the case of differences of opinion between the one-caring and the cared-for.

Dalmiya is at pains to specify and describe the process involved in caring for another. In her “simulation” model what we can see is an alternation of perspective: sometimes we are expected to imaginatively simulate the cared-for’s situation or predicament; sometimes we must critically reflect on our own perspective on this situation. This is a complex procedure and I share Dalmiya’s critique of Noddings that we do need a detailed explication of what happens when the one-caring cares. Before I make any critical points I shall first look at Dalmiya’s additional safeguards that she introduces into her caring epistemology, namely the concept of care as a “reliability” and “responsibilist” virtue.

Intolerance of ignorance

Dalmiya construes caring as an intellectual virtue in the sense of virtue epistemology in its two forms, “reliabilist” and “responsibilist” virtue epistemology. She argues that caring should be added to the list of intellectual virtues that she calls “faculties or stable dispositions enabling us to reach the epistemic goal of truth.”\textsuperscript{14} This list of “stable dispositions” already includes the examples of sight, hearing, memory, introspection, deduction and induction. By ‘intellectual virtue’ Dalmiya means the following: a “power or ability or competence to arrive at truths in a particular field and to avoid believing falsehoods in that field”.\textsuperscript{15} Caring as an intellectual virtue, according to her, is a competence to arrive at truths and

\textsuperscript{14} Dalmiya 2002, 42.
\textsuperscript{15} Dalmiya cites John Greco “Virtue Epistemology” in J. Dancy and Ernest Sosa (eds) \textit{A Companion to Epistemology} 1992, in \textit{ibid}. 

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avoid falsehoods in a particular field and care-knowing is justified belief arising from the exercise of the ability to care.

Dalmiya thinks that caring belongs on this list because it is a complex ("higher-order faculty"\textsuperscript{16}) and interactive practice involving high degrees of competence. What caring does, she argues is to allow us "to cognize the particularity and individuality of the cared-for".\textsuperscript{17} Caring enables us, she says, first to see how we appear in the eyes of others and second, how we behave and relate to them. The component of care reception aids us in the first and caring about, caring for and taking care aids us in the second perception. “The reflexivity of caring about caring ensures that we constantly engage with our choices and motives.”\textsuperscript{18}

Regarding caring as a reliabilist intellectual virtue means that we must show how it leads to truths not available to any other cognitive mechanism, she says. What Dalmiya calls the “ethical excellence” of the relationship of the five care facets arises because the one-caring takes cognizance of aspects of self that are usually hidden both to “privilege-preserving” perceptions of others (prejudices, opinions, oversights) and to introspection. Whereas other types of epistemology use analogical inference that gives it knowledge of other minds based on their similarity, caring allows us, she says, to be cognizant of the particularity and individuality of the cared-for. The transition from simulation – the best way of perceiving the other as someone different and not merely similar to the one-caring - to full-blown caring indicates why the beliefs produced in this way are likely to be true, she argues.

The power of caring knowledge should not be underestimated, according to Dalmiya. Because of the characteristic motivation behind caring (a caring about), caring produces reliable and valuable knowledge. She argues that

\begin{quote}
(…)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Dalmiya 2002, 42
\textsuperscript{17} Op cit, 43.
\textsuperscript{18} Dalmiya 2002, 43
Dalmiya specifies that the knowledge generated by caring is different from ‘scientific’ knowledge. It is not accuracy or ‘truth’ but rather the search for a coherent narrative that links the five facets of her caring ideal: caring about, caring for, taking care, care reception and caring about caring. Genuine caring contacts with people, more often than not she believes, lead to true beliefs about them and also to reflective knowledge. Caring, she says, in this sense, can be deemed an intellectual virtue, a broadening of one’s perceptive skills. Such knowledge, caring knowledge, is distinct from other types of knowledge, like empirical knowledge legitimised by science. For this reason she wishes to define caring epistemology not as a ‘reliability intellectual virtue’ but rather as a ‘responsibilist intellectual virtue’. Reliabilist epistemology has a domain restricted to the centres of consciousness; it is concerned with kinds of knowledge production like mathematics or natural history. The epistemological framework within which reliabilist knowledge works is very traditional: it is limited to judging individual beliefs only relevant to a restricted sphere and functions only under limited circumstances. Furthermore, the epistemic target is truth. Defining caring knowledge as ‘reliabilist’ would, therefore, argues Dalmiya exclude much of that which caring attempts to achieve: knowledge of other subjectivities, of the particularities of individuals and of their goals. The danger is that treating caring knowledge as reliabilist could marginalise such knowledge (and knowers) in a society that prioritises the type of knowledge produced by science and scientists very highly, warns Dalmiya.¹⁹

Dalmiya would like caring to be not merely one of the ways of knowing, but as a character-type conducive to and underlying all inquiry. We might say of a scientist, for example, that the character underling a scientist’s care for his friends is also relevant for the epistemic evaluation of his scientific beliefs.²⁰ Caring then becomes an adjective for the knower: “he is a caring scientist” and it signals the effort this scientist makes in accruing knowledge of things and selves. Caring is then not only a “knowledge saturated skill” in the words

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¹⁹ Dalmiya 2002, 46.
²⁰ At this point Dalmiya’s conception of caring is comparable with that of Tronto’s and Fisher’s categories of “caring about” and “taking care of” in which caring goes beyond mere “caring work” and becomes an activity that is both individual and social (see Tronto 1993, 105 – 6). Dalmiya’s point that caring about the fruit of one’s intellectual activity is an enhancement of the quality of that knowledge is, in the first place, an epistemological (rather than a political) claim.
of philosopher and epistemologist Lorraine Code, but it is also an epistemic evaluation – a truth indicator – for other types of knowledge.

Dalmiya offers an alternative to seeing caring a reliabilist epistemology: she argues that we should regard caring as a ‘responsibilist’ virtue. Responsibilism is a perspective that argues that individual beliefs are judged as epistemically good if they follow from a character who reveals a stable disposition to acquire truth-conducive dispositions and skills that ensure a desired cognitive end. Virtue responsibilists conceive of intellectual virtues as good intellectual character traits, traits like attentiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual tenacity and courage. “The concept ‘responsibility’ allows emphasis upon the active nature of the knower/believer that ‘reliability’ cannot”, argues Code. To be intellectually virtuous, follows Code, “is not just to have a good score in terms of cognitive endeavours that come out right. It is much more a matter of orientation toward the world, and toward one’s knowledge-seeking self, and other such selves as part of the world.” Thus, according to responsibilism, the emphasis is not so much on the truth-parity but rather on the character who seeks knowledge. Dalmiya concludes: “the practice of knowledge-seeking is sustained by trustworthy knowers and ultimately, trust is founded on who we are, on consciousness and integrity.”

Epistemic vigilance

Furthermore, argues Dalmiya, caring gives us access to information that is unavailable by other means. The important motivation of caring – to make a particular other important – involves, she says, the crucial aspect of selflessness. Selflessness is the moment in which we, along with our biases and expectations, recede so that the object of knowledge can present itself. Constant examination, in the form of reflection and inquiry, must ensure that the submission to the object is complete. In this manner caring involves “self-

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22 This definition is derived from The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, "Virtue Epistemology". http://www.iep.utm.edu/v/VirtueEp.htm
24 Op cit, 41.
26 Op cit, 46. “Selflessness” is sometimes termed “objectivity”, says Dalmiya. I contest this definition: objectivity must be achieved without prejudice but cannot be achieved without the (thinking, reasoning, experiential) self.
transcendence” and can therefore provide the basis for truth, says Dalmiya. On this point Dalmiya’s approach to the phenomenon of caring is very similar to that of Noddings. However, Dalmiya does attempt to rectify the potential loss of self with her model of “imaginative” simulation without the self-ascribed experiences of the cared for. She says that “imaginative identification” involves the pretence that you are in the same situation as the cared-for. These ‘pretend’ states are not self-ascribed (for example, if the cared-for is angry and frustrated then I do not become angry and frustrated); these are experienced as “off-line” states and are attributed by the one-caring to the cared-for. However, she warns, the more dissimilar we are from the cared-for, the more the process of simulative caring for him is likely to miss the truth. The reaction of the cared-for is a continual ‘reality’ check for the one-caring. If simulation involves a “struggle” towards that understanding then, says Dalmiya, that understanding is likely to be more accurate. (In this aspect Dalmiya, again, resembles Noddings though, unlike Noddings, Dalmiya is not propagating a form of selflessness in all the stages of one-caring which, as I argue in Chapter One, I thought a particularly bad idea.) But this is not the only perspective on how to deal with arduous or intractable caring tasks. Baier takes a different perspective on difficult caring. She emphasises what she calls “epistemic vigilance”. Realising that a caring relation is not appropriate can lead the one caring to break with caring, she says. In her article in response to Frankfurt’s “The Importance of What We Care About”, Baier lists several aspects the detection of which would make her want to terminate the caring relation. She argues, as starting-point, that caring is risky: caring makes us vulnerable in ways we need not have been to the losses and grief we will suffer when what we care about is defeated, or tormented, or dead, or permanently absent from our lives. This in itself is not a reason not to engage in caring but it is an indication of what is involved in the inevitable emotional attachments involved in caring. She acknowledges that being in a caring relation is being subject to the willing constraints (or “volitional necessities” as Frankfurt refers to them) that sweep us along either in a state of desire or in a state of unwillingness to stop whatever process is at hand. But, says Baier,

(i) it is not just acts of will, but necessities too which can be criticised – and the resultant raised critical consciousness may

27 Dalmiya 2002, 47.
28 For a detailed discussion of ‘volitional necessity’ see Chapter One: “Engrossed Care”.

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break the necessity reflected upon, when criticism is accompanied by an understanding of why we were thus necessitated. (Baier “Caring About Caring” 1982, 275)

Fetishism (in the sense of fanaticism), perversity (in the Freudian sense) and false consciousness (in the Marxist sense) are examples provided by Baier as sufficient grounds for breaking with what Frankfurt calls “necessity” (the constraint to care). In particular, Baier insists that our understanding of our caring relations includes an understanding of its nature and history. Caring is not, she says in critique of Frankfurt, only a forward-looking, prospective (Frankfurt refers to caring as a type of investment)\(^\text{29}\), future relation but also one that has a past, says Baier. And we, reflecting critically on whether we want that relation or not, can conclude - as Baier does - that a caring relationship which cannot survive a confrontation with its own past is “unworthy”.\(^\text{30}\) But, she reminds us, caring is always a risky business and even in-depth understanding of a relationship’s past does not guarantee that we will care unscathed. What Baier has, apparently, found unacceptable about Frankfurt’s account of caring is his non-normative perspective. The additions that Baier makes – the conditions under which one as a one-caring is entitled to break with caring relations and the insistence on a past as well as a future – are normative qualifications. According to her, caring under conditions of fetishism, perversity and false consciousness is not good and should be desisted. Exploitation, manipulation, and deceit could clearly also be added to this list – these are the negative qualities that Walker is concerned to eliminate from a moral epistemology.

**Naturalised epistemology**

A brief introduction to Walker’s rather unique epistemological ethics is in order. Walker is concerned to establish guidelines or a template for a moral-epistemic perspective in moral theory. Her *Moral Understandings* (1998) can be read as a prologue or a prolegomenon to a critique of moral reflection found in what she refers to as the theoretical-juridical characteristic of much of contemporary moral philosophy. Her alternative is to describe, by means of a model\(^\text{31}\), the necessary ingredients for the development of moral theory according to “reflective equilibrium” which seeks the best fit between our

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\(^{29}\) For a more detailed discussion of Frankfurt, see Chapter One.
\(^{31}\) The “expressive-collaborative” model. See below for a more detailed discussion.
intuitive judgements about particular cases and those principles we can recognise as "the premises of their derivation".\textsuperscript{32}

Moral judgments, or understandings, in this approach she says, acknowledge the relation of judgements to theory but give neither an unimpeachable foundation. On the contrary, normativity is something that is collectively sought – it represents the best of our ‘intuitive’ judgments at a social level. Intuitive judgments are relatively fixed starting points and continuing reference points of understanding, reasoning and discussion. They are simply the judgments most commonly taken as being correct. Deliberation and debate initiate from these socially shared bases for moral thinking, often by means of analogical and narrative elaboration on specific cases or kinds of case. Intuitive judgments need to be linked to specific situations in order that morality retains its dynamic and contextual character. Not only should we harmonise our individual practices of moral judgement with the standing moral belief which we all more or less maintain, but we should also aim to harmonise judgment and action among us, argues Walker.\textsuperscript{33} Equilibrium should thus not only be aimed at internally to individuals but also among them.

Walker rejects the idea that trans-historical moral principles are necessary for arriving at valid moral judgements. An objective moral judgement, she says, is a judgement “from the (comparatively) best epistemic position we know of”, such that there is no other epistemic position which trumps it.\textsuperscript{34} What we need, she argues, is a reliable and reflexive error theory to explain why others may have different moral judgements. And her chief tool for the critical assessment of practices is the idea, inspired by Bernard Williams, of “transparency”. A community’s moral account of itself, she argues, should not be out of step with its actual practices; neither fraud, nor manipulation, nor deception are to be used in order to maintain or install social practices that purport to be based on mutual trust. The normative thrust of Walker’s epistemology is that ‘appropriate’ knowledge is not generated by philosophical reflection, critiqued, clarified and encoded into a theory but by the experience of those in actual, contingent and specific situations. What does she mean by that? Can these practices be recognised as moral? And what are the benefits of doing so?

\textsuperscript{32} Walker 1998, 64.
\textsuperscript{33} Op cit, 65.
\textsuperscript{34} Op cit, 206.
Walker’s moral epistemology consists of four working hypotheses: firstly, morality consists of practices, not theories. Secondly, those practices that should be traced are ‘practices of responsibility’. Thirdly, morality is part of shared, social life and does not exist beyond or separate from it. And fourthly, moral knowledge must be sought in experience. The second aspect, that of responsibility, I have discussed briefly in Chapter Two and shall summarize shortly (see Practices of responsibility below). The other three aspects, morality as practice, morality as shared and morality as experience I shall address now by taking a closer look at Walker’s “expressive-collaborative model”, her template for what could become new moral theory. Furthermore, I shall examine what Walker means when she describes her moral epistemology as “naturalised”.

For Walker, morality is collaborative in that it is interpersonal: it is constructed and sustained by means of the efforts of people together. What goes on morally between people is constrained and made intelligible by a background of understandings about what people are supposed to do, expect and understand. These are the ‘moral understandings’ that form the title of her book (1998). Morality is not only collaborative but also expressive: people learn to understand themselves as bearers of particular identities and as actors in various relationships that are defined by certain values. People learn to understand each other this way, says Walker, and express their understandings through, what she calls, ‘practices of responsibility’. In these practices, people assign, accept, or deflect responsibilities for different things. The combination of the collaborative element with the expressive element Walker calls her ‘expressive-collaborative model’.

The three elements of attention, contextual and narrative appreciation, and communication in the event of moral deliberation might be seen, in their natural interdependence, as an alternative epistemology of moral understanding, or the basis of one. (Walker Moral Understandings 1998, 19)

This model treats morality as “a socially embodied medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people” as regards their responsibility for things open to human care and response.\(^{35}\) In this view, moral knowledge is thoroughly embedded in social, psychological, historical, anthropological, and other empirical knowledge. Moral reasoning takes the form of narratives, specifically, narratives of identity, relationship, and value. It presents moral

problems in terms of the histories and relationships of the parties involved and their shared understandings of what is important. The point of using an expressive-collaborative model is not only for action guidance but also for clarification of shared understandings and evaluation of emotional responses to past acts, especially failures to live up to responsibilities. Morality, writes Walker, “consists in a family of practices that show what is valued by making people accountable to each other for it,” and “what goes on morally between people is constrained and made intelligible by a background of understandings about what people are supposed to do, expect, and understand”.

The tasks of moral philosophy, on the basis of Walker’s model, are two-fold: first, to analyse reflectively the forms that moral life actually takes, and second, to evaluate those forms of moral life. The first of these tasks requires substantial empirical research: documentary, historical, psychological, ethnographic, and sociological. Walker does not distinguish between general empirical knowledge and knowledge of particulars. The second task, evaluation or critical reflection, is a testing of the moral understandings embedded in particular forms of moral life. It asks whether those understandings – about such things as who may, and who must, do what to whom, as well as who has standing to give or demand accounts – really are intelligible and coherent from all points of view within the form of moral life that is under examination. It looks for relations of earned trust and for places where only coercion, duplicity, or manipulation sustain relationships that try to pass themselves off as mutually agreeable understandings. With respect to particular forms of life, Walker’s expressive-collaborative model aims to be “fully normative” in the sense that it involves comparative evaluations and judgements of the best moral positions. That is not in a Platonic, idealistic way but in a comparative way: “when we ask ourselves what can be said for some way of life, we are asking whether it is better or worse than some other way we know or imagine”. It aims not just to record and analyse the forms that moral life takes but ultimately to see whether a particular form of moral life truly is the way to live for people

(... in a particular set of historical, cultural and material circumstances, which already include some legacy of moral

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37 Op cit, 10.  
38 Op cit, 13.
understandings and practices of responsibility” (Walker Moral Understandings 1998, 13).

It does this by recognising that among the forms that moral life takes are practices of criticism and self-criticism, practices that are themselves not exempt from moral evaluation. Walker’s view of moral life is bottom-up rather than top-down: embedded life experiences inform general moral understandings, not the other way around.

It is at this point that Walker’s concept of transparency comes into play. The significance of transparency is that “shared moral understandings create mutual intelligibility”, she says. Feminist ethics, for example she argues, pursue transparency by making visible gendered arrangements which underlie existing moral understandings, and the gendered structures of authority that produce and circulate these understandings. In so doing it magnifies “embarrassing double binds of modern morality”. This means that “official” conceptions of moral agency, in which alternative forms of agency, judgement and responsibility are devalued or disqualified, are rejected. Purportedly universal norms that define moral personhood, rationality, autonomy and objectivity but are in fact not universally accessible positions or statuses under actual conditions should also be rejected. Walker’s use of ‘transparency’ is as a tool for the deconstruction of existing and persisting norms and universalities, she claims: a kind of ideology critique. It reveals hypocrisies, double-binds, distortions and outright lies; it is in itself a normative instrument. But transparency is not only critical; it is also a normative stance in which trust and credibility are prioritised, thus enabling moral understandings by creating a kind of “equilibrium” between people. Thus, in Walker’s account of how moral epistemology works, transparency engenders truthful or meaningful mutual understandings. It is also a criterion for internally coherent lives – one’s own moral life should be transparent to oneself; it should be reflective to the extent that it is a subject of explicit consideration in the sense that people should consider what they are actually doing, value and care about. It should also be reflexive in that it is a critical and self-critical stance towards the epistemic positions that people occupy.

Having examined in some detail Walker’s expressive-collaborative model, in particular what she means when she emphasises practice, interpersonal morality and experience as a basis for moral knowledge, I shall now look at what she means when she describes her moral epistemology as “naturalised”.

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Walker’s definition of naturalised moral epistemology is that “it takes actual processes and determinants of human cognition and inquiry as its subject”.\(^{40}\) It sees theories of knowledge as interdependent with, and subject to the same sorts of confirmations or (re)considerations as, whatever else we (think we) know, says Walker. This means that prevalent or authoritative assumptions will shape the direction, practice, interpretation and results of inquiry, and that social powers can render some people’s assumptions arbitrarily prevalent or undeservedly authoritative in inquiry as elsewhere.\(^{41}\) Epistemology, she argues, consists of two things: an actual production of knowledge plus normative standards for good epistemic practice – and both processes need to be taken into consideration. Naturalised moral epistemology eschews practices of assuming to know \textit{a priori} the nature of situations and experiences that require moral deliberation, says Walker.\(^{42}\) Thus it promises to close a gap between formal ethical theories and circumstances where people need guidelines for action. Moral experience consists of how moral agents, singly and co-operatively, express their sense of self, situation, community, and agency in the responsibilities they discover and/or claim as theirs. Expressing and claiming are thus personal processes; the actions of specifically identified, located deliberators, trying to work out how to live well in the circumstances in which they find themselves; starting not from an unstructured, uncontaminated ‘original position’ but from the possibilities and constraints consequent upon the hand they have been dealt, insists Walker. Moral precepts are derived from the exigencies of practice. Naturalised moral epistemology begins down on the ground, where people attempt to know their experiences and circumstances well, to claim acknowledgement for what they know, and to act well in light of them. This kind of moral philosophy “bears a far greater descriptive and empirical burden, in pursuing details of actual moral arrangements, than is commonly thought”, she argues.\(^{43}\) Just as naturalised epistemology abandons the quest for \textit{a priori}, necessary and sufficient conditions for “knowledge in general” in favour of examining how people actually produce knowledge variously, so naturalised moral epistemology seeks to discern real-world (natural) conditions for knowing people, events, values, and situations well enough to

\(^{40}\) Walker 1998, 59.  
\(^{41}\) Walker 2002, 59.  
\(^{42}\) Walker 1998, 60.  
\(^{43}\) Op cit, 13.
produce responsible assessments of “the habitability of a particular form of moral-social life”.

This potential for enormous variety is what makes Walker choose a narrative structure of moral understanding: that narrative is a principal source of evidence in negotiations directed toward resolving moral problems. From narratives one can derive understandings of “how responsibilities are kept coherent and sustainable over substantial stretches of lives”. She very emphatically stresses the “messy state” of our moral lives that are essentially complex and interpersonal. It is under these circumstances that moral understandings are “expressive-collaborative” – that is, they are “a socially embodied medium of understanding and adjustment in which people account to each other for the identities, relationships, and values that define their responsibilities”. But Walker rejects accounts of human lives in the style of “narratives of mastery” – of completeness, of consistency, and of coherence told, she argues, by philosophers like John Rawls, Bernard Williams and Charles Taylor. She is quite cognisant of the fact that most people have multiple and disjointed life stories, unfinished story lines, pursued under trying conditions.

Walker’s emphasis on moral practices and on experience means, necessarily, that she is also a relativist. “I don’t mind being some kind of relativist,” she writes, “as long as I am not the kind that renders individuals’ or societies’ moral self-criticism incoherent, or that declares inter-group or intercultural moral evaluation and criticism impossible or forbidden”. Walker’s particularism, and her emphasis of moral understanding as being contextual and situation-bound, means that she cannot make any absolute judgements about the most superior epistemic position. She cannot, as no one can, remove herself from her own particular historically and culturally specific normative view. Nevertheless, as she states above, she does not wish to be paralysed into being altogether unable to make judgements or choices between various epistemic positions. Walker can perhaps better be described as a ‘comparativist’ in that she believes that epistemic positions should continuously be compared with others, reflected on and the best – the most

45 Op cit, 68 – 70.
47 Op cit, 60.
48 Op cit, 61.
49 Op cit, 6.
‘habitable’, or most liveable - sought out. Her relativism or, what I call, her ‘comparativism’ lies in the need she feels for the evaluation and judgement of contingent and specific epistemic positions.

To summarise, Walker’s account of moral understandings is not a moral theory, she says, but an account of moral practices. Thus, in all its expressions, morality for Walker is fundamentally interpersonal; she is concerned with social practices, interaction between people, how moral orders are embodied in social orders, and how moral understandings are collaboratively produced and maintained. Morality for Walker is what any group of people is doing in a place at a time: it is experiential and naturalised. But this type of expressive-collaborative morality is also intensely personal: it takes place in a narrative structure consisting of incomplete and contradictory identities and values. The best moral understandings are those understandings according to which people find that they live best, a quality that is necessarily contextualised in time and place.

But there is also a critical element in and of morality: critical reflection tests whether moral understandings really are intelligible and coherent to those who enact them and whether they are so from different or divergent viewpoints. Critical reflection presses towards, what Walker calls, “transparency”. In her interpretation, transparency demands that moral understandings produce intelligibility or carry authority to the extent that their real workings or preconditions can be grasped and acknowledged. ‘Transparency’ in itself is not normative in a straightforward way: it is part of critical reflection which exposes moral understandings that are not what they purport to be.

Walker’s idea of morality is that shared understandings are about the identities, relationships and values that make practices of responsibility intelligible. This responsibility yields confidence that these practices actually lead to a worthwhile life and in turn support relations of trust between people (who presume that others share this confidence and trust). When “transparency testing” shatters this confidence or trust, then the authority that made the understandings moral can wane or disappear.

**Practices of responsibility**

What are the “practices of responsibility”? Walker uses the notion of responsibility as a meta-ethical tool to reveal the various moral understandings in social life. She reads responsibilities as representative of
what we owe each other: who makes which social contributions and what is
recognised and credited as such. This means that her meta-ethical tool is also
a critical tool that can reveal arbitrary or exploitative relations of
responsibility. This makes Walker’s practice of responsibility suitable for a
care ethics containing a critique of gendered relations of caring and the (lack of)
social recognition thereof.

While Walker is ‘a friend of care’, she prefers the “more capacious language”
of responsibility as a conceptual framework for ethics to the language of
care-taking. Responsibilities trace “our configurations of social roles and the
boundaries of our community” as well as “the distribution of power between
those suffering and those being held responsible”. Being held responsible
means being made accountable, she says; her ‘ethics of responsibility’ is thus
an ethics of accountability. Her practice of responsibility captures aspects of
ethics of care also found in the care ethics of Gilligan, Baier, Noddings, Held,
Ruddick, and Tronto. These ethicists emphasise responsiveness to particular
others in specific (caring) relationships. Their basic claim is that specific
moral claims on us arise from our contact or relationship with others whose
interests are vulnerable to our actions and choices. Walker’s ethics of
responsibility also deals with specific relationships of vulnerability but not
only in terms of relations of dependency. Because it is specifically an ethic of
accountability, it is concerned with issues like transparency, trustworthiness,
and honesty. In other words, Walker’s ethics of responsibility is an
epistemological ethics: it is concerned with normative knowledge claims in
general rather than the more specific relational claims that caring makes.

Walker’s practice of responsibility is particularistic in that it is based on the
priorities that each individual gives to their lives and what they find
important and valuable. There is no a priori ordering of which responsibilities are more or less meaningful or sustainable. This Walker
regards as a virtue of a practice of responsibility because she does not believe
that there is a principled way of ordering for everyone in advance which
things matter morally, and with respect to which we may be called to
account. Morally significant things, concludes Walker, our responses to

50 Walker 1998, 77.
51 Walker 2002, 179.
53 Op cit, 105.

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them and responsibility for them, play very important parts in our lives, but our lives are not only about or propelled by them.\textsuperscript{54}

What does Walker’s naturalised epistemology and practice of responsibility add to the discussion of caring as a kind of epistemology? What it adds, to my mind, is the important emphasis on the non-substantive and particularistic morality that (most) care ethics strives for. Walker, with her critique of what she calls “trans-historical moral principles” and “narratives of mastery”, deconstructs prevalent concepts of morality as existing separately from social practices and collaborative moral understandings. As such, Walker’s naturalised epistemology can be read as part of the critical tradition that Sevenhuijsen describes as postmodernism – though Walker does not use this term. The emphasis shifts away from epistemological and moral traditions and towards the individual and collective effort that is involved in finding expression of both morality and knowledge. Like Dalmiya, Walker chooses the notion of responsibility in knowledge production above others. ‘Responsibility’, for Walker, captures both the reflective and reflexive elements in epistemology as well as the obligations that knowledge brings with it: responsibility for Walker is about “what we owe to each other” and as such generates mutual obligations.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Conclusion}

I have described two feminist epistemological accounts in this chapter: a care ethics account of virtue epistemology by Vrinda Dalmiya and a naturalised epistemology by Margaret Walker. There are some strong similarities between these two approaches. Both Dalmiya and Walker (and Baier whom they both cite) are actively opposed to ignorance about “what we care about”. Not only ignorance but also the more actively harmful practices of deceit and subterfuge, and arbitrariness and exploitation, are emphatically rejected.

The emphasis of these two accounts differ however foremost because Dalmiya is specifically concerned with the kind of knowledge that caring generates and Walker is concerned with epistemology in general. Dalmiya regards caring as a unique means of gathering information about the person

\textsuperscript{54} Walker 1998, 106. This view of the importance of moral matters resonates very strongly with Bernard Williams’ view that “ethical life is important but it can see that things other than itself are also important” (“Morality, the Peculiar Institution” in Crisp and Slote, 1997, 184).

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Op cit}, 77.
that should be cared for and their situation. The aim of pursuing knowledge, by means of simulation and suspension of the biases and preferences of the one-caring, is her particular epistemic goal. Walker, on the other hand, wishes to grant us the moral skills to deconstruct norms which deceive or discriminate or purport to be something which they are not. She argues that lies and deceit should be deconstructed by means of a transparency test and those tried and tested norms can lead to endorsed epistemic goals. Whereas Dalmiya pursues the path of the individual one-caring who reaches beliefs by means of simulation; Walker urges that we look to collective processes of negotiated and contextual knowledge.

Dalmiya argues that the underlying motivation of caring – to make a particularised other important – “maps onto the (intellectual) desire to make cognitive contact with reality.” Making another important makes us want to know more about him, she says. Furthermore, the special qualities of caring – being committed, involved, concerned, compassionate, interested – are beneficial adjectives for knowledge. The question of what the role of caring is in empirical philosophy, it would seem to me, is if it is possible to achieve a perspective at all without being in a caring relationship.

What a reading of Dalmiya’s position makes clear is how difficult it is to perceive the cared-for’s predicament with a prejudiced or biased perspective. Dalmiya argues that caring provides an answer to this epistemological problem. She argues that caring is a unique and superior manner of gaining knowledge of the cared-for (she includes objects as well as people as well as scientific knowledge in her category ‘cared-for’). First of all, Dalmiya follows Frankfurt in arguing that we cannot just care about anything; who/what I care for must coincide in some way with who I am and what I regard as important. Secondly, to care for something is to displace interest from oneself to another (this is the simulation stage of caring for). Thirdly, the result of this displacement of interest is that the one-caring becomes impatient to make changes or bring improvements or solutions into effect on behalf of (for the benefit of) the cared-for. (Dalmiya adds ‘happiness’ to the effects for the cared-for; I have fundamental doubts whether achieving happiness for someone else is either possible or desirable.) And lastly, like Frankfurt, Dalmiya stresses that caring is not about liking otherwise we could not care for others or things that conflict with aspects of ourselves (a disobedient child, a racist patient, an intractable theory). Dalmiya argues

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56 Dalmiya 2002, 47.
57 Op cit, 46.

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furthermore that caring is a valuable source of information, like our other sensory and intellectual capacities, and in particular because the degree of engagement with the other/object/scientific knowledge increases the veracity of the information gained. She insists that the stage of selflessness – in which interest in the self is suspended and displaced onto the cared-for – is the most innovative and differs from all other information-gathering moments. Is this the case?

I maintain that Dalmiya’s account of simulation is an insightful elaboration on the phenomenological experience of caring (Noddings’ concept “engrossment”) – despite its problematic claim of selflessness. While I acknowledge that in order to perceive the other as distinct from myself yet requiring caring that I am capable of providing, a temporary suspension of my own interests might be needed. However I fail to see why this must result in “selflessness”. After all, there are many instances of caring in which I need not perceive the other’s reality to the extent that Dalmiya and especially Noddings recommend. In cases of therapeutic treatment, I can imagine that such an approach would be useful, particularly in cases where the one cared for is very different to the one caring. But caring relations are not all therapeutic. Caring involves taking a position in relation to the cared-for: you care about his state of being, his well being and perhaps even his future. “Selflessness’ can only be effective, to my mind, if it is momentary. This Dalmiya confirms by describing it as a “moment” in which the self, with its biases and expectations, “recedes” 58 Dalmiya does not describe the return to the self or how the accrued information is different to information garnered by a not-selfless one-caring. Dalmiya maintains that the advantage of the receding is that the self is transcended and a more objective basis for truth is provided. 59 I can imagine that this process is useful in situations in which the cared-for is in a totally different state to the one-caring. A nurse caring for someone just off of the operating table must be able to – for as long as it takes - suspend his awareness of his own state of being in order to perceive the patient’s. But in order to care, and care capably as a nurse must be able to do, he must refer to a comprehensive field of accrued knowledge and experience in which the observing-, judging- and decisive-self looms very

58 Dalmiya 2002, 46.
59 I cannot but surmise that Dalmiya’s notion of ‘objectivity’ is naïve and that a more sophisticated notion of objectivity must contain many more aspects than selflessness (reflexivity, a degree of scepticism, knowledge of related matters, reflection?) and perhaps does not even contain ‘selflessness’.
large. The capacity to be caring implies both a well-developed self and the capacity to see the predicament of the other, I would argue.

The feminist philosopher Iris Young takes a view opposite to Dalmiya’s. She questions the necessity of imagining oneself in the position of others at all - if you are willing and capable of listening to how others express their perspective. Just ‘listening’ is arguably too behaviourist; it focuses on the expression of whatever it is that the cared-for wishes to express rather than on what caring entails. Being in a caring relationship does necessarily entail imagining oneself in the position of the cared-for (Dalmiya’s simulation model) or the cared-for must coincide in some way with who I am (Frankfurt’s definition of caring).

To return to my central question: does an epistemological approach to caring add to our understanding of why we care? Baier, for example, regards an “intolerance of ignorance” about what we care about as a sign of “real caring”. This claim resonates with an impatience and urgency that might very well provide a motivation to want to know more about what we care about - in the sense: I could not bear not knowing about my loved-ones - but this is not the same as motivation to care. This epistemological form of care ethics, I conclude, has more to do with the justification of reliable forms of knowledge rather than with the motivation to care. Epistemological care ethics has much to add to our understanding of how moral knowledge is accrued: it is a complex composite of intellectual and inclinational capacities; it is not a motivational theory.

In the following chapter I shall look more closely at what it means to treat caring as a virtue and I shall be looking in detail at arguments in favour of seeing virtues as incipiently present natural inclinations which, if nurtured, can blossom into full-blown stable dispositions. I shall also be considering to what extent virtue can be seen as a kind of necessity: to what extent does it compel and how does that work?

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61 Baier 1982, 274.