

“Starving Children in Africa’: Who Cares?”

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Abstract

The current state of global poverty presents citizens in the Global North with a moral crisis: Do we care? In this essay, I examine two competing moral accounts of why those in the North should or should not give care (in the form of charity) to impoverished peoples in the Global South. Nineteen years ago feminist philosopher Nel Noddings wrote in *Caring* that “we are not obliged to care for starving children in Africa” (1986, p. 86). Noddings’s work belongs to the arena of care ethics - the feminist philosophical view that morality is about responding to, caring for, and preventing harm to those particular people to whom one has emotional attachments. By contrast, Peter Singer’s recent work, *One World*, advances an impartialist view of morality, which demands that we dispassionately dispense aid to the most needy (2002, p.154). Thus this question needs answering: am I obliged to give care to desperately poor strangers, and if so, which moral framework (Singer’s impartialism, or feminism’s care ethics) gives the best account of that obligation? I argue that as an American feminist I should care for Africans with whom I will never have a personal relationship. However, this obligation can be generated without relying on the impartialist understanding of morality.

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Introduction

I imagine that many people would accept that volunteering time or giving funds to the less fortunate is part of moral life. Sadly, there are so many worthy causes, and so much suffering that needs to be alleviated, and (in the normal course of things) one does not have limitless resources to expend on all those who are in need of one’s help. Some people might reasonably believe that we have an obligation to help those in dire need, regardless of their relationship to us. Yet others would counter that we only have obligations to give care to our own loved ones.¹ Our concern here will be a normative one. Do we have obligations to care for distant others, and if we do, which type of moral framework best accounts for this obligation? For example, do I, a white, American woman with no particular nationalistic or historical ties to Africa, have to give care to the poverty stricken, AIDS-afflicted, hungry, and politically repressed peoples who live there?

The question of when, where, and how to give to charity is particularly pressing to those from the Global North, who typically have tremendous affluence (compared with those of us who live in the South). History will judge Americans and other Northerners by how we respond to the needs of Southern peoples, just as history judges all those who dwell in plenty while others struggle to survive. I do not want to diminish or dismiss the poverty suffered by fellow Americans, or suffered by residents of other Northern countries. It would be a gross inaccuracy to say that everyone in the North is rich, and everyone in the South is poor. Yet if we do know anything about global economics, we know that the average citizen of the US, say, has more material goods and social welfare resources than the average citizen of the Sudan. The issue for the average American then

becomes whether she ought to give her charity dollars to the Sudanese, rather than her fellow countrymen, just because the Africans probably need her help more than her own co-citizens do. Alternatively, one might argue that for the average American to really *care for* people in distant lands is impossible, because we only truly care for our loved ones.

The foci of this essay are our moral obligations to the world's Southern poor, and the moral perspectives that make sense of those obligations. Yet I must immediately offer a significant disclaimer. I will eventually argue that Westerners do have an obligation to aid those who suffer elsewhere in the world from dire poverty, but this is not to say that 'taking from the West and giving to the rest' is presented here as an ultimate solution to world poverty. I am not an economist. I suspect the long-term solution to global poverty will include promoting democratic political structures, economic self-determination, and universal human rights in the poorest nations, but those are just my private suspicions, and arguments to support such suspicions are well beyond the scope of this article.² Thus I cannot say that giving charity dollars or euros to Africans or others will definitively end world poverty, though if the money is spent efficiently it will help alleviate tremendous human suffering. While I acknowledge here that my view will suffer from a lack of attention to the structural causes of global poverty, I hope to succeed in showing that it is morally required to really give care to those in dire need.

In this essay I consider world poverty relief by revisiting a by-now notorious comment made by feminist philosopher Nel Noddings, who argued twenty years ago that "we" do not have to care for starving children in Africa. In his new book (2002), philosopher Peter Singer has once again drawn our attention to that controversial remark. The argument between Noddings and Singer is over care ethics; care ethics is a branch of feminist theory that builds a moral perspective from women's experiences of caring for others. Using Noddings as his exemplar, Singer holds that care ethics actually discourages us from meeting our obligations to help people in the Global South. In my view, Noddings must be wrong because I can care for starving children in Africa. But Singer also needs correction because I do not need to be an "impartialist" to feel a sense of obligation aid global poverty.

1. Feminism's Care Ethics as a Partialist Ethics

To understand Noddings's remark in *Caring* that "we are not obliged to care for starving children in Africa" (1984, pg. 86) we must first make a brief diversion into care ethics. The philosophical theory known as care ethics actually began as an offshoot of Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan's child development research. In 1982 Gilligan published *In a Different Voice*, the landmark of feminist theory that argued for an expanded role of the "feminine voice" in morality. People who employ the feminine voice in their moral reasoning will "seek to alleviate the real and recognizable trouble of this world", and for too long this voice has been ignored by psychologists (1982, pg. 100). Building on Gilligan's work, feminist philosophers have elaborated caring as an ethos. In general, people who ascribe to care ethics believe that morality consists in responding to the needs of oneself and others by meeting one's responsibilities to care.

For our concerns, a key feature of care ethics is its partiality. The significance of this partiality may not at first be obvious, though this is where the debate between

Noddings's care ethics and Singer's impartialism lies. Under care ethics, moral decisions are made by responding to the needs of self and others. Furthermore, care ethics has built into it the reality that moral decisions are made *partially*. We should not expect ourselves to respond to others' needs equally and without respect to our emotional attachments to them. Instead, a care thinker reasons through moral problems in the social context in which she find herself. This might mean privileging certain relationships or people over others. In care ethics, impartiality is simply not a virtue.

On the other hand, a justice-centered ethic (such as the Utilitarianism that drives Peter Singer) characterizes morally exemplary people as impartial and objective. We can see an advantage to this approach; people who are impartial will reach fair solutions to moral problems by weighing each actor's rights or goods, regardless of one's own personal interests in the outcome. But notice that by placing a heavy stress on impartiality, traditional ethical theories must then confront the so-called problem of special obligations: are we ever justified in giving preference to our loved ones in times of crisis? For an impartialist, one has no morally justifiable reason to rescue one's own mother before a stranger out of a burning building, for example, because being partial to one's own mother is self-interested, arbitrary, and discriminatory.

For care ethicists, however, special obligations are not a 'problem' so much as an unalterable part of morality. Care thinkers take it for granted that we simply *do* take care of the particular people we love and thus treat them with partiality. Being a morally virtuous person under care ethics means responding to the needs of those others to whom one has an attachment. People who use care reasoning to solve their moral problems do not artificially adopt a 'view from nowhere' (1986), but are firmly lodged in the *view from over here*. Rather than resorting to an impartialism to untangle our competing obligations, care thinkers will rely on ad hoc moral judgments that best fit particular situations and best preserve prioritized emotional attachments.

2. Nel Noddings's Care Ethics

And now we return to Noddings, whose care ethics has lead her to claim that we do not have to care for starving children in Africa. Armed with the theoretical background of care ethics as partialist, we can now begin to make sense of her judgment. She begins from the position that there are people who care (one-caring) and people who are taken care of (cared-for). "Ethical caring, the relationship in which we do meet the other morally, will be described as arising out of natural caring - the relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination" (1984, pg. 4-5). When this natural impulse to care is lacking, we summon our resources to provide care out of principle. What she calls caring is the ethical ideal of "total engrossment" with another person, a completed relationship. This makes for a completion of caring, an ideal to which all caring aspires (1984, pg. 11-15).

Yet Noddings acknowledges that there are limits to caring, and this is how her remark about not having obligations to Africans is justified within her work:

Our obligation is limited and delimited by relation. We are never free, in the human domain, to abandon our preparedness to care; but, practically, if we are meeting those in our inner circles adequately as ones-caring and revive those linked to our inner circled by formal chains of relation we

shall limit the calls upon our obligation quite naturally. We are not obliged to summon the “I must” [care] if there is not possibility of completion in the other. I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa, because there is no way for this caring to be completed in the other unless I abandon the caring to which I am already obligated (1984, pg. 86).

One might immediately wonder how caring for an infant or a severely retarded adult could possibly contain opportunities for reciprocity. But for Noddings, completion is not reciprocity per se, but a highly personalized, unique, spontaneous relationship of “meeting” the other. Such a completion of relationship is not typically possible with an African, say, when one lives in America.

In later passages, Noddings explicitly demands that people in advantaged countries, such as the United States, give money to charity to alleviate world poverty. But this is not the same as genuine *caring*. “I can “care about” the starving children of Cambodia, send five dollars to hunger relief, and feel somewhat satisfied ... This is a poor second cousin to caring. “Caring about” involves a certain benign neglect. One is attentive just so far. One assents with just so much enthusiasm” (1984, pg. 112). Thus Nodding cuts the distinction between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about.’ When people give time or money to charitable causes that will benefit others in very distant lands, this is not caring for Africans or Cambodians, but caring about them. Noddings has made the clever observation that caring about is not as personal or authentic as caring for. For example, Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* gives us Mrs. Jellaby, who is so self-satisfied caring *about* starving children in distant places that she fails to care *for* the needy children right in front of her: “She was a pretty, very diminutive plump woman of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they has a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if [sic] they could see nothing nearer than Africa” (Dickens, 1853/1977, pg. 37).³

The partialism of Noddings’s care ethics is apparent because she makes the personalized, caring relationship with another central to ethics, eschewing objectivity and impartiality. However, the high demands of one-caring require that we reign in the scope of people for whom we care (though not necessarily for whom we just care *about*). I think Noddings would say it is just impossible for Americans to care for “starving children in Africa” the same way they care for their loved ones. This is true by the fiat of her definition of one-caring. The shape of her argument is: if being in a personal relationship is a requirement of caring, and I cannot be in a personal relationship with starving millions, then I cannot care for starving millions.

There are three problems with Noddings’s account. First, as someone who shares many of Noddings’s political and philosophical commitments, I must immediately distance myself from her work. Her denial of obligations to starving Africans and her feeble comments about giving money to Cambodians are both ethically unacceptable, as I will shortly argue in section 4. I do think we have real moral obligations to people we have never met based on the moral injunction to respond to evils with caring, and tremendous human suffering (such as what is experienced by those who are deeply impoverished) is such an evil. Yet taken as a whole, Noddings’s work leaves the impression that poverty in the Global South is unimportant, that Northerners working to

relieve it are just self-satisfied dilettantes who don't really care, and that the entire issue is ethically marginal in comparison to our personal relationships. In short, she seems to ignore the demands of justice, as Claudia Card has demonstrated (Card, 1990, pg. 107). At a minimum Noddings ought to have phrased her comments with more circumspection.

Second, many of the problems with Noddings's denial of obligations to the Global South is related to her very specific definition of true caring as being in a personal, completed relationship with another. This definition needs more argument than she has given it to answer obvious objections. Why is the personal relationship the ideal? Why is caring conceived of as the personal administration of care in one-on-one setting? Why can we not *care for* people we have never met? I suspect Noddings would reply that I could care about cause of world poverty (as Mrs. Jellaby does), but in doing so I do not care for Khalid, Puja, or any of the other people who hopefully benefit from my actions. This is true in some way, and Noddings has defended her position by offering that at best we can use our chains of relation to rely on those people or organizations we trust to distribute donated funds we (Noddings, 1990, pg. 122). Yet the burden of proof is on Noddings to show that the fact that one may never have "completion" with the distant recipients of one's care means that one really does not *care for* them in any significant sense. I contend that Noddings has overestimated the completion element in her definition of caring. Her emphasis on personalized *caring for*, she acknowledges in a later work, gives short shrift to *caring about*: "In many cases, we simply cannot care for because of distance or limited resources. We make a step in the right direction by caring about" (Noddings, 1998, pg. 162, emphasis added).

Finally, my third and most central objection to Noddings is that she has mistaken the partialist insight of care ethics. What care ethics gets right is a psychological insight about how we solve moral problems. None of us is an isolated, abstracted, asocial pod; we are flesh and blood people with real social entanglements, and that richness cannot be willed away in the moral realm. Partialism rejects the fantasy that moral obligations somehow stand majestically outside social reality. We should prioritize the needs of those people who matter to us, to whom we are emotionally attached. Where Noddings has made a mistake is in conceiving 'the people who matter to us' exclusively as those with whom we share interpersonal relationships. No doubt Noddings is right to say that we care for our loved ones more than for strangers. But she is wrong to elevate the interpersonal at the expense of all other kinds of emotional attachments, particularly since that elevation results in a denial of charitable obligations to the neediest. Noddings has overcorrected impartialism. She mistakenly advocates a partialism that grounds morality in personal relationships, whereas the real insight of partialism is that morality is rooted in emotional attachments (and not necessarily personal relationships, per se).

3. Peter Singer's Impartialism

Peter Singer's recent work *One World* (2002) continues his long-standing campaign against global poverty. He advances impartialism as part of a Utilitarian ethics. Utilitarians believe that right actions are the ones which produce the most happiness for everyone overall. Moral judgments ought not be based on what best benefits "our own kind" but what will benefit our one world. This leads Singer to say we should strive for impartiality in moral judgments because without impartiality we would

only seek to promote the happiness of those with whom we feel some personal or even nationalistic connection (2002, pg. 154).

He turns his attention to the issue of globalization and economic justice. He asks: “What impartial reasons can there be for favoring one's compatriots over foreigners?” (2002, pg. 167) and answers ‘none.’ While it is tempting to think that nationalistic connections justify giving partial preference to aid our fellow Americans before Africans, in fact they do not. A sovereign nation is only an imagined community, not a face-to-face one. (This is especially true in a large and diverse nation such as the United States.) We justify having special obligations to our co-citizens based on what we imagine to be our shared American values and commitments, but in fact it is our imagination - not the existence of an ‘American community’ itself - that does the work in producing this sense of special obligation (2002, pg. 170).

Since that is the case, Singer continues, we can reimagine the size and scope of our community. Singer urges that we imagine we are in a world community to overcome the (partialist, in his view) prejudice that we ought to give care to our friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens first. The point of creating an imaginary world community is to satisfy those who cannot help but aid ‘their own’ first. It is interesting to note that the imaginary community position comes alongside Singer’s discussion of eighteenth century Utilitarian philosopher William Godwin. Godwin argued that if a chambermaid, *who was his own mother*, was trapped in a burning building with the Archbishop Fénelon (a man who was inspiring many to do good works), he would save Fénelon before the mother (cited in 2002, pg. 156). Singer holds up Godwin as the perfect impartialist who prioritizes the greatest good of humanity before his own emotional attachments. Yet since few of us will be Godwin, and we are for the most part susceptible to making moral judgments partially, we must use our moral imaginations to reset the parameters of our community memberships.

For example, by believing that I am in a single community which includes Americans and Sudanese, I can impartially judge who most needs my help and who will benefit the most from it. I should give my charity dollars to the war traumatized and utterly impoverished people of the Sudan, instead of the otherwise well provided-for American victims of September 11, 2001, say. Perhaps it would take a Godwin-like impartiality for the average American to reach out to Sudanese instead of New Yorkers. But if the Sudanese are in my community, making the correct utilitarian decision to give help where it will create the greatest happiness will not be so difficult. I give help to those who are in most need of it, regardless of national identity, by practicing impartialism. Such impartialism gives us principled reasons to make rational decisions that produce the greatest happiness for our world.

Here is what Singer has to say about feminism's partiality in care ethics, as it relates to global economic justice:

Modern critics of impartialism argue that an advocate of an impartial ethics would make a poor parent, lover, spouse, or friend, because the very idea of such personal relationships involves being partial towards the other person with whom one is in the relationship. This means giving more consideration to the interests of your child, lover, spouse, or friend than you give to a stranger. Feminist philosophers, in particular, tend to stress

the importance of personal relationships, which they accuse male moral philosophers of neglecting. Nel Noddings, author of a book called *Caring*, limits our obligation to care for those with whom we can be in some kind of relationship. Hence, she says, “we are not obliged to care for starving children in Africa” (2002, pg. 158-9).

Singer goes on to write that partialism is somewhat appropriate at the everyday, intuitive level of morality, but impartialism is demanded by the more reflective, critical level of morality where we evaluate our principles to see if they contribute to the greatest good overall (2002, pg. 160).

While I admire much of Singer's work, his reference to and dismissal of feminism in this one passage strikes me as gratuitous. If one had little experience with feminism or care ethics, as is the case with my Business Ethics students who read Singer's book, one might walk away from Singer's discussion with the impression that Noddings's comments are representative of all feminists - which they are not. It really does do feminists a bad turn to pick out only Noddings's views and portray them as *the* feminist position. Furthermore, Singer's enormous professional stature (he is probably the most well-known, English-language, living philosopher) lends even more weight to his condemnation of feminist philosophy. Feminists have enough difficulty getting heard in mainstream philosophy without Singer contributing to their marginalization.

Furthermore, because Singer dismisses feminism so quickly, he misses entirely an important feminist critique to which he is vulnerable. The abstract impartialism that Singer advocates is implausible from a feminist position. Indeed, I think we ought to be suspicious of an argument that uses an example such as Godwin's. We can give Godwin the benefit of the doubt that Fénelon inspired goodness in more people than his own mother, a mere chambermaid in his scenario. Be that as it may, I think most people would agree that Godwin's judgment to save Fénelon is warped by an overly rigorous adherence to an abstract principle, and an insufficient attention to one's actual attachments. We should be wary of impartialism because Godwin's judgment is so excessive. Not only does the Singer-Godwin version of impartialism not solve the “problem” of special obligations, it denies the existence of special obligations entirely - and this denial does not reflect our ordinary experiences. Singer's position disregards the powerful feminist criticism (of impartialism, but of justice-centered ethics more generally) that we are not disembodied, disengaged minds who practice morality as a rational exercise in distributing units of happiness or equal rights (see, for example, Held, 1993; hooks, 1984; Tronto, 1994; Ruddick, 1989; Walker, 1998). Singer's glib comments about feminism cost him the chance to really engage with the well-established and well-argued criticism that an abstract and overly rationalistic account of morality, such as the one he proposes, fails to accurately describe the facts of moral life.

In addition, Singer's own system betrays some awareness of the problems of impartialism. By posing that we must re-imagine our community as a community of one world, Singer grants reluctant acknowledgment to the truth that people will care for their near and dear ones before strangers, even if Singer himself wishes this was not so. (Singer does include a vague nod to evolutionary biology, however, when he says that parents caring for their own children before others' seems to be hardwired into us (2002, pg.161-2).) The imaginary one world community, it seems to me, exists as a motivation

to inspire the well-off to care for the less fortunate in distant lands, just in case Singer's straightforward utilitarian argument fails to be properly motivating. Yet why mention an emotional attachment (such as community membership) at all if impartialism is right and emotional attachments ought to be meaningless in morality? I do not think Singer has been inconsistent in his formulation, but my criticism is that by posing the imaginary one world community Singer is not far from admitting that (for us non-Godwin types, anyway) we in the North cannot be relied upon to give to the South without appealing to emotional attachments.

4. A Partialist Argument about Caring for 'Starving Children in Africa'

Feminists who advocate care ethics believe that moral judgments ought to be personal, contextual, and preserve emotional attachments. Singer counters that unless we take the impartial view, we will arbitrarily and unfairly prefer our fellow Americans at the expense of deeply impoverished others who truly need our help. Which moral perspective better suited to respond to the charity challenge of global poverty: Singer's impartial approach, or feminism's care ethics?

We can begin to answer this question by first arguing that Northerners do indeed have charitable obligations to others in distant lands. My argument here is brief and hopefully simple. The first premise is that widespread, dire material poverty is a source of tremendous human suffering on a grand scale. ('Tremendous' and 'grand scale' are needed. A moral obligation to respond to every variety of human suffering on any scale would be impossible to enact and impossible to argue.) This premise does not strike me as controversial, but simply as an accurate description of how deeply gross poverty impacts human life. Secondly, I hold that tremendous human suffering on a grand scale is an evil. Of course, someone might doubt the existence of evils, but such skepticism is hard to maintain in this context. Indeed, if anything counts as an evil, I think tremendous human suffering on a grand scale would be it. Third, evils are the sorts of things that demand (i.e. obligate) a caring response from those capable of care-responding to them. Dire poverty hence demands a caring response from all those who are capable of responding, and charitable donations to the very poor are one possible form of such care.

This argument sketched here can be filled in a bit. One might object that we have no obligations to respond to evils, but only have obligations not to commit evils ourselves. I think this minimalist account of morality seems anemic, and a well-rounded account of moral life will include positive duties. Indeed, responding to evils with care seems to be the very *stuff* that morality is made of. Furthermore, one might object that even if morality demands that we respond to evils, more reasons are needed to believe that one must respond to evils with *caring*. My answer is to recall the centrality of care in human existence. Noddings has discussed Heidegger's work: "From his perspective, we are immersed in care; it is the ultimate reality of human life" (Noddings, 1992, pg. 15). I agree with Noddings's Heidegger. Human life does not function without caring, and morality reinforces the primacy of caring by generating the obligation to give care when confronted with great evils.

If the argument that we have obligations to respond with care to poor strangers is compelling, one might still ask why alleviating poverty via charitable donations the best way to meet this obligation. As I stated in my opening disclaimer, it may be that such charity is *not* the best response to world poverty. I have not argued that economic aid

flowing from North to South will end world poverty or is the best solution to it. The argument posed here is only that we in the North ought to help Southerners, and charity is one kind of caring response.

Having sketched the argument that we have obligations to give care to distant others, we can now examine this caring itself more closely. We do not need to make sweeping claims about human nature to assert that most reasonably well-balanced people do experience emotional attachments to others. Particularly, we become attached and have feeling for fellow human beings in pain (and obviously we form attachments on other basis, as well). I am not sure that this premise needs argument as much as verification from our experience. We can ask ourselves if, in general, people frequently feel for others when we know they are suffering. (Indeed, if one is persuaded by evolutionary biology, it might stand to reason that in a social species such as ours, emotional attachments for suffering fellow beings would be selected as contributing to species success.) Even though it stands to reason that we forge emotional attachments to others, and this is a hallmark of humanity, if one had to characterize the philosophical attitude towards emotionality and emotional attachments, it would be a hostile one (Jaggar, 1989).

Of course, finding that we feel attached to those who hurt does not deny the depths of depravity to which we can sink. There might be many reasons why emotional attachments are forestalled, extinguished, or wholly absent. My guess is that the best account of emotional attachments for others is that, like other human experiences, these attachments are greatly shaped by social conditions. I do not want to say, as Hume does, that sympathy is natural to us, that its origins lie in human nature. My claim here is simply that we have emotional attachments for fellow beings who are suffering - whether the attachments' source is human nature, social conditioning, or some combination - and this is observed with enough frequency that we might safely generalize that we often enough feel for others who suffer.

Caring for others emerges in response to the demands of human life (Ruddick 1989). One such demand is meeting the needs of others and alleviating their suffering. That is, experiencing emotional attachments for others can prompt caring behavior towards them. Ideally we would experience emotional attachments for others who are suffering and then act on this emotional attachment by caring for them to alleviate their suffering, meeting their needs. There are obstacles to this idealized progression, and I am aware my account may seem Pollyannaish if it does not acknowledge that we sadly have innumerable examples of the failure to have attachments and the failure to care. Some people are utterly lacking in feeling for others. Some people may have emotional attachments for others, but for any number of reasons find themselves unable to follow through with caring behavior. Some people may feel emotional attachments to others that hurt, but unreliably or only when those others resemble themselves. Some people may care but in inappropriate or harmful ways. Some people may be forced into giving care for others without actually wanting to. The recipients of such emotional attachments and care might reject those feelings and efforts, and so on. But none of these possible monkey-wrenches threatens the basic outline that care can emerge as a result of feeling for others. The care ethical "injunction to care" can be understood as rooted in the emotional attachments we often feel for each other.

So far I do not think Singer or Noddings would disagree with what I have said about the sources of caring. In fact, we three can agree that the moral problem of charitable obligations to others in distant lands enters when Americans, for example, cease to act on our attachments for Africans and others, or else are so preoccupied with our daily chores and worries that we feel no real attachment. I suspect many Americans do not give care to starving strangers because either we cease feeling emotional attachments for them or else we are unable to act on attachments by caring.

What I have said so far is not terribly controversial, though this juncture is where Singer and Noddings diverge. Singer believes that the only way to ensure the needs of the deeply impoverished in the global South are met is to act impartially by cutting off sentiments because we simply run out of emotional attachments when we are not personally invested in foreigners' welfare. Noddings, on the other hand, makes the hard claim that we simply do not care for (in her highly personalized and 'complete' definition of caring) and cannot be expected to care for distant others. My criticisms of each have shown that neither account is fully satisfying. It may be true that we prefer our near-and-dear ones in moral judgment, and we try to save them from harm before others. But this truth does not foreclose another truth: that we have obligations to respond with care to those who endure the evil of suffering deep poverty, even if we have not met them and do not have a personal relationship with them.

We can show partial preferences for impoverished strangers by drawing on our emotional attachments for fellow beings that are suffering. I want to say that we can retain the partiality of care ethics by giving preferences to those with whom *we feel* the most. Caring need not be grounded in an interpersonal relationship but in our emotional attachments for others whose needs and suffering are tremendous. We do not need to be impartial to have obligations to victims of world poverty. In fact, a highly emotional partiality is useful to promote caring for victims of global poverty.

I propose we build on emotional attachments for "starving African children" by giving partial preferences to those who arouse our emotions the most. Singer's view, that we cannot rely on the vagaries of feeling to alleviate global poverty, underestimates our empathetic capacities. We should practice triage, not just in the allocation of resources to help those who are needy, but also a triage of emotional attachments. To say that we might order our feelings for others is not to say we practice impartiality. Rather it means that we are partial to those with whom we feel the most. And contra Singer, we can feel with those who suffer the most, not just with our compatriots who look like we do or speak our language. I do believe that if more Americans really knew the conditions under which 30,000 children under age 5 die each day from preventable causes around the world, emotional attachments would prompt caring action.

It might seem that my call to meet our obligations to care for distant others is identical to Noddings's remarks on caring *about* distant others, which we have seen she labels a mere "good start." But I do mean achieving a real caring *for* distant strangers. I do think that is possible. As argued in section 2, Noddings's definition of 'caring for' over-exaggerates the role of personal relationships, when she ought to have emphasized the role of emotional attachments in 'caring for.' Thus when I claim we can meet our obligations to the Global South by caring for those suffering there, I am not using Noddings's definition of the phrase, but a revised sense that instead stresses the emotional component of actively empathizing and responding to those who are suffering

greatly. Charitable giving, when prompted by such emotional attachments, can be seen as a genuine act of caring for – even though I acknowledge this is a departure from Noddings’s sense of that term.

The partiality of care ethics has two advantages when surveying the challenges of global poverty. First, it acknowledges the moral reality that we do care for those we are most attached to first and foremost. As care ethicist Virginia Held has written, “The hunger of our own children comes before the hunger of children we do not know, the hunger of children in Africa ought to come before some of the expensive amusements we may feel like providing for our own children” (1993, pg. 74). This might immediately sound unpromising for starving Africans, yet it is a moral reality that cannot be argued away. But secondly, care ethics maximizes (rather than denies) the role of partiality and emotionality in producing moral acts. We can and should care for those people with whom we make an emotional connection based on the depths of their hardship and suffering. We can use this care ethics framework to be partial towards those who tug on our hearts the most - giving preference to those people whose connection to us is not interpersonal, but personalized through our emotional attachments.

Before concluding, two objections need to be addressed. First, one might worry that after all the criticism I have made against Singer, I have endorsed his rather simplistic solution to world poverty, charity that flows from the North to the South (as outlined in *One World* (2002) and other works, for example, Singer, 1999). This objection finds that since I argue in favor of charitable giving to relieve world poverty, just as Singer does, I am vulnerable to the same objections as he. Namely, that his strategy utterly fails to reckon with the structural causes of world poverty. By ignoring the real causes of world poverty, the most a Singer-type approach does is just stick a finger in poverty’s leaking dam. The second, somewhat related objection to my view is that by endorsing the care-taking of strangers in distant lands we will ignore the pressing obligations those in the North help to “their own” poor. This objection need not fall prey to Singer’s worry, preferring to aid one own co-citizens first is arbitrary. In fact, it can be argued that Americans, for example, have an obligation to give charity to other Americans before Ethiopians, say, because wealthy Americans benefit more directly from the poverty of poor Americans than they do from the poverty of poor Ethiopians. Thus it might be argued that Americans owe each other charity before others in distant lands, not because of physical proximity, but the proximity of exploitation. These two objections are similar in that they analyze poverty and its alleviation along structural lines.

My response to the first objection, that I endorse Singer’s simplistic solutions to world poverty, is to admit that Singer has made some valid points. Singer is right, of course, that there is no famine in the United States, whereas famine is more frequent in other parts of the world. And I think Singer is right to say that we should give care to those who need it most, although I have argued this determination should be made partially, not impartially. However, I do not think the areas of overlap I share with Singer should be construed as an endorsement of the Singer solution to world poverty. Whatever the structural causes of world poverty are, charitable giving surely will not eliminate them. Yet I think I am not vulnerable to the first objection because, unlike Singer, I have not depicted North-to-South charity as the solution, but only as an succor to poverty. My response to the second objection, that people have greater obligations to

their poor neighbors, is similar to the first objection. Such structural economic critique is beyond the purview of my comments here. For this objection to work, one would need to show (along Marxist lines, perhaps?) the wealth is acquired by the exploitation of nearby others. Even if such an argument could be made, it still does not address the material reality that (for the most part) people in the South need aid more than people in the North, a point on which Singer is persuasive.

I think wealthy Northerners can build on our emotional attachments to sufferers to be more caring towards Southerners. My hope is that caring for the Global South ceases to be a moral challenge and instead becomes a political one. We need political strategies to rediscover emotional attachments and prompt caring towards the deeply impoverished.

¹Since Noddings makes the helpful distinction between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’, I will frequently use the somewhat clumsy phrase ‘giving care to.’ This phrase is deliberately ambiguous and could include ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’.

²Other feminists have turned their attention to this problem lately. See, for example, Jaggar 1998, Sterba 2002, and Young 1990.

³I am indebted to Kay Mathiesen for this literary reference.

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