Care Ethics and Obligations to Future Generations

THOMAS RANDALL

A dominant area of inquiry within intergenerational ethics concerns how goods (and bads) ought to be justly distributed between noncontemporaries. Contractualist theories of justice that have broached these discussions have often centered on the concepts of mutual advantage and (indirect) reciprocal cooperation between rational, self-interested beings. However, another prominent reason that many in the present feel that they have obligations toward future generations is not due to self-interested reciprocity, but simply because they care about what happens to them. Care ethics promises to be conceptually well-suited for articulating this latter reason: given that future generations are in a perpetual condition of dependency on present-day people's actions, this is precisely the kind of relational structure that care theorists should be interested in morally evaluating. Unfortunately, the care literature has been largely silent on intergenerational ethics. This article aims to advance this literature, offering the blueprints of what a care ethic concerning future generations—a "future care ethic"—should look like. The resultant ethic defends a sufficientarian theory of obligation: people in the present ought to ensure the conditions needed to encourage and sustain a world that enables good caring relations to flourish.

A dominant area of inquiry within intergenerational ethics concerns how goods (and bads) ought to be justly distributed between noncontemporaries. Identifying what resources people in the present should sustainably use is inherently intertwined in discussions about what sort of world they are obligated to bequeath to future generations. Contractualist theories of justice that have broached these discussions have often centered on the concepts of mutual advantage and (indirect) reciprocal cooperation (Gauthier 1986; Rawls 2001) between rational, self-interested beings (McCormick 2009; Heath 2013). Although such theories offer an important normative dimension for deriving and justifying what obligations those in the present have to future generations, other significant dimensions ought to be considered in tandem—if only to provide a more holistic view about the nature of such obligations. Indeed,

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another prominent reason that many in the present feel that they have obligations toward future generations is not due to self-interested reciprocity, but because they *care* about what happens to them.

Care ethics promises to be conceptually well-suited for articulating this latter reason. Care ethics emphasizes the moral significance of our relational interdependency in the provision and receipt of care. Given that future generations are in a perpetual condition of dependency on present-day people's actions, this is precisely the kind of relational structure that care theorists should be interested in morally evaluating. Unfortunately, the care literature has been largely silent on intergenerational ethics. In this article, I aim to advance this literature by offering the blueprints for what a care ethic concerning future generations—a "future care ethic" (Makoff and Read 2017)—should look like. First, I consider what initial problems care theorists might face in formulating a future care ethic. That is, is it possible for those in the present to care about and establish normatively relevant relations with nonexistent future persons? Second, I analyze how these initial problems have been addressed by the only future care ethic formulated thus far: Christopher Groves's "care imaginary" (Groves 2014). Although Groves makes insightful inroads, I ultimately find his argument unpersuasive. Third, then, I offer a novel future care ethic that is preferable to Groves's, which argues that those in the present can have *imaginal* relations with future generations that are *real enough* for them to be normatively relevant within the care ethical framework. This ethic generates a sufficientarian theory of obligation: those in the present ought to ensure that goods (and bads) are distributed such that the conditions for good caring relations to flourish are encouraged and sustained.

Initial Problems

Care theorists face some initial problems when applying their normative framework to intergenerational ethics. This is because two central concepts within the care ethical framework—*care* and *relations*—have been interpreted so as to inadvertently restrict care theorists from meaningfully commenting on what obligations those in the present have to future generations. This is not to say that care theorists have argued that such obligations do not exist, nor that such problems cannot be responded to. It is to say that these problems need to be acknowledged and addressed for any future care ethic to be convincing.

Consider first how care theorists have understood the concept of relations. For care theorists, the self is conceived as relational. Jean Keller puts it this way: persons are "always embedded in relations with flesh-and-blood others and [are] partly constituted by these relations" (Keller 1997, 152). Depending on circumstance and capability, some persons will have more power over others in establishing how such relations are shaped. For care theorists, this point is significant with regard to a person's capacity to provide and receive care. At various points in our lives, we are both dependent on others for care and others will be dependent on us. We are interdependent beings who both give and receive care to survive and flourish within the

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nested dependencies in which we are situated (Kittay 1999, 2015). In a nutshell, we are relational selves whose lives can go better or worse depending on the structure and efficacy of the relational webs of caring that we are embedded in. Care theorists are thus interested in how relations of interdependence ought to be structured to promote successful caring practices that enable individuals to survive and flourish—both at the personal level (as between parents and children) and the institutional level (improving health care, education, and social-welfare systems).

This suggests that care theorists would take special interest in morally evaluating present-day people's relations with future generations. This is because of the total dependency that future generations have on present-day people. Those in the present not only shape the world that future generations will inherit, but also which future persons will fill that world. As Stephen Gardiner writes, present-day "choice of policy will make a difference to which individuals are born" (Gardiner 2011, 180; see also Parfit 1984). It is surprising, then, that hardly any care theorists have offered a sustained focus on this issue.

However, there is an obstacle here that potentially prevents care theorists from engaging with intergenerational ethics. Normatively relevant relations within the care ethical framework concern the ties that constitute concrete beings whose lives can be bettered or worsened depending on the care provided or received through such relations. That is, it is only through relations between "flesh-and-blood" individuals, as Keller tellingly put it above, that the normative concerns of care emerge (see also Hamington 2014, 198–99). Of course, future generations are not yet flesh-and-blood individuals. They do not yet have lives that can go better or worse because they have no lives and no existent interests to speak of. This implies that the normative concerns of care cannot emerge between those in the present and those in future generations.

This obstacle is mirrored in how care theorists have developed the concept of *care*. Various understandings of care have been offered within the literature, but a noticeable theme that runs through them all is that normatively relevant caring practices can occur only between concrete individuals. Nel Noddings offers the earliest and clearest delineation of normatively relevant care as occurring only between concrete beings: caring for another person "requires the engrossment and motivational displacement of the one-caring, and it requires the recognition and spontaneous response of the cared-for" (Noddings 1984, 78). For Noddings, there is "necessarily a form of reciprocity in caring" (71). This is not reciprocity as understood in contractualist theories of justice; on Noddings's view, the reciprocity of care is completed through the carer receiving recognition from the cared-for that their caring practice has been successful.

Perhaps the most interesting result of Noddings's interpretation of caring is the rejection of "universal caring," which she puts into concrete terms as follows: "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 obligated" (Noddings 1995, 15). Caring-for requires a person-to-person relationship. Though Noddings thinks capable persons ought to extend help to distant others

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through various international institutions (like charities), these actions fall outside the normative domain of her care ethic: such actions would not count as care per se, but rather as actions that support "the conditions under which [actual face-to-face] caring relations can prosper" (Noddings 2015, 83). Although this could be interpreted as "caring-about" others, lacking is the face-to-face caring-for that Noddings emphasizes: "Caring-about [is] a poor second-cousin to caring" (Noddings 1984, 97).

Following Noddings's logic, given that those in the present and those in future generations lack the sort of interaction identified as necessary for reciprocal care, the present generation would not be obligated to care for future generations. Noddings implies that there still exists the possibility (that is, it is at least not impossible) for caring-about distant others to turn into face-to-face caring for distant others. Those who are able could visit and personally engage in reciprocal care with those distant others. Yet reciprocal care remains *impossible* between present and future generations. Even if those in the present engage in caring-about behavior (such as promoting sustainable development), they are still unable to receive the recognition and response of future generations—the present generation will not live long enough to do so, leaving the caring process incomplete.

As such, care as a reciprocal process in the context of intergenerational ethics faces a similar problem that various contractualist theories of justice have also been charged with, namely, the "nonreciprocity problem" (Page 2007, 232). This problem states that if no ties of reciprocity bind different generations, then—according to reciprocity-based accounts of justice—"no duties of justice obtain between them" (McCormick 2009, 451). For Noddings, no normatively relevant forms of care can obtain between present and future generations because the care cannot be reciprocated, and thereby remains incomplete. Again, on this view, the present generation would not be obligated to care for future generations.

However, a defense of care as a reciprocal process could be given: that though the nonreciprocity problem holds if present and future generations were nonoverlapping, it is the case that generations *do* overlap. Anca Gheaus offers an argument that could be applied here (Gheaus 2016). Gheaus's argument, in brief, is this: If each child has a right to adequate life prospects, and if adequate life prospects require enough resources to raise children justly, then adults (if they are adequate parents) have a right to rear with enough resources to justly raise their children. Given that generations will continue overlapping indefinitely into the future, the argument simply repeats. This supports care as a reciprocal process in the following way. Potential parents engage in caring acts for their potential children by conserving enough resources for these children's adequate development. Once these children are born, the parent can receive recognition that their caring act of conserving resources has been successful. Here, care is completed, albeit delayed until the parent receives recognition. This process of care repeats into the future.

However, there are two problems with this response. First, it limits present-day obligations to only would-be parents. On this argument, those persons who do not have children, or do not want children, would have no obligations to future generations. This seems mistaken—we want to say that all of those in the present have

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some obligations to future generations, regardless of whether they have children. Otherwise, there is no normative urge for nonparents to conserve resources for the future—which, in turn, could affect the success of would-be parents in their conservation of resources.

The second problem is that this argument gives parents an obligation to conserve only enough resources for their children. This obligation may not go far enough to conserve resources for nonoverlapping generations. Parents may conserve only what they need for their children, and consume the rest. As such, resources may diminish over time, to the point where the sixth generation may struggle to conserve resources for the seventh. Moreover, on this view, should a parent decide to conserve enough resources for their potential grandchildren, or if nonparents decide to conserve resources (even only small amounts) for future generations regardless of which future person is born, such actions would be supererogatory. This again seems like something we do not want to say.

There are issues, then, with understanding care as a reciprocal process in the context of intergenerational ethics. Of course, many care theorists have moved beyond Noddings's specific notion of care because it is too limiting. Perhaps other interpretations of care may fare better in intergenerational ethics.

Virginia Held has provided an influential interpretation of care. For Held, care as a practice is concerned with cultivating and sustaining morally worthy relations over time, with individuals having the ability to be attentive and responsive to contextual needs, to build trust and mutual concern, and work to continually scrutinize and improve one's care through the lived experience of caring itself. Held consequently identifies care as a *reflective* practice, whereby the provision and receipt of care are continually scrutinized through iterated efforts and communication (Held 2006, 20).[1] In this way, Held's interpretation of care has a built-in critical component that ensures an *ethics* of care, not merely naturalized or traditional care: "the ethics of care does not accept and describe the practices of care as they have evolved under actual historical conditions of patriarchal and other domination" (39). Not only should caring practices be appraised and altered if needed, their surrounding social and political context ought to be as well.

However, Held's understanding of care is still built on the assumption that successful caring relations between two or more individuals requires a form of reciprocity. Building trust and mutual concern—crucial components of how Held interprets care—are not one-way affairs. Both activities presume shared interests and expectations between persons, who engage and respond to one another to strengthen their caring relation. Given that future persons do not yet have existent interests, expectations, or needs, and cannot respond in kind to actions of those in the present, Held's understanding of care also suffers from the nonreciprocity problem.

It is clear, then, that a nonreciprocal understanding of care is required for a future care ethic. The closest the present literature gets to fulfilling this condition is through Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto's broad understanding of care. For Fisher and Tronto, care is "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher

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and Tronto 1990, 40). On this view, caring moves beyond person-to-person interaction: it also includes concern "for objects and for the environment, as well as for others" (Tronto 1993, 103). As with Held, Fisher and Tronto address the surrounding social and political context in which caring relations are embedded. Yet Fisher and Tronto's interpretation is broader still: if one can care for inanimate objects, as suggested above, then this assumes caring can be a one-way affair. This takes the concern of care beyond relations between humans, and implies that reciprocity does not play an essential role in the process of care.

However, I argue that Fisher and Tronto's understanding of care cannot be used for a future care ethic for two reasons. First, a common criticism of Fisher and Tronto's interpretation is that it is *too* broad to guide care ethics' framework. Both Daniel Engster and Held have argued that almost too much of society's laborious aspects are included in this interpretation (Held 2006, 32; Engster 2007, 24). If much of our daily life consists in maintaining, continuing, and repairing the world, caring becomes indistinguishable from any given kind of practice. Held specifically argues that almost any amount of economic activity could be included in this definition, such as "retail sales, house construction, and commercial cleaning" (Held 2006, 32). Consequently, the distinctive normative features of caring could be lost.

Tronto has recently defended the broadness of this interpretation of care. This interpretation intends to work only "at the most general level" as an umbrella term, from which narrower notions of care can be derived and applied in different contexts. These narrower notions of care would be "nested" in the broader understanding (Tronto 2013, 19). Unfortunately, the problem again is that care ethics is concerned with the normative relevance of care as it emerges through interdependent relations of care. Care theorists need not deny that the concept of care can be used elsewhere in different ways, and, indeed, that the normatively relevant aspects of care that they want to focus on can fit under Fisher and Tronto's umbrella term. The consequence, though, is that this does not go the other way; for the purposes of care ethics alone, Fisher and Tronto's broad interpretation cannot fit.

The second reason that Fisher and Tronto's understanding of care cannot be used, then, is ironic: it still does not stretch broadly enough to include future generations. Fisher and Tronto restrict their understanding of care to its applicability within the boundaries of our "world." Yet the "world" Fisher and Tronto speak of encompasses only "our bodies, our selves, and our environment" (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40). Future generations, as nonexistent persons, fall outside of these boundaries. Indeed, Tronto confirms this implication when she states that care is "the concern of living, active humans engaged in the processes of everyday living" (Tronto 1993, 104). Of course, Fisher and Tronto could expand their definition of what they mean by the "world" to include future generations. However, this would require a new argument defending how future generations fit into the "world," despite their spatial and temporal absence from the activities of care that exist in the present.

This concludes the initial problems care theorists may face should they want to engage with intergenerational ethics.

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Groves's Future Care Ethic

There is only one sustained argument for a future care ethic in the care literature: Groves's care imaginary (Groves 2014). In this section, I examine how far Groves overcomes the initial problems outlined in the previous section. Even if Groves's account is ultimately unsuccessful (as I will argue), it is useful to see if any promising areas of Groves's argument can be built upon in the formulation of a stronger future care ethic.

Groves's starting point is an analysis of the phenomenology of future uncertainty, interpreted through an Arendtian understanding of the human condition. Groves describes the human condition as one of perpetual fear of an unknown futurity, in part fueled by the unpredictable consequences of the plurality of human actions. How to overcome this fear of future uncertainty? Groves answers by drawing upon the psychological literature of *attachment*.[2] Attachments are connections an individual makes to particular objects in the world around them as a way to orient themselves and make sense of their place in it. Attachments are mutually constitutive: the self both shapes and is shaped by the attachment objects it engages with. Attachment objects can take many forms, ranging from other persons (including nonhuman living entities), "places, institutions, cultural objects of various kinds and ideals that represent dispositional and behavioural models around which the self can be integrated through its beliefs and actions" (Groves 2014, 120). Collectively, these attachments form shared "social imaginaries" for individuals—repertoires of beliefs, images, and concepts that provide direction and consistency, serving "as the connective tissue of a web of meaningful relationships that enable human beings to make sense of, endure and flourish amidst the inherent uncertainty of the future" (143).

Groves then begins interweaving attachment theory with care ethics to explain the present generation's obligations to future generations. However, Groves makes a contentious first move: for Groves, attachment, "across all its forms, is a type of relationship" (127). This claim is contentious because it does not square with how care theorists have developed the concept of relations. It might be said that all relations are a form of attachment, but not all attachments are relations in the normatively relevant sense that care theorists emphasize. This issue parallels the criticism I leveled at Fisher and Tronto's broad interpretation of care in the previous section. Though I flag this issue, let us put it to one side for the moment and continue with Groves's argument to the end.

Groves identifies attachments as relations to outline a novel understanding of care: "Care for an other is active concern that aims to further the good of a particular kind of 'object' (which may also be a subject), namely an object whose own good is esteemed by the carer as being of inherent value" (139). On this account, any attachment object that has a good that can flourish or be thwarted is an object that can be cared about. In other words, relations (understood generally here as attachments) are caring if the objects involved in that relation have their good furthered. Yet just as I think Groves's classification of relations is contentious, I also think his understanding of care is, too—it is just as broad, if not broader, than Fisher and Tronto's (Fisher

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and Tronto 1990). For although Tronto argues that care does not concern creating a work of art (Tronto 1993, 104), art creation could straightforwardly be classified as an attachment of care for artists. Again, though, I only flag this issue to be addressed later in this section.

Groves uses his understanding of relations and care—that is, the act of furthering the good of an attachment object—as the basis for formulating a future care ethic. This future care ethic is grounded in Groves's "obligation to care for the future" (Groves 2014, 158). The justification for this obligation is as follows:

1 To care for an object of attachment is to further the good of that object into the future.
2 To state that you do not care what happens to that object's good after you die is to not actually care for that object at all—even if you care for that object in the present.
3 To do so would perform the contradiction of caring and not caring at the same time.
C Therefore, to disavow care for the future implies that we do not actually care for attachment objects at all. (151)

Groves intends this syllogism to follow the same logic as the justification Daniel Engster gives for his rational obligation to care (which, in turn, Engster based on Alan Gewirth's principle of generic consistency). Engster's justification is that, given that we implicitly value care given to us when we require it, it would be a performative contradiction to not also care for others when they need it and we can give it (Engster 2007, 46–49). Groves applies this reasoning to caring for attachment objects: to deny caring about the state of an attachment object's good after you die is also to deny that you care for that object in the present, even if you do care for it in the present. This denial "would perform the contradiction of caring and not caring at the same time" (Groves 2014, 151). For if we genuinely cared about the good of an attachment object we would want to ensure that good is furthered into the future, even if we are not there to experience that good flourishing.

Groves continues this argument by asking: "If we happen to care about the future of a particular ideal, place, institution or something else, why should this either give us reason to care about the future more generally, or give others a reason to care for the same things we do?" (161). In response to the first part of this question, Groves argues that the attachment object's good that we care about logically extends to an expanding "circle of what we care about" (180). If the success of our caring for the attachment object's good is embedded in and dependent on a much broader range of support systems (such as social and biophysical support), the fact of our initial attachment generates other responsibilities for us to maintain these support systems over time. Indeed, if we are to properly care for an attachment object's good moving into the future beyond our deaths (such as an institution or ideal), the "charmed circle of developmentally significant attachments logically contains within it a demand to expand concern for futures far beyond it in space and time" (180). Groves concludes that this expanding circle of care generates in the present generation an

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obligation to care for future generations via furthering the goods of our attachment objects, continuing these objects along a sociohistorical narrative of care into the future.

The second part of Groves's above question addresses an important point. Not all individuals share the same attachment objects. Indeed, some objects might be incompatible: a person's attachment to an ideal of oil-production is not compatible with an attachment to producing renewable energy. One of these is better for future generations, but under what normative criteria? Groves argues that the kind of social imaginary we ought to further is a *eudaimonic* care imaginary: "the care imaginary looks for flourishing by examining the range of attachments available to an individual in a given society, their histories and potential futures, and the styles of dealing with attachment that are expressed therein" (179). Those attachments that enable individuals to flourish are the attachments to be preferred. Individuals flourish when "subjects are able to participate in practices and institutions that support more solidaristic forms of attachment" (178). That is, those attachments that form solidarity between individuals lessen the future uncertainty one has. Consequently, when people choose to withdraw from these types of attachments, they "undermine the dispositions that are necessary to proper care and for flourishing" (178). Therefore, producing renewable energy is a preferable ideal because it promotes long-term flourishing for future generations.

Overall, the idea behind Groves's future care ethic is that the present generation has obligations to future generations vis-à-vis those in the present caring for (and thereby passing on) their attachment objects. An important advantage to Groves's argument is this: it does not suffer from the nonreciprocity problem. Caring for an attachment object implies a nonreciprocal responsibility to maintain its existence beyond one's own life, by virtue of the constitutive role that object plays for an individual. Therefore, these attachments flow into the future without concern about reciprocation from future generations (129).

However, I argue that there are two reasons that Groves's argument is ultimately unsuccessful. One of those reasons concerns the above-flagged issues on how Groves understands care and relations. The basic point is that Groves's interpretations are too broad to fit into the care ethical framework. That is, to be consistent with earlier criticisms I leveled against Fisher and Tronto, Groves must also account for stretching these concepts beyond what the care ethical framework considers normatively relevant. It may well be that attachments are relations and caring involves furthering an attachment object's good into the future. However, not all relations and forms of care fall within the normative boundaries of the care ethical framework. As such, it is preferable to retain some specificity for how to define care and relations to ensure these concepts retain some intuitive meaning and can be addressed within a well-bounded care ethical framework.

However, the more noteworthy point is that Groves's understanding of these two concepts could render his argument circular. As seen above, Groves argues that a "disavowal of care for future generations implies a simultaneous disavowal of the care that the subject does in fact practice here and now in the present" (Groves 2014,

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151). This is because to genuinely care for an attachment object is to further its good into the future, even if we are not there to experience that good flourishing. Therefore, Groves believes that his obligation to care for the future is justified. However, this conclusion works only because it is already assumed in his understanding of care. Indeed, if it is possible to simultaneously care for an attachment object in the present while wishing its good to not be furthered into the future, then Groves's obligation to care for the future does not follow.

The second problem with Groves's argument concerns what care theorists want out of a future care ethic. If care theorists want a future care ethic that perceives future generations as being of direct moral relevance, then Groves does not offer that ethic. Instead, Groves's future care ethic considers future generations as relevant insofar as they come to relate to the present generation's attachment objects' goods. As I pursue in the next section, perhaps there is a stronger, alternative argument: rather than future generations being normatively relevant insofar as they relate to the attachment objects of the present generation, it is because the present generation *already* directly cares about future generations' well-being, which is what embeds substantial meaning in various attachment objects in the first place. Indeed, attachment objects may lose their meaning if the prospect of future generations inheriting those objects disappeared.

Blueprints for a Future Care Ethic

The problem remains: how to establish normatively relevant relations with future generations within the care ethical framework? In this final section, I offer an answer to this question and, in doing so, present some blueprints for a future care ethic that are preferable to Groves's.

The argument defended in this section draws on a wide range of literature. To enable some focus, here is a brief outline of this argument:

1 Imaginal content is a fundamental element for the moral evaluation of our relations.
2 Present generations can form imaginal content with future generations.
3 Much of what the present generation attaches value to (for instance, their projects and communities) is due to the possibility of future generations inheriting them. Such value is generated through the imaginal content the present generation forms with future generations.
4 Here lies an intergenerational relational interdependency: future generations are dependent on the present generation as the present is dependent on future generations' possibility.
C1 These imaginal relations between present and future generations are *real enough* to be normatively relevant in the care framework.
5 Care theorists' central normative claim is to encourage and sustain good caring relations that enable the individuals involved to survive and flourish.

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6 Future generations are normatively relevant in the care ethical framework (following C1).

C2 Therefore, a sufficientarian theory of obligation is generated: the present generation ought to ensure the conditions that enable good caring relations to flourish for posterity.

I will now defend each premise, beginning with premise 1. As shown earlier, care theorists understand normatively relevant relations as the ties that constitute concrete beings whose lives can be bettered or worsened depending on the care provided or received through such relations. Any relations the present generation has with future generations would be imaginary; that is, they would not be metaphysically real to constitute as normatively relevant. However, perhaps this framing of relations (as being either real or imaginary) is a false dichotomy. Instead, I argue that a middle route can be taken—that although relations between present and future generations will not be metaphysically real, they could still be *real enough* for them to count as normatively relevant within the care ethical framework. Kathryn Norlock has pursued such a route with regard to the present generation's relations to the dead (Norlock 2016). Examining Norlock's argument first will offer some tools to begin establishing normatively relevant relations between present and future generations.

Norlock begins with an interesting claim: a fundamental element of the relations "between living entities include imaginal content that endows our relationships with moral import and meaningfulness," and that this imaginal content can continue "even after one of the relata has died" (Norlock 2016, 343). The concept *imaginal* is of central importance here. It is derived from Mary Watkins, who argues imaginal is different from the words *imagined* and *imaginary* (Watkins 1986). The difference, as Mary Gergen writes, is that whereas "the latter two words suggest something fictional or frivolous, *imaginal* suggests other, more consequential possibilities" (Gergen 2001, 144, n. 3). Whereas the imagined and imaginary have free play within the mental content of a person's mind, imaginal content is constrained by the reality of our interactions with the world. For instance, how we think our close relations will react to shock, anger, or a fun surprise is channeled through our imaginal content of what our close relations are like. Watkins calls this reasoning process *imaginal dialogues*. That is, in developing self-awareness of our place in the world, we develop internal dialogues that help us interpret how we perceive and interact with others. This process is not antithetical to reason, but in service to it—"not imaginary, but developed imaginally on the basis of known actualities" (Norlock 2016, 346).

Relations between contemporaries exist primarily in the imaginal contents of the mind. Though our relations form facts, experiences, and memories, we endow these relational characteristics "with emotional and interpretive content" (352). This imaginal activity is an ongoing, mutually constitutive process. We do not just coexist with other people, but develop and reflect upon accounts of what our relations are like. Some relations we perceive as caring, and we act accordingly within that context. Yet certain feedback may alter our interpretation of that relation (perhaps our care is rejected by the other), in turn altering how we interact with the world and see

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ourselves in it. In other words, our imaginal content helps us reason about the moral state of our relations, forming the basis for action. As Norlock puts it, "our dialogical thinking processes are not fictional creations so much as interpretive narratives based on experiences with real persons" (347).

There are significant implications of acknowledging the importance of imaginal content in care theorists' understanding of relations. Imaginal content forms a fundamental element of how relations are structured, creating the very possibility for their moral evaluation. Explicitly centralizing the imaginal part of our relations opens a doorway for considering how future generations can be normatively relevant within the care ethical framework.

Before demonstrating how, it is worth acknowledging an initial objection to appropriating and applying imaginal content to relations between present and future generations. Norlock's argument is focused on imaginal relations with the dead. There are some clear differences between having imaginal relations with the dead and with future persons. It may be possible to channel what a dead loved one might have said or done, but this is possible only because such a relation did exist in the past. We have memories and emotional content of what that person was actually like. The same cannot be said for future generations, given that they have not yet come into existence. Relations with future generations would seem to be more imaginary that imaginal.

However, I do not think that this objection holds, which leads into premise 2 of my argument: contemporaries can form imaginal content with future generations. Even though it is impossible to concretize what a future person will be like, we can make some important assumptions. For instance, so long as nothing radically happens to the homo sapiens gene pool, we expect future persons to have similar vital interests that will need caring for; that is, interests that pertain to the minimum subsistence levels required for persons to survive and have the opportunity to flourish: "unpolluted air, unpolluted water, adequate food, adequate clothing, adequate shelter, and minimal preventive public health care" (Shue 1996, 23). Moreover, social determinants of health are crucial for a person's survival and flourishing: the active production and reproduction of social relationships and social practices are "structures that are symbolically and substantively constitutive of identity and agency" (Groves 2014, 86). Relations do not exist just so that our vital interests for food and shelter are met; instead, not being grounded in a social structure removes much of the meaning we attach to life, and thereby removes the point of fulfilling our interests of having food and shelter in the first place (Marris 1996, 45).

If these vital interests are taken as a benchmark for well-being, the nonidentity problem need not be invoked. Stephen Gardiner writes that, in the context of dangerous climate change, "it is difficult to believe that the people of 2100 or 2200 will prefer climate instability to stability" (Gardiner 2011, 178). Though choosing between sustainable policies over resource-depletion policies will mean different future persons are born (Parfit 1984, 361–64), perhaps this is the wrong focus. Rather than be concerned with what specific identities will or will not be born (an impossible task), we ought to be concerned with what sort of world we are

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bequeathing to whatever persons are born—something that is within the present generation's control (Sagoff 1988). We ought to choose those policies that stand the best chance of making sure the resultant population has at least their vital interests met. As Gardiner continues, we "do not seem to be swamped by uncertainties about future preferences" (Gardiner 2011, 178). We are aware that future generations will have lives that can be bettered or worsened, and the present generation plays a significant role in establishing the milieu from which those future lives are played out.

Above this benchmark of well-being, different communities and cultures will formulate their own ideas about what ideals and goods they want future generations to inherit. Now, Groves argues that the reason such ideals and goods will be inherited by future generations is that the present generation cares about those ideals and goods—future generations are of indirect moral relevance in this analysis. However, as I suggested in response, Groves's point might be mistaken: a stronger argument can be made that it is because the present generation *already* directly cares about future generations' well-being, which is what embeds substantial meaning in various attachment objects in the first place. Indeed, attachment objects may lose their meaning if the prospect of future generations inheriting those objects disappeared. How the present generation perceives its place in the world in part derives from its imaginal content of what will improve the lives of future generations—this, in turn, shapes the present generation's behavior regarding questions about what sort of world they ought to bequeath. This brings us to premise 3: much of what the present generation attaches value to (for instance, their projects and communities) is due to the possibility of future generations inheriting them. Such value is generated through the imaginal content the present generation forms with future generations.

Premise 3 can be defended by considering Samuel Scheffler's work on this point. Scheffler argues that much of what people in the present find meaningful in their lives is contingent on there being an "afterlife" (in the sense that people will continue to exist after we die). Scheffler outlines a thought experiment to test this intuition. If we learned that a fatal asteroid will hit Earth thirty days after we die, Scheffler contends that many of us will not be indifferent to this news (Scheffler 2013, 18–19). This suggests that something that will not happen until after our deaths can still matter to us, beyond our concerns for the present. Moreover, to use Groves's language, many of our attachment objects will lose the meaning we attach to them if we learned that there would be no more future generations. Of course, this does not support Groves's point that caring for *any* attachment object implies that we want it to continue after we die. It just means that the ultimate success of *some* of our attachments are tied up with the hope that people will continue to derive and receive those objects' benefits into the indefinite future. Often these projects are the most meaningful to us, precisely because they are future-oriented. Artistic, musical, and literary endeavors, improving societal infrastructure, and scientific research are examples of such projects. Scheffler thus offers an "afterlife conjecture": people would lose confidence in the value of many sorts of projects, and would cease to see a reason to continue engaging in those projects, if we learned that there would be no more future generations (Scheffler 2013, 25).

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An objection can be raised at this point. Scheffler is ultimately making a phenomenological argument, addressing like-minded thinkers who share his attitudes (Scheffler 2013, 17–18). It is plausible to think that there are those in the present for whom none of their projects take their meaning from the possibility of there being future generations. Their only concern is what their projects can contribute *now* in the present. I want to argue that all of those in the present have obligations to future generations. How can these persons be persuaded otherwise?

My response is to consider what future-oriented object all, or at least most, of the present generation shares that derives value from its prospect of being inherited. Avner de-Shalit's communitarian argument for a transgenerational community can help in this regard. de-Shalit argues that a "person is conceived as bound by social connections and relationships" (de-Shalit 1995, 15). As seen earlier, care theorists share this assumption, accepting Aristotle's view that the person who lives outside the community is "either a beast or a god" (Aristotle 1998, 1253a30). de-Shalit continues that all persons are a part of some community that extends into the past as it will the future (such as through national identity, religion, or local tradition) (de-Shalit 1995, 15ff.). Indeed, such communities are not ahistorical but are the product of a sociohistorical narrative, which holds value through its recognition of historical roots and, furthermore, its longevity into the future. Without the possibility of future generations, a significant part of what sustains and moves a community into the future dissipates.

Scheffler's argument can be imported at this point. A major reason that gives such communities meaning for those in the present is that they envision future generations inheriting them. In turn, the present generation forms imaginal relations with future generations by virtue of their being part of a transgenerational community. That is, persons use their imaginal content to envision how their community will be inherited by, and make better the lives of, future generations. As such, Scheffler's argument can be extended beyond future-oriented projects (which may belong only to some persons in the present) to include communities too (which encompass all of the present generation—or at least enough that the remainder is minuscule). This extension follows naturally from Scheffler's argument: the meanings attached to future-oriented projects, after all, are often bound up in enhancing, sustaining, and continuing the communities from which they arise.

The present generation, then, is dependent on the possibility of future generations for their projects and communities to have value. Of course, the other side of this argument is that future generations are totally dependent on what sort of world the present generation will bequeath them. Yet even though future generations have no existent voice, those in the present are capable of channeling through their imaginal content what sort of broad wishes future generations would ask for. As seen earlier with Gardiner, it is not too difficult to give voice to future generations' need for sustainable behavior so that their vital interests, at the very least, are cared for. What this all points to is an intergenerational relational interdependency, captured in premise 4 of my argument: future generations are dependent on the present generation as the present is dependent on future generations' possibility. Not only do those in

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the present better or worsen the lives of future generations, but whether there are future generations to speak of also betters or worsens the lives of those in the present. We rely on future persons for value in our own lives, as they rely on us for bequeathing a sustainable world to them.

Of course, this interdependency by no means balances the scales, but it is enough to demonstrate the first conclusion of my argument: imaginal relations between present and future generations are *real enough* to be normatively relevant in the care framework. They are *real enough* in that though such relations are not metaphysically real, they are not fiction either—such relations have a normatively significant role to play in the meaning that the present generation attaches to how their societies ought to be structured. If care theorists seek to structure societal institutions to encourage and sustain good caring relations, this cannot be done without acknowledging the value the present generation attaches to this process vis-à-vis future generations inheriting those institutions.

We thus reach the latter part of my argument. Premise 5 reiterates that care theorists' central normative claim is to encourage and sustain good caring relations that enable the individuals involved to survive and flourish. Indeed, this premise reinforces the point made in premise 2: that the social determinants of health are crucial for a person's survival and flourishing. This forms a sufficiency threshold: we must create the conditions for all persons to be embedded in good caring relations. Yet, as raised in premise 6, if future generations are normatively relevant in the care ethical framework, how should future generations be appropriately accommodated? My answer is that if those in the present are concerned with what sort of world they will bequeath future generations, they will want to ensure that future generations (once they exist) have the resources they need to engage in good caring relations. Care ethics' central normative claim can thus be applied in this way: the present generation ought to ensure the conditions that enable good caring relations to flourish for posterity. Therefore, the resultant future care ethic here generates a sufficientarian theory of obligation.

As Groves noted, different people in the present will recommend different goods and ideals to bequeath to future generations, to encourage and sustain good caring relations. By what normative criteria can we resolve conflicting goods and ideals? Groves's solution is to utilize a *eudaimonic* care imaginary: if an ideal does not exemplify solidarity with encouraging and sustaining good caring relations for all, then it should not be bequeathed. However, I think that Groves's solution can be refined. The care literature has proposed a series of caring values—that is, relational moral considerations of care—that can evaluate the worth of caring relations beyond Groves's sole focus on solidarity. Held has been especially influential here. For Held, caring relations are morally assessed through a cluster of values intertwined with successful caring practices, abstracted to help evaluate and guide caring relations generally (Held 2006).

Elsewhere, I have argued that there are four principal caring values: attentiveness, mutual concern, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Randall 2018).[3] These values can briefly be defined here. Attentiveness, at base, is the recognition of a need that requires attending to, and at most is a critical awareness about what psychological

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and social biases could be preventing the recognition of certain needs (Tronto 1993; DesAutels 2004). Mutual concern is expressed between related beings when there exists a shared interest to make possible the cooperation required to develop and sustain association for the benefit of all involved (Held 2006). Groves's understanding of solidarity slots into this value. Responsiveness refers to the ability of the carer to respond to the cared-for's needs, how attentive the carer is to the response given by the cared-for to determine if the care provided was well-received, and how responsive the carer is to his or her own well-being (Tronto 1993). Trustworthiness characterizes the expectation that persons in a relation will remain loyal and not pursue deceitful or hostile actions toward each other (Baier 2004).

Good caring relations are those that exemplify these values through the practices of care carried out by the individuals involved. To do otherwise would be to the detriment of the relation: if the relation does not exemplify attentiveness, no needs that require caring for are recognized; if the relation does not represent intertwined interests to make possible the cooperation required to develop and sustain association for the benefit of all involved, it is domineering or exploitative; if the relation does not exemplify responsiveness, caring practices are not being delivered successfully; and if the relation lacks trustworthiness, it is deceitful and paranoid. Given our relational interdependency, such outcomes would make our lives worse and are undesired. To ensure the basic minimum requirement for upholding these caring values, a threshold can be derived: avoid and prevent relations that are dominating, exploitative, hostile, negligent, and mistrustful. As such, ensuring the conditions that enable good caring relations to flourish requires that those in the present do not bequeath a world that undermines the possibility of caring values being exemplified in them.

Earlier in this article, I criticized Held's interpretation of care. I said that at least two of the above caring values—mutual concern and trustworthiness—cannot properly emerge between present and future generations because both values imply some form of reciprocation between existent interests and expectations of persons. However, the argument I have defended in this section offers a response to my initial criticism of Held. The present generation's imaginal relations to future generations do not have to directly exemplify the values of care. All that is required is that those in the present bequeath a world that sustains and encourages good caring relations to flourish. That is, those in the present should ensure that they bequeath a world that encourages and sustains relations between future generations that can exemplify mutual concern and trustworthiness, alongside the other values of care.

The specific obligations that emerge from these blueprints will inevitably be contextual, requiring my future care ethic to be applied on a case-by-case basis. However, a general theme emerges: to ensure the conditions that enable good caring relation to flourish, I argue that the present generation must avoid passing on a world that engages in zero-sum games. That is, present-day people ought not to bequeath a world that moves to undermine the possibility of caring values through envisioning noncontemporaries as competitors for benefits. As emphasized in the value of mutual concern, care theorists see the interests of individuals as "importantly intertwined rather than as simply competing" (Held 2006, 15). To overlook mutual concern is to

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fail to recognize our relational interdependency (temporally and spatially) as ontologically basic. This means, for instance, that the present generation should stop what Gardiner calls "intergenerational buck-passing": extracting the benefits of resource use for the present and passing on the costs to future generations without addressing issues of sustainability (Gardiner 2011, 123). Passing on such costs subverts the ability that future generations will have to best attend and respond to one another's needs if they inherit a world without sufficient resources, or the appropriate institutions, to do so. Instead, we ought to promote the conditions that: enable the value of mutual concern to be exemplified; encourage and improve the efficacy of attentiveness and responsiveness to others' needs; and strengthen the trustworthiness that holds communities together.

Notes

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1. Held writes that, in this vein, care ethics is hospitable to methods of discourse ethics (Held 2006, 20). What Held should also emphasize is that by "communication" we ought to mean both verbal and nonverbal methods. Nonverbal methods of communication are particularly important to provide adequate caring for infants or persons incapable of ordinary speech.

2. It is not clear why Groves does not pursue Hannah Arendt's solution to uncertainty (namely, the act of promising). This is speculative, but perhaps Groves chooses to engage with the literature of attachment theory because this literature attests to a verified psychological phenomenon and therefore a more reliable basis from which to base his argument.

3. The reader may think of other values in the care literature. For instance: cheerfulness (Ruddick 1989); competence (Tronto 1993); empathy (Held 2006); forgiveness (Walker 2006); hope (Walker 2006); respect (Tronto 2013); sensitivity (Held 2006); and taking responsibility (Tronto 1993). This article does not consider these other values because either: 1) they are subsumed into one of the four principal values mentioned above, or; 2) they are not intrinsic moral considerations of care. Cheerfulness, competence, and forgiveness are better understood as referring to the attitudes and abilities of the carer as part of the value of responsiveness. Empathy and sensitivity are necessary components for attentiveness and responsiveness, and so are subsumed under them. Respect is also subsumed under attentiveness and responsiveness: if we are not attentive or responsive to the cared-for's need to not be degraded or demeaned through caring practices, then the values of attentiveness and responsiveness are undermined. Hope is an emotion rather than a value, though it is an important factor for generating trustworthiness. Taking responsibility is the manifestation of undertaking what responsibilities our relations generate—not necessarily a value in itself, but certainly a practice that can serve to reinforce the four principal values.

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