Can Politics Practice Compassion?

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On realist terms, politics is about power, security, and order, and the question of whether politics can practice compassion is irrelevant. The author argues that a politics of compassion is possible and necessary in order to address human security needs. She extend debates on care ethics to develop a politics of compassion, using the example of asylum seekers to demonstrate that politics can practice compassion with (1) attentiveness to the needs of vulnerable people who are suffering, (2) an active listening to the voices of the vulnerable, and (3) open, compassionate, and appropriate responses to particular needs.

Emotions influence the ways in which we respond to and engage with our relationships. Emotions also underpin political values and practices. Instances of emotional responses to political practices include anger at racial, gender, and economic injustice, shame at harsh government decisions toward asylum seekers, frustration at political failures to deliver electoral promises, or bewilderment at the direction the "war against terrorism" is taking. Traditionally, men have been associated with reason and women with emotion. The idea has long existed that women are suited to the realms of family, domestic life, and intimacy where tenderness, nurturance, and compassion are valuable qualities. Whereas a concern for feelings was seen by many to limit women's moral reasoning, more recently, feminists have come to see compassionate empathy as "the essence of morality but no longer associated particularly with women" (Gilligan and Wiggins 1988, 111). Feminist perspectives on the emotions break the gender-based dichotomy between male reason and female emotion, arguing that "connection, compassion and affectivity should be recognized as important sources of moral reasoning" for women and men (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 12).

Emotions reveal what is important to us, what we value, how we perceive situations, what affects us, and how we should respond ethically. Emotions are
suppressed and released in private, as well as directed toward others. Herein lies the distinctiveness of feminist uses of emotions in emphasizing "the domain of particular others in relations with one another" (Held 1987, 117). For example, Iris Murdoch, while not always seen as a feminist, suggested "that the central concept of morality is 'the individual' thought of as knowable by love" (1985, 30). Carol Gilligan’s outline of a care ethic specifically is "tied to feelings of empathy and compassion" (1983, 69). Within an ethic of care, personal elements are intrinsic to the moral puzzle. The moral agent focuses on "the feelings and opinions of the relevant others, their relationships, their histories, their individuality and their connectedness" (Cole and Coultrap-McQuin 1992, 4). In the history of feminist analysis of the emotions, compassion has always been a central moral virtue. Feminist ethics values moral traits (traditionally associated with women) like sympathy, nurturance, care, and compassion. Often these traits are used synonymously, but I will argue there is distinctiveness to compassion that can assist an understanding of how care applies not only to relations with one another but also to political relations and those with whom we have no particular relationship. In this essay, I draw broadly on feminist ethics, rather than solely on the ethics of care.\(^2\)

Let me explain this distinction. In her influential Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care, Joan Tronto included compassion as a central value of caring, along with attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, and meeting others’ needs (1993, 3). Further, she argued, "we cannot understand an ethic of care until we place such an ethic in its full moral and political context" (125). Certainly, she maintained "that the practice of care describes the qualities necessary for democratic citizens to live together well in a pluralistic society, and that only in a just, pluralist, democratic society can care flourish" (161–62). While I agree with Tronto that "by starting from the premise that these (caring) practices are central, we are able to place them at the centre of our moral and political universe" (154–55), I suggest that the work of care theorists can be extended. The examples used by feminist theorists advocating an ethic of care typically are such political aspects of the “caring professions” as welfare, health, custody, child care, aged care, or disability rights. These issues are extremely important and undoubtedly political, but I am trying to expand the political domain in which care in the form of compassion is appropriate. While care ethics incorporates feelings of compassion, most writings on care ethics focus the context for the practice of care on personal relationships, many of which are also political relationships. For example, Raja Halwani has stated explicitly: "Care is aimed at particular people that the moral agent is in relation with" (2003, 166). While Tronto wrote differently that “care is not solely private or parochial, it can concern institutions, societies, even global levels of thinking” (1995, 145), in my view, there is minimal application of these themes to those political issues of international relations, where the care of
distant humans is paramount. Fiona Robinson's (2001; 1999) important work is a notable exception.

Admittedly, there is a fine line between care ethics generally and the distinctiveness of a politics of compassion as I am developing it. There often is a conceptual convergence of themes, and thus in elaborating on compassion, I draw explicitly on care theorists. In various instances, I draw more broadly on other international relations and moral theorists to argue that a focus on compassion fosters a more thorough ethical response to politics than many current versions of care ethics because it enables responses to those political issues that are outside of our immediate everyday relationships. I endeavor to clarify where there are clear overlaps between care ethics and a politics of compassion and where the differences are important. The main similarity between care ethics and a politics of compassion lies in the commitment to the particular, contextualized characteristics of care, including the moral requirement of compassion. The main difference lies in the focus of attention. Whereas care ethics is usually directed toward a specific known person, a politics of compassion extends the political domain in which compassion might operate to include examples where we do not personally know the people requiring care, such as with refugees, women raped in war, or civilians killed by the “smart bombs” of the “war on terrorism.” The “ethics of care” broadened into a “politics of care” and a “politics of compassion” extends these debates so that: in situations where there is a lack of previous history and everyday relationship between the parties involved, the role of compassion enlarges and adopts an important feature in the relationship. A politics of compassion links the universal and the particular in that it assumes a shared humanity of interconnected, vulnerable people and requires emotions and practical, particular responses to different expressions of vulnerability.

Also, I suggest (but cannot fully develop here) the applicability of compassion to the so-called hard world of politics, including issues like national and international security, conflict analysis, and decisions about war. All of these issues have an immediate bearing on human security and well-being. I seek to show how the need for a politics of compassion is premised on a shared humanity, that is, our universal vulnerability to risk and the urgency to maintain human dignity. My intention in this essay is to demonstrate that compassionate politics is both possible and necessary to responding emotionally and practically to the need for human security, which for many women and other vulnerable groups means simply feeling “safe.” My argument also is that the emotion of compassion is central to the practice of an ethical life and thus compassionate political responses are integral to decent politics. I apply these arguments to the lack of compassion demonstrated to asylum seekers in Australia and the need for both security and political compassion in the post-9/11 global context.
Most theorists understand compassion as some combination of three factors—feelings, empathy, and co-suffering. First, compassion involves a “feeling with” another person. In an early influential article, Lawrence Blum discussed “compassion as a kind of emotion or emotional attitude [with] an irreducible affective dimension” (1980, 507). Blum categorized compassion as an altruistic virtue given its regard for the well-being of others. What marks the subject of compassion is the graveness of a situation in which persons or groups experience serious pain, anguish, torture, misery, grief, distress, despair, hardship, destitution, adversity, agony, affliction, hardship, and suffering. Blum explained that compassion is not a simple feeling, “but a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person” (509). This imaginative dimension visualized what the other person, given his or her “character, beliefs, and values is undergoing, rather than what we ourselves would feel” in a similar situation (510). Often, we come to some understanding of someone’s plight by imagining what our reactions might be, for example, to having our city bombed, or our daughter raped in war, or our friend called a terrorist simply for looking Middle Eastern. “The limits of a person’s capacities for imaginatively reconstruct set limits on her capacity for compassion” (510). Later, I give instances of politicians’ conspicuous lack of imaginative identification with many groups who clearly are suffering and desperately in need of compassion.

Second, if we understand compassion as “the capacity to feel for others and, to some extent, share their emotions and enter into their predicament” (Porter 1999, 184), feminists are divided as to the extent to which one can empathize with others. For example, Seyla Benhabib has supported an egalitarian reciprocity that recognizes “the dignity of the generalized other through an acknowledgement of the moral identity of the concrete other” (1992, 164). To this end, the more we seek to identify with another, the greater likelihood we have of being able to understand some of this person’s deep needs. In response, Iris Young maintained “that identifying moral respect and reciprocity with symmetry and reversibility of perspectives tends to close off the differentiation among subjects that Benhabib wants to keep open” (1997, 41). I argue elsewhere that we must put ourselves in the position of others to grasp the nature of our differences, otherwise, “we fail to risk the vulnerability of being truly open to others” (2000, 175). Admittedly, in doing this, we may be repulsed by our differences. Yet the process of opening ourselves to others’ situations is, as I argue more fully later, part of beginning a dialogue. Clearly, there are limits to how fully we can identify with others. Those who lost loved ones in the 2001 attacks on the United States, the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2003 Madrid bomb, the 2005 London bomb, or who continue to lose loved ones in Afghanistan,
Iraq, Israel, Palestine, or elsewhere, feel the pain differently from those who watch television accounts. Those involved in refugee advocacy or who befriend asylum seekers listen to firsthand narratives and can empathize with firsthand knowledge of peoples’ pain. As I expand upon later, compassion is grounded in the universality of human vulnerability, and it requires meaningful responses to particularity that avoid presumptuous paternalism.

Knowing how to respond to differences is important, given that there are linguistic differences in defining the empathetic aspects to “compassion.” Milan Kundera pointed out that language that derives from Latin forms “compassion” by combining the prefix meaning “with” (com) and the root meaning “suffering” (passio). Other languages use the root “feeling.” The difference is significant. In the former example, “compassion” means: we cannot look on coolly as others suffer, or we sympathize with those who suffer”; in the latter, compassion has a broader meaning, where to have co-feeling means to feel the emotions of joy, anxiety, happiness, or pain with the person involved (Kundera 1989, 20). Compassionate co-feeling “therefore signifies the maximal capacity of affective imagination” as the supreme sentiment (1989, 20). Similarly, Martha Nussbaum uses the words “pity” and “compassion” as a single emotion. She explains that it was from the Victorian era onward that pity “acquired nuances of condescension and superiority to the sufferer that it did not have formerly” (Nussbaum 1996, 29). Nussbaum defines pity as “a painful emotion directed at another person’s misfortune or suffering” (1996, 31). Yet, Nel Noddings differentiated the two and suggested that when “one feels pity . . . the appropriate response is one of compassion” (1984, 211).

In the third aspect of compassion, there are important differences between having sympathy for and co-feeling, or what many writers refer to as co-suffering. Whereas with empathy someone tries to identify similarly emotions to understand sympathetically how the person is feeling, co-feeling implies attachment “as identifying with and feeling the suffering of others” (Arendt 1973, 81). Empathy sympathetically identifies with others’ emotions, but compassion feels pain and responds accordingly. As Sara Ruddick put it, in “imaginatively apprehending another’s pain as painful” the compassionate person is “pained by the other’s pain, and . . . acts to relieve the other’s suffering” (1992, 152). For Ruddick, compassion differed from pity, empathy, and co-feeling. The compassionate person does not and should not try to actually share the other’s suffering. Such appropriation almost always leads to misunderstanding, and romantic, masochistic, or mystifying identifications. As Nussbaum also has expressed this point, compassion involves empathetic identification, where “one is always aware of one’s own separateness from the sufferer” (1996, 35). The compassionate person is pained by another’s distinctive pain and acts to relieve it.

Compassionate co-suffering presupposes a sense of shared humanity. “The other person’s suffering is seen as the kind of thing that could happen to
anyone, including oneself” (Blum 1980, 511). While there is inequality of suffering, compassion promotes the equality of possibility, in that cancer, death of one’s child, retrenchment, or a terrorist attack could happen to anyone. As humans, we are all vulnerable to suffering. Thus respect for the equal worth of every person’s humanity is crucial to compassionate co-suffering, “for without it, compassion runs the danger of being a form of charity and condescension toward those less fortunate” (Bunch 2002, 16). Co-suffering occurs only when there is a “care respect” for others in which we try to discover how someone views herself and her world, “trying to understand what it is like to be her living her life from her point of view” (Dillon 1992, 75). The respect is demonstrated by promoting another’s good, which can only transpire after careful attention to the other’s needs. Such attention requires a sympathetic engagement that expresses a valuing of the person. This underlying respect for the feelings of others removes the arrogance of deciding for others whether their needs are “real” (Gilligan and Wiggins 1988, 132). Therefore, “in compassion, I am moved by what you are going through, not what I am going through, concerned about your condition, not about mine” (Spelman 1997a, 120). Further I am moved by your experiences, and not because your pain has reminded me of my own past or present pain. Often, in listening to others tell of their pain, we quickly respond by recalling an incident in our own lives when we experienced a similar type of pain. Our story might help us connect with another, but we need to concentrate our attention on the other’s plight in order to demonstrate compassion.

The relationship between universalism and particularism is an important dimension to my theory of compassion. As mentioned above, compassion presupposes shared humanity, but is an emotional and practical response to particularity; the compassionate person is, after careful consideration, making a reasoned judgment about the needs of a specific person, group, or sociopolitical concern. Sometimes we misjudge. Intrinsic to this particularity is a sense of connectedness, where the compassionate person recognizes his/her relationship as parent, colleague, neighbor, fellow citizen, or as someone implicated in the wider global context. There are different degrees of intensity of connections. For example, Noddings (1984) distinguished between a direct “caring for” and an indirect “caring about.” When we care about an issue, we select indirect strategies to address needs, so we may donate to charity or vote for politicians who prioritize welfare over defense budgets. Given the indirect nature of this care, we rarely can observe the direct effects of our care and we are not responsible for these effects. Such “caring about” readily “lends itself to self-righteous talk,” in that we can act as if we are compassionate without really having to do “the hard, direct work of caring-for” (Noddings 1998, 162). Realistically, there are many issues we cannot care for in a direct fashion because of distance, limited resources, or ignorance, such as knowing how best to care for the plight of
people in war-ravaged nations. While minimal, caring about others is morally preferable to indifference. However, to go beyond a token gesture, we should find out whether our caring has translated efficaciously. These distinctions have relevance for the way we prioritize a commitment to compassion. For example, we might claim that while our own children's hunger takes precedence over that of children we do not know, consideration of worldwide starvation and malnutrition ought to come before the purchase of expensive toys (Held 1987, 119). In a politics of compassion, the universal and particular considerations are kept in taut balance, a theme I return to frequently.

I have summarized a range of feminist usages of compassion as an important emotion and a central moral virtue. I have suggested that most often, compassion is understood as feeling with a sufferer and imaginatively identifying with these feelings to become a co-sufferer in order to respond appropriately. My theorization of compassion in the rest of this article is based on my understanding of a three-stage process of feeling pain, discerning needs, and responding wisely. I maintain that each process is necessary for the fullest expression of compassion. First, the compassionate person feels the pain of another, and in experiencing some anguish becomes a co-sufferer, whether this other is known personally to her or not. Second, the compassionate person tries to identify imaginatively with the other in order to understand the sufferer's viewpoint on her suffering and what might relieve her pain. The sufferer is not a passive victim. Hence, in this stage, the compassionate person attends to her interests, listens, heeds, and judges perceptively in order to discern how best to respond to the sufferer's needs and minimize the chance of misjudgment. Third, the compassionate person responds to the suffering and needs of the sufferer with compassionate practical wisdom. This practical wisdom is in the Aristotelian sense of phronesis, where there is an understanding of appropriate feelings, careful deliberation, scrutiny of one's options, and the carrying out of good intentions through effective, reasoned choices. Before elaborating on this three-stage process of compassion as emotion and response, I clarify some conceptual issues that block people from imagining the possibility of political compassion.

Conceptualizing Compassion in Realpolitik

Can compassion, as I have outlined it, be applied to international relations and the tough issues of global politics? We are familiar with realist notions of politics as power and of global politics as balances of power among competing states. On realist terms, the idea that politics is ultimately for the welfare of citizens becomes subordinate to national security and international order, and military force and economic globalization are readily justified. On these terms, the question of whether politics can practice compassion appears irrelevant. However, care ethics does not always provide an adequate response to this question.
For example, Tronto listed the four ethical elements of care as “attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness” (1993, 127). She maintained also that these qualities “need not be restricted to the immediate objects of our care, but can also inform our practices as citizens” (167–68). I reiterate that the practices most typically referred to by care ethicists are those relating to personal relationships and to the caring professions. These are tremendously important, but I am trying to extend the parameters of application by suggesting that a feminist politics of compassion, with values and practices that clearly overlap with care ethics are applicable to realpolitik. The political cynic recognises global inequalities, poverty, genocide, refugee crises, war, and terrorism, and while acknowledging the many who are suffering, feels a pragmatic helplessness. I present a counter view that is aware of these global realities, including the need for national security, but I argue that compassionate politics is possible and necessary in order to address human security needs and that feminists have much to offer in elaborating on the possibilities. It is a matter of balancing national and international security with human security and being prepared to adjust political decisions that have a negative impact on human well-being. It means admitting misjudgments (for example, those who allowed the war in Iraq to be justified on incorrect claims about weapons of mass destruction), something leaders of the “coalition of the willing” will not do. I draw on feminist moral philosophers referred to above, and from political and international relations theorists who have normative commitments to upholding human rights and responding with compassion to global suffering.10

It is true that feminism should become “more international, more attentive to the urgent problems” of inequality in hunger, health care, and the political rights of women (Nussbaum 1999, 131). However, “feminist approaches to ethics in the context of world politics remain barely visible” (Robinson 2001, 69). The bringing together of ethics, feminism, and international relations has “traditionally been seen as inappropriate” (Hutchings 2001, 194). Most people take for granted that compassion is essential in personal relationships, but are reluctant to grasp the importance of compassion in political relationships. Before looking at examples of how political compassion might be practiced, particularly in terms of the plight of asylum seekers who arrive to Australia’s shores on boats, I discuss three conceptual objections to the possibility of these practices. The reason I do so is to highlight further the similarities and differences between care ethics and a politics of compassion. First, there is the objection that compassion is only personal and thus inapplicable to politics. Second, there is the objection that justice and care are separate moral perspectives. Third, there is the objection that we are responsible only for personal connections. Against these objections, I argue that compassion is needed in personal relationships and in global politics; compassionate justice is possible; and that we have obligations to be compassionate whenever possible.
First, critics counter that care ethics, which includes compassion, is too personal and provides an unsustainable basis for ethical politics. However, I agree with Fiona Robinson, that a "critical ethics of care" that is characterized by a relational ontology accepts that "relationships are both a source of moral motivation and moral responsiveness" to global concerns (1999, 2). Robinson argues that the political priority placed on autonomy, independence, noninterference, self-determination, reciprocity, fairness, and rights mean that liberal ethics characterizes the "acceptable voice of morality" in international relations. She argues further that this "has resulted in the creation of a global 'culture of neglect' through a systematic devaluing of notions of interdependence, relatedness, and positive involvement in the lives of distant others" (7). Her emphasis on "a critical politicized ethics of care" (47) is crucial. Compassion, imagination, and responsiveness are needed for deliberation about meeting peoples' needs, but, as Alison Jaggar reiterated, critical reflection also is needed on "the structures that create these needs or keep them unfulfilled" (1995, 197). Take for example women's illiteracy. A critical compassionate stance is needed to break through the cultural and religious barriers that make women's education a low national priority in many parts of the world. The central component to Robinson's "critical feminist ethics" is the analytical scrutiny of the contextual relations within global politics. Her point is that ethics in global politics is concerned not just with specific crises such as the moment when ethnic relations break down and erupt into violence, or barbaric genocide occurs, or the "coalition of the willing" invades a country. It is also concerned with the nature and quality of "normal" social relations that contribute to processes of marginalization, exclusion, and powerlessness that so often prompt violent conflict (1999, 144).

Attachments among people, states, and the international community can build self-esteem and enhance feelings of safety. Or, they can contribute to inequalities, violence, domination, and exclusions that undermine dignity and lead to relations of oppression and feelings of insecurity. In politics, compassion is needed most frequently to address the "felt injustice" that arises in relationships (Shklar 1990, 50),1' such as when an asylum seeker becomes a detainee, or citizens are left dispossessed or homeless after the invasion of their national territory, or girls are raped in war. Without political compassion, these personal feelings of injustice fester unheeded because the person who is suffering feels and believes there is a lack of recognition of her pain. "We cannot lose our humanity even when our dignity is horribly violated" (Cornell 2003, 172). The importance of dignity is what makes a "crime against humanity" so abhorrent. Injustice is felt also by collective groups like indigenous people, colonized people, and agriculturalists whose land is degraded by multinational exploitation of natural resources. It is true that the motivation to respond to injustice might not always be compassion, but, perhaps, a hatred for the
bullies, corporatists, nations, or superpower that cause suffering. However, the underlying motivation still is sensitivity toward those in distress and thus those who are suffering are helped as a side effect. To summarize, my first counter to critics is that compassion is necessary in personal relationships and also in sociopolitical arenas.

**Compassionate Justice in Politics**

Second, the question of the relationship between justice and care has absorbed many debates. Gilligan argues that justice and care are “two cross-cutting perspectives” (1987, 25) that cut across egoism and altruism. She argues that “we all are vulnerable to oppression and abandonment, two moral visions recur. “The moral injunction not to act unfairly toward others, and not to turn away from someone in need, capture these different concerns” (20) of justice and care. Within these concerns, a lack of compassion is made problematic—“what appears as dispassion within a justice framework appears as detachment from a care perspective” (Gilligan and Wiggins 1988, 128). Imbalance between an attention to justice and an attention to care has marked effects. For example, at the political level, the replacement of compassion for justice has been responsible for “morally discrepable aspects of Victorian Poor Law” with its spurious notions of the “deserving poor” (Mendus 2000, 107). Yet women’s development and aid agencies struggle constantly to deal with the structural inequalities and injustices that confront those they are assisting, but know that some immediate help is preferable to none at all. In this vein, Anne Philips is right to have argued that “compassion cannot substitute for the impartiality of justice and equality” (1991, 156). However, I agree with Nussbaum that compassion is “intimately related to justice” and rights (1996, 37). Compassion in care ethics focuses on people’s pain and specific needs, but within a political context, it requires also the realization of human rights, and the fulfillment of liberty, equality, and justice for needs to be met. A struggle for justice and the realization of human rights is part of striving toward a compassionate society.

I am defending the position that it is possible to be politically compassionate and just and that such a claim should be disentangled from notions of gender. I dispute the essentialist claim that women are naturally compassionate. However, because of women’s traditional association with caring and their role as primary parent, many women are experienced in caring and tend to respond readily with compassion. As others also argue (Philips 1993, 70; Sevenhuijzen 1998, 13), I am emphasizing the interplay between the particularity of compassion and the universality of justice. Undoubtedly, the dichotomy of public justice associated with masculinity and private care associated with femininity narrowed moral parameters, harmfully cementing restrictive gendered stereotypes. Rather, the relationship between compassion and justice is rich. Compassion
“helps us recognize our justice obligations to those distant from us” (Clement 1996, 85). Examples of justice obligations include welfare programs; foreign aid; famine and disaster relief; humane immigration policies; and relieving the suffering of families who are affected by terrorism in Bali, Iraq, Israel, London, Morocco, Northern Ireland, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, the United States, and elsewhere. A choice between justice and compassion is false; considerations of justice “arise in and about the practice of care” (Bubeck 1995a, 189). Thus, a defense of the need for compassion is as much a defense for the rights of justice.

Anticipating this defense was Elizabeth Bartlett’s (1992) interpretation of Albert Camus’ concept of rebellion in the novel The Plague. She made three points that resonate with my argument on the relationship between justice and care. First, justice originates from care. In Camus’ ethic of rebellion, the passionate demand for justice and rights comes from compassionately witnessing and being outraged by such aggressive acts as battering, abuse, or police brutality, such incomprehensible injustices as innocent children suffering from malnutrition, and various forms of others’ oppression. As Bartlett remarked, “It is these moments of compassionate recognition of human dignity, not a dispassionate calculation of rights, which give rise to the demand for justice” (1992, 84). Second, both justice and care imply community. In The Plague, rebellion is a rejection of all forms of oppression. Acts of compassion are choices to “suffer with” others in order to build solidarity. Third, care defines justice. For Camus, “only those actions which retain the impulse and commitment to care serve justice” through compassionate responses (Bartlett 1992, 86). This strong notion of compassionate justice in politics is necessary if we are to respond meaningfully to peoples’ pain. The defense of compassionate justice is prominent in feminist literature because of women’s historical experience of injustice and because of women’s traditional association of caring. It is also prominent in postcolonial and development discourse where there are attempts to redress political injustice with the practical, compassionate development of human well-being.

Responsibility for Connections

The third potential barrier to realizing political compassion lies in the controversy as to who and what we are responsible for. I have argued elsewhere that responsibilities are based on the principles of connection (1991, 159). We carry out responsibilities through moral engagement with others. The question, “how can I (we) best meet my (our) caring responsibilities?” (Tronto 1993, 137) is central to, but not exclusive to, feminist ethics. Jean-Marc Coicaud and Daniel Warner, in expanding the relational dimension of ethics, argue that “somehow, we owe something to others and that our ability to handle what we owe to others
decides in some sense who we are" (2001, 2). Yet this is not easy in practice. In our socially embodied moral world, our identities, relationships, and values differentially define our responsibilities. Practices of responsibility are situated culturally and many need changing. For example, in a materialist, technocratic age dominated by self-interest, compassionate impulses toward those who are suffering are dismissed readily as time-consuming, or consciences are salvaged by a quick donation to charity while complaining of "compassion fatigue." Yet after the anguish of 9/11, people in many nations reassessed their priorities and lifestyles, reaching out to loved ones and strangers in affirming ways.14

Some feminists see the particularity of responsibility as an obstacle to realizing political compassion. For example, Susan Mendus argues that "identity and morality are constituted by actual relationships of care between particular people," thus the concept of care does not translate readily to the wider political problems of hunger, poverty, refugee status, and war that require solutions for people we do not know (2000, 106). As I am arguing, it is not care alone or a particular relationship of care that enables compassionate responsibility, but a merging of a compassionate drive with a search for justice, equality, and rights. Caring for someone necessarily encompasses a concern for his or her equality and rights. I am supporting a strong notion of compassionate justice that accepts responsibilities toward "particular others" who can include "actual starving children in Africa with whom one feels empathy" (Held 1987, 118). If we take seriously the idea of global interdependence, then regardless of our specific nationalities and races, we have "duties" to people who are distant from us and belong to other communities (Midgley 1999, 161). Amartya Sen also believes we have a "multiplicity of loyalties" (1996, 113) to humanity, our nation, city, community, family, and friends. Simone Weil's notion of "justice as compassion" also is one in which mutual respect for all humans grounds our obligations to prevent suffering and harm. She believes that we have an unconditional obligation not to let a single human suffer "when one has the chance of coming to his assistance" (quoted in R. Bell 1998, 114).15 This qualifier is important. We cannot assume responsibility for all suffering, to do so is naïve. We can assume, however, some responsibility to try to alleviate suffering whenever we can.

Yet, as intimates earlier, in order to move beyond empathy, we must also address claims for justice and equality. Again, I suggest that without the compassionate drive that is prompted by visualizing the pain of injustice, we will not feel peoples' anguish, or bother to consider what they need. As individuals, we have responsibilities beyond our personal connections to assist whenever it is within our capacities and resources to do so. I do not want to give the impression that our entire lives should be devoted to attending to others' needs. To do so would return women to exclusive nurturance at the expense of self-development and public citizenship. It is, rather, a matter of acting with compassion when it
is possible to do so, and the possibility of course is debatable and requires priorities, which differ with us all. Politically, this means that politicians, nations, and international organizations have a similar responsibility to alleviate the suffering that results when peoples' basic needs are not met. There is a heavy responsibility on wealthy nations where the extent of poverty and misery is not as conspicuous as elsewhere to assist less wealthy nations.\textsuperscript{16} State responsibility is acute when suffering is caused by harsh economic policies, careless sales of arms and military weapons, severe immigration rules, and obscene responses to terrorism by further acts of violence. With the majority of these massive global issues, most of us can only demonstrate the first stage of co-suffering, and perhaps move to the second and debate the merit of options that might meet peoples' needs, and alleviate suffering. This vocal civic debate can provoke the third process of political responses that actually lead to political compassion. Given nations' moral failures of compassion and such conspicuous evidence of oppression, exploitation, brutality, and indifference, we need to be observant, and understand the implications of a failure to practice compassion.

To summarize this section, the conceptual barriers that prevent the practice of political compassion are significant but surmountable. Compassion is not too personal for politics. Rather, it can be the emotion that helps prompt a critical scrutiny of institutional structures; it is the driving force toward the practice of compassionate justice; and, as an emotion and response, it broadens political responsibilities.

\textbf{Political Compassion}

I now argue that political compassion is linked to the political goals of a good society and is achievable politically.\textsuperscript{17} This argument contrasts with that of Hannah Arendt, who wrote that compassion abolishes the distance between citizens and thus is "politicallySpeaking, irrelevant and without consequence" (1973, 86). Arendt's belief is that whereas the public arena is a site for deliberation, dissent, and argument, compassion requires a direct response that talking distorts. Certainly, too much abstract discussion on poverty, asylum seekers, detention camps, or the effects of war delays actual decisions for change. However, later, I argue that dialogue is a crucial way for all concerned groups to ascertain the best way to respond to peoples' feelings of vulnerability.

Particularly in the current global climate of heightened vulnerability to terrorist attacks, the need for protection is powerful. Within liberal democracies, we are more accustomed to emphases on autonomy and self-sufficiency than the need for protection. While care ethics recognizes that we all are vulnerable in the sense that fortune and fate are "morally arbitrary" (Porter 1995, 181) and this is why it is important that we care about each other, most care ethics literature refers to the vulnerable either as children or as those requiring
welfare, disability rights, or health care. In the present international context, we often lose sight of personal powerlessness and politically equate vulnerability with minimizing the possibility of terrorist threats. Considerations of national security thus dominate over human security. Certainly, terrorist threats must be dealt with appropriately, but the means of national protection should not be at the expense of the emotional safety of such vulnerable groups as asylum seekers. States need to maximize security, but “there are broader understandings of human security that encompass social well-being and the security of political, civil, social, cultural, and economic rights” (Porter 2003b, 9). The defense of human security can adopt an attitude toward the vulnerable of protective “holding,” which minimizes harmful risk and reconciles differences (Ruddick 1990, 78–79). How democratic nations deal with the vilification or reconciliation of cultural and religious differences is central to the practice of political compassion.

For example, asylum seekers rightfully seek refuge, safety, and security, under United Nations conventions. These rights include the right to seek asylum and the right to request assistance to secure safety in their own countries. Those seeking such rights increasingly are facing governments with tightened borders. In multicultural states, tolerance, trust, and openness are essential for positive civic relationships. Since 9/11, there has been a movement away from open tolerance to closed dichotomies based on an “othering,” a stereotyping of groups considered different from “us.” These dichotomies are not harmless opposites; they “mask the power of one side of the binary to control the other” (D. Bell 2002, 433), like us/them, citizen/foreigner, friends/enemies, and good/evil. Absolutist dichotomies are blind to nuances, middle-ground positions, particular contexts, and connections, all the considerations of judgment needed for wise, compassionate decisions. Importantly, absolutist dichotomies are oblivious to the pain of those who are excluded, those most in need of protection. They make people feel “at risk” simply for looking different or having a different faith. Those with absolutist views see “illegal immigrants” and “queue jumpers” rather than desperate, fearful people seeking legitimate asylum. A classic example of this binary control is President George W. Bush’s ultimatum, “If you’re not with us, you’re against us.” A simplistic with us/against us, free world/axis of evil analysis cements an inclusion/exclusion that fails to comprehend the pain of those who are excluded.

In Australia, asylum seekers, people from Middle Eastern cultures, and many with a Muslim faith feel excluded. The mythology of Australia portrays a tolerant, diverse, open, multicultural society. Historically, colonized Australia’s “other” were Southern European immigrants perceived as less “white” than Anglo-Celts and Northern European immigrants, then the “other” became Asians. The gaze shifted during the Gulf War to those from the Middle East.
Most asylum seekers coming to Australia in recent years are Muslim, mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq, fleeing the terror of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's regime. Ferment over Australia's refusal to allow the landing of unseaworthy vessels carrying frightened asylum seekers to Australian shores, the subsequent processing of some refugee claims in poor Pacific Islands, and the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia shaped the context in which news of the September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent retaliation in Afghanistan and Iraq occurred. Then Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock and Prime Minister John Howard actively fostered fear in the Australian population by promoting ideas that asylum seekers might be terrorists or morally shallow people who throw their children overboard to force a rescue. Such belittling claims have attached to Arab-Australians more generally and this "othering" has led to group vilification, such as toward Middle Eastern Muslims, which is happening widely in many Western nations. Some of the harmonious nature of multicultural Australia is breaking down and mosques are subject to arson, racist graffiti is increasing, and women wearing the hijab or even a head scarf often are tormented. The Australian government has ideologically legitimized a fear that justifies strengthening protection, a concept reduced to minimizing terrorist threats by tightening border controls and limiting entry through immigration.\textsuperscript{18} Terrorism is linked irrationally with asylum seekers, and immigration policy with protection against external threats and national defense.

What are lost in these responses to asylum seekers are the personal factors that drive people to take desperate measures to flee their countries. Suffering, persecution, torture, intimidation, death threats, abuse, suppression of rights, and fear propel people to seek asylum and claim their legitimate right to seek refugee status under internationally recognized conventions. In Australia, most politicians in power and in opposition parties refuse to imagine what it is like to be placed in mandatory detention camps in remote outposts with poor facilities, run worse than many prisons.\textsuperscript{19} Such shameful treatment of mandatory detention is a morally repugnant "ethnic caging" (Hage 1998, 106). The detainees sometimes go on hunger strikes, young people have sewn their lips together in protest, suicides occur, psychological trauma is intense, and children are not properly educated. The Australian government has failed to attend, listen, and react humanely to their suffering. In response to this failure and the similar failures of other governments, I suggest that political compassion can occur with a combination of three central features: first, attentiveness to the suffering of vulnerable people who are experiencing pain, marginalization, belittlement, and loss of citizen rights; second, active listening to the voices of sufferers in order to discern their needs; and third, compassionate, appropriate, wise responses to particular needs.
ATTENTIVENESS TO SUFFERING

First, attentiveness to suffering is needed because as fragile, vulnerable humans, we all suffer sometimes. The suffering I refer to here is that which has political implications. “How we engage with the suffering humanity around us affects and mirrors the health of our souls and the health of society” (Spelman 1997a, 12). Feeling compassion is a moral prompt to encourage a response to those we know are suffering. Nussbaum suggests that compassion rests on three beliefs about the nature of suffering. First, that the suffering is serious, not trivial. Second, “that the suffering was not caused primarily by the person’s own culpable actions” (1996, 31). For example, suffering is caused by mercenaries or armies who murder all men in a village as “soft targets”; “smart bombs” that “surgically” destroy independent media networks and family homes; “friendly fire” that accidentally kills allies; and missiles on “probing missions” that kill civilians in war as “collateral damage.” The Australian government’s mandatory policy of detaining asylum seekers causes suffering. Third, “the pitier’s own possibilities are similar to those of the sufferer” (31). Compassion acknowledges vulnerability, an admittance of one’s own weakness, without which arrogant harshness prevails. For this reason, those who have suffered great hardship, pain, or loss are often the most compassionate. Yet, we do not wish suffering on anyone simply to teach what is required for compassion. Cornelio Sommaruga, who headed the International Committee of the Red Cross for ten years, has reflected that it was his “daily realization that the more one is confronted with the suffering caused by war, the less one becomes accustomed to it” (1998, ix). Just as Weil used the term “discernment” (quoted in R. Bell 1998), Nussbaum suggests that “judgment” that does not utilize the “intelligence of compassion in coming to grips with the significance of human suffering is blind and incomplete” (1996, 49). This judgment is crucial for understanding the conditions that give rise to injury and thus to the wise responses that might address such harms.

When the experience of, for example, being in a detention camp in a remote desert area seems to crush the morale of asylum seekers, attentiveness to their plight in the form of gifts, letters, and practical or legal help affirms their humanity. We see this dignity explained in Seyla Benhabib’s concept of the “generalized other,” which treats people as having equal rights and duties including the right to seek asylum when one has been persecuted, and the “concrete other,” which “requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution” (1987, 164). Ethical politics is about trying to cultivate decent polities that affirms human dignity. Such politics acknowledges the uniqueness of citizens, and affirms “our humanity in making others part of our lives while recognizing their right to be different” (Coicaud and Warner 2001, 13). It is
by no means simple to humanize the experience of the other when that experience is horrific, such as in torture, war-rape, sexual trafficking, or existing in detention camps. The “humanizing” comes in recognizing the intensity of pain, feeling some of the anguish, and realizing human vulnerability to the point of appreciating that in different situations, we too might be tortured, raped, forced into prostitution, or seeking asylum. Yet there are competing interpretations of the nature of pain and its causes, consequences, and moral, religious, and social significance. Debating pain and suffering places it in a political space. A compassionate society that values people must value different people with different interpretations of what is needed to ease suffering. It is hypocritical for states to mouth the rhetoric of compassion and respect of obligations to others, but in practice to ignore suffering. For example, mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia can last for many years. Isolation, uncertainty, separation from families, and memories of past traumas in one’s country of origin often lead to mental breakdown or prolonged anguish. Yet the Australian government claims to respect the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

I have explained what constitutes suffering and that attentiveness affirms dignity. I clarify further the nature of attentiveness. If morality is about our concerned responsiveness, attention is the prerequisite to intense regard. Iris Murdoch borrowed the concept of “attention” from Simone Weil “to express the idea of a just and loving gaze” (1985, 34) on the reality of particular persons. Part of the moral task is, as Murdoch reiterated, to see the world in its reality—to see people struggling in pain and despair. Weil, too, gave “attention” a prominent place, grounded in concrete matters of exploitation, economic injustice, and oppression. Her emphases were pragmatic in struggling against the debilitating nature of life—how “it humiliates, crushes, politicizes, demoralizes, and generally destroys the human spirit” (quoted in R. Bell 1998, 16)—and idealistic in striving to put ideals into practice. Too readily, we think about suffering in the height of media accounts of famine, suicide bombings, terrorist attacks, refugee camps, and war’s destructive impact, and retreat quickly into our small world of self-pity. As Margaret Little explains, Murdoch’s point was that “the seeing itself is a task—the task of being attentive to one’s surroundings” (1995, 121). We need to “see” reality in order to imagine what it might be like for others, even when this includes horrific images from war violence. Yet despite the presence of embedded journalists, media reporting of such events as the invasion of Iraq has remained entirely typical in that “the experience of the people on the receiving end of this violence remains closed to us” (Manderson 2003, 4). Without political imagination, we will not have compassionate nations. “Without being tragic spectators, we will not have the insight required if we are to make life somewhat less tragic for those who . . . are hungry, and oppressed, and in pain” (Nussbaum 1996, 88). In order for political leaders to demonstrate
compassion, they should display the ability to imagine the lives led by members of the diverse groups that they themselves lead. Otherwise, dispassionate detachment predominates and acts like the 2003 invasion of Iraq lead to talk of freedom without seeing fear, assume liberation without replacing the losses, and abuse power without addressing people’s pain. “The difference, for instance, between someone who discerns the painfulness of torture and someone who sees the evil of it is that the latter person has come to see the painfulness as a reason not to torture” (Little 1995, 126). Attentive ethics in international relations is about priorities and choices.

To focus these priorities, Nussbaum makes compassion central to her ideas on human capabilities; which include being able to show concern for others and “to imagine the situation of another and to have compassion for that situation” (1995, 84). Such compassion crosses class, national, racial, and gender boundaries as compassionate colleagues, NGOs, policy makers, lawyers, legislators, or politicians imagine different positions, and come “to see the obstacles to flourishing faced by human beings in these many concrete situations” (Nussbaum 1996, 51). Thus, in order to appreciate the richness of diversity and the complexity of struggle, Nussbaum argues that what is needed is a multicultural education that promotes compassionate citizenship. Part of this education is to become as knowledgeable as possible about people’s lives, including the issues most of us have not had to endure, such as sexual slavery, seeking asylum, starvation, torture, or having a missile hit our marketplace. I am not suggesting that we should spend all of our time dwelling on suffering and pain, or that we should feel guilty at enjoying the pleasures and delights in life. I am suggesting that we become mindful of and knowledgeable about diverse ways to understand pleasure and pain.

In my view, Weil’s question, “Why am I being hurt?” (quoted in R. Bell 1998, 44) penetrates to the core of suffering. Accordingly, she tied justice with compassion, where no harm is done. Attentiveness to suffering listens to the cry of hurt. If part of the aim of justice is to prevent harm, then political strategies must attend to the circumstances that induce harm, such as inhumane policies toward asylum seekers and the reasons why the persecution they are fleeing arose. The way of justice as compassion translates beyond individual connections to attentive relationships within communities and between nations, an attention that is not motivated solely by economic benefit or strategic interest.

**Active Listening to Discern Needs**

Second, to be attentive requires a careful, sensitive listening to sufferers’ voices in order to discern their needs. Listening assumes a willingness to accept that others’ stories affect one’s life. In our rapid-paced world, the art of listening,
hearing, and attending to each other has diminished; it is an art that needs to be restored. We should never assume we know people’s needs without listening to their stories. Arendt wrote strongly, “Compassion speaks only to the extent that it has to reply directly to the sheer expressionist sound and gestures through which suffering becomes audible and visible” (1973, 86). However, she suggested that the cry of suffering requires swift, direct action, so political processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromises are inappropriate. I disagree with Arendt here. All those working in refugee rights, whether in advocacy groups, political parties, law reform, NGOs, or the United Nations, adopt political processes of debate and persuasion in order to respond perceptively to peoples’ stories about their needs. Listening involves a willingness to be attentive. It does not presuppose empathy, but it does require us to be open to “the possibility that what we hear will require change from us” (Bickford 1996, 149). Truth is often hard to digest. In conflict societies, “the importance of sharing stories about pain and fear is a crucial starting point to building trust between adversaries as ‘both sides’ come to realize that there is common ground in the shared nature of pain and suffering and the desire for reconciliation” (Porter 2003a, 262).

Those who commit acts of terror, or, as asylum seekers, put themselves at the mercy of unseaworthy vessels, or self-harm as detainees, often despair deeply of being heard without resorting to desperate measures or horrific acts. Within multicultural democracies, there is a responsibility to listen and to respond. The duty to listen includes being exposed to “unsavoury views like religious beliefs we disagree with, cultural practices we do not understand, and stories of torture and suffering that are painful to absorb. The duty to respond includes replies to uncomfortable findings like the Amnesty International Human Rights’ criticism of Australia’s detention, particularly of children” (Porter 2003b, 14).28 Refugee advocacy groups have ongoing contact with asylum seekers and engage in regular dialogue with government departments. These groups demonstrate capacities for empathy, listening, and tolerance, which facilitate democratic persuasion.28 Without compassionate listening there can be little understanding of others’ needs. I include here the indirect “listening” that occurs when we are trying to understand the plight of those with whom we do not have personal contact, but about whom we read books and articles, scour the internet for information, network in coalitions and at conferences, and exchange emails in order to hear different voices. Many women’s coalitions and peace builders rely on this compassionate listening in order to build trust.

Thinking concretely about peoples’ differing needs and questioning how they may be met introduces questions of value into the broad international context. “Questioning who is and who is not cared for in the world will force us to explore the role of social relations and structural constraints in determining who can and cannot lead a dignified and fulfilled life” (Robinson 1999, 31).
Thus dialogue with sufferers, or, where access is denied, their representatives or advocates, is crucial in order to decide, given our many differences, what a compassionate response might be, and, perhaps more important, how to procure the necessary resources to respond adequately. For example, a central issue in international ethics is humanitarian intervention and the question of when the UN Security Council should authorize overriding a state's sovereignty in order to assist the plight of people suffering from a dictatorship, political tyranny, genocide, or "ethnic cleansing." As Robinson (1999) also argues, to think compassionately, the international community should not wait until emergencies eventuate as with Rwanda in 1994, but listen to early warning cries. Being prepared to listen depends on the nature of relationships within the international community, as well as the background context and the reasons for contemplating intervention. The means of intervention has degrees of morality, where "clearly persuasion is preferable to coercion, positive sanctions to negative ones, diplomatic pressure to embargoes and blockades, economic sanctions to war, warning shots, or attacks on criminal leaders to indiscriminate bombing on their population" (Hassner 1998, 24). Attentive listening to discern what sufferers themselves believe they need affirms their agency and should lead to compassionate, wise responses.

**Compassionate, Wise Responses**

Third, in addition to attentiveness and listening, compassionate responses should be part of political practices. While clearly there are limits on the extent to which we really can identify with others' suffering, the politically compassionate react with feelings whenever we hear of suffering and with practical responses whenever possible. Admittedly, we prioritize instances of those who are closest to us or instances that, for various reasons, move us emotionally. Political care is the hallmark of a decent society that accepts the moral responsibility to protect the dignity of all citizens and persons within its borders. Political care is the demonstration of compassionate decency by committed citizens, political representatives, and political leaders who collectively strive for an inclusive polity that is responsive to peoples' needs. While this perspective strives to improve the well-being of all people, not only women, it is distinctively feminist in stressing the relational aspects of politics and in building on women's traditional experience of compassionate care. For example, despite the awful situation in detention camps in Australia, the suggestion by men and women to accommodate people in community housing while their claims are processed is ignored, yet clearly is a viable compassionate alternative. Those with power to make decisions have a responsibility to examine how they contribute to political structures that exclude, marginalize, and cause
suffering. The capacity for feeling pain at the distress of others and imaginatively responding draws us together in communities. Yet we often avoid being emotionally outraged at injustice because if we are moved by compassion it compels us to act.

We cannot always act; we all have limited resources. However, as Naomi Klein argues, we should “refuse to engage in a calculus of suffering” (Klein 2002, 148). Klein is responding to claims from the Left that the post-9/11 outpouring of compassion was disproportionate and, given the atrocities happening elsewhere in the world, racist. Her response is valid. Anyone who claims to be compassionate and abhors injustice and suffering should not be miserly in their compassion. “Surely the challenge is to attempt to increase the global reserves of compassion rather than parsimoniously police them” (Klein 2002, 148). Kathleen Barry (2002) also argues for the importance of “non-selective compassion.” By this, she means that the lesson we should learn from 9/11 is attentiveness to the plight of all who are victims through no fault of their own. For people living in occupied territories, areas of armed conflict, or violently divided societies, everyday life is full of terror, fear, violence, shootings, and bombings. For asylum seekers living in detention camps, everyday life also is miserable. Whenever we feel some of their pain, we empathetically imagine a little of what it might be like to be a sufferer because of political harshness, and we have begun the process of compassion. Whenever governments, states, and international organizations resist revenge attacks, preemptive strikes, and state-sponsored terrorism, or refuse to sell arms, they move closer to some understanding of what minimizing suffering entails. A humane yet rigorous asylum policy can balance state security and the need to protect borders, with human security and the need to protect refugee conventions.

If prime ministers, presidents, military advisers, and the UN Security Council were to take these arguments about political compassion seriously, the idea of “collateral damage,” the dismissal of deaths of innocent civilians in war as inevitable would be so morally abhorrent that it would act to deter war. However, these arguments also have massive implications for justifying careful intervention in the name of compassion to alleviate suffering where there is genocide and “ethnic cleansing,” as Rwanda and Bosnia taught the international community in different ways during the late twentieth century and as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur, Sudan, present today. In order actually to relieve suffering and respond to needs, attentiveness to suffering, active listening, and wise, compassionate responses are required at all political levels. Such responses require a change of political heart that leads to corresponding humane policies. Considerable political will is needed for the realization of compassionate politics.
Notes

1. I believe that the term "war against terrorism" is misleading in that the general understanding of war is an invasion of territory or a civil war that is internal. The term gives unwarranted legitimacy to activities like revenge, retaliation, preemptive strikes, and unsanctioned invasion. As it is in prevalent use, however, I use it. See Claudia Card (2003) for a similar view.

2. See Samantha Brennan's article (1999) for what constitutes feminist ethical theory as being normative and based on women's experiences.

3. I thank Jacky Morris for a careful reading of this essay and for her useful suggestions. This point of clarification was her suggestion. Thanks also to the anonymous referees for helping me refine, clarify, and tighten my arguments.

4. Fiona Robinson also argues that while feminist ethics has been applied to care, maternal thinking, and the politics of peace, a feminist "moral analysis of global politics must be equipped to extend beyond these issues" to the "hard" issues of international relations like sovereignty, intervention, conflict, and war (2001, 72). Mainstream international relations scholars may classify my example of asylum seekers as a "soft" issue of citizenship. However, I am critical of an oversimplification of the soft/hard classification and maintain that in a post-9/11 context, decisions about asylum seekers are connected to decisions about territory and national and international security that in orthodox ways are conceived as "hard" politics.

5. The development of this applicability requires another article. Here, I can only outline the underpinning framework.


7. Noddings suggests this requires empathetic judgment to discern what is really needed in a particular situation, direct responses to the cared-for, and "receptive attention to the way one's caring is received" (1998, 162).

8. This form of listening does not always entail dialogue. The sufferer may be an unknown person or in another country. The "listening" may include listening to media reports or accessing women's networks.

9. Ideally, this is a cooperative venture, but realistically, often sufferers are in such emotional pain that they are grateful for the assistance of others. I stress that victims are agents. They are victims of someone else's violence or political insensitivities, but victims retain a sense of who they are and what they believe they need to restore their dignity, and they often prefer to be called survivors.

10. Judith Squires suggests that there is a "willingness amongst feminists adopting a positivist perspective, to embrace a methodological eclecticism" and that this eclecticism is "a political act: a refusal to accept imposed boundaries" (2002, 213). Vivienne Jabri argues that an important implication for normative thought in international relations is an expansion of the imagination beyond the confines of the state, to "move towards the construction of self as the starting point for a post-positivist ethical agenda" (2001, 162).

11. Shklar's idea of a "felt injustice" (1990, 50) as a personal experience stands in contrast to theories of justice that typically respond to the impersonality of the disengaged subject.
12. See also Friedman (1995) for what she called "the de-moralization of gender."

13. Bartlett suggested that "actions based on compassion may provide a more solid foundation for political obligation than do those obligations based on contract, which may be performed resentfully out of a sense of duty or fear of repercussion" (1992, 85).

14. It is often said that tragedies and natural disasters bring out the best in communities. I think the reason for this is more complex than complacency in normal times. Just as those who have suffered greatly often demonstrate more compassion than those who have had an easy, comfortable life, many people need to witness closely the suffering of others as a prompt to act compassionately.

15. Weil was referring specifically to suffering from hunger. In Hannah Arendt's view, it was only the predicament of poverty that could arouse compassion (1973, 73). Tronto made the powerful point that ignoring others is "a form of moral evil" (1993, 127).

16. This statement is not meant to underestimate the structural inequalities of poverty that exist in the affluent West or individual experiences of personal grief. Rather, I suggest that the extent of widespread suffering is more extreme in the Global South.

17. Notable feminist theorists have connected care and compassion with the political goals of a good society (Tronto 1993, 9; Bubeck 1995a, 189; Spelman 1997b, 128-43; Sevenhuijsen 1998, 6, 147). Indeed, Bubeck suggested that care should be considered a "citizen's duty" (1995b, 31).


19. The Australian Greens and Australian Democrats are vocally opposed to mandatory detention, as are a few individuals in the Opposition, the Australian Labor Party.

20. She draws particularly on Aristotle's notion of pity as "a painful emotion" directed at another person's misfortune (1996, 31).

21. Yet one may feel compassion for those who have violated just laws and deserve punishment, but who are being punished excessively.

22. Jacky Morris visited the Baxter Detention Centre at Port Augusta, South Australia, and spoke to a man who had been in the Australian detention system for six years (personal correspondence, June 2005).

23. While Weil wrote in her notebook, "I am not a feminist" (quoted in R. Bell 1998, 12), she focuses on women's needs—particularly those of prostitutes, homeless persons, crippled and violated women, and exploited women in factories where she was a coworker.

24. See Curiel (2003, 1) for reasons why people should see ghastly images of war, particularly those horrors caused by "smart bombs." See also Manderson (2003, 4) for his discussion of war as the breakdown of ethics. He argues that the media's passion for immediacy presents war as sport, which "replaces why with how, and thus inhibits our ability to judge the long-term legitimacy of purposes, which is the very stuff of ethics" (4).

25. This is number seven of ten human functional capabilities that are needed for people to flourish. This capability requires protecting freedom of assembly, political speech, and institutions that encourage affiliation.

26. In Sara Ruddick's concept of 'attentive love,' attention is a cognitive capacity and love is a moral virtue. The capacity for such attention comes by asking the question,
“What are you going through?” (1990, 121), thus is more akin to empathy. Despite Ruddick’s idealism in linking “attentive love” with “maternal thinking” (1990, 119), it may be “more appropriate to the messiness and ambivalence of problems in international politics than more rule-based moral theories” (Hutchings 2001, 215).

27. Compassion extends toward those with whom we have “no pre-existing relationships” (Blum 1986, 344).

28. A visit by Amnesty International’s secretary general Irene Khan in March 2002 highlighted the abuse of basic democratic rights in Australia’s mandatory detention camps.

29. Deliberative democracy plays a crucial role in empathetic responses because it involves all who are affected by a policy or decision to be included in consultative processes and to deliberate over the moral implications of the issue.

References


