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"From Autonomy To Relationality: A Care Ethics Perspective On Global Justice"

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Abstract
In an era marked by ecological fragility, humanitarian crises, and widening global inequalities, dominant theories of justice—rooted in autonomy, impartiality, and universal reason—prove increasingly inadequate. These frameworks often overlook the emotional, relational, and embodied dimensions of moral life, particularly in contexts of caregiving, migration, and structural vulnerability. Feminist theorists such as Carol Gilligan, Virginia Held, and Joan Tronto have advanced the ethics of care as a critical response to this moral abstraction. This paper explores how care ethics reorients global justice by foregrounding dependency, responsiveness, and moral proximity. Through case studies including vaccine apartheid, global care chains, and refugee policy, it demonstrates the ethical insufficiency of justice without care. Rather than discarding justice, the care perspective deepens it– transforming foreign policy, institutional ethics, and global governance. The study ultimately proposes care ethics as an urgent philosophical and political corrective to the moral blind spots of the liberal order.

Keywords: *care ethics, global justice, feminist ethics, relational responsibility, moral proximity*

INTRODUCTION

In the shifting landscape of global political thought, questions of justice have come to occupy a central place in both normative and applied discourse. As globalization intensifies the interconnectedness of lives, economies, and vulnerabilities, the challenge of articulating moral obligations across borders has grown increasingly urgent. Dominant liberal frameworks—especially those influenced by the canonical works of Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, and later cosmopolitan theorists such as Thomas Pogge and Charles Beitz—have laid out systematic accounts of distributive justice, human rights, and moral universalism. These theories rest upon the foundational pillars of impartiality, autonomy, and rational agency, constructing a vision of justice abstracted from context and affect. However, despite their conceptual elegance and moral ambition, such justice-centered paradigms often fail to adequately capture the texture of lived experience—particularly the embodied, emotional, and relational dimensions of human life that are essential to any ethically serious account of global inequality. As Virginia Held incisively observes, "The language of rights, rules, and contracts has dominated moral and political discourse, often ignoring the centrality of care and the moral importance of attending to the needs of others in concrete, relational contexts" (Held, 2006, p. 10). Liberal cosmopolitanism, for all its normative force, tends to operate at the level of ideal theory, frequently detached from the everyday realities of gendered labor, caregiving asymmetries, and the global structures of dependence and vulnerability that sustain the neoliberal world order.

Against this backdrop, the ethics of care emerges not merely as a critique of traditional liberalism but as a transformative supplement to its moral vocabulary. Grounded in feminist philosophical inquiry—especially in the pioneering work of Carol Gilligan, Annett Baier, and later expanded by Held, Joan Tronto, and Fiona Robinson—care ethics redirects our moral attention from abstract rules to the morally generative terrain of relationships, interdependence, and affective responsibility. Rather than positing individuals as atomistic, self-legislating agents, care theorists emphasize the ontological and ethical primacy of relationality. "Persons in caring relations are acting for self and other together," Held writes, "and both develop through their relationships" (Held, 2006, p. 14). This orientation fundamentally challenges the assumptions of liberal justice, foregrounding dependency, responsiveness, and context as morally salient.

Indeed, global inequalities today are not only matters of unfair distribution but also deeply relational and gendered, embedded in the asymmetrical flows of care and labor. For instance, consider the phenomenon of *global care chains*, in which women from the Global South migrate to the Global North to provide domestic and emotional labor, often leaving behind their own dependents. These sacrifices—largely invisible within rights-based

frameworks— reveal a moral terrain shaped by emotional labor, embodied vulnerability, and systemic neglect. Such injustices demand not only distributive solutions but also an ethics that can respond to the intricacies of human need, attention, and responsibility.

This paper thus asks: *How can care ethics contribute to a more relational, responsive, and contextually attuned understanding of justice in global politics?* It does not seek to discard justice as a moral category, but to reimagine its foundations through the lens of care. This reimagining involves shifting from universalism to situated moral reasoning, from moral distance to attentiveness, and from autonomy to mutual dependency. As Held argues, "The ethics of care is not opposed to justice, but it challenges the view that justice is the most fundamental moral consideration" (Held, 2006, p. 17).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the paper adopts a philosophical and conceptual framework, beginning with a critical comparison of liberal justice theories and care ethics. It draws on the foundational texts of Held, Baier, Tronto, and Robinson, alongside contemporary critiques of global injustice. By examining care through the lens of transnational case studies—such as refugee crises, pandemic care infrastructures, and migration policy—the paper explores how care can offer both normative clarity and moral depth to global justice debates. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic not only underscored questions of fair distribution but revealed deep care deficits in global health systems—reminding us that justice without care is ethically incomplete.

Thus, this paper argues that care ethics is indispensable to the future of global justice discourse, offering not merely a corrective to existing theories, but a reconceptualization of moral responsibility itself. In a world defined by structural inequality, ecological fragility, and interdependence, care ethics offers a more responsive, compassionate, and morally grounded vision of global politics.

"TRADITIONAL THEORIES OF GLOBAL JUSTICE"

As global interdependence deepens through economic integration, humanitarian crises, climate change, and armed conflict, the ethical demands placed upon individuals, institutions, and states have only intensified. Theories of global justice advanced by John Rawls, Thomas Pogge, Charles Beitz, Brian Barry, Onora O'Neill, and David Miller offer normative frameworks for understanding these moral obligations. Yet, while these theories contribute significantly to the conceptual grammar of justice, they often fall short in accounting for the relational, emotional, and power-infused dimensions of global suffering—especially in contexts of war, forced displacement, and systemic inequality. John Rawls, in A Theory of Justice (1971), presents a compelling vision of fairness within domestic societies. However, when extending his ideas to the global stage in The Law of Peoples (1999), Rawls adopts a minimalistic stance, prioritizing stability among "well-ordered societies" rather than global distributive justice. This approach has proven inadequate in confronting the deep structural inequalities exposed by events like the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, which left millions—particularly women and girls—vulnerable to Taliban rule. A Rawlsian framework, focused on mutual respect among states, lacks the normative tools to assess the transnational consequences of political abandonment or to engage with the responsibilities of powerful nations toward vulnerable populations. By contrast, Thomas Pogge offers a far more incisive critique of global structures. In World Poverty and Human Rights (2002), Pogge contends that affluent nations are complicit in sustaining unjust global institutions that actively harm the world's poor, transforming global justice from an aspirational moral ideal into a question of systemic responsibility. For instance, Pogge's analysis is especially resonant in the context of the global COVID-19 vaccine distribution, where wealthy countries secured vaccine supplies far in excess of their populations while many nations in the Global South were left without basic access. This was not merely a failure of generosity, but, as Pogge might argue, a violation of negative duties to avoid perpetuating harm through unequal systems of trade, intellectual property, and health governance. Charles Beitz similarly expands Rawlsian egalitarianism to the global domain. In Political Theory and International Relations (1979), he insists that the global basic structure—comprising trade, finance, and migration regimes— is morally analogous to domestic institutions and therefore subject to principles of distributive justice. Beitz's arguments resonate in the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis, where millions fleeing war faced disproportionate burdens on neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan, while many Western states resisted accepting refugees. Justice, Beitz would argue, demands a fair distribution of responsibilities, not

arbitrary exclusions based on geography or political expedience. Brian Barry, in Justice as Impartiality (1995), reinforces cosmopolitan commitments by asserting that impartial moral reasoning demands consistent treatment of all individuals, irrespective of national identity. Yet such impartiality is often absent in global responses to conflict. For instance, the disparate international reactions to the war in Ukraine versus conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, or Palestine reveal a selective moral compass shaped by racial, political, and economic biases—an inconsistency that justice theories grounded in universalism are well-positioned to critique but often fail to address with the necessary attention to systemic causes. Onora O'Neill, with her Kantian emphasis on duty-based justice, focuses on building trustworthy and non-coercive international institutions. Her framework offers important insights into the ethics of intervention and development aid. However, its abstract orientation may struggle to fully reckon with the emotional devastation and long-term psychological trauma caused by war, famine, or forced displacement—experiences that require not only duty but empathy, care, and relational repair. David Miller, by contrast, cautions against cosmopolitan overreach. In National Responsibility and Global Justice (2007), he defends a context-sensitive nationalism, emphasizing the priority of obligations to compatriots. While this view recognizes the moral salience of shared history and identity, it can also serve to justify inaction in the face of suffering beyond borders. Miller's framework, for instance, provides little recourse for challenging the moral indifference of countries that close their borders to climate refugees or displaced peoples from war-torn regions. Such limitations become starkly evident in the face of state-enabled terrorism and expansionist violence, where abstract justice models are ill- equipped to handle the realpolitik of aggression. A striking example is the 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack, in which Pakistan-based militants targeted a convoy of Hindu pilgrims in Jammu & Kashmir. The attack resulted in the tragic loss of innocent lives and invoked deep national grief. Yet theories grounded solely in institutional respect, reciprocity, or distributive fairness offer no sufficient ethical vocabulary to address the relational harm, asymmetric threat, and ideologically driven aggression this event exemplifies. Justice theories that presume peaceful coexistence between "well-ordered" societies fail to confront the reality of deliberate cross-border violence and ideological expansionism, where care, protection, and moral responsibility take precedence over abstract reciprocity. Despite their intellectual rigor, these traditional theories share a common limitation: they construct justice around the rational, autonomous agent and tend to neglect the messy, embodied, and emotionally charged realities of care, dependence, and power. They often fail to grasp how global injustices are experienced—by the caregiver in a war zone, the mother fleeing across borders, or the healthcare worker in a collapsing system. These omissions create a moral vacuum that traditional justice theory cannot adequately fill. It is precisely this vacuum that the ethics of care seeks to address. By foregrounding vulnerability, attentiveness, and moral responsiveness, care ethics offers a richer, more humane vocabulary for global justice—one that does not erase suffering through abstraction but engages with it directly, relationally, and ethically.

THE ETHICS OF CARE: REWEAVING THE MORAL FABRIC OF HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

In the wake of persistent global injustices—from gendered labor inequities to forced migrations and humanitarian neglect—the ethics of care has emerged as a compelling moral framework that speaks where traditional justice theories often fall silent. Unlike justice-based models that prioritize abstraction, autonomy, and universal principles, care ethics begins with the everyday experiences of vulnerability, emotional need, and relational interdependence. As this paper explores, care ethics does not merely complement justice; it reorients the ethical gaze—from impersonal obligation to situated responsibility, from impartiality to empathy, and from rational detachment to moral proximity. Rooted in feminist theory and informed by diverse philosophical voices—Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Joan Tronto, Virginia Held, Milton Mayeroff, Annett Baier, and Michael Slote—care ethics constitutes not just a critique of liberal morality but a transformative paradigm for ethical and political life. The intellectual rupture begins with Carol Gilligan, whose seminal work *In a Different Voice* (1982) redefined the terrain of moral development. In critiquing Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning, Gilligan argued that women's moral decisions were often dismissed as "inferior" because they emphasized relationships, empathy, and contextual sensitivity, rather than abstract rules. Through the Heinz dilemma, she showed how girls' responses focused not on legality but on caring for the people involved, illustrating a different moral voice—one attuned to the complexity of human connections. "The moral imperative," she writes, "is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world." Gilligan's contribution laid the epistemological foundation for care ethics by affirming that ethics is not gender-neutral, and that

women's moral reasoning is not deficient, but different—relational, embodied, and context-sensitive.

Building on this foundation, Nel Noddings brought greater clarity and structure to the ethics of care. In *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), she advanced the distinction between the "one-caring" and the "cared-for," arguing that morality begins with engrossment in the particular needs of others and the motivational displacement that arises from that attention. Unlike Kantian ethics, where the moral law commands from afar, Noddings situates ethics in the immediacy of response—not because of a duty imposed by reason, but because of a relational pull grounded in trust, empathy, and attentiveness. As she writes, "Caring is the foundation of morality." Her model is especially significant in spheres like education, therapy, and social work, where moral responsiveness—not rule- following—is the bedrock of ethical action.

Yet, as this paper argues, care must not remain confined to the private realm. Joan Tronto's political turn in care ethics is both timely and radical. In *Moral Boundaries* (1993) and *Caring Democracy* (2013), Tronto challenges the liberal separation between public justice and private morality. She outlines five phases of care: *caring about*, *taking care of*, *care- giving*, *care-receiving*, and *caring with*—the latter emphasizing democratic inclusiveness and solidarity. Tronto exposes how care work, especially that performed by women, racialized communities, and migrant laborers, is routinely devalued and depoliticized. "The privileging of justice," she warns, "has prevented us from seeing how deeply moral our caring practices are." For instance, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tronto's theory helps unpack how health infrastructures collapsed not only due to technical failure but due to a chronic moral neglect of care. Her approach illuminates how global labor chains, from Filipino nurses in U.S. hospitals to South Asian domestic workers in Gulf states, are embedded in structural asymmetries that justice theories alone cannot decode.

Virginia Held, perhaps the most philosophically rigorous defender of care ethics, pushes the theory further by asserting its status as a distinct moral philosophy. In *The Ethics of Care* (2006), Held argues that care is not an affective add-on to justice but a normative alternative to liberal ethical frameworks. She critiques Kantian, utilitarian, and even Aristotelian ethics for overlooking the fundamental human reality of dependency. "The ethics of care," she contends, "challenges the assumption that the more abstract a moral theory is, the better it is." Held's work is especially relevant to global issues of migration and governance, where she proposes replacing the cold language of sovereignty and control with a relational vocabulary of needs, attentiveness, and responsibility. She also critiques militarism, corporate apathy, and neoliberal efficiency as antithetical to care-based governance. In an era of refugee crises and ecological collapse, Held's ethics offers a vital corrective: build institutions not on control, but on compassion.

Annett Baier, too, dismantles the gendered and rationalist underpinnings of traditional ethics. In *"The Need for More than Justice"* (1985), Baier critiques the Kantian and Rawlsian visions of the moral agent as autonomous and abstract, suggesting instead that ethical life is founded in relationships of trust and affect. She writes, "The trusted and trustworthy person is not best described as one who will do his or her duty, but one who has a certain moral character." Baier argues that moral reasoning cannot be disentangled from social roles, histories of caregiving, and the asymmetries of dependence—particularly the exclusion of children, elders, and the disabled from the liberal moral imagination. Her feminist reworking of moral agency offers a sociologically and psychologically richer account of how moral trust is formed and betrayed in both private and public life.

In expanding care ethics to the global stage, Michael Slote brings forth the critical role of empathy as the core of moral imagination. In *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (2007), Slote argues that unlike traditional frameworks which lose force over geographic or cultural distance, care ethics maintains that moral concern must not fade with distance. "Empathy," he argues, "allows us to grasp the needs of others as if they were our own." This resonates deeply in contexts where state-sanctioned neutrality or realpolitik justifies inaction—such as the persecution of Bangladeshi Hindus, who face systemic erasure. A justice framework may bracket such suffering under sovereignty or non-intervention. But a care-ethics perspective sees the moral imperative: *to listen, to respond, to protect*. Slote's vision enables us to reimagine global ethics not through alliances or treaties, but through expanded circles of moral proximity. Eva Feder Kittay has also been a foundational voice in reorienting moral and political philosophy around the ethics of care, particularly through her emphasis on dependency as central to justice. In her influential work *Love's Labor* (1999), Kittay challenges liberal theories that idealize autonomy, arguing instead that all human beings are inevitably dependent—whether as infants, the aging, or those with disabilities—and thus care must be recognized as a fundamental moral practice. She introduces the concept of

"doulia," a social model that emphasizes the responsibility of institutions to care for caregivers, ensuring that the burden of care is not unjustly privatized or feminized. By linking care to broader structures of social and global justice, Kittay expands the scope of care ethics beyond interpersonal relations to include questions of policy, distribution, and international responsibility. Her work thus calls for a global reconfiguration of justice that centers not only rights and equality, but also embodied vulnerability, reciprocity, and institutional care.

From these thinkers emerge several core principles of care ethics that this research foregrounds as central to any viable ethical theory of global justice:

- **Relationality:** Rejecting the myth of the self-sufficient agent, care ethics sees humans as interwoven in networks of care and dependence.humanism
- **Contextuality:** Ethics must be responsive to particular needs, histories, and asymmetries, not reduced to fixed abstractions.
- **Vulnerability:** Far from being a liability, vulnerability is recognized as a shared human condition that grounds moral life.
- **Responsibility:** Moral obligation arises not from legal command, but from attentive awareness of another's need. Justice as being responsible.
- **Responsiveness:** Ethics is not rigid, but dialogical—shaped by listening, adapting, and sustaining relationships.
- Trust, relationship
- No harm theory

As this paper has argued, the ethics of care is not merely an alternative ethical theory—it is a philosophical realignment with how human beings actually live, suffer, and relate. Where justice frameworks start with abstraction, care ethics begins with life itself—with the crying child, the ailing parent, the migrant crossing borders, the neighbor grieving loss. These thinkers remind us that ethics cannot be disembodied. In an age of ecological fragility, nationalist hardening, and algorithmic detachment, care ethics offers not only resistance but moral repair—a vocabulary of empathy, a politics of responsiveness, and a vision of a world where ethics is rooted in relational truth and not merely legal formality.

THE INTERSECTIONS OF CARE AND JUSTICE

One of the most enduring and generative questions within contemporary moral and political philosophy is whether the ethics of care and theories of justice—typically situated in separate philosophical traditions—can be reconciled, integrated, or fundamentally rethought. While justice theories, particularly in the liberal tradition, have historically prioritized autonomy, impartiality, and universality, care ethics brings to the fore an ethos of relationality, contextual judgment, and emotional responsiveness. From a feminist perspective, the dichotomy between justice and care reflects deeper structural divisions in moral thought, including the gendered public/private split and the privileging of abstract reason over embodied experience. The question this research engages with is not simply whether care and justice can coexist, but how care ethics can serve as a critical lens, corrective, or even foundation for reimagining justice in a global, interconnected, and ethically complex world. While justice is concerned with fairness, rules, and rights, care is grounded in the particularities of relationships, the recognition of need, and the moral salience of interdependence. Held writes, *"The ethics of care is not opposed to justice, but it challenges the view that justice is the most fundamental moral consideration"* (2006, p. 17). In contexts such as healthcare, education, or refugee resettlement, Held's framework shows that attention to emotional and relational realities may be more morally urgent than adherence to procedural fairness. She emphasizes that care is not merely personal—it has institutional and political implications, and must inform how we build just societies.

Christine Koggel furthers this line of thinking by urging us to resist dichotomizing care and justice. In her essay "Caring and Justice: What Difference Do Differences Make?" Koggel critiques the philosophical impulse to frame moral theories in oppositional terms. She instead calls for a relational ontology that acknowledges both care and justice as necessary ethical dimensions, particularly in cross-cultural and postcolonial contexts. Justice, stripped of care, may become rigid and impersonal; care, without justice, may lack normative guidance or fall into partiality. Koggel's dialogical model suggests that ethical reasoning is enriched when care and justice are in

conversation, not isolation—especially when considering global moral problems like climate change, migration, and humanitarian crises.

Fiona Robinson, too, highlights the importance of care ethics in reimagining global justice. In *Globalizing Care* (1999), she critiques liberal cosmopolitanism for relying on an image of the rational, autonomous individual, which obscures the complex networks of emotional labor, dependency, and transnational caregiving that structure global life. Robinson introduces the concept of global care chains to reveal how migrant women—often from the Global South— shoulder the burden of emotional and physical care in the Global North, at the cost of their own familial relationships. She writes, *"We must begin to take seriously the structures of care that bind individuals across borders, responsibilities that are not chosen but arise through interconnection and dependence"* (1999, p. 45). Robinson's work is particularly instructive in contexts where justice theorists focus on distributive fairness, while care reveals the deeper emotional and relational costs of global inequalities.

A key intervention in this debate comes from Annett Baier, whose work underscores the limitations of justice theories in capturing the moral complexity of human relationships. In her essay *"The Need for More than Justice"* (1985), Baier contends that the dominant moral philosophies—particularly those of Kant and Rawls—reflect a male-oriented ideal of morality, centered on rights, independence, and contractual obligations. She writes: *"The very conception of morality that most moral theorists hold is one that would have to be supplemented, corrected, or replaced by a morality of care and trust."* For Baier, justice is necessary but insufficient. She argues that Rawls's vision of the autonomous, veil-of- ignorance subject obscures the dependencies, asymmetries, and trust-based relationships that constitute moral life. *"The justice tradition,"* she writes, *"needs the care perspective to become fully human."* Baier's contribution is crucial in highlighting that moral life is not only about fair treatment, but also about being trustworthy, being cared for, and sustaining moral bonds that are often invisible in procedural frameworks.

These critiques gain further force when situated within the feminist challenge to the public/private divide in moral theory. Traditional liberal ethics has long confined care to the private realm—the home, the family, the domain of women—while reserving justice for the public sphere of rights, contracts, and institutions. Feminist philosophers like Held, Tronto, and Baier argue that this division not only devalues the moral labor associated with care but also reinforces structural inequalities by making care invisible in political discourse. As Joan Tronto puts it, *"The boundary between private and public morality has served not to protect care but to devalue it."* Reconciling care and justice, then, requires more than philosophical synthesis—it demands a restructuring of moral priorities and a rethinking of how societies define and distribute ethical responsibility.

Thus, care ethics is not merely a supplement to justice, as if adding emotional richness to an already complete theory. It is a philosophical and political provocation that calls into question the foundational assumptions of justice itself. Rather than seeking to dissolve either into the other, the most promising path forward is one of ethical pluralism, where justice offers structure, rights, and equality, and care provides attentiveness, trust, and responsiveness. As Held notes, *"A society that promotes justice without promoting care is morally incomplete"* (2006, p. 52). And as Baier suggests, moral life must begin not only with rights but with the "trust that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited."

The intersections of care and justice offer not only a theoretical convergence but a pragmatic vision for ethical life in the 21st century. From refugee protection and global caregiving to climate displacement and economic precarity, a combined lens of care and justice allows us to respond not only fairly, but also responsively—with compassion, contextual judgment, and shared moral responsibility.

Locating Care in International Relations: Feminist Ethics in the Reflectivist Turn In the evolving discourse of International Relations (IR), the *Fourth Great Debate*—between rationalist and reflectivist approaches—marks a profound shift in how we understand global politics, not just theoretically but ethically. It is within this critical fissure that the ethics of care emerges, not merely as a moral sentiment but as a radical reconfiguration of political responsibility and relational ontology. Unlike earlier debates that focused on methodology or inter-paradigm rivalry, the Fourth Debate delves into epistemological and normative foundations: Who speaks in IR? Whose lives matter? What kind of world are we imagining, and for whom?

Rationalist theories—such as Realism, Neoliberalism, and to a limited extent, Constructivism—have long dominated the field, operating under the assumption that sovereign states are the primary actors in an anarchic international system. These theories prioritize macro-level analysis, predictive capacity, and descriptive models

focused on power, national interest, and systemic structures. Classic realists like Hans Morgenthau, and structural realists such as Kenneth Waltz, envisioned politics as a domain of survival and strategic competition. Even liberal thinkers like Robert Keohane, despite their emphasis on cooperation and institutions, continued to frame global politics within a paradigm of rational utility and formal justice. What remains conspicuously absent in these models is the moral and emotional texture of political life—the experiences of care, dependency, trauma, and relational suffering that shape the majority of the world's population, especially women, migrants, and the marginalized. Fioona robinson, (care in global justice) global security, global peace. This is precisely the terrain that reflectivist theories begin to uncover. Feminism, critical theory, Marxism, and postcolonial thought reject the state-centric, anarchy-assumed neutrality of rationalism. They turn the analytic gaze from sovereign states to embodied, vulnerable subjects, from strategic calculus to relational ethics. Feminist IR, in particular, disrupts conventional political theory by insisting that the personal is not just political—it is international. As Cynthia Enloe provocatively asked, "Where are the women?"—a question that exposed how traditional IR systematically ignores care work, emotional labor, and the everyday experiences that sustain both states and systems. The ethics of care, a feminist moral framework, enters the scene as a powerful ethical and epistemological response to this erasure.

Originating in moral philosophy with Carol Gilligan's landmark work *In a Different Voice* (1982), care ethics challenged the masculine-coded values of autonomy, impartiality, and abstraction that dominated moral and political thought. Gilligan's insight was that moral reasoning often emerges not from universal rules but from context-sensitive attentiveness to others' needs. She showed how women's moral voices, grounded in relationships and emotional nuance, were systematically devalued in both psychology and ethics. Building upon this, thinkers like Annette Baier, Virginia Held, and Joan Tronto expanded care from the intimate realm of family to the public and political domain. Baier observed that justice theories such as Rawls's presuppose relationships of trust and care, without acknowledging them. Held argued that care is not just a private virtue but a public necessity, with political implications as significant as liberty or equality.

It is Fiona Robinson who most powerfully translates the ethics of care into the realm of International Relations. In *Globalizing Care* (1999) and *The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security* (2011), she contends that care ethics offers a much-needed corrective to the "masculinized" nature of IR theory. According to Robinson, global politics is not simply a matter of state interaction or institutional design, but a deeply moral field where interdependence, emotional labor, and structural inequalities must be brought to the forefront. Traditional models of security, which focus on military threats and sovereign borders, are not only inadequate but morally hollow. Instead, care-based ethics foreground the lived insecurities of ordinary people—starvation, domestic violence, forced migration, and ecological vulnerability. As Robinson writes, "To locate care in IR is to shift the very boundaries of what counts as politics."

This shift has profound implications. The ethics of care challenges the very unit of analysis in IR. No longer is the atomized, rational, sovereign state the starting point; instead, it is the relational, vulnerable human being. Care ethics reimagines global responsibility not in terms of contractual obligation or national interest but in terms of moral responsiveness, especially to those systematically rendered invisible. Joan Tronto's five phases of care—caring about, taking care of, caregiving, care-receiving, and caring with—serve as a framework to reimagine international institutions, foreign aid, refugee policy, and development economics. Who is cared for and who does the caring? These are not trivial questions but foundational ones that expose the gendered, racialized, and class-based inequities underpinning global structures.

The ethics of care is also fundamentally decolonial. Scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Uma Narayan have shown how Western feminist discourses, if uncritical, can reproduce colonial hierarchies. Care ethics, when practiced with epistemic humility, resists these tendencies by centering local knowledges, experiences, and moral vocabularies. It calls for listening, witnessing, and walking with communities rather than speaking for them. In international development, this means dismantling the technocratic, top-down models that ignore the voices of women in the Global South. In climate politics, it means understanding environmental responsibility not as a matter of emissions quotas alone, but as a relational ethic of intergenerational and global care.

Critics have argued that care ethics is too emotionally grounded, too particularistic, and lacking the universality required for global ethics. But this critique misunderstands the radical promise of care. As Virginia Held counters, care is not anti-rational—it offers a different rationality, one attuned to the needs, histories, and vulnerabilities of

real people. Far from being apolitical, care is intensely political; it questions the very foundation of our political imaginaries. In the words of Christine Sylvester, "Security is knowing your children will eat, not being raped in your home, and not fearing the sound of planes overhead." These are not peripheral concerns—they are central to what global politics ought to be about.

Ultimately, the ethics of care within International Relations invites us to reweave the moral fabric of global life. It urges a move away from the sterile language of deterrence and deterritorialization toward a richer moral vocabulary of responsiveness, reciprocity, and relational justice. It does not discard justice but complements and deepens it. In an age of pandemics, ecological breakdown, war, and forced migration, the care perspective is not just a critique—it is a blueprint for ethical transformation. As Fiona Robinson concludes, care "is not just a way of being in the world—it is a way of remaking the world."

GLOBAL POLITICS THROUGH THE LENS OF CARE: REFRAMING POWER, VULNERABILITY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

For centuries, global politics has been scripted in the language of sovereignty, security, and self-interest. Its dominant grammar—whether expressed through realism's power calculus, liberalism's institutionalism, or even constructivism's ideational shifts—has largely marginalized the relational, affective, and embodied dimensions of human existence. Into this world of abstractions and anarchy enters the ethics of care: a quiet revolution, long nurtured on the margins of moral and political theory, now emerging as a transformative lens through which to rethink international relations.

The ethics of care rejects the illusion of the autonomous actor—be it the sovereign state or the rational individual—and foregrounds interdependence, vulnerability, and contextual responsiveness as the ontological basis of political life. It asks not just *who governs*, but *who cares, and under what conditions?* It shifts the focus from grand strategies to everyday survival, from coercive diplomacy to compassionate listening, from legalism to lived experience. Through the lens of care, global politics becomes not only a matter of contracts and conflict, but of attention, empathy, and ethical presence. As theorist Joan Tronto asserts, "Care is both a practice and a disposition, a way of seeing and a way of being with others."

A. Global Inequalities and Structural Injustice

Who Cares, and for Whom? Global Care Chains and the Political Economy of Intimacy The global order is sustained not only through military alliances and trade agreements but also through flows of care—often invisible, feminized, and racialized. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild's concept of *global care chains* reveals how women from the Global South migrate to wealthier nations to perform caregiving labor—raising children, nursing the sick, tending the elderly—while often leaving their own families in fragile circumstances. This transnational redistribution of emotional labor is not accidental; it is a structural feature of global capitalism that continues the logic of colonial extraction.

As Fiona Robinson argues, global care chains embody "the moral fault lines of international relations," where the reproductive and affective labor of the marginalized is harvested to support the lifestyles and health systems of the affluent. Such arrangements reflect not only economic asymmetries but also moral asymmetries, where some lives are cared for, while others are made to care, often without recognition or reciprocity.

GENDERED LABOR AND THE INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

At the very heart of global capitalism lies a foundational paradox: its dependence on care work, and its simultaneous erasure of that work from formal economic valuation. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that women perform over 75% of unpaid care work worldwide—labor that sustains households, communities, and even GDP growth, yet remains absent from national accounts and trade negotiations.

Care ethics challenges this epistemic erasure. It insists that caregiving is not peripheral but foundational to human survival and flourishing. As Eva Feder Kittay suggests, dependency is not a failure of autonomy but a condition of possibility for moral life. A genuinely just global order would not only redistribute resources but revalue care itself—as labor, as affect, and as a relational good.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: UNVEILING THE FRAGILITY OF GLOBAL CARE SYSTEMS

The COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a magnifying lens, exposing the fragility of care infrastructures worldwide. While world leaders held press briefings and instituted lockdowns, it was caregivers—nurses, sanitation workers, community health volunteers, domestic workers—who absorbed the shock of the crisis. These essential workers, often migrants and women of color, risked their lives in service of others, while receiving minimal protection and recognition in return.

The global scramble for vaccines laid bare a deeper moral fracture: vaccine apartheid. Rich countries stockpiled doses and outbid poorer nations, leaving billions in the Global South unprotected. The Director-General of the World Health Organization called this a "catastrophic moral failure." From a care ethics standpoint, it was a failure not just of solidarity, but of moral imagination—a refusal to see others' vulnerability as our shared responsibility. The pandemic did not merely expose a care crisis; it revealed that care is the very infrastructure of survival, and its neglect carries systemic consequences.

B. Global Institutions and Moral Responsibility: Toward a Responsive International Order

Rethinking Global Obligations: From Charity to Responsiveness

Traditional international relations treats foreign aid, refugee support, and climate finance as matters of obligation or strategy. But care ethics reframes them as moral relationships, rooted in the recognition of shared vulnerability. In migration policy, for instance, asylum-seekers are too often seen as threats to national security or as burdens on the state. But care ethics insists on attending to the whole person—their traumas, attachments, aspirations—and calls for policies that center dignity, healing, and belonging.

Climate change, similarly, is not simply an issue of carbon accounting or market-based offsets. It is a relational crisis: between humans and ecosystems, between past and future generations, between the Global North and the Global South. Care ethics speaks here in the language of repair and stewardship, challenging the extractive logic of climate finance with an ethic of intergenerational solidarity and ecological humility.

CASE STUDY: VACCINE DISTRIBUTION AND THE FAILURE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The COVAX initiative, launched by the WHO, GAVI, and CEPI, sought to distribute vaccines equitably across countries. But the promise of COVAX was undercut by vaccine nationalism, as wealthy nations prioritized contracts over care. As doses were hoarded and pharmaceutical patents remained protected, billions in low-income countries waited. This was not a logistical failure alone—it was a moral failure, symptomatic of a world order that still treats care as a secondary concern, subordinate to economic and national interests.

A care-based alternative would have foregrounded global health as a shared good, prioritized frontline workers in vulnerable regions, and ensured open-access vaccine technologies. It would have understood pandemic response not as competition, but as co-responsibility.

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF CARE

International institutions are often critiqued for their bureaucratic distance and technocratic language. Yet through the ethics of care, we can envision these institutions not only as regulators, but as ethical mediators—platforms for nurturing attentiveness, responsiveness, and relational justice.

- The United Nations, while built on ideals of peace and rights, must deepen its participatory ethos. Agencies like UN Women, UNICEF, and the UNFPA already embed care in their work with maternal health, education, and child protection. But a broader care lens would demand bottom-up inclusion—particularly of women, indigenous communities, and frontline caregivers—in agenda-setting and implementation.
- The World Health Organization aligns with care ethics in principle, but its centralized structure often limits its responsiveness. A care-based reform would decentralize decision-making, amplify local health knowledge, and address social determinants of health—housing, nutrition, mental well-being—not just biomedical factors.
- Non-Governmental Organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE International, and Oxfam often embody the ethos of care in practice. However, even they must remain reflexive—guarding against paternalism, aid dependency, or the replication of colonial dynamics. As Robinson and Tronto caution, care must always be coupled with justice, autonomy, and mutual respect.

The ethics of care invites us to re-envision global politics not as a battlefield of interests, but as a web of

interdependence. It does not deny the reality of power, but it insists that power must be accountable to vulnerability. In a time marked by ecological collapse, displacement, and democratic erosion, care offers a moral compass—a way to reconnect institutions with life, policy with presence, and justice with healing. If, as Annette Baier reminds us, "morality must begin in the nursery," then global ethics must begin not in war rooms, but in wombs, kitchens, shelters, and clinics—in all those spaces where life is made and remade through care.

CONSIDERING CASES: AUGMENTING JUSTICE WITH CARE

1. Arms Control: Between Interests and Compassion

a. Detente and Arms Control Treaties

The détente phase of the Cold War (late 1960s–1970s) was marked by important arms control agreements like:

- The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty (1972)
- Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I and II)

These treaties were primarily driven by mutual strategic interests: maintaining the balance of power and avoiding nuclear annihilation. From a justice-based perspective, they upheld international law and mutual restraint.
However, a care perspective asks what these treaties meant for human lives—the desire to prevent global catastrophe, the emotional anxiety of populations living under nuclear threat, and the ethical responsibility to future generations. While not explicitly framed in care language, these agreements embodied an unspoken ethic of protection and interdependence.

b. Oslo Accords: A Gesture of Political Compassion

Signed in the 1990s, the Oslo Accords marked the first time Israel officially recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as a legitimate representative body. Though heavily criticized for their limitations, the Accords involved a symbolic gesture of recognition—a move that, in care ethics, is deeply important.
As Fiona Robinson (2011) notes, "To care is to recognize the other as worthy of moral attention." Recognition of Palestinian suffering, displacement, and dignity, even if partial, reflects an incipient ethic of compassion in international diplomacy.

2. Climate Change Negotiations: Shared and Historical Responsibility

a. CBDR-RC and Kyoto Protocol

The concept of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), enshrined in the Rio Earth Summit (1992) and later the Kyoto Protocol (1997), acknowledges that developed countries bear historical responsibility for the climate crisis.
They are thus ethically obliged to take the lead in emission reductions.
This move goes beyond legal obligations into moral responsibility and intergenerational care, a theme echoed by thinkers like Henry Shue (*Climate Justice*, 2014), who argues that the rich have a "duty of repair" for the environmental harms they've caused.

b. Paris Climate Agreement and Shared Care

The Paris Agreement (2015) marked a shift to collective climate stewardship. Though less binding than Kyoto, it emphasized collaborative responsibility. The creation of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27—largely due to pressure from the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)—is a milestone where global compassion met justice.
Notably, the emotional appeal of Tuvalu's President Simon Kofe, who addressed COP26 while standing knee-deep in seawater, symbolized what Virginia Held (2006) calls "responsive attentiveness to the needs of others"—a foundational principle of care ethics.

3. Post-War Reconstruction: From Rule of Law to Healing

a. IBRD and Economic Reconstruction

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), part of the World Bank, was created post-World War II to help nations rebuild. While grounded in economic rationality and legal agreements, its work inherently supports the restoration of livelihoods and communities—a process central to the care of

nations.
However, critiques by postcolonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak have pointed out that such efforts often replicate power hierarchies unless paired with grassroots empowerment and relational ethics.

b. UNSC Resolution 1325: Gendered Care in Peacebuilding
Adopted in 2000, UNSC Resolution 1325 calls for women's full participation in conflict resolution and post-war reconstruction. It recognizes that women are not merely victims of war but agents of healing, reconciliation, and inclusive peace.

This aligns with Joan Tronto's (1993) vision of care as a political practice involving:
1. Attentiveness,
2. Responsibility,
3. Competence,
4. Responsiveness, and
5. Solidarity (added later).

By institutionalizing women's care-centered approaches in post-conflict recovery, the resolution reframes peace not just as cessation of violence but as the restoration of relationships.

4. Refugee Problem: Legal Obligations vs Moral Care
a. EU-Turkey Deal and Rwanda Plan: Outsourcing Responsibility
In the EU-Turkey Deal (2016), the EU provided €6 billion to Turkey in exchange for preventing Syrian refugees from entering Europe. Similarly, Rishi Sunak's 2024 Rwanda Plan aimed to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, outsourcing care under the guise of legality and deterrence.
From a care perspective, these policies commodify human vulnerability, reducing refugees to burdens or strategic threats. As Fiona Robinson writes, "A caring policy cannot begin by deciding who is unworthy of care."
b. Canada, Germany, Sweden: Empathic Integration
In contrast, Canada accepted 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015–16, with efforts to integrate them through housing, language support, and community involvement. Germany and Sweden also opened borders during the height of the refugee crisis.
This policy orientation exemplifies what Robinson calls "caring with"—not just giving charity, but fostering relational responsibility, cultural dialogue, and human dignity.

5. Campaigning for a Cause: Political Care by the Vulnerable
a. AOSIS and Loss and Damage Fund
Small Island States like Tuvalu, Maldives, and Fiji have long campaigned for climate justice. Their role in initiating the Loss and Damage Fund demonstrates how the most vulnerable can lead global care discourse.
The formation of AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) was not only strategic—it was an act of care for future generations and for the planet.

b. Tuvalu's President: Embodied Protest
President Simon Kofe's speech from a submerged podium during COP26 used the language of vulnerability as political force. It transformed abstract policy into an emotive, visible, relational appeal—precisely what care ethics demands.

6. Agricultural Subsidy and Global Injustice
a. Unequal Support Systems
Developed countries, especially the U.S. and EU, provide massive non-tariff subsidies to their agricultural sectors, disadvantaging smallholder farmers in the Global South.
Care ethics challenges this as a moral failure of reciprocity. As Nel Noddings emphasizes, ethics must not abstract away from those who are affected, especially when policies cause structural harm.

7. Pharmaceutical IP: Compassion in Global Health

a. TRIPS Waiver and the Global South

In 2021, India and South Africa proposed a temporary suspension of intellectual property rights (TRIPS waiver) for COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments. This would have enabled more equitable access in the Global South.

The U.S. partially supported the waiver—for vaccines only—but the EU blocked all three components. This exposed a justice-care divide: legal frameworks upheld proprietary rights, while care ethics demanded compassion-based action to save lives.

As Eva Feder Kittay (2002) has argued, a moral society must "structure relationships to accommodate dependency," and COVID-19 demonstrated just how global that dependency is.

CARE ETHICS AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

India's foreign policy has long been characterized by a delicate balance between strategic interests and moral imperatives. Rooted in its civilizational ethos and the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and compassion, India has often projected itself as a proponent of global justice and care. However, its actions on the international stage reveal a complex interplay between altruism and realpolitik. This essay explores key moments where India has exemplified care in its foreign engagements and others where its approach has drawn criticism for a perceived lack of ethical commitment.

India's intervention in East Pakistan in 1971, now Bangladesh, remains a landmark instance of humanitarian action aligned with strategic calculation. Amidst a brutal crackdown and the mass exodus of refugees into Indian territory, India intervened militarily to halt widespread atrocities. While self-interest played a role, scholars like Gary J. Bass have argued that the intervention was equally driven by moral imperatives to alleviate suffering and uphold human rights and dignity—making it a rare case of foreign policy informed by both interest and compassion. A similar commitment to humanitarian responsibility was evident in 1959 when India granted asylum to the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetan refugees after the failed uprising against Chinese rule. Despite long-term geopolitical costs, India honored its tradition of hospitality and moral duty, a gesture globally acknowledged as principled and compassionate.

India has also acted with remarkable responsiveness in the face of natural disasters in the region. For instance, following the devastating 2025 earthquake in Myanmar, India launched Operation Brahma, providing over 650 metric tons of relief supplies, deploying medical teams, and establishing a 60-bed field hospital. This swift and large-scale humanitarian operation reinforced India's image as a first responder in South and Southeast Asia, emphasizing solidarity over strategic gain. That same ethic of global care was reflected during the COVID-19 pandemic through the Vaccine Maitri initiative, wherein India supplied vaccines to over 90 countries. Despite domestic supply challenges, this act showcased India's commitment to health equity and global solidarity, earning praise for its altruistic diplomacy, as noted in Christ University Journals.

India's dedication to global justice and care extends to climate diplomacy as well. Its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) include a pledge to reduce emissions intensity by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030, with 33% already achieved, and to derive 50% of electric power from non-fossil sources. These commitments balance ecological stewardship with developmental imperatives and reinforce India's role in global climate justice. Equally significant was India's successful campaign during its 2023 G20 presidency to include the African Union as a permanent member. This advocacy underscored India's longstanding commitment to amplifying the voices of the Global South and advancing inclusive multilateralism. Consistent with its philosophical heritage, India's foreign policy has also been guided by Gandhian ideals—emphasizing non-violence, moral leadership, and disarmament. Its advocacy for a nuclear weapons-free world and a rules-based international order reflects a strategic culture that values ethical restraint alongside national interest.

However, India's record is not without contradictions. In 2015, during Nepal's constitutional transition, India was accused of imposing an unofficial blockade in protest of the perceived marginalization of the Madhesi community. This led to severe shortages of essentials in a country still reeling from a major earthquake. While India's concerns were rooted in democratic representation, the means raised questions about its commitment to non- intervention and humanitarian care. Another contested episode is India's continued purchase of Russian oil during the Ukraine conflict. Despite global sanctions, India increased imports, citing energy security. This

pragmatism, though defensible on economic grounds, attracted criticism for potentially undercutting collective efforts to isolate Russia. Yet, as diplomat Mohan Kumar contended, invoking Gandhi's talisman, such decisions must prioritize the poorest—arguing that affordable energy is vital to the well-being of India's marginalized.

Similarly, India's evolving position on the Israel-Palestine conflict reflects a shift from its traditional moral stance. Historically supportive of Palestine and among the first non-Arab nations to recognize the PLO, India in recent years has deepened ties with Israel, notably in defense and technology. In response to the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, India condemned terrorism and expressed solidarity with Israel. However, as civilian casualties in Gaza rose, India called for restraint but abstained from a UN General Assembly vote for a humanitarian truce, drawing critique. From a care ethics perspective—which prioritizes empathy, relational responsibility, and the protection of the vulnerable—this measured stance may be seen as a departure from India's moral leadership. Had care ethics guided its policy, India might have called for unimpeded humanitarian access, led a Global South coalition for a "Compassion-Based Ceasefire Framework," and reasserted its non-aligned legacy through moral diplomacy. As Virginia Held reminds us, "Care is not partiality; it is attentiveness to the needs of the vulnerable in context."

This ethical tension is echoed in India's domestic response to the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, where 26 Hindu pilgrims were killed by Lashkar-e-Taiba- linked terrorists. India responded with Operation Sindoor, deploying advanced indigenous military technology to strike across the border. While praised for its precision and avoidance of civilian casualties, the operation illustrated the challenge of balancing justice with care.

Military retaliation alone, though justified, could have been supplemented by a "National Grief and Reconciliation Initiative"—a care-based framework supporting victim families, promoting interfaith solidarity, and facilitating dialogue with Kashmiri civil society. As Joan Tronto reminds us, care involves not just response, but competence and responsibility. India's counter-terrorism strategy could have incorporated care-based governance reforms to build long-term peace and trust.

Lastly, India's muted response to the persecution of Bangladeshi Hindus in 2024 poses another ethical dilemma. Following the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the eruption of anti-Hindu violence, many fled to India seeking refuge. Though Prime Minister Modi expressed concern and discussed the crisis with global leaders, India's reluctance to offer formal asylum or create protective mechanisms was stark. As a non-signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, India lacked a structured framework to assist these displaced persons. From a care perspective, this restrained response appears as a failure of humanitarian obligation. India could have established a fast-track asylum policy based on Gandhian ethics, offered sanctuary spaces, legal aid, and trauma support, and reaffirmed its identity as a civilizational refuge, framing refugee care not as burden but as legacy.

Incorporating care ethics into foreign policy does not entail abandoning strategic interest—it means redefining interest to include the emotional, existential, and relational well-being of people. This redefinition is particularly pertinent for a civilizational state like India, whose heritage is deeply informed by *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Karuna* (compassion), and *Dharma* (ethical duty). A care-based diplomacy would prioritize human security alongside border security. It would promote dialogue, empathy, and healing as tools of conflict transformation. It would institutionalize care through gender-inclusive peacebuilding, comprehensive refugee policies, and climate justice frameworks rooted in relational equity. As Annette Baier aptly wrote, "A morality of care sees the world not as a chessboard but as a web of relationships." In this web, India has the opportunity to offer not just influence, but inspiration—a foreign policy not merely of power, but of compassionate statesmanship.

CONCLUSION: REIMAGINING GLOBAL POLITICS THROUGH THE LANGUAGE OF CARE

If global politics is a theatre of laws, alliances, and power games, then care ethics emerges as the long-silenced whisper from the wings—a reminder that behind every policy decision lies a fragile human life, every statistic a silenced story. The case studies explored in this research reveal a profound and unsettling truth: justice, in the absence of care, can become a sterile ritual. It can fulfill legal obligations, sign treaties, and uphold norms, yet still fail to reach the trembling hands of the vulnerable, the displaced, the grieving. It may bind states, but it cannot bind hearts. It may build institutions, but it cannot build trust.

To be clear, formal justice matters. Legal frameworks, procedural integrity, and institutional mechanisms are the scaffolding upon which global order rests. They are essential—but not exhaustive. Without moral imagination,

they risk becoming bureaucratic monoliths, hollowed out by abstraction and detached from the very lives they claim to protect. A world ruled only by justice might be efficient, even stable—but it will not be humane. As this study has shown, justice disciplines, but it is care that heals.

Care, then, is not an optional virtue—it is the ethical soul of justice. It breathes life into law and humanity into governance. It challenges us to look beyond the letter of agreements to the lived experience of those who are affected. The ethics of care insists that vulnerability is not a weakness to be managed, but a reality to be acknowledged. It asks us to lean into discomfort, to stay with suffering, and to recognize that relational interdependence—not dominance—is the ground of political life.

In moments where India extended compassion—be it sheltering Tibetan refugees, launching Vaccine Maitri, or championing the African Union's inclusion in the G20—it acted as more than a geopolitical player; it stood as a moral actor. In these instances, care transcended interest. But when India chose silence in the face of Gaza's devastation, restraint amidst the plight of Bangladeshi Hindus, or legality over empathy during the Madhesi blockade, it revealed the limits of justice divorced from care. These were missed opportunities—moments when the world needed India not just to lead, but to listen. Not only to act, but to feel.

This is where the future lies—not in choosing between care and justice, but in interweaving them. As Virginia Held reminds us, *"Care is not just a feeling—it is a practice, a form of reasoning, and a political commitment."* To embed care in foreign policy is to reimagine diplomacy itself—not as cold calculation, but as relational stewardship. It is to understand responsibility not merely as obligation, but as moral proximity—a willingness to be moved by the suffering of others. Such a vision demands structural transformation, not sentimental gestures. It calls for care-based institutions that value dignity over data. It envisions relational accountability, where states are judged not only by compliance, but by compassion. It imagines transnational solidarity built not on transactional deals, but on shared humanity. In such a world, education would cultivate empathy as much as economics, diplomacy would be measured by healing as much as hard power, and international law would be grounded in listening, not just legislation. To incorporate care ethics is not to weaken foreign policy; it is to deepen its moral core. It means crafting a world where protection is not conditional, and compassion is not politicized. It means that the smallest gestures—welcoming a refugee, pausing to mourn the dead, standing for the silenced—will carry the same ethical weight as summit declarations or military restraint.

In closing, this research has sought to illuminate not just what India has done, but what it could become—a voice not only of the Global South, but of global empathy; a leader not only in power, but in principled care. For in an era marked by planetary crisis, rising authoritarianism, and moral fatigue, care is not a luxury—it is the foundation of ethical survival. And perhaps, when we begin to speak in the language of care, we will finally move beyond the map of strategic interests into a deeper cartography—one etched with tenderness, shaped by justice, and lived with dignity. Only then will we have created a world not just governed well, but truly worth living in.

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