Defining Home:

Developing Ethical Theory Through a Relational Perspective

Introduction

The question I seek to answer in this work is whether a person has a moral obligation toward one's home. I answer this question by looking at the relationship between a person and one's home. I define home as a place to which a person has a particular and unique attachment. I explain what I mean by place using Jeff Malpas' and David Seamon's work on phenomenological geography.

In my first chapter, I explain my methodology, which is inspired by Alastair MacIntyre's *After Virtue.* I offer an introduction to the philosophy of the home by looking at architectural definitions of home as the starting point for exploring this topic. In my second chapter, I analyse the relationship between persons and their physical surroundings and argue against the notion of an atomized individual, showing that one's physical surroundings are integral to one's very being. I also offer a philosophical definition of home. In my third and final chapter, I explain the obligations one has towards one's home and propose the application of care ethics as a way of understanding these obligations.

Chapter One

A Starting Point for an Analysis of Home

I am concerned with building a robust theory of how one ought to conduct oneself in relation to one's home. My concern with the topic of home comes from the combination of how much time a person spends at home and the limited philosophical analysis that has been done on it. In the context of ethics, our concern is with how to live well. Consequently, since "on average, in the Western world, people spend nine-tenths of their lives inside buildings [and] about two-thirds of that indoor time is spent at home,"[1] the topic of home seems worthy of philosophical inquiry. However, there is little philosophical research on the topic of home. Even in the literature that does concern the topic of home, there is little agreement on what a home *is*, which is problematic when evaluating how one ought to conduct oneself with regard to it. Therefore, my first task is to propose an adequate definition of home. My first and second chapter focus on doing so.

Methodology

I draw methodological inspiration from Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue.* In this book, MacIntyre addresses the problem of moral arbitrariness. He traces this problem back to the Enlightenment, where he claims the moral sphere became separated from theology, legality, and aesthetics. This separation, he explains, led to what MacIntyre calls "the Enlightenment's systematic attempt to discover a rational justification for morality".[2] However, MacIntyre finds

[1] David Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives of Place Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement* (London: Routledge, 2023), 122.
[2] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, third ed., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 39.

that there is a problem with using rationality to justify morality, which is the problem of moral authority; it is not clear what authority reason has to compel people to follow a moral theory.[3]

The problem, MacIntyre explains, is demonstrated in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or,* where Kierkegaard argues that whether a person adopts an ethical life rather than an aesthetic life (or a legal or theological life) is based on personal choice rather than the authority of the ethical.[4] When discussing how one chooses between the ethical life and the aesthetic life, MacIntyre states:

> Suppose that someone confronts the choice between them having as yet embraced neither. He can be offered no *reason* for preferring one to the other. For if a given reason offers supports for the ethical way of life … the person who has not yet embraced either the ethical or the aesthetic still has to choose whether or not to treat this reason as having any force. If it already has force for him, he has already chosen the ethical; which *ex hypothesi* he has not. And so it is also with reasons supportive of the aesthetic. The man who has not yet chosen has still to choose whether to treat them as having force. He still has to choose his first principles, and just because they are *first* principles, prior to any others in the chain of reasoning, no more ultimate reasons can be adduced to support them.[5]

While a robust moral theory can be developed on a rational basis, it does not guarantee that the theory has any authority. This is a problem, as the Enlightenment understanding of morality is that it is objective in relation to the individual, and unaffected by personal desires. These characteristics are supposed to come from its authority. According to MacIntyre, if morality is based on personal choice, rather than morality's authority, then there is nothing stopping people from abandoning a moral principle whenever it suits them.[6]

The problem, then, is how to build a moral theory that has authority. MacIntyre introduces the requirement of a *telos,* which he takes from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics.*

[3] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 40.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 42.

MacIntyre identifies three pillars needed for a moral theory: the conception of an untutored human nature, of precepts of rational ethics, and of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realised-its-*telos*.[7] However, MacIntyre argues that moral theories based on reason do not provide a sufficient *telos.*

> Since the whole point of ethics – both as a theoretical and a practical discipline – is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end, the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a *telos* leaves behind a moral scheme composed of two remaining elements whose relationship becomes quite unclear.[8]

While reason can inform us about how to achieve our ends, it cannot determine what that end ought to be.[9] The solution, then, is to establish an end so that all three moral pillars are present. For MacIntyre, the moral end should be informed by human experience.[10]

However, when looking at what human life *is* like to inform us as to what human life *should* be, we run into the problem of turning an "is" into an "ought". MacIntyre addresses this by explaining that there are times when an "ought" actually can be derived from an "is," such as when dealing with functional concepts.[11] MacIntyre uses the example of a watch: a watch *is* something which tells time and is only properly a watch if it does so, therefore a watch *ought to* tell time well.[12] Extending this to humans, MacIntyre notes that "Aristotle takes it as a starting-point for ethical enquiry that the relationship of 'man' and 'living well' is analogous to that of 'harpist' and 'playing the harp well'."[13] While neither Aristotle nor MacIntyre provide a clear

[7] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.
[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 54-55.
[9] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 53.
[10] Ibid.
[11] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 57.
[12] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 58.
[13] Ibid.

definition of "living well," I take it to mean something like the classic notion of flourishing, which is associated with positive psychological and social functioning.

MacIntyre also specifies that a functional concept is a relational concept.[14] Looking at people as atomized individuals leaves us unable to conceive of a *telos* because functional concepts are grounded in their physical and social context. Returning to the example of the watch, to tell time well, a watch must tell time to *someone;* a watch in isolation would be devoid of a function. Similarly with people, considering persons abstracted from their physical and social context results in an incomplete picture of human life. Function involves interacting with something else. This is why I choose to look at the experience of home to understand the function of home in human life. Architectural literature provides observational findings of different understandings of home, so I start there.

The Sources

In this chapter, I discuss a few perspectives on home, which I pull from articles in North American architecture journals from the 1990s. These articles present many different definitions of home but unfortunately "lack any coherent or unifying theory".[15] The result is an understanding of home that is seemingly subjective, as all definitions are given equal legitimacy. An ambiguous definition of home is a problem for moral theorising because it results in an unstable foundation upon which to build a working moral theory of home. To have a robust moral theory of home one must have a clear understanding of what home is. These sources have two purposes in this work. One, which has already been stated, is to get a preliminary view of

[14] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 59.
[15] Peter Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* Vol. 14, No. 3, Autumn, (1997): 226.

how people understand the idea of home and the function it has in their lives. The other is to show how divergent perceptions of home can be. After presenting various intuitive understandings of what a home is, I will try to find a throughline to build a practical moral theory on.

The first two sources I look at are Carol Deprés' "The Meaning of Home: Literature Review and Directions for Future Research and Theoretical Development," and Peter Somerville's "The Social Construction of Home." I begin with these articles because they offer a reasonably comprehensive overview of the empirical and theoretical research that has already been done on the meaning of home in North America. Although the two articles offer a condensed version of studies done on the meaning of home, they both struggle to present the information in an organised way, which confirms the unsettled state of this field. After giving a brief summary of each article, I reorganise the information in a way that is even more condensed but hopefully better organised. The aim is to get a general understanding of the current research that has been done on the meaning of home in North America.

Deprés' article gives an overview of empirical research done on the meaning of home in North America between 1974 and 1989.[16] The article breaks up into three sections: definitions of home as it is understood by the people who live there; interpretive models for understanding home; and a discussion of selective and interpretive biases often found in efforts to understand this evasive concept. Although I present the information from Deprés' article in my own categories, she discusses ten definitions of home. The definitions are:

- home as security and control;
- home as a reflection of one's ideas and values;

[16] Carol Deprés, "The Meaning of Home: Literature Review and Directions for Future Research and Theoretical Development," J*ournal of Architectural and Planning Research* 8, no. 2. (1991): 96.

- home as acting upon and modifying one's dwelling place;
- home as a place of permanence and continuity;
- home as a place for relationships with family and friends;
- home as a centre for activities;
- home as a refuge from the outside world;
- home as an indicator of personal status;
- home as a material structure, and;
- home as a place to own.[17]

Deprés distinguishes five interpretive models of home from the first-person perspective, meaning from the perspective of those who live there. These interpretive models are territorial, psychological, socio-psychological, and phenomenological and development.[18] Deprés concludes her article with a call for additional research on the meaning of home, including research into non-traditional homes.[19]

Peter Somerville's article follows Deprés' work. In "The Social Construction of Home," Somerville attempts to create a unified understanding of home by combining psychological, phenomenological, and sociological approaches.[20] Like Deprés, Somerville reviews both empirical and theoretical literature on the meaning of home.[21] Somerville specifies that he reviews both sociological and non-sociological work on understandings of home and wants to show that a holistic approach (which combines sociological and non-sociological approaches) is required for an accurate definition.[22] Somerville chooses to investigate three areas of analysis in the meaning of home: privacy, identity, and familiarity.[23] He states that these three areas of

[17] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 97.
[18] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 98
[19] Ibid.
[20] Peter Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 14, no. 3 (1997): 226.
[21] Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home," 227.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

analysis correspond to three dimensions of home's reality: physical, psychological, and social.[24] As Somerville acknowledges, however, there is overlap between the three groups, which is why a holistic approach is required.

While these two articles offer a helpful survey of current research on the meaning of home, the information contained within them is disparate. Collectively, the two articles present 19 different, but not necessarily distinct, definitions of home. What stands out in these definitions is that they all have both a physical and psychological component. In the proceeding pages, I reorganise their definitions of home around what I consider to be primarily physical definitions, or physical-psychological definitions, and psychological definitions. However, as the articles acknowledge, the physical and psychological aspects of home overlap significantly. The categories I use to organise the literature are: home as a physical structure; as a place of security and control; and as the site of a certain psychological experience. Although I organise the literature into these categories, the boundaries between the definitions and categories remain to some degree ambiguous.

Home as a Physical Structure

I begin with the most physically oriented understanding of home, which is straightforward: a home is the physical structure one lives in. Deprés mentions that in the context of North American nuclear families home is most often defined as a house.[25] These families, Deprés explains, are primarily married couples with young children, tending toward middle-class standards and owning and living in single-family detached houses.[26] Somerville proposes this

[24] Somerville, "The Social Construction of Home," 238.
[25] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 97.
[26] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 102.

definition, stating that "in America … it has been claimed that the word 'home' is 'used in everyday speed as a synonym for the owned single-family house'."[27]

While this definition of home emphasises the physical structure of the house, the owning of a house also brings social and psychological benefits. As Deprés and Somerville both describe, the owning of a house in a North American context is generally associated with the gaining or maintaining of social status. According to Somerville, "for the middle class in Canada, the home play[s] a central role in confirming their status and helping in upward mobility."[28] He explains that between the 1960's and the 1990's, the working class has become more like the middle class, for whom having a home confirms one's economic status and aspirations to upward mobility.[29] Deprés also notes the influence of propaganda that encourages citizens to purchase detached single-family houses. This propaganda emphasises owning a detached home as a sign of equality and an object of financial incentives for banks to encourage citizens to purchase homes using mortgages.[30] With these social pressures and symbolic implications, owning a house becomes a way for individuals to feel confident in their social position.

There are problems with this definition, however. Deprés acknowledges that using "home" and "house" as interchangeable terms is becoming increasingly untenable.[31] This is due to the declining number of people who are able to buy houses and the large percentage of people who either rent or live in multiple family houses such as condominiums or duplexes.[32] The tension is captured by Somerville when he notes that "in capitalist countries generally, home-

[27] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home," 228.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home," 229.
[30] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 104, 105.
[31] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 107.
[32] Ibid.

owners are more likely than tenants to see their home as an indicator of social status, to display 'pride of possession,' to value the privacy and freedom from the control and intrusion of others which owner-occupation provides, and in general to feel they have more scope for making a dwelling into a home."[33] While home may be understood by some as referring to one's house, the declining accuracy of this definition means that it is not adequate for building a moral theory on. As people increasingly become unable to participate in home ownership, the likelihood of home being regularly defined as a house, which is associated with economic status and mobility, becomes more unlikely. For people who are unable to own houses but still consider themselves to have a home, defining home this way may be problematic.

Home as Security and Control

As Deprés and Somerville explain, home is also understood as a physical place that provides inhabitants with security and control. In this definition, the physical and psychological elements are relatively balanced, as this definition refers to a location that induces both physical and psychological effects. As Deprés describes, this conception "refers to home as the sole area of control for the individual as providing a sense of physical security."[34] A similar definition Deprés discusses is what she calls the territorial interpretation of home, where territoriality is understood as a boundary between self and others in relation to what one owns compared to what another owns.[35] In this interpretation, physical and psychic security and control are outcomes of what she calls "territorial satisfaction."[36]

[33] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home" 228.
[34] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 97.
[35] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 99.
[36] Ibid.

The motivation to attain territorial satisfaction is not altogether distinct from the motivation to own a house. The ownership of a house is a straightforward way to achieve control over a physical space. One benefit that comes from having control over an area is security through privacy. Sommerville discusses the development of home as a place for privacy, explaining that since the seventeenth century in Europe there has been an increase in the tendency to associate "home" with privacy.[37] "Since then, private specialised spaces have been created within dwellings … and the home has become a place of intimacy and personal fulfilment for which privacy is essential."[38] Somerville also shows how domiciles were once more public, with only the family's bedrooms being considered private spheres.[39] Changes in the structure of both houses and social relationships have made domiciles increasingly more private to the point that now one's house is considered a private sphere for the family and those invited inside, while bedrooms still remain individually private spheres.[40]

While the social boundaries between private and public spheres can be difficult to navigate, with the boundary changing over time, relying on the physical boundaries of the house is straightforward. The inside of the house is private for the family, with bedrooms being individually private, while outside the house is public. One is thereby granted psychic security as well as physical security without having to constantly spend energy renegotiating these boundaries. There is the physical security that comes from being in a space one has ownership over and is therefore free from the threat of outsiders, but there is also the psychic security that comes from having personal control instead of having to navigate the public sphere and the pressures associated with it. This comes close to the concept that Somerville calls "ontological

[37] Somerville, 232.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home," 234.

security."[41] With ontological security, the person is secure in one's existence and reality.[42] Having a place where one is in control removes the existential threat posed by a public world, allowing one to exist in this space with ease.

Returning to the idea of home as a place of territorial satisfaction, Deprés explains that territorialization is related to exerting control over one's space, since "one's desire to act upon and modify the dwelling has been interpreted as aiming toward territorial satisfaction."[43] On this view, home is a place where the dweller is able to express "tastes, interest, and character."[44] This understanding is also related to the definitions that emphasize what Deprés calls "home as acting upon and modifying one's dwellings" and **"**home as reflection of one's ideas and values."[45] Here the emphasis is on the ability to control one's surroundings, as one's home emerges from a wider process of controlling the environment.[46] While modifying one's environment can be a means of self-expression, it is the ability to do so in the first place – the control over the environment one has – that is the core of this definition of home.

To further clarify the idea of territorial satisfaction, I turn to J. Douglas Porteous' article "Home: The Territorial Core," where he offers an explanation of territoriality that is helpful for understanding this conception of home. Porteous begins by asserting that Western societies "tend to assert exclusive jurisdiction over physical space."[47] He states that control over an area is secured in two ways: through personalization and by defence.[48] He specifies, as well, that these

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 99.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 98.
[46] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 99.
[47] J. Douglas Porteous, "Home: The Territorial Core," *Geographical Review* 66, no. 4 (1976): 383.
[48] Ibid.

behaviours are notably strong in relation to one's home space.[49] This contrasts to a place such as an office or other workspace, where one may to some extent territorialize one's desk, for example, while also recognizing that the space may be intruded upon by others, such as building custodians.[50] The personalization of a space, Porteous explains, confers psychic security, especially through freedom of self-determination, while control confers physical security.[51] Home, in this picture, satisfies territorial behaviours as long as it remains under one's control.

To complicate this definition of home, however, Somerville also argues that the demarcation between wholly private and wholly public spheres corresponds with a demarcation of gender roles.[52] Deprés agrees that the perception of physical security changes with the age and gender of the dweller.[53] For instance, adults typically experience their home as a place of spatial control, while children experience it as a place for freedom of action as well as physical and emotional security.[54] While having control over an area can provide one with physical and psychic security, there are individual variations in how this is experienced. We end up finding the same problem with this definition as with home as house: It is difficult to build a general moral theory of home when the experience of controlling an environment is inconsistent across different demographics. We would likely not want to create a definition of home that excludes someone based merely on the amount of control available to a person when control is connected to one's involuntary social position.

Home as Psychological Experience

[49] Ibid.
[50] Porteous, "The Territorial Core" 384.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home," 232.
[53] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 98.
[54] Ibid.

In this section, I discuss understandings of home that are based on a psychological experience. In these understandings, what makes a home is whether one feels that it is one's home. This is the vaguest definition of home, as there are no criteria to distinguish whether a location is a home aside from whether or not the subject feels it to be one. Although the feeling is associated with a particular place, this understanding of home emphasises the psychological experience of the person. Among the definitions that Deprés surveys, those that best fit under this category are "Home as Permanence and Continuity,"[55] and "Home as Relationships with Family and Friends."[56] Here, Deprés refers to home as "a temporal process that can only be experienced along time."[57] This understanding deeply connects home to the past and memories.[58] As Deprés says, "home is perceived and experienced as the locus of intense emotional experience, and as providing an atmosphere of social understanding where one's actions, opinions, and mood are accepted."[59] Here, home is closely related to feelings of acceptance. For a place to be a home, the subject must accept the place, which often comes with a feeling of being accepted in return. This acceptance can come either from other persons who live there as well, or from the existence, identity, and behaviours of the subject being *acceptable,* at least in this home space.

One problem with this definition, however, is that there is not a necessary connection between persons and places, since the definition depends only on the subjective experience of the person. As discussed by Jeff Malpas in *Place and Experience,* this is unsatisfactory because it allows for the physical location to be arbitrary. When a person states that a particular location is

[55] Deprés, "The Meaning of Home," 98.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

their home, there is something significant about that space that sets it apart from other space. If we deem any location to be our home whenever we feel like it, then we are missing a key part of what makes a space a home, particularly that a home is a unique space. Ultimately, such a definition is too focused on the subject as opposed to the relationship between subject and location to develop an understanding of how one is to act in regard to one's home. If one can simply deny that a location is one's home, then there is no obligation to follow a moral theory of home in that space.

The problem of disconnecting location from an understanding of home can to some extent be remedied by Maria Vittoria Giuliani's argument in "Towards an Analysis of Mental Representation of Attachment to the Home." [60] Giuliani discusses individual differences in the affective bonds that bind people with their home. She accounts for these differences by describing differences in individual mental representations of the self in relation to the home, which is developed over a lifetime.[61] Giuliani looks at patterns of attachment to the home, stating that there are two characteristics of an attachment bond with an object, one being the state of psychological well-being in the mere presence, vicinity, or accessibility of the object, and the other being the distress caused by the absence, remoteness, or inaccessibility of the object.[62] As well, Giuliani believes that people may only become aware of their attachment to their home when this attachment becomes threatened.[63] She discusses various attachment behaviours, which she describes as behaviours aimed at preserving the presence, vicinity, and accessibility of the object; in other words, behaviours that aim at maintaining the continuity of the experience of the

[60] Maria Vittoria Giuliani, "Towards an Analysis of Mental Representations of Attachment to the Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 8, no. 2 (1991): 133.
[61] Giuliani, "Attachment to the Home," 134.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

home, including residential stability and care for and improvement of the physical environment.[64]

Giuliani states that her main aim in her article is to present a theoretical framework for analysing psychological attachment to a home, which she supports with empirical evidence.[65] As she states, "an emotional based relationship with the dwelling place is what defines the very nature and essence of the home."[66] According to Giuliani, this attachment is rooted in the psychological experience of the home. Looking at cases of involuntary relocation, she observes the emergence of characteristic grief patterns associated with the loss of one's home and resembling people's attachment to a loved one.[67] She describes how relocation can impact people's psychological experience of home, concluding that one's attachment to home "depends on mediating psychological processes," especially those that determine how people understand their home. [68]

Giuliani identifies three components that characterise the mental representation of home attachment: the self, the object, and the self-object relation.[69] She states that representations of the self are characterised by time or are time-oriented, by which she means that a mental representation of the self is created through continuity, age, lifestyle, memories, and the ability to envision a future for oneself.[70] Representations of the object, she says, are characterised by spatial extension while subject/object relations are formed through recognition of an object's singularity.[71] As she says, one must recognize that like oneself, the object has an identity through

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Giuliani, "Attachment to the Home," 135.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Giuliani, "Attachment to the Home," 139.
[71] Giuliani, "Attachment to the Home," 139-40.

its singularity, which subjects recognize and in which they recognize themselves in the object. She thinks this self/object relation has a modifying and preserving orientation.[72] According to Giuliani, however, priority is most often given to modifying the environment, which leads to a lack of attachment to one's home. This is because one could swap one home for another. The contrasting attitude, she explains, is one of perseverance of the environment, which is more likely to lead to an emotional attachment to the home.[73] In bringing the role of location back into an understanding of home, Giuliani begins to alleviate the problem of distinguishing a home exclusively based on individual psychological experience. However, her article is still only a starting point for understanding what a home is and its relationship to a person.

The Problem

The primary problem with these definitions of home is that they are parochial. When trying to build a non-arbitrary moral theory of home, the definition should capture as wide an experience as it can. If the theory is based off a definition of home that only applies to a select demographic, one need only to reject the definition of home to reject the moral theory. For example, in Somerville's article, he discusses the social variability of meanings of home.[74] Returning to the example of defining home as one's house, the significance of one's house can change with changing social identity, most particularly for women.[75] Somerville states that based on sociology studies, "men are more likely than women to see the [house] in terms of status and achievement, while women are more likely than men to perceive the [house] as an emotional

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

refuge or haven or source of protection."[76] He also claims that based on these same studies, women are more likely to care for their house and become more emotionally attached to it.[77] While this demonstrates my previous point that there is both a physical and psychological element to this understanding of home, and that it is problematic to use a definition that depends on one's social identity. Resting a moral theory on a definition that can change from person to person is precarious when building a philosophical theory of home. The problem, as presented by MacIntyre, is that we want to avoid an arbitrary moral theory we want a theory that has authority and a clear *telos.* These definitions of home, as presented above, do not provide a definition of home that informs us clearly about what a home most broadly *is,* or what a home *should be.* Without these questions answered, we are not able to understand what our moral obligations are with regard to our home.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the starting point of my argument. I have also explained my methodology, which I take from MacIntyre. To take MacIntyre's concern about post-Enlightenment ethical theories seriously requires that an exploration of the ethics of home must begin with an inquiry into what a home is and how it relates to human life. To this end I have given an overview of the definitions of home found in architectural research from the 1990s. The problem with these definitions, however, is that they do not reach a settled conclusion on the best definition of home. In the articles I have discussed, home emerges as a multi-dimensional concept that connects aspects of the physical world to people's psychological world. The

[76] Ibid.
[77] Somerville, "Social Construction of Home," 229.

connection, however, remains opaque and requires further investigation, which I take up in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

A Philosophical Definition of Home

Now that I have described the goal of this work and highlighted some architectural interpretations of home and some problems with them, I will argue for a philosophical definition of home. I define one's home as the place to which one has a unique attachment, and I will unpack what I mean by this in the following pages. As David Seamon defines it, a place is a geographical point that draws together human experience, actions, and meanings spatially and temporally.[78] While the relationship between person and environment is integral to the person, the relationship between persons and their home is a distinct form of this relationship. What characterises this relationship is the person's particular attachment to their home. With the argument that "home" signifies a unique relationship between persons and places, I will advance my primary argument that one's home is integral to one's wellbeing.

The sources I discuss in this chapter are David Seamon's *Phenomenological Perspective of Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement* and Jeff Malpas' *Place and Experience.* Both authors look at the relationship between person and environment through a phenomenological lens. Both also argue that persons are inseparable from their environment. While neither author provides a clear definition of home, I use their work as the basis for proposing a definition of my own. After establishing the justification for my view of the relationship between person and place, I will narrow my discussion to home as a particular kind of place.

[78] David Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives of Place Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement* (London: Routledge, 2023), 12.

In *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement,* Seamon provides the background for a phenomenological understanding of person and environment. He primarily uses the work of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to argue for the inseparability of subject and environment, believing that "to speak of human beings apart from their worlds is inaccurate conceptually and destructive practically."[79] For Seamon, to view people as separate from their environment damages our ability to understand ourselves properly, which causes us to act incorrectly, and therefore destructively, towards our world. His particular concern is with the loss of lifeworlds, which he believes is caused by viewing people and their environment as separate. I will say more on lifeworlds and their importance to Seamon shortly.

A work that nicely complements Seamon's is Jeff Malpas' *Place and Experience,* which gives an in-depth explanation of how subjects rely on their environments. Like Seamon, Malpas positions his work in the context of Merleau-Ponty as well as Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard. Also like Seamon, Malpas is critical of the Cartesian tradition, which separates the mental from the physical and prioritises the former. Instead, Malpas argues that the material world is necessary for experience to occur in the first place. As well, he believes the study of place is at the heart of the philosophical enterprise, stating that "if philosophy is understood … as essentially concerned with a form of self-examination and self-knowledge, and if human existence is seen as necessarily tied to the nature of place, then the inquiry into place must surely be at the very heart of the philosophical enterprise."[80]

[79] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,*
[80] Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 15.

Lifeworlds and the Natural Attitude

Seamon begins his book with the point that there is no real distinction between person and environment. While these may be considered conceptually distinct, Seamon acknowledges that they only ever occur together and intertwined. From that point, Seamon explains the concept of *lifeworld*, which he describes as the ordinary, taken-for-granted context in which we live.[81] A key characteristic of lifeworlds is that we are unlikely to be conscious of them unless something happens to impede our experience: "Only when some taken-for-granted aspect of a lifeworld shifts (for example, my coffee machine breaks, or my house and neighbourhood are severely damaged by a storm) does the lifeworld become apparent (my considerable dependence on a morning cup of coffee or the sustaining everydayness of my home and local environment now dramatically out of kilter because of the storm's destruction)."[82] Seamon also adds that lifeworlds are like matryoshka (nesting) dolls; there are smaller lifeworlds within lifeworlds, and there are also larger lifeworlds sustained by smaller ones.[83] The term "lifeworld" is useful to keep us from falling back into a person/environment dichotomy.[84] For Seamon, concern for environmental destruction, which comes from interacting incorrectly with our world, is related to the loss of lifeworlds through loss of diversity in environments. This is a problem because Seamon believes that a diversity of lifeworlds is inherently valuable. While the preservation of lifeworlds is not a direct concern in my argument, I share the concern for properly interacting

[81] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 15.
[82] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 16.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

with the environment, which requires understanding the relationship between people and environment.

Along with lifeworld, Seamon also explains the concept of *being-in-world.* This term refers to the idea that a being, something that physically exists, necessarily exists in a place; narrowed to my purpose, there is no person separate from an environment. When considering persons, it is necessary to include their environment because persons always emerge through and remain dependent upon the environment around them. Seamon states that he wants to highlight "the significance of the lived body in human experience [and] examine the dynamic relations between lived body and place by highlighting how each *interanimates* the other."[85]

Two additional terms that Seamon uses are "environmental embodiment" and "body-subject."[86] Environmental embodiment refers to the pre-reflective ways in which the body interacts with the physical world, while the body-subject refers to the subject whose body engages directly and pre-reflectively with the world. Together, these terms support Seamon's view of person and environment as intertwined, since the subject's body engages directly with its environing physical world. As Seamon states, "there is no thing, creature, situation, event, or experience that can exist without finding itself emplaced in some wider world."[87]

What complements the lifeworld is the *natural attitude*, which Seamon describes as our tendency to be unaware of the familiar world around us.[88] He says we are typically "unaware of our lifeworlds as our lives unfold in an everyday manner in the only way we expect them to

[85] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 15.
[86] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 19.
[87] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 22.
[88] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 21.

be."[89] While one exists in a lifeworld, it is the natural attitude to accept the lifeworld as it is without reflective thought.

All of these terms – being-in-world, lifeworld, natural attitude – relate to physical place, and they are beneficial for looking at the relationship between a person and a place because they all, in various ways, show that persons are connected to their world. A term that is also crucial to this discussion is *place.* While Seamon does not offer an explicit definition of place, he does make some rough allusions to such a definition. One description he gives of place is that it is "the typically pre-given, unreflected-upon environmental contexts that sustain particular lifeworlds."[90] He also describes place as "not the material environment distinct from people related to it but, rather, the indivisible, typically unnoticed phenomenon of person-or-people-experiencing-place."[91] From Seamon's work, we get an introduction to the phenomenological view of the relationship between person and environment, where subjects exist in a lifeworld characterised by the natural attitude. However, it is unclear exactly what the role of place is in this view.

Defining Place

In *Place and Experience,* Malpas addresses the difficulty of defining place. His first chapter explains the obscurity that besets this concept. He claims that place is often overshadowed by understandings of physical space or seen as derived from space.[92] However,

[89] Ibid.
[90] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 42.
[91] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 21.
[92] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 23.

Malpas asserts that while we often take place for granted, we are constantly engaged with it.[93] Like Seamon's description of lifeworlds, Malpas states that a place is often only recognized when it is disrupted. While Seamon uses the example of a broken coffee machine or damage after a thunderstorm, Malpas focuses on feelings of disconnection or displacement that can make one aware that one has been experiencing a place. When familiarity with an environment becomes disrupted, it causes one to become aware of the environment in a way that can make one feel "out of place." Hence, according to both authors, it is feeling out of place that makes us recognize a place.

Malpas begins his inquiry on place by looking at its relationship with space. While a place is located in physical space, he believes that place is not reducible merely to a geographical location. He also argues for an understanding of space that does not reduce it to the Cartesian view of physical extension, stating that "the analysis of place must encompass a broader analysis of space that does not restrict space merely to notions of physical extension and position."[94] While Malpas distinguishes between place and space, he also aims to expand conceptions of space in a way that addresses space's relationship with other concepts, including temporality.[95] For our purposes, however, we are only concerned with space's relationship to place.

After explaining the relationship between place and space, namely, that place includes space but is not reducible to it, Malpas looks at the human element in the idea of place. Place is often seen as different from space because of this human element; indeed, place can be

[93] Ibid.
[94] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 30.
[95] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 25.

considered as the *"human response* to physical surroundings."[96] However, Malpas believes that defining place as simply a human response to the physical environment makes the role of place arbitrary. He argues that "the connection between any particular space and certain emotional or affective responses to that space could turn out to be completely contingent."[97] When place is defined only by a subjective experience, the connection to physical location is lost; the cause of the experience could become something internal rather than coming from the interaction with the environment.

After discussing the differences distinguishing place, space, and experience, Malpas presents his primary argument, which is that "the connection between place and experience is not. . .that place is properly something only encountered 'in' experience, but rather that place *is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience.*"[98] Place, in other words, is a relation linking space, time, subjectivity, and objectivity, and can never be separated into its components but must always be considered as a relational unity among them.[99]

Place, Subject, and Agency

In his second chapter, Malpas describes how place is integral to experience and discusses the element of spatiality. He describes how spatiality is connected to agency, arguing that agency inherently requires an understanding of spatiality. Agency, which Malpas defines as the ability for intentional action, requires subjects to understand, even if only implicitly, the relationship

[96] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 30.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 31.
[99] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 40.

between their body and the space they inhabit. This is because the relation between one's body and the space one inhabits determines what actions are possible.[100] Without knowing what actions are possible, one cannot act intentionally. Malpas therefore argues that the subject is not only in space but that space is "in" the subject, in the sense that subjects must have an intuitive understanding of the space in which they find themselves.[101] As he states, whether a creature can act depends on "the creature's tacit knowledge of the space or of its embodied engagement in space."[102]

To have agency a creature must understand space intuitively, though agency does not require a conceptual understanding of space.[103] Conceptual knowledge is required to *understand* that some location is a place, but it is not required to participate in places generally. He states:

> Place is thus not restricted to the human – place always involves that which goes beyond the human. Place is not determined by the human, and neither are individual places, – at least, they are not determined by the human alone – and so, as noted earlier, place cannot be regarded as a function of the human or as constituted by it.[104]

To have agency, the ability to act intentionally, means one must necessarily have a grasp of one's environment. Moving from agency to subjectivity, Malpas explains that one's subjectivity, one's experience of the environment, is determined by one's capacity to move within and interact with that environment. Creatures with different capabilities will have different experiences of the same environment based on their specific relationship to it and their ability to interact with it.[105]

[100] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 49.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 50.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 51.
[105] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 79.

In this way, Malpas shows that one's environment is not separate from the subject but is required for subjectivity to exist at all.

After examining the relationship between subjectivity and agency, Malpas describes how subjectivity is related to self-identity. He reasons that experiences cannot be detached from the individual, so what one experiences will necessarily become part of one's identity.[106] He makes the caveat, however, that there is a difference between what experiences individuals "identify" with, in the sense of accepting as part of their identity, and what they "identify" with, in the sense of which experiences belong to them.[107] He argues that experience and thought are holistic, meaning that one's identity emerges from a system of embedded experiences. Regardless of whether a subject accepts or rejects experiences, the experience still belongs to the subject. As well, these experiences arise through subjectivity, which is embedded in the environment.[108] Malpas states that "our mental lives are indeed organised and defined only in relation to action."[109] By this, he means that because subjectivity is connected to our environment and gives rise to experience and subsequently a self-identity, making our identity inseparable from our whole environment, but especially from the particular places we inhabit. Furthermore, it is through intentional action that we engage with our environment, have experiences, and build self-identity.

Defining Home

[106] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 82.
[107] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 86.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Malpas, *Place and Experience*, 107.

From the work of Malpas and Seamon, we see that the reason people are inseparable from their environment is because the environment is necessary for existence in the first place. Furthermore, particular environments are necessary for particular existences. Consequently, place, defined as the relation between space, time, subjectivity, and objectivity, is integral to experience. The two elements I am most concerned with are subjectivity and spatiality. Temporality will become important in the following chapter, where I discuss how to develop an ideal relationship between person and environment. While it is typically unnoticed, we are constantly engaged in places. I will now suggest a definition of home based on this understanding of the relationship between person and place.

One of the concepts Seamon discusses is *homeworld*, which is similar to lifeworld. The term "homeworld" comes from Husserl, who describes it as "the tacit, taken-for-granted sphere of experiences, understandings, and situations marking out the world into which each of us is born and matures as children and then adults."[110] Since place is described by Seamon as the physical location which facilitates lifeworlds, home must be the place that facilitates homeworlds. What home means in this picture, however, is still obscure.

I propose that the term "home" signifies a particular kind of relationship between persons and places, characterised by the person having a unique attachment to the place. A person can occasionally have more than one place that can be called home, but it most often only applies to a single place at a time. I have shown that places in general are integral to experience, but home is the place that is most significant to a person's experience because of the meaningful

[110] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives*, 41.

attachment the person feels towards the home place. Multiple people can consider the same place to be home, such as with a nuclear family living in one house, but this is because of the common relationship with the place that each person has, rather than because of something about the house itself.

While places are an ontological necessity (a person requires a place to exist), home is the primary place of the person. Returning to what Malpas says about identity and subjectivity, experience arises from subjectivity and all of a peson's experience is incorporated into a self-identity. Home, being the place of most significance to a person, therefore constitutes the primary basis or foundation of self-identity. There are two reasons for this. First, the home being of unique significance to the person means experiences related to home are especially meaningful for self-identity. The second reason is related to Seamon's explanation of *homeworld,* where home is the lifeworld that a person is born into and matures into as an adult. Because home can be the place where maturation occurs, it is a prime location for significant experiences, if only because a considerable amount of time is spent there. Other places exist as secondary to the home and other identities emerge from the home identity. Just as experience and thought are holistic, so too identity. One's home identity may be augmented or altered, but it remains at the core of the individual.

However, not all homes are necessarily the place one is born or grows up. Limiting an understanding of home to biological families or particular physical structures (a house) does not adequately capture the extent of what "home" means. While one's birthplace can have a meaningful impact on one's identity, the term home can also be applied to different places over

time. As one builds an attachment to new places, those places can potentially become one's home.

Home and Wellbeing

In Seamon's third chapter, "The Wellbeing of People and Place," he defines wellbeing as "human flourishing" and "optimal psychological experience and functioning."[111] On the surface, one's relationship with one's home is important to wellbeing because of the amount of time spent there. Seamon notes that "on average, in the Western world, people spend nine-tenths of their lives inside buildings; about two-thirds of that indoor time is spent at home."[112] However, after looking at the relationship between person and environment, it should be clear that "the mental life of the subject is dependent on the subject's active engagement with the surrounding environment."[113] While places certainly influence the mental life of those who occupy them, one's home has an especially strong influence. As I said in the previous section, this is because we are more attached to our homes than we are to other places. While losing a place can be disappointing, such as one's often-frequented cafe shutting down or having to relocate from a familiar work office to a new one, losing a home is drastically more painful. It has been documented that losing one's home can result in grief similar to that of losing a loved one.[114] This is why the relationship people have with their homes is worthy of consideration.

[111] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 39.
[112] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives,* 122.
[113] Malpas, *Place and Experience,* 180.
[114] Maria Vittoria Giuliani, "Towards an Analysis of Mental Representations of Attachment to the Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer, 1991, 135.

When it comes to developing a theory of how to achieve wellbeing, the physical world needs to be considered. The psychological flourishing of people cannot be separated from their relationship to their environment, and even more so from their relationship to their home. To answer the question posed in the previous chapter of whether and how a person can have a moral obligation to a place, the answer is that people have an obligation to places insofar as they have an obligation to themselves or others. If we are concerned with cultivating wellbeing for people, then we are obligated to concern ourselves with our environment. A good place to start, because of its significance for our experiences and self-identity, and therefore our psychological flourishing, is by looking at how we treat our homes.

Conclusion

From Seamon and Malpas, we get a phenomenological account of the relationship between person and environment, namely, that persons cannot be separated from their environment. Consequently, moral theories that focus on human life must also include the environment. Based on the reasoning I have traced in Seamon and Malpas, I have suggested a definition of home that incorporates the aspects of architectural definitions of home from the last chapter. Viewing home as a place that one has a unique attachment to captures the physical location, which often includes a structure such as a house. My proposed definition of home also accounts for the desire to have control over the environment, since one's home is a significant aspect of one's identity, and accounts for the psychological aspect of home, which comes from the attachment to a specific place. However, on the philosophical definition of home I have proposed, it does not follow that one's home is necessarily a nurturing environment. For a home

to be conducive to one's wellbeing, the relationship between persons and their home must be conducive to wellbeing. In the next chapter, I look at how one can build a relationship with home in a way that makes it a place where one can flourish.

Chapter 3

Building a Good Home

Now that I have proposed a definition of home, I want to look at how people can make their relationship with home one that nurtures wellbeing. As I proposed in the previous chapter, "home" signifies a special relationship between a person and a place – it does not necessarily mean that home is a place conducive to flourishing. When David Seamon discusses the homeworld, he acknowledges this fact:

> Because the homeworld is pre-given via the arbitrariness of birth and family, we have no choice in what our particular homeworld is. Some individuals are born into homeworlds that sustain kindness, freedom, and beneficence, while other homeworlds are unkind, restrictive, and bleak. In this sense, the homeworld is that lived portion of the lifeworld wherein one is most unwittingly and most primally who one is, largely because of the happenstance of time, place, birth factor, and familial and societal circumstance.[115]

While Seamon's implicit definition of a home is narrower than the one I suggest, the point still applies. Since one's home substantially influences one's wellbeing, the fact that one cannot always choose one's home presents a potential challenge to wellbeing. If someone is born into an unkind or restrictive homeworld, this can be a hindrance to that person's wellbeing. This becomes especially problematic if the impacts of home on experience are unacknowledged. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize and understand the influence of home on wellbeing.

Yet there is a challenge to deal with. How do we cultivate wellbeing if our home is not conducive to doing so? I propose that we should aim to develop the wellbeing of the place as well as the person. Regarding one's home, one should pursue one's own wellbeing and the home's wellbeing, by which I mean its conduciveness to flourishing, which makes it more likely

[115] David Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives of Place Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement* (London: Routledge, 2023), 41.

that those who live there can achieve the optimal psychological experience that we aim for in life.

Although one cannot choose the home one begins with, this does not mean one cannot build a better home. Seamon writes, "The homeworld is indifferent to whether we like it or not, or to whether it makes us happy or miserable. The point is that the norms that guide the homeworld are our norms, our way of life."[116] Our homeworld gives us our everyday context and orients us in the world, but by nurturing our homeworld, or our home, we can change this orientation into something that takes us closer to flourishing. By caring for our homeworld, we can build a more ideal homeworld that will positively impact our wellbeing. I discuss building a good relationship with home in this chapter. The question I seek to answer is: given the relationship between person and place, how do people create a good relationship with their home?

The Sources

The sources I use in this chapter are from Nel Noddings and Marian Barnes. Both authors are proponents of care ethics, which I argue can be used to develop a nurturing relationship with one's home. While care ethics originally discussed education and child-rearing, later works have enlarged care ethics for broader contexts, including even the creation of public policy. After presenting these theories, I will expand on them to apply them to the physical surroundings people call home.

[116] Seamon, *Phenomenological Perspectives*, 41.

In Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, the author gives a preliminary analysis of caring, asking what it means to care. She states that she is offering a new starting point for morality rather than making first-order moral judgements. Instead, she presents what she believes is an intuitive conception of ethics. She states:

> A difficulty in mathematics teaching is that we too rarely share our fundamental mathematical thinking with our students. We present everything ready-made as it were, as though it springs from our foreheads in formal perfection. The same sort of difficulty arises when we approach the teaching of morality or ethical behavior from a rational-cognitive approach. We fail to share with each other the feelings, the conflicts, the hopes and ideas that influence our eventual choices. We share only the justification for our acts and not what motivates and touches us.[117]

Here, Noddings explains that her concern is not with finding moral justification for action but rather how to make moral education effective. She argues that an overly analytical approach leads to poor moral education, tending to make the process of moral decision-making too obscure for pupils to grasp. She calls this method the cognitive-rational approach. She aims to create an alternative ethical theory that contributes to the goal of rendering moral decision-making more accessible. She suggests we move towards a concrete and involved position rather than analysing ethics from an abstract and removed position, and that we begin from a position of caring, where we make moral decisions based on our care for one another.[118]

My other source is Marian Barnes's *Care in Everyday Life.* Barnes argues that care is important in more areas than sociology and social work, where it is most commonly invoked. In her introduction, she describes care as an enduring and contested issue in social policy

[117] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 8.
[118] Ibid.

creation.[119] She states, "Care is fundamental to the human condition and necessary both to survival and flourishing."[120] Barnes notes that political discourse often limits care to the practice of social work. However, she aims in her book to show that care is an essential part of people's everyday lives and how they relate to one another.[121] She notes as well that her book aims to "understand the importance of care in securing individual and collective wellbeing."[122] Barnes seeks to consider care in various contexts in order to develop a critical analysis of care ethics and show how it functions in interpersonal relationships, taking as her starting point the lived experience that best supports any theory that affects daily living. [123]

I choose these sources because they are grounded in the nature of relationships, understanding care as something that sustains them. After describing the theory, I will show how to use it to nurture a relationship between person and place.[124]

A Relational Approach to Ethics

Barnes begins by looking at a definition of care presented by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher:

> On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Tronto 1993, in Barnes, 1)

[119] Marian Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life: An Ethic of Care in Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012), 1.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 2.
[124] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 3.

Barnes notes that in her book, she thinks about care in three different ways: first, as a way of conceptualising personal and social relations; second, evaluating care in a relationship; and third, care as a practice.[125] She also discusses the difference between care ethics and traditional Western ethics, stating that as a practice, care is based on "an analysis of dependency and interdependency, rather than autonomy, as fundamental to human survival and wellbeing."[126] It is in this context that she introduces her concept of person, which she considers fundamental to ethical theories. Barnes says that care ethics has a "fundamentally relational view of human beings."[127] Other theories, she argues, conceive the person as an autonomous individual; care ethics focuses on our function within relationships and understanding the person as fundamentally relational rather than independent.

This relationality, for Barnes, stems from our original condition as babies and children, when we were utterly dependent on others to care for us. This dependency, she argues, continues into adulthood and results in a universal need for care.[128] Further, she believes that "human individuals need care to ensure their developmental, emotional and social needs are met and to enable them to engage successfully in social relationships in order not only to avoid serious harm, but also to flourish as effective participants within human society."[129] Necessary to cultivating this care, she continues, is "respect and sensitivity to both the emotional and bodily dimension of people's experiences."[130]

---

[125] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 4-6.
[126] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 11.
[127] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 13.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 15.

Care ethics is a fitting theory for discussing how one should engage with one's home because it rests on an understanding of the person as fundamentally relational. While traditional ethical theories concern universal rules and abstract theorising, Noddings claims that care ethics remains concrete and considers the specifics of each situation when morally deliberating. In care ethics, what matters primarily is tending to relations between people and enhancing lived experience. Rather than prescribing this or that specific action, it encourages people to adopt a caring perspective and assess the appropriate action for themselves in these contexts.

The Caring Relation

Noddings states that "the essential elements of caring are located in the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for."[131] One person is designated the one-caring, and the other is the cared-for in a simplified, two-person relationship. She notes, however, that all people will be both the one-caring and the cared-for in different relationships, even though in particular instances of caring each person is assigned one or the other role. She takes her definition of caring from Melton Mayeroff, who says, "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself."[132] Here, caring requires an action done by the one-caring on behalf of the cared-for. As Noddings explains, if somebody claims to care but does not act in a caring way, we assume that they do not care.[133] For an action to be considered a caring action, the cared-for must perceive the action as caring.

[131] Noddings, *Caring,* 9.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Noddings, *Caring,* 10.

A caring action must be on the terms of the cared-for. For this reason, care ethics does not prescribe actions but only guides moral deliberation. Noddings explains: "When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other."[134] The one-caring must displace their own interest and adopt the perspective of the cared-for: "Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring."[135]

Regarding the cared-for, Noddings explains that although the relationship is asymmetrical it must still be reciprocal.[136] Reciprocity from the cared-for involves expressing acceptance of the action as caring.[137] When the cared-for receives the action from the one-caring as caring action the caring relation is complete.

Noddings emphasises the importance on both sides of the relation of the caring attitude, which is an attitude of receptivity – the cared-for and one-caring must be receptive to each other and mutually engaged in the relationship for it to be caring. Noddings believes that for the cared-for, the attitude of the one-caring is more important than the actions performed.[138] She clarifies that while the cared-for need not perform a caring action in return, he or she must respond to the caring for the relation to be complete. Noddings's basic formula for a caring relationship is: (A, B) is a caring relation (or encounter) if and only if:

[134] Noddings, *Caring,* 14.
[135] Noddings, *Carling,* 16.
[136] Noddings, *Caring,* 19.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Noddings, *Caring,* 20.

i. A cares for B — that is, A's consciousness is characterized by attention and motivational displacement;

ii. A performs some act in accordance with I; and

iii. B recognizes that A cares for B.[139]

As Noddings explains, caring involves meeting the other's needs, for which we must be receptive. However, she specifies that this receptiveness "is not totally passive."[140] She describes the process of the one-caring while determining which action to perform: "A soul (or self) empties itself, asks a question, or signals a readiness to receive, but the state that develops is thoroughly rational."[141] When caring, we want to meet the needs of the other and pay attention to them to understand their needs, as we recognize they may differ from ours. In return, the response from the cared-for allows the one-caring to monitor the effects of their actions and provides the intrinsic reward for caring.[142] In this context, Noddings acknowledges that care ethics is not a utilitarian theory, but rather consequentialist in that caring must include actions from both parties.

Ethical Caring as a Practice of Receptivity

Noddings distinguishes between natural caring and ethical caring, believing that we act ethically when we develop ethical caring. She describes the ethical self as "an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one-caring and cared-for."[143] She argues

[139] Nel Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19.
[140] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 15.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 19.
[143] Noddings, *Caring*, 49.

that the impulse to act on behalf of another is born from a fundamental recognition of relatedness – understanding that we rely on others for our existence, which she thinks makes caring for others simultaneously caring for oneself. She articulates the foundational belief of care ethics:

> I am not naturally alone. I am naturally in relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance. When I am alone, either because I have detached myself or because circumstances have wrenched me free, I seek first and most naturally to reestablish my relatedness. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality.[144]

As previously explained, the caring attitude includes receptivity to the cared-for. In care ethics, it is the role of the one-caring to listen to the needs of the cared-for and it is the role of the cared-for to accept the care. Coinciding with receptivity in the caring relationship is empathy, though Noddings clarifies that it is not empathy associated with projecting oneself into the situation of another but instead an empathy that includes being receptive to how the other experiences a situation. Noddings states: "I set aside my temptation to analyze and to plan. I do not project; I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other … the seeing and feeling are mine, but only partly and temporarily mine, as on loan to me."[145] She claims that being receptive to the feelings of the other will intuitively move one to action. She describes this as the impulse of "I must do something." When we act on this impulse Noddings believes we are closest to our ethical selves.[146]

According to Noddings, caring, as an ethical action, requires two feelings: the sentiment of natural caring, which she describes as the call of "I must," and the recognition of past times

[144] Noddings, *Caring,* 50.
[145] Noddings, *Caring,* 30.
[146] Noddings, *Caring,* 49.

when we have cared for and been cared for.[147] She thinks these two sentiments together encourage us to act in caring ways. While we may feel a natural inclination to act, we engage in ethical caring when we deliberately and thoughtfully choose to pursue this inclination to action. The role of the second sentiment is to encourage us to continue caring and carry us through times when it may seem that our caring is ill-received.[148]

Care ethics makes the crux of the caring attitude a receptivity to the other and acting on our natural inclination to care. When acting as the one-caring, we must be receptive to the experience of the cared-for. When we are the cared-for, we must be receptive to the care shown to us to complete the caring relation. While care ethics does not prescribe action, it encourages those who practice care to remain sensitive to intuition. I propose using this receptive, caring attitude to build a good relationship with one's home.

Caring for Places

In Noddings' chapter on caring for plants and animals, she states that we can never be in the same sort of caring relationship with such nonhuman things as we can be with other people. While we can be the one-caring for plants and animals, they can never express acceptance of care in the way people can. Therefore, they cannot reciprocate in the caring relation, or at least not fully. She also explains that while plants and animals may be cared-for, they can never be the one-caring for us.[149] The reason, Noddings argues, is that the caring relation requires

[147] Noddings, *Caring,* 79.
[148] Noddings, *Caring,* 100.
[149] Noddings, *Caring,* 149.

"*engrossment* and *motivational displacement* on the part of the one-caring and a form of *responsiveness* or *reciprocity* on the part of the cared-for."[150] From Noddings's description, it is clear that only persons can fully participate in the caring relation, which presents a problem for the argument for caring for one's home. If plants and animals cannot participate in caring, how can we justify an obligation to care for the home?

Despite Noddings' declaration that only persons can participate in caring, in a later book, *Starting at Home: Care and Social Policy,* she argues that the home is integral to care. She asserts that home is valuable for understanding care ethics because it is associated with people's original condition of utter dependency.[151] For Noddings, infancy and childhood define our fundamental need to be cared for. Although never explicitly stated, she considers the home synonymous with a nuclear family and the house where they live. She also claims that home is where one develops the capacity to care, making the analysis of home critical in discussing care ethics.

Having a Good Home

In *Starting at Home*, Noddings claims that the characteristic of the ideal home is that there is "someone who does the work of attentive love."[152] When discussing why a caring home is ideal, she responds that children who learn joy in being receptive to their own needs as much as those of others are more likely to lead happier lives.[153] She states: "If one enjoys the glow of

[150] Noddings, *Caring,* 150.
[151] Noddings, *Starting at Home,* 150.
[152] Noddings, *Starting at Home,* 4.
[153] Noddings, *Starting at Home,* 168.

polished furniture, the sensory delight of well-cooked and attractively served meals, the vigorous growth of well-tended plants, the energy and affection of a pet whose needs are regularly met, the world involved in producing these results will fit more seamlessly with leisure activities."[154]

Noddings notes that she is influenced by Edward Casey's work regarding the relationship between place and identity.[155] She discusses the potential for housework as a creative activity, stating that while one cares for objects in the house, one "increases the object's human dignity," registering the thing officially as a member of the human household.[156] She also notes that a change in conscious attitude can change the self. There is in her argument an emphasis on caring as an attitude with which to approach the world. She argues that looking at the things in one's home with a loving eye expresses a caring attitude and allows us to practice caring. She states: "It is at home that we learn (or fail to learn) to care for people, animals, plants, objects, and ideas."[157]

She considers the relationship between people and their homes by looking at the relationship between older people and their homes. She explains that older people tend to be especially attached to their homes, noting that "when older people say they want both to stay living in their own homes and that they want to die at home, they are expressing the relational importance of home."[158] Barnes also remarks that home "is important in terms of people's

[154] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 168.
[155] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 154.
[156] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 164.
[157] Noddings, *Starting at Home*, 165.
[158] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life*, 129.

relationships to themselves; to significant others with whom that space has been and continues to be shared; and to adult children, for whom it is a base to go out from and return."[159]

While the home is significant because of the memories created there, Barnes also discusses caring for one's home as a beneficial activity in its own right. She describes how especially older people derive self-confidence from their capacity to care for their home.[160] Like Noddings, Barnes believes that caring for one's home can be a way to practice identity construction.[161] She explains that "losing the capacity to care for the home environment can mark a significant shift in older people's lives."[162] While the home can be a place of sentiments for the past, the benefits of continuing to care for one's home show that an ongoing relationship with the home is valuable for personal wellbeing.

In Noddings' writing, two sentiments are worth noting. One is that care ethics calls on us to be attentive to other's needs and to take responsibility "for making sure needs are met to enable people to flourish."[163] The second important sentiment is that to cultivate the ethical ideal, we must "celebrate the ordinary, human-animal life that is the source of [our] ethicality and joy."[164] Care ethics is a vital practice in cultivating wellbeing because it allows people to have their needs met, which happens in relationships with others. To accomplish this, people must learn how to be receptive. As Noddings and Barnes maintain, taking care of one's home allows

[159] Ibid.
[160] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 130.
[161] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 133.
[162] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 131.
[163] Barnes, *Care in Everyday Life,* 5.
[164] Noddings, *Caring,* 125.

one to learn how better to engage in caring and experience the benefits of having a cared-for home.

Care Ethics and the Natural Attitude

Care ethics is an effective theory to incorporate into a moral theory of home because it encourages us to be aware of and responsive to those we are caring for. From Seamon's work, we get an understanding of lifeworlds, which are the typical taken-for-granted everyday contexts in which we exist. As well, there is the homeworld, which is similar to a lifeworld but restricted to where we are brought up. These contexts are taken for granted because of the natural attitude, the unawareness of lifewords (and the homeworld) because of our familiarity with them. As a result, we may not notice the ways in which we are connected to our environment. We also lose sight of the role of our environment in the pursuit of human flourishing, missing out on both how it may be hindering flourishing and the ways it can potentially enhance it.

However, by practising care ethics, we can disrupt this natural attitude and become aware of our world. In the home, we become aware of previously overlooked aspects that, because of the relationship between person and environment, impact our wellbeing. This is especially important in the home because of the more significant connection between persons and their home. As discussed by Noddings and Barnes in the previous section, when we care for our home we are also caring for ourselves and learning how better to practise an ethic of caring. By being aware of our home and receptive to the ways we should care it, we acknowledge the relationship between person and environment and can better cultivate a home that is conducive to flourishing.

Conclusion

In this work, I have outlined some architectural definitions of home, proposed a philosophical definition of home based on geographical phenomenology, and offered a practical theory of home life based on care ethics. By grounding my definition of home on being-in-the-world, a phenomenological concept that underscores how persons and environment are interconnected, I have attempted to build a theory that minimises MacIntyre's concern of moral arbitrariness. On my account, the motivation to care for one's home comes from the motivation to care for oneself. These are really just two sides of the same concern. The interconnection between person and environment is justified by the argument of Seamon and Malpas, who use geographical phenomenology to show how beings are inseparable from their environment. Being inseparable from the physical world, persons can have a moral obligation to a place insofar as they have a moral obligation to themselves to pursue their own flourishing.

Bibliography

Barnes, Marian. *Care in Everyday Life: An Ethic of Care in Practice.* Bristol: Policy Press, 2012.

Deprés, Carol. "The Meaning of Home: Literature Review and Directions for Future Research and Theoretical Development," Jo*urnal of Architectural and Planning Research* 8, no. 2 (1991): 96-115.

Guiliani, Maria Vittoria. "Towards an Analysis of Mental Representations of Attachment to the Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 8, no. 2 (1991): 133-46.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* Third ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography.* New York: Routledge, 2018.

Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

—— *Starting at Home: Care and Social Policy.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Porteous, J. Douglas. "Home: The Territorial Core," *Geographical Review* 66, no. 4 (1976): 383-90.

Seamon, David. *Phenomenological Perspectives on Place, Lifeworlds, and Lived Emplacement.* London: Routledge, 2023.

Somerville, Peter. "The Social Construction of Home," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 14, no. 3 (1997): 226-45.