rejected them for that reason: maybe global justice does require us to transform our world in quite fundamental ways. I have rejected them instead for ignoring the special responsibilities we properly owe to our compatriots, for failing to take proper account of the value of self-determination, for insufficient sensitivity to cultural difference, and so forth—in other words for philosophical and not merely political deficiencies. But I have not yet begun to develop my own alternative view, or in particular to defend the idea of national responsibility which will play a central part in that view. This is the task of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that follow.

In Chapter 1, I said that an adequate theory of justice, and especially perhaps of global justice, has to strike the right balance between two aspects of the human condition: between regarding people as needy and vulnerable creatures who may not be able to live decently without the help of others, and regarding them as responsible agents who should be allowed to enjoy the benefits, but also to bear the costs, of their choices and their actions. In this chapter, I want to explore the idea of responsibility in greater detail, and to see how it relates to each aspect. More precisely, I want to distinguish two senses of responsibility, the responsibility we bear for our own actions and decisions—I shall refer to this as ‘outcome responsibility’—and the responsibility we may have to come to the aid of those who need help, which I shall call ‘remedial responsibility’. Both kinds of responsibility have key roles to play in a theory of global justice, but their roles are very different and should not be confused.

My wider aim in this book is to explain and defend the idea of national responsibility. Does it make sense to hold nations, and their individual members, responsible for the benefits they create for themselves and the harms and losses they inflict on themselves and others? If it does make sense, how far does national responsibility extend, and when does it run out? National responsibility, clearly, is a species of collective responsibility: individuals share in it only by virtue of their membership of those large communities we call nations. Many people find the idea of collective responsibility, and thus national responsibility, puzzling or even abhorrent. They believe that someone can only be held responsible for what he or
she does or brings about personally. Responding to these doubts and concerns is the task of Chapter 5, where I explain how it is possible to treat nations as responsible agents, and explore under what circumstances such attributions of collective responsibility are justified. But here I want to focus on the idea of responsibility itself, and, in particular, on the distinction mentioned above between outcome and remedial responsibility. In proceeding in this way, I am assuming that when we apply these concepts to collectives such as nations, the concepts themselves are the same as those we apply on a much smaller scale to individuals. So throughout this chapter I shall use individual examples to clarify the two concepts, before turning in the following one to examine forms of collective responsibility.

Why is it necessary to begin with a conceptual analysis of the idea of responsibility itself? 'Responsibility' has proved to be one of the most slippery and confusing terms in the lexicon of moral and political philosophy. Arguments founder as the protagonists slide from one sense of responsibility to another without noticing what they are doing. The sheer variety of claims that can be made using the language of responsibility is nowhere better illustrated than in a well-known passage by Hart designed to demonstrate precisely this:

As captain of the ship, X was responsible for the safety of his passengers and crew. But on his last voyage he got drunk every night and was responsible for the loss of the ship with all aboard. It was rumoured that he was insane, but the doctors considered that he was responsible for his actions. Throughout the voyage he behaved quite irresponsibly, and various incidents in his career showed that he was not a responsible person. He always maintained that the exceptional winter storms were responsible for the loss of the ship, but in the legal proceedings brought against him he was found criminally responsible for his negligent conduct, and in separate civil proceedings he was held legally responsible for the loss of life and property. He is still alive and is morally responsible for the deaths of many women and children.¹

Hart went on to classify notions of responsibility under four main headings, hoping in this way to map the concept systematically. My aim here is less ambitious: it is to identify two senses of responsibility that I believe play a key role in our thinking about issues of global justice, and to separate these out from other senses of responsibility that are less relevant, if relevant at all. In other words, I want to narrow down the concept of responsibility for purposes of the task in hand, without in any way suggesting that I have given a definitive account of the concept as a whole.

The second reason for exploring the idea of responsibility is to defend it—or at least to defend the conceptions that I want to use—against a familiar critique, which arises from the fact that human agency is immersed in a stream of natural causation. Whenever human beings act, individually or collectively, their actions can always potentially be explained by causes that are not themselves instances of human action and decision, and this may appear to undermine the very notion of responsibility in any of the ways that we usually understand it. This is a deep problem, but I do not think it can be altogether avoided if we want to show that the idea of responsibility is normatively relevant. If we want to say that individuals or groups should sometimes enjoy benefits or suffer harms because they are responsible for creating those benefits or harms, then we need to show that this claim is not undermined by the fact that the benefit-creating or harm-creating decisions and actions can themselves be given a causal explanation. We need, in short, to establish when causal factors remove responsibility and when they do not ('always' and 'never' being the two extreme answers to this question).

Let me then begin by identifying the two concepts of responsibility that are needed for my larger project, and they can be introduced, and contrasted, most easily by means of an example. Imagine a teacher returning after morning break to find her classroom in a state of chaos, with desks overturned and rubbish strewn across the floor, and demanding indignantly 'who is responsible for this mess?' Her question is interestingly ambiguous. She might mean 'who is responsible for producing this mess—who tipped the desks over, etc.' or she might mean 'who is responsible for clearing up this mess—whose job is it to get the room ready for the next class?' Of course the same child might be responsible in both senses: Johnny might be responsible for clearing up the room because he is the one who tipped the desks over. But this is not necessarily the case, and even if it is, there are plainly two notions of responsibility in play here. One has to do with agents producing outcomes, and I shall call

having created it. But perhaps the class have agreed in advance that, because break-time rumpuses are common and the chief culprits are hard to identify, they will simply take it in turns to clear up the room. It may then be the case that George is on this occasion remedially responsible for the state of the classroom. However, the teacher might also simply assign remedial responsibility, picking out one child at random or choosing a child she dislikes. Here she would naturally say ‘I’m making you responsible for clearing up this room’. Again such an assignment might be justified or unjustified—it would be unjustified if the teacher kept picking on a particular pupil, for instance—but it could not be correct or incorrect in the way that an identification could be.

It is easy to overlook or blur this distinction. The language of responsibility is partly to blame: we often say that we are holding certain agents responsible, and this can mean either that we are identifying or assigning responsibility. Furthermore, we often want our assignments of responsibility to track identified responsibility: we want to assign outcome responsibility to Johnny because he is, in fact, responsible for messing up the classroom, or remedial responsibility to George because he is indeed remedially responsible, on whatever grounds apply to the case. On the other hand, notice that we can sometimes be justified in assigning responsibility to agents who are not, in fact, responsible for what has happened. A parent who is away for the weekend on which her teenage son is holding a party may say before she leaves, ‘I’m holding you responsible if anything gets broken’ and the assignment applies even if the son was in no way involved in the upsetting of the china cabinet and could have done nothing to prevent it. Strict liability laws are another example of this: they can act as incentives to people to take particular care in, say, matters of food hygiene, or serve as a convenient way of assigning costs in circumstances where it is very hard to work out who is indeed responsible for the damage in question. Thus a rule to the effect that the driver of any car that runs into the back of another car is to be held responsible for the costs of the accident may be justified on these grounds, even though it will catch some drivers who were driving carefully and could not have avoided the collision, and who were therefore not responsible in the identification sense.

My interest is in responsibility in this latter sense. I want to establish what must be the case for people to be either outcome

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or remedially responsible for states of affairs like overturned classrooms. As just indicated, this will help us decide which assignments of responsibility are justified and which are not, but it will not always settle the matter conclusively. Looking at responsibility assignments first, as some authors advocate, seems to me to get matters back to front. That is, we might begin by asking what overall social justice or social welfare requires, and then work out how responsibilities have to be assigned to produce these outcomes. We would then conclude that this is what it means to be responsible. Thus, taking the case of outcome responsibility, we would say that some agent A is responsible for an outcome O when we are justified in assigning O to A on the basis of our preferred conception of social justice and the like. But this ignores the fact that judgements of responsibility can have independent weight. We are uneasy about strict liability laws and other devices for assigning responsibility in the absence of actual responsibility, even if we think that on balance they are justified. It is that unease which motivates us to ask questions like 'are agents ever really responsible for the outcomes they produce? If so, under what conditions?' If all that mattered was to find a justified way of assigning responsibility, we could set these questions aside as irrelevant.

II

Let me begin, then, with outcome responsibility, which is both the more difficult of the two ideas and the one that looms largest in debates about national responsibility. What does it mean for an agent to be responsible for an outcome? Responsibility here has a causal component—the agent must in some way have contributed to producing the outcome—but outcome responsibility needs to be distinguished from causal responsibility as such. Causal responsibility is being invoked when we ask the question 'why did O occur?' We want to know which among the many conditions that had to be fulfilled in order for O to occur to single out as the cause of O. As Hart and Honore among others have pointed out, there is no single correct answer to this question.3 Which of the conditions we identify as causally responsible will depend on the nature of our interest: different people with different concerns might single out the behaviour of the driver, the condition of the car, the state of the road, etc., as the cause of a particular car crash. What this example also reveals is that human agency has no special status when causal responsibility is being allocated. We want to know why something happened, what made the difference between O's occurring and its not occurring, and from this point of view an erratic driver and a burst tyre may be equally good candidates, depending on why we are asking the question. Nor, if human agency is identified as the cause, does the nature of the causal chain between A and O matter. A's releasing a butterfly in China might in theory be identified as causally responsible for a hurricane in the Bahamas.

We ask about causal responsibility when we want to know why something happened. In the case of outcome responsibility, our interest is different. We want to know whether a particular agent can be credited or debited with a particular outcome—a gain or a loss, either to the agent herself or to other parties. There is a presumption that where A is outcome responsible for O, then the gains and losses that fall upon A should stay where they are, whereas gains and losses falling upon P and Q may have to be shifted: A may have to compensate P for imposing a loss, and Q may have to return something to A—a word of thanks at least—when she enjoys a gain. As I have already indicated, this presumption can be set aside. There may be overriding reasons why the gains and losses should be distributed differently. Nevertheless, we will not understand outcome responsibility, and how it differs from causal responsibility, unless we grasp this underlying normative concern. As Honore has stressed, it appears integral to our conception of ourselves as freely choosing agents who can make a difference to the world that we should, in general, both be permitted to enjoy the benefits that our doings create and be required to bear the costs that may ensue.4

This can help us understand the contours of outcome responsibility, and especially cases in which causal responsibility and outcome responsibility come apart. First of all, there must be genuine


4 See T. Honore, 'Responsibility and Luck and Being Responsible and Being a Victim of Circumstance', both in Honore, Responsibility and Fault (Oxford: Hart, 1999); also Hart and Honore, Causation in the Law, bxxi–bxxxi.
agency as opposed to inadvertent bodily movement if the agent in question is to be outcome responsible. I am not, for example, outcome responsible for the carbon dioxide that I am producing by breathing as I write this book. This does not mean that outcome responsibility requires intention. I may be responsible for results that I produce negligently—for instance for breaking the figurine that I handle carelessly and drop. What is required here is that there is a foreseeable connection between my action and the result. When I pick the figurine up, I can be expected to foresee that unless I handle it with care, there is a danger that it will break. Handling it roughly is an action of mine that with some probability will produce the result that does occur, so when the figurine smashes the responsibility and the costs fall to me. Moreover, outcome responsibility may be attributable even to agents who have taken some care to avoid the outcome that does in fact ensue. Suppose I decide to light a bonfire in my garden, taking all proper precautions, but unluckily a stray spark sets fire to my neighbour’s garden shed. I am responsible for the damage and should reimburse my neighbour for the cost of replacing the shed.

Because the underlying notion is of an outcome being credited or debited to the agent, the nature of the causal chain matters too for such attributions of responsibility. As the chain becomes longer and more tortuous, responsibility dissipates. Thus I cannot claim outcome responsibility for fluky good results, even if I intended to produce them, such as sinking a hole in one on the golf course (I am not Tiger Woods). There has to be some connection between my capacities and the result for outcome responsibility to obtain, although it is hard to specify this precisely. In the case of bad results, the criterion is somewhat different: the result must be one that a person with normal capacities could have avoided producing. This is to cater for the fact that a person who is, say, unusually clumsy can be held responsible for the destruction he wreaks, even though, at the time of the events, he could not have averted them. We expect such a person to be aware of his shortcomings and therefore to stay away from shops full of cut glass. Our interest in outcome responsibility arises from our interest in the fair distribution of benefits and burdens between different agents: as far as possible we want people to be able to control what benefits and burdens they receive, but we also want to protect them against the side effects, intended or unintended, of other people’s actions. On the other hand, a genuine accident—dropping the figurine because a loud gunshot just behind you causes you to jump—does not produce responsibility, even though the person who is causally responsible by virtue of having chosen to pick it up will no doubt feel in some sense responsible for the loss. It would not be right to ask this person to bear the costs: the causal connection between his action and the result is of the wrong kind.

Outcome responsibility must also be distinguished from moral responsibility, the kind of responsibility which is a necessary precondition for moral praise or blame. The conditions for moral responsibility are more demanding: to be morally responsible for something, you must be outcome responsible for that thing, but the converse does not hold. We can see this most easily by considering the credit side of the ledger first. Suppose a naturally talented artist produces a record-breaking performance or a naturally talented athlete produces a masterpiece. Here the conditions for outcome responsibility will in normal circumstances be met. The athlete intended to run fast and directed her powers to that end; similarly for the artist. The outcome can be attributed to the agent in the right kind of way (it was not inadvertent or a fluke). But we would not hold either athlete or artist morally responsible for what they have done, in the sense

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5 There may be cases in which I become outcome responsible for the harmful results of such movement if I fail to take precautions that would avert such results—e.g. I am not normally outcome responsible for emitting germs by breathing, but I might become so if I chose not to wear a face mask in a hospital’s intensive care ward.

6 Honoré refers to such persons as ‘shortcomers’. See the discussion in Honoré, ‘Responsibility and Luck’.

7 I shall not discuss how these two concerns are to be balanced against each other as the limits of outcome responsibility are set. For illuminating critical discussions of Honoré’s concept, see S. R. Perry, ‘Honoré on Responsibility for Outcomes’ and P. Cane, ‘Responsibility and Fault’ in P. Cane and J. Gardner (eds), Relating to Responsibility (Oxford: Hart, 2001) and P. Cane, Responsibility in Law and Morality (Oxford: Hart, 2002), esp. ch. 3.

8 This is true when we are considering actions and the states of affairs that result from them. On the other hand, it seems that we can be morally responsible, and blameworthy, for forming certain intentions, even in cases where we are prevented from acting on these intentions—for instance, setting out to kill someone, but being forestalled by one’s car breaking down on the way. Here there is no relevant outcome to be responsible for.
of being disposed to express moral praise. The outcome depends too much on natural talent, too little on those qualities of intention and will that attract moral assessment.

On the other side of the ledger, consider someone who is a poor gardener. He handles his seedlings clumsily, does not add the right kind of nutrients to the soil, and so forth, and as a result his yield is poor. He is outcome responsible for this bad result, but he is not morally responsible or morally blameworthy, except in circumstances where he has an obligation to try to produce a better result (say his family is dependent on the crop). His fault is not of the kind that draws moral appraisal. Keeping outcome responsibility and moral responsibility distinct is important for two reasons. First, as I have indicated, outcome responsibility often gives us reason to let gains and losses stay where they fall, or, in the different case where A is outcome responsible for a loss suffered by P, to require A to make compensation or redress. When we make these judgements, we need not be assigning moral praise or blame. A may, for instance, have been acting in a way that is morally innocent or even admirable, and yet may owe compensation to P since he is outcome responsible for a loss to P—for instance, if A damages P’s car in the course of rushing Q to hospital. This will turn out to be important in the international context, where we need to keep responsibility-based claims for compensation separate from the question whether nations can be bearers of moral responsibility, and thus potentially subject to moral praise or blame. Second, if we are interested in the causal conditions of responsibility—which causal antecedents of a decision or an action are such as to relieve the agent of responsibility—then again we may find that outcome responsibility and moral responsibility must be kept apart. For instance, it is often said that an agent must have acted voluntarily if she is to be held responsible for what she does. But, assuming this is true, are the conditions for voluntariness the same for outcome responsibility as they are for moral responsibility?

III

This question leads us unavoidably to the deep problem that I mentioned earlier, namely whether the very idea of outcome responsibility is not undermined if we assume that all human behaviour is explainable in principle by reference to causes that are not themselves instances of human action or decision. In attempting to resolve it, I shall adopt a strategy that has been used to answer the parallel problem about moral responsibility. The strategy is this: to look at those cases in which an agent is relieved of responsibility because his actions have certain causal antecedents, and then to see whether those cases generalize in such a way that the notion of responsibility itself is undermined. If the cases do not generalize—that is, we can explain why certain causal factors undermine responsibility but others do not—then we can maintain a normative defence of responsibility along the lines sketched above, one that underlines the connection between how we see ourselves as free agents interacting with other free agents, and the idea of taking responsibility for the outcomes of our actions. In other words, the general strategy takes the following form: responsibility is something that we want to hold on to, if we can, for normative reasons. Certain causal explanations of human action are taken to relieve the agent of responsibility. But we can give reasons to distinguish these explanations from others that do not undermine responsibility in the same way.

So when, according to our everyday intuitions, do the causal antecedents of an action relieve the agent of outcome responsibility for its effects? First, we have cases which can be lumped together under the heading of ‘derangement’, where the agent wasn’t, as we might say, ‘in his right mind’. This might be the consequence of extreme pain—torture, say; of sensory deprivation or the use of certain drugs; or perhaps extreme provocation. Here the agent acts in a certain way, and may intend his action to have the result that it does, but the action is not governed by the reasons he would otherwise have, or by stable character traits. The external cause generates an emotional response which in turn produces the action, by-passing normal processes of decision. There is a sense, therefore, in which the action, although performed by the agent, is not his action. Under
unbearable pain, for example, a normally trustworthy person betrays a friend. We do not consider him responsible because we think that almost anyone would do the same under these circumstances.

Second, we have cases of manipulation, where A induces B to do something she would not otherwise have done by distorting B’s process of decision. The simplest case involves B acting on false information she has been given—doing one thing (poisoning P) when she believes she is doing something else (feeding P). Other cases might involve planting reasons in B’s head—persuading her that she will go to heaven if she kills P, for instance. To escape responsibility, B must meet certain standards: she must not be unusually gullible, for instance. But if she does meet these standards—if, for instance, there is nothing to suggest that A has any malign intentions in relation to P, and therefore B has no reason to think that the bowl she has been handed contains anything other than nutritious food—then responsibility for P’s fate passes from B to A. B, although in one sense an agent, is in reality A’s tool. The reasons which direct her action are not hers, but A’s.

Third, we have cases of coercion, where A forces B to do something by issuing a serious and credible threat: a bank robber holding a sawn-off shotgun tells a cashier to open the safe. In these cases, unlike those we have already considered, B is usually in command of her actions. She may be terrified by the threat, in which case it will come closer to being a case of derangement, but equally she may be able to weigh up the situation perfectly rationally and decide to comply—for instance she may decide that it is better to hand over the money than run the risk of people being shot. Again, provided her judgement is reasonable—the threat does indeed look serious—she is not responsible for the ensuing loss. Why is this? To simplify matters, let us suppose that A’s threat is to kill P and that A is certain to carry this out. Then let us ask what B has control over. She cannot bring it about that the money remains in her safe keeping while P stays alive. She can choose between keeping the money and seeing P killed, or handing over the money and saving P’s life. So if she decides to hand over the money, she is not outcome responsible for losing the money per se, but only for bringing about one outcome (money lost + P saved) in preference to another (money saved + P killed). The external cause operates here by narrowing down the options to these two. If we judge that the outcome she has brought about is the better one, then it should be entered on the credit side of her ledger even though it involves a loss of money.

In each case, the key question to ask is what the agent has control over—how far the outcome is within her power. In derangement cases, the agent loses control because of some overriding emotional force—he is maddened beyond reason, delusional, etc. In manipulation cases, control passes to the manipulating agent who acts through the person he controls. In cases of coercion, the area of control is narrowed down to two unpleasant alternatives by the coercer. Three further points are worth adding, however. First, implicit in all these judgements are expectations about the normal powers of agents—for example, their ability to see through deception or to resist very mild forms of coercion. A cashier who hands over the content of the bank vault having been threatened by a water pistol shares in outcome responsibility for the loss. Second, in saying that for responsibility to be attributed, the outcome must be under the agent’s control, I do not mean to retract my earlier claim that we can be outcome responsible for some of the unintended consequences of our actions. When I light a bonfire that, as it happens, sets my neighbour’s shed alight, this is certainly not something that I intended or expected, but nevertheless that outcome is in the relevant sense within my control. Honoré uses the analogy of betting to throw light on cases like this: in lighting the bonfire, I have taken a reasonable risk, but on this occasion I have gambled and lost. The key point is that I was fully in control when the bet was placed. Third, responsibility can pass back to the agent if he is responsible for getting into the situation where he loses control. For instance, someone who goes out and gets helplessly drunk may be incapable of controlling his actions when he reaches that stage, but is nonetheless responsible for the damage he may inflict on himself or on others by virtue of choosing to, or allowing himself to, become intoxicated.

In the manipulation and coercion cases, it may seem easier to relieve B of responsibility for the outcome because it belongs so obviously to A, the manipulator or coercer. What then of cases in which an agent’s options are narrowed down by natural forces or

11 This in turn could be defeated in certain cases—for instance, if the person has lost control of his life and his alcoholism is part of that.
occurrences? Suppose, to use a variant on a well-known example, \(^{12}\) B is a water engineer who is able to divert a flash flood from one stream to another, causing a different village to be inundated in each case. Suppose she diverts the flood towards the village where the damage will be less severe. Given that the outcome here seems in the relevant sense to be within her control, should she not be held responsible for the damage that the flood causes?

Clearly B is not morally responsible for the damage; given the facts as stated, she has chosen the lesser evil and can justify her action, so there are no grounds for blaming her. But we know that outcome responsibility can attach to agents who act justifiably, like the driver who damages another’s car while rushing a third party to hospital. In the present case, I think that some trace of outcome responsibility does rest with B. This is revealed by the fact that she may owe it to the inhabitants of the drowned village to explain to them why she had to take the decision that she did. But this responsibility is very weak, as indicated by the further fact that she is not required to make any form of material compensation despite the extent of the damage she has caused. The reason, I think, is the very narrow sphere of control that B possesses: allowing one village or the other village to be flooded. ‘I had no real choice’, she would naturally say, echoing the words of the coerced bank clerk. So again we see that causation undermines responsibility when it removes or radically restricts agents’ control over outcomes.

If this conclusion is sound, then we can infer that causation generally does not threaten outcome responsibility. Consider any normal case in which a person acts to produce outcomes that benefit or harm himself or others, where he is fully in control of what he does. We might in theory offer a causal explanation of his actions, beginning with his genetic make-up, continuing through his childhood experiences, the opportunities available to him in later life, and so forth. Even if this explanation were available, it would not invalidate the claim that the agent was in the relevant sense in control of his actions and the resulting outcomes. He acted for reasons that he grasped, he knew what he was doing, other options were open to him, and so forth. That is a strong enough sense of control to support outcome responsibility.\(^{13}\) Where particular causal antecedents appear to undermine responsibility, it is because they invalidate one or other of these conditions, as they do in the examples we have considered. There is no reason to suppose that all causal explanation can be assimilated to the kinds of causation involved in derangement, manipulation, etc.\(^{14}\)

My argument here is not meant to imply that identifying outcome responsibility is a straightforward matter. There are two main areas of uncertainty. One has to do with identifying more precisely the causal antecedents that can relieve agents of responsibility. As we have seen, our judgements about whether a particular person was responsible for what he did involve holding him to certain normative standards. If he was put under pressure to act in a certain way, was the pressure such that we would expect someone to be able to resist it? Should he have understood that the action he undertook was likely to have the consequences that it did? Although where we set the bar will be heavily influenced by what we observe to happen in the case of most people—if nine others were able to resist the pressure, then the tenth should also have resisted—there is still room for setting it higher or lower in general, and for adjusting it to take account of individual circumstances. What if somebody has an irrational fear of spiders such that threatening her with a spider induces her to perform some very harmful act? Should we say that this person ought to have conquered her fear in the circumstances, or that for her this is a genuine case of responsibility-annulling coercion? As we see later, parallel questions arise in debates about national responsibility, for instance when we ask whether whole populations

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\(^{13}\) See further T. M. Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 6, sec. 5.
can be held responsible for not resisting oppressive regimes that inflict damage on other peoples.

The other area of uncertainty concerns how far agents can be held responsible for the remote consequences of their actions. We have seen that outcome responsibility extends beyond the agent's own intentions: we can be judged responsible for outcomes that arose inadvertently or by omission. A natural requirement is that the agent should have been able to foresee the consequences of what he did, or failed to do. But in interpreting this condition we have to steer a midcourse between, on the one hand, asking what the particular person in question could have foreseen, given his actual capacities and state of mind, and on the other asking what was foreseeable in principle, given complete knowledge of the circumstances in which the action occurred. We have, in other words, to apply a standard of reasonable foresight: an agent is outcome responsible for those consequences of his action that a reasonable person would have foreseen, given the circumstances. Thus a man who fires a rifle in a crowd and hits a passer-by cannot escape responsibility by saying that he believed the bullet to be empty, or that he did not know that rifle pellets could hurt human beings, even if he says those things in good faith. A reasonable person would know that people can be hidden from view in woods and that pellets can maim them. But again the standard of reasonableness we use here is partly a normative one, and therefore open to dispute.

From one point of view, tort law can be seen as a way of resolving such disputes by assigning outcome responsibility according to well-defined principles. It has other functions too—it provides incentives to people to take proper care when their behaviour is likely to impact on others; it supplies remedies to people whose interests are harmed by assigning responsibility for the harm somewhere, even if this involves a form of strict liability—but in large part it serves to specify when people are to be treated as outcome responsible and when they are not, giving concrete shape to the pre-legal idea of responsibility I have been trying to outline. Unfortunately, there is as yet no real equivalent to this in the case of nations, or nation-states, and the impacts they make on outsiders, so in developing the idea of national responsibility we have to rely on intuitive (and therefore partly contestable) judgements of reasonableness when it comes to assigning consequences.

There is one further aspect of this worth mentioning before we turn to the idea of remedial responsibility. When calculating the consequences of someone's actions for the purposes of allocating outcome responsibility, we have sometimes to consider the response of other people: in particular, what steps did they take to avert damage to themselves? Tort law includes the idea of contributory negligence, where A's liability to P whom he has injured is reduced or even eliminated when it can be shown that P's conduct was defective in some way—that he was behaving recklessly, for instance. This idea seems sound if we think of outcome responsibility as a basis for assigning costs and benefits fairly among agents each of whom is capable of governing their own behaviour. Why should A bear all the costs of his action when they would have been less had P behaved sensibly? So outcome responsibility does not necessarily extend to the actual consequences of behaviour, but in some cases at least to the consequences that would have occurred if other agents had responded reasonably. Again, we encounter a normatively laden notion of reasonableness, which may give rise to disagreement. Must P's response have been the optimal response to A's action, or does responsibility remain with A so long as P's response was at least adequate by some standard? It requires no great leap of imagination to see how questions of this kind can arise about national responsibility: if nation A changes its trade policy in a way that is damaging to P, what can we reasonably expect members of P to do in return if responsibility for the damage is to remain with A?

IV

I turn now to the second concept of responsibility distinguished at the beginning of this chapter, remedial responsibility. Responsibility of this kind is clearly quite different from outcome responsibility. With outcome responsibility we begin with an agent whose

action produces beneficial or harmful consequences, and we ask which of these consequences can be credited or debited to the agent. With remedial responsibility we begin with a state of affairs in need of remedy, like the overturned classroom, and we then ask whether there is anyone whose responsibility it is to put that state of affairs right. If there is, then we require that person to act and stand ready to apply sanctions of one form or other if she fails. What needs to be explored here is how remedial responsibilities arise, and what relationship they bear to the other kinds of responsibility (causal, moral, and outcome) we have already discussed.

As the classroom example illustrates, the idea of remedial responsibility potentially applies whenever we encounter a situation in need of remedy. My particular interest, however, is in cases where the remedy is owed to a person or a group of people who are unjustifiably deprived in some way. They fall below some threshold in terms of material resources, or they are in danger or distress. They may, for example, be victims of famine or a natural disaster, or they may have been humanly deprived by robbery or civil war. On a much smaller scale we might think of the person who collapses in the street, or is stranded by a rising tide. For the time being I want to bracket off questions about the source of their deprivation. What matters for remedial responsibility is that the situation is one that demands to be put right: it is morally unacceptable for people to be left in that deprived or needy condition, and there is no overriding justification such as that they are being fairly punished for some wrongful deed. So initially it seems that there is a moral requirement that falls on everybody else to provide the help or the resources that are needed. It is not necessary for present purposes to decide whether this moral requirement is better interpreted as a matter of justice or, for instance, as a humanitarian duty. All that matters is that we find it morally unacceptable if the deprived person is simply left to suffer.

The problem that arises, however, is that an undistributed duty such as this to which everybody is subject is likely to be discharged by nobody unless it can be allocated in some way. We need to pick out one person or several people (or perhaps an organized group) as having a special responsibility to put the situation right. This is what it means to be remedially responsible: to have a special responsibility, either individually or along with others, to remedy the position of the deprived or suffering people, one that is not equally shared with all agents; and to be liable to sanction (blame, punishment, etc.) if the responsibility is not discharged. Unless remedial responsibilities are identified, then even well-meaning people are likely not to intervene, either on the grounds that their intervention would be superfluous, or for the less generous reason that they do not see why it is their job to pick up the pieces when so many others are spared that cost.

Since deprivation is often severe, and since the problem I have just identified is pervasive, human societies have evolved mechanisms for assigning remedial responsibilities. People are given jobs or roles that carry such responsibilities with them, so that if we ask who is responsible for safeguarding this particular battered child, the answer is likely to be the social worker who has been assigned to the case. But unfortunately there are many instances in which no such mechanism exists—who should go to the aid of a person who collapses in the street, for instance—and where we must therefore try to discover reasons of principle to identify responsible agents. Indeed, at global level, the absence of such mechanisms is all too evident: no one is formally assigned the responsibility to rescue the victims of famine or civil war, for instance, so it becomes crucially important to see whether we can have good reason to hold particular governments or nations responsible in such cases.

I want to propose what I shall call a ‘connection theory’ of remedial responsibility. The basic idea here is that A should be considered remedially responsible for P’s condition when he is linked to P in one or more of the ways that I shall shortly specify. The nature of the link varies greatly: in some cases, as we shall see, it provides a substantive moral reason for holding A remedially responsible, whereas in others it simply picks A out as salient for non-moral reasons. We might think, therefore, that some forms of connection

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18 I first put this forward in ‘Distributing Responsibilities’, Journal of Political Philosophy, 9 (2001), 453–71, but have revised it in several respects in the meantime.
should always be given priority over others; I shall argue, however, against this. The point to bear in mind is that the weight of justification is borne by the pressing need to relieve P, and the necessity of identifying a particular agent as having the obligation to provide the relief. The fact that some of the links appear morally flimsy when taken by themselves matters less when this point is grasped.

I shall suggest six ways in which remedial responsibilities might be identified. The first three look backwards and correspond to forms of responsibility discussed earlier in this chapter; the second three are of a sharply contrasting kind.

1. **Moral Responsibility**: The agent who is remedially responsible for P's condition is the agent who is morally responsible for bringing it about. This way of identifying remedial responsibility is intuitively very powerful. In order to be morally responsible for P's condition, A must have acted in a way that displays moral fault: he must have deprived P deliberately or recklessly, or he must have failed to provide for P despite having a pre-existing obligation to do so (e.g., he had promised to feed B, but then defaulted on his promise by doing nothing). So A is to be blamed for P being in the state that he is, and by holding A remedially responsible for P we not only create a mechanism for getting P out of that condition but we also help to put right the moral imbalance between A and P (to put the balance completely right, more has to be done—for instance, A may have to apologize to P for the original act or omission, as well as remedying the effects of that act or omission). It would be wrong to say that we are punishing A by holding him responsible, but making him pay the cost of helping P is a natural way of expressing blame for what he has done. So we have strong, independent moral reasons for wanting to assign remedial responsibility on this basis.

2. **Outcome Responsibility**: As we have seen already, A can be outcome responsible for P's condition without being morally responsible for it. This will be the case, for example, if P's deprivation is a side effect of some action of A's, that is morally neutral or even justified. A might enter into fair economic competition with P, causing her in the process to go bankrupt. So long as the outcome is not due to P's negligence—it happens because A is better at business than P, or has more luck—it will be A's responsibility. The same applies to our earlier example of a bonfire that sets fire to a neighbour's

shed, despite all reasonable precautions having been taken. If in cases like this, P's subsequent condition calls out for remedy, then it will seem natural to pin the responsibility on A, who has brought about the deprivation, albeit inadvertently. Is there an independent moral reason for doing this? I think there is, although the reason is less compelling than in the case of moral responsibility. When we act as free agents among other free agents, we expect to keep the benefits that result from our actions, and so we should also expect, in general, to bear the costs. Of course we do not always assign costs in this way: people who drive others out of business in the course of fair competition are not expected to provide compensation, nor are athletes who win races expected to comfort the losers. But if the costs are heavy—the defeated shopkeeper becomes destitute, or the losing athlete becomes suicidal—then remedial responsibilities cut in, and, other things being equal, they fall to the agent who was outcome responsible.

3. **Causal Responsibility**: What if A is the cause of P's deprivation, but in such a way that he cannot be regarded as outcome responsible for P's condition? How could this be? There are cases in which A is not acting in the sense that outcome responsibility requires—for example, I move backwards in a crowded bar to avoid somebody else who is pushing forward and as a result knock over someone else's drink. There are also cases in which the causal link between action and result is so bizarre and unpredictable that it would be unreasonable to hold A (outcome) responsible—for instance, I walk round the corner of a street, causing a workman standing on a ladder to start and fall off the ladder. And there are cases where A acts under coercion or constraint—B says he will kill P unless A first punches her in the face. Here, then, the only link between A and P is one of physical causation. Nonetheless, this may be enough to trigger remedial responsibility in certain cases. The causal relationship suffices to pick A out from the universe of others who might also come to P's

17 Not everyone shares my intuition that in these competitive examples the winners may have remedial responsibilities to the losers when the latter suffer serious harm. Of course, we can establish practices that assign these responsibilities elsewhere—we can set up social safety nets for bankrupt shopkeepers and counselling services for defeated athletes—and there may be good reason to do this. My argument is that in the absence of such practices primary responsibility lies with the agent who is outcome responsible for the harm.
aid. The mere fact that it was I who caused the workman to start identifies me as the person who should attend to see whether he has been injured in the fall.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to separate pure causal responsibility from relationships of outcome and/or moral responsibility on the one hand, and what I shall shortly describe as capacity on the other. That is, we might be inclined to see the person who steps backwards in the bar and upsets a drink as to some degree negligent, and therefore morally responsible; we might think that causing workmen to fall off their ladders is one of the hazards that goes with being a pedestrian, and therefore assimilate that example to outcome responsibility. Equally, the person who is causally responsible for P's condition may also be the best placed to help him subsequently: if I stumble in the street and knock a fellow pedestrian down, then by virtue of physical proximity it will normally be easy for me to help him. Nonetheless I am inclined to treat causal responsibility as an independent source of remedial responsibility, one that continues to be relevant even in the absence of the other factors just mentioned. My stumbling in the street might have been unavoidable; there may be many others who are equally well placed to pick up the person I have knocked over; nevertheless, the bare fact that I have caused him to fall connects me to him in a special way and *ceteris paribus* makes me remedially responsible. Or consider someone who under coercion injures another. If the coerced himself disappears from the scene, causal responsibility falls on to the person who has been made to inflict the injury, and with it the responsibility to care for the injured party. There is of course no moral reason why agents who are causally responsible and nothing else beyond that should be judged remedially responsible for the conditions they have caused. But in the absence of other forms of connection, the importance of fixing remedial responsibility somewhere explains why bare causation can count.

4. *Benefit:* Suppose that A has played no causal role in the process that led to P's deprivation. He has nonetheless benefited from that process—for instance, resources that would otherwise have gone to P have been allotted to A. In these circumstances, A is not responsible for P's condition in any of the three ways we have so far identified, and yet indirectly he is linked to that condition. He is an innocent beneficiary, let us assume, but the benefit would not have arisen unless P had been deprived. This may be sufficient to make him remedially responsible for P. Suppose that the agents who have deprived P have vanished from the scene or are no longer capable of helping P. A, however, is not in need himself and can restore resources to P. There is a moral reason for him to do this—he has been unjustly enriched by the train of events that led to P's being deprived, even though he himself has not behaved unjustly. In general, the reason invoked here is not particularly strong: we do not think innocent beneficiaries always have an obligation to return their gains. It is also important to distinguish benefit from capacity, the next criterion to be considered. Sometimes beneficiaries, by virtue of having been advantaged, are also the people most capable of supplying the remedy without incurring significant costs. It seems nonetheless that benefit by itself can serve as a ground of remedial responsibility: being a beneficiary of the action or policy that has harmed P establishes a special connection with P of a kind that stands independently alongside the other forms of connection that make up this list, and that may in certain cases provide a decisive reason for A to remedy the harm that has befallen P.²⁰

5. *Capacity:* One rather obvious way of identifying an agent who can be held responsible for bringing relief to P is to establish who is capable of supplying the remedy. If A is uniquely in this position, then he is remedially responsible for P: if I am the only person walking along a river bank when a child falls in, then it is my responsibility to rescue the child. In other cases, where several agents are to different degrees capable, we may assign responsibility to the most capable, or divide it between them along the lines of the classic principle: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'. The rationale for this criterion is evident: since the whole purpose of identifying remedial responsibilities is to get help to P, picking the agent who is actually able to provide that help makes obvious sense.

²⁰ For a thorough exploration of the circumstances under which benefiting from wrongdoing may give rise to remedial responsibilities, and more generally responsibilities to compensate, see D. Butt, 'On Benefiting from Injustice', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 37* (2007), 129-52.
On closer inspection, however, the capacity principle seems to blend two different factors which may not always point in the same direction. One has to do with the effectiveness of different agents in remedying the situation; the other has to do with the costs they must bear in the course of doing so. Suppose there are a number of people standing on the river bank when the child falls in. We may think that whoever is the strongest swimmer should go to the rescue. But suppose that person is also fearful of strong currents (so that although he is an effective rescuer, the rescue causes him considerable distress)—or perhaps he simply dislikes the kind of attention that goes along with a successful rescue. If A is slightly stronger than B, but A’s costs are also much higher, is it obviously the right solution to hold A responsible for rescuing P? In this context, judging capacity may involve us in trading off effectiveness against cost in identifying the relevant agent.

6. Community: The final criterion that I want to consider for attaching remedial responsibility to A is that he should be attached to P by ties of community. This term is used loosely here to cover the great variety of bonds that link people in groups—ties of family or friendship, collegiality, religion, nationality, and so forth. Communitarian relationships are in general independent of and prior to the fact of P’s deprivation. But because it is integral to these relationships that they involve special obligations to fellow-members, when P stands in need of assistance, an obvious place for her to look is to agents linked to her in this way. If a child goes missing, for instance, not only her family but also neighbors, the local community, etc., will feel a special responsibility to try to find her. They are in no way causally responsible for her disappearance, have no special capacity, etc., but the fact of community picks them out as bearers of responsibility. In some cases being connected to P by ties of community will also mean having certain kinds of expertise that will help in relieving her condition: if A and P share the same language or cultural background, for instance, A may be better able to work out what P needs. So here community is connected with capacity. But this is a special case, and it would be a mistake to try to reduce community to one of the forms of connection already discussed. It stands on its own feet as an independent source of remedial responsibility.

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Up to this point, my analysis of remedial responsibility has been primarily descriptive, in the sense that I have sought to identify the criteria that are, as a matter of fact, called into play when remedial responsibilities are distributed, and briefly considered to what extent they have independent moral force. But the analysis is somewhat indeterminate in so far as it gives no normative advice as to what to do when the different criteria conflict. Suppose A is clearly responsible for P’s condition, but B has a far greater capacity than A to remedy it; who should then be assigned remedial responsibility for helping P if only one such agent is needed? If A has pushed P into the river, but is a weak swimmer, whereas B, a passer-by, is an experienced lifeguard, who should carry the primary responsibility for rescuing P?

Let me explore two possible ways of responding to this question. One would be to attempt to arrange the criteria we have explored in rank order: we look first for an agent who fits the criterion we judge to be the strongest, then if there is no such agent, we move on to the next criterion in order of strength, and so forth. Such an approach might seem plausible in the case of the first three criteria in the above list. If we can identify someone who is morally responsible for P’s condition, we should hold them remedially responsible; failing that, we look for someone who is outcome responsible for P’s condition; failing that again, we look for someone who is merely causally responsible. But this does not generalize plausibly when we bring the other three criteria into the picture. Consider the case of the person who pushed the child into the river. We might think that the person who pushed him should also be responsible for rescuing him. But moral responsibility can come in degrees: carelessly pushing someone into a river is blameworthy, but not as bad as pushing them deliberately. Are we to say that a careless pusher who is also a weak swimmer should be held responsible for the rescue in preference to the lifeguard who can make the rescue easily and safely? Getting P out of the river seems more important here than enforcing the moral responsibility of the pusher. Or think of a case where A is outcome responsible for a serious loss borne by P, but the main beneficiary is not A but B—A is employed to harvest fruit belonging to P, but because of incompetence on A’s part most of
the fruit ends up scattered on land belonging to B. Depending on the specifics of the case, we may believe that either A or B should be primarily responsible for covering P's loss. It is not plausible to say, in general, that outcome responsibility trumps benefit or vice versa.

Another response would be to challenge the idea of remedial responsibility as I have been using it. Someone might argue that two quite different phenomena are being conflated in this discussion. On the one hand, we have the idea of making redress to someone who has been wronged; on the other, we have the idea of bringing aid to someone who is in need. In a particular case these might overlap, but they remain conceptually distinct. Returning to my six-part list, the first four criteria belong under the first heading—they represent different ways of redressing a wrong or an injustice—whereas capacity and community belong under the second—they are relevant as ways of determining who should help people in need, irrespective of whether they have been wronged.

There is some truth in this challenge, in so far as it draws attention to the fact that in explaining the moral force of the various criteria, we invoked quite different considerations. It is also true, and worth recognizing, that moral responsibility and outcome responsibility can ground claims for redress even in cases where the injured party is not deprived in some absolute sense. If I deliberately or carelessly ruin one of your paintings, I owe you compensation even though, without the painting, you are still in a perfectly comfortable state overall. Your position is not one that calls out for remedy, except in the sense that there is an injustice that requires redress. I am outcome responsible for your loss, but not remedially responsible in the sense in which I have been using the term.

Despite this concession, I want to defend the idea of remedial responsibility I have been examining. Although we can imagine simple cases such as the one just described in which redress and deprivation come apart, in many cases they are intertwined. We become concerned about redress only because the person who has suffered the loss is thereby deprived in a way that causes independent moral concern. Suppose you have a large apple tree on the border of your land, and I own the neighbouring field, which I cultivate in such a way that the yield of your tree is reduced. What, if anything, do I owe you? If the crop is still amply big enough to meet your needs, then although you might still have some legal case for compensation, the moral case seems vanishingly weak. The case changes radically if you are dependent on the crop and will go hungry if the yield is reduced. My outcome responsibility now matters because of the absolute level of deprivation I have brought about.

In many, probably most, real-world cases of deprivation, assigning remedial responsibility involves applying multiple criteria, which are also somewhat opaque. It may be uncertain how the deprivation came about, and whether the roles played by individual agents in that process are such that they bear moral or outcome, as well as causal, responsibility. Questions of capacity may be equally problematic, particularly when relative costs are taken into account. If we take a complex case, such as poverty in developing nations, all of these questions arise, and it may seem that fixing remedial responsibilities is impossible. Such cases certainly show us why having formal mechanisms for assigning responsibility are so vital—in the absence of such mechanisms, everyone can find a plausible reason for shifting the burden of responsibility elsewhere. In designing the mechanisms, however, we have no alternative but to consider each of the agents—primarily states and international institutions—able to provide a remedy and then to assess how strongly each is connected to the impoverished group. Sometimes the upshot will be to assign responsibility to one agent who stands out as most closely connected; in other cases remedial responsibility will be shared between several agents. There may be disputes about how the different sources of connection should be weighed against each other—for instance how far the historical impact of the As on the Ps should be weighed against the greater present capacity of the Bs. As far as I can see, there is no algorithm that could resolve such disputes. We have to rely on our intuitions about the relative importance of different sources of connection.

21 It may also change somewhat if the previous large crop has come to play a significant role in your life, for example if you are known in the neighbourhood for the delicious cider that you generously offer your friends and acquaintances. Under such circumstances my action harms you and I may have remedial responsibilities.
In this chapter I have been outlining two concepts of responsibility that appear to play a crucial role in debates about national responsibility and global justice. As we have seen, they are conceptually quite distinct, and yet normatively closely connected—outcome responsibility provides us with one important way of identifying remedial responsibility. Outcome responsibility starts with agents and asks how far they can reasonably be credited and debited with the results of their conduct. Remedial responsibility starts with patients—people who are deprived or suffering—and asks who should shoulder the burden of helping them. As I suggested at the beginning, these two kinds of responsibility reflect contrasting aspects of the human condition: on the one hand, we are vulnerable creatures whose lives may not be worth living unless others are willing to come to our aid and supply us with resources. These needs impose obligations of justice on all those who are able to help, but because these obligations are initially so diffuse, we need the idea of remedial responsibility to make them specific and effective. On the other hand, human beings are choosing agents able to control their actions and to take responsibility for the results. For such agency to exist they must be willing to bear losses and enjoy gains, whether these fall immediately on themselves or on others. The idea of outcome responsibility permits that. It prevents one person, or group of persons, imposing losses on other. At the same time, where losses are self-imposed, it frees other agents from having to make good the deficit.

In our thinking about responsibility, we have to keep these two aspects of the human condition in proper balance. This applies both to questions of social justice and to questions of global justice. If we focus too narrowly on outcome responsibility, then when confronted by situations in which people are in desperate need, but where responsibility for this appears to lie with them, or with no one at all (as in the case of natural disasters), we will fail to see injustice. If we focus too narrowly on remedial responsibility, we may encourage a victim mentality and deny people who are in need of help the status of agents who can, and ought to, take control of their lives. We need each concept to play its proper role in our thinking about justice, and the obligations that it imposes.