

# **The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global**

A book review by Martha Miller

Author: Virginia Held

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Length: 220 pages

The goal of this book is to provide context and a general understanding of the Ethics of Care, a moral theory. The author continues to write on the subject to deepen support for this theory having a defined place among established schools of moral thinking such as Kantianism and Utilitarianism.

The central focus of this body of moral thinking is our attending to and meeting the needs of persons for whom we take responsibility. Readers learn relationships and feelings distinguish this approach from others that may be rule- or end result-based thinking. Simply said, we have experience of receiving care and providing care within the relationships of our lives.

Care is both a value or moral principle and a group of practices or goals supporting the principle. The values the author describes as encompassed by the ethics of care include trust, mutual concern, empathetic responsiveness and solidarity. Practices will be observed as needs being responded to, relationships cultivated and sensitivity demonstrated.

The Ethics of Care values emotion and encourages reflection on feelings to best meet the needs of the other(s) and the self. The author also notes how caring emotions can become misguided. An illustration provided to the reader expands on how the positive value of empathy can change when excessive empathy may lead to a wrongful degree of self-denial for the person providing care.

The Ethics of Care is grounded in the reality of daily relationships. (Though a major portion of the book takes the Ethics of Care to the broader society and its institutions) The author acknowledges family relations may, in fact, be between persons with highly unequal power. However the carers and the cared for are importantly intertwined and together foster social bonds and cooperation. Held states feelings must accompany the labour of care, regardless of the setting.

Held explains that the motivation of the person providing the care is essential to the caring relationship is - the carer's motivation is solely to meet the needs of the cared for. Further, the carer and the cared for share an interest in their mutual well-being. This is fundamental whether or not the care is being provided in a family relationship or a paid employment .

Finally, the Ethics of Care encircles persons as relational and interdependent and, for most people past childhood, needing care from others at various times of our lives. Held explains the Ethics of Care as the formula Care + Work + Motive + Value / Practice.

The reviewer appreciated learning this school of moral thought, though it took a great deal of effort to distill the writing to a level I could understand and share with others.