

Caring for Others, the Torah, and Ourselves: Jewish Perspectives on the Ethics of Care Session 1: Introducing Ethics of Care

I What We Talk about When We Talk about Ethics

a) Virtue ethics

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Virtue then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching; that is why it needs experience and time. Virtue of character [i.e., of ethos] results from habit [ethos]; hence its name 'ethical', slightly varied from 'ethos'.

For what we do in our dealings with other people makes some of us just, some unjust; what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear or confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others of us cowardly. The same is true of situations involving appetites and anger; for one or another sort of conduct in these situations makes some temperate and mild, others intemperate and irascible. To sum it up in a single account: a state [of character] results from [the repetition of] similar activities.

b) Deontological Ethics: Ethics as Rules

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

If we look back upon all previous efforts that have ever been made to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder why all of them had to fail. **It was seen that the human beings is bound to laws by his duty, but it never occurred to them that he is subject only to laws given by himself but still universal and that he is bound only to act in conformity with his own will, which, however, in accordance with nature's end is a will giving universal law.**

c) Social Contract Theory

Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*

Let us consider men...as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other."

II Ethics of Care's New Approach

Virginia Held *Ethics of Care*

The ethics of care values the ties we have with particular other persons and the actual relationships that partly constitute our identity. Although persons often may and should reshape their relations with others—distancing themselves from some persons and groups and developing or strengthening ties with others—the autonomy sought within the ethics of care is a capacity to reshape and cultivate new relations, not to ever more closely resemble the unnumbered abstract rational self of liberal political moralities. Those motivated by the ethics of care would seek to become more admirable relational persons in better caring relations.

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The ethics of care is a deep challenge to other moral theories. It takes the experience of women in caring activities such as mothering as central, interprets and emphasizes the values inherent in caring practices, shows the inadequacies of other theories for dealing with the moral aspects of caring activity, and then considers generalizing the insights of caring to other questions of morality.

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Women's experience has typically included cultivating special relationships with family and friends, rather than primarily dealing impartially with strangers, and providing large amounts of caring labor for children and often for ill or elderly family members. Affectionate sensitivity and responsiveness to need may seem to provide better moral guidance for what should be done in these contexts than do abstract rules or rational calculations of individual utilities.

Nel Noddings *Caring*

For many women, motherhood is the single greatest source of strength for the maintenance of the ethical idea. The young woman who has just given birth to a child may, if she has a religious faith, turn in wonder and gratitude toward the God she thanks for the safe delivery of her child. But she may equally well lie awake all night thinking on this strange God.

What then, of God or gods? Why, she wonders, would an all-knowing and all-good God create a world in which his creatures must eat each other to survive? Why, oh, why, would he withhold his physical presence from them? Why would he demand that they—much the needier and weaker—love Him?

III An Ethics of Care in Rabbinic Sources?

<p>Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 36b</p>	<p>בבלי סנהדרין, לו:</p>
<p>We learn in a baraita: An elder, eunuch, or someone who does not have children cannot serve on a Sanhedrin. Rabbi Yehudah adds, even a wicked person. And the reverse is true for a rebellious person, because the Torah says, "Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him." (Deut. 9:13).</p>	<p>דתניא אין מושיבין בסנהדרין זקן וסריס ומי שאין לו בנים ר' יהודה מוסיף אף אכזרי וחילופיהן במסית דרחמנא אמר (דברים יג, ט) לא תחמול ולא תכסה עליו:</p>
<p>Exodus Rabbah 23:8</p>	<p>שמות רבה כג:ח</p>
<p>Rabbi Yehudah said: Who said praise to God [at the sea]? The babies that Pharaoh had</p>	<p>רבי יהודה אומר, מי אמר קלוס להקדוש ברוך הוא? התינוקות, אותן שהיה פרעה מבקש להשליך ליאור</p>

decreed to be thrown into the Nile, because they knew God.

How is this so? When Israel was in Egypt, and one of the women of the children of Israel was ready to give birth, she would go out into the field and give birth there. And once she gave birth, she would leave the child and hand him over to God. And she would say: 'I did my part, now you do yours.'

Rabbi Yochanan said: At once, it was as if God in God's honor came down and cut their umbilical chords, and washed them and wrapped then annointed them [with oil], and so it says in Ezekiel: "on the day you were born, you were left lying, rejected, in the open field" (Ezekiel 16:5), and it also says "As for your birth, when you were born your umbilical cord was not cut" (Ezekiel 16:4), and "I clothed you with embroidered garments," (Ezekiel 16:10), and "I bathed you in water" (Ezekiel 16:9).

And God would suckle them with milk in one hand and honey in the other, as it says "He fed him honey from the rock," (Deut. 32:13), and they grew in the field, as it says "I let you grow like the plants of the field" (Ezekiel 16:7).

And when they had grown, they went to their parent's houses, and their parents asked them: "Who took care of you?" And they answered: "A fine-looking and praiseworthy young man, came down and took care of everything that we needed, as it says "My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy, Preeminent among ten thousand" (Song of Songs 5:10).

And when the Israelites came to the sea, these children were there, and they saw God was in the sea, and they started to say to their parents: "This is the one who did all of those things for us when we were in Egypt," as it says "This is my God and I will enshrine Him" (Exod. 15:2)

שָׁהֵם מִכִּירִין לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא.
כִּיצַד? כְּשֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהִיְתָה אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּקֻשֶׁת לִילָד, וְהִיְתָה יוֹצֵאת לִשְׂדֵה וְיוֹלֶדֶת שָׁם, וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהִיְתָה יוֹלֶדֶת, עוֹזֶבֶת הַנַּעַר וּמוֹסְרֶת אוֹתוֹ לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְאוֹמְרֶת רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָם, אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶת שְׁלִי וְאַתָּה עָשֵׂה אֶת שְׁלִי.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, מִיָּד הָיָה יוֹרֵד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכַבּוּדוֹ כְּבָכּוֹל וְחוֹתֵר טְבוּרָן וּמְרַחֵץ וְסָכוּ, וְכֵן יִחְזַקְאֵל אָמַר (יִחְזַקְאֵל טז, ה): וְתִשְׁלַכֵּי אֶל פְּנֵי הַשְּׂדֵה בְּגַעַל נַפְשָׁה, וְכַתִּיב (יִחְזַקְאֵל טז, ד): וּמוֹלְדוֹתֶיךָ בְּיוֹם הַיּוֹלֶדֶת אוֹתָךְ לֹא כָרַת שְׂרָף, וְכַתִּיב (יִחְזַקְאֵל טז, י): וְאַלְבִּנְשָׁךְ רִקְמָה, וְכַתִּיב (יִחְזַקְאֵל טז, ט): וְאַרְחֲצֶךָ בַּמַּיִם. וְהָיָה נוֹתֵן שְׁנֵי טַגְרִין בְּיָדוֹ אֶחָד מְנִיקוֹ שְׁמֵן וְאֶחָד מְנִיקוֹ דָּבֶשׁ, שְׁנָאֲמַר (דְּבָרִים לַב, יג): וַיִּנְקְהוּ דָּבֶשׁ מִסְּלַע, וְהָיוּ גְדֻלִים בַּשְּׂדֵה, שְׁנָאֲמַר (יִחְזַקְאֵל טז, ז): רַבְּבָה כְּצַמַּח הַשְּׂדֵה וְתַתִּיךְ,

וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהָיוּ גְדֻלִין הָיוּ נִכְנָסִין לְבֵיתֶיךָ אֶצֶל אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וְהָיוּ שׂוֹאֲלִין לָהֶם מִי הָיָה זְקוּק לָכֶם, וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לָהֶם בְּחֹר אֶחָד נָאָה וּמִשְׁבַּח הָיָה יוֹרֵד וְעוֹשֶׂה לָנוּ כָּל צְרָכֵינוּ, שְׁנָאֲמַר (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ה, י): דוֹדֵי צַח וְאֲדוֹם דָּגוּל מְרַבְּבָה.

וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁבָּאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִים הָיוּ אוֹתָן הַתִּינוּקוֹת שָׁם וְהֵם רָאוּ לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּיָם הַתַּחֲלִילוֹ אוֹמְרִים לְאֲבוֹתֵיהֶם זָהוּ אוֹתוֹ שֶׁהָיָה עוֹשֶׂה לָנוּ כָּל אוֹתָן הַדְּבָרִים כְּשֶׁהָיוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם, שְׁנָאֲמַר: זָה אֵלֵי וְאַנְוָהוּ.