

CHAPTER 6

Virtue and Caring

The weakest of all weak things is a virtue that has not been tested in the fire.
—Mark Twain

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics, or *character ethics*, has been around easily as long as both consequential and duty-based theories; however, the Enlightenment pretty much guaranteed that an emphasis on duty, obligation, and the greater good would dominate Western ethical thought. It is only recently that the study of virtue ethics has elicited new interest. It is surprising, therefore, to find that the study of virtue as an ethical construct is at least as old as the ancient Greeks.

History of Virtue Ethics

The Greek philosophers (especially Plato and Aristotle) chose not to ask: What is the right thing to do? Instead, they asked: What traits of character make one a good person? They called these traits virtues (*areté*) and defined them as actions that, if practiced habitually, would ultimately result in a good character. In other words, virtues are needed for human beings to conduct their lives well—not just one person, but all people. The idea was not egoistic (just make *yourself* a better person) but other-focused (use your character to contribute to society as a whole). Aristotle's virtues, for instance, are decidedly community centered; they contribute to the betterment of society, not just the individual. However, it is *within* the virtuous actor that morality lies, not in the action itself or the output produced by the actor. A person who acts virtuously while producing a product, will produce a good product. The Aristotelian tradition aligned the virtues with the practical and moral excellence produced within a society, the ultimate goal of which is “human flourishing” (*eudaimonia*). This is the *telos* (end) to which all humans should subscribe.

It is within the virtuous actor that morality lies, not in the action itself or the output produced by the actor.

Virtues can be acquired, learned, and cultivated by the diligent person. Plato concentrated on what he called the “Four Cardinal Virtues”: temperance, justice, courage, and wisdom. In Judeo-Christian cultures, desirable virtues might include these four plus gentleness, fairness, generosity, and truthfulness.¹ In fact, in early Christian theology the four cardinal virtues of Plato were com-

bined with the three, often-cited virtues of faith, hope, and charity in order to act as a balance for the seven deadly sins. (As we all probably know—perhaps personally—these are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride.) Of course, many lists of virtues are possible.

Aristotle, who was Plato's student, divided the virtues into *intellectual* virtues and *moral* virtues. Intellectual virtues are character traits that you need to make correct, practical decisions. Things like:

- Theoretical wisdom—the ability to understand abstract concepts and principles
- Scientific and empirical wisdom—the ability to see the world as it really is.
- Practical wisdom—the ability to use life experience to make decisions.
- Technical wisdom—the ability to learn crafts and use skills properly.

Moral virtues are character traits that you need to live a good life and consistently do the right thing. For example:

- Prudence—the ability to discipline yourself by the use of reason toward the correct action.
- Justice—the ability to act with fairness and balance when it is called for.
- Courage—the ability to discern and do the right thing in the face of either physical pain/hardship or opposing pressure, social, personal, or otherwise.
- Magnanimity—being generous, especially to those in need.
- Temperance—being moderate in all things. Aristotle considered this the key virtue from which all other moral virtues could be derived.

The Golden Mean

Aristotle held that a “Moral virtue is a mean between two extremes, the one involving excess and the other deficiency.”² Aristotle dubbed this concept “the Golden Mean,” and called for moderation in all things as the road to a virtuous character. For example, the middle ground between cowardice and foolhardiness would be courage. The mean between shamelessness and bashfulness is modesty; and between stinginess and wastefulness lies generosity.

According to Stanley Cunningham, however, Aristotle didn't intend that we should begin with the extremes and then identify the mean. This would tend to lead us into mediocrity rather than excellence. Instead, he believed that a person of moral maturity (one who had learned the habits of good character and subsequently gained the acuity of moral reasoning) would naturally seek the action that would further excellent moral character—an action that would logically lie somewhere between two extremes—one excessive, the other deficient. As Cunningham suggests, that

The Golden Mean, “is the informed choice of a morally developed person whose cognitive apparatus and emotional status are in good working order.”

same quality of goodness in the things we do is ultimately grounded in our perception or judgment about what is the right thing to do . . . It is the informed choice of a morally developed person whose cognitive apparatus and emotional status are in good working order.³

Aristotle also held that the process of reasoning that would lead to the moral mean was dependent on the individual and on the circumstance. The moral mean would, thus, be different for each person—no one, absolute mean would suffice.

[E]verybody who understands his business avoids alike excess and deficiency; he seeks and chooses the mean, not the absolute mean, but the mean considered relatively to ourselves.⁴

And he was much in favor of teaching the young to develop the habit of moral reasoning so that, when they were adults, they would naturally gravitate toward the moral mean in any given situation.

Arguments and teaching surely do not influence everyone, but the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating finely, like ground that is to nourish seed.⁵

Ultimately, the moral mean can be discovered only by the application of both learned theory and personal perception (the practical application of our natural senses to a situation).

Thus, Aristotle's model of the Golden Mean is not a simple, arithmetical calculation of an average action. Rather, it is the result of acquired character, a moral maturity, and an ability to perceive a situation accurately as it pertains to the individual involved. He would say that any person of moral maturity with an understanding of what is right and what is wrong would view the situation through the lens of his personal experience and naturally choose the moral mean. As every situation differs, every moral mean will likewise differ.

For example, an editor deciding on a privacy issue might decide to “soften” a story to avoid inflicting undue harm on the story's subject; however, this decision would not be based on first deciding on the extremes (for instance, publishing and injuring the subject of the story, or not publishing and depriving the public of information it needs). In other words, the decision is not a compromise between the two extremes. Rather it is based on the knowledge and experience of the editor, his vision of the place of journalism within society, the obligations inherent in that charge, and the myriad other factors that make up the whole of the issue. The decision is, thus, a choice to do the right thing under the circumstances, but based on a well-developed character, honed in the practice of journalism and tempered by both personal and societal morality.

Although critics have complained that virtue ethics doesn't provide a method for making moral decisions, that is an incorrect assessment. Based on level of moral maturity (both learned and practical), amoral agent can test the application of various virtues in several ways.

1. Estimation of the situation and the potential obstacles or dangers involved
 - Define the situation, obstacles or dangers, and to whom they apply.

- Are they serious? How serious?
 - Will anyone be harmed if you don't act? In what way?
2. Estimation of your ability to handle the situation
 - Are you the right person for the job?
 - Can or should someone else handle the situation or help you handle it?
 3. Evaluation of what is at risk
 - What is the worst case scenario if you don't do something?
 - Is doing something worth the risk? Why or why not?
 4. Evaluation of the worth of the goal
 - What is the goal you wish to achieve by your actions? Is it worth it? To you? To others involved?
 - If you attain this goal, what will be the benefit to your character? Your practice? Your community?

For example, overestimating the danger or over evaluating the risk involved in a situation could lead to inaction when action is required. Likewise, underestimating your ability to handle the situation could also lead to inaction. On the other hand, underestimating the danger could lead to unnecessary harm to yourself or others. Finally, over valuing the goal you wish to achieve may prove to be a waste of your effort, and your virtues. Of course, not recognizing that the goal is worthy or believing that the risk isn't worth the effort may lead you to inaction, to everyone's loss.

Although some have noted that this approach, by its very nature, must consider every situation as unique, it doesn't make the process arbitrary. It's still about character. A morally mature character will deal with every decision based on her estimation of the situation. But, she will *act* based on her character. So, a courageous person will never be a coward, yet will always be judicious about her actions.

A morally mature character will deal with every decision based on her estimation of the situation. But, she will act based on her character.

For virtue ethics, no single strength of character will normally suffice. The virtues work together and support one another. Taking courage again, without good judgment, it is blind—risking without knowing what is worth the risk. Courage without perseverance is short-lived. And, without a clear sense of your own abilities your actions may prove reckless and foolhardy.

Both Plato and Aristotle believed that a good character would result in good actions; and virtues, in turn, were cultivated by the practice of good actions—so the logic is somewhat circular. Regardless, the message is clear: A person's character dictates whether that person will conduct himself morally or immorally. A person possessing the virtue of honesty is not very likely to lie, since telling the truth is habitual with that person. A virtuous person is, therefore, a person of continuity—a person for whom moral action is based on a good character, not on consequences or rules. This sort of person will be consistent in her judgments because her character dictates it. You'll recall that the

legal scholar Stephen Carter called for more integrity in moral decision making, and was cited earlier as an example of Kantian thinking. Carter could also be said to be a virtue ethicist in that he views integrity as an essential and desirable character trait—a virtue.

When using virtue ethics, try the following exercise:

Ask yourself if your decision will harm your integrity in any way, making your character seem inconsistent or negative. Is this the type of character trait you would admire in others? Ultimately, will your action contribute to the well being of the community?

Virtue Ethics in Modern Practice

The real value of virtue ethics is that it places the onus of right action directly on the person making the decision. A person of strong character developed through habitual right action will make the right decisions, most of the time. A person of weak character will not. But how does this work out for those in the media? First, we must ask ourselves what we would consider virtues in the various media professions. For example, a list of virtues for journalists would probably include truthfulness, tenaciousness, fairness, and self-reliance. Certainly, there are others, but you get the idea. For public relations: truthfulness, loyalty, trustworthiness, honesty, diligence, and discretion. How about advertising? Certainly advertisers would cite truthfulness in common with the other media professions; but also loyalty, diligence, honesty, and tactfulness. You may have noticed that these virtues all have one thing in common—they contribute to the effectiveness of the practice for which they are considered virtues.

Contemporary philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre has made a life's work of resurrecting Aristotelian virtue ethics in the modern era. MacIntyre notes that any area of human endeavor, such as professions, in which standards of excellence guide the production of societal goods is an "appropriate locus for the exercise of the virtues, and the virtues are those qualities that allow practitioners to excel in their roles."⁶ He calls these endeavors "practices."

According to MacIntyre, a *practice* is a unique environment in which people may apply their virtues to their work, and by so doing, help establish and further standards of excellence within that practice. As part of this pursuit of excellence, the activity must produce both "internal goods" and "external goods."

Internal goods are those produced through excellent performance resulting in an excellent product.

Internal goods are those produced through excellent performance resulting in an excellent product. For example, the production of a heartwarming television ad for a non-profit. The virtue applied is the natural and learned talent of the advertising people who work on it. The internal good produced is the re-

sulting ad, which is excellent due to the excellence of the ad team. Internal goods are typically achieved on behalf of the whole community participating in the practice, thus, the ad agency itself benefits. Excellent advertising becomes part of a community of excellence, produced on behalf of the larger society.

External goods are those such as money, power, and fame, the acquisition of which by an individual or a practice is self-serving, and often runs counter or even interferes with the production of internal goods. Thus, the goal is to produce excellence as a benefit to your community, not just yourself.

External goods are those such as money, power, and fame, the acquisition of which by an individual or a practice is self-serving, and often runs counter or even interferes with the production of internal goods.

Values that drive excellence often proceed from virtues or character. For example, a belief in truth telling derives from the virtue of honesty (i.e., having an honest character). The employment of values such as these within a practice results in excellence of internal goods. In turn, MacIntyre's definition of a virtue stems from his definition of a practice. A virtue is "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods

which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."⁷ He identifies three basic virtues that are common to most endeavors.

- *justice*, which demands that we recognize the skills, knowledge, and expertise of other practitioners, and that we learn from those who know more and have greater experience than we do;
- *courage*, which requires that we take self-endangering risks, push ourselves to the limits of our capacities, and be prepared to challenge existing practice in the interest of extending the practice, despite institutional pressures against such critique;
- *honesty*, which asks us to be able to accept criticism and to learn from our errors and mistakes.⁸

Justice, especially, points out the Aristotelian focus on learning from those who have come before us on the journey toward excellence. These virtues and resulting standards of excellence are thus passed on from generation to generation via the language of historical narrative. Because these virtues are not specific to any one practice, they may be readily adapted to any of the media professions in order to provide for excellence in whatever we do.

When using MacIntyre's virtue ethics approach, try the following exercise:

Ask yourself if your decision furthers the excellence of your profession and contributes to the overall good of the society in which your practice plays a part.

Weaknesses in Virtue Ethics

Are there weaknesses in virtue ethics? Of course. First of all, since the emphasis is on character and not on action, there is no easy way to determine a right action from a wrong one. Virtue ethicists simply insist that a virtuous character will result in virtuous actions. Also, there is no way to resolve conflicts of virtues. For example, should honesty supersede kindness (should I or should I not tell my roommate that her newly dyed green hair is nauseating)?

Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the idea behind virtue ethics if we are to make good decisions. We must consider the character of those with whom we must deal as well as our own character every time we make a moral decision. Some say that inconsistency is the hobgoblin of moral decision making. Having a virtuous character helps exorcise that particular spirit.

The Ethic of Care

We have seen that respect for other people is at the heart of a number of philosophies—most notably, Immanuel Kant's. In this sense, *respect* refers to a feeling of deference toward someone and a willingness to show consideration or appreciation to them. Respect itself is related to a number of other concepts including sympathy, the ability to empathize with others, compassion, and caring for others. These words are all closely related and often interchangeable. *Sympathy*, for example, refers to the act or power of sharing the feelings of another whereas *empathy* means to identify with and understand another's situation, feelings, and motives. Compassion and caring are likewise closely related. *Compassion* refers to a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it. *Caring* means to feel and exhibit concern for others, and can include empathy. No one would disagree that these are major determinants of moral action; however, to what degree they can or should be incorporated into a system of media ethics is debatable.

We have also seen that professional obligations to truth telling, dissemination of important information to the public, loyalty to legitimate client interests, and other such duties may potentially clash with personal convictions of compassion and care for others. And, we have considered whether personal ethics can or should override professional ethics in circumstances in which the role of professional is operational. To some extent, these considerations and assumptions are based on the degree of importance attached to certain professional undertakings. We assume that some harm is a necessary by-product of many media activities, and that our primary responsibility is to do our jobs while mitigating as much harm as we can. However, is it possible, or even conceivable, that we could carry out our functions as media practitioners while working under a model in which the default would be “no harm to anyone”?

In her foundational work, *In a Different Voice*, developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan proposes what she calls an “ethic of care.” According to Gilligan, most of our moral concepts have developed from a particularly male perspective. The major approach to moral philosophy over the past several hundred years has been what might be called an “ethic of justice,” which is deeply rooted in a desire for individual autonomy and independence. The focus of this “ethic” is the balancing of competing interests among individuals. It is

easy to see this model at work in the philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and scores of other Enlightenment thinkers. In fact, individualism and sanctioned competition are at the heart of the American system of government and economics. And, although Gilligan doesn't necessarily take umbrage with this result, she does point out the troubling consequences of an ethic of justice not tempered by an "ethic of care."⁹

The formality of such concepts as duty and justice often results in objectification of human beings, or, at least, a distancing of the parties involved in and affected by moral decision making. Caring, on the other hand, requires a closer relationship between parties and recognition of the other as a subjective being.

Gilligan proposes that the female moral voice is characterized by caring. It considers the needs of both the self and of others, and is not just interested in the survival of the self. There is also more to this approach than simply the avoidance of harm. Ideally, no one should be hurt in interchanges among human beings. Although not dismissing the importance of justice and fairness, Gilligan points out that moral decisions should also make allowances for differences in needs. In other words, *need may dictate an obligation to care*. However, the feminist author Joan Tronto points out that a more appropriate term for obligation would be responsibility. She holds that obligation implies formal relationships and agreements, and refers to explicit promises and duties. Responsibility allows that we may have played a part in bringing about the circumstances that give rise to the need being expressed. In addition, responsibility requires that we ask ourselves if we are the best suited to give the care requested.¹⁰

Moral decisions should make allowances for differences in needs. In other words, need may dictate an obligation to care.

Unlike Kant's imperfect duties, which were to be followed only if nothing else prohibited the action, the ethic of care requires, at minimum, that need be recognized as an important component of human interaction. Gilligan, and others using her approach as a basis for their own systems of care, point out that although an ethic of care may be a predominantly female construction, it is not limited to the female perspective and can (and should) be used by male and female alike.

Based on an "obligation to care," this approach would have us view ourselves as part of a network of individuals whose needs (when they become clear) create a duty in us to respond. In responding, we must pay attention to the details of the need and to the outcome of our response on others potentially affected by our actions.¹¹ This does not mean that every need requires a response. The seriousness of the need, the likely benefit derived from our response, our ability to respond to this particular need, and the competing needs of others in our network must also be weighed. Like most ethical decisions, responding to need requires a weighing of interests; however, relating to the need on an emotional level is a vital consideration absent from many other such formulas.

Based on an "obligation to care," this approach would have us view ourselves as part of a network of individuals whose needs (when they become clear) create a duty in us to respond. In responding, we must pay attention to the details of the need and to the outcome of our response on others potentially affected by our actions.¹¹ This does not mean that every need requires a response. The seriousness of the need, the likely benefit derived from our response, our ability to respond to this particular need, and the competing needs of others in our network must also be weighed. Like most ethical decisions, responding to need requires a weighing of interests; however, relating to the need on an emotional level is a vital consideration absent from many other such formulas.

Individual autonomy, a mainstay of most Enlightenment philosophy, is not entirely absent from the concept of care. Julia Wood, in *Who Cares?*

Women, Care, and Culture, suggests that a flexible sense of autonomy would allow us to value both the needs and interests of others while not neglecting our own needs. This flexibility would recognize the primary qualities our culture seems to value in care givers: *partiality* (the ability to focus with feeling on the needs of others), *empathy* (having insight into others' needs), and *willingness to serve others*. Woods proposes a concept of *dynamic autonomy* that involves an awareness of our individuality coupled with an ability to choose when to accentuate our own desires and points of view and when to emphasize and cooperate with those of others.¹²

Confucian philosophy agrees with much of the ethic of care, and disagrees with Western liberal thought that individual autonomy is the most important

“It is not merely that we are obliged, of necessity, to interact with others, we must care about them as well.”

consideration of human interaction. For a Confucian, human interaction is an indispensable part of life—an essential component necessary to achieving self-realization. As the Confucian philosopher Henry Rosemont, Jr., states, “It is not merely that we are obliged, of necessity, to interact with others, we must care about them as well.” Confucians are defined by

their interactions with others. They are not autonomous; rather, they are “relational,” leading morally integrated lives in a human community. As Confucius points out, “[I]f I am not to be a person in the midst of others, what am I to be?”¹³

Can the Media Care?

The question remains whether the media can consider an ethic of care as a realistic component of their moral curriculum. As we've seen, the media, especially journalists, value autonomy above almost all else. Caring and care giving imply a subjective viewpoint. We have also seen that the notion of objectivity itself can be viewed as a flawed concept. For example, the feminist theorist Linda Steiner holds that a “feminist ethic challenges the treatment of mass media subjects as objects—challenges the objectification of both mass media sources as well as their audiences. ‘The goal would be to respect others’ dignity and integrity, to make the process more collaborative and egalitarian, less authoritarian and coercive.’”¹⁴

Not only feminist authors but also many others point out that honoring the ideal of objectivity establishes an us–them relationship between the media and virtually everyone else. Whereas journalism seems to be the focus of much of the public's concern over the caring versus harm debate, advertising and public relations are merely assumed to be logically without care for anyone except the client. This difference in public attitude stems as much from a misunderstanding of the nature of the information media versus the persuasive media as it does from any lack of expectation that the latter will ever change. As we shall see, all of the media currently have in place ethical models that reflect, to some degree, a consideration of care.

Public Journalism Again

Part of the response to a distancing of the media from both their sources and their publics has been *public journalism*, an approach that considers the news media as both responsive and responsive to the community. As we discussed in Chapter 3, a news outlet practicing public journalism would be community-oriented by design. In fact, we are seeing more of this reflected both in the type of coverage and in the ambience of local television news. Although many bemoan the smiling faces and happy talk of much of this type of broadcasting, the approach is decidedly community-centered. Even local newspapers are experimenting with community-oriented approaches, such as the creation of voter forums during elections and web sites that invite reader involvement in deciding the content of news.

Whereas some worry that any public involvement in deciding what is “news” is dangerous, others point out that the economic necessity of providing consumers with what they want as much as with what they need is already a move in that direction. Quoted in Louis Day’s *Ethics in Media Communications*, ABC’s Ted Koppel apparently sees the fact that business decisions drive news decisions as a virtue, “because it gives the public a significant voice in shaping the news agenda. In short, the application of marketing principles to journalism has helped to ‘democratize’ the profession.”¹⁵ Although the economic necessity of giving the public what they want may be driving some movement toward a more participatory form of journalism, we cannot place a moral value on such motives since the intent, as Kant would say, is not to do good but to remain economically viable. On the other hand, the move toward public journalism is, by and large, an authentic attempt to bring the news media and the public closer together—clearly indicating a change in the level of care with which the media may be dealing with their constituents.

Persuasive Models and Care

Although journalism may be reluctant to inject an ethic of care into its discipline, public relations has a long history of trying to show that it’s doing just that. And, although many would argue that public relations is biased by nature in favor of the client, we have seen that an adherence to professional standards should disallow such total obeisance to any one party—especially the client. The fiduciary model of the professional–client relationship assumes that both the professional public relations practitioner and her client will work together to affect the most beneficial solution to the client’s problems. However, the balanced relationship between the two primary parties exists only insofar as it does not ignore relevant third parties. The professional is under a special obligation not to harm others in the pursuit of his client’s interests.

Although the ideal of advocacy, as it is construed in the legal profession, relies on total client loyalty, neither public relations nor advertising can claim the same status as that profession. Third parties must be considered. The clients of public relations have no constitutionally guaranteed right to representation by a PR agency, nor do the clients of advertising agents. Professionals in both of these fields not only can, but also should turn down client requests that would unduly harm third-party claimants. Professional codes in both advertis-

ing and public relations call for a balancing of interests in favor of non-injury to third parties. Articles of those codes that address not lying to the media or to consumers (theoretically on behalf of clients) are examples of the recognition of third-party concerns. However, simply recognizing third-party concerns doesn't imply a caring attitude in the sense of an ethic of care. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, even advocates can, and should, reject client aims that unnecessarily harm third parties.

Educator and theorist James Grunig proposes four models for the practice of public relations: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric, and two-way symmetric. In the *press agentry/publicity* model, the practitioner's role might be that of a press agent, functioning as a one-sided propaganda specialist. The *public information* model presents the practitioner as journalist, carefully disseminating balanced information to the public. Practitioners in a *two-way asymmetric* model are seen as "scientific persuaders," using social science techniques to gather information on attitude and behavior characteristics of their publics and then adjusting their messages accordingly in order to influence those publics. And, finally, the *two-way symmetric* model uses practitioners as mediators between organizations and their publics. One of the key differences among these models is the emphasis placed on either persuasion or mutual understanding as an end.¹⁶

Grunig proposes the two-way symmetric model as an ideal for public relations. Although he recognizes persuasion as a legitimate function of the public relations role, he posits that mutual understanding ultimately leads to a more beneficial relationship between the public relations practitioner's client and that client's constituencies. More profound associations are built on understanding gained, most often, through communication, negotiation, and compromise. It can be inferred from this model and its goal that care must, at least, be a part of the process leading to compromise (although compromise itself is viewed by some feminist scholars as a by-product of competition and, therefore, a negative outcome). Regardless, some care (perhaps in the form of respect) for the position and views of the "other" is required in this model.

If we accept the traditional ideal of persuasion as a process necessary to the successful application of democracy as a form of government, then we must accept that ethical persuasion is a legitimate approach to coming to grips with different points of view.

The two-way asymmetric (persuasive) model may also operate under an assumption of respect for both the integrity and the intelligence of the parties being persuaded (as Aristotle's *Rhetoric* suggests). However, the techniques of persuasion can, and often are, used unethically. And any technique that has persuasion as its intended outcome is far more easily open to abuse than a technique having mutual understanding as its goal. The reality of public relations, however, is that persuasion is a recognized and respected communication technique. If we are to accept the traditional ideal of persuasion as a process necessary to the successful application of democracy as a form of government,

then we must accept that ethical persuasion is a legitimate approach to coming to grips with different points of view.

This does not invalidate the possibility of incorporating an ethic of care into the persuasive process itself. All that is needed, as Linda Steiner points out, is respect for the dignity and integrity of the receivers of your message. As we have noted throughout this book, coercion and manipulation through communication are decidedly unethical and are actions for which there can be no excuses. Remember that respect, as Kant pointed out, is the least we owe to other human beings; and respect is very definitely a form of caring.

Does this mean that persuasion done in order to sell something other than a political point of view is less than ethical or cannot take advantage of an ethic of care? Ideally, this “respectful” approach to persuasive communication should apply equally to public relations and advertising. A goal of mutual understanding is probably not as appropriate for most advertising as it is for some public relations. Even advertising whose primary purpose is to inform doesn’t usually seek or need mutual understanding. It requires only a fairly complete understanding of the needs of the receivers of the information, and that can be gained through audience analysis. Grunig’s press agency/publicity and two-way asymmetric models (although not intended for advertising) are certainly the most appropriate. However, even these models, if practiced conscientiously, can be respectful of audience dignity and integrity. Audiences are often viewed by advertising practitioners as “gullible”; why else would so many ads seek to obfuscate reality? How the advertising professional views the audience dictates the level of respect reflected in the advertisement. The intelligence of a targeted audience is not denigrated by serious advertisers with ethical intent. On the other hand, the harder an ad tries to misrepresent reality for the purpose of deception, the less respect it shows for the audience. Of course, part of the analysis has to be the audience’s Qualified Expectation of Reality (explained in more detail in Chapter 9). If they expect the information—or the form of its presentation—to be real and it isn’t, they have been intentionally duped.

In the final analysis, media communicators cannot afford to ignore such characteristics as empathy and caring. The often-quoted Chinese philosopher Confucius didn’t even have a word for *reason* or *rational* separate from his concept of *emotion*. Or, as Steiner contends, “virtues” such as empathy and caring can and should function alongside concepts such as integrity, fairness, and respect for others. Journalists and advertising and public relations practitioners alike may need to adjust their traditional conceptions of such time-honored practices as near-total objectivity in both informing and persuading in order that some indication that “we are all in this together” be admitted to themselves and to those they affect so profoundly.

When using the Ethic of Care, try the following exercise:

Ask yourself whether the seriousness of a need, the likely benefit derived from your response, and your ability to respond to this particular need (weighed against the competing needs of others in your network) warrant your attention—especially if relating to the need on an emotional level.

NOTES

1. Richard L. Johannesen, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 4th ed. (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1996), 12.
2. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II, section 9, translated by James Weldon (New York: Macmillan, 1906).
3. Stanley Cunningham, "Getting it Right: Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' as Theory Deterioration," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 14 (1), 11.
4. Weldon, Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book II, section 6.
5. *Ibid.*, Book X, section 9.
6. Neil Levy, "Good Character: Too Little, Too Late," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 19 (2): 111.
7. Alisdair MacIntyre, *After virtue* (2nd ed.). (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191.
8. *Ibid.*, 187.
9. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 19, 73–74, 127, 143, 156–165, 174.
10. Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 102–160.
11. Rita C. Manning, *Speaking from the Heart: A Feminist Perspective on Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 49, 56, 65–69, 139, 152.
12. Julia T. Wood, *Who Cares? Women, Care, and Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 41–49, 106–110.
13. Henry Rosemont, Jr., "Whose Democracy? Which Rights?"
14. Linda Steiner, "Feminist Theorizing and Communication Ethics," *Communication*, 12 (1989), 157–173, cited in Johannesen, *Ethics in Human Communication*, 236.
15. Louis Day, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, 2nd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), 218.
16. James Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 21–25.