

Introduction

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This volume grew out of two events in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Joel J. Kupperman's teaching career in philosophy. The first was "Character: East and West—a Conference in Honor of Joel Kupperman," organized by the Philosophy Department of the University of Connecticut, in Storrs, on May 20 and 21, 2011. Joel Kupperman, David Wong, and the editors of this volume were among the attendees. The second event was a mini-conference in honor of Joel Kupperman, held in conjunction with the Tenth East-West Philosophers Conference in Honolulu, on May 23 and 24, 2011. The mini-conference was organized by these editors, attended by Roger Ames, Henry Rosemont, Jr., Karyn Lai, Kwong-loi Shun, Sor-hoon Tan, whose papers are included here, and Joel Kupperman. Other invitees to the mini-conference, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Robert C. Neville, and Bryan Van Norden, although unable to attend, have graciously made their contributions to this volume in honor of Kupperman.

As former students with the good fortune of having studied with Kupperman, we can speak the world of our mentor. Kupperman is not only a learned scholar and a thought-provoking philosopher, but also a most caring teacher, who has the ability to convey deep insights with a good sense of humor. Though his research and publications encompass a broad range of ethics, aesthetics, moral psychology, metaphysics, applied philosophy, and the philosophy of mind, his major intellectual focus has been on ethics. Much of his early work in this regard was a reaction to a widespread assumption by philosophers that judgments of values or of rightness were to some degree subjective. In the 1960s, there was

much talk about “pro-attitudes,” or inclinations. In two books, *Ethical Knowledge* (1970) and *The Foundations of Morality* (1983), Kupperman argued that there are cases in which some judgments of rightness or of value could reasonably be considered objectively right, or to be wrong. Most distinctive about him as an ethicist, however, is his engagement in Asian and comparative philosophy. Kupperman’s interest in Asian philosophy began early when he was an undergraduate student in Herrlee G. Creel’s seminar on Chinese philosophy at the University of Chicago. He began to publish on Asian and comparative philosophy in 1960s. In a time when Asian philosophy was virtually excluded from philosophy departments in universities across North America, Kupperman was one of the few mainstream Western philosophers who had the vision, knowledge, and yes, the courage, to bring Asian philosophy into philosophical discourse. His signature work, *Character* (1991), synthesized Western, Chinese, and Indian philosophies in developing a character-based ethics. Along with his other very influential publication *Learning from Asian Philosophy* (1999), and many articles, Kupperman’s work in comparative philosophy has set a model for fruitfully navigating wisdoms of both East and West to address philosophical questions of our times.

Kupperman never does Asian philosophy for its own sake. He is not a “scholar” of Asian philosophy in that sense. Kupperman is an ethicist and a philosopher. His goal, as stated in *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, is “to gain contributions to philosophical enterprises that are, in the end, primarily Western rather than Chinese or Indian” (1999, 3). In doing so, Kupperman never for a minute fails to be a serious mainstream Western philosopher. He studies and borrows from Asian philosophers in ways most philosophers in Britain and America study and use Descartes and Locke: as reminders of problems or lines of thought that we might have forgotten about or ignored, and as suggestive philosophical activity that we can continue, revise, or debate in our own philosophical work (Ibid.).

As a Western ethicist, Kupperman maintains that ethical philosophy in our age “needs to be comparative,” because without some knowledge about differences among traditions of ethical thought, it is all too easy to conclude that “reason” requires what amounts to a structural feature of most Western ethical thought. Given everyone’s own tradition, if he or she is “compelled” to think in a certain way, then it may seem obvious that this is the path of reason. Furthermore, if the reference points are mainly Western systematic ethics of the last two and a half centuries, it is easy to conclude that the primary task of normative ethical philosophy is to arrive at principles that yield decision proce-

dures. It would follow that any project of transforming oneself into a certain sort of person is secondary to that of arriving at reliable moral decisions (Kupperman 2010). Comparative approaches to ethical study, or for that matter to philosophy in general, encompass using ideas and concepts from one philosophical tradition to interpret, understand, and develop ideas in another tradition.¹ As such, comparative philosophy has added advantages compared to a philosophy that is confined to a single tradition. It allows us not only to think “outside the box” but also to acquire additional tools in solving problems within one’s own tradition. Philosophizing in response to contemporary problems in a global age, we need to draw on intellectual resources from both West and East. In this regard, Kupperman has provided a good model for us.

As David Wong puts it, “Too many contemporary philosophers have nothing to say on a subject if they cannot hope to identify the singular truth. Alternatively, most of what they have to say is that there is no final word or singular truth, as if that were all that was left to say. . . . The tone of much of Kupperman’s work is that of a gentle and wise interlocutor who refrains from lecturing to us on what the good life is, but rather assists us in our individual and collective endeavors to live a good life by articulating much good advice and well-taken cautions” (see p. 97 in this volume). Kupperman’s *Learning from Asian Philosophy* illustrates that we can make judgments or estimates of activities or forms of activity and speak of the knowledge of values without being able to supply conclusive grounds. Countering the widespread tendency to center philosophical judgments on logic, in particular, he articulated in a recent essay on “Half Truths” in the English journal *Ratio* (2012) that judgments of value cannot be examined straightforwardly in terms of logic or logical influences. None of this, in his view, precludes awareness that some activities or forms of activity can have considerable positive or negative value. But this does indicate that judgments or estimates of this sort are highly unlikely to be very widely shared, or to be demonstrable.

Things not demonstrable may nevertheless be illustrated. A good example is how Kupperman absorbs ideas and insights from Confucius and other Asian thinkers as well as Aristotle and Hume in developing a character-based ethics. He finds that Kantian and utilitarian ethical theories have largely ignored the ways in which decisions are integrated and shaped over time in a person’s life. Through comparison with Confucius’s and other Asian philosophers’ emphasis on ritual and cultivation of one’s demeanor or style of conduct, Kupperman reveals that Western ethicists in the last two hundred years have focused mainly

on the “big moments” in which people make critical ethical decisions, and largely ignored “the moment-to-moment texture of the large part of our lives” as a “free-play zone” (see Kupperman 1999, 167–169). His study of Chinese Philosophy led him to believe that a good deal of personal interaction that did not quite involve moral issues nevertheless could be (to a significant degree) deplorable or praiseworthy, and could affect the value in a life. Nuances and styles could matter. The preoccupation with decision making makes being ethical a bitter business, as if being ethical is a joyless obligation rather than a constituent of an excellent life. Furthermore, he points out that by laying down minimal demands of ethics for everyone, modern Western ethicists largely failed to see that there can be sliding scales of ethical requirements. He reveals that, contrary to our intuition, being ethical actually has more to do with cultivating one’s character so that one’s live options are narrowed down when immoral things become unthinkable, rather than making right choices when facing with alternative options. “At the extreme, a Confucian sage, say, would have no choice to make, in that a wide variety of unworthy actions would have ceased to be live options” (Ibid., 136). Yet on the other hand, this insight is fully consistent with our intuition that the value of a life is very much related to the kind of person one manages to become. He also notices Confucius’s observation that a person’s faults often go along with his virtues (*Analects* 4.7). If this is true, Kupperman infers, developing virtues has its natural limitations. Character-based ethics is not just about individual virtues; it is about building a character as a way of life, which is less likely to lend itself to compartmentalization. In his view, Western virtue ethics have largely overlooked the interrelationships between virtues and failings within a character.

Drawing insights from his comparative study, Kupperman sheds light on many things that people who work exclusively in one tradition tend to miss. In his book, *Value and What Follows* (1999), he focuses on how judgments of values connect with estimates of what is worth seeking or avoiding in life, and points out that there often are misconceptions about this, especially if people emphasize pleasure or immediate satisfaction. His other book, *Six Myths About the Good Life* (2006), examines the values that are important in our lives, and explains how easy it is to miss these. For the purpose of broadening people’s vision across different traditions, Kupperman has also recently published a book entitled *Theories of Human Nature* (2010), surveying various views of what human nature is, and edited a book entitled *Human Nature: A Reader* (2012),

which brings together ways in which human nature has been treated in different traditions.

The value of Kupperman's works is not limited to the specific philosophical insights they provide, but also reflected in the way he does philosophy. He inspires people to make a deeper reflection on the function of philosophy itself (e.g., how it is related to Asian philosophy which is sometimes dismissed as "wisdom literature"), and how philosophy communicates and what counts as really effective communication.

With regard to philosophical communication, we want to mention another salient feature of Kupperman's scholarship: his amazing ability to unpack complicated issues in simple terms and to spell out things in a concise fashion. He pays attention to the style of writing as much as to the content of what he is writing about, or to put it more accurately, his writings exemplify his moral character as well as explain what moral character is, although in no way does he suggest that his is the only right kind of character.

It is with all these that Kupperman has triggered widespread resonances—not necessarily agreements but varieties of responses that truly vitalized the field. As a snapshot of these resonances, this volume opens with a foreword by Fred Dallmayr, who himself is an exemplar in comparative philosophy, and followed by ten essays by eleven authors. All these chapters deal with issues of contemporary significance on ethics, and do so from a Confucian perspective or comparative perspective, or both. They share Kupperman's hallmark of philosophizing on pertinent issues across ethical traditions, yet, in diverse ways, they respond, expand, and engage in critical dialogues with Kupperman's views. This is, in our view, the best way to celebrate Kupperman's achievements. Instead of just explaining and elaborating on Kupperman's contributions, the essays in this volume all have distinctive merits of their own, making the volume a lively platform of contemporary scholarship on ethics in its own right. As Dallmayr aptly reminds us in his foreword, the varied views on reading Confucian ethics as presented in this volume do not cancel a deeper commonality: the recognition that role performance depends on the cultivation of personal dispositions which, in turn, are shaped by interpersonal contexts.

We begin with the article by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., who in the last decade or so have been developing a "role ethics" from Confucian philosophy. Ames and Rosemont acknowledge that, in seeking to replace virtue ethics with character ethics, Kupperman challenges the "snapshot" view of ethical decision making in virtue

ethics and equally the “big moment” ethics we associate with Kant and Bentham and Mill, and that his character ethics points us in the right direction for appreciating the role that family has in developing moral competence. They argue, however, that Confucian role ethics in taking family relations as the entry point for developing moral competence has more to offer contemporary conversations in moral philosophy than other approaches. Kupperman’s character ethics, according to Ames and Rosemont, has several limitations. First, character is individual-based and presupposes a reified conception of a unified and discrete self. There is for Kupperman a definite individuality to the self that serves as the ground and locus of one’s character development. Role ethics makes no appeal to superordinate, substantive categories such as “self” or “character,” but instead locates “person” gerundively as the embodied, social activity of thinking and feeling within the manifold of relations that constitutes family, community, and the natural environment. Person thus understood is a complex event rather than a discrete “thing,” a process of “becoming” rather than an essential “being,” an on-going “doing” rather than an autonomous “is,” a configuration of concrete, dynamic, and constitutive relations rather than an individuated substance defined by some subsisting agency. Second, Confucian role ethics would resist the uncritical substance ontology underlying Kupperman’s conception of agency that requires a separation between the agent of conduct and the conduct itself. The Confucian concept of *ren* is a gerundive notion—a verbal noun—that is descriptive of consummate “person-ing.” Third, Kupperman’s character ethics has little to say about the body as the root through which human conduct, being nourished and grown, becomes refulgent. Hence he fails to appreciate the dramatic role that the body has as integral to achieving personal identity and consummate conduct. Fourth, Kupperman fails to appreciate the vital role that the process of moral imagination plays in the moral life. Fifth, in reading Kupperman’s *Character*, the expectation is that we learn from it a conceptual vocabulary that enables us to think about personal moral development in a more cogent and nuanced way, rather than that we become inspired by the exhortations and the models of the cultural heroes to become better people. Finally, even though Kupperman values the role of family in the moral life, he did not accord family the vital importance that it deserves. In comparison, role ethics is fully family-centered.

Unlike Kupperman or Ames and Rosemont, Philip J. Ivanhoe reads Confucius (Kongzi) as a virtue ethicist. Taking a comparative approach in explicating Confucius, Ivanhoe argues that, if we consider Confucius’s

teachings as a whole and seek to interpret them comprehensively and systematically, we will come to understand his ethical philosophy as an expression of virtue ethics and more particularly as a form of virtue ethics that shares important similarities with the kind of view one finds in Aristotle. Such an approach enables us to account for and understand centrally important features of Confucius's thought that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, even though Confucius did not develop a specific theory about human nature, it is clear that his philosophy relies upon a general and distinctive concept of human nature and its flourishing. One critical feature of Confucius's view of human nature is that at birth, one's nature is underdeveloped and incomplete; we can and must cultivate our original nature by developing a set of virtuous dispositions in order to attain an ideal form of life. In all three respects—being founded on notions about human nature, focusing on the cultivation of a set of virtues, and aiming at an ideal form of life—Confucius's philosophy distinguishes itself as an expression of virtue ethics. Similar to Aristotle in explicating his virtue ethics, Confucius insists that the good life can only be found in the right kind of community and that such a community is constituted by special relationships between and among properly cultivated human beings. For Ivanhoe, Confucius is neither a character ethicist, nor a role ethicist, but a virtue ethicist and must be read as such.²

Going beyond the question about virtue or character, Bryan Van Norden tackles a more fundamental question about the nature of value. Following Kupperman's contrast between Platonic realism, which takes values as "spectral furniture of the universe," and what Van Norden calls "anthropocentric realism," he endorses Kupperman's recommendation to reject the first approach, and elaborates the latter in his own way. Van Norden argues that, just like the notion of "poison" is meaningful only in the context of living organisms and yet it is objective whether something is poisonous to an organism, "value" for humans is anthropocentric, i.e., meaningful only in relation to humans, and objective in the sense that either what is valuable is a means toward what is intrinsically good for humans, or is itself intrinsically good for humans. Citing early Confucian Xunzi as an example of anthropocentric realism, and rejecting the widespread argument from disagreements for ethical non-realism, Van Norden, again, in agreement with Kupperman, defends the version of anthropocentric realism that admits varieties of distinct but equally adequate forms of human conduct, such as marriage ceremonies, funeral rituals, etc. Van Norden's own position is more inspired by Aristotle than by Xunzi, who Van Norden thinks "fails to do justice to pluralism." He

phrases Aristotelian rationality as “the simple recognition that ‘Why are you doing that?’ is always a legitimate question to ask of a human being,” and argues that Hume’s famous view about the nonrational nature of value is question-begging (as it depends on his stipulative definition of rationality). He moves on to reject four “inadequate answers” and defend six “adequate answers” to the “Why question,” the question about what is or is not objectively valuable for humans. Van Norden concludes his essay with a definite but open position: As philosophy is dialogical, so if one disagrees with his view, he is willing to ask “Why?” and will begin a dialogue with the person.

Comparing to the previous chapters, David Wong’s appears to be less ambitious, as it focuses on just one specific emotion—love and its place in a good life. His essay belongs to the kind of project that Kupperman has done so much to renew in a contemporary setting but has not been explored in depth by Kupperman himself. However, readers will soon realize how rich and broadly significant Wong’s essay is. Through his discussion of a wide array of accounts of love, including well-known philosophical accounts such as those given by Harry Frankfurt and J. David Velleman, filial love in Confucian texts, and psychological and neuroscientific studies of love and attachment, Wong lays out three forms or faces of love—the kind that answers to no reasons, the kind that answers to reasons grounded in personal qualities of the beloved, and the kind that answers to reasons grounded in relationship. He shows any account that makes one of these the only or primary mode of love to be inadequate. The tensions and apparent conflicts between these forms answer to the complexity and changing nature of the human needs to which love answers. Wong’s fair-minded, pluralistic approach and his style of clear articulation and tight reasoning, which have gained him the reputation of being one of the most prominent scholars in comparative philosophy today, are well exemplified in this essay.

Making ancient ideas appealing to contemporary readers is a challenge for today’s students of Asian philosophy, even from a comparative perspective. Following Kupperman’s lead but extending beyond Kupperman’s own discussion, Kwong-loi Shun espouses a Confucian account of equanimity. By “equanimity,” Shun denotes a cluster of qualities such as calmness of the mind, maintaining one’s balance in the face of trying circumstances, and being unperturbed in seemingly alarming situations. He begins with a puzzling observation: Confucian thinkers often attribute the good person such qualities as ease of mind and being free from anxiety, qualities that are usually unassociated with the ideal

person in contemporary ethical theories. Shun draws on both early and later Confucian thought to extract a more elaborate account of these qualities and of how they are grounded in a complete orientation to the ethical in the Confucian tradition. On the account developed by Shun, the state of mind described as equanimity is not a matter of one's immediate responses to one's environment, and is not something that comes and goes as the way one relates to environment changes. While there is a sense of calm, of being at rest and at peace, of not moving around or being agitated, and of being in control of oneself and not being a captive of one's environment, the state of mind under consideration here also involves a certain reflective stance, namely, one's awareness and affirmation of the fact that one is flowing along with the ethical. It is a more enduring state that is grounded in this reflective stance, and it involves a certain outlook, posture, or orientation in life, having to do not just with one's feeling a certain way, but also with the way one views and relates to the world. Reflective equanimity is a posture toward adverse conditions of life that is grounded in the awareness that these other conditions of life pale in significance compared to the importance of following the ethical path. Such a state of mind is an integral part of Confucian moral cultivation and the moral life, and perhaps an important quality possessed by persons of a good character.

Robert Neville has been a representative of "Boston Confucianism," a contemporary Confucian school that brings Confucianism into lively dialogue with mainstream Western philosophy. Deeply rooted in the Xunzian philosophy of ritual propriety, his work complements Kupperman's, which has more to do with Confucius and Mencius. Neville argues that the Western "subject-object" dichotomy has turned other people into the actual or potential experience of them. From the perspective of the Confucian ritual, a person's relationship with others is not seen as a subject-object contrast but as constituted by a natural standpoint within which individuals interact, most often in ritualized, meaningful, roles. An individual understands herself or himself to be one among many individuals in the dance of a ritual. The other individuals are also players in that ritual pattern. The fundamental reality of the ritual, or nexus of rituals, makes players of us all. In the process, each player needs to individuate the playing: I see my individuating to be part and parcel of the ritual reality, just like the individuations being cultivated by the others. In Neville's view, ritual is a fundamental dimension of the human reality. In it, both "I" and "Others" are individuated as persons. Neville's Xunzian approach to individuation pro-

vides an important philosophical dimension to Kupperman's character ethics.

The next group of essays by Chenyang Li, Sor-hoon Tan, Peimin Ni, and Karyn Lai are all concerned with the idea that a good life must extend beyond, though does not exclude, material well-being. Though this thesis seems like common sense, the prevailing materialistic culture in the world, the difficulties and the urgency in overcoming the materialistic tendency, and the theoretical complexities involved and revealed by these essays all warrant serious treatment.

Inspired by Kupperman's work on material good and the good life, Chenyang Li's chapter examines the relationship between material well-being and moral cultivation in early Confucianism. Confucians advocate both material well-being and moral cultivation. While people seldom question the value of these two pursuits, their relationship is by no means intuitive. Various passages in the classic texts suggest varied possibilities. Li analyzes four possible solutions to this relationship. First, material well-being is not a precondition for moral cultivation, but it improves human life in a separate dimension and, therefore, it is good on its own. Second, material well-being is a precondition for moral cultivation and must be achieved before cultivating character. Third, Confucius and Mencius have different virtues in mind when they say that one needs material well-being in order to cultivate (one set of) virtues *and* that one does not need material well-being to cultivate (another set of) virtues. The fourth view, which Li supports, is that, whereas a small portion of people may be able to become morally cultivated without a decent level of material well-being, the large majority need material well-being as a foundation for moral cultivation. Introducing a concept of "statistical necessity," Li argues for a Confucian view that, while in principle each individual person possesses the capacity for self-cultivation even without adequate material provisions, statistically a population cannot be well-cultivated without adequate material provisions. Therefore, Confucians maintain both that an individual should strive for moral refinement regardless of his or her material circumstances, and that material well-being in a society is essential toward achieving a good society.

In her essay, Sor-hoon Tan explores the relationship between materialistic desires, pursuit of profit, and wealth on the one hand and ethical life on the other, and reveals interesting complexities in Confucian attitudes to the tension between them in the *Analecets* and the *Mencius*. Her study shows that there is no doubt that the highest ideal for both

Masters is that of a person who loves the ethical so much that she is willing to sacrifice all materialistic goods and even her life. They are however realistic enough to recognize that materialistic desires are common and dominate the motivations of the average human being, and the idea that ethical life precludes these desires is more likely to turn people away rather than lead them toward the Confucian way. Nor is it necessarily the case that what is profitable and what is ethical are always opposed. In the Confucian view, it is possible to satisfy materialistic desires, gain wealth and honor while living ethically.

Peimin Ni's chapter points out an elephant in the room: while we expect individual persons to be morally decent and care for more than material possession and consumption, social entities in today's world increasingly revolve around economic standards and submit to the whim of the market. Extending Kupperman's study of character and his insights about the value of Confucianism to the ethics of social entities, the chapter breaks the taboo of avoiding the topic for fearing stereotypes against groups of people. Ni argues that in most cases we can meaningfully apply the word "self" to social entities, which is not only irreducible to mere collections of individual persons, but often a source of individual selves, and hence the ethics of social entities is not reducible to but rather should be placed within its dynamic interrelation with the ethics of individual persons. Viewing this point in the context of this book, we implicitly see a path where Ames-Rosemont's and Kupperman's views about self might be reconciled. Ni takes the character of social entities roughly as their culture, which is reflected in and shaped by but not reducible to their primary functions, structures, and operational regulations. It is their continuity of commitment, which is difficult to break up in the short run, as illustrated by what Ni calls "the Red Lantern Effect," but not impossible to alter in the long run. Having summarized the limitations of the "lowest-common-denominator" approach, Ni proposes a Confucian way to shape the character of a social entity—model emulation, and suggests that, to avoid conceiving creativity as merely acting "out of character," we should more accurately understand character cultivation as a process of acquiring artistic abilities, or using his favorite term, "*gongfu*."

The chapter by Karyn Lai extends Kupperman's character ethics to social entities and aims to rectify the tendency in recent scholarship on Confucian business ethics that, in her view, overly and wrongly puts building harmonious relationships as fundamental and central to Confucian business ethics. She argues that, although relationships are a

key aspect of Confucianism, what is fundamental in Confucian ethics is the cultivation of character, from which good relationships manifest. If relationships were to be taken as central, it would lead to difficulties such as making compromises for the sake of maintaining good relations, or nepotism. However, this shift of center from relations to the cultivation of self does not entail an acceptance of the notion of self as an autonomous choice-maker who makes single, disconnected decisions and actions, but rather a longitudinal understanding of a person as the development and manifestation of character over time. Lai concludes her essay with three features of the Confucian cultivation of character to be pertinent for business: that a business should not be limited to gaining its own profit; that a business should not just occasionally do a charitable thing, but to have a long-term commitment of making it part of its core business to contribute to the society; and that a business should constantly reevaluate its objectives in light of their situatedness within particular social, political, legal and ethical contexts.

This volume concludes with Kupperman's "Responses and Comments." Kupperman acknowledges the differences between the views expressed by contributors and his own. However, he sees these different views as revealing various aspects of the issues under consideration. Each of us has some kind of blind spot and collectively we "see" a fuller picture. If there is one substantial difference of views, it is the one on self between Kupperman, on the one hand, and Ames and Rosemont on the other. Ames and Rosemont charge that Kupperman holds on to a notion of "reified self" and retains a clear distinction between the self and the character. They do not think there can be such a clear distinction. Kupperman acknowledges the influence of Indian philosophy on him, but does not give up such a notion of self entirely. In his view, although the image of an individual agent functioning in an autonomous way is overworked in recent Western philosophy, it does not mean that it can be abandoned. For Kupperman, it is the idea of the individual agent functioning in an autonomous way that takes on personal meaning. In Dallmayr's view, these differences are more of a matter of different "accents" than fundamental disagreements. Kupperman does not deny that persons exist in relationships; Ames and Rosemont do not entirely rule out the relative independence of the self. As Dallmayr says, no matter which accent one prefers, the fact remains that Kupperman's work has given new impulses to a great variety of interpretations and thus provides a boost to the reinvigoration of virtue ethics in a global setting. For this service, we—Western and Asian comparativists—are all deeply indebted and grateful to Kupperman.

Notes

1. See Stephen Angle 2010. It is conceivable, of course, that one could philosophize on common problems shared by more than one tradition, draw on more than one tradition, and advance a thesis in between and across traditions. That would also fall into the category of comparative philosophy broadly construed.

2. Besides virtue ethics, character ethics, and role ethics, for a debate on whether Confucian ethics can be properly read as a form of care ethics, see Star 2002 and Li 2002.

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