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Daniel Engster, *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. 274.

Daniel Engster aims to remedy gaps in theorizing about care and to develop a theory of justice based on caring practice. Engster defines caring as “*everything we do directly to help individuals to meet their vital biological needs, develop or maintain their basic capabilities, and avoid or alleviate unnecessary or unwanted pain and suffering, so that they can survive, develop, and function in society*” (28-29, italics in original). One engages in caring virtuously when one does it “*in an attentive, responsive, and respectful manner*” (31, italics in original). In Engster’s view, caring does not constitute a complete morality but it does represent a moral minimum that other theories of justice tend to neglect.

One gap in care theory today is the absence of an account of the obligation to care for others. Engster’s account is the heart of his first chapter: (1) Each human being can be assumed to value her own survival, development, functioning, and avoidance of suffering. (2) At least for some stages of life, all human beings depend on care by other human beings for these goods. (3) Each human being can therefore be assumed to *claim*, at least implicitly, that others should help her to achieve these goods (46). (4) This prudential claim implies a full-fledged moral principle “*that capable human beings ought to help individuals in need when they are able to do so consistent with their other caring obligations*” (48, italics in original). (5) Finally, each person recognizes as valid the claims that others make for her care for them (49).

The crucial move from (3) to (4) seems the most problematic. This generalization is warranted according to Engster because we do not know ahead of time exactly who might be able to help us meet our needs in any particular situation and because those who help us are enabled to do so only because of a network of social relations in which they too receive care. “Our own particular claims thus necessarily require claiming and justifying care for anyone in need” (48).

However, this inference does not follow. One’s prudential needs commit one to claiming only what is necessary for one’s own care. The care networks required to sustain any particular caring person do not encompass “anyone in need.” If my caretaker’s caretakers do not survive, I need merely claim care from someone else. The move to generality is thus not yet warranted.

Engster himself limits the *weight* of a duty to care. He allows that even if there are others in the world who are starving, it is still permissible to use one’s resources to develop the higher capacities of close others or to live a “good life” beyond satisfying one’s own basic needs (60-61). He writes: “caring values cannot be shown to be always more important than all other pursuits” (61). This concession further diminishes the weight of a general claim that “human beings ought to help individuals in need.”

Nonetheless, Engster’s second chapter develops an account of why and how political institutions should incorporate considerations of care into public policy. Many basic needs of others cannot be met by individuals alone but can be met through organized collective efforts of individuals. The general duty to care thus entails a duty to organize collective caring institutions, such as governments, to meet basic needs, such as safety and security, that individuals cannot meet alone (71-75). Specific governmental

caring policies also include income subsidies to poor families, quality childcare, adequate medical care for all, and care for the elderly and disabled (82-90).

In Engster's estimation, liberal democracy might be slightly better than other forms of government in providing these services; but it also has certain disadvantages, such as lack of sensitivity to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised (92-93). Liberal democratic theory also emphasizes goods such as autonomy and freedom that can be used to oppose governmental welfare policies (93-94). Care theory provides a more consistent defense of welfare programs than does liberal democratic theory. Care theory does not, in Engster's view, require democracy, representative government, or wide-ranging civil rights. It requires mainly a government that is attentive and responsive to its people's needs (173).

Engster pays noteworthy attention to the multi-cultural differences that affect people's ideas about what constitutes basic care and what sorts of caretaking are actually abusive. Engster defends cross-cultural assessments of caring practices on the grounds that care, as he defines it, avoids cultural biases and is based on "the common biological and developmental needs of human beings" (33). Of course, cultures that must live together may disagree about whether specific practices are helpful or harmful in terms of people's basic needs. When cultural groups disagree, they should engage in dialogue (101). However, Engster's approach does not clarify what to do when cultural disagreement about care persists after dialogue.

Engster's third chapter deals with economic justice based on care. Most generally, a caring economy would ensure that everyone has sufficient economic resources to care for themselves and their dependents, would not hamper anyone's caring

abilities, and would support people's personal caring activities as necessary (118). A caring economy, according to Engster, is not specifically liberal, Marxist, capitalist, or socialist but aims at practices that best attain the goals of caring (118). Engster agrees that the values and practices of market capitalism, such as individualism and the profit motive, diminish the extent to which economic practices generally serve caring ends (124-34). He argues, however, that the problem lies in unregulated markets, not in capitalism as such (136-139). Governmentally regulated capitalism can promote economically caring practices such as equal pay, minimum wage, worker safety protection, and environmental protection (141-5).

Engster's fourth chapter explores international relations in light of care theory. Despite expressed agreement with human right standards around the world, actual compliance and enforcement are uneven. Compliance and enforcement would increase if the moral foundation of rights were widely accepted. Engster argues that care theory's general moral principle, that capable persons should meet people's basic needs, provides a widely acceptable foundation for human rights (163-67). The government of a people has primary responsibility to ensure their basic rights, but if a particular government cannot do so, the responsibility falls to the international community (171).

While care theory leans strongly against the use of violence, it permits military violence for national self-defense so long as requirements similar to those of just war theory are met, for example, proportionality and discrimination. As well, care theory permits humanitarian military intervention when a state fails to care for its own people. Care theory provides a distinctive justification for these permissions, namely, to protect a people's ability to care for themselves (191-93).

The fifth chapter surveys the ways in which cultural institutions can promote caring attitudes such as sympathy, compassion, and trust, and dispositions to act caringly toward others (198-200). Engster surveys the effects on caring attitudes of various childrearing practices, educational programs, and television media. Engster's recommendations include parental leaves, decent childcare (210-16), special support for caring attitudes in males (216-26), education for "emotional literacy" (230-33), and television programming that lacks undue violence and harmful stereotypes (234-35).

Engster's approach will disappoint those who look to care theory for the foundation of a complete, progressive political agenda. For example, his care theory opposes the oppression of women to the extent that oppression limits care for women and women's abilities to care for others; but it does not support women's "full social and political equality" (100). Also, Engster claims that care theory gives priority to "the care of individuals over group values and goals" (99), a kind of individualism than many other care theorists would dispute.

However, Engster's book effectively advances the development of care theory in important directions that have received insufficient attention. This excellent book should help care theory to win deserved recognition from mainstream ethics.

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