



THE ETHICS OF CARING

FINDING PROFESSIONAL RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH CLIENTS

Kylea Taylor

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EXCERPTS from *The Ethics of Caring*

From the Preface...

I have come to believe that a close examination of ethical issues and of our personal interest in ethical right relationship could involve more than merely rote learning of a set of external rules and hearing how to protect ourselves from the perils of legal prosecution. I believe now that such an examination gives us precious insights into ourselves and our sacred relationships with our clients. These insights affect our clients and their therapeutic outcomes at least as deeply as what we learn from any other part of our professional training.

One of the most important concepts of the caring professions in modern times is the idea that the professional, what she or he brings to the caring situation as a person, is a more important influence on the outcome of the care, therapy, education, medical service, bodywork, or mentoring than the choice of technique she or he employs in giving the care. The therapist must have the ability to travel deeply and empathetically with the client, sometimes into uncharted, even frightening, territory, sometimes at a moment's notice, at the moment the client's material arises within a session.

In order to navigate effectively, the professional must have experience with the territory the client is traveling. The professional must have an understanding of the challenges and the pain that may be encountered. Most important is that professional can convey trust (verbally and non-verbally), assuring the client that it will be safe enough and ultimately healing to travel through these areas and that there is significant hope that the client will come all the way through to a healing outcome. Professional training which incorporates emphasis on self-examination and experiential, inner exploration

enables therapists and other professionals to gain the familiarity and confidence that are necessary to hold the light for others' explorations of difficult terrain. (from *The Ethics of Caring*, pp. xxvii-xxviii)

Learning from ethical missteps

Right relationship includes the process of unintentionally mis-stepping. One then is challenged to lovingly forgive oneself in order to quickly transition back into the dance and into synch again.

Sometimes one partner in right relationship leads and the other follows, sometimes both surrender to letting the motion itself lead them to delightfully synchronous steps. It is quite beautiful when both right relationship "dancers" are conscious of their bodily energies, their values, and their needs, and when they are committed to moving together, and to enjoying the union in dance.

The goals symbolized by harmonious dancing may include: assisting with change and transformation in therapy, encouraging a patient with medical healing or in birthing, mentoring and empowering someone so they feel able to manifest what they want and give what they have to contribute, following a student's curiosity as a teacher, coaching a client to success and joy in business, providing alliance and guidance for a client's inquiry about spiritual direction, and sitting with another person at the end of life in such a way that the dying person feels allied, understood, and supported.

It is beautiful and rewarding when both partners in the professional/client relationship are committed to awareness of this dance and its goals. On the other hand, it is awkward, at the very least, and even can be dangerous to both "sets of toes" when one or both are not so committed. Always, however, the ultimate responsibility, for this awareness and for negotiating the "dance floor" safely in the professional/client relationship, rests with the professional.

This book is about professional relational ethics, how we find that sweet spot of right relationship with an "other." It is about how we do the work of inner ethics and our own self-discovery and course-correction so that we can inhabit that constantly moving zone of right relationship. It is about how doing so contributes to a healing field where our increased awareness nourishes us and supports not only ourselves and our goals, but also supports the systems to which each of us belong.

Ethics has to do with the most interesting parts of human life: money (exchange), sex, relationship, self-understanding, power, love, truth, insight, and mysticism. Ethics, like sex (which it often seems to concern) is arousing, engaging, and often amusing. The consideration of ethics has the potential to expand self-knowledge and self-concept and to improve relationships.

In summary, ethics is about relationship. It is about the inner relationships of our values to actions. It is about the interaction between one belief and another, one desire and another, one fear and another. Ethics is about how we view and treat “the other” in our personal and professional communities. Ethics is the process by which we sort out what best creates inner and outer harmony in our lives and in the lives of those we care for. (from *The Ethics of Caring*, pp. 36-37)

Why are we doing the work we do?

Ethical behavior stems from the internal congruency and harmony between our values and our actions, between the value we have of wanting to do our best for our clients and our actual willingness to bring our best awareness and skills to that task.

Our very first self-reflection must be on our reasons for taking on the professional role we have chosen. Once we know that core motivation, we can go back to it again and again when we are confused by the centrifugal forces and chaos of incidents, personalities, and the many details on the periphery.

Sometimes the reason we are in a role is central to our life purpose. It is what we feel we are here to do, what we feel are our gifts we want to share with others. Sometimes the reason is a temporary one, and that is good to know, too. It is useful in that case to check back to find our core purpose to which this temporary goal relates.

We are working with more than the individual client

We must be willing to deepen our personal awareness in order to learn more about our own motivations. We must be willing to discover the point at which our unique qualities are in the best balance to serve others. And we must also be willing to widen our understanding of the external contexts and connections that affect our professional relationships.

We are working with all the client's associations as well as with the client

For example, the professional works with not only all parts of a client—the biographical history, the state of the body, the moods, the roles, the personality parts, the client's interests and goals, the client's symbolic and dream life—but also with those people and associations to whom the client is *connected*. The therapist and other professional thus works also, even if not in person, with the client's partner, the client's family and ancestors, the client's workplace, the client's ethnic or religious culture, the community associations the client has, and all other parts of the network to which the client is connected.

We are working with the client's *disconnections* also

The professional often works also, just as importantly, with those parts of the network from which the client has become *disconnected*, the family members the client may have cut off, the religion the client is rebelling against, the neighbors to whom the client is no longer speaking, and the inner spiritual or professional callings the client has not yet heeded.

The professional is working with all these elements, even when they don't come up explicitly in the client's words.

A clergyperson works not only with a member of the congregation, but with the member's family, the congregation as a whole, and the community in which the spiritual congregation worships. Any professional is working with all the numerous aspects and associations one person has: physical, emotional, cognitive, social, creative, economic, cultural, existential, and spiritual.

Physical healers weigh external input to the individual, such as the quality of air, water, food, and intake of chemicals that affect the body/mind. Emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual healers do likewise and also take into account the racial, ethnic, sociological, and religious cultures and belief systems of both the professional and the client, and the greater socioeconomic and political systems (and perhaps even the cosmological systems) within which the therapeutic, educational, or spiritual relationship exists.

Coaches and educators will also recognize that some of the elements mentioned above have presented themselves from the wider field into specific work they are doing with a client or student. Perhaps it is something they learn while they are actually with a client, or perhaps they discover something new about the wider field in presenting or marketing themselves or exploring an academic subject. Often this kind of discovery is a kind of gateway that opens a professional to unexpected influences. The professional enters new territory and this usually results in surprising opportunities for personal as well as professional development.

Human interconnection to each other and all living beings

An ethic of relationship must address the web of relationship that extends beyond immediate personal relationships to people of other races and nations and to all living things. In a speech given at Stanford University in 1994, Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel spoke of what he called the “forgotten dimension of democracy...that spiritual dimension that connects all cultures and in fact all humanity.” He spoke about the ethics of politics being an ability to see the commonality in humanity, and said, “many politicians or regimes espouse these ideas in words but do not apply them in practice.”

Havel’s message was that a transcendent viewpoint (a spiritual perspective beyond personal, ethnic, religious, or chauvinistic viewpoints) would result in ethical relationship on a global scale. He said that loss of respect for our transcendental origins “always leads to loss of respect for everything else, from the laws people have made for themselves, to the life of their neighbours and of our living planet.”

The principle of interconnection that Havel expresses is what I will call the “web of life.” The “web of life” metaphor describes the fact that we are all in this together, not only sociopolitical systems and ethnic groups, but all beings. This can be demonstrated in many ordinary tangible ways.

Humans are interconnected in our financial relationships and daily conversations. We all feel the impact on us of community, national, and world events. We see our web like a field of connection daily in our computer “contacts” files and social networking interactions, and perhaps even in our more subtle connections, such as in dreams and thoughts that include others, and even in the collective unconscious, described by C. G. Jung, in which all humans share archetypal experience.

Deena Metzger (2002) writes in her profound book about healing entitled *Entering the Ghost River* how she discovered her own physical cancer was related to (and healed by) much more than she could have imagined before her personal experience of illness: Through cancer, I was being educated about the ways of illness as both private and public events. My mind went back and forth between my own fate and the fate of the community. Afterward as a healer, I knew I must never give my attention only to the individual circumstances of those who consulted me; it was right and proper to be equally preoccupied with the state of the world... (p. 22)

The web of life is demonstrated also by the mysterious phenomenon of synchronicity, by research demonstrating the power of prayer, by shamanic healing mechanisms, and by the capacity of the *professional love*, one of the six kinds of love defined by anthropologist Angeles Arrien (1993, p. 52), the positive regard of one person to be therapeutic to another.

We speak more ethically and act more ethically when we begin to widen our view to see and honor the web-like context of relationship that weaves among the strands connecting professional and client. That web connects the systems extending beyond the walls of the treatment room, consulting room, or classroom into family, culture, ecosystem, all beings on the Earth, and even perhaps extends our honoring into unseen dimensions, beyond the boxes of the current paradigms and belief systems within which we assume we live in modern culture.

Ethical development requires acknowledgment of relationship

If ethics is the study of relationship, then transcending the limited viewpoint that we are unrelated, wholly separate, is essential for ethical development. Transcendent viewpoint (the ability to perceive the interconnectedness) develops within one person at a time. It can happen simultaneously in groups, even large groups, but the transcendent experience is still an internal one, not an external one. A metaphor for transcendence of the self through inner work is this one: *We all have to dive into our own well to reach the underground river that connects all sources of water.*

Those who have been for some time conscious professionals: healers, educators, nurses, physicians, ministers, and bodyworkers, know that the healing works both ways. Although their focus is on their clients, the students, members of congregation, and patients, still, the *relationship*, in which these individuals were the clients, has also been

healing for the professionals. It has taught them, and made them ever better at what they do for others.

All forms of professional caregiving are contexts for the growth of the transcendent cultural viewpoint. Among the means by which we expand our ability to realize our relatedness are our relationships: one-on-one experiences, parenting and family relationships, partnership and teamwork at home and at work, spiritual fellowship, and group association and ceremony. Philosopher, Charles Eisenstein (2013) goes further to say:

“Interdependency,” which implies a conditional relationship, is far too weak a word for this nonseparation of self and other. My claim is much stronger that the self is not absolute or discrete but contingent, relationally defined, and blurrily demarcated....There is no self except in relationship to the other. (p. 20).

And Albert Einstein (1950) in his letter included in her book by Alice Calaprice (2005) put it this way:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. (p. 206)

When our belief systems have expanded so that we are intimately sensitive to the connection among us all, we appreciate community. We discover the benefit from the mirroring and understanding of others who also feel and support that expanded perspective. If the professional is not supported sufficiently by culture and community, a *dis*-ease or dissonance occurs between the internal truth of her perception and the external mirroring by others that she experiences. (from *The Ethics of Caring*, pp.39-44)