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Ethics of care and politics of the ordinary

My exploration of care and the ordinary follows a trajectory of Wittgenstein’s philosophy beyond the “grammar” of the first person, the uses of psychological verbs and the nature of our states of mind. Wittgenstein invented a philosophy of subjectivity as voice; that is, as expressed in language and as the site of production of ordinary moral expression.

The idea of an ethics formulated in a different voice – women’s voices – follows on these explorations. In this ordinary conception of ethics, morality is founded not on universal principles but rather starts from the experiences of everyday life. It is best expressed not in the form of a theory, but as an activity, namely, caring: as action (taking care, caring for) and as attention and concern (caring about). Care is at once a practical response to specific needs and a sensitivity to the ordinary details of human life that count – that matter. Hence, care is a concrete matter that ensures maintenance (e.g. as conversation and conservation) and continuity of the human world and form of life. This is nothing less than a paradigm shift in ethics. As such, the notion of care brings ethics back to Wittgenstein’s “rough ground of the ordinary”.

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