# CONTEMPT OR CARE? MEDIATING A WESLEYAN VIRTUE ETHIC FOR TODAY

Dean G. Blevins, Nazarene Theological Seminary

## *Introduction: Contempt, The Spirit of the Age*

*"Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"*

In recent years the language of civility in the midst of advocacy, in both political and ecclesial discourse, finds itself in grave peril. Of course, civility, for civility's sake, remains an open question for many writers in social and political arenas, but less so for those working in care-related professions.[1] At times, pastors, online influencers, social organizers, and even conservative pundits suspend the language of civility often when advocating for a position through the employ of prophetic language, particularly the rhetoric of "jeremiad." Jeremiad defines a semi-legal indictment confronting what advocates believe creates a grave in-justice, either upon cultural or theological assumptions. However, as Cathleen Kaveny notes, those prophetic rhetorical strategies, anchored in Puritan culture, often misrepresent the valid use of jeremiad either upon the conditions of disputation (inciting forensic claims versus deliberative ones) or by succumbing to the inherent temptation to move from confrontation to contempt.[2] Why important? Because, if we accept even provisionally, Jonathan Haidt's six-word summative principle of his social intuitionist model that "intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second," we must deal with contempt if we hope to engage in civil discourse or prophetic speech.[3]

One might assert that the "spirit of the age" might well be characterized, as Arthur C. Brooks argues, as an era saturated by a posture of contempt. Brooks, a conservative economist with, by his judgment, a liberal heritage, argues that contempt serves as one of the major issues of our day by functioning much like a methamphetamine addiction similar to other addictive habitual needs (where gambling, codependency, and excessive consumerism "consume" people).[4] Brooks writes:

> America is addicted to political contempt. While most of us hate what it is doing to our country and worry about how contempt coarsens our culture over the long term, many of us still compulsively consume the ideological equivalent to meth from elected officials, academics, entertainers, and some of the news media. Millions actively indulge their

[1] Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility: Disagreements and the Limits of Toleration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Mark E. Biddle, "A Word about: Civility: Reconciliation 'Lite'" *Review & Expositor* 116, no. 2 (2019): 121–23; Cynthia M. Clark, *Creating & Sustaining Civility in Nursing Education*, Second edition (Indianapolis: Sigma Thea Tau International, 2017; James Kelsey, "Practicing Civility in an Uncivil Age," *Review & Expositor* 116, no. 2 (2019): 146–59; K Lauriston Smith, "Towards Civility as a Virtue: James K. A. Smith's Creational Hermeneutics and Roger Williams's Civility" *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 8, no. 1 (2023): 88–107; Ian Ward, "Democratic Civility and the Dangers of Niceness" Political Theology 18, no. 2 (March 2017): 115–36.

[2] Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2016), x, 7-10.

[3] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 61.

[4] Arthur C. Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save the America from the Culture of Contempt* (New York: Broadside Books, 2019), 3-4, 27-28.

> habit by participating in the cycle of contempt in the way they treat others, especially on social media.[5]

Brooks language, while stark, includes an invitation to adopt more positive postures like empathy, and even gratitude, in response to, or recovery from, this acidic/addictive discourse.[6] In doing so, Brooks, the economist, drifts toward the employ of positive emotions, or a positive moral psychology to resist the dangers of the public sphere. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt identifies five socio-moral postures that shape US discourse: Care/harm, Fairness/cheating, Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, and Sanctity/degradation.[7] This move to moral psychology might well serve as an invitation to "nurture care" as elaborated later in this writing.

Public discourse often segues into ecclesial disputation as well. Ministers and theologians alike find themselves attempting to encourage the strength of given practice (including theological method) for their intrinsic worth, and encourage an embrace of some version of the "good life" often associated with Aristotelian (among other) visions of virtue, or vice, all for the general good of community and society through life in the church.[8] Within the life of the church, how might one, for the sake of catholicity, amend differences that inevitably drive us not to "civil" difference, but to contempt? Could contempt serve as a particular "vice" that challenges catholic discourse and disagreement and might (like Brooks suggest) there be a "virtue" that helps disputing parties accept their differences yet retain some sense of catholic connection?

In the *Catholic Spirit*, John Wesley offered the following "metric" for authentic engagement among a truly "catholic" encounter. On matters of difference from worship to "opinions" Wesley invites: "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" Wesley's response is based on 2 Kings 10: 14-15, where Jehonadab's answered, "It is" which resulted in Jehu's affirmation "If it be, give me thine hand."[9] However, the question of discerning a "right heart," including one's own disposition, may well require considerable judgment.

Ethics of the "heart" raise intriguing questions considering recent challenges invoking prophetic claims of "justice" that devolve into disparaging comments on both sides of any disagreement. The advent of research in moral psychology, perhaps the "heart," or emotional disposition, raises the key concern by both parties. If the heart is ladened by a moral emotion more associated with "contempt" than "care," can a truly Catholic Spirit remain? Could Wesleyans attend to both the

---

[5] Brooks, 28-29.
[6] Brooks, 57-63.
[7] Haidt, 146.
[8] Kevin Tempe and Craig A. Boyd, Eds. *Virtues and Their Vices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). See the editors' "Introduction" (1-34) where they acknowledge the diversity, difference, and breadth of virtue theory/theology though often through the more traditional lens of Aristotle and medieval theologians (p. 6). The editors identify the tension between defining a virtue as a persistent disposition (characteristic) for the sake of personal flourishing versus a pursuit for excellence based on the intrinsic "good" resident within the practice itself (9-10). Much like the editors, this writing leaves the concept of virtue and that of vice open to final definition, preferring to allow the global nature of the concepts to emerge in dialog with the material.
[9] John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit," in the *Works of John Wesley*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 81-95, cf. 82.

"vice" of contempt and the "virtue" of care, offering a mediatorial model of engagement, for the sake of agreement and disagreement within a Catholic Spirit?

In previous work, Marie Gregg and I argued that much of the problem might revolve around a lack of a Wesleyan "plain account" of Christian purity. We noted the dangers of "Berlin walls" (unreasonable resistance) and "blindspots" (preoccupations that often mask/miss other pressing interests).[10] I now will suggest another danger, a tendency toward the vice of contempt, undergirded by specific forms of rhetoric, and I proffer a possible countering through the virtue of care. I believe our lack of a "plain account" of Christian purity also impedes our employ of Wesley's "catholic" spirit since it also risks an unhealthy contempt for those we think differ from our vision of purity. However, I also believe an antidote to that sense of degradation and contempt rests within the virtue of care… which can lead our hearts back to the catholic spirit. While contempt might not always be a "vice" of care (as Bell argues below) contempt remains an unhealthy response when tied to degradation, when employed to undermine care. To be certain, I am not trying to "reduce" all forms of contempt to a vice, nor suggest care serves only as an antidote. Yet a plain account of Christian purity may do well to attend to both moral emotions, or postures, going forward in a world saturated by misplaced "prophetic" voices.

When one fears that one's purity might be threatened with degradation, a dangerous tendency occurs to either ignore, attack, or just barrier the suspected culprit through active or passive versions of contempt. Yet emerging Wesleyan resources for a moral psychology affords a way forward through care, particularly the virtue of generative care, to engage and mediate between differences that resist any tendency toward contempt.

Generative care serves as an orientating vision for virtue formation through a combined effort at Point Loma Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary. Much of that work, both theoretically and practically, remains indebted to the research and development of G. Michael Leffel and his team at PLNU.[11] The language of care serves as the framework and telos of the curriculum both with adults and, more recently, with children in mind. This writing serves merely as a complementary effort to situate Leffel's highlighting the work of Erik Erikson with additional reflections, both on the dangers, or vice, of contempt; and enhancing the virtue of care through feminist voices alongside earlier philosophies of sentimentalism that circulated in Wesley's day. Much like early critiques of deontological visions ethical decision making based on justice, feminist reflections on the ethics of care afford additional resources for deliberation when it comes to a Wesleyan "posture" around mature affections/tempers for the sake of catholic encounters. The writing first identifies the complexity within the process of contempt and its potential as a limitation, perhaps a vice, when amplified through "prophetic" voices in our social setting. The writing then expands on Leffel's vision of generative care as an overarching virtue

[10] Dean Blevins and Marie Gregg, A Plain Account of Christian Purity: Berlin Walls," *The Asbury Journal* 79:1 (Spring 2024), 29-51; "A Plain Account of Christian Purity: Blind Spots," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 59:2 (Fall 2024), 138-154.

[11] G. Michael Leffel, "Embodied Virtue: A Model of Virtuous Caring for Practical Theology and Christian Formation," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 21:1 (Summer 2021), available online (accessed 2/21/2024) at https://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/filedownload/didache-volumes/vol-21-1/1291-didache-v21n1-02-embodied-virtue-leffel

for our era by drawing out the implications within both Moral Sentimentalism and particularly feminist ethics of care. The review offers space for a reflection how a heart of care hopefully might renew a catholic spirit, at least mitigating some of the toxicity of this era. Contempt, as a habitual practice, may threaten any disposition care. So, by raising the important question "who cares?" the people of God might find a way forward to mediate relationships and mitigate the level of contempt. Finally, any approach to advocacy, particularly when threatened by contempt, may require for a particular form of deliberation, known as mediation, to offer a "caring" response without demanding a specific response.

## *Whither Contempt?*

As noted, contempt appears to be a growing concern not only in the USA but in other European settings, often fueled by recent issues such as the pandemic, yet extending back to deeper roots of violence.[12] Gaining a deeper understanding of the place of contempt both within philosophy and psychology, requires some historical investigation (for this paper through the capable guides of contemporary researchers) as well as acknowledging other nuances that display contempt regardless of a reactive or non-reactive state.[13]

### *An Aristotelian Framework*

Exploring any virtue, or vice, often invokes the work of the classical world, particularly the contribution of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[14] However, for the sake of a clearer understanding of contempt, researchers rely on Aristotle's use of the term in his writing in *Rhetoric*. Robert Sokolowski, the Elizabeth Breckenridge Caldwell Professor of Philosophy at Catholic University of America, observes that many dictionaries associate the Aristotle's Greek term *oligrein* or *oligria* as a term that "slights" people. However, Sokolowiski offers terms like "belittle," or holding someone in contempt, better serves the concept as he notes "The Greek words contain the term *oligos*, which signifies few, little, or small, and hence 'belittle' is especially appropriate, while 'contempt' conveys the force of the action."[15] Solonowski then notes that Aristotle offers a taxonomy of three concrete forms of belittling or contempt. In an extensive section he writes:

---

[12] Sigurd Bergmann, "Navigating Ethics in a Pandemic—Contempt for the Weak Versus Love of Neighbor in a Swedish Lens," *Dialog* 60, no. 4 (2021): 421-431; Harald Ofstad, *Our Contempt for Weakness: Nazi Norms and Values-And Our Own*, Clas van Sydow, trans. (Sweeden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989), 44-49; Elizabeth Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 78-82, 146.

[13] Michelle, Mason "The Moral Psychology of Contempt: An Introduction" in *The Moral Psychology of Contempt*, ed. Michel Mason (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), vi-vii.

[14] Michael Pakaluk, "Contempt in Classical Philosophy," in *The Moral Psychology of Contempt*, 1-36; Pakaluk notes "contempt in the classical view (reveals that) contempt is to dismiss a person or thing as of no account, while conceiving of oneself as occupying a higher place, and conceiving of that dismissal as a successful looking down upon that person or thing (p.19)."

[15] Robert Sokolowski, "Honor, Anger, and Belittlement in Aristotle's Ethics." *Studia Gilsoniana* 3: 221-240, (2014), 234

> The first kind of slighting or contempt is disdain (*kataphronsis*), which has the sense of looking down or "thinking down" on someone (*kata*, *phronein*), of understanding them to be lowly and insignificant. In disdain we do not perform a full-blown action; we merely show what our opinion is by the attitude we take, our tone of voice, or the pose we strike. We show that you appear in a certain way to us but we do not do anything to you. The second kind of belittlement is spite (*epreasmos*), which Aristotle defines as putting obstacles in the way of the other person's wishes, that is, preventing him from obtaining what he wants, and doing so not for any advantage of one's own, but simply to thwart him, just for the fun of it. If I spite you, Aristotle says, I show that I am not afraid that you will be able to do anything about it; that is, I show that I think you are insignificant and helpless, practically nothing (*den ti h mikron*, from his definition of contempt). I also show my low opinion of you by implying that you are so insignificant that you could not possibly be of any use to me, for if you could be helpful at some time, I would not alienate you in this way. Spite is more active than disdain because it involves doing something that thwarts you, whereas disdain is more a matter of an attitude, expressed perhaps simply in my demeanor or in what I fail to do. The third kind of contempt is *hubris*, insult, and it is a still more affirmative action. Spite merely keeps you from getting what you want, but *hubris* positively inflicts injury or pain (*blaptein kai lupein*), but of a kind that involves disgrace (*aischun*) to the recipient. I do not just injure you; I do so in a way that belittles you. This is done, moreover, not for any advantage to the doer, nor even as revenge for something done previously, but simply for the pleasure of disgracing the target.[16]

Solonowski's portrayal provides a beginning consideration of contempt while he also notes a response to contempt might reasonably include anger at being slighted by others.[17] Ultimately, at least according to Solowski's treatment of Aristotle, contempt robs people of a sense of honor, particularly real honor worthy of the virtue they live out before others.

> If we belittle others, we take away their honor or prevent them from having any, and we make a public show of it. It would not be disdain, spite, or an insult if it were not manifest. We show that in our opinion they are not worthy of any sign of recognition that they have done some service.[18]

So, contempt does not remain private, the public display inevitably robs others of any service they might render.

Aristotle's nuanced expression, and public implications, offer clues in how Wesleyan's might approach contempt as a vice that hampers a catholic spirit. However, moral psychology also provides key insights that also nuance any understanding of contempt.

[16] Sokolowski, 234
[17] Sokolowski, 233
[18] Sokolowski, 238

*Moral Psychology's Treatment of the Bad… and good… of Contempt*

Macalester Bell's full treatise *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* offers a detailed overview of the subject from within the phenomenology of the experience of contempt, seeking both understanding and justification for the moral emotion for those with a minimally acceptable morality.[19] Bell notes the process of holding contempt, or contemning, comes close to the three "Ds" of deriding, despising, and disdaining. Yet Bell expands the definition to "contemn" as "to negatively and comparatively regard or attend to someone who has fallen below some standard that is part of the subject's personal baseline [core value system]; this form of regard constitutes a withdrawal from the target of contempt and may motivate further withdrawal."[20] Such contempt focuses on the whole person (not just specific actions or traits), includes an active posture (not merely apathy or disregard), and "fits" the circumstances in a way that includes the whole person.[21]

Bell's agenda seems clear in her attempt to rectify what she sees as "lack of attention paid to contempt" and demonstrate the important role the moral emotion can play in contemporary lives, including an appropriate response to a range of vices, so an emotion to cultivate.[22] Whether one accepts Bell's long term thesis, the vices she asserts worthy of contempt include dispositions toward superiority: overweening ambition, arrogance, hypocrisy, racism, and gullibility; leaning particularly against arrogance and hypocrisy. She notes "those who evince these vices see themselves as having a comparatively high status, desire that this high status be recognized, and, in paradigmatic cases, attempt to exact esteem and deference on this basis."[23] Bell does believe there are appropriate reasons (and necessary stances) to demonstrate contempt in specific situations, and is not alone in her attempt to argue the value of contempt in very specific settings.[24] Ultimately Bell believes contempt can play an instrumental role in encouraging protest, exposing unknown inequities, and motivating change.[25]

*Contempt and Relationship*

For the sake of future discussion in this paper, the one element that persists may be the contemnor's desire to withdraw within a circumstance. Bell believes this withdrawal includes a comparative and reflexive act, to basically withdraw so one does not identify closely with the person of contempt. Unlike approaching someone in anger when wronged, people who contemn

---

[19] Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 8-10, 22-24.
[20] Bell, 25, 46, see also 65.
[21] Bell, 48-58, 64-73.
[22] Bell, 21.
[23] Bell, 96-99, cf. 99. Bell references, but does not cite, the writings of Akeel Bilgrami and Achille Varzi as resources.
[24] Bell, 147-168; see also Michelle Mason, "Contempt as a Moral Attitude," *Ethics*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (January 2003), pp. 234-272 . For Bell, for contempt to have moral value it must 1) "fit" the target as a whole person based on 2) morally justified and 3) reasonable evidence that results in 4) serious implications for the target; all the while not 5) displaying hypocrisy, 6) unreasonableness or 7) unfair behavior on the part of the contemnor.
[25] Bell, 151-161

tend to withdraw to avoid a closer comparison. Of course, withdrawal alone does not indicate contempt, since many people withdraw based on trauma (of consequences, violation, harm, etc.). However, the comparative quality may provide clear distinction not only in the separation of persons but also the retention of one's values over against the need to hold someone else accountable for the violation of those values.[26]

Within this treatise the ultimate moral value of contempt takes second chair to the inherent danger of contempt as equally a moral vice. Bell notes this danger repeatedly in her treatment, often in relation to times when the separation betrays the contemnor's sense of superiority without validation. This concern may be shared particularly when standards of value (the person's baseline) appear not from within the phenomenology of "hard feelings" but from compelling narratives around an alternative vision of the good life or even neighborly love.[27] Of course, people fearing any sense of degradation (intellectual or moral) of one's personal worth may motivate contempt as well.

*Misplaced Prophecy, A Contemptuous Rhetoric*

To return to Kaveny, when one perceives and advocates "against" a particular ill via jeremiad, the rhetoric may invite contempt on the part of the advocate, or the audience. In early Puritan culture, the jeremiad revolved at time against an undue "toleration" of different perspectives compared to God's covenant with God's people. Kaveny, a law professor, notes, that even as covenants agreements changed, jeremiad retained a legal framework of a "just" discourse of complaint against a perceived, toxic, social ills. This posture leaves little space for a call to deliberative engagement around a difficult problem.

Perhaps the underlying problem, within recent Christian circles, may revolve around the assumption that prophets served exclusively as social justice critics, a view that biblical scholar Julia M. O'Brien identifies as a progressive orthodoxy: "an unquestioned an irrefutable set of beliefs whose acceptance becomes the litmus test of accurate knowledge and legitimate faith."[28] Ministers, even general readers, shaped by this progressive orthodoxy assume the prophets of scripture only spoke to the social, political, and economic ills of Israel and Judah, instead of serving other interpretive frameworks. In short, when prophetic speech seems to serve only as a vehicle of social justice, advocates tend to adopt the posture of speaking "prophetically" and being drawn into modes of discourse that risk drawing upon jeremiad. So, the moral emotion of justice, filtered through the rhetoric of prophecy, can set the "tone" of complaint and contempt on the part of either speakers, or listeners.

[26] Bell, 44-46; 161-164.
[27] Ryan West, "Contempt and the Cultivation of Character: Two Models," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 43.3 (2015):493-519.
[28] Julia M. O'Brian, *Prophets beyond Activism: Rethinking the Prophetic Roots of Social Justice* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2024), p. 11

However, other researchers, such as historian Glenn Walach, note the same Puritan terminology around jeremiad can invoke a different moral emotion, generational loyalty, or faithfulness. [29] Walach notes that early Puritan "fathers" also challenged their sons, based on a growing sense of decline in moral intentionality, to retain the faith of a previous generation through continuous revival and reform.[30] Once the assumed covenantal assumptions change, prophetic speech against those who fail to keep covenant can be equally strident. So, jeremiad, as a model of advocacy, can also be used as an indictment toward other moral stances within Jonathan Haidt's vision of the social moral intuitions: a lack of loyalty to authority, or supporting division within community, or degrading the sacred.

Advocacy, while a valid model of rhetoric, risks jeremiad as an expression of engagement and unfortunately can result in contempt that severs any hope of relationship. Kaveny observes that prophetic speech often works like chemotherapy, addressing what one perceives as a cancerous problem of deep resistance. However, like chemotherapy, this mode of rhetorical treatment that may attack both healthy, and unhealthy, "bodies" often while risking separating, or killing, the body through contempt.[31] Kaveny suggests other modes of discourse may offer complementary approaches alongside justice (humility and irony serving her purpose). However, there may be a different moral emotion may guide that deliberative framework, one that offers a stronger moral vision and modify the form of deliberation most appropriate to the conflict created.

Within the desire to "lend a hand" undergirding Wesleyan approaches that value both understanding and embrace amid differences, contempt may remain a dangerous vice unless balanced by an alternative vision of care. With a clearer understanding of care, alternative modes of engagement, beyond even a positive framework of calling for prophetic justice, may complement our efforts. In particular, the virtue of care may call for the practice of mediation as a necessary first step in any form of deliberation.

### *Care as a Virtue*

As noted earlier, the first of Haidt's socio-moral stances gestures to a posture, or virtue, that might best describe a love that guides both disposition and action during a relational imbalance, that of care. The imbalance may not be one of dependency, it merely reflects a kind of relationship where love/care does not demand a transactional parity, nor always seek full relationality in the best sense of the term (more later in the paper). Researchers may explore care through three lenses: first through the language of the moral sentimentalists acknowledging their early contributions including an emphasis on empathy, second, through moral psychology, and finally through the work of feminist ethics. As in the previous review, the historical review occurs through contemporary guides while the moral and feminist representations reflect current advocates of those perspectives, including the author's current engagement in a recent project.

---

[29] Glenn Wallach, *Obedient Sons: The Discourse of Youth and Generations in American Culture, 1630-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 21-54.
[30] Wallach, 21-54, see also Kaveny 159-165.
[31] Kaveny, 287-293.

*The Moral Sentimentalists*

Historically the first real engagement around the importance of care may well have occurred through the writings of eighteenth moral philosophers engaged in moral emotions, or sentimentalism: David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Smith; as well as the contributions of Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury.[32] Reviewing their work, ethicist and advocate for care Michael Sloat notes,

> What is distinctive of—and perhaps most suspect about—sentimentalist theories of moral language is the idea that certain affective psychological states form the basis for moral judgment, the idea, in other words, that we can ultimately account for or understand the meaning of moral terms and utterances in terms of certain affective psychological states and the ways we operate upon (or work with) them. In particular, the psychological states that sentimentalism paradigmatically considers to be the basis of moral judgment are states of approval and disapproval, and that means that sentimentalism has to regard approval and disapproval as affective states that don't presuppose the very moral utterances or judgments they are supposed to ground and (be used to) clarify.[33]

At the "heart" of moral sentimentalism's approach to care, according to Slote, lies the underlying emotion, or posture, of empathy. Slote may represent one of the more comprehensive treatments in sentimentalist ethic, both his smaller treatise *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* and his later attempt to extend Hume's ethics to a new era, *The Moral Sentimentalists*. In both projects, Slote reframes an earlier use of the term "sympathy" to argue that empathy "can" provide a comprehensive approach to ethics, from our most intimate relationships to large scale issues under the banner of social justice.[34] Throughout both books empathy provides what Slote calls the "cement," or causal mechanism, (conceived by Hume) for altruistic, or what one might deem caring moral action.

> The morally good or decent life depends on our being altruistically concerned with others and on refraining from harming them and treating them unjustly, and I shall be arguing that empathy makes all of this possible. But empathy is also partialistic: we normally feel more empathic concern for potential or actual harm or pain that we notice in our vicinity than for what we merely know about or have heard of, and when we hear of a contemporaneous threat to human life (say, if coal miners are trapped underground), our empathy is more sharply aroused than if a(n even larger scale) threat arises concerning future loss of life.[35]

---

[32] Michael Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010 ), 3; Noriaki Iwasa, "On Three Defenses of Sentimentalism," *Prolegomena* 12:1 (2013): 61-82. See also John Michael McAteer, "Moral Beauty and Moral Taste from Shaftesbury to Hume," Ph.D. Diss. (University of California, Riverside, 2010) 37-58; available online (accessed 2/21/2024) at https://escholarship.org/content/qt7jp259wn/qt7jp259wn_noSplash_b56ad12a9d1dbdbbd35d7a7569304810.pdf?t=mhwc1k.

[33] Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism*, 6-7.

[34] Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 94-103.

[35] Slote, *Moral Sentimentalism*, 14.

Slote acknowledges that early sentimentalists focused on the limitation of empathy for those "near and dear" (relationally, socially and geographically) yet maintains that our current era possesses the resources to extend empathy through the various mediums of engagement in our mediated environment, coupled with intentional formation of the underlying narratives and "lives" of others (overcoming what Vincent Miller calls a consumer commodification, and ultimate decontextualizing, of personal expression through media).[36] Sloat also notes that religion possesses both the power to engender empathy, but also the terrible tendency to harm others, even persecute those who believe differently. He notes that such harm can include a self-deception based on arrogance. Sloat writes, "So-called concern for those one persecutes involves, or is accompanied by, an attitude that is arrogantly dismissive of, and lacking in empathy for, the viewpoint of the other."[37] Ethicists may, or may not, adopt Slote's comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, his work appears consistent with Haidt's observations above and gestures toward a concern below, of our need to be connected to others to live our lives in a caring posture.

For the purposes of this writing, care relies on empathy as a moral emotion that allows us to engage others in relationship, a posture that pushes our engagement beyond an abstract concern for a given principle and instead a deeper connection to the person… even at a distance. Returning to social justice, Slote notes more work may need to be done around distributive, criminal, and tort forms of justice. Still, the dictum "do no harm," which begins John Wesley's three simple rules for the Methodist societies, may govern our empathetic, or caring response to others. Stated positively in the second rule, do good, may govern our emotional/empathetic response to care for others as well as any deontological principle or teleological vision. The moral sentimental vision provides both the importance of care within social engagement as well as personal relationship, and gestures toward a virtue worthy of embrace within an aretaic vision of our engagement with each other. Whether empathetic care remains a virtue, in itself, relies more on the work of moral psychologists such as G. Michael Leffel.

*A Moral Psychological Embrace of Generative Care.*

As noted, Point Loma Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary remain in a project to raise up and inculcate the virtue of care for local church members and ministers in training. He initiative utilizes a preliminary workbook, *Crafted 4 Care*, designed by faculty, counseling professionals, and ministers. The workbook includes two curriculums, the first guiding participants through four socio-relational virtues of gratitude, trust, compassion and forgiveness alongside to meta-cognitive virtues of mindfulness and empathy. The six virtues are then reformatted and given more extensive treatment in the second curriculum to emphasize generative care. Ultimately the goal of the material is to provide adults a means (often through reflective practice and interpersonal engagement) to inculcate a deeper sense of "care" in their lives.

[36] Sloat, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, 32, 58-59; Vincent Miller *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture*, 2003 reprint, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[37] Sloat, 59.

The underlying vision that guides this work does emerge primarily from G. Michael Leffel's appropriation of moral psychological theory, and his adaptation of Randy Maddox's portrayal of John Wesley's moral psychology. Leffel produced a series of articles that draw from an interdisciplinary range of discussion partners: contemporary philosophy, theological ethics, cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology and psychology of religion.[38] Lefflel's thesis occurs early in a three-part series when he argues that many psychologists wrestle with a "fuzzy" vision of the ultimate goal or concern of "the Good Life" in their writings. Leffel asserts:

> Articulated in various ways, one prominent view takes the general form: The purpose of a good relationship is to make one another feel good. Or, stated with a little more theoretical precision: The purpose of a good relationship is to create enough exchanges of positive emotion, relative to negative emotions, such that more likely than not the relationship will not prematurely terminate (see Fredrickson, 2008; Gottman, 1994 for reviews). In contrast, this article argues for an alternative view of the Good life and relationships, one less subjectively oriented and utilitarian in nature. An alternative conception of the *summum bonum* of a good relationship sounds something like this: Good relationships not only make us feel good (happy), they have the potential to actually *make us good* (virtuous).1 And, such relationships are able to make us better persons by virtue of the quality of *care* shared one with another, not simply as a consequence of the frequency of positive emotions exchanged. This, at least, seems to be the positive psychology of relationality embedded within Erik Erikson's (1950/1963) psychosocial model of development. In Erikson's view, optimal personality development, as well as a good relationship, makes not just for a happy person, but a happy, *caring* person.[39]

[38] G. Michael Leffel, "Who Cares? Generativity and the Moral Emotions, Part 2: A 'Social Intuitionist Model' or Moral Motivation," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 36:3 (2008), 182-201, cf. 183. See also Leffel's three part series "Emotion and Transformation in the Relational Spirituality Paradigm, Parts 1-3," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35:4 (2007), 263-316.

[39] G. Michael Leffel, "Who Cares? Generativity and the Moral Emotions, Part 1: Advancing the 'Psychology of Ultimate Concerns,'" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 36:3 (2008), 161-181, cf. 161-62. Leffel's lengthy footnote needs to be noted as well since he writes: "In agreement with other writers in this area, these "two happinesses" are not necessarily opposed to one another (e.g., King, 2008, p. 432). There are good reasons to believe that many happy persons are also caring persons (Eid & Larsen, 2008), and that these two processes reciprocally influence one another (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Nevertheless, as described below, the *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* approaches to well-being do present contrasting views of how one arrives at happiness. Erikson's *eudaimonic* model discussed here holds that happiness is more likely the by- product of the striving and progress made toward attainment of other relational goals, not the "ultimate concern" itself. And, as the title suggests, positive and moral emotions will indeed play a prominent role in the proposed motivational model of generative care. But argued here, moral emotions function as mediators (means) to virtuous character and caring relationships, not as the primary outcome variables. This reverses the typical order of predictor and outcome variables seen in most subjective well-being research."

Leffel's three articles, alongside his later publication for *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, holds generative care as the penultimate goal of the good life.[40] Leffel notes that his view shares previous studies in psychological, particularly developmental, studies that include Erikson, that advocates for a relational generativity often implicit in Erikson's comprehensive lifecycle but particularly in his treatment of middle age. However, Leffel also observes a growing rediscovery of Erikson's moral treatments of relationality and even moral motivation that predates mid-life. This review leads Leffel early to argue:

> Erikson understood generativity, *fundamentally*, as an emergent master capacity to *take care* of the strengths-development of *cared* for others, and that this capacity provides the *telos* (goal, aim) for optimal personality development and flourishing relationships. The term relational generativity is suggested in order to highlight this subset of Erikson's thought and to emphasize its relevance in all relationships, not only for the social roles and domains of middle age.

Leffel then begins to detail his argument across the three-part article leading, with the help of colleagues, to a kind of "ecology" of virtues, or moral-affective capacities that draw together the moral motives (intuitions), moral emotions, and moral virtues that, at the time of the writing, include questions of attachment, altruism, reciprocity, and reparation.[41] Later Leffel refines the model to the one presented to support the *Crafted 4 Care* approach, drawing from a neuroscience model of moving from perception (awareness), to moral intuition (instinct), to emotional deepening (virtue) to moral strengthening through action. The four-fold movement then guides one's journey through the six preliminary virtues with the goal of deepening generative care.

Admittedly other theorists may differ with Leffel's treatment of Erikson's primary goal and contribution. As early as 1977, psychologist and theologian Walter E. Conn posited:

> Erikson's principal contribution to the specifically religious dimension of ethics lies, in my judgment, precisely in his specification of the concrete shapes (in terms of ego strengths or virtues) which the personal dynamism for self-transcendence assumes in the normative process of psychosocial development.[42]

---

[40] Andy Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 188-241. The language of "penultimate" merely acknowledges a bias of the author that there can be no claim to the "ultimacy" of any one perspective. Acknowledging our limitation to knowing the "ultimate" intention of God rests with both our humanity and God's mystery. As Root writes "Reality includes the human mind but is (ontologically) more than what the human mind can know (epistemologically)" (193). So, one might situate this view in "critical realism" a philosophical approach that works well both in empirical science but also theology, where any attempt to claim final understanding of God's revealed will should always be couched in humility, a key intellectual virtue.

[41] G. Michael Leffel, Malerie E. Fritz, Michelle R. Stephens, "Who Cares? Generativity and the Moral Emotions, Part 3: A Social Intuitionist Model 'Ecology of Virtue,'" *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 36:3 (2008), 202-221, cf. 206-208.

[42] Walter E. Conn, "Erik Erikson: The Ethical Orientation, Conscience and the Golden Rule," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 5:2 (1977), 249-266, cf 250; see also Donald Capps, *Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues* (Fortress Press, 1987).

Erikson's own work, as it shifted over time, alternating between psychoanalysis, society and the life cycle, and writing did seem to mirror his own personal journey so that even major biographies center specific aspects of Erikson's contribution.[43] Still, Leffel's work on generative care not only serves this article but also dialogs well with Randy Maddox's moral affectional psychology that Leffel draws from in his later writing. Generative Care, as a virtue, lies both at the heart of Erikson's vision, and Wesley's later moral psychology. What may be lacking, is the very feminine "voice" that sparked a resurgence of the ethic of care in the original work of developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan, but also even among Erikson's "near and dear" inner circle.

*Feminist Ethics of Care:*

Leffel's treatment of Erikson does not explicitly mention the influence of Erik's wife, Joan Erikson. Erikson biographers do acknowledge that Erik and Joan contributed to each other's careers and Joan continued Erikson's work.[44] Joan M. Erikson's own writing, *Wisdom and the Senses: The Way of Creativity,* provides a marvelously aesthetic (and woven, much like a multicolored shawl) vision of the life cycle. In her writing, Joan Erikson summarizes generativity through the simple assertion: CARE.[45] What proves more amazing involves her quick and simple acknowledgment of care of people's closest dependents yet Joan then moves quickly to discuss generativity as the care and maintenance of the world. She argues that "(c)are is the strength of the state of the 'maintenance of the world': caring for and being a participant in all of the social institutions mentioned, and caring about the welfare of others in every sense of the word."[46] Joan lifts up the helping professions as emblematic of this kind of care and notes the particular challenges one undertakes to accept care as one's response and responsibility.

Joan Erikson provides one bridge between a feminist voice and moral psychology, as other theorists acknowledge the same bridge with moral sentimentalism. Michael Sloat notes

> Nel Noddings, the first person to explicitly formulate an ethics of care or caring, was also explicit about the influence of or similarity to Hume, and the connection with Hume and with Hume's emphasis on the sentiments—what we would nowadays speak of as emotions and feeling(s)—is certainly clear in care ethics as a normative approach to moral issues, that is, as giving us and defending substantive moral judgments.[47]

However, whether feminists see their work as a continuation of either sentimentalism, or Aristotle's virtue ethics, remains to be seen. Virginia Held notes Sloate's emphasis on caring as a

---

[43] Robert Coles, *Erik H. Erikson: The Growth of His Work* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1970); Lawrence J. Friedman, *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson* (New York: Scribner, 1999); Robert S. Wallerstein and Leo Goldberg, Eds., *Ideas and Identities: The Life and Work of Erik Erikson* (Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1998). See also Lawrence J. Friedman, "Erik H Erikson's Critical Themes and Voices: The Task of Synthesis," Chapter 4, *Ideas and Identities*, 353-378, cf. 363.
[44] Friedman, *Identity's Architect*, 258-59.
[45] Joan M. Erikson, *Wisdom and the Senses: The Way of Creativity* (New York: W. & W. Norton, 1988), p. 99-103, cf, 99.
[46] J. Erikson, *Wisdom and the Senses*, 101.
[47] Sloat, *Moral Sentimentalism*, 4.

primary virtue but also asserts that feminists remain wary since virtually all preceding ethical theories remain patriarchal, while feminist ethics need to operate in a post patriarchal society focused on "caring *relations*." She continues:[48]

> The ethics of care, in my view, is a distinctive ethical outlook, distinct even from virtue ethics. Certainly, it has precursors, and such virtue theorists as Aristotle, Hume and the moral sentimentalists contribute importantly to it. As a feminist ethic, the ethics of care is certainly not a mere description or generalization of women's attitudes and activities as developed under patriarchal conditions. To be acceptable, it must be a feminist ethic, open to both women and men to adopt. But in being feminist, it is different from the ethics of its precursors, and different as well from virtue ethics.[49]

Held's position seems to correspond with other feminist ethicists. Ruth E. Groenhout notes relating feminist care ethics to virtue ethics appears as a strange question. She notes,

> An ethics of care arises within feminist circles, is profoundly anti-elitist and egalitarian, rejects patriarchal systems, and analyzes power relationships with a fairly jaundiced eye. The historical roots of virtue theory lie in deeply hierarchical and patriarchal theories, are unreservedly elitist and assume that only the powerful will really live good lives.[50]

Perhaps, the tandem cautions invite those interested in the virtue of care to attend to feminist thought first and ask how virtue might be reconceived within a new, post patriarchal approach that attends to the relational concerns and avoids non-egalitarian visions of the good in any formulation.

Virginia Held notes that care combines both value and practice, and then lists several positions within a feminist ethic of care, that may contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of care. Care includes: 1) a particular moral drive to attend and meet the needs of others, 2) a disposition that values emotion and relational capabilities in discerning what one might ethically do, and 3) a posture that rejects the assumption that abstract reasoning provides the best way to avoid bias. This last element reminds readers of the inherent relationality involved in a disposition of care, one that Held asserts "respects rather than removes itself from the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships."[51] The underlying emphasis on relationality seems to govern much of feminist discourse around care.

Groenhout, through her fuller treatment, *Connected Lives: Human Nature and an Ethics of Care*, may offer us a way of understanding care both as an inherent relational quality but also a virtue to pursue.[52] To begin, Groenhout argues that an ethic of care resonates with our inherent humanness through our natural interdependence (as opposed to rationality) for survival, our

---

[48] Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.
[49] Held, 10.
[50] Ruth Groenhout, "Virtue and a Feminist Ethics of Care," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, 481-501, cf 481.
[51] Held, 10-11, cf 11.
[52] Ruth E. Groenhout, *Connected Lives: Human Nature and an Ethics of Care* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004). 36.

embodiment, and our temporal existence. All these attributes contribute to a social particularity and biological tendencies to motivate us to respond and give care and to extend that care to consider others beyond our immediate proximity (the same assumed limit Sloat addresses).

However, Groenhout also recognizes the need for a formative process that intersects with human development and discernment "shaped by a picture of human flourishing and a recognition of how a child might best flourish."[53] This "double vision" as Groenhout notes, includes some idea of the good life but also attends to the ability (or disability in some circumstances) any given child faces. The double vision affords the opportunity to avoid false visions of the good life (such as abusive or enslaving visions of human living) yet keeps the caregiver inherently related and adaptive to the specific needs/challenges of the given person in their care. Groenhout acknowledges this double vision of care (envisioning the good while really assessing the capability of those in our care) requires a deep sense of mutual respect, but also the paradoxical nature of possessing a sense "of what another can and should become."[54] Ultimately caring persons adopt certain implicit, but guiding, ideals but always within the social boundaries and particularities of people's lives, allowing mutuality and relationship to deeply nuance the call to care for others in varying spaces.[55]

Groenhout's call for navigating a double vision gestures toward a different understanding of both practice and excellence in giving "care" with and for others. This vision "tempers" other approaches to care ethics in a way that allows for egalitarian relationships but also notes the particularity of those relationships may require proactive care "for" others based on their location and need. Only a deep understanding of those needs can allow for a correct employ of formational guidance for others.

For theorists, and ministers, willing to hold all three approaches to care in tandem, perhaps the intersections provide more clarity than confusion around the importance of care as a virtue, with attending postures to lift up, and a practice to emulate. Still, while the virtue of care may be conceptually expanded, how does the practice of contempt influence care, particularly those who choose to care?

## *Who Cares?*

To this point the writing has provided primarily an overview to the complexity of both the concepts of contempt and of care. When it comes to care, the author, following Leffel, remains disposed to see this moral emotion, both in practice and as vision, reflecting a virtue. This approach to care, as a nuanced virtue, does find roots in moral psychology, which seems to resonate with sentimentalism and with aspects of a feminist (double) vision of care as preferred view of flourishing following Groenhout. One might say that care carries within itself a practice to emulate in its intrinsic ability, and a vision to aspire to in imagining a caring world that accepts people based on this double vision of both respecting them as they are and seeking the best that that person might hold for themselves… their best "life." This double vision does

[53] Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 36.
[54] Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 37.
[55] Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 43-49.

gesture back to the Eriksons' language of generative care (individually and written large), employing the sentimentalists' embrace of healthy understanding of empathy to "cement" a relationship regardless of the reciprocity.

Care need not appear as the exclusive virtue to pursue. True, for Leffel, specific forms of virtuous practice engender a deeper vision and capacity for generative care. However other practices, such as giving blessing or extending hospitality, and other virtues, such as gratitude, can inform the virtuous life.[56] Also, giving "care" remains a virtue in part because the practice proves arduous, as most caregivers know all too well. Keith Dow calls the challenge of difficult caring a "dark side" to these vocations. Dow reminds readers of "compassion fatigue," a deep sense of fatigue, emotional distress, and apathy. Working within the field of autism, Dow notes:

> Worn down by the "cost of caring" for the people whom they support, caregivers can be left with nothing to give. Besides experiencing overwork and fatigue, people undergoing compassion fatigue are at risk of depersonalizing the people for whom they provide care. This can result in caregivers interacting with people as they would with tasks or objects. In compassion fatigue, caregivers may be incapable of mustering the resources necessary to engage on a deeply human level.[57]

Care… is … hard. A virtue not easily attained in many settings and one to marvel among those who regularly give care. Still, for Groenhout, care reflects "an embodied concern, focused on the other as another physical being, it is grounded in emotions but not limited to those in which emotions support the expressions of care. It is given under specific historical and cultural circumstances."[58] Yet, Groenhout does not "reduce" care to those circumstances, allowing the caregiver a larger vision that examines culture with a "critical eye" yet attends to the specific need of the person. The double vision espoused by Groenhout reminds caring persons to retain a comprehensive vision of the good, a realistic vision of the person, and navigate the needs of both.

*Returning to Contempt*

Returning to the underlying thesis, this writing asserts that fostering contempt proves problematic to those who wish to bridge differences and lend "heart and hand" to another person when ideological or relational differences appear as a threat to one's purity. Therefore. contempt may serve as a potential vice that threatens to disrupt civil discourse around differences and undercut a caring response. While there may be some notable moments when contempt might be renovated into a positive moral emotion, following Macalester Bell, one might ask if contempt could ever qualify as a "virtue" to pursue either as a vision of the good life or as an intrinsically good practice. Those viewers formed by certain forms of comedy and punditry might find

---

[56] Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks* (New York: HarperOne, 2018); Timothy Sedgwick, *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1999); 69-126. Sedgwick anchors his work in the covenant of hospitality.
[57] Keith Dow, *Formed Together: Mystery, Narrative, and Virtue in Christian Caregiving* (Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability), (Waco, Baylor University Press, 2021), 19.
[58] Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 42.

themselves given to an affirmative conclusion. However, the phrase "who cares?" may carry more meaning than one realizes in response to deciding what best serves as a vice and a virtue.

Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, following Alasdair MacIntyre, notes that both a virtue, or a vice, "is acquired through practice--- repeated activity that increases our proficiency at the activity and gradually forms our character." Recognizing the inherent relational quality of care, the "who" of the very person one might be called to engage with empathy (Sloat). The need to combine relationship and emotion (Held) seems quite challenging during a time of either active contempt or passive contempt (Ball). How one might truly overcome the very distancing that Ball advocates (partially to protect those who contemn) to "see" the embodied, temporally transient, and socially condition person in order to "care" for the same person appears very difficult. If Ball's assertion proves correct that contempt, as a globalist emotion, regards the "whole person" rather than just specific acts (a major condition for Ball) those who contemn should struggle with any emotional connection within the specificity of a person's particular socio-cultural location so important to Groenhout process of care.[59] Any concept of the "good" of the other based on mutual respect (one of Groenhout's important theories to maintain a double vision of specificity and greater good) risks spinning away if the whole person, whether due to arrogance or hypocrisy, seems beyond respect.[60] Ultimately the challenge of moving from contempt to care proves difficult based on the posture inherent in the process of demonstrating contempt.

For those who might "fine tune" contempt, the regular employ of the practice of contemning seems to shape personal character. This implicit formation makes the "who" in "who cares" problematic both as agent and subject. Can one care for a "who" that one habitually distances oneself from (albeit even for good reason)? Can one "who" practices contempt with real regularity ever learn the disciplines to cultivate a disposition that values both emotion and the relational capabilities in discerning what one might ethically do (Held)?

Instead, might contempt risk consideration as a vice? Following DeYoung's vision of habituation, "virtues or vices are gradually internalized and become firm and settled through years of formation."[61] Recognizing the amount of social influence and formational practice, one might wonder whether contempt could ever fully grasp a person's life. However, coupling the range of small behaviors, perhaps better understood as passive expressions of contempt (which Ball distinguishes as merely acknowledging one's virtue as better than another, but one does not flaunt the difference), can result in a compressed view of others over time, particularly if one is not aware of one's mistaken view of another's behavior.[62]

Overall, the vice of contempt may be hard won (and perhaps it would be important to distinguish from arrogance, since people who do not have a high view of their life might still hold others in contempt for a different reason). Nevertheless, the corrosive power of social formation, fueled by jeremiad, may well create an "ecology" of contempt worth deeper investigation than this paper

[59] Ball, 64-97, Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 35-40.
[60] Groenhout, *Connected Lives*, 37.
[61] DeYoung, 14.
[62] Ball, 137-148.

affords but one suggested in social media practice. Returning to the initial concerns by Arthur Brooks, such an environment may well be in place.

*An Alternative Rhetoric: Mediation*

If jeremiad risks an advocacy of that engenders the vice of contempt, could other forms of discourse result in a more caring engagement? For Kaveny, who distinguishes between prophetic and deliberative discourse, obviously a deliberative approach (also anchored in Greek thought) affords one possible approach. Unfortunately, Kaveny fails to discern the range of such discourse during times of conflict and delineate the best approach.

An alternative form of advocacy, anchored in deliberation, may surface that reflects a more caring approach to resolving differences or disputes, even in Kaveny's own field of legal disputation. Goldberg, Sander and Rogers, in their survey text that includes a series of compiled resources, note that resolving disputes often invokes multiple deliberative processes, from negotiation to mediation to adjudicating differences either by arbitration or in a trial. Often the four frameworks: negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and adjudication, include a number hybrid approaches across these more basic categories.[63]

The authors note while negotiation remains the most prevalent approach in solving differences, only adjudication, or resolution through the trial process, involves a public accounting, with involuntary participation, resulting in an imposed, formal, and binding outcome.[64] Unfortunately in many highly contested situations, even ecclesial disputes, adjudication appears at the only option.[65]

However, among the approaches, mediation may offer the most help since the mediator often operates in a non-binding role, with "no power to impose an outcome or disputing parties" yet possessing the power to alter the dynamics of advocacy, engagement, and final agreement. [66] Mediation may seek several different goals and employ a wide array of postures during the engagement. However, the practices might best be summarized as helping different parties, "get to the table," explaining the process, allowing each proponent a time to be heard, navigating strategies to continue communication, and assisting in summarizing possible areas of agreement.[67] Drawing from multiple sources, the compilers note this type of engagement

---

[63] Stephan B. Goldbert, Frank E.A. Sander and Nancy H Rogers, *Dispute Resolution: Negotiation, Mediation and Other Processes*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 3-12; see also Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus, eds. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014.; Stephen B Goldberg, Frank E.A. Sander, Nancy H. Rogers, Sarah Rudolph Cole, and Jean R. Sternlight. *Dispute Resolution: Negotiation, Mediation, Arbitration, and Other Processes.* 7th ed. New York: Aspen Publishers, 2020.
[64] Golbert et al. 17
[65] Sarah Rudolph Cole, Craig A. McEwen, and Nancy H. Rogers, "Non-Binding Arbitration: A Viable Alternative for Resolving Disputes." *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution* 9, no. 1 (1993): 1-50; David S. Schwartz, "If You Love Arbitration, Set It Free: How Mandatory Undermines Arbitration," *Nevada Law Journal* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 400-426.
[66] Golbert et al. 103
[67] Golbert et al. 104-110.

includes five types of activity 1) clear investigation of the facts as possible, 2) exercising empathy with all parties, 3) persuasion without manipulation to gain some agreement, 4) invention or creativity once the situation is clearly understood, and 5) distraction to assist parties to not become preoccupied with previous grievances.[68] Overall, much of the work of mediation occurs within a climate of confidentiality on the part of parties and particularly the mediator.[69] So, this confidential process can take place simultaneously with public advocacy, but rarely, if ever, by the same person.

The guidelines by Golbert et al. prove helpful particularly as they reflect an overall legal mode of deliberation like Kaveny. When final judgment "must" be rendered, mediation may serve a better role than prophetic indictment but still limit the possibility of true care in light of a specific "winner/loser" binary. However, mediation can include non-binding resolutions, serving primarily to facilitate understanding, clarity, and empathy during conflictual settings. This embodied form of mediation opens the door to a process where "care" may be exercised for the sake of peace and to avoid the possibility of contempt.

*Conclusion, Our Need to Care*

The call, and habituation into the virtue of care may well help to mitigate an environment of contempt. Contemnors might wrestle the "globalist" view of the whole person worthy of contempt through Groenhout's reminders of the call to recognize the embodied, temporal, and socially constructed nature of personal life. Practitioners of care may close the distance between contemnor and subject by encouraging the practice of empathy, albeit in healthy portions. Even when contempt seems apt and appropriate (for prophetic reasons) as a valid moral emotion in the moment, the need to combine a double vision of a larger "good" may resist the dismissal of even the most arrogant or hypocritical person, if only in envisioning the reality of that person's social location and ability while asking a broader, critical question, of what care might engender in that life. In such circumstances, perhaps hearts might be softened enough to move back into a "catholic spirit" of mutual engagement, hand to hand, if not embrace, arm in arm.

Should the church ever consider this form of caring discernment, perhaps a new order of "Deacon" might emerge. The diaconate remains a somewhat controversial, but needed, role in denominations like the Church of the Nazarene.[70] A quick review of disciplinary processes in the *Manual Church of the Nazarene*, reveals that most deliberation reflects more juridical processes (like a law court) or, at best, a binding arbitration between parties, often superintended by "elders" tasked with the responsibility of oversight.[71]

---

[68] Golbert et al. 113-116.
[69] Golbert et al. 179-190.
[70] Church of the Nazarene, "Deacon" in *Manual: Church of the Nazarene 2023* (Kansas City: Foundry Publishing, 2023), 219-221; Joseph Wood, "Diakonia and Education: Exploring the Future of the Diaconate in the Church of the Nazarene," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 14:1 (Summer 2014). Available online (accessed 3/8/2025) at https://didache.nazarene.org/index.php/volume-14-1/1031-didache-v14n1-08-te-diakonia-history-wood/file
[71] Church of the Nazarene, "Judicial Administration," 245-260.

Perhaps a new diaconal order, dedicated to non-binding mediation, could create a much needed "buffer of care" in otherwise conflictual situations. Many times, pastors implicitly adopt this posture during counseling or even spiritual direction. However, the Deacon as Mediator, might create a special order of ministry, one explicitly designed to exercise care prior to any form of juridical decision making. Such an approach might prove remarkable, particularly during this historical period of the church.

To close this writing, one might return to the tension resident within prophetic stances. Cathleen Kaveny argues prophetic discourse will not survive without a heavy dose of humility and irony.[72] Humility really rests with the prophet as well as those prophesied against. Irony reflects the sudden turns in the story of Jonah and reflects a very practical tool to "scrutinize and revise one's commitments" even during the prophetic task.[73] Perhaps, at that moment, the proverbial question of "who cares?" serves a similar role, in tempering the jeremiad of prophetic discourse. In a world rife with moral outrage, challenge, and contempt. Care may help people find hearts, and follow them to foster a catholic spirit, and lend a hand.

[72] Kaveny, 375-377.
[73] Kaveny, 415.