Feminist Ethics: Ethic of Care

“the primary aim is caring and being cared for.”
(Rita Manning)
There was a man named Lawrence Kohlberg who was interested in models of maturation of moral agents. Kohlberg's (1958a) core sample was comprised of 72 boys, from both middle- and lower-class families in Chicago. They were ages 10, 13, and 16. He later added to his sample younger children, delinquents, and boys and girls from other American cities and from other countries (1963, 1970).

The basic interview consists of a series of dilemmas such as the following: “Heinz Steals the Drug”

*In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $ 1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug-for his wife. Should the husband have done that?* (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19)
Kohlberg’s Stages

Summary

- **At stage 1** children think of what is right as that which authority says is right. Doing the right thing is obeying authority and avoiding punishment. At stage 2, children are no longer so impressed by any single authority; they see that there are different sides to any issue. Since everything is relative, one is free to pursue one's own interests, although it is often useful to make deals and exchange favors with others.

- **At stages 3 and 4**, young people think as members of the conventional society with its values, norms, and expectations. At stage 3, they emphasize being a good person, which basically means having helpful motives toward people close to one. At stage 4, the concern shifts toward obeying laws to maintain society as a whole.

- **At stages 5 and 6** people are less concerned with maintaining society for its own sake, and more concerned with the principles and values that make for a good society. At stage 5 they emphasize basic rights and the democratic processes that give everyone a say, and at stage 6 they define the principles by which agreement will be most just.
Kohlberg’s morally mature agent:

**Stage 6: Universal Principles.** Stage 5 respondents are working toward a conception of the good society. They suggest that we need to (a) protect certain individual rights and (b) settle disputes through democratic processes. However, democratic processes alone do not always result in outcomes that we intuitively sense are just. A majority, for example, may vote for a law that hinders a minority. Thus, Kohlberg believes that there must be a higher stage—stage 6—which defines the principles by which we achieve justice.

But then came Carol Gilligan

... who argued that Kohlberg ignored the emergence of an alternate way of resolving moral dilemmas which was often reflected in the way little girls responded to the Heinz dilemma.
Carol Gilligan’s Reply to Kohlberg

- What set her off in thinking this was the fact that in some of Kohlberg's investigations, women turned out to score lower - less developed - than did men. Were women really moral midgets? Gilligan did not think so. In taking this stand, she was going against the current of a great deal of psychological opinion. Freud thought women's moral sense was stunted because they stayed attached to their mothers. Another great developmental theorist, Erik Erickson, thought the tasks of development were separation from mother and the family. If women did not succeed in this scale, then they were obviously deficient.

- Gilligan's reply was to assert that women were not inferior in their personal or moral development, but that they were different. They developed in a way that focused on connections among people (rather than separation) and with an ethic of care for those people (rather than an ethic of justice). Gilligan lays out in this groundbreaking book this alternative theory.
Gilligan's Stages of the Ethic of Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preconventional</td>
<td>Goal is individual survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition</strong></td>
<td>is from selfishness -- to -- responsibility to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Self sacrifice is goodness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition</strong></td>
<td>is from goodness -- to -- truth that she is a person too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postconventional</td>
<td>Principle of nonviolence: do not hurt others or self</td>
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# Two Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justice Model</th>
<th>Ethic of Care</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on Autonomy</td>
<td>Emphasis on Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule &amp; principle directed</td>
<td>Context dependent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appeal to what is “just”</td>
<td>Appeal to “compromise &amp; accommodation”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on integrity</td>
<td>Focus on caring responsiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jake: “Stealing is wrong”</td>
<td>Amy: “It depends, ….”</td>
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Is it a Virtue Ethic?

- Caring *For* – a skill which requires moral attention and practice. Often based on past experiences - both successful and not so successful – of giving care and receiving care.

- Caring *About* – an attitude one has – may enhance one’s ability to recognize need for care and to respond adequately but is not necessary to engendering a moral response.
The Ethic of Care: Four Key Elements

1. Moral Attention: one must pay attention to the complexity of the situation gather information and immerse oneself into the principle issues.

“Jasmine”- rescued dog -http://www.warwickshirewildlifesanctuary.co.uk/index.htm
2. Sympathetic Understanding: story of Iris Murdock and her daughter in law – she went from seeing her as “vulgar” to seeing her as “naïve and charming.”
3. Relationship Awareness: this is an issue of accounting and accountability
The Ethic of Care: Four Key Elements

4. Harmony: one must respond in a way that balance is preserved and nurtured.
When do we have an Obligation to Care?

Three Conditions:

1. A relationship exists.
2. A need for care exists.
3. We have the ability to provide care.
Caring for Strangers: What if there’s no existing Relationship?

- If the need for care exists and our ability to provide care for others is not strained or exhausted, then we do have an obligation.

“If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do it...” (Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality“)
Is Care based on Reciprocity?

Restricting obligations to care based solely on reciprocity results in some problems:

1. Those incapable of returning care would never receive care they need
2. Relationships would fail to be based on the core principle of care and become contractual – and perhaps ego-centric – “what’s in it for me?”
How do we ensure everyone gets the care they need?

“Networks of Care” – instead of a reciprocal contract we build a community of care – as long as no one is exhausted in their capacity to care and no one is not given care then the goal has been accomplished.
Caring Burnout

We are not obligated to care if our resources are exhausted. Care includes care for oneself – which should not be necessarily regarded as in conflict with care for others.

A Model for the Ethic of Care

Mother/Child relationship