

Part VIII
Virtue Ethics

Chapter 19

Gender Theory: the Ethics of Care

19.1 Homework

Readings – EMP 11

Recommended: Gilligan *In a different voice*, 1982 – a bomb in the field, still very influential

Study Questions :

1. What is Heinz's dilemma? What did Kohlberg want to study with it? How would you describe the general trend of moral development according to Kohlberg? What were Kohlberg's findings concerning the moral development of girls compared to boys?
2. What is Gilligan's analysis of Kohlberg's findings?
3. In what sense and to what extent can we say that men and women think differently concerning ethical issues? Is it to say that all men and all women think in a particular way due to their gender?
4. What are the two ways in which we could explain the differences between men and women?
5. Why cannot the ethics of care be the whole story of morality according to Rachels?

19.2 Introduction

We have studied three serious accounts of morality: utilitarianism, duty theory, and the social contract theories. There are radical differences between these views. According to utilitarianism, whether or not an action is morally right depends on whether consequences are beneficial. According to duty theory, it depends on whether or not the rule of your action can be turned into a universal law. According to social contract theories, it depends on

whether or not the action complies with the rules which the contractors have agreed upon. These are very different and at least partially conflicting views on morality.

That said, there is one element which is common to all: the idea that morality consists in general, impersonal and objective rules. Any particular moral situation is supposed to find a solution by application of these general objective rules.

Where does this come from? A key word in all these systems of morality is: rationality. In all the views above, moral agents are taken primarily as being *rational agents*. A rational agent is an abstract entity, with no personal, even less intimate, relationships with others. The entire community is seen as a collection of independent agents solely characterized by their rationality. What is moral is then to be understood *from the point of view of such a rational impersonal agent*. Because of the atomistic view of the community of rational agents, the moral point of view is equated with the *impartial* point of view.

At several occasions, we voiced our dissatisfaction with such a disembodied view of morality. For example, we could not accept the strict impartiality that the utilitarian view was imposing on us. It did not seem right that a mother living in NYC should give up on her kid because she could save five kids in Central Africa with the same money.

On the other hand, we felt uncomfortable with Kant's idea that to be a unsympathetic, cold hearted person who does his duty without taking any pleasure in it is the best moral achievement we could dream of.

So, because of the exclusive emphasis they put on rationality, the theories of ethics that we have studied up to now are missing two important elements of our moral life:

- a notion of care
- a notion of partiality and personal relationships

These elements correspond to what Feminist theorists of ethics take to be typical of a female way of thinking (or "voice"), while the strictly rational and impartial point of view would be typical of the male way of thinking.

Where does this idea come from? Do you think gender could affect the way in which we think of morality? What would be then the feminine way of thinking? the masculine way of thinking?

19.3 Theories of Moral Development

Theories of moral development – brief history

- For a long time, morality is seen as *imposed on the kids by external factors*: education (parents, school), society.
- In the 30's, change in perspective: notion of "moral development" – that is, morality is not the result of external pressure, but of the natural development of internal, structural characters.

Lawrence Kohlberg – Harvard Professor– very influential theory – all individuals follows a path through 3 levels of development, which includes 2 stages each. Everybody starts at the bottom, not everybody reaches the top (some stay at lower levels):

1. Pre-conventional:

- (a) Avoid Punishment – “Carrot and stick” – one’s sole objective is to satisfy one’s interests without consideration of other people’s interests, but in avoiding punishment.
- (b) Personal Reward Reciprocity – “You’ll scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” – Limited reciprocity: One’s objective is to satisfy one’s interest through collaborative work, that is, in taking the others’ interests into account in so far as the others do the same.

2. Conventional:

- (a) Mutual Expectations Conformity – “Good boy, nice girls” – One’s objective is to live up to the others’ expectations, to fulfill one’s responsibilities to the others and so to receive their approval.
- (b) Social system – “Law and order” – One’s objective is to fulfill one’s institutional responsibilities (not only within a small group of fellows).

3. Post-conventional:

- (a) Natural Rights and Social Contract: Rational and impartial perspective – recognition of the existence of pre-institutional values and right – liberty, life etc. The institutional rules of living should comply with these absolute values, and thus promote the general welfare. One sees himself as bound to these rules as a rational agent.
- (b) Universal Ethical Principles: Recognition of absolute ethical principles, which should be given priority to any institutional obligations. Absolute right and wrong, above humans’ contingent social rules. One’s objective is to do what is right to do, that is, to follow these absolute, abstract rules which are inspired by absolute values.

—> *Moral development thus would consist in shifting from a egoist or local (a few fellows) point of view to a impartial / rational / universal point of view.*

The empirical findings :

- Heinz’s dilemma – Heinz’s wife has cancer and is dying. The druggist in town has invented the cure. It costs him \$200 to make. He sells it \$2000. Heinz can raise only \$1000. He asks the druggist whether he could lower the price, explaining that his wife is dying – the druggist refuses. Should Heinz steal the medication or not?

- Jake (11): yes – opposition between property and life – a human life is worth more than money – general, abstract rule applied to a particular situation

- Amy (11) – much more hesitant – no appeal to general rules (see answer EMP p.162), but considerations of who’s going to get hurt and how / personal relationships / resolution of conflict through dialogue.

→ *The researcher's conclusion was that girls are behind: they are not as developed as boys, they get stuck at the second level (stages 3 and 4) – girls never go further than being “good girls” and follow the rules.*

19.4 Carol Gilligan's Voices

Feminism – A little bit of history

Old view – Men are seen as rational and fit for leadership, women emotional and fit for family management. Since morality is seen as a matter of rationality, women are seen as morally defective.

60's, 70's: Feminism, first round – Denial of any fundamental difference between men and women – all are equal – Any difference that we could observe is acquire instead of innate: the result of a biased education and social pressure.

70's, 80's to present: Feminism, second round – Recognition that men and women are different. But rejection of the idea that women are inferior, as well as the idea that the existence of differences justify the subordination of women. Instead, women' ways of thinking give insights that are typically missed by men and that could help us make progress. Some radical feminists also maintain that the female point of view is superior.

→ *Two distinct questions: are there any difference between (typical) men and (typical) women? If so, is there any of the two which is superior?*

Gilligan objection to Kohlberg – Carol Gilligan, Kohlberg's Ph.D. student at Harvard, then Harvard Professor herself. Gilligan suggested that the girls' answers do not correspond to any stage of development on Kohlberg's scale, because they have an alternative way of thinking about morality.

Two different voices :

Men	Women
Justice	Care
Impersonal Rights	Personal Responsibilities
Fairness	Consideration of suffering
Impartiality	Relationships
Abstract agents	Real individuals

→ *The idea is thus that men and women have different perspectives or points of view on morality. That said, neither is superior. The notion of “voice” is meant to express exactly this: different voices can be heard at the same time. No voice is supposed to detain the absolute truth. There is no competition between voices. Rather, the notion of voice allows harmony without reduction of one to another.*

Where does this difference come from?

Two different view of the self – The difference in moral perspective, Gilligan claims, is rooted in a difference on how men and women see themselves¹:

Men	Women
Autonomy	Relatedness
Freedom	Interdependence
Independent	Emotional Connection
Separateness	Responsiveness to the needs of others
Hierarchy	Web of Relationships
Rules guides interactions	Empathy and connectedness guide interactions
Roles establish places in the hierarchy	Roles are secondary to connections

→ *The idea is that men mostly define themselves by exclusion / separation from the others, while women define themselves by inclusion in a web of connections. Their views on morality vary accordingly.*

The moral development of girls thus differs from the moral development of boys:

Girls' scheme of moral development – Another framework is needed for female moral development²:

1. Consideration of individual needs - Transition from selfishness to responsibility
2. Consideration of the others' needs
 - Goodness equated with self-sacrifice
 - Transition from self-sacrifice to giving themselves permission to take care of themselves
3. Balance between one's own needs and the others
 - Goodness seen as caring for both self and others
 - Inclusive, Nonviolent
 - Condemns exploitation and hurt

→ *So, Amy, and girls in general, are not less morally developed than their male fellow. Instead, they follow a different, but neither superior of inferior, pattern of development. Amy, who was classified in the second level on Kohlberg's scale, can be classified at the maximum level at Gilligan's scale.*

¹This is taken from Prof. Hinman power point presentation available on his website *Ethics Updates*.

²This is partially taken from Prof. Hinman power point presentation available on his website *Ethics Updates*.

19.5 How to Understand Gender Differences?

Both Kohlberg and Gilligan have been criticized for over-interpreting the kids' answers. That said, let's take seriously the idea that there are some significant differences between the ways in which men and women think. What are we to make of them?

Do men and women really think differently? :

1. Not fundamentally different types of reasoning : they can understand each other !
2. One option is : different emphasis and priorities instead of different reasoning
3. Typical male / Typical female different from actual males and females – individuals all over the scale – only averages (statistics between freezer and oven)

→ *We are all both male and female! At best, we can define types of behavior, and attribute them to men and women on average. That said, individuals may place themselves at very different spots on the scale between male and female – See Sandra Bem's scale for gender: male and female are not exclusive: you can be both strongly male-oriented and female-oriented, or weakly oriented in both type.*

Why would there be a difference? – Either the social environment or the biological constitution, or any combination of the two:

1. Social role and psychological conditioning (Maiwen and the vacuum cleaner or the baby doll)
2. Motherhood - frivolous fathers and careful and carrying mothers can have been selected

→ *One can say that the biological difference (bearing the child or not) has been extended in the society such that it had a great influence*

19.6 What to Take from the Care Perspective?

Does the idea of care help make progress in our search for a good theory of ethics?

A complement to our ethical theories – It forces us to consider other values. So, it forces on us a new level of complexity for morality.

Some room for partiality – The ethics of care gives us a way to understand why impartiality is lacking as a moral principle. There are some cases in which it seems right to be impartial : saving your kids or saving a stranger?

→ *The ethics of care leaves room for this important element of moral life.*

Some room for the kind of person we are – The ethics of care gives us a means to emphasize the importance of caring for others, of compassion and empathy, of taking into consideration the others' feelings, by contrast to considering the others as abstract rational agents.

Some room for a more horizontal view on morality – Instead of thinking in terms of general rules and particular cases subsuming under these rules – strict hierarchical view, one considers the interests at work as included in a complex web of relationships.

Some room for flexibility – Against the idea that absolute rules apply to all cases, emphasis on dialogue and mutual compromise.

Why the ethics of care is not the whole story – because there are cases in which taking the point of view of impartiality is crucial to morality – Rachels quote Nel Nodding, who defends a radical view. I

1. Third World Children

2. Non-human Animals – Pets / Cows in the slaughter house

→ *It seems unacceptable to restrict our moral responsibility to these beings with whom we have direct and personal relationships.*

19.7 Conclusion

Is moral judgement solely about applying strict, general, and abstract rules to particular cases, these rules being designed with the idea that moral agents are equal rational and independent agents?

The Ethics of Care helps us embodying morality in real individuals with personal relationships. It puts the emphasis on the kind of person we should be. In doing so, the ethics of care help us taking into account important elements of our moral life.

That said, does it have to be gender-related? We'll see in the next chapter that these ideas are partly in Aristotle's view on ethics. The ethics of care can be seen as one part of virtue ethics