

NATURE AND DIMENSIONS OF THE ETHICS OF CARE THEORY

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Abstract

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the rightness and wrongness of human actions. It bothers on human interaction and how human life is valued and treated. As a normative discipline, ethics of care is a perspective that uses a relational and context bound approach toward morality and decision-making. It refers to ideas concerning both the nature of morality and the normative ethical theory. For sure, no one is an island; and as such, there is need to care for the other as others also care for one. The ethics of care takes responsibilities within relationships as the most important moral consideration. Thus, ethical issues are framed as issues that arise within particular relationships and can be dealt with only as participants in a relationship. Applying the philosophical methods of analysis and phenomenology, this study observes that Ethics of care, if not well-understood and applied, can promote favoritism or partiality as it is human orientation to always get attracted to some things more than others. It therefore submits that the biggest challenge for care ethics is on how to integrate some ethical values like justice which seem not to be in line with it in decision-making.

Keywords: Ethics of Care, Morality, Human actions, Justice, Affection

Introduction

This paper studies the Nature and Dimension of Ethics of Care Theory. Ethics is “the area of philosophy concerned with human values. It studies the meanings of moral terms and theories of conduct and goodness.”¹ For Kipfer, ethics mean “moral philosophy, values, belief, conduct, conscience, criteria, decency, goodness, honesty, honor, ideal, integrity, moral code, morality, mores, natural law, nature, practice, principles, right and wrong, rules of conduct, standard, the golden rule.”² Ethics is the area that is very much concerned about the virtues and vices, right and wrong actions. The word, ethics, is “related to the Greek *ethos*, habit, or custom. It is used in a number of related senses, which have to be distinguished to avoid confusion.”³ This study is set to beam its searchlight on care ethics theory in order to establish its relevance or otherwise in our contemporary society.

Origins and Developments of Care Ethics

Furrow Dwight recognizes ethics of care theory as a philosophical endeavor:

It first emerged in psychology because of work on the development moral reasoning skills in children. In the late 1960s, the moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg published research that seemed to show that children's moral development occurs in six states that roughly correspond to the development of other intellectual skills. As very young children, we do as we are told to avoid punishment. We soon recognize that if we do things for others, others will help us, which is the second stage of moral development. In the third, adolescent stage, we begin to seek approval from others and thus conform to prevailing norms. Later in adolescence, we gain respect for law and authority and learn that others respect us for being honourable and law-abiding. As young-adults, we adopt a conception of autonomy and the idea that social life is a contract whereby individuals can do as they please as long as they do not harm others. Then individuals finally achieve the highest stage of moral reasoning, a Kantian perspective in which we are no longer ruled by self-interest, the opinion of others or fear of punishment but live according to self-imposed universal principles such as those of justice and respect for the dignity of persons.⁴

This understanding of moral development was challenged by Carol Gilligan, a member of Kohlberg's research team. She noticed something peculiar about Kohlberg's data. Kohlberg's early research focused on boys. When Kohlberg later

¹ M. Upshall, *The Hutchinson Concise Encyclopedia* (London: Guild Publishing, 1990), 322.

² A. B. Kipfer, (Ed.), *Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus* (2nd Ed.), (1999), 80.

³ T. Mautner, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (2nd Ed.), (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 201.

⁴ D. Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 63.

included girls in his sample, they seldom reached the highest stages of moral development, tending to reach only the stage of seeking approval from others. He concluded that girls do not have a clear sense of justice or the logical capacity to arrive at moral conclusions. After reviewing Kohlberg's data and conducting her own research, Gilligan concluded that Kohlberg had misinterpreted the data. She argued that girls' moral reasoning is not inferior to boys'. Instead, they tend to reason differently about moral issues.⁵

As “a moral theory, the ethics of care originated during the 1970s and 1980s in association with challenges to the standard moral theories of utilitarianism and deontology, primarily by women philosophers.”⁶ Deontology is defined as “Moral theories according to which the rightness or obligatoriness of at least some actions, the fulfillment of a promise, say, is not exclusively determined by the overall value of the consequences.”⁷ Utilitarianism is a “Moral theory according to which an action is right if and only if it conforms to the principle of utility. An action conforms to the principle of utility if and only if its performance will be more productive of pleasure or happiness, or more preventive of pain and unhappiness, than any alternative.”⁸ In our research we shall focus only on few protagonists of care ethics. “Care ethics was initially developed by psychologist Carol Gilligan during the 1960s from a feminist perspective. Since then it has been widely applied in various professional fields such as nursing, health care, education, international relations, law and politics. Care ethics considers the family as the foundation of ethics.”⁹

Ethics of care is unique from the three Western ethical theories, namely; Utilitarianism, Deontology and Virtue Ethics. While “Deontology and Utilitarianism demand impartiality above all, ethics of care focuses on the moral importance of relationships with families and groups, and on how individuals or societies should respond to a situation or person requiring care. Ethics of care differs from virtue ethics because it focuses on the caring relations rather than the virtues of individuals.”¹⁰ It tends to focus on appropriate responses to particular individuals in concrete relationships. In this sense, ethics of care is a relational ethics, a framework that includes many non-Western ethical approaches such as Chinese Confucian ethics and the African ethics of Ubuntu. It is interesting to note in this context that Ubuntu conceptualizes power as deriving from immaterial force rather than from material resources such as wealth, weapons, physical strength or natural resources. Power is understood therefore as that which is between people, grows the more it

⁵ D. Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy* 63.

⁶ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

⁷ T. Mautner, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 148.

⁸ T. Mautner, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 636.

⁹ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

¹⁰ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

includes and is measured in terms of how sustainable our actions are for society.¹¹ This idea is consistent with the idea that women's empowerment goes beyond material aspects.

Carol Gilligan on Care Ethics

The ethics of care was initially inspired by the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan. Early in her career, Carol Gilligan worked with psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg while he was researching his theory of moral development. Gilligan's work on women moral development arose in response to the seemingly male-based results that arose from Kohlberg's studies. Carol Gilligan had conducted her original work in the early 1970s and articulated it in "*In a Different Voice* (1982)". Gilligan argued in response to the psychology of moral development formulated by Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987).¹² Kohlberg himself "built on the ideas of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), who did preliminary work on moral development as one facet of cognitive growth. In his research Kohlberg posed moral dilemma to males of various ages and compared the kinds of reasoning with which they responded. The dilemmas tended to show details about the people involved. The responses moved from self-centered thinking, emphasizing the importance of physical pleasure, to a moral orientation toward justice and abstract appeals to universal rights."¹³ Gilligan, on the basis of alternative research with both men and women, "discovered a contrasting tendency, predominantly but not exclusively among women, to interpret the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules."¹⁴ For Gilligan, "While an ethics of justice proceeds from the premise of equality, that everyone should be treated the same, an ethic of care rests on the premise of non-violence, that no one should be hurt."¹⁵

Gilligan sees "ethics of care emerging in three phases. In the early phase, individuals care more for themselves than for others. In a middle phase care comes to emphasize concern for others over care for oneself. Finally, in its mature form the ethics of care seeks a balance between care for oneself and care for others. What nevertheless remain primary in each case are personal relationships: of others to oneself, of oneself to others, or mutually between oneself and others."¹⁶

Gilligan and others "suggested that the history of ethics in western culture has emphasized the justice view of morality because it is the outlook that has

¹¹ Cf. D. Furrow., *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*, 65.

¹² Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

¹³ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

¹⁴ C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*,⁵¹³ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 73.

¹⁵ C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 174.

¹⁶ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

traditionally been cultivated and shared by men.”¹⁷ The justice view of morality:

focuses on doing the right thing even if it requires personal cost or sacrificing the interest of those to whom one is close. By contrast, women have traditionally been taught a different kind of moral outlook that emphasizes solidarity, community and caring about one's special relationships. This care view of morality has been ignored or trivialized because women were traditionally in positions of limited power and influence. The care view would instead say that we can and should put the interest of those who are close to us above the interest of complete strangers, and that we should cultivate our natural capacity to care for others and ourselves.¹⁸

Nel Noddings' Relational Ethics

Following Carol Gilligan's seminar work in the ethics of care (*In A Different Voice*; (1982), Nel Noddings developed relational ethics in her *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984). Like Carol Gilligan, Noddings accepts that “justice based approaches, which are supposed to be more masculine, are genuine alternatives to ethics of care. However, unlike Gilligan, Noddings believes that caring is rooted in receptivity and relatedness, and responsiveness is a more basic and preferable approach to ethics. The key to understanding Noddings' ethics of care is to understand her notion of caring and ethical caring in particular.”¹⁹ Noddings outline some areas to help us understand better her care ethics:

Engrossment

Noddings believes that “it would be a mistake to try to provide a systematic examination of the requirements for caring, nevertheless, she does suggest three requirements for caring.”²⁰ She argues that the “carer (one-caring) must exhibit engrossment and motivational displacement, and the person who is cared-for must respond in some way to the caring.”²¹ Noddings' term engrossment “refers to thinking about someone in order to gain a greater understanding of him or her.”²² Engrossment means “coming to grasp another person's reality from the inside, on her own terms rather than how we prefer to see her. It also involves an openness to being changed by the other.”²³ In other words, it “is necessary for caring because an individual's personal and physical situation must be understood before the one caring

¹⁷ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

¹⁸ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

¹⁹ Cf. N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 2.

²⁰ N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* 11.

²¹ N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 69.

²² www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

²³ D. Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*, 134.

can determine the appropriateness of any action. Engrossment requires the attention needed to some in order to understand the position of the other. Noddings believes that caring requires some form of recognition from the cared-for that the one-caring is, in fact, caring. When there is a recognition of and response to the caring by the person cared-for, the caring is completed in the other.”²⁴

Natural Caring and Ethical Caring

Nel Noddings draws an important distinction between natural caring and ethical caring. Noddings distinguishes between acting because 'I want' and acting because 'I must'. When I care for someone because 'I want' to care, say I hug a friend who needs hugging in an act of love, Noddings claims that I am engaged in natural caring. When I care for someone because 'I must' care, say I hug an acquaintance who needs hugging in spite of my desire to escape that person's pain, according to Noddings, I am engaged in ethical desire. Ethical caring occurs when a person acts caringly out of a belief that caring is the appropriate way of relating to people. When someone acts in a caring way because that person naturally cares for another, the caring is not ethical caring.²⁵ Noddings claims that “ethical caring is based on, and so dependent on, natural caring.”²⁶ “It is through experiencing others caring for them and naturally caring for others that people build what is called an 'ethical ideal', and image of the kind of person they want to be.”²⁷

Diminishing of Ethical Ideal and Evil

Noddings describes wrong actions in terms of 'a diminishing of the ethical ideals' and 'evil'. A person's ethical ideal is diminished when she either chooses or is forced to act in a way that rejects her internal call to care. According to her, people and organizations can deliberately or carelessly contribute to the diminishing of other's ethical ideal. They may do this by teaching people not to care, or by placing them in conditions that prevent them from being able to care. A person is evil if, in spite of her ability to do otherwise, she either fails to personally care for someone, or prevents others from caring.”²⁸ Noddings writes, “when one intentionally rejects the impulse to care, and deliberately turns her back on the ethical, she is evil, and this evil cannot be redeemed.”²⁹

Ethics of Care Theory

The ethics of care is “a normative ethical theory that holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and care as a virtue. Ethics of care is also called care

²⁴ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

²⁵ Cf. N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 79.

²⁶ N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* 83.

²⁷ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nel_Noddings.

²⁸ Cf. N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 116.

²⁹ N. Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 115.

ethics. It is a feminist perspective that uses a relational and context bound approach toward morality and decision-making. The term “ethics of care” refers to ideas concerning both the nature of morality and the normative ethical theory.”³⁰ Normative ethics is “an inquiry into, or theory of, what is good and bad, right and wrong, in respect of character and conduct.”³¹ Within the ethics of care, the one caring receives the cared-for without evaluation. The inclination to care is primary. Even with regard to those with whom one has no caring relationship, complete strangers, memories of natural caring arise, generating a feeling of 'I must do something'. This “impulse is obligatory in anyone who aspires to the sense of self as a moral”³² and caring person. One holds an obligation to be prepared to care at all times, for others in particular. A normative ethics is a “rational inquiry into, or a theory of, the standards of right and wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct, which ought to be accepted by a class of individuals.”³³ Dominant traditional ethics “theories such as utilitarianism and Kantian deontological ethics developed ethical theories based on an understanding of society as the aggregate of autonomous, rational individuals with an emphasis on rules, duties, justice, rights, impartiality, universality, utility and preference satisfaction.”³⁴ Care ethics, on the other hand, “developed based on the understanding of the individual as an independent, relational being and emphasized the importance of human relationships and emotion based ethics such as benevolence, mercy, care, friendship, reconciliation and sensitivity. In care ethics, the family is the primary sphere of morality where a person can cultivate his or her character.”³⁵

It is already stated above that ethics of care was initially developed by the psychologist Carol Gilligan from a feminist perspective. Ethics of Care emphasizes the importance of relationships, emotional aspect of human beings, and the importance of family as the ground to cultivate moral virtues. Ethics of care was developed and motivated by the idea that men think in masculine terms such as justice and autonomy, whereas women think in feminine terms such as caring.³⁶ It “calls for a change in how we view morality and the virtues; shifting towards virtues exemplified by women, such as taking care of others, patience, the ability to nurture, self-sacrifice, etcetera, which have been marginalized because society has not adequately valued the contributions of women. It emphasizes the importance of solidarity, community, and relationships rather than universal standards and impartiality. It argues that instead of doing the right thing even if it requires personal

³⁰ <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

³¹ T. Mautner, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 430.

³² Cf. www.britannica.com-topic-ethics-of-care.

³³ T. Mautner., *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 201.

³⁴ Cf. <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

³⁵ Cf. <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

³⁶ <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

cost or sacrificing the interest of family or community members, as the traditional consequentialist and deontological approaches suggest, we can, and indeed should, put the interests of those who are close to us above the interests of complete strangers.”³⁷

Care ethics believes that “the virtue of care is central to understanding morality.”³⁸ Care ethics employs a conception of care where “the relationship becomes the figure, defining self and others, and the moral agent responds to the perception of need.”³⁹ Care ethics seeks to “maintain and promote relationships with one another. It asks people to approach a moral issue with sensitivity. In care ethics, the virtuous agent is he/she who acts with the virtue of caring; he/she becomes the caring agent. Care ethics believes an action is right if and only if it is what the caring agent would perform in the circumstances. The big appeal of care ethics is that it accommodates a person's intuition to give preferential treatment to those closest to him or her. It realizes and protects the value in personal and interpersonal relationships and activities.”⁴⁰

Characteristics of Ethics of Care

Ethics of care is sometimes called ethics of love or relational ethics, “which has several notable characteristics in contrast to two traditional normative ethical theories: Utilitarianism and Kantian Deontological Ethics. While ethics of care is considered a virtue ethics, it is also different from traditional Aristotelian virtue ethics. Ethics of care has some notable common characteristics.”⁴¹ The key characteristics of ethics of care perspective are:

- 1) The complexity and variation in degrees of dependency and interdependence between people and institutions over time are acknowledged and considered.
- 2) Those people particularly impacted by our choices need to be considered carefully in our decision-making. Those especially vulnerable deserve extra consideration, love and care.
- 3) Rather than relying on the blanket or one size fits all approach, it is necessary to attend to contextual details of situations in order to safeguard and promote the actual specific interests of those involved.⁴²

a. Dependency and Interdependency of Human Existence

Traditional ethical theories presuppose that a moral agent is an autonomous, independent individual. Care ethics, however, points out the fact that a human being

³⁷ Cf. <https://philosophybasics.com/branch-virtue-ethics>.

³⁸ M. Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, (MD: Rowan & Little Field, 2002), 282.

³⁹ M. Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, 283.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction*, 285.

⁴¹ Cf. <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

⁴² Cf. <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

is essentially dependent on others. Children are dependent upon parents, the elderly are dependent on their children or other caretakers, and handicapped persons have to rely on others. “Each human being goes through a process of dependency according to his or her age or physical or mental conditions. Human life is possible only by the care and support humans offer each other. Parents have a moral responsibility to care for their children and children have a moral responsibility to care for the elderly. Thus, human beings exist in interdependent relationship”⁴³ that entails ethical responsibilities.

b. Emotion as the Essential Human Nature

Traditional ethics are hinged upon the primacy of reason. Proponents of traditional ethics argued that reason is valued as a more stable faculty of mind than emotion, which they viewed as unstable, changeable, ephemeral and less important. “While care ethics recognizes the value of reason, it recognizes the importance of feeling or emotion or related virtues such as benevolence, compassion, sensitivity, responsiveness, and sympathy. The emotions that traditional ethics have rejected are egoistic, emotional attachments which bring about favoritism, resentment, hatred, and other negative or destructive feelings.”⁴⁴ The care ethics argue that “emotions and desires are essential to achieving moral wisdom. Although feelings sometimes distort our reasoning, they need not do so. Moreover, emotions and desires are crucial for understanding what morality requires, moral reasoning cannot be effective without them.”⁴⁵

c. Prioritization of Human Relations

Traditional theories focus on establishing abstract, universal rules and principles in consideration of impartiality. It is observed that in human life, not all human relationships are equal. For example, experience has shown that while caring for all children on the earth is noble and important, caring for one's own child is an immediate and direct responsibility of the parent. Care ethics recognizes the importance of limited impartiality and prioritization of human relationships.⁴⁶

d. Family as the Unit of Society

Traditional ethics operate within a framework constituted by the relationship between individuals and society. Primary ethical concepts such as justice, universality, impartiality, and duty are all discussed within this framework. The family does not play any specific role in this framework; in fact, the family is a private realm in which the public or sphere or government does not interfere. On the other hand, the ethics of care considers the family as a primary sphere in which we understand ethical behavior. It considers the family as an ontologically,

⁴³ Cf. <http://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

⁴⁴ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

⁴⁵ D. Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*, 78.

⁴⁶ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

epistemologically, and morally important sphere where values are cultivated and inherited.⁴⁷

e. Independency of a Person

The concept of person in traditional ethical theories tends to view the individual as “independent, isolated, rational, and self-interested. Care ethics, however, views a person as dependent, integral of emotion, reason and will, and relational. It argues that the concept of self can be properly defined only when the person is understood as an interdependent and relational being.”⁴⁸ The concept of the liberal individual is an abstract, illusory concept.

Care Ethics and Morality

There are three levels of caring morality:

- 1) The self is cared for to the exclusion of the other
- 2) The other is cared for to the exclusion of the self
- 3) Moral maturity wherein the needs of both self and other are understood.

The virtue would be caring, understanding the needs of self and others; the vice deficiency excess might be caring for others to the exclusion of self, and the vice excess might be selfishness, caring for self to the exclusion of others. The caring moral agent will consider that one's duty may be greater to those they have particular bonds with, or to others who are powerless rather than powerful.⁴⁹ The ethics of care, we must observe, is a “distinctive approach to moral theory that emphasizes the importance of responsibility, concern and relationships. The concept of care is inherent to professions that care for individuals, and this approach to ethics has therefore been a central part of professional ethical issues in both nursing and medical ethics. The capacity for care is a general human strength that should be encouraged regardless of gender.”⁵⁰ A good moral theory “must accommodate both the insights men have more easily than women, and those women have more easily than men.”⁵¹

The application of the Ethics of Care

Care ethics, being so important, has been applied in different fields. We see it being applied in biomedicine, in technology, science and engineering.

a. Application in Biomedicine

Gilligan identified a distinct approach on care, concern, responsibility and connection, based on personal relations. This care orientation forms the basis of the ethics of care, “grounded in responsiveness to others, that dictates providing care,

⁴⁷ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

⁴⁸ Cf. www.newworldencyclopedia.org.

⁴⁹ Cf. www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-of-care.

⁵⁰ <https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer/ethics-of-care>.

⁵¹ A. C. Baier, *What do Women want in a Moral Theory?* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994), 56.

preventing harm and maintaining relationships.”⁵² It “was natural that such an approach to ethics would be applied in the field of medicine, especially in nursing, where caregiving is already a defining characteristic. In the field of nursing, in which care exercises an even more defining role than in other medical professions, the ethics of care has been accorded more significance.”⁵³

Beauchamp noted “The core perspective is especially meaningful for roles such as parent, friend, physician and nurse, in which contextual response, attentiveness to subtle clues, and the deepening of special relationships are likely to be more momentous morally than impartial treatment.”⁵⁴ We therefore note the centrality of two themes in the ethics of care, mutual interdependence and emotional responsiveness.”⁵⁵ For the ethics of care, “many human relationships involve persons who are vulnerable, dependent, ill, and frail, and the desirable moral response is attached attentiveness to needs, not detached respect for rights.”⁵⁶ The ethics of care further corrects a cognitivist bias in principles by “giving the emotions a moral role and encouraging attention to aspects of moral behavior that might otherwise be ignored.”⁵⁷

b. Application in Technology

J. C. Tronto suggests that caring be viewed as a “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That would include our bodies, ourselves, and our environment all of which we seek to intervene in a complex, life-sustaining web.”⁵⁸ The understanding of Tronto recognizes that human existence is intrinsically woven into the web of the natural environment and that the ethics of care must apply to nature as well as to humans and their communities. In this perspective, care is well positioned as an ethics for a sustainable world, a prime challenge to today's technology. The ethics of technology and of science needs to be a system ethics to be followed by a system of actors, doers, and stakeholders. It needs to work in the context of the science and technology enterprises which are distinct.

A science is done in response to a need. In the case of science in general, “the ethics of care can provide some ethical tests attuned to each phase. Care in this sense is larger than care implied by familial and close community relationships. Technological planning has begun to consider systems' characteristics such as environmental impacts of a product life cycle in the design of a product or process. Meeting human

⁵² Larrabee, M.J. (Ed.), *An Ethic of Care*, 5.

⁵³ www.encyclopedia.com-ethics-of-care.

⁵⁴ 2T. L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 373.

⁵⁵ www.encyclopedia.com-ethics-of-care.

⁵⁶ www.encyclopedia.com-ethics-of-care.

⁵⁷ J. C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 103.

⁵⁸ www.encyclopedia.com-science-encyclo.

needs is indeed the ideal for technology. Tronto had provided a framework for practicing care that is particularly suited for application to technology and indeed to science. Tronto identifies four phases of care that are parallel stages identified with the process of engineering design⁵⁹, namely,

Attentiveness or Caring About: This is the phase of recognizing the correct need and realizing care is necessary. This is parallel to the need identification stage of design.⁶⁰

Responsibility or Taking Care of: It is the phase that involves “assuming responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond to it.”⁶¹ This is parallel to the conceptualization phase of design.

Competence or Care Giving: It is a “phase in which the need is met with the expertise needed. This is parallel to the actual design and production.”⁵⁶¹

Responsiveness or Care Receiving: This is the phase in which “the object of care will respond to the care it receives.”⁶² This is parallel to the acceptance or rejection of the designed product.

The Importance of Ethics of Care

Ethics of care is very influential in disciplines such as philosophy, Nursing, Social Work and education. Given the traditional roles that women have occupied as “mothers, nurses and teachers, caring has played a more central role in the lives of women than in the lives of men and this accounts for the different approaches to moral reasoning that Gilligan identifies.”⁶³ Ethics of care is well recognized as a normative ethical theory, a theory about what makes actions right or wrong. It occupies a prominent place among a cluster of normative ethical theories advanced by feminists in the second half of the twentieth century. It was successful in establishing a significant alternative to Kant's moral philosophy, utilitarianism and virtue theory. By placing the emphasis on the way in which the work and practice of care originates in the private realm, it distinguishes itself from the nurturing of the character of the man of virtue, or the man of reason's exercise of universal rationality in the public realm.⁶⁴ It can be employed in the field in which it resolves a conceptual or empirical problem with which that practical discipline is preoccupied.

Nowadays, “care ethics is considered to be a key concept in ethical debates linked to routine work in social work and nursing, the allocation of resources, the preference

⁵⁹ www.encyclopedia.com-science-encyclo.

⁶⁰ www.encyclopedia.com-ethics-of-care.

⁶¹ J. C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 106.

⁶² J. C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, 107.

⁶³ D. Furrow, *Ethics: Key Concepts in Philosophy*, 65.

⁶⁴ <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

given to certain populations or patients, and the way in which a patient or any other individual in need should be treated.”⁶⁵ That particular perspective has led to the development of important insights into the moral values involved in the caring practices applied to family relations, relations between friends and individual's care-giving. Ethics of care gave to the world a way of thinking which shed new light on these issues and provided possible solutions. As a result, “today the terms caring, nursing, social work and ethics of care are inextricably linked. In the making of moral decisions about routine issues related to care, ethics of care takes into account consideration that traditional moral theories did not recognize as legitimate. It differs from the traditional Kantian formulation according to which welfare policy has to be set according to universal laws of justice, as well as from the idea that cold rationality is more important than emotion in resolving a moral dilemma. An ethics of care makes the nurturing of our immediate communities and the protection of those closest to us the highest moral obligation.”⁶⁶

Ethics of care asks us to “review decisions not in terms of hard rules but in terms of how they will affect the people with whom we share our lives. Ethics of care challenges traditional moral theories as male-centric and problematic to the extent they omit or downplay values and virtues usually culturally associated with women or with roles that are often cast as feminine.”⁶⁷ Ethics of care defends some emotions such as care or compassion as moral. Feminist ethics also recognizes that roles must be applied in a context and that real life moral decision-making is influenced by the relationships we have with those around us. Ethics of care has continued being influential in areas like education, counseling, nursing and medicine.

Concluding Reflections

There are many obvious reasons for which ethics of care can be criticized. The ethics of care can easily be distorted by the different cultural expectations especially that emotion plays a vital role in decision-making on what care can be offered in a specific circumstance. One person's emotional reaction can never be exactly the same with the other persons. An individual can easily distort care ethics since individual emotions or reactions differ. A person out of individual desire can come up with a goal to achieve which may be favorable to him or her but not necessarily so to others. The association between the women and ethics of care does not promote the movement accordingly to those people who do not understand that actually this association cannot be true in all circumstances. Interestingly, women themselves argue mostly on some key issues expressing their different views. Ethics of care, if not well-understood and applied, can promote favoritism or partiality as it is human

⁶⁵ <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

⁶⁶ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

⁶⁷ Cf. <https://ethics.org.au-ethics-explainer:ethics-of-care>.

orientation always to get attracted to some things than the others. The biggest job for care ethics is on how to integrate some ethical values like justice which seem not to be in line with it.

The ethics of care takes responsibilities within relationships as the most important moral considerations. Thus, ethical issues are framed as issues that arise within particular relationships and can be dealt with only as participants in a relationship. Actions are justified by appeal to the dynamics of the relationships of the particular people involved, and problems are solved by working within a relationship. There is an emphasis for integrity of care.

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