

### Care Ethics – The philosophy Bit

#### ▣ Traditional philosophy

- ▣ Since Plato – philosophers have become used to distinguishing between knowledge and opinion
- ▣ Gaining knowledge has been seen as a matter of establishing truth
- ▣ And that truth produces knowledge
  - Rationality as Knowledge as truth as objective
  - The philosopher overcomes subjectivity
  - And gives voice to reason and logic and objectivity
  - Feminists argue that knowledge is not impartial
  - Nor does it exist alone as some kind of truth out there – waiting to be discovered
  - Knowledge is not timeless and unchanging

#### ▣ Gender – of little importance

- ▣ Philosophy has seen that the body is irrelevant, except where our senses mislead us
- ▣ So traditional philosophy suggests that **emotions detract us from rational** thought and pursuit
- ▣ And gender carries little weight in relation to the pursuit of knowledge
- ▣ Feminist thought
- ▣ Feminists, however, explore gender as very relevant **and** particularly in relation to our **connection with others**
- ▣ A whole new field has emerged called care ethics
- ▣ **This focuses on** The networks of relationships that we are in – such as parents, children, friends etc. **and** that those **relationships might influence** our thinking and knowledge
- ▣ Traditional philosophy ignores gender

- Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher (1724-1804) equated moral reasoning with impartial or objective thinking
- From Kant's standpoint, all people are equal in dignity and are entitled to equal rights and equal moral consideration
- Impartial reasoning is the mark of an autonomous person who is not a slave to the opinions of society, nor to her own private passions.

- An autonomous and moral person isn't moved primarily by personal desires, But instead always chooses the course of action that she believes will be the most fair or beneficial to everyone who might be affected.

### Emotions

- From that viewpoint, emotions such as loyalty, love devotion, compassion and care are not important
- Moral decisions are guided by emotional connections to particular individuals rather than by impartial reasoning
- Some feminists argue that **the care and emotion is an equally valid** basis for moral decision making
- The moral theory has come to be known as **feminist care ethics** or the ethics of care
- One key thinkers to question the superiority of moral reasoning based on Kantian framework, Was feminist psychologist **Carol Gilligan**
- She critiqued the work of her mentor – **psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg** (1927-1987)

### Kohlberg

1. Kohlberg believed there are several **stages** that individuals typically go through on their way to becoming mature moral reasoners who can understand and **apply impartial moral principles**.
2. We begin as **young children** at what Kohlberg called the **preconventional** stage – during which our most important moral consideration is **pleasing authority figures like** our parents
3. At the apex of moral development which Kohlberg called the **postconventional** stage, is the **mature adult** who is guided by **universal, abstract principles of just behaviour**, like the ideal moral agent of Kant's philosophy
4. Kohlberg designed tests to determine whether a person had reached this peak of moral maturity
5. But something happened when these tests were administered – **men** tended **to score consistently higher than women** on the scale of moral development
6. This, Gilligan, argues obviously does not mean that women are inferior moral reasoners
7. Either due to the way they have been **socialised or to some natural** deficiency
8. Instead she proposed that the results **real that women reason** differently from the impartial way that philosophers like Kant and Psychologists like Kohlberg take as their moral idea.
9. She coined the phrase **justice perspective**, to highlight the abstract, impartial framework for moral reasoning that Kant and Kohlberg favoured
10. This approach to moral reasoning makes sense in the situations and roles that have been reserved in the past for men

### Care perspective

1. Gilligan calls **emotional attachment in decision making** – care perspective
2. She argues that the **care perspective** is more **typical of women**, Where women instead of focusing on abstract moral principles,
3. women will turn their attention to the **concrete responsibilities and emotional bonds** that arise out of particular **caring relationships**
4. This care perspective has historically been **unrecognised or devalued** by male philosophers and psychologists, Because it was linked to **women's care-based responsibilities**
5. Women have traditionally taken on most of the responsibilities for caring for children and other vulnerable members of society such as elderly, sick, disabled etc.
6. Consequently **women's moral reasoning** has a put a premium on maintaining, nurturing and protecting the relationships and bonds of affection that make this vital caregiving possible.
7. The care perspective or feminist care ethic – never loses sight of the fact that our **moral lives aren't lived in the** space of abstract principles

### Care perspectives

1. Unlike the **abstract moral reasoning** of the **justice perspective**, the care **perspective draws** on the **emotions of care and empathy**
2. Focusing on responses that are **specific to each situation** and attentive to the needs of the persons involved.
3. Care ethicists recognise that human beings are **interdependent**.
4. The justice perspective believes that one of the goals of morality is to ensure that **we're all treated** equally.
5. Care ethicists like to highlighting that we are all weak and vulnerable at various stages of our lives and hence in need of the protection and nurturance we receive from caring relationships
6. Everyone one of us has been *a child* – and we will be **elderly** someday
7. In short, there will always be **people in need of care** and all of us will find ourselves among them at times
8. Care ethicists believe that **people in need deserve** more than just the protection of their rights.
9. Their needs **should elicit a caring response** from those of us who are in a position to help

### Justice and relationships

1. Some philosophers believe that great strength of the **justice perspective is the emphasis on impartiality** that helps us to understand why we have **duties to those we** don't care about or even like

#### Critique of care ethics

2. a **morality based on emotional connections is unreliable**
3. Emotions are **instinctual and fickle** and not always under our control
4. **two kinds of caring**
5. **Natural caring** and **ethical caring**
6. Natural caring is the **spontaneous concern** we feel for our loved ones, such as the caring a mother has for a child
7. Ethical caring occurs when our memories of past experiences of natural caring – both as givers and recipients of care – help us to **recognise the goodness of caring relationships**
8. **Caring** becomes our **ethical ideal as we begin** to sense that we're at our best in caring relationships
9. Which leads to the feeling that we must care for others in certain situations even if caring is what we want to do at that moment
10. Caring at these times, may require a **conscious decision and effort** on our part – in response to the plight of the other and our conflicting desire to serve our own interests

#### Care ethics and Facebook

##### Facebook and gender

1. Until recently relationships received only sporadic attention from philosophers
2. Feminist philosophers began refocusing on what it means to be moral by placing significance on care ethics
3. Feminists argued that **rules and consequences are fine** but they are not at the heart of morality
4. Which is found in the **best kind of relationships** we have
5. Partial, caring relationships which exhibit moral disposition and moral behaviour

##### Caring

1. When we care about someone we take a certain posture to them
2. We **listen to them** when they go through trials
3. And **help tend** to their needs
4. It is the empathetic response to others that is referred to as care ethics

5. If **Facebook – is part of how we define friendship** in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it needs to be analysed in the same way we examine other methods of relating to each other
6. The care ethics – **seems like a natural fit** for asking about ethics and Facebook
7. Does Facebook facilitate more caring in the world or does it inhibit caring?

#### Facebook and caring

1. A caring relationship as defined as **'a rich reciprocal relationship that includes a genuine concern for one another through listening and maintaining a desire for mutual growth and flourishing'** (Wittkower (2010 p. 137).
2. It is suggested that our sphere of **caring overlaps with our Facebook** social network
3. Some of our friends on Facebook we do care about

#### Information

1. It does enable **information of one another's lives** to be transferred
2. Care ethics suggests we need to take the individual circumstances into account
3. Exploring the motivations behind the thief and the victim
4. **Knowledge is crucial to caring**

#### Social networks

1. One way to think of social networks is a form of **information repository**
2. Some information is **rich and meaningful**, whilst some is **trivial** and not that relevant
3. Finding out what is happening in friend's lives may enable caring
4. I may have Facebook friends who are politically, ethically, religiously different from me
5. And may **drop them from Friends** so as not to care

#### A postmodern redefinition of friendship

1. Facebook may be facilitating a modern alteration of our understanding of friendship categories
2. Historically a binary approach to caring friendship dominated
3. I care for my **close friends and relatives** but I have **acquaintances** for which my caring is limited
4. Facebook is constantly suggesting we add more friends - almost in a game of popularity
5. More is going on than just the **endless addition of friends**
6. A new mediating category or a new range of friends are emerging
7. For some, social networking contributes to wellbeing through greater connection

### Before

1. Before social electronic networks the maintenance of **hundreds of friends would be daunting**
2. Through social networking friendship seems to be entering a **postmodern era**
3. When the understanding of what constitutes **a friend is more fluid** than ever before
4. Perhaps there is a **reconsideration of binary distinctions** in those we care for
5. Care ethics emphasises that **morality requires a complex response** to each situation
6. But social networks add an additional layer of moral complexity
7. It is harder to categorise some of our Facebook friends
8. **Caring is a choice we** make

### Caring for animals

1. Gilligan was silent about the moral status of animals in care ethics
2. But others (Nel Noddings) made it clear that humans have moral obligations to animals, Which are open to caring and capable of reciprocity
3. The application of care ethics to the moral status of animals has been explored most thoroughly by Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, Noting the sexual politics of meat and Maintaining a feminist care tradition offers a superior foundation for animal ethics

### Feminist care: animal ethics

1. They argue that a feminist care ethics is preferable for grounding moral obligations to animals
2. Because it acknowledges love and empathy as a basis for human-animal connections
3. And because it is context specific it allows for nuanced considerations of different animals.
4. As the obligation to care is rooted in dependency, humans do not have moral obligations to care for animals that are not dependent on humans
5. An obligation to care for animals is established when humans make them dependent by providing food or shelter

### Moral status of animals

1. Some suggest that there is a connection between feminism, animal advocacy, environmental ethics and holistic health movements