

Ecological Identification, Friendship, and Moral Development: Justice and Care as Complementary Dimensions of Morality

Dale T. Snauwaert
Adelphi University

In the fields of moral development and moral education there persists a central philosophical debate concerning the nature of morality, in general, and as it relates to gender, in particular. This debate concerns the relationship, or lack thereof, between justice and care as exemplified by the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, among others. It will be argued that justice and care are complementary dimensions of morality conceived in terms of friendship. This complementarity is, in turn, based upon an enlarged sense of self-identification from the personal to the ontological to the ecological. It will be proposed that this sequence of enlarged identification constitutes the development of morality as an integration of justice and care.

THE JUSTICE - CARE DEBATE

For Kohlberg the basic referent of morality is judgment, rather than a type of behavior, emotion, or social institution.¹ Kohlberg posits that considerations of morality are defined by general formal criteria. Morality is defined in terms of the formal character of a moral judgment rather than in terms of its content.

These formal criteria are, however, only fully met in the most mature state of moral judgment, a state which Kohlberg defines in terms of Rawls's concept of reflective equilibrium.² Rawls defines reflective equilibrium as a state of complete impartiality and reversibility. These characteristics are exemplified in the hypothetical "original position" wherein one is required to choose principles of justice under a "veil of ignorance" (not knowing one's eventual place in the society nor one's innate talent) prior to the creation of society. Kohlberg maintains that the original position and the veil of ignorance represent the formal criteria of moral judgment: impartiality (veil) and reversibility (original position).

Within the context of moral development, impartiality entails the ability to separate one's self from one's own egocentric needs, stepping back to a reflective position wherein one can judge moral claims impartially. In addition, moral judgment requires us to be empathic, to take the position of the other and, in that sense, mature moral judgment requires reversibility. Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development is based upon these formal criteria in the sense that each stage of moral development contains a greater degree or capacity for impartiality and reversibility.

Kohlberg's formalistic conception of morality is an appealing proposition in the following sense: It avoids the problem of relativism inherent in conceptions of morality which define morality in terms of content or in terms of the standards of the existing social order. However, his formalism is open to critique on other grounds.

For Kohlberg, moral dilemmas are justice dilemmas in the sense that they require judgments of right and duty in situations that involve conflicting claims. However, moral judgment seems intuitively to be broader than an abstract consideration of principles of justice (rights and duties). The conception of moral dilemmas as solely justice dilemmas portrays moral judgment as a rational calculation, abstracted from the particularities of their context. However, real life dilemmas involve love, forgiveness, compassion, conflict, struggle, pain, and care, which transcend considerations of

fairness per se, suggesting that moral conflicts are embedded in the particularity of complex relationships.

This is precisely the feminist critique of Kohlberg developed by Carol Gilligan.³ Gilligan's theory is based upon the distinction between the development of masculine and feminine identity. The development of male identity is critically tied to separation and individuation, since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. This separation is the basis for all further development in the male, and is illustrated in games where boys develop elaborate rules for the fair adjudication of conflicts. This male trait of separation is at the core of Kohlberg's moral theory, for principled moral judgment is, in part, contingent upon impartiality -- a function of separation.

In contrast, Gilligan argues that feminine identity is not dependent upon separation, but is defined in terms of attachment. Consequently, as male development proceeds in terms of separation, female development progresses in terms of connection and relatedness. This female progression is based upon the "ideal of care"; caring is "an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection."⁴ Thus, in Gilligan's view, the moral development of the female is a function of the ethic of care, whereas male moral development is a function of the ethic of justice.

Gilligan posits a theory of female moral development based upon the ethic of care. Moral development for females culminates, not in the realization of justice per se, but in the "realization that self and other are interdependent and that life, however valuable in itself, can only be sustained by care in relationship."⁵ Thus, female moral development is guided by an ethic of care which is context-specific and founded upon the inherent interdependence existing between individuals.

THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF JUSTICE AND CARE

The ethic of justice and the ethic of care appear to be diametrically opposed conceptions of morality and moral development. However, it can be argued that they complement rather than conflict with each other. First, on the highest level of abstraction the ethic of justice as fairness maintains that there exists a universal obligation to humanity. This obligation is generally conceived in terms of a universal commitment of respect for the inherent dignity of all persons. The ethic of care, on the other hand, maintains that moral obligation is grounded in the particulars of the moral context. In this sense the ethic of care grounds morality in an ethic of association. The ethic of association maintains that moral responsibility is based in particular human relationships over time, not universal standards. Ethical obligation emerges out of relationship, and it is care, from the feminist perspective, that is the central emergent property of ethical association.

However, while perceiving the associative quality of morality as essential, the ethic of care is also based upon a universal commitment to our shared humanity. For example, one of Gilligan's subjects maintains that we have a duty to "that giant collection of everybody...the stranger is still another person belonging to that group, people you are connected to by virtue of being another person." Gilligan herself concludes that the essential motivation of an ethic of care is "that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt."⁶ These statements suggest that a commitment to our shared humanity in a universal sense, rather than one that is founded upon particular and immediate association, is as basic to the ethic of care as it is to an ethic of justice. The web of relations extends beyond immediate association to include an ontological interdependence.

Second, it seems that the basic orientations of each conception are fundamentally different: the ethic of justice requires separation, while the ethic of care requires attachment. Separation is needed for the development and exercise of impartiality which, in turn, enables one to adjudicate moral conflict fairly. Attachment, on the other hand, is necessary for care, for care is based in empathy, and empathy in the recognition of interconnectedness. In other words, the ethic of care is founded upon reversibility. Without the capacity of reversibility it would be impossible to care. As discussed

above, the ethic of justice also entails reversibility. Kohlberg and Rawls maintain that it is impossible to be fair without empathy. If justice is a function of reflective equilibrium, then it must, by definition, entail reversibility. Moral development for both ethics is constituted by the enlargement of one's capacity for reversibility; one's capacity for care and fairness respectively are based upon the degree one is capable of identifying with other persons. Thus, one's capacity for both care and fairness is based upon the expansion of one's identity.

Responsibility is essentially a function of one's capacity to respond to others, whether in terms of their needs (care) or in terms of respect (fairness).⁷ Being responsive is the ontological foundation of moral obligation and, hence, moral development. And, responsiveness is a function of identification. Responsiveness occurs within a relational field. It requires and is constituted by relationship. Responsible relationship implies a mutually permissive interaction that can only occur if there is resonance between the individuals who are in relationship. Resonance, in turn, occurs on the basis of identification. Therefore, if there is no identification, there will be no response and, hence, neither care nor fairness. As one's identification expands or contracts, one's capacity to respond and, thus, to act morally, expands or contracts. This is the essence of reversibility as a moral foundation, and it applies to both care *and* justice.

However, there is a different flavor, if you will, between the reversibility of care and that of justice. Care entails the embracing of interconnectedness. The expansion of identification here is one of unification with the other -- recognizing the web of relationships that literally connect our identities. Whereas the expansion of identification entailed in justice does not imply interconnection per se, but it is an identification that recognizes the sameness of interpersonal boundaries that define individuality within a relational field. This identification of the boundaries of others as identical to the boundaries that define our own individuality is the basis of respect. This kind of identification is a recognition of the fact that, just as you do not want your private boundaries violated, neither do others. This accounts for justice as respect. This notion of responsibility is essentially negative in that it requires a response that prohibits interference (the essence of respect for boundaries), whereas the ethic of care entails a positive conception of responsibility in that it requires a response to help, to provide in order to satisfy a need.

These two kinds of identification and their emergent ethics are not in conflict, but are, in fact, complementary. Moral responsibility entails both respect for the boundaries of other persons as well as responsiveness to their needs. Care devoid of respect is smothering and invasive, while respect devoid of care is impersonal and legalistic. We exist in a web of relations which interconnects us, and that interconnection demands that we respond to each other with care, but while existing in this web we are also individuals; we are individuated even though interconnected, and our individuated status demands that we respect interpersonal boundaries. Thus, it can be argued that both justice and care are necessary *and* complementary dimensions of morality.

ECOLOGICAL IDENTIFICATION AND FRIENDSHIP

The complementarity between justice and care is expressed in the ecosophical conception of morality put forth by Arne Naess.⁸ The justice and care orientations of Kohlberg and Gilligan have important features in common which relate directly to Naess's ecosophy. All three orientations are ontological. Morality is not conceived as an abstract body of rules, but as a state of being. Morality here is not a body of principles to be obeyed, but a way of being in the world, in relation to other human beings as well as nature. From an ecosophical perspective, we exist in a web of relations that extends to nature itself. Naess writes:

Instead of matter, I will speak of the relational field. The term "relational field" refers to the totality of our interrelated experience.... Things of the order "material things" are conceived of as junctions within the field... Similarly, a person is a part of nature to the extent that he or she too is a relational junction within the total field. The process of identification is a process in which the relations which define the junction expand to comprise more and more. The "self" grows towards the "Self."⁹

As identification expands to include a larger web of relations, the ethic of care emerges as an ontological state. Naess writes:

Care flows naturally if the "self" is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves....Just as we need not morals to make us breathe...[so] if your "self" in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care...you care for yourself without feeling any moral pressure to do it.¹⁰

Here identification is expanding to include the web of relations that constitutes nature as well as the world of human interaction. Naess suggests that with this larger identification, with a larger sense of self, our capacity for care is proportionally increased. Care is a spontaneous result of expanded identification. This is morality performed out of inclination rather than duty.¹¹ Moral development from this perspective is a process of widening and deepening our self -- what Naess refers to as "self-realization." It is clear that Naess's view is consistent with the ethic of care, even extending the sphere of association to include not only the web of human relations, but the ecological web.

However, identification is not identity. It does not entail a literal merger with nature or with others; our individuated status and those of others is maintained. However, we do not exist with complete autonomy: we are fundamentally related *and* simultaneously individuated. Just as our interrelatedness requires care, our individuated status requires respect. Naess states it this way: "In the thinking of the field ecologist there is respect for an extreme diversity of beings capable of living together in an intricate web of relations."¹² The deep field ecologist acknowledges both the care and justice dimensions of moral agency as the negative and positive polarities of responsibility grounded in ontological and ecological identification.

When we care for and respect another being or even the earth, we are engaged in an act of friendship.¹³ Friendship is a relationship of love which allows the other person to be authentic. In facilitating the authenticity of the other, we are simultaneously caring for and respecting them, acknowledging and nurturing our interdependence while simultaneously affirming our individual uniqueness. Friendship, in this sense, is the organizing catalyst for the expansion of self and the proportional expansion of our moral capacity for care and fairness. As Erich Fromm puts it:

*Love is union...under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self. It is an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full unfolding of one's own inner activity....If I love, I care -- that is, I am actively concerned with the other person's growth and happiness; I am not a spectator. I am responsible, that is, I respond to his needs....I respect him, that I look at him as he is, objectively and not distorted by my wishes and fears.*¹⁴

The growth of friendship generally proceeds in terms of personal interaction and identification. We become friends and treat others with care and respect those who we have come to know and appreciate personally. However, friendship and, thus, care and respect can proceed in terms of ontological and even ecological identification.¹⁵ As Gilligan's subject above, we can identify with our shared humanity and, thus, treat others, even though not personally connected to them, with care and respect. We are friends in this case in an ontological sense. In addition, Arne Naess's notions of ecosophy and self-realization suggest that we can befriend nature and the earth by expanding our sense of self through a recognition of ecological interdependence. Here our identification is ecological and, in turn, our moral sensibility enlarges to include the natural environment.

There is not enough space in this paper to fully articulate the above position. Here I can only propose that a more comprehensive conception of moral development -- one that acknowledges the complementarity of justice and care -- may proceed on the basis of an expansion of identification from the personal, to the ontological, to the ecological. From this perspective, moral development would be conceived as progressing in terms of more expanded states of identification, entailing increased responsibility in the sense of being increasingly able to respond with care and respect.

1. This discussion of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development is based upon my reading of his *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
 2. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).
 3. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
 4. *Ibid.*, 62.
 5. *Ibid.*, 127.
 6. Gilligan, cited in Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 271.
 7. I am indebted to Brooks Barton for this point. See also Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947).
 8. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, trans., and ed., David Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
 9. *Ibid.*, 55-56.
 10. Naess cited in Warwick Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1990), 217.
 11. Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, 219.
 12. Naess, cited in *Ibid.*, 257.
 13. Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, 257.
 14. Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Henry Holt, 1955), 31-33, (*italics original*).
 15. Fox, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, ch. 8.
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