Justice and Utility: Who Cares?

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In the period from the 1960's to the present, the dominant moral theories taught to undergraduates and elaborated in graduate school programs have been deontological, especially Kantian theories, and consequentialist, especially utilitarian theories. Both kinds of moral theory are theories of right action. Both rely on universal norms and recommend simple, abstract principles assumed to be applicable to all cases in which decisions are to be made about what we morally ought to do. The moral epistemology of both Kantian and utilitarian theories is rationalist. To the Kantian we are to rely on reason to understand the implications of the Categorical Imperative and we are to act in accordance with the rational will, not our feelings. To the utilitarian, we are to bring about the greatest happiness or utility or satisfaction of preferences for all concerned, but in deciding what is required to do so, we are to employ rational calculation and rely on reason to make rational choices.

Arguments have been pursued about which kind of theory is superior, or which has the least severe unacceptable implications. And arguments within both Kantian and utilitarian theories have been explored. Within a Kantian approach, for instance, arguments about universalizability and formalism, about the connections between reasons and motives, about the responsibilities of agents, and about ideal contracts have become ever more sophisticated — some would say scholastic. And within a utilitarian approach, arguments about interpersonal comparisons of utility, about rational choices and contracts in situations of uncertainty or conflict, about cooperation and free-riders, have also become ever more sophisticated — some would say removed from reality.

In the last decade or so a renewed interest in virtue theory has arisen. To some, virtue theory is an alternative to deontological or consequentialist theories, and should replace them. If we cultivate good character in persons and achieve a society of virtuous persons, it is thought, we will not need additional theory: virtuous persons will do what is best or what is morally required.

Also in the last decade or so, feminist moral theory has developed. In many departments and classrooms, it has had little influence, and debates continue to be preoccupied with the problems of Kantian and utilitarian theories or with a renewed interest in metaethics. But among a substantial number of philosophers, not all of them women, feminist moral theory is now recognized as a distinct and interesting alternative approach to moral issues. It is recognized as making an important contribution to normative ethics and to metaethics. There are, by now, a substantial number of books in the area of feminist morality, and a few general texts now include a segment on feminist ethics among their theories and topics covered.

In some ways, feminist moral theory resembles virtue theory, but many feminists resist classifying it as a form of virtue theory. I will treat it as an independent approach, one which contains many diverse strands and builds on all three of the other kinds of theory though it should not be seen as a version of any of them.

Some feminists have been wary of or even hostile to moral theory as such, thinking that cultivating moral sensitivity, through acquaintance with literature and through actual practice, may be a better moral guide than any theory. But others point out that the critics' own discussions seem to constitute "doing theory," and many retain a willingness to try to develop feminist moral theory. The questions then are: is feminist moral theory distinctive, or is it a version of another type of moral theory, such as Kantian...
theory, or utilitarian theory, or virtue theory? What are its major elements or norms, and how should it be understood?

Feminist moral theory of all varieties is united by certain core commitments: domination of women by men should end; women are entitled to equal rights; the moral experience of women is as important as that of men. Of course the meanings and implications of all of these positions require much interpretation.

Feminist inquiry exploring the moral experience of women has led to careful attention to the caring activities in which women so often engage. It has led to a recognition of how neglected by other moral theories this domain has been. As women care for children and others who need care, moral issues are ever present, yet this kind of experience has not entered into the thinking of moral theorists developing the dominant outlooks. Traditionally, women's mothering activities have been assimilated to what is natural and instinctual, rather than what has moral significance or involves moral choice. As recently as 1982, David Heyd, in a way that was entirely typical, dismissed a mother's sacrificing for her child as an example of the supererogatory because it belongs, as he put it, to "the sphere of natural relationships and instinctive feelings (which lie outside morality)."

Among the clearest positions feminist moral theorists take is that such a dismissal of women's moral experience is unacceptable. In taking such experience seriously, feminist moral inquiry has developed what has come to be best described as an "ethic of care." Starting with Carol Gilligan's empirical studies of the ways girls and women seem to interpret moral problems, and with Nel Noddings' phenomenological inquiry into what caring involves and how we evaluate it, feminist moral inquiry has illuminated the importance of caring activities and relationships in human life, and has established the moral significance of care. Caring well should be a moral goal, and basic caring relations are a moral necessity. The values involved in the practices of caring need to be understood and cultivated, and the failures of many practices to reflect these values need also to be understood. Caring as an actual practice should be continually evaluated and improved. To bring about such improvement, radical transformations may be needed in the social and political contexts in which caring takes place.

Many cautions have been raised about an "ethic of care." To the extent that women have been confined to the work of caretaking, an ethic that reflects this may have the effect of perpetuating inequality. It may merely mistake a historical fact — that women have done most of this labor — for a claim about women's inherent outlooks on moral issues. And to the extent that caring is for particular others with whom we have actual relationships, some fear it may draw attention away from the oppressive social structures in which such caring occurs. To elevate the activities of caring, which should be shared by men and not assigned automatically to women, into an ethic of care associated with women's experience, can thus be thought problematic.

An Ethic of Care

What is an ethic of care and can these objections be answered? How an ethic of care should be formulated continues to be a subject of feminist inquiry. I think the objections can be answered.

My own views on how an ethic of care should be developed see it as incorporating at least these central positions:
1. In trying to understand what morality requires of us or what it would be morally best to do or to be, emotion — sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, fellow-feeling — is valued rather than rejected. This does not mean that raw emotion should be our guide; feelings need to be reflected on, and good ones need to be cultivated. But it does mean that moral theories that rely entirely on reason and rationalist deductions or calculations are to be seen as deficient. When rationalist moral theories think of emotions, they typically think of egoistic impulses that challenge moral norms, or of aggressive anger against which morality should provide restraints. An ethic of care appreciates that there are what some call the moral emotions, as well as those that threaten morality. Since even the morally helpful emotions can often go wrong — as in excessive sympathy that can lead to a destruction of the self, or as in the kind of feeling for others that crosses over into domination of those dependent on one — we need an ethic of care and not just caring. But in understanding what it calls for as well as in carrying it out, we should value rather than reject the emotions of caring, of sympathy, of feeling for others, of hope for their well-being. Hume is here thought a much better source of insight than Kant or Bentham.

2. An ethic of care respects rather than rejects the claims of particular others with whom we share particular relations. The universalistic and abstract aspects of dominant moral theories are thus questioned rather than taken for granted as defining features of morality.

When universalistic moral theories look at relations such as those between a parent and child, they may see them as permitted by a morality that deals with interactions between all persons taken as equals. They then may have little to say about morally evaluating such relations as long as they violate no moral rules against harming or failing to respect anyone. Or such theories may contain universal rules specifying that parents should care for their children. But they do not allow for such actual relations ever to take priority over universal moral requirements. In a conflict between what we ought to do for the sake of our child and what we ought to do out of respect for universal moral law or for the sake of everyone affected, dominant moral theories would see the latter as having priority. Anything else would be ruled out as "favoring one's own," as failing to have the required impartiality.

An ethic of care is skeptical of such abstraction and reliance on universal rules. It values actual relations between actual persons and holds that such relations may at times have moral priority over abstract rules. Dominant theories interpret moral problems in terms of a conflict between egoistic individual interests on the one hand, and universal moral principles on the other. They recognize the poles of "individual" and "all persons," and lose sight of everything in between.

An ethic of care focuses on the area between these poles. Those who genuinely care for others are not acting to further their own individual interests, but they are not acting for the interests of everyone either. They seek to maintain or develop an actual human tie, they act for particular others, not all persons in general, and for themselves-in-relations-with-others. Their stance is neither egoistic nor altruistic: the well-being of the relation includes the well-being of the particular others for whom they care and their own well-being.

In trying to overcome the ties and attitudes associated with tribalism, or religious intolerance, dominant moral theories have assimilated the domains of family and friendship to the morally suspect status of the tribal, or they have relegated them to the
non-moral realms of instinctive behavior, or permitted personal preference. An ethic of care recognizes the moral importance and the need for moral guidance, in the relationships of family and friendship.

3. An ethic of care works with a conception of persons that understands us as inherently connected with others rather than as fundamentally individualistic. The concept of person in dominant moral theories is the liberal notion of the rational, autonomous moral agent, or of the self-interested individual. As Brian Barry usefully characterizes a major version of this conception, it is "the vision of society as made up of independent, autonomous units who cooperate only when the terms of co-operation are such as to make it further the ends of each of the parties." And as Michael Sandel adds, the vision holds that "what separates us is in some important sense prior to what connects us—epistemologically prior as well as morally prior. We are distinct individuals first and then we form relationships..." Although the Kantian moral agent is seen as having to assert his rational will against his self-interest rather than as being able to further his own interest through contractual agreements, he is no less an individual first.

An ethic of care, in contrast, sees persons as interdependent. Every person starts out as a child dependent on caretakers, and we remain interdependent in totally fundamental ways throughout our lives. That we can think and act independently depends on a network of social relations enabling us to do so. From the perspective of an ethic of care, to construct morality as if we were Robinson Crusoes or (to use Hobbes’ image) mushrooms sprung from nowhere, or to assume merely for argument’s sake that we are pure, self-sufficient individuals, is highly misleading, and distorts morality. Of course we can think of ourselves as abstract individuals; the questions are whether we ought to do so, and what are the implications and effects of doing so, and of supposing that this conception of the person is the appropriate one for our moral theories.

A morality built on the liberal concept of the individual reflects at the moral level what may at best be a suitable view for economic and political interactions between strangers. It is of limited value and often inappropriate for the moral questions that arise among friends or within families and various other associations. And when the morality appropriate for those with whom we have substantial human relationships is explored, it must include the components suggested by an ethic of care. And then to suppose that moral theory in general can be adequate when it is only suitable for the contexts of political and economic life (if it is) while unsuitable for other contexts is clearly a mistake.

4. An ethic of care reevaluates traditional notions about the public and the private. Feminist thought from many directions has been critical of traditional views, built into the dominant moral theories, that there is a private sphere beyond politics into which government should not intrude. Feminists have shown clearly how the gender hierarchy underlying control by men of social, economic, and political power and institutions has structured a supposedly private sphere to the disadvantage of women. For instance, women’s "private" economic dependence on men has left women vulnerable to domination and abuse. The "private" domain from which government should supposedly be excluded, and is often assumed to be already excluded, has been one in which male heads of household exercise power over women and, all too often, engage in violence against women and children without legal interference. The law has not hesitated to interfere with the personal decisions of women concerning reproduction, but it has been very reluctant to curb the use of coercive power by men in what has been thought of as a man’s "private" domain.
Dominant moral theories have been heavily biased toward seeing the “public” life of men as significant for morality, and toward missing the moral significance of the “private” life of women in the family. Thus can the dominant moralities concern themselves with relations between individual strangers assumed to be equal, and fail to illuminate the moral issues in relations between persons interconnected by family ties or by friendship. Here, relations are standardly between unequals — parents and children, for instance — who did not enter freely into the relation, since no child can choose his parents. Such relations are standardly non-contractual rather than contractual, as in friendship, where thinking of them as contractual would undermine the trust on which friendship relies. And here relations are often permanent but constantly changing: a child, for instance, will always have the genetic parents she has, but as she grows to adulthood, she may be the one with power and strength far greater than her formerly powerful and now feeble and failing parents. An ethic of care addresses moral issues in the domain of the unequal and the dependent, in actual emotion-laden relationships, whereas the dominant moral theories speak only to abstract, rational individuals assumed to be self-sufficient and independent. And those developing an ethic of care often suggest that it may be suitable also for “public” policies and decisions, not only for “personal” contexts.

Care versus Justice

As thinking about care developed in the work of Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and various other feminist theorists, care and justice were often seen as alternative values. “Care” and “justice” were taken to name different approaches to moral problems and characteristically different recommendations concerning them. Care, as I have suggested, valued relationships between persons and empathetic understanding; justice valued rational action in accord with abstract principles. Gilligan saw these as alternative interpretations that could be applied to given moral problems, yielding different ways of construing what the moral problem was and how it should be handled. She saw both approaches as valid, but since interpretation from the perspective of care had been grossly neglected in the construction and study of dominant moral theories, it should now be seen as valid, and the deficiency corrected. Gilligan argues that if one sees a moral problem as an issue to be dealt with in terms of care, one cannot at the same time see it as an issue to be dealt with in terms of justice, because the two perspectives organize the problem differently. A given person can recognize both interpretations, and examine them one at a time. Morality, she argues, should include the concerns of both care and justice. But with respect to a given problem, we are left with alternative interpretations and no suggestions for choosing between them.

Other theorists, Nel Noddings for instance, thought care should replace justice as the central concept of morality. On this view, care could provide the guidance needed for whatever moral problems we face, and justice should be displaced to the sidelines. An ethic of care would be sufficient.

In these debates, the dominant ethic of justice was taken to include both Kantian and utilitarian approaches. To those whose focus is on the difference between Kantian and utilitarian approaches, this may seem unwarranted, and defenders of both Kantian and utilitarian moral theories have tried to assimilate care to their own favored frameworks.

From the perspective of those developing an ethic of care, however, it is the similarities between Kantian and utilitarian theories that is of more interest than the differences: both rely on simple, universal rules; both are rationalist in their moral
epistemologies, both assume a concept of person that is individualistic and independent; both are theories of right action aimed at recommending rational choices: both can be interpreted as far more suitable for guiding the decisions of persons in “public” life than in dealing with moral issues of family life or of friendship. Finally, both are concerned with issues such as justice - through rights and through public policy - though a Kantian foundation may be far stronger for rights, and a utilitarian one for many issues of public policy. It is in these ways that an ethic of care contrasts with both.

Debates for some time concerning an ethic of care became formulated as care versus justice. We were asked to consider which was more suitable for the concerns of feminists and our allies. Those concerned especially with oppressive social structures and unjust economic and political institutions were dubious about focusing on the family and personal relationships. They continued to see demands for equality as primary, though notions of liberal equality were reconceptualized, and they saw such concerns as best handled through an ethic of justice. Some argued that justice required socialist institutions and economic democracy. Others argued for the extension of justice to women in the household as well as the workplace. And others argued that an ethic of justice is superior to an ethic of care to protect women against violence and abuse.

Others defended an ethic of care against charges that it is tied to women’s traditional roles and complicit in them. And they showed how care could be extended beyond the contexts of family and friendship to call for deep restructuring of society, of economic, political, and legal institutions, and of international relations. A caring society would reorder its social roles and transform its practices. Care could be seen as a public and not only a private value, if one uses those unsatisfactory concepts. As Monique Deveaux, introducing a symposium on care and justice, writes, “A care perspective relies centrally on a conception of human good and entails a deep commitment to a transformative politics.” Not only have care thinkers asked “what difference contextual moral reasoning might make to politics, but more radically, they’ve asked what it would mean to fundamentally reorder our social and political priorities to reflect the central role of care in all of our lives.”

Instead of seeing law and government or the economy as the central and appropriate determinants of society, an ethic of care might see the up-bringing of children and the fostering of trust between members of the society as the most important concerns of all. Other arrangements might then be evaluated in terms of how well or ill they contribute to the flourishing of children and the health of social relationships. That would certainly demand a radical restructuring of society. Just imagine reversing the salaries of corporate executives and those of childcare workers: Corporate executives now earn 52 times as much as the ordinary factory worker, and childcare workers usually make even less than the ordinary factory worker. When one thinks about the restructurings that would be required by taking seriously an ethic of care, the idea that an ethic of care is a conservative ethic tied to women’s traditional roles seems very implausible.

Care and Virtue

Is an ethic of care a kind of virtue ethics rather than a distinctive kind of moral theory? Some feminists find an Aristotelian approach to moral problems far more hospitable to their concerns than Kantian or utilitarian ones. Insofar as an ethic of care wishes to cultivate in persons the characteristics of a caring person and the skills of activities of caring, might an ethic of care be assimilated to virtue theory?
There are some similarities between an ethic of care and virtue theory. Both examine practices and the moral values they embody. Both see more hope for moral improvement in reforming practices than in reasoning from abstract rules. Both understand that the practices of morality must be cultivated, nurtured, shaped.

As so far developed, however, virtue theory has not paid attention to the practices of caring in which women have been so heavily engaged. Although this might be corrected, virtue theory has characteristically seen the virtues as incorporated in various traditions or traditional communities. In contrast, the ethic of care is wary of existing traditions and traditional communities: virtually all are patriarchal. It envisions caring not as practiced under male domination, but as it should be practiced in postpatriarchal society, of which we have no traditions or experience.

Virtue theory has characteristically seen the virtues as attaching to individual persons. An ethic of care, in contrast, is more concerned with relations between persons. It is a relation of caring that is seen as valuable, or faulty, not the dispositions of persons apart from this. Annette Baier has argued that trust should be seen as a central concept of morality, and has explored it in some detail. Trust is a good example of a value inherent in an ethic of care, for good caring relations require it and are characterized by it. And trust is a relation between persons not a value achievable by persons in isolation. The value of trust cannot be divided into the values of the dispositions of the persons in the relation, or to the value of the relation to the individuals involved.

For all these reasons, care should not be seen as just another component — hitherto neglected — in what critics call the “bag of virtues.” An ethic of care is an alternative moral approach of its own.

The Ethic of Care and Feminist Morality

Is feminist morality the same as an ethic of care? In my view, the answer is no. But in my view feminist morality will certainly include an ethic of care. Views that an ethic of justice alone, even revised in the light of feminist concerns, can be adequate, is, I think, mistaken. But so is the view that an ethic of care alone is sufficient. And the view that virtue ethics alone can substitute for justice or can incorporate care adequately is also, in my view, mistaken.

Recent debates among feminist moral theorists have generally moved beyond the justice versus care formulations. The questions now being posed are often about how these core values should be thought to be related or combined: How should the framework that structures justice, equality, rights, and liberty, mesh with the network that deliniates care, relatedness, and trust?

Feminist morality is surely concerned with the equality of women and with women’s rights. If we look at the work of feminist legal theorists, we can see both criticisms of the justice approach, and a determination not to lose what it can provide. Catherine MacKinnon has argued, for example, that “in the liberal state, the rule of law — neutral, abstract, elevated, pervasive — both institutionalizes the power of men over women and institutionalizes power in its male form.... Male forms of power over women are affirmatively embodied as individual rights in law.... Abstract rights authorize the male experience of the world.” And many Critical Legal Studies and feminist legal scholars have been critical of focusing even legal argumentation, much less moral argument generally, on rights. They see rights claims as promoting individualistic, self versus other conflicts, and have argued that conceptualizations of issues in terms of rights claims “limit legal
thinking and inhibit necessary social change." Carol Smart shows how one can see a "congruence" between law and "masculine culture," and she examines the way law "disqualifies women's experience" and women's knowledge. She urges feminists not to focus on law and rights in working to bring about the changes they seek.

Feminist legal theorists have also shown, however, how rights cannot be replaced by what an ethic of care alone would provide. When rights are viewed in the context of social practice rather than abstractly, they can effectively express the aspirations of a social movement and "articulate new values and political vision." Patricia Williams, for instance, argues that "although rights may not be ends in themselves, rights rhetoric has been and continues to be an effective form of discourse for blacks," whereas describing needs has not been politically effective. And Frances Olsen, well aware of the deficiencies in relying on law to reduce the subordination of women, nevertheless shows in detail how with respect to statutory rape, rights analysis can lead to reforms taking place and people's lives being changed in ways that empower women.

The area of sexual harassment illustrates the potential of legal rights to bring about social change that decreases the subordination of women. Feminist jurisprudence turned the harms that women have long experienced in sexual harassment into a form of discrimination from which they could seek to be protected by the law. Catherine Mackinnon notes that the victims of sexual harassment "have been given a forum, legitimacy to speak, authority to make claims, and an avenue for possible relief... The legal claim for sexual harassment made the events of sexual harassment illegitimate socially, as well as legally for the first time." Women now have a name for the harm of having sexual pressure imposed on them and not being in an economic position to refuse it. This may well provide a strong argument for the potential of law to bring about social change for women.

The importance to women of reproductive rights has become ever more clear as such rights are threatened and constantly challenged. Reproductive freedom is seen by most feminists as a precondition for other freedoms and for equality for women. Patricia Smith argues that "it is inconceivable that any issue that comparably affected the basic individual freedom of any man would not be under his control in a free society." As women strive to overcome their subordination in other areas of society, women's rights to control their own sexuality and reproduction and to avoid being commodified are especially crucial.

Among feminist moral as distinct from legal theorists, there has also been much appreciation of the discourse of justice and rights along with the development of an ethic of care. Not all theorists have combined an interest in both, but there has been continual mutually enlightening dialogue between those whose primary interests were in one or the other approaches. I interpret many critiques of justice and rights as critiques of the dominance of this approach. That rights arguments serve well for some domains should not be taken to indicate that they serve well for the entire spectrum of moral or political concerns, or that legal discourse should be the privileged or paradigmatic discourse of morality or social interpretation. The framework of justice and rights should be one among others rather than dominant.

Moralties of rights and justice can well be interpreted as generalizations to the whole of morality and social evaluation of ways of thinking developed in the contexts of law and public policy. Such expansions of legalistic approaches are and should be resisted by feminists. These ways of thinking are unsuitable for many contexts, and many of the contexts now thought best handled through justice and rights should be transformed so
that a care approach would be more suitable and could be seen to be so. The sexual abuse of children might be one such context. But to argue that justice and rights should not dominate our moral thinking does not mean they are dispensable. And though the law does treat persons as conceptually self-contained individuals, a conception an ethic of care can recognize as an artificial and misleading abstraction, we can also assert that for some legal and political purposes, it may be a useful abstraction as long as it is not generalized and imagined to be the appropriate concept of the person for the whole of morality.

Feminist Theorists are well aware, as well, that women must have sufficient autonomy and individual subjectivity to resist and reformulate the ties of traditional communities and families. The feminist self is not absorbed into its social relationships. Feminist critiques of communitarianism make this clear.

**Feminist Morality and Reductionism**

My own view is that care and its related concerns should be seen as the wider network within which justice and utility and the virtues should be fit. This does not mean that the latter can all be essentially reduced to aspects of care. The model of reductionism seems to be the wrong model.

Care seems to me to be the most basic of moral values. Without care as an empirically describable practice, we cannot have life at all since human beings cannot survive without it. Without some level of caring concern for other human beings we cannot have morality, and without some level of caring moral concern for all other human beings we cannot have a satisfactory moral theory. Within a network of caring relations, however, we can demand justice, fairness, rights, and out of caring concern we can determine that it is sometimes best for the sake of justice to imagine persons as abstract individuals. But these ways of thinking, we need to remember, are suitable only for limited domains, such as those of criminal law, taxation policy, commercial transactions, assuring basic human rights and basic levels of equal treatment — including in the household. While assuring basic rights is an enormously important task, it is not all that morality should concern itself with. Caring well for our children requires vastly more than simply treating them fairly and not violating their basic rights. And the discourse of justice and rights should not push care to the margins, as has happened, taking justice’s political reflection as the model of morality in general.

We need new images for the relations between justice and care, rejecting the impulse toward reductionism. The idea that one kind of value can be reduced to another, or one kind of moral recommendation to another, may be a legacy of imagining that deductive or scientific approaches are most suitable for moral understanding.

While we can acknowledge that our moral conceptions could be arranged along neat and clean lines if only the messy concerns of morality could be reduced to the Categorical Imperative or the Principle or Utility, actual experience with most moral problems and especially with those in the contexts of care — understood narrowly rather than as including all the rest — show that this is a mistaken goal. While a generally Kantian approach does seem suitable for various legal contexts, many other contexts such as those of friendship and family are not best handled with such approaches. And while utilitarian ways of thinking may be those that can often best guide the policy choices of governments, they are not well suited to upholding rights and ensuring fairness, and they are not suited for contexts such as those of family relations and friends where it is the particularity
of persons not their universal features that matters most.

If moral concerns about right action could be reduced to the cultivation of the virtues, it would simplify our efforts at moral education and at structuring society in justifiable ways. But I think they clearly cannot. Although virtue theory is not in my view reducible to theories of right action — merely equating virtue with acting in accordance with principles of right action — neither are justice or utility reducible to whatever attitudes or dispositions virtuous persons will have. We need objective standards for the care of children, the safety and health of citizens, and so forth. Virtuous dispositions fail to tell us what they are, let alone assure that we meet them.

An ethic of care, I have argued, cannot be reduced to an aspect of either kind of ethic of justice, or to virtue ethics. But if I argue for care as the wider moral network within which other moral concerns are to be placed, is this not to argue for a reduction of justice, utility, and virtue to an ethic of care?

The answer is no. We need new analogies and metaphors and images to deal with these questions. Instead of the metaphor of reduction through logical relation or conceptual analysis, perhaps we should think of a painting or a tapestry or a glass sculpture. There is an overall design within which are salient and less salient components. The overall moral design of feminist moral theory, I believe, will be one of caring relations. But within that overall design there will be a number of salient components organized around the values of justice and of utility. And there will be many interesting and detailed elements concerning the virtues.

Such a morality might lack the appeal of what various reductionist programs aim at, but fail to achieve. It might, however, offer a design we could live with. To the objection that without clear and fairly simple principles, we will not be able to teach morality to children, we should remember that children have never been taught the Principle of Utility or the Categorical Imperative. Children have been and should be taught such aspects of the overall design of morality as that we should not harm others, we should treat them fairly, and above all we should care about their well-being. We should be the sorts of persons others can trust and we should value the caring relations that connect us with those close to us and those far away with whom we share the global environment.

But how can a theory be like a work of art? A scientific theory is part of the practice of scientific inquiry, but a theory in philosophy of science is a theory about this practice. It may hold that biological theories are in some sense reducible to those in physics, or that they are not.

The practice of morality, I think, should contain many recommendations that could be thought of as moral theories for particular areas of life: economic activity, medical practice, bringing up children, and so on. But the philosophy of morality should consider whether there is or is not some one underlying theory to which the others can be reduced. It is at this level that the various theories embedded in various practices might more appropriately be thought to be features of an overall design for living good lives in caring relationships with others, rather than as abstract formulations logically reducible to simpler ones. Moral practice can certainly be thought of as an art. Perhaps it is possible to outline some general recommendations for the development of what we usually think of as art: seek to create what is beautiful and “true” independently of such pressures as those from commercial interests; strive for artistic integrity, and so on. But we do not imagine that the practice of painting can be reduced to that of needlework or to that of glassblowing. Perhaps morality in all its different forms is more like that than like the sciences. Who knows?
Notes


2 See, for instance, David Goldberg, ed., Ethical Theory and Social Issues, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1995).


5 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Nel Noddings, Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); and see Note 1.


11 See Virginia Held, Feminist Morality, Chapter 4; Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics (New York: Routledge, 1992).


18 See e.g. Marilyn Friedman, What Are Friends For? Chapter 6.

19 See e.g. Virginia Held, Feminist Morality; Joan C. Tronto, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument For an Ethic of Care (New York: Routledge, 1993); Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland, eds., Gender and International Relations (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).


22 See e.g. Marilyn Friedman, What Are Friends For?, Chapter 9.

23 Annette C. Baier, Moral Prejudices, Chapters 6-9.


28 Elizabeth M. Schneider, Ibid., p. 322.


See Patricia Smith, ed., Feminist Jurisprudence, Part IV.


For an opposing view, see Michael Slote, From Morality to Virtue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).