

“Care-Based Ethics: A Solution for Environmental Issues”

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Abstract

Now-a-days, environmental issues are the major concern for the society. It is necessary for all to think about the care for our mother i.e Nature. This paper has made the arguments on care ethics to make a better solution for environment issues. In this paper, it has been discussed, how the care ethics is applied in the framework of environmental ethics and the merits of traditional theories of ethics. The arguments have been expressed on, “why we need an alternative conception of care?” and the eradication of “isms”, which are harmful for environment. Traditional ethical theories have some different characteristics than the care ethics. Though there are many solutions made by environmental theories, but we need care ethics or eco-feminism in the present context. In this paper, the arguments have been made on behalf of eco-feminism, which is a better solution than the other remedies available for environmental diseases

Key Words: *Care Ethics, Eco-feminism, Environment issues*

Introduction:

Rising temperatures will increase also the likelihood of floods, droughts, and heat waves, effecting the food supply world-wide and could also contribute to the further extinction of many plant and animal species. All of these effects are due to the rising temperatures of climate change caused by our greenhouse gas emitting lifestyles. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations. Countless research has demonstrated the high likelihood of rising temperatures as being caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human consumption of fossil fuels. Our planet is clearly in trouble and we are in these drier straights due to our own actions.

If there was ever a time for heightened concern for not only our future, but the future of all species and our planet, the time is now. Tackling such a big problem is very difficult. Policies need to change around the entire world. But this is only one way we can begin to address such a huge and serious problem. Changing laws and policies could bear great positive effects, but changing the attitudes of individuals along with providing refined methods of dealing with environmental problems may be able to achieve even greater effects. In this paper, I hope to contribute to changing individuals attitudes as to why they should care about the environment and also describe “a practice of care” as to how we might better be able to solve environmental problems drawing upon care ethics as well as ecofeminism, and refining them, to provide the beginnings of such a practice. In the last concluding chapter, I demonstrate how a care-based method could provide better solutions to environmental problems than other non-care-based methods.

The Dilemmas of Feminist Ethics

Although we hear phrases like “going green” more often than we did ten years ago, some environmental movements, in particular ecofeminism, have fallen out of the mainstream trends of today, at least in academic philosophical circles; this may be revealed by the diminishment in the number of publications over the last ten years or so. The very tenets of ecofeminism claim that 1) oppression and domination are the root cause of not only environmental harms and the harm of sexism, but also of racism, ageism, and other common “isms” in need of eradication and that 2) in their place, we should focus on the values and practices of care. Most feminists focus on domination and oppression by men, but not all. Although ecofeminists do focus on women's struggles, they also explore the interconnectedness between the domination of women and that of nature, as well as other forms of domination, such as those previously mentioned. Since, they argue, domination is interconnected, by focusing on female domination, they will subsequently also combat other forms of domination. Furthermore, ecofeminists argue that we ought to see ourselves as connected with and in relation with nature, rather than removed from it, simply a resource. Roughly, nature “takes care” of us, so we ought to “take care” of nature. My paper reflects upon how a refined care-based ethics could provide better guidance and solutions to environmental issues than non-care-based theories. In particular, I first investigate the phenomenon of care, provide some of the theoretical and psychological framework for the ethics of care, and then apply this framework to environmental issues.

Not unlike ecofeminism, care ethics has faced similar accusations and sustained only *limited* attention throughout the academic literature, and it has yet to achieve the same prestigious status in ethics as Kantianism, utilitarianism or virtue ethics. Care ethics – what some categorize as a subset of feminist ethics – also has been denounced for being too broad and difficult to delineate. This classic version of care ethics does not adopt a rigid normative theory, as do traditional ethical theories, but typically proposes

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vague guidelines and general descriptions of what “care” and “caring” are. Such unfettered methodology of care ethicists often faces opposition with those coming from the traditional ethical camps of Kantianism, utilitarianism, or virtue ethics.

For instance, utilitarian’s and Kantians require some kind of singular ruling maxim. On the one hand, utilitarian’s such as Jeremy Bentham contend that one should act on a principle of utility, aiming for the greatest good for the greatest number. On the other hand, Kantians argue that one should act out of a sense of duty, adhering to a moral norm of respecting persons. These traditions are concerned with determining right action. Contrastingly, virtue ethicists urge that one should cultivate certain virtuous character traits. Virtue, according to Aristotle, is the mean that lies between two opposing vices; for instance, the mean or virtue between the vice of cowardice and the vice of foolhardiness is courage. Virtue ethicists, hence focus on a different aim: becoming a good person, a virtuous person.

Care Ethics

In contrast to the above approaches, care ethicists, generally speaking, do not advocate such a concise and agreed-upon maxim nor focus simply on right action or being good persons; they claim that our moral life is more complicated than other ethical theories purport. Care ethics can perhaps be understood best by highlighting how it differs from traditional ethics, particularly Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. First, according to care ethicists themselves, care theories emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships, whereas traditional ethical theories value independence and autonomy of the individual. Secondly, traditional theories typically utilize universal and impartial abstract principles, but care ethics theories take a more contextual approach, examining the details of a concrete situation, where partiality may be exercised. Finally, traditional ethical theories, for the most part, tend to value reason over emotion when making moral decisions, care theories, by contrast, emphasizes the crucial role that emotions play when facing such dilemmas. There are numerous other claimed differences between care ethics and traditional ethics, but I have only discussed some of the most central here.

Just as care ethicists criticize traditional ethicists for the differences mentioned above, so do traditional ethicists criticize care ethicists for those differences as well. In the end, both care ethics and ecofeminists face similar difficulties. Neither theory can be summed up into a somewhat concise and generally agreed-upon maxim nor “slogan,” if you will, as can the competing traditional ethical theories, and the competing theories expect all theories, feminist or otherwise, to fit into their traditional molds. When feminist theories (like care ethics and ecofeminism) fail to conform, they have been looked down upon as lacking rigor and clarity. Some feminists would argue that they are simply conveying a different perspective or conceptual scheme and that neither of these perspectives is correct or incorrect; they are only different. So it seems we are faced with a dilemma. Feminists want their point of view to be taken seriously, but by its very design, traditionalists take the feminist perspective to be underdeveloped and lacking in sophistication. The feminists can either reformulate their theories to fit into the traditional (and some may say, male-biased) mold, but they thereby undermine some of the central tenets of feminist theory: its novelty and rejection of male-biases. Or, feminists can continue on par for the course and give up trying to convince the traditionalists of their alternative conceptual scheme, but this latter route, again, undermines another tenet of feminist theory: being taken seriously. So where do we go from here?

A Possible Solution

For the dialogue to continue, those skeptical of a feminist perspective surely need to become more open minded to the possibility of a different conceptual scheme. If neither side can look beyond their own prejudices, no headway will ever be gained. Just as the skeptic of feminism needs to remain open minded, perhaps the feminist should be open to describing his or her ideas in a variety of ways, even ways which they have traditionally avoided in the last decades, believing them to be “male-biased.” By describing feminist theories in ways that may be conceived by some as “male-biased,” such as introducing principles, the feminist may be able to locate greater common ground between herself and those skeptical of feminism and doing so may create the possibility of further advancements in ethics for all considered. A large portion of this paper investigates the phenomenon of care with this in mind and applies this framework to environmental issues.

At this point, the following question presents itself to the skeptic: why do we need care ethics or ecofeminism or feminist theory? At the very least, these theories deserve careful examination for reasons presented by John Stuart Mill. Society can never expect to progress unless new ideas are explored; our current norms become dogma as they are never challenged, and society ultimately stagnates. Care ethicists, ecofeminists and feminists alike have all demonstrated deficiencies with other non-feminist theories and offered promising alternatives. Alternatively, some theorists have strengthened what may once have been deemed “male-biased” theories by refashioning them into decidedly feminist thought. Care theorists such as Virginia Held and Joan Tronto (along with many others) present serious challenges to traditional ethics and developed theories which are capable of providing favorable results when faced with moral dilemmas. Sibyl Schwarzenbach, and Carol Gould offer political theories with a feminist perspective, which bring to light notions typically ignored in (male-minded) politics, such as care and friendship, ultimately enriching theories of justice and human rights. To ignore this enormous body of work would be merely a dogmatic move, stifling any possibility of progress; hence, in the name of progress, we are required to examine and consider the aforementioned theories carefully.

Why We Need a Definition and an Alternative Conception of Care

Some care theorist now may argue that a definition of care is not needed. Perhaps we already have an adequate idea of what care is without needing a precise definition; I would argue otherwise. As the literature reveals, there is notable divergence between care theorists' accounts of care. If we cannot determine more precisely in what our conception of care consists, then there is no way we can improve upon the conception of care nor its practice. If one only has a vague idea about the practice and skill of snowboarding and little about its techniques, one likely could not do it all, let alone well. Similarly, the same would seem to apply

to an account of care. Without a clearer conception of in what caring consists and ways in which it is best practiced, one likely could not care well. So too, providing a definition of care may provide greater common ground between the traditional ethicist and care ethicist, since traditional ethicists argue for the necessity of clear definitions over vague phenomenological accounts.

I argue that care is not just a sentiment, but also a virtue. Care is a sentiment, a disposition to feel various emotions such as concern and sympathy. The virtue of care involves the appropriate caring feelings, desires, motives reasoning and action..in care ethics the caring person plays an important role, who practices care guided by caring principles.

In this paper, I have explored how an ethics of care may serve to provide better environmental solutions all around over non-care based theories.

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