

Reason vs Emotion – In Search of an Alternative Moral Framework

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Abstract

In every part of this world, there is gender discrimination between men and women. Society thinks that gender discrimination is wired into biology and expects some ideal qualities from men and women. In this way, men and women are situated in different societal positions. For this very reason, gender discrimination is considered as created by society. According to feminists, gender discrimination is expressed in society mainly in three ways. Firstly, in daily life, secondly, in patriarchy, and finally, in the theoretical sphere, known as androcentrism. Mainstream ethics is based on rationality, neutrality, impartiality, objectivity, and universality, but feminists note that there is hidden gender politics in making a neutral perspective of mainstream ethics. In mainstream theory, all the gendered characteristics of men become the ideal qualities of humans in disguise of neutrality, while all the attributes of women remain absent. According to feminist thinkers, mature moral thought looks at the complexities within the various dimensions of human feelings, emotions, and experiences, making the question of emotions a central concept to moral education. Such ethics developed by feminists are called care ethics. Finally, some feminists assert that although care- and justice-based mainstream ethics provide different frameworks for morality, neither is complete without the other. Therefore, if there is a harmonious coexistence between the two, it will probably represent an ethics with maturity.

Keywords: sexual difference, gender discrimination, mainstream ethics, care ethics, reason, emotion.

Introduction

In every part of this world, there is gender discrimination between men and women. Society believes that this gender discrimination is wired into their biology. Sexual differences between men and women are created by their different reproductive capabilities. Gender difference is created by society, which expects some ideal qualities from men, such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, activeness, bravery, and abstract thinking ability. On the other hand, the ideal attributes of women expected

by society are kindness, patience, soft-spokenness, etc. In this way, men and women are situated in different societal positions, and all the qualities or traits of men are identified as ideal qualities of human beings. For this reason, gender discrimination is considered as created by this society. Eventually, women become marginal, and men reside in the centre of society. Consequently, all the traits of men are valorised by society over the traits of women.

According to feminists, gender discrimination is expressed in society mainly in three ways. In daily life, some behaviours and traits of women are seen as inferior to those of men – this form of gender discrimination is called sexism. Secondly, in patriarchy, a power structure posits men at the top and women at the bottom. Finally, we can see the effect of gender discrimination in the theoretical sphere, known as Androcentrism. In mainstream theory, there is a binary of reason and emotion. Reason is considered superior to emotion. Reason is associated with the thought processes of men, while emotion is associated with women. In this way, in the theoretical space as well, women become marginal; they grow up through different experiences by imbibing all the traits of women expected by society. Generally, women seek their identity with relation and express themselves as related. Thus, women prioritise connectedness and are guided by emotion to maintain relationships. Women are associated with concrete thinking, relativity, context-sensitivity, subjectivity, etc. On the other hand, men build their identities or personalities through detachment and autonomy. As men have historically been more associated with the public sphere, they do not prioritise relations in their lives. So, they are habituated to abstract thinking, reason-oriented thinking, neutrality, objectivity, etc.

Mainstream ethics is based on reason. This type of ethics offers a neutral theoretical base that deals with human values. The presumption of morality and ethics is based on the idea that all men are rational. But feminists show us that this type of gender-neutral theory pretends to be neutral by representing human values. Feminists point out that there is a hidden gender politics in the question of making a neutral perspective of mainstream ethics. In the mainstream thought process, all the traits of men are valorised, and those traits become feted as human virtues. On the other hand, the characteristics of women remain absent there. All the gendered attributes of men become the qualities of humans in the name of neutrality.

This paper explores the possibility of arriving at an alternative framework of morality where we can discuss the heterogeneity of this society by focusing more on the differences and diversity within the members of society. In search of an alternative ethics, this paper analyses the basic ideas of mainstream ethics and points out the flaws in these ideas in addressing heterogeneity or plurality. To accommodate discussion on plurality, this paper takes support of the tenets of Care Ethics. However, the discussion concludes with the realisation that a mature form of ethics can be reached by harmoniously blending rationality and emotion.

The Idea of Mainstream Ethics

From the time of the Greek philosopher Plato, reason has received more importance than emotion in mainstream epistemology. Reason is considered higher than emotion as it is associated with objectivity, neutrality, universality, public and cultural domain, and something that is mental and connected with the thought process of men.

In the issue of finding a solution for any problem, reason has been prioritised in mainstream theory. Maturity in the psychological and moral fields has always been viewed through the lens of reason. Mainstream ethics emphasises principle and justice, not the significance of lived experience for an individual. Objectivity and reason have received more importance in justice-based ethics than emotion, co-feeling, etc. Emotion, co-feeling, and empathy are considered useless elements to building justice-based ethics.

Mainstream ethics believes in a universal, a priori perspective. In this ethics, it is expected that the moral agent would be guided by abstract thinking and, irrespective of the context or situation, would make a neutral ethical decision. In this way, justice-based ethics become neutral irrespective of all context, situation, gender, history, and experience of an individual and are preserved through the principle of fairness.

All mainstream ethicists believe that abstraction is helpful in building a neutral theory. However, the emphasis on abstraction erases some members' social participation, even though society depends on them. According to classical ethics, the more a person grows through isolation, the more developed their ability for independent thought. Autonomy is seen here as the content of the matured human will. These autonomous, independent thinkers select those reason-based general principles as the standards of moral judgment.

We can think about the theories of Kant and Rawls as a paradigm of mainstream ethics. The sense of duty is imbibed in Kant's ethics. According to Kant, actions acquire moral status only where they are performed out of duty. Kant believes that man is a rational being and his reason is the source of all morality. So, the source of moral authority is not external. Morality is dictated by practical reason. Since his practical reason is inherent in man, he can judge the morality of his own actions. In this way, he identifies man's autonomy. Kant thinks that man has all his desires, interests, and intellect, but even so, if man is guided and controlled by reason, he will rise above his petty self-interest, fulfil his duty, and possess 'goodwill'. According to Kant, this goodwill motivates the individual to perform duty. He says the 'dictates of reason' above individual self-interest would be unconditional. This unconditional imperative is called a Categorical Imperative by Kant. The criterion by which the morality of an action is to be judged must have such a force that the individual rises above considerations of self-interest and utility in all circumstances. He even wants to construct the moral standard in such a way that impersonal subjectivity becomes religiously neutral and universal. Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative is a central concept in his moral philosophy and has several formulations. The most commonly discussed formulation is – The Formula

of Universal Law: ‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.’¹

This means that before you act, consider whether the rule guiding your action could be applied universally to everyone in a similar situation. If it could be a universal law, then your action is morally permissible. This principle is a universal moral principle whereby the performance of moral duty is possible without questioning an individual experience. If everyone acts rationally and observes morality, such actions become universal and a priori. Thus, when a principle of action can be universalised, and there is no contradiction in its form, it is considered the duty of everyone to follow that principle.

Now we will discuss John Rawls, one of the proponents of Justice-based ethics. John Rawls, a prominent political philosopher, developed two fundamental principles of justice in his theory, which are presented in his book “A Theory of Justice.”²

1. First Principle (Equal Liberty Principle):

Each person has an equal right to the most extensive basic liberties compatible with similar liberties for others. This principle emphasises that everyone should have the same fundamental rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech and the right to vote.

2. Second Principle (Difference Principle and Fair Equality of Opportunity):

- **Fair Equality of Opportunity:** Offices and positions should be open to everyone under fair equality of opportunity conditions. This means people should have equal chances to succeed regardless of their social background.
- **Difference Principle:** Social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. In other words, any inequalities should work to improve the situation of the worst-off individuals.

These principles aim to create a fair and just society by ensuring equal liberties and addressing inequalities to benefit everyone, particularly those who are least advantaged. Here, we must remember the following two preconditions of Rawls —

- 1) Man is a rational being and, therefore, a rationality maximiser.
- 2) All relationships to him are contractual.

He then mentions a kind of experience-transcendental veil of ignorance, behind which the two principles of justice are to be chosen. This veil covers an individual’s position in human society, race, ability, concept of good and evil, mental capacity,

¹ Kant Immanuel, *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, p.29.

² Rawls John, *A Theory of Justice*, United States, 1971.

distribution of natural resources, etc. As such, these two principles will be impartial irrespective of context. This type of social arrangement would benefit all members of the society, where both the least and the most advantaged groups would benefit equally. A hierarchy will persist in this society because the distribution will be unequal, but primarily, as much will be given to whoever needs it. These basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health, and education for all should be met so that no one lives below the poverty line. After providing these basic needs equally to all, whatever surplus remains will be unequally distributed. He posited the field of unequal distribution so that after meeting the basic needs of life, each person sharpens their skill for further development. According to John Rawls, each person shall act as an independent individual unit and be contractually related to others. If there is any abuse anywhere, they will resort to justice for protest. Our duties and rights are logically / rationally determined. If it is not rational, it will not be considered as ethical. Changes can occur within the system itself.

Feminists argue that decisions made in isolation or detachment are not to be understood in reality since no thought can be valid if it is not judged in its specific socio-historical context. Feminist theorists view rationality as an essential component of ideal moral judgment. They do not consider objectivity and rationality to be the only element in moral thought. Instead, they give more weight to sensitive, emotional relationships in discussions of morality and refuse to be guided by specific predetermined rules. According to them, the true meaning of morality lies in the sensibility of the moral agent and in its adherence to certain subjects like adhocism, relation, responsibility, care, context-sensitivity, etc. This alternative to Justice-based ethics believes that reason, principles, autonomy, and neutrality cannot provide valid morality. This type of ethics discusses mainly two significant flaws in mainstream ethics. Firstly, mainstream ethics fails to talk about the individual voice. As a result, moral judgments become detached, de-contextualised, and de-humanised. Abstract principles do not concern others and have nothing to do with an individual's actions. Consequently, a majority of the members of society show their reverence towards moral conduct and maintain distant relations among themselves, i.e., they maintain arms-length distances between them. Society is guided by reason-based, neutral, abstract laws and principles. However, because of this attitude towards ethics, women, children, and older people gradually become marginal. The rights and demands of these marginal people have been ignored and, therefore, remain unknown to everyone. Secondly, mainstream ethics is bound to fail because of its foundation in purely abstract, rational philosophy. Logical philosophy seeks to understand human well-being in terms of intellect and reason. Mainstream ethicists ignore the contextual complexity of human experience. They completely deny the limitations of the human and emotional aspects. They consider emotional feelings as irrational thinking. According to feminist thinkers, mature moral thought looks at the complexities within the various dimensions of human feelings, emotions, experiences, etc., making the question of emotions central to moral education. Feminist ethics tries to solve the problem of oppression and suppression of women

and, above all, the issues of the marginalised. Such an ethics developed by feminists is called Care Ethics. The proponents of Care Ethics are Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Nancy Chodorow, et al. This morality is not homogenised but includes care, compassion, empathy, feelings, etc. for others. Let us now look at some of the features of this ethics.

Basic Tenets Of Care Ethics

The concept of contextuality is a necessary concept in this ethics, from which situational ethics naturally follows. In this ethics, moral decisions are made on personal relationships with care. What suits one person in one situation may not be suitable in another. In the context of care, areas of ethics emphasise subjective experiences. Situational, relational judgments depend on a person's emotions and the areas of complexity within their relationships. Situations are rarely similar in individuals' lived experiences, so there is little opportunity to make homogenised decisions. Care ethics teaches us to be context-sensitive so that there is no place for universality in the context in which a person is a victim of a specific event in their lived experiences.

This ethics emphasises the needs of others more than the construction of an ideal. Care ethics emphasises individual attention and being more empathetic to the questions of moral conflict in personal experience. This ethics never gives importance to the detached individual but seeks to solve all moral problems concerning the good for humanity and society in general with an eye to the welfare of society as a whole. Care ethics believes that a person's socio-cultural values help them construct their form of life through a world of beliefs.

Care ethics gives importance to the concrete and particular. This type of feminist ethics analyses and examines specific practical areas. Yet this ethics thinks more about women's experiences, as this is an error of omission for women in mainstream ethics. This type of feminist ethics differs from mainstream ethics in two significant respects — the first is that whereas mainstream ethics emphasises the universal view, this alternative ethics emphasises particularity. Second, while abstract universality is an essential topic of discussion in mainstream ethics, care ethics constructs the concept of morality by prioritising lived experience. This replaces the principle-based ethical system of mainstream ethics with context-based ethics.

According to care ethics, personality is gradually developed through various societal relations. A unique feature of this ethics is that the individual grows up not only from their latent energies but also that they are intimately related to others. This ethical decision-making approach is more concerned with the moral agent's intimate, specific story and is interested in explaining and analysing its social and relational contexts. The right and wrongness of moral action can only be judged appropriately when it is concerned with relation, connectedness, and responsiveness. It is never seen from an unbiased, neutral, logical perspective. Abstract principles can never be merely logical and mechanically applied where

the principle is seen from the perspective of care. Care ethics holds that moral truth is hidden in the individual's lived experience.

Care ethics is based only on psychology. According to this theory, an individual's identity is never constructed through detachment but through relations. Therefore, care ethics presented the moral voice to the structure of relationships through the construction of women's personalities or identities. Although the lived experience of women shapes this morality, they argue that the moral voice of the related self applies to all individuals. In mainstream psychology, Freud, Kohlberg, Piaget, and others' theories of personality formation reveal that a man's personality is developed through isolation and detachment. On the other hand, a woman's personality is formed through relationships. Mainstream ethical theorists such as Kant and Rawls speak of the atomic or detached self, and their eternal psychological discourse proves that this kind of detached self gives more importance to reason over emotion. According to mainstream ethics, one should have an independent self by transcending all attachments and connectedness to grow into a mature personality. Mainstream ethics believes that various family relations, care, trust, empathy, and sympathy should be understood in the hierarchical structure of society or on the basis of contract. Mainstream ethics believes in the body-mind binary. According to feminists, women have historically been excluded from mainstream philosophy. Women have always been regarded as the 'Other', as opposed to ideal values. Over the ages, women have been identified as 'Other' by associating them with undefined subjects. Feminists criticise the mainstream ethicists on this point. Mainstream ethics believes that the mind can exist separately without the body. However, according to feminists, the concept of subjectivity arises out of the different experiences that women have with the body, and although rational thinking is associated with the mind, both concepts actually reside in the same body. According to feminists, the rational ability of thought subordinates the questions of other bodily feelings and emotions.

Care Ethics emphasises the importance of listening to others when resolving ethical conflicts. According to Carol Gilligan, since there is no place for dialogue in mainstream ethics, such ethics fail to uphold the dignity of every individual. According to care ethics, we should listen to others. The mere acknowledgement of the importance of a related soul is not enough. The caregiver's compassion or care for others about the oppressed or downtrodden is necessary. This ethics allows others to speak so that appropriate moral decisions can be made by speaking according to others' needs. No moral situation is the same. So, moral behaviour cannot be the same. A commitment to represent care is never violated by a combination of interests or principles in respecting the needs of others. It is only after listening to the other person that one perceives the other's situations and emotions, and only by understanding them can one come to any moral conclusion. It is only after listening to the other person that one feels the other's emotions and situation, and only by understanding this does this ethics acknowledge plurality and heterogeneity by listening to everyone's problems and attending to each

person's specific context. Care ethics is much more comfortable with equivocal ambiguity. Proponents of this ethics say there is no clear binary in soul-other relationships, and this ambiguity hides the ethics' central message. According to care ethics, the situation of a moral agent is also fuzzy. According to them, to act in complete ambiguity is a sign of maturity, and on the other hand, acknowledging a clear binary to moral judgment symbolises moral immaturity.

When different ideals are situated in the social context, there is a tendency to create a polarisation of power. Therefore, a top-down power structure is made in this society. The Care Ethicist never believes in the homogenisation of ideals. According to them, while living with each other in the universe, people will share the power by relating to each other. According to Carol Gilligan, reflexive connectivity and raising voices is the right way to maintain social relationships. Achieving genuine autonomy does not require an exit from the relationship. This ethics does not recognise the need to construct the autonomy of the atomic, detached self through exit. In care ethics, one can bring about change in the decision-making process through dialogue and raising one's voice. In that case, no supreme universal moral decision is imposed on anyone. The main goal of care ethics is to make correct moral decisions based on the needs of each person, i.e. this ethics respects differences and does not ignore anyone as powerless. Instead, it gives an assurance of the decentralisation of power in society.

Many care ethicists, however, argue that their ethics have no actual conflict with justice,³ and there is no conflict with justice in showing respect towards contextual variation of an individual's specific experiences. According to care ethics, the diverse needs of each person are respected, and it becomes possible to value diversity and heterogeneity through mutual understanding, empathy, and connectedness. Thus, there is considerable room for ethical judgment in the case of an individual's situation. Mary Wollstonecraft believed that we need to feel before we think. We cannot obtain true world knowledge through moral standards and philosophical knowledge alone. It is also gained through learning, moral understanding, correcting wrongs, and valuing emotion. According to Wollstonecraft, emotions should be guided by moral principles, which include valuing feelings and making rational decisions about which emotions to value and which to ignore. Wollstonecraft's own writings demonstrate that reason, feeling, and thinking are all important components of moral personality. She observed that Kant said poets and all men who perceive or think of some subtle beauty definitely have lively thoughts and touch the sublime.⁴ According to Wollstonecraft, humans have the ability to think rationally. As a result, a sense of empathy and desire for aesthetic beauty is central to the social and moral development of human beings.

³ Kiss, Elizabeth, 'Justice', in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, p.487-99.

⁴ Green Karen, 'Reason and Feeling: Resisting the Dichotomy', in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, p.395.

She believes that emotions broaden and open our minds. The urge to be accepted by others strengthens our efforts to bring out the good in us. A rational study of well-being can never be completed without the experience of emotions and the capacity for co-feeling, where both reason and emotions are equally important. Feminist Philosopher Karen Green argues in her essay 'Reason and Feeling: Resisting The Dichotomy' that by understanding the extent of another's suffering, one may be interested in avoiding such suffering for oneself rather than caring about the suffering of others. A person who is not empathetic towards others does not understand the suffering of others. When a person is sensitive, they can see and feel the pain of others to some extent. Karen Green says those who are blind about care, much like colour-blind people, have a flawed moral sense or a deficiency in vision.⁵ People always seek a motivation to act morally, which never arises from rational self-interest. In this context, we can say about the need for care for moral motivation, i.e. we give care to others in the hope of receiving care for ourselves. So, he will not only be motivated to do good for others but also think that the other person will stand in his aid. In this way, the person will create a responsibility towards others. Our moral obligation is not limited to the direct consequences of our actions but also demands attention to indirect consequences of how our actions affect our moral life, mentality, emotions, and respect for others. However, Green says that those who think that focusing only on neutrality raises contradictions in making the theory of equality fail to assess that only compassion and emotions are not enough to do good for others. In various situations, there will be times when we need to examine and introspect our own feelings. In that case, there is a need to prove one's own behaviour to others with the help of reason. According to Elizabeth Kiss, critics of the method of abstraction argue that feminists may use this method in building their theory. On the other hand, justice-based ethics can also be contextual. Feminists also use abstraction in building their theories, and there is no exception. Despite the importance of context, according to Kymlica, the task of deciding whether context is morally relevant or irrelevant is essentially impossible without the guidance of moral principles. Evaluating moral principles without contextual applicability is meaningless, just as moral principles are without moral instincts. Kiss says that as a result of abstraction, in justice-based ethics, the issue of women has been omitted over a long period. On the other hand, she tries to show that in the revised form of ethics, we have to be more concerned about the particular context of an individual.

If the central goal of feminist justice theory is to include all in moral and social life, it follows that planning policy or principles and practices ignore the specific, particular experience of justice-based theory. Here, the feminist is looking for a general perspective in which no one is given more importance than others; this neutral stance will be reconstructed where the question of equal rights is framed by also considering the differences of the members of society. But the question of attention to this distinction may lead to a neutrality equated with a society's top-

⁵ Green Karen, I bid, p.397.

down power structure. In this regard, feminists should be careful about neutrality. Feminists should take into account the diversity and stratification of society in the building of their theory. However, it should never be assumed that impartiality is inappropriate and unnecessary in the framework of feminist ethics. According to Kiss, first of all, to properly organise the statement of feminists, one must also proceed with other aspects of mainstream theory in mind. Secondly, theories should be abstracted in such a way that their statements are easily understood by all. After all, she wants to say that both principles and practice will be equally helpful to feminists in constructing gender ethics. In other words, one should not deny the need for moral principles as well as context sensitivity. Unquestioningly guided by the idea of care alone in a situation of injustice would not be an indicator of moral goodness but would be anti-justice. Care and Justice-based ethics provide different frameworks for morality, but neither is complete and cannot lead to a complete morality without the other. In this connection, we can recall Val Plumwood⁶, who talked about many-valued logic. Plumwood said if we look at the mainstream two-valued logic, we can see the effect of this very logic in patriarchal society also, where we can find the different ideal traits of men and women and the clear binary between reason and emotion of their respective thought processes. However, according to Val Plumwood, this clear binary is not really possible because there is indeed an ambiguity between them, and the distinct forms of the two cannot be discerned. Similarly, there is no clear division between justice and care; the two types of ethics never conflict because they are complementary parts of each other. Therefore, if there is a harmonious coexistence between them, it will probably represent an ethics with maturity.

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