

## The Ethics of Care

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The ethics of care is an emerging discipline developed by feminist ethicists in the latter half of the 20th century. It has gradually gained support from non-feminist ethicists and is now examined not as a feminist ethics but as a possible general ethical theory.

Care ethics has three main characteristics:

- It views the human being as interdependent, who values caring relationships and recognizes the family as the primary setting where interdependence is evident and caring relationships are cultivated.
- It recognizes the moral value of emotional feelings and emotion-based virtues such as benevolence, empathy, receptivity, and sensitivity.
- It acknowledges the moral value of partiality in intimate relationships, such as those defined by family ties and close friendships.

This article considers each of these characteristics, notes criticism from traditional ethicists, examines the Unificationist perspective, and suggests that it offers the basis for a global ethic.



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**Interdependence.** Major proponents of this theory such as Carol Gilligan, Virginia Held and Nel Noddings argue that dominant modern ethics, such as Kantian ethics and utilitarianism which they characterize as ethics of justice, were built upon the assumption that the human being is an autonomous, rational, independent individual.

Care ethicists disagree. They point out the fact that no human can survive without caring adults who nurture and raise him or her at the early stages of life. Later in life, one also becomes dependent upon others who take care of them. It is an illusory view, care ethics theorists argue, that a human being is independent. Rather, they argue that an adequate ethical theory must be built upon the understanding that human beings are essentially interdependent.

This insight is similar to the Unificationist understanding of co-existence. One's identity is not an isolated, atomic entity. It is intertwined with others.

Although traditional ethics in the West starts from a state or a society and moves down to family roles, care ethicists reverse the order. They argue that morality is established in the family first and then is extended to the state or society. Care ethics has brought a family and home to the forefront of moral discourse.

**Emotion-based virtues.** Whereas dominant modern ethics pays little attention to the fact of caring in human life, an ethics of care argues for the moral relevance of caring and being cared for as the basis of moral reasoning.

Emotion has been often dismissed as unreliable or even an obstacle to sound moral judgments. "To be emotional" was nearly equated to being "irrational." An ethics of care values "sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness." Care ethicists stress the importance of these emotion-based virtues to bring peace and reconciliation in conflicts. Thus, an ethics of care is recognized for its practical value.

**Partiality.** Dominant modern ethical theories recognize moral reasoning as the pursuit of impartiality. Despite one's natural inclinations to be partial towards certain people, e.g., family and friends, modern ethics takes those emotional feelings as "natural" and defines moral reasoning as an attempt to overcome those partial feelings. Impartiality is thus the primary requirement in ethical reasoning.

An ethics of care, on the other hand, finds moral value in special, partial, caring relationships themselves. A care ethics starts from particular experiences, primarily found in family relationships, and extends them to other people.

## Criticisms

Traditional ethicists level several criticisms of an ethics of care. Critics argue, for example, that care is not intrinsically good. A person must care about the right things, have the right set of values, and “the person must care in the right way. Since the judgment of right and wrong is external to care and outside of the framework of care ethics, they dismisses a possibility of an ethics of care.”

Second, if an ethics of care recognizes the value of emotional feelings and values partiality in relationships, how can one avoid unfair favoritism? We can extend this reasoning to racial groups, the nation, and other communities. If partial caring is morally justifiable, how can one avoid racism, nationalism and other sectarianism?

Third, its virtues can be applied to any family or community or organization including crime organizations or tyrannical families. Filial piety to a superior in a criminal organization or a tyrant can conflict with fidelity to the general public.

Fourth, emotional feelings can turn into negative ones such as hatred, vengeful feelings, and resentment. If, for example, a person one deeply cares for is hurt by someone else, one can develop resentment and vengeful feelings against the person who caused the harm.

## A Unificationist Perspective

Unification ethics shares some common perspectives with an ethics of care: the moral relevance of the family and recognition of the value of emotional feelings. Hence, some criticisms of an ethics of care are also relevant to Unification ethics.

Unification Ontology has two fundamental concepts of being: Individual Embodiment of Truth and Connected Body. When this perspective is applied to human existence, it gives two ways of seeing a human being. Each human being is a uniquely individuated manifestation of truth and, at the same time, he or she is an interdependent existence.

In ethical terms, these points of view signify the moral autonomy of the individual and the individual’s interdependence with others. Ethical theories such as Kantian ethics are built on the former point of view, and care ethics builds its theory on the latter. Unification ethics is built upon these dual co-primordial principles.

Yet, how do these two concepts relate? Is either one of them primary? Does ethical theory give primacy to the moral autonomy of an individual as a rational agent, or to the relationships in which the individual finds him or herself?

In Unificationist terminology, one’s “heart” primarily defines who that person is. Thus, relationships with others are built into the moral self. In other words, the morally autonomous individual exists and defines his or her identity through relationships.

Nevertheless, Unificationism still presupposes the moral autonomy of an individual. Unificationism argues that an individual has a realm of freedom in which no one can intervene; even God cannot intervene. The moral responsibility of the individual rests on this point.

The Unification Theory of Human Nature identifies three human natures as essential: heart (love), logos (reason) and creativity. These three traits are co-primordial and work together. The key element is how one can balance reasoned principles and emotional feelings in a given situation.

From the Unificationist perspective, a moral judgment is a synthetic balancing act that involves impartial reasoning and partial emotional feelings, rules and cases, motives and consequences, different virtues to different objects, and considering specific contexts and situations. Thus, moral discourse is comparable to a hermeneutic, i.e., interpretive act. Interpretation is a complex, synthetic act that involves considering both part and whole, rules and contexts. For this reason, Unificationism recognizes the element of creativity in addition to reason and love.

Unificationism agrees with care ethics on the moral relevance of emotional feelings. It also agrees with rationalist ethics and recognizes the crucial role of reason. Reason discerns, guides, and prescribes what actions should be taken to make love truthful and right. In Unificationism, love is the whole context of thoughts, cognition, experience, and action. Although reason is the primary faculty of moral discourse, reason alone does not make life meaningful. Love makes life meaningful. Unificationism views the cultivation of heart as the ultimate purpose of life.

Unificationism distinguishes authentic love from inauthentic love by the presence or absence of truth. Reason, as a primary faculty to discern truth from falsity, prescribes human actions to make love truthful.

Truth is embedded in authentic love, and its absence leads to inauthentic love. Rational understanding of truth, cultivation of caring heart, and character building by repeated practice are co-primordial elements of ethics. Furthermore, every moral decision is made in a concrete, unique circumstance by a particular individual. Dynamic interplay among reason, love, and action take unique forms in creative decisions by moral agents.

Unification ethics is a virtue ethics based upon the family. It holds that love is manifested in human relationships in the family in the form of parental love, conjugal love, children's love, and love among siblings. Thus, Unificationism agrees with care ethics that the family is the central setting where interdependent caring relationships are naturally found and cultivated.

Among love relationships in a family, Unificationism considers conjugal love as the basis for sexual ethics. One of the unique perspectives in Unificationist ontology is the principle of *yang* (masculinity) and *yin* (femininity), which in an ethical context indicates the relationship between masculinity and femininity.

Unification ethics therefore, has a potential to develop a gender-based approach in ethics, just as care ethics does. For example, Unification ethics views the conjugal relationship as the manifestation of the *yang-yin* principle. Accordingly, sexual ethics is not a marginal practical ethics as many suppose but a central component of Unification ethics. This integration of sexual ethics into a main ethical theory distinguishes Unification ethics from other ethical theories including care ethics; care ethics is vague on the concept of marriage and its approach to sexual ethics.

### **Partiality and Impartiality: Is There a Solution?**

The problem of partiality and impartiality is probably one of the most difficult problems for both care ethics and rationalist ethics.

In questioning how we can morally justify partial caring of special people, care ethics maintains that caring for one's own children, spouse, and parents as "special" is natural. Rationalist ethics, on the other hand, demands one overcome these "natural feelings" and pursue impartial judgments.

How does one reconcile the two approaches?

Admittance of partial emotional relationships seems to lead to favoritism, nepotism, and by extension racism, nationalism and sectarianism. If one feels special intimate feeling with people of the same racial origin, it can open the door to racism. Some principle of impartiality seems necessary to avoid unfair favoritism and nepotism. The question is what kind of, how, and to what extent an impartial principle is to be adopted within an ethics that accepts the moral relevance of partial emotional feelings.

The Unificationist framework of the part-and-whole dynamic can be adopted in an attempt to accommodate both impartial and partial principles. Each being has internal constitutive parts and, at the same time, is a part of the larger whole.

With this part-and-whole concept, one can apply both partial and impartial approaches at each level. The question is how to balance the two. Partial caring is not only justified but necessary to preserve each part. In a family, partial caring of each member is necessary and morally justifiable. Yet, fairness is also required in caring for the wellbeing of the whole family. Similarly, both partial caring and fairness are necessary for a community or an organization. Stated generally, there needs to be both at each level: partial caring for each part and fairness among all the parts for the wellbeing of the whole. This part-and-whole reasoning can be applied to every layer of society.

Unificationism views the world as having numerous layers of part-and-whole relationships. The fundamental unit is, nevertheless, the family in which interdependency and happiness is rooted. Unificationism extends the concept of a family to the world and views it as "one world under God." Having a theistic framework, however, raises theological questions such as the fairness of God's love and the concept of God.

In Unificationism, a personal and intimate relationship with God opens the way to an impartial perspective because God is a caring parent who loves all humankind. According to Unificationism, God is both a personal parent for each individual and the parent of all humankind. By developing an intimate, personal relationship with God, one can experience God's caring heart for all humankind. Consequently, the deeper one's relationship is with God, the more expansive one's heart becomes. Therefore, one's intimate relationship with God allows one to love others from this parental, impartial perspective that cares for all people.

## **Toward A Global Ethic**

Caring for a particular person can turn into hatred, resentment, and even vengeful feelings if the person cared for was hurt by someone else. One way to resolve the problem of resentment is through the Unificationist practice of intercultural, international, interracial, and interreligious marriage.

In Unificationism, the relationships found in the family extend to the whole world to constitute a global family under God, the universal parent. The idea that all people are members of the same “one family under God” can be the basis for a global ethic. Such a global ethical theory based on the idea of a global family culminates in intercultural, interracial, international, and interreligious marriages. Such marriages and the love that binds such families have the potential to resolve deeply rooted feelings of resentment across race, culture and tradition.

Marital love is exclusive and partial. Nevertheless, Unificationism also recognizes the paradoxical duality of partiality and impartiality in true marital love. In particular, intercultural, interracial, international and interreligious marriages are an explicit recognition of openness to others while maintaining partial, exclusive feelings for another individual. Thus, just as a personal relationship with God can open a way to embrace the other, marital love can also enable one to embrace a partner whose self-identity is constituted by different social, cultural, and religious traditions.

The emotion-based approach of care ethics and the rationalist approach of traditional ethics offer contrasting perspectives. Unificationism has the potential to integrate the two approaches and to resolve some of these tensions.

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