UNIT 11: FEMINIST ETHICS: RIGHTS OF WOMEN

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know what is feminist care ethics
- Know about some of the important contributor of feminist care ethics
- Explain feminist care ethics and its application

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the concept feminist ethics. After going through this unit you will be able to know that feminist ethics can also be regarded to be care ethics. It is mainly called care ethics because it believes

that human issues can be resolved with the help of qualities like care, love, compassion and benevolence. It is called feminist ethics because ethics of care is one of the clusters of normative ethical theories that were developed by feminists in the second half of the twentieth century.

11.3 THE FEMININE ETHICS ORTHE ETHICS OF CARE

One of the influential and contemporary versions of virtue ethics is the ethics of care which is called feminist ethics. This is a form of virtue ethics, which is mainly developed by the feminist thinkers like Annette Baier. This particular type of virtue ethics is influenced by the thought that men think in masculine terms such as justice and autonomy etc. and a woman thinks in feminine terms such as caring, love and benevolence.

The supporters of the care-based virtue ethics theory try to modify and change the vision of viewing and analysing the principles of morality and the virtues. This theory tries to focus on the virtues mostly characterised as feminine virtues, such as taking care of others, patience, the ability to nurture, self-sacrifice, etc. These virtues have been given importance as most of the time society failed to adequately value the contributions made by women also in terms of some such feminine virtues which do not get proper attention in the usual moral theories as well as in other theories.

11.4: THE ETHICS OF CARE OR FEMINIST AND SOME IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTORS

While discussing about feminist ethics or care ethics, it is to be said that it is very contemporary form of ethics, which is mainly developed by feminist thinkers. Let us now try to discuss the main contributors and their theories in details.

11.4.1: Maureen Sander-Staudt

According to Maureen Sander-Staudt, the moral theory known as “the ethics of care” or the feminist ethics maintains that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and

feelings and emotions in human life. Care ethics normatively tries to maintain relationships by contextualizing and promoting the well-being of care-givers and care-receivers in a connection with social relations. Most often defined as a practice or virtue rather than a theory as such, "care" involves maintaining the world of, and meeting the needs of, our self and others. It builds on the motivation to care for those who are dependent and vulnerable, and it is inspired by both memories of being cared for and the idealizations of self. Care ethics follows the sentimentalist tradition of moral theory and it affirms the significance of caring motivation, emotion and the body in moral deliberation, as well as reasoning from particulars.

11.4.2: Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan

Milton Mayeroff's short book entitled 'On Caring' (1990) can be regarded to be one of the most original and important contribution on care ethics. But the emergence of care ethics as a different moral theory has been attributed in the writings of psychologist Carol Gilligan and philosopher Nel Noddings in the mid-1980s. According to them traditional moral theories have suffered from the male biasness and that is why they have asserted the "voice of care" as a legitimate alternative to the "justice perspective" of liberal human rights theory. Proponents of feminist care ethics, including Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings stress that traditional moral theories, principles, practices, and policies are deficient to the degree they lack, ignore, trivialize, or demean values and virtues culturally associated with women.

Gilligan offers her work as a critique of the Freudian notion that whereas men are morally well-developed, women are not. Freud attributed women's supposed moral inferiority to girls' psychosexual development. Whereas boys break their attachment to their mothers for fear of being castrated by their fathers if they fail to do so, girls remain tied to their mothers because the threat of castration has no power over them. As a result of this theorised male-female difference, girls are supposedly much slower than boys to develop a sense of

themselves as autonomous moral agents, personally responsible for the consequences of their actions: as persons who must obey society's rules or face its punishments. In other words, boys and men come to respect law more than girls and women do.

11.4.3: Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan

In his doctoral thesis, Kohlberg (1988) writes about modes of moral thinking interviewing some 10–16 year old boys living in the suburban areas of Chicago, mostly from upper-middle class, and also from lower to lower-middle class family. In order to identify the mode of rationality employed in their arguments, he presented them a moral dilemma known as the Heinz dilemma. The Heinz dilemma was one of the moral problems that Kohlberg used in his very first studies.

Here, Carol Gilligan, a friend and a colleague of Kohlberg, try familiarized herself very deeply with Kohlberg's research method and moral thinking by describing a case of two eleven-year-old children named Jake and Amy, who participate in a study with Kohlberg's formulation of the Heinz dilemma. Jake's answer was very clear that is 'Heinz should steal the drug'. Jake has used the logical argumentation like comparing the value of human life and the drug. He also used the argument that mathematics is the only totally logical thing. Thus, the moral dilemma can be solved by logic and reason, and everybody would come to the same conclusion, because his solution is rational. But the important point that can be mentioned here is that Jake also considered the fact that stealing is against the law. Here he has augmented that laws can be wrong, because one cannot write up a law for everything one can imagine. Jake had not changed his answer when more questions about the dilemma were asked. Jake's judgments are scored as conventional on Kohlberg's scale, that is a mixture of stages three and four. Jack has the ability to use logic and to differentiate morality from law, and he was very much sure about his judgment based on justice.

But according to Kohlberg's theory, Amy's judgment of the dilemma has appeared to be a full stage lower than that of the boy. Gilligan has found this problematic as Amy's answer was unsure. Amy thought that there could be other ways to solve the problem, like to borrow the money or negotiate on the matter. But she was also sure about the fact that Heinz's wife should not die, either. Amy's main concern was the effect that theft could have on the relationship between Heinz and his wife. She was concerns about the fact that if it would happen that Heinz has to go to jail, and then who would take care of the wife? For Amy, the dilemma was not mathematical but human. It is more like a narrative of relationships that extends over time. In the course of the interview, Amy's answer was not adequate and sure. She could not see the problem by neglecting surrounding world. Gilligan has argued that this is the reason because of which Amy's mode of moral thinking completely circumvents Kohlberg's theory. Gilligan was not able to rate the children, but she sees that Amy's judgments contain the insights central to an ethic of care, just as Jake's judgments reflect the logic of justice.

The Heinz dilemma has been found to be problematic, and it is possible to ask whether it really measures the state of moral development. In the Heinz dilemma, the motivations of the druggist and his situation have been excluded, and the sick wife's view and her voice have been excluded from the moral problem at hand too. In Kohlberg's research, it was already decided what the highest moral level contains the autonomic subject, who believes in universal moral principles, who is sure of his argumentation, and who does not change his opinion even if new information comes up.

Based on her research, Gilligan published in 1982 a book called '*In a Different Voice'* in which she presents her critique on Kohlberg. The book became to be one of the most influential books in the field of the ethic of care. The ethic of care has two different

lines; they are namely the feminist ethic of care and the phenomenological ethic of care. But both of the labels are a little bit misleading. The feminist ethic represents care as a starting point for ethics. These theories have tried to clarify the female-male-dichotomy in morals, and they are closely related to practice. The phenomenological ethic of care is based on a very heavy philosophical background, and it is not phenomenological in the way phenomenology is usually understood.

By listening and analysing the view points of women it can be clarified that the ethic of care is necessary not because care is essentially associated with women or part of women's nature, but care ethics is a combination of psychological and political reasons voiced relational realities that were otherwise unspoken or dismissed as inconsequential.

It is mentioned by Gilligan that while masculinity is defined by separation and threatened by intimacy, femininity is defined through attachment and threatened by separation. Girls have mainly tried to understand themselves as imbedded within a network of personal relationship. Most of the feminist writers have also discovered and mentioned that a masculine biasness is present in the way we think of mind and body and the relationship between them.

Gilligan's care ethical position has inspired a kind of feminist ethics related to maternal thinking. Many feminists identify feminist ideals with communitarians, ecologically sensitive approaches to reshaping society. Following theorists like Sara Ruddick and Carol Gilligan, even some pro-choice feminists link abortion rights with the growth of "maternal thinking" in our heretofore patriarchal society. Maternal thinking is loosely defined as a responsible commitment to the loving nature of specific human beings as they actually exist in socially embedded interpersonal contexts. It is a moral perspective very different from the abstract, competitive, isolated and principled rigidity so characteristic of patriarchy.

11.4.4: Some of the Pro-Life and Care-Based Feminists

Some of the pro-life and care-based feminists and the profile feminist recognize the claims of foetal life and offer different perspective on what is good for women. Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Ruddick, and Joan Tronto are some of the most influential among many subsequent contributors to care ethics. Annette Baier has observed certain inherent resemblance between care ethics and the moral theory of David Hume. Because Hume too has claimed that morality is something, which depends on the sentiment and not in the reason. Baier had regarded care ethics as the "women's moral theorist." Baier suggests denying that morality consists in obedience to a universal law. More than law abiding character morally emphasizes rather the importance of cultivating virtuous sentimental character traits, including gentleness, agreeability, compassion, sympathy, and good temperedness. Baier specially underscores trust, a basic relation between particular persons, as the fundamental concept of morality, and notes its obfuscation within theories premised on abstract and autonomous agents. She recommends carving out room for the development of moral emotions and harmonizing the ideals of care and justice.

11.4.5: Sidney Callahan

Profile feminists like Sidney Callahan argue against the dominating positions of prochoice feminist thinkers like Beverly Wildung Harrison's Our Right to Choose and Rosalin Pollack Petchesky 'Abortion and Woman's Choice' who would argue for the moral right to control one's body, and the moral necessity of autonomy and choice.

Care ethics usually does not support the traditional moral theories like deontological or Kantian theory and consequentialist or utilitarian ethics. Care ethics uses to give importance on various cultures based moral perspectives such as African ethics, Confucian

ethics, and others. According to many critics care ethics has the tendency to accept or follow the slave morality, and that is why suffers from various limitations including essentialism, parochialism, and ambiguity. It is being said that care ethics is a form of feminine and feminist ethic, in relation to motherhood, international relations, and political theory. But actually it is not the case. It believes and respects the caring attitude of human being, irrespective of male or female.

11.5: FEMINIST CARE ETHICS AND ITS APPLICATION

In addition to the above topics, care ethics has been applied to a number of timely ethical debates, including abortion, reproductive technology, homosexuality and gay marriage, capital punishment, political agency, hospice care, and HIV treatment, as well as aspects of popular culture. It increasingly informs moral analysis of the professions, such as education, medicine, nursing, and business, spurring new topics and modes of inquiry. It is used to provide moral assessment in other ethical fields, such as bioethics, business ethics, and environmental ethics. Perhaps because medicine is a profession that explicitly involves care for others, care ethics was quickly adopted in bioethics as a means for assessing relational and embodied aspects of medical practices and policies. As well as abortion, both Susan Sherwin and Rosemary Tong consider how feminist ethics, including an ethic of care, provides new insights into contraception and sterilization, artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, and gene therapy. Care ethics is also applied by other authors to organ transplantation, the care of high risk patients, artificial womb technologies, advanced directives, and the ideal relationships between medical practitioners and patients.

11.6: WHY CARE ETHICS? COMMON CONCERNS WITH BIO MEDICAL ETHICS

Biomedical ethics, like feminine care ethics, looks for real guidance in an actual troubling situation than a fusing on the abstract domain of rules and principles.

Feminists are largely influenced by Carol Gilligan's claim that women are more likely than men to understand morality in terms of caring for others although many feminists remain uneasy about the normative significance of this gendered description of ethics.

Another similarity with bio medical ethics with feminist care ethics is inequality in relations, either in terms of gender or the one that characterizes unequal relational status between the patient and the doctor. Within such framework the model of contracts negotiated by independent, rational agents does not provide a useful perspective for this sort of interaction. Both need careful reflection of the underlying medical view of the body because under patriarchal ideology the body is characteristically associated with the feminine and the female body is particularly subject to medical dominance.

11.7: CONCLUSION

This is in brief about the feminist ethics or the care ethics. So from the above discussion it becomes clear that so far as ethics of care or the feminist ethics is concerned, it has given tremendous importance on emotional aspect of human life. That is why it believes that if one is to be found out the moral solution of problems related to the relationships of human beings or human relations with that of any other issues, care ethics can be the only solution.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q No 1: What is the other name of 'ethics of care'?

Q No 2: Who is the author of the book 'on caring'?

Q No 3: Who has written the book named 'In a Different Voice'?

Q No 4: On what background the Phenomenological ethics of care is based on?

Q No 5: Who has observed certain inherent resemblance between care ethics and moral theory of David Hume?

Q No 6: From which claim of Carol Gilligan, feminists are influenced?



11.8: LET US SUM UP

- One of the influential and contemporary versions of virtue ethics is the ethics of care which is called feminist ethics.
- This particular type of virtue ethics is influenced by the thought that men think in masculine terms such as justice and autonomy etc. and a woman thinks in feminine terms such as caring, love and benevolence.
- This theory tries to focus on the virtues mostly characterised as feminine virtues, such as taking care of others, patience, the ability to nurture, self-sacrifice, etc.
- According to Maureen Sander-Staudt, the moral theory known as "the ethics of care" or the feminist ethics maintains that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and feelings and emotions in human life.
- Milton Mayeroff's short book entitled 'On Caring' (1990) can be regarded to be one of the most original and important contribution on care ethics.
- Gilligan's care ethical position has inspired a kind of feminist ethics related to maternal thinking. Many feminists identify feminist ideals with communitarians, ecologically sensitive approaches to reshaping society.
- Biomedical ethics, like feminine care ethics, looks for real guidance in an actual troubling situation than a fusing on the abstract domain of rules and principles.
- Feminists are largely influenced by Carol Gilligan's claims that women are more likely than men to understand morality in terms of caring for others although many feminists remain uneasy about the normative significance of this gendered description of ethics.



11.9: FURTHER READING

Ethics of care. (2017, 08 15). Retrieved 12 17, 2018, from New World Encyclopedia: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ethics_of_care Mayeroff, M. (1990). *On Caring.* Harper Perennial.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education.* University of California Press.



11.10: ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Feminist ethics

Ans to Q No 2: Milton Mayeroff

Ans to Q No 3: Carol Gilligan

Ans to Q No 4: It is based on a very very heavy philosophical background.

Ans to Q No 5: Annett Baier has observed certain inherent resemblance between care ethics and moral theory of David Hume, because Hume too has claimed that morality is something, which depends on the sentiment and not it in the reason.

Ans to Q No 6: Feminists are largely influenced by Carol Gilligan's claim that women are more likely than men to understand morality in terms of caring for others although many feminists.



11.11: MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.No.1: From which particular thought, care ethics found to be influenced?

Q.No.2: Mention Maureen Sander- Staudt's definition of 'ethics of care'.

Q.No.3: Write the name of the theory presented by Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan.

Q.No.4: How according to Gilligan the term 'masculinity' and 'feminity' are defined?

Q.No.4: Mention the names of some of the influential feminist ethicist.

B. Short Questions (About 100-150 Word)

Q.No.1: How Maureen sander- Staudt has explain the 'ethics of care'? Briefly write.

Q.No.2: Briefly explain the moral dilemma called Heinz dilemma.

Q.No.3: Briefly explain about the feminist care ethics and its application.

Q.No.4: What are the common concerns of bio-medical ethics and feminine care ethics?

C. Long Questions (About 300-500 Words)

Q.No.1: Explain the concept of the Feminine ethics.

Q.No.2: Describe some of the views of the contributors of care ethics.

Q.No.3: How can the feminine care ethics be applied in the various real life issues? Explain.

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