**Feminist Ethics**

This theory is based on the assumptions that the world is male oriented, devised by men and dominated on a male emphasis on systems of inflexible rules. The goal of feminist ethics is to create a plan that will hopefully end the social and political oppression of women. It is believed that the female perspective of the world can be shaped into a value theory.

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Omonia Vinieris (QCC, 2002) on the  ***Feminist Theory of Care***

            It has been conventionally thought by traditional thinkers of ethics that the moral development of females is slow-paced and secondary to that of males.   Standard ethical attitudes entail hostile, aggressive, and masculine principles of authority, supremacy, and social order.  Feminist opponents consider the latter to incite the debasement of women’s moral capabilities and to demoralize the conception of morality altogether.  The “ethics of justice” is often the terminology used to denote moral duty based on the masculine   traits of reason and aloofness.  Feminists strive for vindication by formulating a theory entitled the “ethics of care” to counter its antithetical parallel, the manly principle, “ethics of justice”.

            Ethics of care focus on the morality and integrity of women which primarily center on interpersonal relationships.  Feminine values such as gentleness, sympathy, and genuine caring are devalued and deemed irrelevant to the public world where self-rule and power thrive.  Carol Gilligan, a feminist theorist and psychologist, presumes that the morality of women is merely different from that concerning men’s and that it is not at all inferior as her male counterparts claim it to be.   She profoundly opposes the theories of moral development devised her colleague, Kohlberg, who only confined his study to males.  His study neglects a woman’s ability to possess self-legislated ethical dogma.

Gilligan, in attempt to refute Kohlberg’s philosophy, composes a scale to illustrate the different stages of a woman’s moral development.  In the first stage, the female is only concerned with herself as she is basically helpless and vulnerable and finds comfort in her seclusion.  She steers clear of any type of relation with others.  In the second stage of moral development, she acquires an awareness of others around her and clings on to various personal contacts that she develops.  She feels a sense of responsibility and devotion to care for them.  She essentially cares for and finds interest in the people she relates with.  She is naturally able to sacrifice herself for these people out of her innate goodness.  Finally in the third stage, she masters equilibrium between the first two stages.  She exhibits self concern for herself and others.  In order to essentially care for others, she must care for herself first, and perhaps the reciprocation of care between her and different people is an indication that she cares for herself.  This universal factor of ethical principle verifies a woman’s ability to control the moral principles concerning her, as it also exemplifies the potency she holds in concurrently providing for others.

Gilligan further goes on to say that an ethics of care is an essential component of ideal moral thought.  Children must be taught to “value their hearts over their heads” (Gilligan) rather than disregard their natural emotions in fear of resorting to subjection which defies the traditional male-oriented “ethics of justice”.  In sum, women and children may exhibit more moral depth than men (Gilligan).

If women are to tolerate the impersonal and “rational” principles anchored in the “ethics of justice” they might as well become merciless, heartless brutes.  However, women are humane and acknowledge the fact that genuine impartiality requires emotive input in ethical reasoning and assessment.  In order to judge morally, we must identify emotionally with the individual to make sense of his or her motives that triggered their actions.  Yet, masculine or “traditional” ethical principles eschew the idea of involving emotion in moral judgment.  Sarah Hoagland comments that traditional ethics undermine rather than promote individual moral ability and agency because the direction of traditional ethics is impersonal and merely focuses on control and social organization.  Thus it does not uphold individual integrity as social organization is acquired through oppressive and authoritative means.

Unfortunately, feminists realize that in their own quest to incorporate their “ethics of care” principle into the canons of society, society is much too fixated on the masculine tenets of competition and self-interest.  An environment based on interfamilial relations and mutual communication is one where an “ethics of care” ideology will be embraced by its people.  Human emotional responses are now a low key supplement to traditionalist ethical principles, as sensitivity and kindness were never equated with human goodness.  Yet, it still seems that rationale and intellect overpower these feminine aspects in a male-dominated world.