What is feminist ethics theory?

Feminist ethics is **an approach to ethics that builds on the belief that traditionally ethical theorizing has undervalued and/or underappreciated women's moral experience**, which is largely male-dominated, and it therefore chooses to reimagine ethics through a holistic feminist approach to transform it.

What is the main concern of feminism?

Feminism is defined as the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. The goal of feminism is **to challenge the systemic inequalities women face on a daily basis**.

What are the characteristics of feminist ethics?

Tong argues that, alongside this dissatisfaction with traditional ethics, feminist ethics may also have some or all the following characteristics: **they highlight the differences between men's and women's situations in life, both biologically and socially, rather than assuming a “universal” human being**

What is the main concern of ethics?

Ethics is **concerned with what is good for individuals and society** and is also described as moral philosophy. The term is derived from the Greek word ethos which can mean custom, habit, character or disposition.

What are feminist values?

It begins by establishing a link between feminine gender and feminist values, which include **cooperation, respect, caring, nurturance, intercon- nection, justice, equity, honesty, sensitivity, perceptiveness, intuition, altruism, fair- ness, morality, and commitment**.

How does feminist ethics differ from Kantian ethics?

unlike Kantianism, an ethics of care does not place supreme importance on justice. ... The feminist ethics of care **threatens to restrict the scope of the community too greatly**. 2. The role of the emotions in helping us to know the right thing to do and in moving us to do it, needs further exploration.

What is the link between feminist ethics and ethics of care?

[[](https://www.google.com/search?output=search&tbm=isch&q=What+is+the+link+between+feminist+ethics+and+ethics+of+care?&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=Id8Ef1tGuO_HCM%2CCk_aDIue-WijtM%2C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kSxPStk1DbW29g8BEskDOiXFDMkpw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjz3e-RwJP1AhWgzzgGHZFWAZwQ9QF6BAgGEAE#imgrc=Id8Ef1tGuO_HCM)](https://www.google.com/search?output=search&tbm=isch&q=What+is+the+link+between+feminist+ethics+and+ethics+of+care?&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=Id8Ef1tGuO_HCM%252CCk_aDIue-WijtM%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kSxPStk1DbW29g8BEskDOiXFDMkpw&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjz3e-RwJP1AhWgzzgGHZFWAZwQ9QF6BAgGEAE" \l "imgrc=Id8Ef1tGuO_HCM)

Ethics of care is a feminist approach to ethics. It **challenges traditional moral theories as male-centric and problematic to the extent they omit** or downplay values and virtues usually culturally associated with women or with roles that are often cast as 'feminine'.



Ethics Explainer: Ethics of Care

**ARTICLE**BIG THINKERS + EXPLAINERS

BY **DR LAURA D’OLIMPIO** 16 MAY 2019

Ethics of care is a feminist approach to ethics. It challenges traditional moral theories as male-centric and problematic to the extent they omit or downplay values and virtues usually culturally associated with women or with roles that are often cast as ‘feminine’.

The best example of this may be seen in how ethics of care differs from two dominant normative moral theories of the 18thand 19thcentury. The first is [deontology](https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-deontology/), best associated with [Immanuel Kant’s](https://ethics.org.au/big-thinker-immanuel-kant/) ethics. The second is [consequentialism](https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-consequentialism/), best associated with [Jeremy Bentham’s](https://ethics.org.au/big-thinker-jeremy-bentham/) utilitarianism and improved upon by John Stuart Mill.

Each of these moral theories require or encourage the moral agent to be unemotional. Moral decision-making is expected to be rational and logical, with a focus on universal, objective rules. In contrast, ethics of care defends some emotions, such as care or compassion, as moral.

On this view, there isn’t a dichotomy between reason and the emotions, as some emotions can be reasonable, morally appropriate or even helpful in guiding good decisions or actions. Feminist ethics also recognises that rules must be applied in a context, and real life moral decision-making is influenced by the relationships we have with those around us.

Instead of asking the moral decision-maker to be unbiased, the caring moral agent will consider that one’s duty may be greater to those they have particular bonds with, or to others who are powerless rather than powerful.

In a Different Voice

Traditional proponents of feminist care ethics include 20thcentury theorists Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. Gilligan’s influential 1982 book, *In a Different Voice,*claimed that Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis and Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development were biased and male-oriented.

On these dominant psychological accounts of human development, male development is taken as standard, and female development is often judged as inferior in various ways.

Gilligan argued if women are ‘more emotional’ than men, and pay more attention to relationships rather than rules, this is not a sign of them being less ethical, but, rather, of different values that are equally valuable. While Gilligan may have deemed these differences to be ‘natural’ and associated with sex rather than gender, these differences may well have been socially constructed and therefore the result of upbringing.

How might the ethics of care theorist resolve the classical ‘Heinz’ dilemma: Should a moral agent steal the required medicine he cannot afford to buy to give to his very sick wife, or stick to the rule ‘do not steal’, regardless of the circumstances? A tricky dilemma, to be sure, as there are competing duties here (namely, a positive duty to help those in need as well as a negative duty to avoid stealing).

Arguably, the caring person would place the relationship with one’s spouse above any relationship they may or may not have with the pharmacist, and care or compassion or love would outweigh a rule (or a law) in this case, leading to the conclusion that the right thing to do is to steal the medicine.

It’s worth noting that a utilitarian might also claim a moral agent should steal the medicine because saving the wife’s life is a better outcome than whatever negative consequences may result from stealing. However, the reasoning that leads to this conclusion is based on unemotional weighing of costs and benefits, rather than a consideration of the relationships involved and asking what *love*might demand.

Writing at the same time as Gilligan, Noddings also defended care as a particular form of moral relationship. She asserted that caring was “ethically basic” to humans and that it can be seen in children’s behaviour. While Noddings does not rule men out from being caring, it is usually women who feature in her examples of caregivers.

Noddings, like Gilligan, prioritises relationships that are between specific individuals in a particular context as the basis for ethical behaviour. This stands in contrast to the idea that morality involves following universal, abstract or purely logical moral rules.

Who cares?

Ethics of care has been influential in areas like education, counselling, nursing and medicine. Yet there have also been feminist criticisms. Some worry that it maintains a sexist stereotype and encourages or assumes women nurture others, even while society fails to value carers as they should.

Noddings and Gilligan both argue against this, saying that the capacity for care is a general human strength, and while it is empowering to acknowledge it as a positive capacity in women, it should be encouraged regardless of gender.