

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM 103)

FEMINIST ETHICAL THEORIES

LECTURE BY RIAZ P KHAN



Alison Jaggar: Male Bias in Ethics

- ❖ Relegates to women subservient obligations (obedience, silence, and faithfulness)
- ❖ Confines women to domestic realm of society with little legitimate political regulation
- ❖ Denies moral agency of women, claiming they lack the capacity for moral reasoning
- ❖ Preference for “masculine” values over “female” ones (e.g., independence, autonomy, intellect vs. interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion)
- ❖ Prefers male notions of moral rules, judgments about particular actions, impartial moral assessments, contractual agreements.



Two Central Questions

1. How do men and women psychologically differ from each other (if at all)?
2. Based on those psychological differences, how do men and women morally differ from each other (if at all)?



Aristotle_ Women and Natural Subservience

The Natural Psychological Differences-

- ❖ Men are by born psychologically designed to command and lead whereas women to obey and follow. Such as, the natural structure of family is hierarchical where husband sets the rules and dominates over wife and children.
- ❖ Women and children are not slaves just because they are dominated, rather they fill the subordinate roles.
- ❖ The difference between slaves and wives or children is to Aristotle, is nothing but slaves completely lack the ability of deliberate faculty whereas wives or children are capable to do that.



Two Criticism

1. Universalizing and Normalizing Male based Opinion
(Patriarchy)
2. Doubting and Eventually Rejecting Women's Capability
and Rational Activity

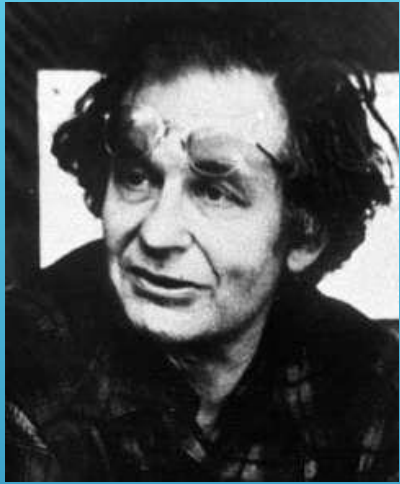


Wollstonecraft: Gender-Neutral Morality

*I do not wish them [women] to have power over men;
but over themselves.*

- Mary Wollstonecraft (27 April 1759 – 10 September 1797) was an English writer, one of the founding feminist philosophers who advocated women's rights until the late 20th century.
- Men and women are fundamentally the same; The apparent differences are the result of socially assigned and imposed gender roles.
- She advocates three features of personhood what separates humans from animals: i) Reason, ii) the exercise of virtue, and iii) the passion for knowledge
- All moral duties are human duties and there are no special female virtues or obligations.





Lawrence Kohlberg
(1927-1987)

Kohlberg's stages of moral development:

- *Theory inspired by Jean Piaget;*
- *Method - moral dilemmas (Heinz) to investigate children's reasoning.*
- *Six stages - concerned with justice and reasoning*
- *The Moral Development stages are-*
 1. *Punishment and Obedience*
 2. *Rewards and Self Interest*
 3. *Conformity (good/bad boy confirmation)*
 4. *Obedience to Authority (Law and order)*
 5. *Recognizing between moral and legal rights (Human rights)*
 6. *Individual Principle of Conscience (Universal human ethics)*

Gilligan's Criticisms:

- *Kohlberg's studies were done entirely on males.*
- *woman's moral point of view is different from a man's, as men typically emphasize rights and principles of justice; women typically focus on particular relationships, on care, where principles are less important and they place more importance on the process.*
- *Specifics 3 levels of moral development-*
 1. *Girl focusing on self, neglecting the needs of others;*
 2. *Focusing too much on the needs of others, neglecting her own, and;*
 3. *Where her needs and those of others are more in balance.*



Carol Gilligan
(November 28, 1936)

Care and Particularism

- ▶ Moral particularism: morality always involves particular relations with people, not lifeless abstractions.
- ▶ Classical moral theory incorporates some particularism by recognizing obligations to family, friends, and local community.
- ▶ There are four components of female ethics, they are- care, specific circumstances surrounding moral situation, close personal relationships (intimate emotional connections), vulnerability and dependency.
- ▶ The close differences occur when women follow them religiously in higher degree than men do.
- ▶ Care ethicists reject traditional Universalist ethics, the idea that ethics consists in universal moral principles, applicable to all people at all times. They argue that universalism is too abstract to justify our special obligations to family and community.
- ▶ Limitation- Care ethics cannot be a dominant feature all the time, may not sustain for a long time as it will vary from person to culture to state.



Care and Virtue

- ▶ American philosopher of Education Nel Noddings suggests that care should be seen as a component of virtue theory, where care is a nurturing character trait that we personally internalize, as we do other virtues.
- ▶ She criticizes Aristotle's view of female virtues was based on a hierarchical social structure in which the lower classes were locked into their roles.
- ▶ We should practice every day and traditional caring roles of women, such as cooking, teaching, nursing, and childhood education etc. they require special virtues or character traits that traditional morality has overlooked. These all emphasize needs over rights, and love over duty.
- ▶ Noddings emphasizes on gender-free morality



Gender Ethics: Four Options

- ❑ Male-Only Option
- ❑ Female-Only Option
- ❑ Separate-but-Equal Option
- ❑ Mutually-Inclusive Option



Mutually Inclusive Option

- ▶ The final option is a mutually inclusive approach that men and women should adopt both the male and female approaches to morality, internalize both tendencies.
- ▶ Just like women have already internalized male traditional approach, practiced and overcame the conditions; men too have to address, understand and learn women components and capacities and internalize them.
- ▶ The morally responsible person fulfills both sets of these obligations.

