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VIRTUE AND CARE IN MODERN ETHICS

Abstract

In this paper I compare two contemporary moral theories; virtue ethics and the ethics of care. They both reject traditional ethical positions – Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. Virtue ethics focuses on the question what person should I be, instead, as in the case of Kantian ethics and utilitarianism, what should I do. It holds that value concepts (good, value) in contrary to deontological concepts (duty, obligation) are fundamental in ethical theory. Ethics of care, in rejecting a position based on justice, emphasises the role of care in human relations. It concentrates on personal relationships like love, friendship and charity. Virtue ethics emphasises the crucial role of individual character in moral life, whereas ethics of care holds that relations between people based on attentiveness, responsiveness and respect are the most important in moral life.

Key words: virtue, value, character, care, justice

In the modern world, one may observe the continual clash of various values and value systems with each other. Such conflicts may be found in spheres connected with religion, society, politics, economics and, last but not least, aesthetics. In the shadow of these axiological conflicts, ethics seems to have found a place in which there has been a “redefinition of values” during the last 20–30 years. The reign of the modern Kantian-utilitarian paradigm has come under question with its place being taken by a new paradigm alluding to ancient positions, namely virtue ethics. Above all, this questioning has changed the key assumptions of Kantianism and utilitarianism, namely concerning the primacy of the deontological concept with regard to value judgements, as well as the primacy of actions regarding people.

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In parallel to virtue ethics, the 1980s saw the appearance of a trend known as ethics of care which also undermined the rationale of a position based on duty and justice. Both of these trends stand in opposition to Kantianism and utilitarianism by assuming an anti-theory position.² These are also linked by concentrating on the agent and the conviction that feelings and emotions not only do not pose an obstacle to taking moral decisions, but are actually key in this regard. Both of these positions refer to values regarding virtue and care and not abstract laws and principles. They also arise from the conviction that it is more important in our moral life what kind of person we are and what we are like towards others rather than how we conduct ourselves and which norms and rules we follow.

VIRTUE ETHICS³

Virtue ethicists are linked by a conviction regarding an erroneous stance towards the ethics of Kantianism and utilitarianism. They define these positions as theoretical and oppose them with their anti-theory.⁴ One exponent of the anti-theory position regarding ethics is Robert B. Louden who writes that “virtue ethics is best interpreted both as a protest against certain modern assumptions concerning what ethical theory should look like as well as an attempt to return us to more realistic avenues of moral reflection.”⁵ Louden outlines several characteristics which describe theoretical approaches to ethics. The supporters of theorization in ethics assume that ethical theory should aid an individual by setting out certain

² Anti-theory does not, however, deny its supporters the possibility of engaging in rational argument. On the contrary, virtue ethicists propound serious arguments of a rational nature against Kantianism and utilitarianism.

³ It is important to differentiate virtue theory (aretology) from virtue ethics: the first deals with general deliberations on the subject of virtue while the second has a prescriptive character and defends the concept of virtue. In particular, virtue theory may ignore virtue ethics or take a hostile stance towards it.

⁴ Such a view was voiced by Bernard Williams and Annette Baier. They criticised the position stating that one should seek and find a set of universal and hierarchically organised principles which would enable the taking of morally sound decisions. See A. Baier, *Postures of the Mind*, Minneapolis 1985; B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Cambridge 1985.

⁵ R. Louden, “Virtue Ethics and Anti-Theory”, *Philosophia*, vol. 20, nos. 1–2 (July 1990), p. 94.

procedures in taking moral decisions. It should also serve as a test of one's moral convictions, as well as a criterion of their coherence. Theoretical approaches are also characterised by formalism regarding principles and rules of which – as in mathematics or logic – should be informed correct decisions. Utilitarianism and Kantianism are aimed at creating a completely coherent ethical system which should serve as a theoretical background for an agent taking moral decisions. This theory is also characterised by universalism, referring to the universal rationality of human existence, as well as objectivism displaying the independence of reason from subjective desires and individual convictions. Supporters of the theoretical position in ethics believe that ethical dilemmas do not exist and that every conflict in ethics can be solved. They also state that there exists within ethics expertise based on knowledge of universal, objective and abstract principles and rules.⁶ The Kantian-utilitarian paradigm also leads to the splitting of the agent into rational and emotional parts, by which the second is to be purged from the moral sphere. This model also covers the difference of the sphere of facts from the sphere of duty.⁷ A characteristic trait of this approach is also the impersonal treatment of moral agents. This also covers both the ontological, as in the work of Kant (depriving the moral agent of their emotional sphere), and the procedural, as in utilitarianism, the rationality of the agent.

The exponents of anti-theory believe that moral theories are not only undesirable, but are impossible since they, as Loudon writes: “have aims which are incompatible with certain fundamental features of moral practices.”⁸ This occurs because firstly, the moral rules and principles are not properly defined as the supporters of the theory wish, but always demand an interpretation which is deeply-rooted in culture and moral practices; secondly, real and unsolvable moral dilemmas exist while people stand in the face of conflicting duties; thirdly, certain virtues (humility) exist which are unable to be expressed in categories of calls to action and are present “in terms of dispositions to act according to rules”⁹; and fourthly, in order to understand the actions of people while taking moral

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–50.

⁷ According to Kant, the world of facts and the world of values are incompatible with each other, the first being governed by the principle of determinism and the second by the principle of free will.

⁸ R. Loudon, “Virtue Ethics . . .”, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

decisions, one may not ignore their emotional sphere. The enhancement of the emotional sphere and the basing of virtue ethics upon it also signifies the bridging of a gap between the sphere of being (moral psychology) and the sphere of values.

The rejection of certain theoretical assumptions on which Kantianism and utilitarianism are mainly based does not mean, however, that virtue ethicists reject theorization entirely.¹⁰ It concerns the building of such a theory which is free from elements characteristic of Kantianism and utilitarianism. This would be possible on the basis of a new paradigm proposed by virtue ethicists.

The pioneering work for virtue ethicists was an article by Elizabeth Anscombe in *Modern Moral Philosophy* in 1958 in which the author, rejecting the ethic of duty, proposed a return to Aristotle and the concept of virtue while awakening contemporary ethicists from their philosophical nap with the same article.¹¹ The philosophers who, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, took up this challenge brought about the establishment of virtue ethics.¹² Although it was founded on the ancient concept of virtue, it was not identical to it.

Due to the fact that virtues are related to people, not actions, virtue ethics seeks above all answers to questions as to which kind of person should someone be, how a person should live, and not whether this or that principle or moral precept allows us to solve any kind of conflict. Virtue ethics places emphasis on character, not on actions, stemming from the assumption that all actions are a reflection of one's character.¹³ Proper

¹⁰ The patron of virtue ethicists, Aristotle, was a theoretician.

¹¹ She wrote: ". . . it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy, that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. . . . concepts of obligation, and duty – *moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say – and of what is morally right or wrong, and of the moral sense of 'ought', ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it." E. Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, in: R. Crisp, M. Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford – New York 1998, p. 26.

¹² They included: A. MacIntyre, M. Slote, R. Audi, T. Irwin, R. Hursthouse, C. Taylor, R. Crisp, J. Annas, P. Foot, M. Nussbaum, B. Williams.

¹³ As Rosalind Hursthouse writes: ". . . virtue ethics, in being 'agent-centred' rather than 'act-centred', is concerned with Being Rather than Doing, with good (and bad) character rather than right (and wrong) action, with the question 'What sort of person

actions are defined in turn as those which a person full of virtue would take in a manner typical of themselves in given circumstances.¹⁴ One behaves in life in a given way not because he is applying certain rules and moral principles, but because that is the character they have. Moral judgments result from one's character rather than preceding it. A person of experience may, on the basis of their experience, formulate certain moral principles, although these principles do not shape their character. Moreover, it seems that a person of good character does not refer to principles and moral precepts in the decision-making process, but acts in accordance with their character. As Louden believes: "It simply is not the case that morally good people have always engaged in rule-guided deliberation."¹⁵ Thus, neither are they moral experts who are competently able to apply given moral precepts to concrete situations. The application of appropriate formulas does not mean, however, automatically being a good person. In this context, virtue ethicists quote Aristotle who wrote:

But virtuous acts are not done in a just or temperate way merely because they have a certain quality, but only if the agent also acts in a certain state viz (1) if he knows what he is doing, (2) if he chooses it for its own sake, and (3) if he does it from a fixed and permanent disposition.¹⁶

In the opinion of Aristotle, we cannot say much about a given action if we do not refer to the concept of the good or virtuous person. For Aristotle, a good action was one carried out by a virtuous person defined as one who bore a disposition which: ". . . lead virtuous agents to be sensitive to the goods and ills to which people are exposed in particular situations and

should I be?' rather than the question 'What should I do?'" R. Hursthouse, *Normative Virtue Ethics*, in: R. Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live?*, Oxford 1996, p. 19. Roger Crisp believes that emphasis on actions is a reflection of deep-rooted modern ethics in the Judeo-Christian tradition based on the principle in which the most important question was not "How do I live?" but "How should I behave?" The answer to the latter question always refers to the category of duty. R. Crisp, *Modern Moral Philosophy and the Virtues*, in: *idem* (ed.), *How Should I live?*, Oxford 1996, p. 1. A similar view is expressed by Anscombe. See E. Anscombe, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁴ R. Hursthouse, *Normative Virtue Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ R. Louden, "Virtue Ethics . . .", *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J.A.K. Thomson, London 1976, 1105 a, p. 97.

to respond by bringing about good and preventing harm.”¹⁷ A virtuous person, stresses Julia Annas, “not only does the right thing but has the right feelings and emotions about what she does.”¹⁸

In place of the theorising expert supporters of virtue ethics would rather see the Aristotelian *phronimos*, namely a person who possesses practical wisdom, or one who “can aim, by the help of his calculation, at the best of the goods attainable by man.”¹⁹ However, the Aristotelian *phronimos* is not a technocratic expert because they are also guided by intuition (*aisthesis*) in their decisions.²⁰

The supporters of virtue ethics also reject the premise of objectivity understood as impartiality in ethics. They are thus convinced that the carrying out of certain practices in respect of virtue demands special involvement and favouring one of the parties involved – therefore, it demands partiality.

Virtue ethicists believe that principles and moral precepts which should have an influence on moral practice must be deeply-rooted in a concrete tradition and the characters of people. They also consider the individual, not as an abstraction taken out of context (the rational being) but as connected with a particular time and place. A similarly particularistic position is taken by virtue ethicists in the case of virtue itself, believing that ethics “must research the particular motives and hidden mechanisms directing the agent.”²¹ These in turn must also not only refer to actions and choices, as the Kantians and utilitarians would wish, but also, perhaps even above

¹⁷ J.B. Schneewind, *The Misfortunes of Virtue*, in: R. Crisp, M. Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford – New York 1998, p. 179. Michael Slote differentiates two interpretations of moral behaviour. The first of these, the Aristotelian interpretation, is termed “agent-focused”, while the second is termed “agent-based”. In applying the first interpretation, one should state that a virtuous person does that which is noble because it is noble. In the second interpretation, that which is noble is so because it is done by a person full of virtue. See M. Slote, *Agent-based Virtue Ethics*, in: R. Crisp, M. Slote (eds.), *Virtue Ethics*, Oxford – New York 1998, pp. 239–240 and M. Slote, *From Morality to Virtue*, New York – Oxford 1992, p. 89.

¹⁸ J. Annas, *The morality of happiness*, New York 1993, p. 56.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *op. cit.*, 1141 b 13–14, p. 213.

²⁰ “Such questions of degree occur in particular cases, and the decision lies with our perception.” *Ibid.*, 1109 b, p. 110.

²¹ R. Loudon, “Virtue Ethics . . .”, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

all, to the character and virtue of the agent,²² as well as the dispositions and motivations which make them a virtuous person.²³

In contrast to Kantianism which refers, above all, to deontic (from the Greek – ‘that which is necessary’) concepts of duty and rightness, virtue ethics prefers aretaic (from the Greek, *arete* ‘virtue, courage’) concepts, such as “good” or “virtuous”. Virtue ethicists state that referring to deontic concepts is an error as they narrow the scope of ethics.²⁴

Supporters of virtue ethics also see their dissimilarity with Kantianism in relation to actions and character. They perceive Kantian ethics as putting actions, not character, centre-stage and the categorical imperative as a test of which actions are morally acceptable, (meaning they are carried out in the name of duty) and which are not.²⁵ Moreover, in the question of the motivation of a position they are different: while Kantianism favours a deontic motivation, the dominant role in virtue ethics is played by the desires and aims which a virtuous person possesses.²⁶ Virtue ethicists reject the Kantian view of a good person as someone motivated by duty, maintaining that acting from duty or acting regarding one’s responsibility may not be traits for improving one’s character. In the opinion of virtue ethicists, Kantian ethics (along with utilitarian ethics) place too little weight on the interests of the individual agent.²⁷ Kantians and utilitarians believe that the essence of morality is proper treatment of principles and moral precepts while virtue ethicists are of the opinion that understanding moral life requires understanding of that which is virtuous behaviour and who

²² M. Slote, *From Morality . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²³ *Idem*, *Virtue Ethics*, in: M.W. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote (eds.), *Three Methods of Ethics*, Oxford 2005, p. 177.

²⁴ Some, such as Michael Slote, believe that deontic concepts may be derived from aretaic concepts. See M. Slote, *From Morality . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv–xv, and *idem*, *Virtue Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

²⁵ As Marcia Baron believes, the Kantian categorical imperative is not primarily a criterion for the rightness of an action but a maxim, as subjective principles of action: M. Baron, *Kantian Ethics*, in: M.W. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote (eds.), *Three Methods of Ethics*, Oxford 2005, p. 35. Baron also maintains that while Kant places great weight on behaviour, this is not separate from the character of the acting individual, and in particular from its maxim. *Ibid.*, p. 37. She even states that if virtue ethicists are seeking a theory which places emphasis on the internal aspects of one’s character, Kant’s ethics would be a good proposition. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁷ M. Slote, *From Morality . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

a virtuous person is. This is why, as Michael Slote writes, virtue ethics are ethics which concentrate on the agent (agent-focused) in contrast to Kantianism and utilitarianism which concentrate on actions (act-focused).²⁸ The reasons forming the basis of given assumptions in the case of these three varieties of ethics are also varied. For example, both a Kantian, a utilitarian, as well as a virtue ethicist would agree with the point that in concrete situations one should not lie. The Kantian would state that one should not do this as it is in opposition to the categorical imperative, the utilitarian would argue that lying will not engender more usefulness while the virtue ethicist would invoke the virtue of honesty.²⁹

In contrast to Kantianism and utilitarianism, supporters of virtue ethics reject the splitting of the agent into rational and emotional spheres. This understanding of the agent prevents its complete presentation, as well as understanding the relations between their past actions and behaviour and the current situation. Julia Annas presents this question in the following manner:

Modern discussions encourage us to discuss an action in a vacuum without regard to previous decisions that inclined the agent to do it, or its effects in terms of the agent's future character. The ancient thought that virtue is a stable disposition, by contrast, reminds us that every action has both a past and a future.³⁰

In virtue ethics, the agent is spread between their own past and present and understood to be in possession of their own story or, as McIntyre writes, a narrative unity which is understood as an individual story of the agent about themselves, itself deeply-rooted in culture and social life.³¹

Virtues are understood as valuable internal states of the agent, states which are primary regarding actions. Their value may be understood as a secondary aim which they serve, as in the case of eudaimonia, or for their intrinsic value, independent of whether the aim was achieved with their help. In the first case, one may use the teleological concept of virtue

²⁸ *Idem, Virtue Ethics, op. cit.*, pp. 177–178.

²⁹ R. Crisp, *Modern Moral Philosophy . . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7. This does not mean, however, that virtue ethicists exclude other types of reasoning.

³⁰ J. Annas, *The morality . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³¹ A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty*, trans. by A. Chmielowski, Warszawa 1996, pp. 337, 366.

while the second may be seen through motivation.³² Virtues are instructions and possess an affective aspect: “they involve our feelings, especially our feelings of pleasure and pain, and developing a virtue involves habituating our feelings in certain ways.”³³ Virtues also possess intellectual aspects, aiding through reason the grasping of that which it is necessary to do in a given situation.³⁴

Virtue ethicists place centre-stage, neither the motivation as in Kantianism nor the consequences as in utilitarianism, but the person. This also causes that ethics has ceased to be merely an intellectual activity but is becoming the art of living a good life.

ETHICS OF CARE³⁵

In a similar manner to virtue ethics, ethics of care places itself in opposition to traditional ethics and defines its position in a comparable way, taking a critical view of Kantianism and utilitarianism while adding liberalism as a political manifestation of both of these trends. One of the basic charges addressed towards Kantianism and utilitarianism was one in relation to a polemic by Carol Gilligan and Lawrence Kohlberg concerning the role of justice in the moral life of the individual.³⁶ Supporters of the ethics of care maintain that justice may not have, as Kohlberg wanted, the aim of moral development in mind. They stressed that, from the results of his research, boys think in the categories of law and values. As Gilligan showed, girls perceive dilemmas and moral conflicts in categories of disrupted

³² J. Jaśtał, *Etyka cnót, etyka charakteru*, in: *idem* (ed.), *Etyka i charakter*, Kraków 2004, p. 28.

³³ J. Annas, *The morality . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³⁵ In this section, I have used an extract from my article “Czy etyka troski może prowadzić do zaniku troski?”, *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, vol. LXIII, no. 2 (2015), pp. 186–206.

³⁶ This fairly well-known theory is presented by Kohlberg in the following works: *Moral Stages and Moralization. The Cognitive-Developmental Approach*, in: T. Lickona (ed.), *Moral Development and Behavior*, New York 1976; *Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development*, San Francisco 1981; *From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It in the Study of Moral Development*, in: T. Mischel (ed.), *Cognitive Development and Epistemology*, New York, London 1971.

relations, not conflicts regarding law or values. Thus, ethicists of care have rejected the view of justice as the only acceptable position in ethics. They also criticised the approach in which all social relations were treated from a male perspective,³⁷ in particular “judges, managers, officials”.³⁸

This perspective prevents the formation of close relations with others as other people are treated as strangers – citizens, voters, customers. In transferring relations appearing in the public sphere to the private sphere, ethics oriented towards justice also prevents understanding of such personal and intimate relations as love, friendship or care. Thus, the Kantian-utilitarian approach ignores the role of feelings and emotions in reflection of moral behaviour. In particular, on the basis of this paradigm it is difficult to understand such emotions as “sympathy, empathy, sensitivity and responsiveness”.³⁹ The ignoring of feelings in moral discourse and practice was supposed, in the opinion of Kantians and utilitarians, to ensure that ethics would have an objective and universal character, while the agent itself would have moral impartiality. According to ethicists of care, such an approach is unjustified when, as Nel Noddings writes, abstract and universal principles separate us from each other while ethics is neither universal nor abstract but particularistic and contextual.⁴⁰ Rather, moral decisions require realization and a feeling of putting oneself in the place of others, not abstraction and deduction.⁴¹ Moreover, the universalism called for by Kantians and utilitarians, along with liberals in the political and social spheres, assumes by implication an equality of interests and statuses of all moral agents, not discerning the inequalities appearing in such relationships as parent/guardian-child, a healthy person-ill person and rich person-poor person.⁴² In the opinion of ethicists of care, universal principles and rules may not comprise the only source of moral precepts. Thus, moral decisions always have a contextual character and result from relations with another person. They are also based upon feelings and emotions resulting from such relationships. Supporters of the ethics of

³⁷ As ethics of care, more than virtue ethics, is to a large degree linked to feminism, its criticism of traditional ethics includes aspects relating to domination and control.

³⁸ M.U. Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics*, New York 1998, p. 21.

³⁹ V. Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, Oxford 2006, p. 10.

⁴⁰ See N. Noddings, *Caring: The Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1984, p. 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 16–17.

⁴² M. Uliński, *Etyka troski i jej pogranicza*, Kraków 2012, p. 70.

care also do not agree with the vision of the agent proposed by Kantianism, utilitarianism and liberalism. In this vision, the individual appears as self-sufficient, independent, rational and autonomous. Ethicists of care oppose this image with one of a person entering into relationships with other people, dependent on others (children, the elderly, the ill), relatively autonomous and reacting emotionally to the needs of others.⁴³ They also maintain that it is relations which decide the identity of an individual, as well as that the agent not being prior to them.

The basis of care is characterised by a belief indicating sensitivity to problems requiring a moral response.⁴⁴ It is this form of sensitization in which a person discerns the necessity of entering a relationship with another person and coming to them with help. Sensitivity is also an essential characteristic, appearing in the desire to communicate with others and in recognising their needs. This sensitivity is directed at observing the reactions of others to the help provided with the aim of better suiting care to their needs. An important element resting on the basis of care is respect, understood as equality of the positions taken in relations of care. The basis of respect with others in relationships of care also appears in the equal treatment of “care-givers” and “care-takers”. In relationships of care it is thus not only important what we do, but also, above all, how we do it. Caring for others without attentiveness, sensitivity and respect is not genuine care. As Daniel Engster writes:

Caring means something more than satisfying needs, developing basic abilities or protection from pain; it also means the form in which care is provided: we must deal with those who need it in an attentive, sensitive and respectful manner.⁴⁵

Noddings writes in turn about empathy with another person whose essence is “to receive the other into myself”.⁴⁶

⁴³ This is a person, as Held writes, “who with other persons, maintains some and remakes other and creates still other morally admirable relations.” V. Held, *The Ethics of Care* . . . , *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁴⁴ For Noddings *care for* means real care for another person or people while *care about* refers to a verbal undertaking of the possibility of providing care, meaning a readiness to provide care. See N. Noddings, *Caring* . . . , *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ D. Engster, *Rozważania na temat teorii opieki: praktyka i obowiązki opieki*, <http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/pdf/f00087engster.pdf>, 18 February 2015.

⁴⁶ N. Noddings, *Caring* . . . , *op. cit.*, p. 30.

The starting point for justifying ethics of care is a conviction regarding the universal dependence of people on each other. In order to survive and develop, as well as to function well in society, everyone needs appropriate care from others at various stages of their lives. Such care, which is essential for conducting a good life, should be treated as an indispensable value, namely a value which should be accessible to every individual. The indispensability of values, such as care, indicates the necessity for it to be satisfied, or a right to have it. This right must serve all, meaning that a readiness to provide care must become something universal. Thus, care possesses a universal character which indicates that everyone is obliged, within their capabilities, to provide it to others. The moral duty to envelop others with care results from an assumption regarding the importance of life for the good of society. Care is needed by everyone in order to survive and develop. This is why a permanent dependence on others and the values which we attribute to life oblige to provide care to others.

In the approach to care we may differentiate natural care, which is understood as a spontaneous reflex not filtered through theories, principles or rules, as well as moral care. The former possesses a wider scope than the latter as it is not limited, in contrast to moral care, to people (the lifting of an injured bird from the ground or the cleaning of offensive graffiti from the wall of a house). At the basis of moral care lies a reflection on the nature of the universal dependence of people on each other. Natural care is perceived as secondary in relation to moral care.⁴⁷ Moral care may be also found in relationships with those close to us, as well as those far from us, along with those known and unknown to us. It may also be provided in a direct and indirect manner. An example of the first instance may be daily care of the sick (not necessarily those close to us), while an example of the second may be paying for such care. If we put these four types of care together, we gain the following possibilities: (i) direct care of those closest to us (permanent care of parents or children); (ii) direct care of strangers (nursing care either in hospital or at home); (iii) indirect care of those close to us (payment for care either at home or in a care home); (iv) indirect care of strangers (financial support delivered to victims of war or disasters). All kinds of care are based on relationships. Thus, relationality belongs to the essence of care. Relations based on feelings do not

⁴⁷ In the opinion of certain supporters of the ethics of care, natural care does not occupy an inferior position to moral care, in contrast to the Kantian tradition. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

exclusively have either a selfish or an altruistic character. As Held writes: “the value of care relations are comprised of the good of those entering into these relations, as well as the good of the relationships themselves.”⁴⁸ For ethicists of care, as this author stresses, care is “the most basic of oral values” as “without some level of caring concern for other human beings, we cannot have any morality.”⁴⁹ It is from here also that the ethics of care negates and does away with the traditional liberal division into the public and private spheres, indicating the possibility of extending care to the entire life of a moral individual, meaning, in particular, merging the scope of the public sphere within it.⁵⁰

SUMMARY

What links virtue ethics and the ethics of care is a conviction regarding the necessity of introducing psychological aspects into the ethical discourse. From here, there is also a great emphasis in these two theories placed on the role of feelings and emotions in one’s moral life. While virtue ethics focuses on the agent and their virtues in respect of moral perfections, ethics of care places the entering into relations between agents at its centre of interest. Both attempt, above all, to answer the questions “How do I live a good life?” and “What kind of person should I be?”

It seems, however, that in order to conclusively answer the question as to how to live a happy life, thus a basic ethical question, one must refer to deliberations concerning human nature (which, of course, has no place here), particularly regarding its ethical aspects. We only observe, in a summary form, that Kantianism and utilitarianism suggest that the moral nature of the person leads one to follow principles and rules which may be discovered or deduced from a given ethical system. A moral person is a being who obeys laws. Virtue ethics in turn perceives the individual as having being equipped with certain virtues which facilitate a good life; the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ V. Held, *The Ethics of Care . . .*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁵⁰ One may say, with a certain level of simplification, that liberalism reserves justice for the public sphere while concern remains in the private sphere; liberal feminism extends justice to the private sphere whereas the ethics of care calls for its extension to the public sphere.

following and recognition of principles is not a key factor here. Indeed, the decisive factors which decide moral behaviour are, above all, one's psychological state, not one's mental state. However, ethics of care sees the person as entangled in various relationships, and thereby requiring continual support. From this perspective, it is not crucial whether they obey given principles, or (although to a lesser degree), what the person is like, but what kind of relationships they have with others who need them.

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