

Research on the relationship between care and justice - Based on Will Kymlicka's "Contemporary Political Philosophy"

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Abstract: The ethics of care emphasizes emotions, relationships, and responses to specific situations, while the ethics of justice focuses on rationality, rights, and universal rules. The two have long been in tension in the field of moral philosophy. By examining the meaning of care and justice in Kymlicka's "Contemporary Political Philosophy", the difference between care and justice is explored from three aspects: moral ability, moral thinking and moral concepts, and a path to integrate care and justice is found through moral limits, behavior and ethical realization, demonstrating their complementarity and integration possibility in social practice.

Keywords: Kymlicka; care; justice

1 Introduction

In "Contemporary Political Philosophy", Will Kymlicka systematically sorted out the main schools of political philosophy. Regarding the relationship between care and justice, Kymlicka discussed this controversial issue more comprehensively. His main contribution lies in overcoming the simple binary opposition between the two, revealing the complex dialectical relationship between the two and the possibility of integrating caring values into the political system.

2 The concepts of care and justice

Justice has always been a core concept in Western political philosophy. Plato's *The Republic* and Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* place justice as the primary value of social systems. Kymlicka regarded justice as the primary virtue of social systems, focusing on the equal distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources. This view of distributive justice focuses on universal principles and a neutral stance, requiring people to ensure equal rights and obligations of equal status for every citizen through abstract rules.

Since the second half of the 20th century, care ethics have emerged as an important moral theoretical paradigm. Kymlicka's theory of care draws upon feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan, Nell Noddings, and Virginia Held [1]. It has the following characteristics: first, care ethics emphasize caring relationships rather than abstract principles, and focuses on responses to the needs of specific others rather than the application of universal rules; second, care ethics recognize the important role of emotions in moral life, and believe that cultivating caring emotions is more fundamental than just following rational rules; third, care ethics focus on the reality of interdependence, challenge the assumption of "independent individuals" in traditional political philosophy, and emphasize the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence; fourth, the application of care ethics extends beyond private domains like family and friends to encompass

public affairs across political and social fields.

3 The difference between care and justice

These two moral approaches present a variety of differences. In order to better understand the connotation of these two concepts, Kymlicka explains it from three aspects in "Contemporary Political Ethics", namely: moral ability, moral thinking and moral concepts.

In terms of moral ability, justice learns moral principles and cares about the development of moral temperament. Ethics of care "shifts the basic moral question to another dimension" [2]. What are the best principles for individuals to best possess the ability to behave morally? To be a moral person, one must have the right temperament rather than the right principles. This temperament specifically means accurately discerning the needs of others and having the ability to meet these needs. While most contemporary theorists of justice are more concerned with determining correct principles, the former will naturally lead to the latter. This is because the ethics of justice not only demand adherence to principles but also require the cultivation of moral qualities—ensuring that people's wills and actions align with them in a meaningful, rather than rigid, manner.

In terms of moral thinking, justice addresses moral problems through principles of universal significance and care seeks appropriate responses in particular situations. Kymlicka suggests that we should explain morality in terms of concern for particular situations rather than in terms of the application of general principles. Focusing solely on specific situations means that when making moral decisions, one should not only focus on different features of the situation but also judge the extent to which these features are morally relevant [3]. This leads to the complexity of the scenario. There are still many contradictions in the details of the specific scenario. Only by placing those details within the framework of larger normative principles will it be more feasible.

This point about moral concepts lies at the core of the care-justice debate. Justice focuses on rights and fairness, and care focuses on responsibilities and relationships. There are three explanations for fundamental distinction. First, between universality and special relationships, justice pursues universal fairness, whereas care is committed to maintaining everyone's relationship network, emphasizing not abandoning or harming any individual. Second, regarding respect for human nature and individuality, Kymlicka argues that universal care also appeals to common humanity [2], while the theory of justice does not ignore the existence of specific individuals. Third, regarding the relationship between responsibilities and rights, Kymlicka emphasized that responsibility is also at the core of the ethics of justice - the fairness we demand from others is grounded in the responsibilities we ourselves bear, not merely in the rights of the other party. However, he also admitted that there were loopholes in this argument.

4 Integration of care and justice

Regarding the relationship between care and justice, it is unproductive to position one as superior to the other or to compare their respective scopes of existence. The greater value of the theory should be realized from the mutual integration of the two.

From the perspective of ethical limits, care constitutes the social and emotional cornerstone of justice, while justice serves as the institutional guarantee and normative calibration of care. Far from being oppositional, care actually provides the indispensable social and emotional support for a just system. Without basic trust, mutual care and solidarity among members of society, a just system will be difficult to establish and operate stably. Without the nourishment of caring experience, the development of a sense of justice and the formation of moral self-discipline will face fundamental difficulties [4]. On the other hand, without the constraints of a justice framework, caring relationships may become alienated into dominance and dependence, or even become a breeding ground for oppression. The principle of justice

delineates an insurmountable moral boundary for care. It also realizes the institutionalized expression of the value of care through resource redistribution and rights protection.

From the perspective of ethical behavior, care is differentiated, while justice is equal. The basic goal of just behavior is to realize the equality of social subjects. The ethics of justice believes that social subjects not only need to be equal before the law, but also must follow the universal principle of equality in moral behavior and oppose treating others differently based on the degree of emotional relationship. From the perspective of the principle of justice, morality must be based on equal relationships. Different from justice, care is differentiated [5]. Care comes from people's inner emotional reactions and is affected by subjective factors. The caregiver's emotion towards the person receiving care is self-derived, and the degree of caring emotion is the criterion. As a moral emotion, care is bound to be affected by subjective factors, but the payment of caring emotions must be implemented under the basic principle of justice. Justice is the premise and system guarantee. The difference in care is relative to the equality of justice. There are differences in each dimension, but necessary fairness and justice must still be maintained within the dimensions.

Generally speaking, Kymlicka went beyond the traditional concept of justice and put forward a profound argument: justice itself is an important form of care, and the distribution of care itself is also a matter of justice [6].

5 Conclusion

Kymlicka successfully demonstrated that care and justice are not moral binary oppositions, but interdependent, complementary and synergistic. His relational reconstruction provides a theoretical framework for this complex relationship, both acknowledging the tension between the two and revealing the ways in which they are deeply interconnected. Care and justice are two inevitable parts of social activities, integrate with each other to jointly promote the progress of civilization in contemporary society.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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