CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION
Some feminists believe that not accepting care as ethics is the result of traditional conception of human nature, understood as male, and the application of values arising from this conception. The feminists have criticized the Rawlsian model of self-interested, individualistic, rational and autonomous man in the original position, which does not make room for the role for the nurturing, cooperation, care and empathy that are typically female characteristics. Some feminists have gone so far as to argue that Rawlsian model depends on male norms of moral reasoning and therefore emphasizes impartiality, impersonality, rationality and universality, fairness of procedures and principles it is based on.

In her book, 'Different Voice', Gilligan argues, originating the notion of 'ethic of care', that, moral problem arises when there is conflict between responsibilities. According to her moral problems arise not because of competing rights. Therefore, she insists moral problems require for resolution contextual thinking and narrative rather than formal and abstract thinking which is defined as reason. Ethic of care is concerned primarily with the activities centering around moral
development related to understanding of responsibility and relationships. The ethic of justice in contrast as the conception of morality depends on fairness related moral development that require understanding of rights and rules.

Care theorists are concerned with particularity, contextuality distinct individuality and are critical of universalizability, which overrides peculiarities that need to be taken into account when resolving moral problems. The critics of ethic of care have argued that the feminists have to at least assume some principle of equal moral worth to avoid advocating commitment to particular others. The critics have argued that an ethic of care means limiting attention to one’s family, friends or intimates ignoring those most needy and will not be applicable to the public realm.

Susan Moller Okin argues that principles of justice are not distanced and detached, but depend on empathy and concern for others. Therefore Rawlsian original position cannot be understood abstractly as rational choice, which problematizes the original position for as far as she is concerned her interpretation collapses the distinction between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice.
The difference between the feminist and the traditional ethics is primarily with regard to dependence on universality, for the former, and context, for the latter. The universal aspect comes from the exercise of reason in attaining it, in contrast context is dependent on emotion and relationship. Virginia Held explains,

"The ethics of care differs from these [traditional] theories in its assumptions, goals and method. It is closer to virtue ethics, which has enjoyed a recent revival, and it is sometimes thought to be a kind of virtue ethics. But the ethics of care is sufficiently different from virtue ethics as well as other theories to be counted".¹

Interestingly, Aristotle lays down three conditions for his version of virtue ethics. The third condition according to him can only be fulfilled with harmony of emotion and reason which can only be achieved with a ‘firm and unchanging state’ of agent’s character. The divide between ethic of care and ethic of justice is a divide because of insistence by the former on contextual and emotiveness. If, as may also be implied in Aristotle’s third condition, there can be harmony, then there appears to be some possibility of reconciliation, which is found in later feminist. If emotiveness can go hand-in-hand with the agent’s knowledge that her
actions are virtuous and with the agent’s acting for virtuous reasons and caring may be reconciled. Virtue Ethic needs that caring relationships be regulated by reason to ensure their moral appeal. The claim for Virtue Ethic’s emphasis on moral wisdom comprising virtues suggests an in-principle mechanism with which intimate relationships can be assessed morally.

The principle of universality has, historically speaking, been one of the most important principles invoked for morality. The principles, by definition, entail society, inter-personality and inter-subjectivity. It has been the assumption of moral philosophy in general that we cannot speak about virtuous or morally right action unless it is motivated by care and concern and is at the same time derivable from or subsumable under universal principle. In antiquity Aristotle and Cicero two most prominent Greek thinkers reduced the importance of care in moral action. Their primary concern was with universalization of morality so that it is accepted as the standard to be followed by all in similar situation. However, their writings did not exclude or diminish the significance of care and assigned it a role confined to the domestic. Even in modern philosophy the significance of developing sentiments of care with regard to others has not been slighted. For example, Hume has underlined the importance of developing care as an essential component of moral action.
In fact, the entire ‘virtue’ tradition has more often than not emphasized the importance of the cultivation of the sentiment in addition to reason as a crucial and characterizing feature of a moral action.

For Rawls the basic principles of morality are that everyone must have the most extensive liberty while allowing similar liberty to others. Furthermore, social or economic inequalities should not be allowed unless they work to everyone’s advantage and are attached to opportunities for everyone. For Rawls’ a just society is structured with institutions delivering equality and liberty. He therefore argues that only those social institutions are acceptable, if the society is to be just, which are egalitarian and democratic, that is open to all in like manner.

Feminist ethical perspective does not allow conceptualizing morality as essentialist or universalist. These characterizing features of moral action, according to them, are not necessarily in accordance with conventional rational perspective on ethical problem. The Feminist ethical perspective provides an alternative framework of evaluating the rightness or wrongness of particular actions subjecting them to considerations in given contexts and not abstracted.

In contrast the classical male ethical perspective has advanced a universalist, essentialist and transcendentalist set of criteria for evaluating
the moral rightness or wrongness of action. Feminist ethical philosophers have placed emphasis on the role of emotion, care, love and connectedness to replace the claimed determining role of justice and reason. Women ethical philosophers have preferred to abandon the high-ground assumed by universal theorists of justice, instead they require taking into account the particularity of the differences and ambiguities of actual moral life arising out of conflicts in the social inter-personal relations. The feminists, adopting adequate, relevant and critical premises, advocate ethic of care as their main, determined and concerned goal to be treated as equals to men. In this effort they have denied that justice and equality are primarily moral considerations in inter-personal relations. They argue that universal theorists wrongly emphasize that justice and equality are the basic characteristics of morality. In contradistinction to the universal theorists, women ethical philosophers have forcefully brought out that ethic of care ought not only to guide us in the domestic sphere but also in the public sphere. According to feminist ethical philosophers, we cannot build morality on the premise of liberal individualism. Virginia Held rightly informs that,

"Some other feminists reject the contrast between care and justice and dispute their conceptualization. As distinct point of view. But the liberal critique of the ethic of care does
assume that there is a contrast so that justice always has
priority".2

Martha Nussbaum champions liberal universalism for women
over ethic of care. In her understanding she feels that the feminist critique
of liberalism can come into conflict with the "norms of reflective caring
that are preferred by liberalism".3 The critique offered by Nussbaum
misses out the point made by some feminists with regard to ethic of care.
These feminists have preferred reflective care over blind care, the care
which is typifies the moral bond between a mother and a child, where all
is sacrificed for the sake of the child. It is because of this that some
holders of the notion of reflective care disagree with Nussbaum arguing
she does not acknowledge care as a factor of self interest or choice. This
view is cryptically aired by Whitbeck, while describing the
responsibilities view of ethics, which gives primacy to responsibility over
obligations

"...the responsibilities view of ethics takes the moral
responsibilities arising out of a relationship as the
fundamental moral notion, and regards people as beings
who can (among other things) act for moral reasons, and
who come to this status through relationships with other people".4

There is no doubt that, as Joan Tonto points out,

"Often our responsibilities are conceived formally as the need to conform to obligations. Political theorists have devoted much attention to the question of how obligations arise, and usually our strongest obligations arise out of promises that we have made. Responsibility is a term that is embedded in a set of implicit cultural practices, rather than in a set of formal rules or series of promises".5

According to Gilligan women are initially selfish and from it they move to consider the needs of others and then they try to integrate the needs of both self and the other. Kohlberg’s scheme of the moral maturity is rejected by Gilligan in the context of women replacing it with three stage scheme found in the ethic of care, out of which the first stage is survival of the self. The second stage emerges out of this selfish desire to survive to where her morality is seen in the conventional feminine posture of self-sacrifice. The final stage is, according to Gilligan, the stage of truth where a new understanding develops in women “of the interconnection between other and self” and this is when care becomes
“self-chosen”. Gilligan goes on to assert that woman’s assumption is “that she is responsible for the actions of others while other is responsible for choices she makes” and this is a backward understanding. According to Gilligan the transition from goodness to truth can only be reached accepting the responsibility for one’s own choice.

The feminist require that in order for a person or individual to be morally upright s/he must be able to respond to and demonstrate caring. Patricia Benner suggests that “the development of a capacity for responsiveness is an important moral quality in caring”. It also suggests the need to keep a balance between the need of care-givers and care-receivers. On the collective level too, a morally good society or community must also be adequately caring for its members. However, women ethical philosophers are trying to overthrow the generally accepted moral principles, such as ‘do not steal’, ‘being truthful’, ‘not breaking promises’, ‘not harming others’ etc. This implies that ethic of care should not be understood as an exclusive value system and therefore is not and should not be taken to be an alternative total account of morality, as this will also be contrary to the professed aim of feminist ethics of contextualizing morality in order to get away from the abstract notions. However, what marks feminist ethical philosophers is that, other
things remaining the same, caring is the main feature characterizing good moral or good human life. The feminist assert that while other values are both complementary or supplementary caring is the crucial feature which characterizes any individual or collective action. They argue that even men who may claim to abide by the considerations of other vital values will admit that any account of morality remains incomplete without a reference to this most crucial feature of caring.

The responsibility to care depends on a number of factors resulting from our doing or not doing certain things. Our becoming parents leads to the responsibility of caring for the children. We being children, leads us to the responsibility of caring for our parents, As Joan Tranto points out,

"...that between these extremes of being responsible for everyone in every way, and thinking of responsibility as rooted in biology, there is a wide range of other possible assumptions of responsibility that are rooted in political motivations, cultural practices, and individual psychology".10

The feminists have critiqued the traditional universalist ethics from the perspective that most women believe, feel and think in the framework of responsibility and interdependence with others. They are
deeply concerned with moral issues like caring for children and others, who are independent and self-sufficient. This has a special bearing on any moral and political thought. The feminists reject as gender biased the traditional and dominant view of the feminine experience being in the household and therefore of little relevance to morality since it is determined by ‘nature’ or biology, in contrast to the life of men transcending these limitation in the public sphere or the political arena.

Care and compassion in the context of unequal economic distribution, that is, where, women are dependent economically on the men, is not only unhealthy to the woman but also when extended to other family. This is so since it is only through family relationships that women estimate and maintain themselves and develop a sense of their moral values. It is an acceptable fact that care if restricted by the context of unequal power relations may do more harm than good.

Most feminists have pointed out, as is being pointed out again and again, that women are more concerned with their family than with the more general social good, which has been claimed by men to be their domain. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere agree with this assumption of the universal distinction between the public domain and the domestic domain. In Gilligan’s model,
"...women are more inclined to link morality to responsibility and relationships and to their ability to maintain ongoing social ties than are men. They achieve power and prestige through caring for others, and, Gilligan argues, their embeddedness in relationship should not be considered a developmental liability".  

It cannot be denied by anyone that both are kinds of duties and can be accepted as part of one morality. The unity of such a morality is constituted through commitment to some universalizing principle.

Gilligan, however, finds the principle of fairness and an ethic of justice to be describable from two different sex experiences, the male and female, that we our self-negotiate in the world. The experiences that self goes through are then not fixed but process undergoing change. Therefore, the advocates of the ethics of this process of our experience see it as the unfolding of the concept of responsibility.

There is no doubt that the feminist movement has taken the Enlightenment's ideals of equality and emancipation seriously and expected the same for women to be treated politically and socially as equals. These ideals flourished on the hope of betterment of human society through rational discussions, which did not include the
confinement of women in the domestic sphere and an unequal treatment being treated as subordinate to men. It is these ideals of Enlightenment that some feminists have argued that there is a need to hold on to some conception of reason and struggle for the widespread recognition of women being as rational as men.

Feminist philosophers are interested in working out the visibility of women in multiple sphere of operation; social, political, economic, cultural, etc. In order to work that out, feminist require a major of unanimity. They cannot go on emphasizing ethic of difference. Mere creative thinking, philosophy and research are not going to bestow any identity of women. There must be an already existing unanimity on the identity of women which actually determine the social, political and economic lives of women across the spectrum. This is possibly the role of a cultural tradition.

The impact of cultural tradition can be understood by taking cognizance of the institution of patriarchy with reference to its historical and contemporary role. Festenstein and Kenny describe the institution of patriarchy in the following words,

“...while patriarchy as an institution is a social constant so deeply entrenched as to run through all other political,
social, or economic forms, whether of caste or class, feudalism or bureaucracy, just as it pervades all major religious, it also exhibits great variety in history and locale. In democracies, for instance, females have often held no office or do so in such minuscule numbers as to be below even taken representation”.  

Joan Scott reminds us that “Politics construct gender and gender constructs politics”. Bernard Williams, a critic of both Kantian and utilitarian moral theories, writes of Kantian morality that it is,

“...specially characterized by its impartiality and its indifference to any particular person, and that moral thought requires abstraction from particular circumstances and particular characteristics of the parties, including the agent, except in so far as these can be treated as universal features of any morally similar situation”.

It is in a similar vein that Virginia Held also describes and relates Kantian, Utilitarian and feminist ethics,

“Kantian and utilitarian moral theories focus primarily on the rational decisions of agents taken as independent and autonomous individuals. Even virtue theory focuses on
individuals and their dispositions. In contrast, the ethics of care sees persons as enmeshed in relations with others. It pays attention primarily to relations between persons, valuing especially caring relations.”

Historical categorization of male and female virtues has tilted towards the male to accord higher status to his virtues. It is because of this historical tilt that the supposedly masculine value of justice is held to be superior to feminine of caring. Justice is made out to be the virtue which may not benefit its possessor and is regarded as benefiting all other, that is, it is not only benefiting but benefiting in a universalized manner. The concerns that arising out of private life, which society traditionally demarcates as the domain of women are wholly absent from public considerations. The imbalance some theorists of virtue claim may be checked and corrected, since it can make room for both the virtues of private and public life.

The advocates of theory of justice cannot square out the contradictions inherent in their own ethical position, for one hand they are dependent on universality while on the other are deeply involved in figuring out as to how to justify the different treatment of different persons, especially women. In other words, they is unable to present a
feasible or defensible explanation of the social, political and economic
differentiation inherent in their systemization. Theories of justice have all
along been trying to figure out how to legitimize the differential treatment
of persons arising from acquired characteristics or position in society.
The central question for theorists of justice is that why do social
institutions, law and customs treat different persons differently. However,
there are no ready-made answers as to this ailment of legal and
institutional partiality. This predicament is not resolved with the theorist
of justice emphasizing that institutions regulated by laws based on reason
are the only antidote which can cure the malaise of injustice in society.
Their insistence is that only legal and rational criteria can protect our
freedom and ensure justice, by equitable distribution of rights.

Carol Gilligan points out that,

"...a morality of rights and noninterference may appear
frightening... in its potential justification of indifference and
unconcern".  

The justice perspective has always focused on such values as fairness,
equality, and individual rights. It has always sought impartial and abstract
principles that can be applied consistently with a view to adjudicating
particular cases falling under their preview. In this perspective, the whole
emphasis is on general and timeless conception of a person, that is an abstract person and not real persons in actual or real situations. In this perspective individual persons are always seen as instances of the universal conception of men.

The ethics of care, on the other hand, is premised on different lines of thinking or reasoning. There is a paradigmatic shift in understanding and interpretation of the moral issues. Virginia Held clarifies,

"...the ethic of care, the focuses on attentiveness to context, trust responding to needs, and offers narrative nuance, it cultivates caring relations in both personal, political, and global contexts. An ethic of justice seeks fair decisions between competing individual rights and interests. The ethics of care sees the interest of carers and cared for as importantly shared. While justice protects equality and freedom from interferences, care values positive involvement with others and fosters social bonds and cooperation".

In contrast to the perspective of justice subsuming deontological, teleological and consequentalist theories, feminist ethical thinkers have argued for an alternative ethics. Feminists in this alternative perspective
have suggested that the primacy of reason and universality in framing ethics may be abandoned in favor of the contextualist attitude. The contextualist attitude will confront the actual moral problems one as opposed to the abstract. The actual situation will not discriminate as inferior any one part of the society and marginalize it. The feminists consider care to be the fundamental ethical attitude from which a full-fledged ethical approach can be elaborated. The following words will illustrate the same.

“Ethics of Caring or care is a moral sentiment and concern for the well-being of others. As an emotional attitude toward other individuals as individuals, care differs from benevolence or sympathy, which concerns other individuals as human beings in accordance with abstract moral principles. Hence, caring is much deeper and particularized than sympathy. It is certainly not merely a feeling, but also has a cognitive element, that, understands another person’s real needs, welfare, and situation. Care has generally been taken as one among important attitudes. Heidegger, however, saw care as the fundamental attitude of Dasein or human being. In the second half of the twentieth century, feminist thinkers have considered care to
be the fundamental ethical phenomenon and have attempted to construct an entire ethical approach on its basis, that is, the ethics of care or the caring perspective.\textsuperscript{18}

To all intent and purposes, it cannot be denied or doubted, that we happen to be ethical being. As social or political animals, we are condemned to be ethical. We operates within a social context and cannot help caring about the interests and values of other people. The interest and values of wider society among others definitely generate a perspective of caring. Our deliberations, evaluations and considerations of the interests of the other constitute our caring. Of course, we also have a sense of ourselves as isolated and independent, however, ethics starts with interaction with others and as such we are fundamentally dependent upon others. Even if we choose to just care for ourselves, it unavoidably leads to caring for interests of others as they are inextricably linked to our own interests. Cuomo rightly points out,

\textit{...our commitments to others, and to our projects together, create a framework in which other’s well-being remains necessary to our conception of the good.}\textsuperscript{19}
There is an impasse that develops between the feminist insistence on thinking about ethics by not ignoring the sex, being the basis of traditional ethics creating in part rules, judgments, and oppression. The theorists, claim feminists, who are centrally concerned with justice and elimination of oppression it appears did not acknowledge the hidden titles of sexual being, resulting in unrealized favoring of a particular sex. The theorists of ethics of justice do not realize that discourse on choice and agency is not sufficient for this does not easily accommodate gender equality and equality for the marginalized. It is this lack that creates the motivation and texture of ethical life.

Kant's major effort was to restore rationality to ethics and develops ethics along the lines to make it accessible and applicable to all. His intuition is shared by many writers, both before and after him, that for an action to be ethical it has to depend on reason. However, recent critiques, including by the feminists, suggest that the pure rational ego is separates ethics from the emotional and sexual realities of human existence, which require care. Peter Allmark points out the difference in orientation,

"The ethic of care says that we should care, that caring is a moral quality and that we should encourage conditions which create care." 20
However, he goes on to argue,

“What it means is that we should care about the right things in the right way and encourage the required qualities. But by focusing on care as a moral quality in itself, something it is not, ethics of care can tell us nothing of what those right things are”\textsuperscript{21}

Virginia Held does not agree and says,

“The relation between mothering person and child is not voluntary and therefore not contractual. The ties that bind mothering person and child are affectional and solicitous on the one hand, and emotional and dependent on the other...So the intention and goal of mothering is to give of one’s care without obtaining a return of a self-interested kind. The emotional satisfaction of a person engaged in mothering arises from the well-being and happiness of another human being and from the health of the relation between the two persons, not the gain that results from an egoistic bargain”.\textsuperscript{22}

Women were consider by Kant to be incapable of achieving full moral personhood. He even went to the extent to say that women lose their charm when they behave like men. In short, he visualized women as
emotional fools, who would be charming only when confined to the household affairs. In a similar manner Hegel said women’s worry for their families could be admirable provided it is expressed in its proper place, that is in the four walls of their homes. Hegel goes a step further to suggest a role for the women outside their traditional place is a threat to the more universal aims aspired to by men. Lee points out,

"Morality implies a standard of conduct. Morality is a more or less systematic sanction of conduct. As moralities are human constructions within the broad field of morals, that is, are systems of standardized evaluation of conduct, there have been and is much different kind of moralities."^{23}

MacIntyre argues along similar lines and goes on to say that in ethics we are guided by general considerations leading to general conclusions, which nonetheless admit of exceptions. If we follow MacIntyre then we land up by admitting that feminist ethics can only be looked at as an exception.

The political notion of difference within the ethic of care is resisted voicing suspicion that interpretation is loaded with Cartesian dualism in which one views the body from apart and from a distance to determine its values as if from a distant which asserts the nature of woman being
different from man. The Cartesian rationality assumes that human individuals can be independent, self-interested or mutually disinterested. Bernard Gert says,

"...Morality is viewed as a public system that applies to all rational person, but being rational does not require that one act on such a public system, even if as a rational person one would put forward that system as a public one. Kant, on the standard interpretations, would not agree with this view, for he took acting on the maxim you put forward as a universal law as a necessary feature of rationality".\(^{24}\)

However, Jonathan Jacobs points out,

"...only rational beings are capable of morality because only rational beings have the capacity to act according to the conception of law i.e. according to principles".\(^{25}\)

The argument is that rationality if it is what it claims to be cannot emphasize any one of the choice over another, it is to allow a person to make her or his own choice.

It is keeping this in mind that Joan Tronto argues that such view explains the process of care,
"...that care is a complex process that ultimately reflects structures of power, economic order... and our notions of autonomy and equality."  

Nel Noddings feels that rules and principles may play a destructive role which needs to be taken cognizance of, she says,

"...the destructive role of rules and principle” of which rights are reflection: If we “come to rely almost completely on external rule [we] become detached from the very heart of morality: the sensibility that calls forth caring”.

The ethic of care is characterized by its particularizing view of morality. It is characterized by its approach of not abstracting from the particular situation but understanding and responding to the situation. The aversion of the care ethicists to abstraction is put forward by Peter Allmark points out,

“Gilligan and Noddings have both criticized Gandhi for his ‘blind willingness to sacrifice people to truth’, that is, some form of abstract truth. In practice this unwillingness of ‘caring’ ethicists to acknowledge the importance of abstract ideals has some disturbing consequences”.

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The emphasis on rationality and abstract truth, both in political and ethical theories, is a typical feature of the liberals. Despite the concerted effort liberal feminists are critical of and reject the ethic of care. They defend contractarianism asserting that views contained in this theory can be extended beyond the political sphere and enable equal treatment of women in the family. But this is beside the point since equality and justice are not the primary concerns in the four walls of the home or outside it. Gordon Graham rightly points out,

"The liberation of slaves is the liberation of people from slavery. Similarly, the liberation of women is to be understood as the liberation of human beings. The result of such liberation is not a new kind of creature, but the emergence of women to the full status of persons. The liberation of women involves no appeal to the moral significance of womanhood, but only of personhood".29

Similarly Michelle Rasaldo points out that,

"...woman’s [real] place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does (or even less, a function of what, biologically, she is) but the meaning her
activities [of serving and caring] acquire [by serving as a model for] concrete social interactions. 30

Feminists at have demanded for women equal pay for equal work, to be present and treat in social institutions as equal to men. The feminists have rejected the ascription of traditional attributes depicting them as feminine or maternal at least to the extent that through them they are deemed incompatible with of the identification certain ontic and moral values and upheld by them and not be taken in with the ideological glossing over by the rationality dominant in discourse on society and state. Feminist Legal theorist Catharine Mackinnon wrote that,

"In the liberal state, the rule of law- neutral, abstract, elevated, pervasive – both institutionalizes the power of men over women and institutionalizes power in its male form... Male forms of power over women are affirmatively embodied as individual rights in law...abstract rights authorize the male experience of the world". 31

The historically long drawn-out patriarchal institutions are facing challenges from contemporary feminist philosophy, ethics and politics. The feminist philosophers challenge the wide spread patriarchy all the way to its foundations. Feminist philosophers are launching powerful

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discursive considerations with a view to uprooting patriarchy. Feminist activists are also challenging the imperative and the institutions based on patriarchal practices on the social and the political front. This specially evident in the feminist critique of essentialist, traditionalist and universalist ethics and politics. It is on this site that the feminists have tried to provide an alternative to the dominant ethical, social, political, economic and cultural values. In years to come, feminist philosophy is poised to launch a deeper and profounder attack on patriarchal establishment. It will be interesting to watch what philosophical turn and twists will be negotiated by the exponents of patriarchal world view and value system and what would be the negotiation with the feminist deconstruction exposing its deep rootedness. The future of philosophy as that of human civilization is open to numberless possibilities.
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