CHAPTER-IV

MORAL CONCEPT
Moral concepts consist of values, virtues and ethics that help individuals to distinguish their actions as being morally right or morally wrong. It is not only morality but several other fields such as psychology, sociology and religion that focus on moral concepts. Values are moral concepts used in decision-making. A person’s mindset and behavior are directly connected to a person’s value system and most religious traditions specify values. Three most important moral values are freedom, love, and empathy. Virtues are moral concepts, the most important virtues include courage and honesty, which are generally considered morally right and a positive reflection of an individual’s character. Ethics are set of rules that help determine right from wrong with regard to interpersonal interaction, responsibility and restraint are two important ethical rules.

The chapter will be divided into three sections Universality, Respect and Responsibility. Through these sections we would explore the relation moral concepts have with the mentioned qualities of universality, respect and responsibility. However, ethics is a purely
theoretical project and refers to practice only in so far as it is employed to justify its arguments. The theoretical structure of traditional is based on the ethics notion of universality. Ethics, throughout its history, has displayed attempts to universalize. The universalisation is then its goal, for it, require that its rules are formed in a manner the one we exampled that is for humanity as a whole.

**Universality**

In logic a statement is considered to be universal if it can be conceived as being true in all possible contexts without contradiction. The relativist notion denies the existence of some or all universal truths, particularly ethical ones. Mathematic is a field where truths are typically studied for their universal scope. Through usage of word truth has various domains of application relativism does not necessarily apply to all of them. In philosophy, universalism is a doctrine of claiming universal facts that can be discovered and is understood as opposite to relativism. When used in the framework of ethics, the meaning of universal refers to principles which are applicable to individuals in analogical situations. Ethical universalism can be defined as the principle requiring equal and impartial treatment of all people with the view to further their personal goods or interests.
In ethics, especially feminist ethics, there is much discussion on ethical particularism, which is to be distinguished from ethical relativism. Ethical particularism is talk about giving preferential treatment to the interests of a particular person or persons as over others, including not only oneself but also other persons with whom one has special relationship, such as family members, friends, the community, nation or may be other restricted social groups. History shows a continuous dialogue in which the relationship between universality and particularity has come into interplay. An approach argues that the line dividing the universal and particular is uncontaminated. Another approach is that universal can only be grasped by reason, therefore there is no possibility of particular thought affecting the universal.

In contemporary thought prominence is given to two different types of ethical universalism, that is, utilitarianism and deontology. Both of these concepts provide for equal and impartial treatment of private interests. Utilitarianism requires that all persons be regarded equally and impartially to ensure producing the greatest possible overall sum of goods.

The notion of equal and impartial treatment of all has in contemporary times taken the form of human rights, however this is
although claims to be universal in nature is concerned only with possible violations of rights, which can be distinguished, as pointed out by David Brink, by the serious flaws that mar the attempts to show utilitarianism, as a version of ethical universalism, can justify varieties of ethical particularism.¹

The utilitarian’s do not share the Kantian deontological approach that morality is concerned with rights and duties rather than goods. The utilitarians do agree with Kant that morality contains principles for moral judgments that are universalizable impartial rules. Joan Tranto points out that,

"...universalistic morality requires that the rules of moral conduct are accessible to all of those who are expected to adhere to moral rules. Thus, the moral rules must have a universal grounding; usually this grounding is in reason, though we could also imagine it being in some other source, such as a shared divine spark that dictates such rules."²

The universalism in the Eighteenth Century Europe saw broader society whose social, moral, and political concerns were increasingly less parochial and more universal. This was an era of transition and required
a change in moral thinking moving away from a type contextually and particularist moral tenets to an ethic based on human reason dependent on the universal.

The distinguishing feature of a universalist ethical thinker is his differentiating moral ‘truth’ from universally valid moral norms or principles and contextually changing moral norms. It has sometimes been argued that even if moral rules of conduct are understood to be contextually dependent, a universalist insists on norms and principles that are permanent and universal, without ruling out the possibility of it being changed if required, which can help in judging and evaluating the variations in the contextually determined morality.

However, according to Brennan, moral judgment requires to make a universal claim, which implies that the judgments of others should adhere to our reasons by applying moral standards and reasoning. Universalizability of moral judgments is related not only to the idea of rationality involved in moral assertions but also to the claim to objectivity, or some kind of truth. RM Hare says,

"It is most fundamentally because moral judgment are universalizable that we can speak of moral thought as rational (to universalize is to give the reason)." ³
An example of universal moral principle is "lying is wrong". It is claimed that the principle of universalizability is based on the assumption of naturally existing equality between all human beings. In the same way the principles of impartiality assume equality of all persons. The implication is that equality is the most essential principle of morality and put itself up for universal validity. It is argued that justice demands protection each person's freedom, therefore administration of justice has to be impersonal and cannot contextually differentiate among persons. Justice is traditionally considered to be the second most fundamental or substantive principle of morality or the moral point of view, as such, it is claimed to be universal as a normative principle that help in assessing morality and institutions of society. It is also taken to be the guiding norm, as found in Rawls, to correct the initial inequalities and injustices. The blindfold worn by the statute of justice is a metaphor for the law applying to all alike. As Gray puts it, the liberal state is

"...universalist affirming the moral unity of the human species and according (only) a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms".4

At one point Kohlberg stresses that his notion of,
"...morality as justice best renders our view of morality as universal. It restricts morality to a central minimal core, striving for universal agreement in the face of more relativist conceptions of the goods."  

Larrabee spots Kohlberg's use of the term 'justice' in his following passage,

"Justice the primary regard for the value and equality of all human being and for reciprocity in human relations is a basic and universal standard".  

Kohlberg in order to protect morality from a narrow legalistic or absolutistic interpretation uses the concept of universalizable principles of justice and simultaneously criticizes utilitarianism ending up in social Darwinism. Hare points out that,

"The thesis of universalizability does not require moral judgments to be made on the basis of highly general moral principles...Moral development...consists in the main in making our moral principles more and more specific by writing into them exceptions and qualifications to cover kinds of cases of which we have had experience".  

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The third substantive universal ethical principle is truth or truthfulness. The three principles of universal morality are equality, justice and truthfulness, considerable part of morality and can be promptly declared as universal moral principles with overriding authority in respect of all other moral codes.

Kant’s moral philosophy is the model of universal ethics. His categorical imperative, “Act only on that maxim which thou canst at the sometime will that it should become a universal law”⁸, provides maybe the most important and essential condition of universal morality. Kant, in other words, is asserting that only those maxims can be considered to be moral that can be followed by all mankind irrespective of time and place, in short, context. Kant meant that moral law is binding on all rational persons. Kant held that all specific moral duties can be derived from the categorical imperative, “Act only on the maxim which you can will to be a universal law”.⁹ Kant insists that consequences of an act of willing cannot be used to infer the good will of a person. He argues that good consequences could be sheer coincidence or accident arising out of an act that may have been motivated by a desire to cause harm, and bad consequences may be the result of an action that was done of good intentions. In view of this Kant lays down that a person can be said to have good-will only if s/he acts out of respect for moral law.¹⁰ Therefore,
deontology, the thesis held dear by Kant, asserts that any talk of goodwill can only be significant in the light of the person acting out of duty. Thus for Kant goodness is solely assessable on the criteria of rightness. Kantian principle could only be then invoked when one was acting according to law which can be willed to be universal and this needs that women be forced to be taken into consideration. According to Kant man's selfish nature makes the principle of respect the person and property of others unreliable therefore the need arises for universal laws to be evolved.

Habermas, following Kant's universalistic approach, in his 'Discourse Ethics' distinguishes different types of practical reasoning linking them to different moral principles or uses of 'ought'. Habermas, however, is not satisfied just with the universalistic element but adds to it a historical approach. Habermas' post-metaphysical work has come amidst a trend of moving away from of essentialist/foundational discourses of ethical or moral universalization. He argues for resting his ethics on, the notion of moral validity as generalizability. His discourse ethics aims to construct the moral point of view in order to initially and impartially interrogate 'right'. Habermas' universalization principle states that validity of a moral norm depends on,
"...the foreseeable consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of each individual could be jointly accepted by all concerned without coercion". ¹¹

According to Habermas the principle constitutes a moral dialogue where common interests shared by all are identifiable and establish norms that lead to generalizability. For Habermas the validity of a moral norm is established only if it satisfies an interest that is universalizable.

The moral theory of sentimentalisists like Hume, Butler and other proponents too identify a universal sentiment of sympathy and benevolence. It is interesting that they do not any major concern with the sentiment of benevolence in their moral theory. In the western ethical thought with the decline in the respectability of the moral sentiment theories the place of sympathy or benevolence has become even more secondary. However, the feminist critique of traditional ethics bears on the sentiments attached to decisions and thus lay emphasis on context which, should not be misunderstood as ethical relativism, as pointed out by Jaggar who says that,

"...[feminist ethics] incompatible with any form of moral relativism that condones the subordination of women or the
devaluation of their moral experience. It is neutral, however, between the plural and local understanding of ethics, on the one hand, and the ideal of a universal morality, on the other.”

Nel Noddling argues that the possibility of universalizability relies on an overemphasized sense of ‘sameness’, which implies that there are contexts identical in all respect. It may be conceded that Noddling is right to the extent that no two situations can be identical, for if nothing else they cannot escape the spatio-temporality of the context. However, this refers to metaphysical ‘sameness’ and not as is required for similarity determining morality. Noddling would nevertheless argue that universalizability is parasitic on the notion of sameness in the feature of situations, which cannot be obtained without abstracting from the real situation. For Noddling this runs down the significance of particular context in which caring is required. Caring satisfies the criterion for being a virtue, that is, it is a requirement of a person to flourish. It is obvious that without proper care most of the people cannot grow up to lead mentally and emotionally healthy lives. But this leads to the question of significance of personal relationships that are the hub of caring. Virginia Held has rightly pointed out that,
“Care has the capacity to shape new persons by more advanced understandings of culture and society and morality ever more advanced abilities to live well and cooperatively with other.”\textsuperscript{14}

She premised this by suggesting that flourishing is dependent on personal relationships which are seriously jeopardized without care for the sociality and rationality of the agents. It is only within relations that an agent is to continue as human. Care expresses an interrelation between feeling and responsiveness of the other affected by it. Care is not to be understood only in terms of actual ‘taking care’ of a person dependent on us or needing care. Care is also a part of general attitudes and shared awareness. Seem at least one important part of care.

In society each person is independent only to the extent that she enjoys her activities and shares other activities with others. A person is involved in a number of relationships arising out of their shared general commitments and goals. The argument is that the care and concern people have for each other may also originate from the affection that arises from their sharing in rational activity in which they are involved. This sharing in the beyond the immediate is not devoid of its involvement in higher-level interests. The feminists therefore insist that
care is moral, which may be different from the conventional demand of impartiality. However, it is claimed by others that this is the ground for not considering it to be at par with public or impartial universal morality since it is not based on universal principles.

The second dimension of ethics that is ‘responsibility’ can be viewed as central but at the same time problematic for care. In fact, it can be argued that other theories of morality do not take ‘responsibility’ as a feature of ethics seriously. Responsibility is among the handful of concepts that requires constant visiting. Joan Tronto says,

“Nussbaum’s and Sen’s insight in the context of a care ethic provides a vocabulary and framework within which to make judgments about needs... But a care ethic, with its attendant moral requirement of attentiveness and of the need to assume responsibility for that which is done and not done, might more quickly expose how the powerful might try to twist an understanding of need to maintain their position of power and privilege”\(^{15}\)

Gilligan characterizes the viewpoint of an ethic of care as one “...where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to recognition of responsibility for one another”\(^{16}\). For Gilligan morality
importantly but not exclusively consists in attention, understanding and emotional responsiveness toward the person with whom one stand in relationship. Gilligan recognizes that each person is embedded within a web of ongoing relationships.

**Respect**

Respect for persons is a central concept in many ethical theories. There are theories that hold respect for other persons to be the founding element of all moral obligations and duties. It is universally held that all persons have the right to deserve respect. The right to respect in all its complexity implies a right to equality and sympathetic treatment. However, it is argued that here we are confusing rights a person may have with moral principles. The argument is sustained by emphasizing moral principles forming the basis of any given system of rights and duties, whereby they legitimize or delegitimize ethically adequate or inadequate moral and legal systems.

In order to define respect as duty, it is, on one hand, sharply demarcated from fear and submission. On the other hand, it is not to be confused with admiration, liking and love. This follows from the fact that the respect or special regard for persons of unusual merit is different from the respect one normally has for persons. Thomas Hill says,
“Some philosophers identify respect with a gape, a special kind of love, but respect is perhaps most often regarded as a distinct attitude that should constrain and complement the promptings of love. Kant, for example, held that the requirements of respect and love are different, though compatible, and that both are dependent upon the more general and fundamental idea that humanity in every person is an end in itself”.

In considering the duty of mutual respect Rawls also takes a position in his theory of justice. He looks at respect in terms of arguments taken by him for positive duties. The arguments for positive duty of Rawls do not work with the understanding of duty in the ordinary sense, where what is required is enforcement. He argues that mutual respect is not a duty a genuine duty, that is, it is not a duty that requires to be enforced. Mutual respect is has to be unenforced and only then can one expect their associates to reciprocate. Bernard Gert, while quoting Rawls, argues,

“Their self-respect and their confidence in their own system of ends cannot withstand the indifference much less the contempt of other has weight only if “other” is interpreted
as "all other". Self-respect and confidence in the value of one's own system of ends can withstand the indifference and contempt of many others, as long as some show respect. Unenforced respect by some is more important for self-respect than enforced respect by everyone."^{18}

The idea of treating others with due respect is an integral to everyday or common sense morality. The complexity arises when persons disagree not only about when respect is needed but also what is required to fulfill it and why there is a need for such fulfillment.

There can be a specific feeling of regard for a person for his special and actual qualities that may give rise to respect. But respect can also be result of adhering to certain specific code of conduct, for example, as in the case of elders, which is part and parcel of given norms in the society meant for governing individual behavior. Such unwritten rules of behavior are present in all societies and therefore non-apt behavior is considered to part of not showing respect and is condemned on these very grounds, in this a large role is played by what are understood to be conventions. The respect is normally generated out of the values a person possesses. The value a person possesses, if at all, by virtue of being a person, which Kant would term the rational nature.
However, ordinarily it is argued that respect and love are responses to one and the same value. But respect carries with it rationality that has occasionally been, especially in literature, considered to be analogical to love. Thus argue some feminists that regarding a person loved by us as special does not change the view on respect, for him or her. Being loved treated as special implies not being held out for comparisons but being treated subjectively, dropping which leads us back to the Kantian requirements for respect. Stephen Darwall says of respect that it

"...involves recognizing an individual’s dignity or value in himself, but it is grounded in features that a person shares with any other moral agent".¹⁹

Stephen Darwall has tried to address the challenge presented by feminist ethics. Virginia Held says that he,

"...finds that the ethic of care usefully calls attention to the actual relationships that are such an important part of our lives. But he denies that the ethic of care really presents an alternative opposed to the moralities of impartial universal principles, the moralities of Kant and utilitarianism. He argues that we arrive at the basic idea of utilitarianism “that everyone’s welfare matters and matters equally".²⁰
Hence we extend to all persons the kind of respect we can recognize that an individual we know deserves. To Darwall, then, the ethic of care is a "supplement" to "morality as conceived by the moderns", but both aim at the same idea of equal concern and respect.21

Responsibility

The standard meaning attached to the term 'responsibility' is 'accountability of person' for what a s/he does and its consequence. However, a person is also accountable for her/his emotions, etc., as well. It is thus that a person can be responsible and can be blamed, praised, punished, or rewarded for her/his actions. One may be responsible under law or moral principle depending on whether s/he is subjected to legal or moral obligation. A parent’s feeling that the newborn child is the center of the universe and that there is nothing more important in the entire world, may be a temporary emotional distortion but is interesting for us for it expresses a deep moral sense of responsibility. However, the difference between law and morality are separate only occasionally they may coincide. Normally, a person is responsible for an action for s/he is understood to be the agency or cause of the action, brought about by him directly or indirectly. But then not all responsibilities have a causal link, such as our responsibility in case of omission. The condition for
responsibility is the requirement of the person at least being aware of what s/he is doing and has a choice in the matter, that is, s/he is not under any form of coercion. Therefore there is a close connection between freedom and responsibility. Beauvoir says that we have

"...to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns it. A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied."²²

Most feminists critique the traditional ethics through its not taking into account that women think in the framework of responsibility in the context of interrelations and interdependence. The basic purview of women is their care for children and family, the feminists feel this to be especially relevant for moral and political thought. They argue that traditionally dominant view that what women experience in their home is irrelevant to morality, which has ‘nature’ or biology as the determining co-ordinates as compared to man who transcends the security of the home to enter the polis. This philosophical propagation of this traditional view according to the feminists leads to more harm than benefits.

Larabee points out that "...Gilligan argues, men and women claim different moral imperatives: women feel "a responsibility to discern and
alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world" while men's moral imperative "appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of other".\textsuperscript{23} Larabee goes on to point out that Sherry Orther and Harriet Whitehead, emphasizes that,

"...women in the societies...tend to be more involved with private and particularistic concerns, with relationships, and with welfare of their own families than they are with welfare of their own families than they are with the more general social good. Men, on the other hand, are more universalistic and have a concern for the welfare of the whole."\textsuperscript{24}

Gilligan counters the traditional view on the relation of responsibility to morality or ethic by arguing in terms of imperfect and perfect duties. She points out that care and responsibility are understood as imperfect duties, while rights and justice are taken to be perfect duties. She goes on to assert that the cherished goals of the care of concern for and helping others, fulfilling obligations and responsibilities and being compassionate towards others is lumped as imperfect duties. On the other hand rights and justice are understood to be invulnerable, absolute and universal.\textsuperscript{25}
Larabee with the help of quotation from Bernard Gert puts the issue of universal and care ethic by saying, "This is because "evils are ranked in too much diverse way.""\textsuperscript{26} It may be true that sex-specific differences as ranking of evils, for instance, in accordance with the premises put onward earlier, that females consider consequences on the value of the social system as less grave than consequences on the value of interpersonal relations. However this can be taken to be a sex-specific filling of freedom that is conceded within the limits of morality, whereby morality is understood as constituted through an obligation to some universalizing procedure, that is, to impartiality.\textsuperscript{27}

The concept of responsibility exhibits itself in different ways. Responsibility revolves around the self and self-serving, again sometimes it veers around needs of others, and here fulfilling one's own need is considered selfish, and yet again it focuses on relationship, which depends on the fulfillment of the needs of both the self and the other.

The chapter deals with the three features of the traditional ethics. The three features identify the traditional ethics on the basis of which the feminist ethic of care is supposed to be not acceptable. The chapter through its discussion shows that latter two features, viz. respect and responsibility are included primarily of their universal characteristics. In
short, it appears that the feature that traditional ethics posses to
demarcate itself is the universal principle. However, this chapter brings
out that the specific relationships of persons in their various modes of
kindness, friendship, compassion, and the like are expression of
important human qualities which have a claim to be considered moral.
The chapter also shows that care for persons cannot be exhaustively
codified into universal principles since they are contextually dependent
on. The feminists have argued that sense the notion of ‘universal
principle’ in morality that has abandoned rationalism, impartiality.
Kohlberg, in his six stages of psychological moral development, on
which most of feminist ethics depends for justification, acknowledges
that moral capacities, other than derived from the universal principles,
involve perception and sensitivity to particulars and care and concern for
individuals, and are equally central to moral agents. The metaphysical
universalist tradition creating, what has now come to be termed, the
illusion of the Enlightenment, has the possibility of reformulation, in the
wake of critiques of the feminist and other marginalized, in moral
philosophy or ethics.
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