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Critical thinking, charity and care: reason and goodness both

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Preamble

This paper is part of a larger project on the ethics of care which I think it would be helpful to briefly describe in order to provide some context for what follows.

My project is to appeal to the ethics of care as a model of moral reasoning in order to make sense of a claim that I want to make about Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. In turn, I believe that the way in which I put this model to use sheds new light on what it means to call the ethics of care a mode of moral reasoning, as it is called by feminist psychologist of moral development, Carol Gilligan.1

Many people have become familiar with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* through the adaptation brought to us on the big screen by Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey. Some have also become aware, through the publicity surrounding that movie, of the story behind the story contained in the novel that was first published in 1987. This is the story of how Morrison, in the course of performing editorial work on a piece of Black history, encountered old press clippings that haunted her for years after. They told of the case of a fugitive who not long after escaping with her young children to the free state of Ohio was recaptured by her former enslavers. This woman, named Margaret Garner, killed her children, and then attempted suicide, rather than allow them to be made slaves.2

What I want to say about *Beloved* begins with the claim that it constitutes a work of moral reasoning on the part of its author. I also want to insist that the mode of moral reasoning in which Morrison engages plays a crucial role in facilitating reasoning about this subject. The fictional narrative that she creates does more than simply provide a vivid backdrop for a moral argument, or a compelling illustration of a point she wants to convince her readers to accept. It would be a mistake to conclude that the moral reasoning in which Morrison engages, and in which she invites her readers to engage, is something that can be reduced to the "moral of the story".

The ethics of care, which Gilligan identifies as a narrative mode of reasoning, is one which can help us to appreciate the quality of Morrison's reasoning in *Beloved*. But in order to see this it is useful to understand how the ethics of care works. That brings me to my comparison of responding to moral problems from the perspective of the ethics of care and approaching arguments through the application of the principle of charity.

Charity and care: How nice.

Discussions of the distinctive ethics associated with the work of developmental

psychologist Carol Gilligan have been beset by problems generated by some of the commoner connotations of the word she uses to name this ethic, namely care. Care is typically understood to be an emotion, a sentiment, or an attitude or approach to the world, especially to people, that is informed by kindness, compassion, niceness and other gentle affective responses. These are qualities strongly associated with femininity, and especially with maternal, nurturing forms of femininity.

Similarly, efforts to teach the skills associated with critical thinking are often hampered by the connotations of some of the names by which this field is delineated. Most notable among these names is the *logic* part of informal logic, or the rationality taken to be characteristic of a good critical thinker. Often when I ask beginning students what they expect to learn in a critical thinking course I hear answers like, "It will help me to present my views and solve problems in a detached, unemotional, objective, logical and rational way." Many expect to learn an algorithm for decoding and assessing bad arguments or for constructing good ones. They are frustrated when I tell them that critical thinking is more art than science. They are puzzled by accounts of reasonableness and rationality that do not fit familiar cold hard masculine, even Vulcan stereotypes of what it means to be logical.

For some this confusion and frustration are heightened with the introduction of the Principle of Charity as an interpretive tool. The word charity, like care, has its roots in the Latin *caritas*—Christian love. Some students take it from this, that to interpret an argument in accordance with the principle of charity they must treat the arguer nicely or kindly, being gentle, supportive and not too critical in their approach. This no doubt has something to do with our primary understanding of charity as something one does for other, generally needy, people. It takes a considerable stretch of the imagination, for someone not used to this way of speaking, to imagine what it means to be charitable to an *argument*, to a piece of discourse.

Some philosophers describe the principle of charity and account for its place in the practice of critical thinking in a way that tends to feed into this view of things. R.H. Johnson and J.A. Blair, for example, introduce their discussion of the principle of charity by observing that "Logic has its ethical dimension." In explaining this, they stress the relationship between an argument and the person who utters it, so as to motivate the claim that we must treat arguments ethically. "An argument," they observe, "is an extension of a person, and just as there are ethical obligations that must be acknowledged in our dealings with people, so there are ethical obligations to be acknowledged in dealing with their arguments." (7)

Curiously, when the focus of the discussion shifts back from the arguer and on to the argument, the moral language shifts from the language of kindness and generosity towards the language of justice and fairness. "In trying to decide whether a particular piece of discourse contains an argument or not," say Johnson and Blair, "we are under the obligation to treat it fairly, which means to

provide the most favourable logical interpretation of that discourse consistent with the evidence." (7)

Some explanations of the importance of the principle of charity evoke other dimensions of justice, specifically the juridical assumption of innocence until proven guilty. We are to always "give the benefit of the doubt" to whatever arguments, theories, or positions we are considering. A good example of this approach is provided by Bruce N. Waller's discussion of the issue in his *Critical Thinking: Consider the Verdict* (165). In the court of critical thinking we are to assume that any utterance resembling an argument is as cogent as its most cogent possible reconstruction, unless proven otherwise.

But the distance between being fair to an argument and treating someone who makes an argument with the ethical consideration due a person, is revealed more clearly when we compare the approach enjoined by the principle of charity and that prescribed by considerations of fidelity to the arguer's intentions. This issue arises when the interpreter presumes to add implicit premises to the reconstructed version of someone else's argument. As Richard Feldman points out, when you must depart some distance from the textual evidence in order to supply a premise needed to make an argument cogent, then the principle of charity and the principle of faithfulness come into conflict. He recommends resolving this by considering your interpretive objectives. "To a large extent," he says "how you solve [this conflict] depends on the goal you have in reconstructing a particular argument. If your interest is primarily in figuring out whether the author established the conclusion in question, it is best to stay close to the text. If your interest is primarily in figuring out whether the conclusion of the argument is true and whether it is established by considerations along the lines of those raised by the author, then it is acceptable to make a strong argument that strays farther from the original text." (137)

The fundamental rationale underlying charitable interpretation within the philosophical practice of critical thinking is to be found in accounts like the latter. And few accounts of the principle of charity are complete without reference to the rationality of the practice as it is revealed by considerations like the following. To interpret a piece of discourse as an argument rather than a non-argument, where it is possible to interpret it as a good argument rather than bad one, and interpreting it in such a way that you reconstruct the strongest possible version of the argument compatible with the discursive evidence, is to adopt a strategy that has a singular advantage. That is, it enables you to consider the merits of accepting the conclusion and, if the merits are strong, to enrich yourself by incorporating it into your belief system. On the other hand, if even the best argument that can be reconstructed from the available discursive material is not good enough to make it reasonable to accept the conclusion, you are enabled to defend yourself more capably against such a false belief, armed with a critique designed to defuse a stronger rather than a weaker argument in favour of it.

It is curious that the principle of charity, whose name suggests a benevolent and other-regarding orientation, should turn out to be informed by such self-interested, perhaps even selfish motivation. Might there be something comparable in the ethics of care? I think so, but before I explain why, I shall lay out one or two other shared characteristics which will make it easier to discuss the implications of what the principle of charity and the ethics of care have in common.

Methodological Note

In order to make sense of my comparison between the ethics of care and the principle of charity some distinctions between them with respect to the scope of the fields within which they apply will have to be made.

Critical thinking, insofar as it focuses on argumentation, is about analyzing and evaluating the strength of relationships between statements. We ask whether the structure of their relationships, in addition to the inherent strength of the statements they incorporate (which in turn is usually dependent on the structure of another group of statements, or possible sub-argument) is such that it can adequately support the conclusion's claim to being a statement it would be reasonable to accept, i.e. to incorporate into our belief systems.

I will speak from here on in as if critical thinking as an academic discipline is restricted to the consideration of the sub-class of reasoning called argumentation. In fact this is how the majority of critical thinking textbooks are constructed. Most however give at least a nod to the idea that the proper scope of critical thinking is much broader than this, that critical thinking is a skill that enables us to make the best sense of any phenomena we encounter, not just those that take the shape of an argument. Moral reasoning falls within the scope of critical thinking both in the narrowly conceived sense and in the more broadly conceived sense. By this I mean that moral reasoning includes but is not limited to analyzing, evaluating and constructing arguments with moral content and moral implications. But moral reasoning is not restricted to argumentation.

If I am right to say that reconstructing an argument represents an effort to come to terms with the conclusion it is supposed to support, then by analogy, I am claiming, we can understand the activity that falls under the description of the ethics of care as representing an attempt to come to terms with moral subjects.

In coming to terms with statements, we arrange and rearrange the relationships between other statements, we construct and re-construct arguments, which if successful reveal the truth value of the statement in question and enable it to come into appropriate relation with the statements that make up our cognitive belief systems. In coming to terms with moral subjects we also engage in linguistic activity but one in which the truth value of its elements are less determinable than is the case with argumentation. These elements are descriptions constructed to characterize moral subjects (persons rather than issues). Because a moral subject is by definition something, or,

more properly, someone whose description must be incomplete and open-ended, it is most at home in a medium that better tolerates open-endedness and indeterminacy than does argumentation. Narrative (and perhaps even poetry), with its capacity to bear semantic tension —ambiguity and perhaps even contradiction — without collapsing into meaningless nonsense, is such a medium.3

From the perspective of the ethics of care a successful narrative is one which enables you to come to terms, not this time with the truth value of a statement, but with the moral authority of a subject (or the moral authority of the position s/he occupies within a given context). This enables you to incorporate that position or moral orientation into the narrative understanding you have of yourself as a moral subject (or to further consolidate that understanding of your self according to your opposition to the moral position in question). You thereby realize the possibility of coming into relation with other moral subjects as members of a shared moral universe, just as the principle of charity enables you to come into relationship with others as part of a shared universe of justified beliefs about the world.

The normative and hermeneutic dimensions of charity and care

The practice of philosophical hermeneutics depends among other things on awareness that interpretation is an inherently normative activity. This conception of interpretation informs the work of Donald Davidson who argues for a theory of interpretive practice rather than the articulation of a translation manual.4 The principle of charity is one of the tools that Davidson argues is essential to successfully engage in interpretative practice, and whose operation we must recognize in order to adequately theorize this practice.5 More specifically, as commentators have pointed out, the principle of charity is itself expressive of a norm of rationality. Michael Root observes,

> Norms of rationality guide both the interpretation of thought and the interpretation of action. In the case of action the norms are provided by the theory of rational decision or choice. In the case of thought the norms are provided by a theory of rational or reasonable belief. Davidson's principle of charity is a norm that the interpreter employs in the interpretation of thought. (285)

Although it poses no difficulty for hermeneuticists, acknowledgment of the normative dimension of the principle of charity in the context of teaching critical thinking may threaten students' appreciation of its interpretative function. They may confuse the normative dimension of argument interpretation with the normative dimension of argument evaluation proper. However, appeal to the normative rationality of hermeneutics may help us meet this pedagogical challenge. And conveniently, for my purposes, it may also help with the task of producing a rational and morally credible account of the ethics of care.

Without appeal to the model of hermeneutics, in which norms are both presupposed and generated by the practice, the ethics of care appears as an

undisciplined response to moral conflict. It looks like a merely subjective response, one unconditioned by any of the evaluative norms that would come into play in the application of the ethics of justice, the ethic against which Carol Gilligan defines care. On Gilligan's account, a justice thinker approaches a moral problem as "a math problem with humans". That is, the moral reasoner in the justice paradigm identifies the kind of moral problem at play in a given situation and then applies the relevant moral algorithm for solving problems of this sort and notes the particular judgement that issues from applying the general algorithm to the particular case.

Justice reasoning, even on Gilligan's account, involves an interpretive step: that of determining the category of moral problem under which the situation described best falls. This step often involves some interpretive tinkering with the way in which the situation is described in the first place. Nonetheless, the interpretive work performed here is more like translation work that relies on a manual or algorithm than interpretive work that depends on the application of the principle of charity. The more robustly normative component of justice reasoning, critical evaluation, is analogous to the normative component of argumentational reasoning in general, in as much as it involves the application of an external and universal standard of goodness (moral goodness on the one hand and cogency on the other) to any particular case at hand.

Discussion of the hermeneutic dimension of the ethics of care brings me to comment on a related feature, namely that it is moral reasoning in a *narrative* mode.6 Describing the ethics of care as moral reasoning in a narrative mode created two problems for Gilligan's successful exposition of it. The first is that, for many, to reason is to construct arguments. For those who subscribe to this view of reasoning it is hard to imagine what is meant by referring to narrative reasoning at all. The second difficulty has to do with the sense in which the ethics of care as a narrative practice is a practice of *moral* reasoning. For many, it is hard to imagine the sense in which it is moral insofar as not involving argumentation at all it can hardly involve a critical evaluation of the moral problem under consideration.

In response to the challenge of explaining how it is that narrative ethics of care could count as a form of moral reasoning Gilligan produced, in my view over-hastily and misleadingly, a moral principle which, she seemed to be saying, informs the narratives produced by care reasoners. This principle represents a moral vision that "everyone will be responded to and included and that no one will be left alone or hurt."(*IDV*, 63) Gilligan's error, I believe is to reduce the complex relational quality of narrative practice to a principle or standard of judgement. It misrepresents the practice in the way that is analogous to the reduction of a story to its moral, after the fashion of Aesop's fables. This principled account of the ethic of care is misleading in a way that I think also is analogous to Johnson and Blair's attempt to account for the normative dimension of the principle of charity by reducing it to an ethical duty one has towards arguers as persons, and thus a standard against which the rightness of our conduct towards arguers and their arguments can be ethically assessed.

In order to overcome the challenge in response to which Gilligan produced the principle of the ethics of care, I think we can employ a strategy like the one I have proposed for responding to the challenge of accounting for the normative as well as interpretive dimensions of the practice of applying the principle of charity. That is, we need an account of the purpose of the practice. In both cases we must ask why the reasoner engages in the hermeneutic practice, if we are to understand the significance of the normative dimension of the practice.

A functional hermeneutic account of care and charity

As I argued above we can understand the normative dimension of the principle of charity in the following terms: in deciding how to best reconstruct an argument, apply the evaluative standard of cogency in order to determine which among all of its plausible reconstructions is the most cogent or reasonable. A fuller functional account would refer also to the interpreter's objective of adding to her store of true beliefs, or defending this store by adding to the arsenal she can deploy against false beliefs.

On the face of it this is quite a different objective than that motivating Gilligan's care reasoners, whom, she says, are moved by the desire to maintain relationships, to "stay with" all concerned parties. I think however it is not such a different process. I think hermeneutic activity is inherently relational activity. The problem with relational accounts of the ethics of care is that they tend to get stuck on conceptions of relationality that take interpersonal relations as their paradigm. As I have noted this even occurs in accounts of the principle of charity where the motivation for it is taken to have something to do with standing in right relation with other persons, namely arguers, rather than with arguments. What we need is an alternative account of the relationality inherent in care reasoning, and the relationality at work in applications of the principle of charity.

Applying the principle of charity to an argument does not depend on assuming its conclusion is true. It does ask you to imagine what the relevant bits of the world (possible supporting arguments) would have to look like if this statement were true. Similarly the ethic of care does not assume that a subject possesses moral goodness or authority, and therefore is one with whom you ought to maintain or enter relationship. Rather, it asks you to imagine what the moral universe would have to look like in order for this subject to be one with whom you could sustain relationship and on account of its moral authority would be one with which you ought to enter or sustain relationship. The task is to narratively reconstruct the relevant bits of the moral universe to see whether relationship with this moral subject is viable—whether it is narratively sustainable.

Appreciation of the relational work that narrative performs will help bring us to a new appreciation of the kind of relationality that the ethics of care manifests and constructs.

A few words about fiction in argumentational and narrative modes of moral reasoning

Storytelling, especially the construction of fiction is paradigmatic narrative activity. But, given fiction's historically dubious status in western philosophy we must say a few words about fiction and moral reasoning. Consider the following comments made by Wallace Martin, who recalls John Searle's observation that "Fiction is much more sophisticated than lying. To someone who did not understand the separate conventions of fiction it would seem that fiction is merely lying" Thus, Martin continues, "Fiction (pretending without the intent to deceive) is, then the child of lying, not the father of lies, as Plato says." (186)

Argument can also involve us in the manipulation of fictions, as long as the fictions are acceptable. Remember the premises of a cogent argument do not have to be true, but they must be acceptable, that is, they must be statements that it is reasonable to treat *as if* they were true. The reasonableness of treating certain statements as if they were true can in some cases be limited strictly to the context of a specific argument. These are the kind of statements that we admit as premises to an argument by accepting them, or agreeing to treat them as if they were true *for the sake of argument.* We do this when there is something to be learned, some value in examining the relationship between the set of statements out of which a given argument is constituted. Specifically we are interested in establishing whether the relationship between the premises can provide the kind of support for the conclusion that would make it reasonable to accept the conclusion, that is to treat it as if it were true.

It is noteworthy that reasoning involving the manipulation of fictions of this sort (claims that we can agree to pretend are true without intending to deceive ourselves or anyone else) is commonplace in moral reasoning (though by no means restricted to reasoning of this sort). To test the strength or other qualities of a moral principles we often construct hypothetical examples or cases and consider what would issue from applying the principle in this or that fictional situation.

This is the sort of process in which Lawrence Kohlberg invited his experimental subjects to engage.7 In the course of his research on moral developmental stages, Kohlberg presented his subjects with hypothetical situations to which various moral principles might be applied. Though not explicitly formulated as such, the task of the experimental subject, it seems, was to identify which moral principles are relevant to the situation and to apply them so as to generate a justification for a recommended hypothetical most moral course of action in other words an argumentationally justified solution to the moral problem.

Typically the hypothetical problems were constructed in such a way as to contain what would be read (within western traditions of moral reasoning) as cues to identifying several moral principles that in the hypothetical case would issue in conflicting recommendations regarding the most moral response.

Thus Kohlberg's test of moral maturity tests at least two capacities: First, it tests the subject's ability to identify salient moral principles within the western tradition. If the subject passes this part of the test, and correctly identifies the conflicting moral principles, s/he is faced with the second stage of the test. This stage tests the subject's capacity to resolve the conflict between the principles by constructing an argument that demonstrates the priority of one principle over the other, or which justifies appeal to or synthesis of a new principle capable of arbitrating between the conflicting principles.

As I have already noted this kind of reasoning involves a fictional element. That is, it involves treating descriptive assertions about the hypothetical morally problematic situation as if they were true. It also involves treating descriptive claims about moral principles as if they were true. I point out this latter issue not to suggest that moral principles are not in reality true, rather to indicate that to engage in moral reasoning we do not have to decide whether moral principles are true in the sense suggested by moral realists. Rather, all that is necessary to engage in moral reasoning aimed at justifying a moral claim or recommendation (like any other form of reasoning the objective of which is to justify a claim or recommendation) is the willingness of participants in rational discourse to treat a claim as if it were true. This means simply that we do not have to resolve philosophical debates about the ontological or epistemological status of moral principles in order to engage in moral reasoning that appeals to these principles (I think this is revealed also by the fact of the common sense practices of moral reasoning Kohlberg and others observed in subjects who are unlikely to have attempted, never mind resolved, these meta-ethical debates).

The point of discussing this aspect of moral reasoning is to use it in considering some of the kinds of comparisons that can be made between Kohlberg's conception of moral reasoning and the kind of moral reasoning Gilligan calls the ethics of care. In order to make the kinds of comparisons I want to make it is important that we agree that argumentation be recognized as *but one mode of reasoning* rather than identical with reasoning as such. This is important if we are to allow what Gilligan claims, namely that the mode in which the ethic of care operates is a narrative one rather than an argumentational one, and that this narrative response can be properly described as a mode of moral *reasoning*.

In her comparison of these two modes of moral reasoning Gilligan contrasts the narrative mode of the ethics of care, with the deductive mode of justice ethics. I think we can more charitably describe the mode of justice ethics, or Kohlberg's vision of moral reasoning, as argumentational rather than simply deductive, allowing that non-deductive arguments are in fact arguments rather than narratives or something else. In fact argumentational moral reasoning is more typically non-deductive than deductive. Nonetheless, even non-deductive arguments can still uphold fairly rigorous standards of argumentative cogency, and indeed must do so if they are to succeed in doing the work that arguments are intended to do, namely succeed in the task of justification.

Gilligan describes the justice mode of moral reasoning as a deductive mode for the sake of sharp contrast, but in a philosophical context this contrast is too sharp. The contrast between argument and narrative, I think, more accurately reflects the characteristics of the two modes of reasoning to which I take Gilligan to be referring, in a way that enables us to see their shared characteristics. That is, we see them as two modes of the same thing, i.e. moral reasoning, as well as seeing the respects in which the two modes of this thing differ.

One of the reasons for pointing out that fiction can play a role in argumentational reasoning is so that this does not come to be seen as a specific and exclusive characteristic of narrative reasoning. It would be easy to think this since many of us regard fiction (and perhaps this is the common sense understanding of these terms) as a paradigmatic form of narrative. This characterization seems to motivate some criticisms of the ethic of care. Some critics worry that fiction is not constrained in the way that reasoning is, and thus lacks rational legitimacy. From their perspective, fiction is, at best, bounded by aesthetic criteria, but not by rational ones. Thus the ethic of care, it is feared, in generating moral stories rather than argumentational justifications of moral positions, abandons us to relativism. Without the tools of argumentation, they worry, we can cannot decide between competing stories, unless we allow ethics to dissolve into aesthetics.

This criticism would be justified if narrative reasoning were identical with fiction. However, I think it is not. I will attempt to show this by comparing narrative reasoning with argumentational reasoning in several dimensions. First they are both rationally purposive speech acts. The purpose of the speech act of argument is to persuade the listener that it is reasonable to treat a conclusion as true by appeal to the relationships between statements which both speaker and listener agree that it is reasonable to accept as true.

Narrative reasoning is, I think, a more complex speech act, but one that nonetheless is a speech act and a rationally purposive one at that. The person who engages in this sort of reasoning is, I think, trying to persuade by appeal to the connections and relationships it is possible to construct between the values and views that both speaker and listener agree are reasonable to suppose are morally authoritative ones. The difference, I think, between constructing arguments about how to resolve conflicts between moral values and constructing narrative solutions, is that in the former moral values are represented in descriptive assertions about their content, in the latter moral values are *evoked* by the relation in which moral subjects stand to them. Thus, to attempt to construct relations between moral values in the narrative mode you must construct relations between moral subjects.

Are there sufficient constraints on this process to prevent our fall into the abyss of relativism? I think there are. I think that there are sufficient constraints of the sort that will allow us to see the narrative response as a form of reasoning, and that there are constraints that explain what this mode of reasoning makes

possible. What narrative reasoning makes possible, moreover, is, I believe, not possible in the mode of argumentation. From the perspective of good reasoning it is desirable that all of these possibilities be open to us.

Why narrative?

What could be the point of moral reasoning in the narrative rather than argumentational mode? What purpose could it fulfill that moral argumentation does not? To what facet of moral reasoning does narrative facilitate our approach that is inaccessible through argumentation? The answer lies in the differences between the modes of operation of argumentation and narrative.

Let us suppose that all forms of moral reasoning allow us to consider the relationships between values. Argumentation does this by allowing us to compare moral principles and their implications at least insofar as these are captured by descriptive assertions. The advantage of this kind of reasoning is that it allows us to justifiably draw conclusions about what is right or wrong in a given case, or type of case, and about what a person ought to do in such a case. The reliability of the conclusion will depend on the quality of the reasoning as well as on the justifiability of our acceptance of the argument's premises, especially those that represent the nature of the moral conflict in question.

But there is an inherent problem with accepting an account of a moral conflict when that account is given in non-narrative terms and the conflict is, at least in part, a conflict not simply between moral principles but a conflict between moral subjects. The problem is that while a principle can, at least in theory, be treated as an abstract object that can be represented without remainder by a descriptive proposition, a subject cannot. A subject consists not only of her qualities, the labels that could be used to describe her character, or a history of all her deeds and experiences. She consists also of her actual and possible interpretations and understandings of her history as well as all the beliefs, inclinations, intentions, capacities and opportunities that contribute to her potential for doing and becoming something else, achieving new perspectives in a way that would re-order and make new sense out of her history.

Although the propositional content of argumentational reasoning (especially deductive reasoning) is incapable of adequately representing moral subjects, there are many situations in which moral reasoning in the argumentational mode is to be preferred. Though the cogency of this reasoning is limited by the limited adequacy of its premises, it is often good enough for our purposes. In these situations it is preferred because of the practically necessary decision-making and action it authorizes. Thus there are many situations in which it is reasonable for all concerned to accept the account of a particular moral conflict as an account of conflict between moral principles.

If there are situations, however, where such an account is perceptibly inadequate, a narrative response is preferable, insofar as it enables us to represent moral conflict in a way that recognizes the conceptual inadequacies

of existing moral principles to capture all that is at issue in the conflict even in the absence of a more adequate replacement principle. It does this by representing the conflict in terms of the conflict between speaking subjects engaged in attempts to articulate their relationships with that which they value as relationships of moral valuation. Narrative is a mode which permits this to be represented indirectly.

If we think of a moral value not as a morally given object but as that which is performatively produced by a subject's speech act of evaluation, to represent that value we must represent the relevant speech act. To represent the relevant speech act we must represent the moral subject who generates it. Insofar as moral subjects are at least in part indeterminate, no list of the characteristics of the subject, no matter how long and detailed the list, can exhaustively capture the nature of what s/he is as a *subject.* Narrative, however, is capable of representing this incompleteness at the same time as it offers a partial account of the subject's characteristics.

It refers again to Wallace Martin's discussion (following Searle) of narrative and the representation of speech acts. He notes that where to make an argument is to perform the speech act of rational persuasion, to tell a story can be to represent fictional characters engaged in speech acts. To this I would add that, if the speech acts in which these fictional characters engage are speech acts of rational persuasion (persuasion of each other, not necessarily persuasion of the narrative's reader) the speech act in which the *narrator* (rather than a character speaking from within the narrative) engages can be understood as an attempt to articulate the common ground upon which the fictional characters stand, or where they could come to stand, and from which perspective it might be possible for them to resolve their differences.

Even if these differences are not resolved within the narrative, this mode of reasoning about moral conflict enables us to recognize the conflict without reducing it to a description that does violence to the hypothetical moral subjects who are in part defined by their relationship to the values at play in the narrative. While this may not enable us to solve the moral conflict between these values, it does enable us to stay in moral relationship with those conflicting subjects whose identity in part is defined by their caring about this or that value, and the values that are in part defined by those to whom they are important and by the way in which they are important to them.8 This is advantageous where attempts to justify preference for one subject's preferred outcome would inevitably obscure to some degree the values and interests of the other.

An example may be helpful here. Consider the case used by Kohlberg and much discussed by Gilligan, of Heinz and the pharmacist. This hypothetical case of moral conflict revolves around Heinz's need to get a drug for his dying wife, a drug which he cannot afford and which the druggist refuses to give him for a price he can afford. Heinz ponders his options: steal the drug and help his wife or refuse to steal and fail to meet his wife's need for the drug.

To illustrate the distinctions she wants to draw between care reasoning and justice reasoning, Gilligan discusses the responses of two children whom she treats as representatives of the two modes of moral reasoning. Amy is presented as the care reasoner and Jake as the justice reasoner. What is key here is not the solution each presents to the conflict but the way in which their understanding of the task before them differs.

Jake seems to understand his task as something like presenting an account of the situation to a judge located outside of the context of the problem. This judge asks for a decision about who is right or wrong and to what degree. This approach requires invoking or constructing a standard in terms of which the correctness of the answer will be measured.

Amy seems to understand the task as finding a way to reconcile the accounts the pharmacist and Heinz might most reasonably give of how the situation appears to each of them. The pharmacist would probably try to show Heinz what it means for him to account for himself and his actions in relation to his interests as a property owner (to himself, his family, partners, or other stakeholders in his business). Meanwhile Heinz would try to show the pharmacist what it means to account for himself and his actions to his wife and all who care about her (including Heinz himself). Amy seems to perceive the pharmacist as, in effect, asking Heinz "What can I tell the stakeholders in my business?" while Heinz is asking the pharmacist "What can I tell my wife and all those who will grieve her death?" Since Amy sees both as legitimate questions, her task is to see how far both can be moved to take seriously the question that seems to be of exclusive importance to the other party. Amy's narrative strategy is particularly appropriate in virtue of the power of narrative to shift listeners' perspectives and change the orientation of their sense of accountability.

The care reasoner reads the moral conflict not as an impasse of principles to be adjudicated by appeal to a prioritizing meta-principle, but as an impasse in interpretation between two morally reasonable agents expressing their sense of what the problem situation requires by way of response. This is to be resolved by helping each to charitably come to terms with the position of the other, to try to see the sense in what they say.

Justice reasoning seems to assume a model of reasoning that is adversarial in the way that is analogous to arguing before a judge in a criminal court. Reasoning in accordance with the principle of charity and the ethics of care seems to assume a more co-operative model. The object is not to appeal to the judge to decide which side wins or is right, but rather for the interlocutors to find some common ground which will afford a shared perspective on an issue, and from which new insight into the issue is made possible. As Christopher Gauker notes, "Charity...calls on us to learn more about the environment through which the subject's beliefs guide him."(19)

The point of constructing a story that offers hope of reconciling the subjects in moral conflict is not to get them to agree at any cost (to shake hands and be

friends) but to get them to agree in a way that the narrator (care reasoner) can live with and allow for the reestablishment of the care reasoner's sense of moral equilibrium. This accounts for the role of a prior sense of identification between the care reasoner and the subjects in moral conflict. If there was no identification then there would be no motivation to resolve the conflict (equilibrium would not need to be restored);one or both of the combatants could simply be written off as a moral idiot, or evil or insane. Identification is possible in the Heinz/pharmacist story to the extent that the care reasoner knows (like Heinz) what it means to value the life of a loved one *and* what it means to value something you have worked hard to achieve, create, and own (like the pharmacist).

When solving a moral conflict comes at the cost of denying a person the quality or degree of moral subjecthood afforded her on a more charitable account of her relationship with a certain object of moral value, the ethics of care demands that we reconstruct our account of that relationship. If it cannot be adequately captured propositionally, as argument requires, construct instead a narrative of the person as a moral agent engaged in a speech act of rational persuasion. In this way the element of indeterminacy in both the subject and the object of her moral valuation can be acknowledged.

The reason for giving a more charitable account, one that maximizes the moral subjecthood of someone whose behaviour seems to affirm a certain value is not simply that it's unkind to be critical, or that its nice to be charitable. No, the motivation for approaching a moral conflict in the way provided by the ethics of care is selfish in the way that I have suggested that applying the principle of charity in our reconstructions of arguments is selfish. That is, it enables us to enrich our moral understanding. This is not an indiscriminate process any more than is the enrichment made possible by applying the principle of charity to the interpretation of arguments. Good narrative reasoning is constrained by our preconceptions about what is intelligibly possible for a subject whose identity is shaped by the particular moral values s/he holds. This is analogous to the constraint Davidson acknowledges for the principle of charity.

> The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances or other behavior of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything. (137)

In expressing a moral point of view within a narrative a speaker is not thereby arguing that it is reasonable to hold that view. But s/he is asserting that a person (with) whom one can identify as a moral subject might hold such a view. The task becomes to try and see how to reconcile the co-existence of two subjects (with) whom one identifies as moral subjects when the values with which each identifies are in conflict.

The selfish account of the ethic of care

The rationale for reasoning in a way that is governed by the logic of the ethic of care is that it enables you to maintain relationships with other moral subjects. Many have objected that this valorizes a far too uncritical approach to relationships, one that, moreover, threatens loss of self or submersion of self in relationship, especially in a relationship that might in some sense be an unworthy one. Against this I argue that this approach is no more uncritical than that of the principle of charity in interpretation, and that rather than being a selfless practice it is one that can function to enrich and consolidate moral self-hood just as the principle of charity can serve to enrich and consolidate the capacities of the critical thinker.

Insofar as all ethics has at least something to do with interpersonal interactions, how we ought to treat each other, ethics in general is other-regarding. However, most ethical systems, and certainly those Gilligan would put under the rubric of the justice perspective, have their primary relationship with abstract impersonal principles that mediate our interpersonal relationships and that enable us to morally evaluate them. The ethics of care, by contrast, is regarded by its critics as an ethic that is other-regarding to a fault. It seems to them to be other-regarding in a more immediate or unmediated way, a way that seems to demand selflessness and loss of identity through absorption into the perspective and needs of the other. It is my contention, however, that the ethics of care requires no more selflessness, or suspension of critical faculties than does the application of the principle of charity. And further more, I contend that moral reasoning in the mode of the ethic of care can be understood as serving selfish ends in just the way that I have suggested the application of the principle of charity can be understood as self-serving.

When I made my argument that use of the principle of charity can be seen as selfishly motivated, in contrast to what its name might suggest, you will recall that what I said was that applying the principle of charity in your interpretation of arguments enables you to increase your store of true beliefs and increase your capacity to defend against false ones. Perhaps I am overstating my case in calling this motive a selfish one. But while this sort of overstatement may be unnecessary in the revised account of the principle of charity it is necessary to resort to it in trying to present the ethics of care in a new light. The reason for this has to do with how heavily implicated discussions of the ethics of care have been in discussions of gender politics especially as they are played out on the terrains of developmental psychology and moral epistemology.

That is, care as a feminine quality is likely to be seen as entailing selflessness (whether for good or for ill depends on your politics). At some level it is presented in contrast to rational self-interestedness. While a certain amount of selflessness might be regarded as a good thing, its contrast with rational self-interestedness disables care according to many moral theorists from being a virtue characteristic of the good moral reasoner. Though the capacity for care is regarded as sometimes an admirable natural quality, it is problematic

insofar as someone whose moral responses are determined by care does not start from an experiential base of rational self-interestedness, may not be able to appreciate what is in anyone's rational self-interest. Thus, this person poses a threat of performing actions which are biased not only against what is in her rational self-interest but perhaps is against the rational self-interest of someone whose interests ought properly to be taken into account. For example, a caring person might go beyond making (self) sacrifices for the sake of family and friends, she might also (unfairly) fail to take seriously the needs and interests of people beyond the scope of her circle of caring relationships. That is, one whose moral responses are determined by a selfless ethic of care may in fact pose a threat of perpetrating injustice or contributing to the maintenance of existing conditions of injustice and thereby harm herself and others.

Given how easily care lends itself to accounts of the ethics of selflessness, how are we to come to see care as motivated by an impulse that is consistent with rational self-interest? To see this we must return to the concept of relationality upon which it is based. Insofar as we are motivated to enrich the web of relations within which our identities are constructed, and insofar as to do this is to act out of rational self-interest, responding in the relevant contexts either by applying the principle of charity, or with moral reasoning in the narrative mode of the ethic of care, is to act in a rationally self-interested way.

The web of relations into which the principle of charity facilitates our entry is the cognitive web of justified true beliefs. The web of relations into which into which the ethics of care facilitates our entry is the web upon which we map the location of morally authoritative subject positions. Just as our understanding of ourselves and the world is enriched by increasing the number of elements included in the web of justified belief and is strengthened by increasing the complexity of the links we recognize between them, so do we enrich our understanding of ourselves as moral beings—beings who care about the relations within which we exist, for whom relationships between parts of the world matter. Access to an enriched understanding of the moral universe is facilitated by maintaining relationships with potentially morally authoritative subject positions.

It is important to point out that care responses in the narrative mode work to bring one into strong relationship with , or to maintain as strongly as possible a relationship with a human subject who is possessed of possible moral authority. She is possessed, or rather the narrative reconstruction of the position she inhabits in the context of a given moral conflict, is possessed of moral authority in the same sort of potential form that an argument interpreted according to the principle of charity is possessed of a level of cogency potentially sufficient to make it reasonable for anyone to be convinced of the argument's conclusion on the basis of the reasons provided by the argument. Thus, to enter or to stay in relationship with all of the parties involved in a morally problematic context is not to authorize them, nor to confer moral legitimacy on them. It is rather, simply not to prematurely assume or conclude

that any of the subject positions are morally incoherent. To put this point into the terms Gilligan favours, it is not to refuse to listen to the moral voices that can be heard from those positions; rather, it is to amplify or even bring to voice whatever might be heard from those positions.

Endnotes

1Gilligan's most famous exposition of the ethics of care appears in her first book, In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) hereafter referred to as IDV.

2Morrison discusses this in various places. See for example Gloria Naylor, "A Conversation: Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison." Southern Review 21 (1985): 567-93. Angela Davis also discusses the case of Margaret Garner in Chapter 13, "Racism, Birth Control and Reproductive Rights", of her book Women Race and Class. (New York: Random House, 1983).

3Dorothy Walsh says, "The modern critical practice of close reading and analytical explication has directed our attention to the complexities of multiple meaning, particularly in the form of oppositional contrast, ambivalence of attitude, the yes-and-no-ness of dramatic tension. This has had the salutary effect of persuading readers to desist from demanding that a work of literature should yield some sort of general conclusion in the form of an abstractable claim." Dorothy Walsh, Literature and Knowledge (Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 70. Also see William Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

4See, for example, Donald Davidson's "Radical Interpretation", Chapter 9 of his Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

5An illustration of the theoretic role played by the principle of charity in Davidson's work is manifest in the following comment, "What I propose to do is to reverse the direction of explanation: assuming translation, Tarski was able to define truth; the present idea is to take truth as basic and to extract an account of translation or interpretation. (Davidson, 1984, p.134) Analogously, I think that where justice ethics assumes the legitimacy of certain frameworks of moral principle and from that seeks to justify (or censure) a moral subject or his behaviour, the ethics of care takes subjects' moral authority as basic and then tries to construct a narrative of the relations between subjects that could account for the possibility of this authority.

6For Gilligan's first reference to care as reasoning in the narrative mode see IDV p.19.

7It was Kohlberg's research on moral development that generated the results motivating Gilligan's critique of models of moral reasoning that obscure the operation of the mode of moral reasoning she identifies as care reasoning.

8My view of the self as constructed, at least in part, by that about which it cares, and more importantly by the evaluative activity of caring for it, is influenced by Charles Taylor's account of the self. See, for example, Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989) I have also found Nicholas Smith's Strong Hermeneutics: Contingency and Moral Identity (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989) to be a valuable resource in the course of developing my view of the self.

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