

Ethics



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A Comparison of Categorical Imperative and Ethics of Care At first glance, it appears that Carol Gilligan's Ethics of Care concept, described in her seminal work "In a Different Voice" and Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative concept, described in "The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals" are contrasting ways of approaching ethics. Kant's Categorical Imperative is based on highly rational ethical reasoning. Gilligan's Ethics of Care, by virtue of being emotional, can be considered as irrational, thus making it appear as a contrast to the categorical imperative. A bit of digging shows that the two concepts are not so dissimilar, that there are some deep-rooted similarities, as well as contrasts in their approaches. Gilligan persuasively argues that in any ethical situation, one must take into account the human need to care for ourselves and for those close to us. She primarily uses women as the subject of the caring. She launches her platform from the suppression of women and their needs. The book flaunts the social selflessness that is incumbent upon women as they care for others, as the basis for developing care ethics. Kant's categorical imperative attempts to create universal laws acceptable in all ways, without exception. He tries to create freestanding statements that do not require elucidation to establish them. He accepts that such categorical imperatives are difficult to derive. The ordinary person will not be able to logically reason his way through such maxims, nor question their validity. However, through experience, an ordinary person will be able to determine for herself if such maxims work or not. If one disobeys the maxims, and suffers as a result, one will automatically understand that the maxim had a reason for being so rigid. Nevertheless, the experience itself is dependent on emotional decisions, which one makes under pressure, the consequences of which help one

realize the value of the maxims. So the experiential learning that is required to understand Kant's categorical imperatives, is caused by normal emotional reactions to situations, such as those expected by Gilligan's ethics of care. Kant's categorical imperatives are a superset to Gilligan's care ethics. I do not consider them to be opposing each other, but that Gilligan's care ethics is contextual, Kant's categorical imperatives are absolute. If one were to assert, "Thou shall not lie" as a categorical imperative, then Gilligan's ethics of care would look into the emotional aspects of the situation, and adjust accordingly. This is not to say that Kant overlooks the emotional aspect. In his examples of duties, Kant has taken into account that human nature will not see situations as black or white, but the emotional tug will make people take decisions that are not absolutely in line with categorical imperatives. The answer here is, there is a price to be paid, and a reward to be received, for taking decisions that are not absolutely rational. The rational individual takes into account this price and reward, and then takes a decision. Thus, one can argue that even emotional decisions are fundamentally rational, because the individual seeks to satisfy his own needs, which is his absolute duty. So it can be argued that Gilligan's ethics of care is an extension of Kant's categorical imperative, that it has a deeper understanding of human nature and what is natural, which is self-preservation (a moral duty and obligation for any living being) and the preservation of what belongs to one (one's possessions and relations). Gilligan's ethics of care arose as a reaction to a vacuum – caused by the lack of respect for the female value. Her ethics of care touch the western pulse. They may not have value in a culture where women are treated with respect, or even in a matriarchal society. If western society had not been so male-oriented it is unlikely that Gilligan's " In a

different voice” would have been written. Works Cited Gilligan, Carol. In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development. Harvard University Press, 1983. Print. Kant, Immanuel. Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals. Translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. Project Gutenberg eBook. May, 2004. Web.