

“No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings of the others. Such a sensitive heart was possessed by former Kings and this manifested itself in compassionate government. With such sensitive heart behind compassionate government, it was as easy to rule to the Empire as rolling it on your palm.” (Mencius)

The manifestation of our metaphysical condition as humans affects our thought processes – the way we relate to the other person and how we structure the social order on behalf of it. Hence, questioning whether there truly is no heart that would not be attentive to the plight of others is superbly relevant.

The relation to the other in which I, as a moral subject, actively acknowledge the other’s need for care and deliver accordingly, is aptly addressed by the ethicists of care. My essay will hence discuss ethics of care as an alternative approach to ethics, in contrast with most prominent Enlightenment thinkers, namely Kant. As such they pose a different perspective on evaluating both the sentiment’s role in moral decision-making, which is going to be discussed in the first section. Second section is going to question the relation between the moral decision-maker and object/subject of those decisions, whilst the third section’s objective is going to be to provide discussion in relation to the chosen title, namely, to what extent is the notion of the sensitive heart for the governance, mentioned in the title, present in Kantian deontology and ethics of care.

I. On the role of the sentiment

Ethics of care builds on a specific kind of a sentiment – care, evidently, which according to Nel Noddings is both a disposition to act and the act itself.

Disposition-wise, it is an emotion that makes us acknowledge our surroundings, be it living or non-living matter, but particularly in relation to our own species, it is our consciousness

reaching out towards the other's consciousness, so to speak. When I see another person, I do not simply register his or her existence in the same manner that I acknowledge the presence of a jumbo poster by the pavement. It is a much more meaningful presence, one that I can ascribe emotional value to. Thus, as I notice a person and focus on what this person is communicating to their environment, I can observe their mood, whether they are distressed or joyful, if they are having difficulties carrying their shopping bags or if they are in a hurry. By registering these observations I convey my general caring attitude towards others – I recognise their particularities that echo in me.

This disposition is then the motivating force behind my actions. Act-wise, taking care is directly responding to the need observed and providing the required help, be it saving a drowning child or holding a door open for the person entering behind us. Such actions are the manifestation of the caring attitude, because the attitude enables us to recognise whether our help is needed, and consequentially, the sliding of muscle filaments, stimulated by motor neurons as a response to the mind's decision to help (yes, I intentionally assumed a dualistic human condition), makes the decisive, physical push against the force closing the doors.

Being caring is thus a synthesis of thinking and acting caringly, and it is a legitimate way of knowing for making moral choices, because it is so heavily imbued in us. Noddings ascribes the presence of caring to our memory of being cared for, and to the aspiration within us to be good people – people who consider being caring as virtuous, good, perhaps even in Aristotelian sense of the word. We are inevitably surrounded by other people with whom we communicate, trade, sympathise – form relations that carry an emotional weight.

The emotion of care is hence a tenet of morality, in contrast to Kantian deontology, where emotions, inclinations, are considered as hindrances to the reasoning capacity. Kant therefore posits an ethical system based on pure reason and pervasive admiration for the universal moral law – the categorical imperative.

The aim of the categorical imperative is to set the guidelines for discovering what is morally permissible (or even obligatory, in some cases, if not performing a certain act is not

universalisable) and what is not. Its first formulation emphasises the universalizable nature of our maxims – generalised forms of our desired course of action. If our maxims are logically and pragmatically universalizable, meaning if they pass the universalizability test, we are allowed to pursue them, if not, pursuing them would be disregarding our rationality.

Emotions have no place in making moral decisions for four reasons, broadly speaking. Firstly, because they are unnecessary for achieving logical conclusions (e.g. is my intention of crossing the red light, when formulated as a maxim – everyone should cross the red light – universalisable in terms of logical and pragmatic consistency), secondly, because they are frivolous and whimsical according to Kant (on some days we would like to save the world, but on others everyone displeases us by solely existing), thirdly, because they pose an obstacle for being impartial moral decision-makers, and fourthly, because they twist our comprehension of our moral duty stemming from the impartial outlook on morality. The proverbial case of the three shopkeepers illustrates this by Kant concluding that shopkeeper, who is morally the most admirable, is not the one who cares about his costumers and does not cheat them due to his benevolence towards them, but the one who would like to scam his clients, but decides against it on the basis of his rational comprehension that scamming costumers is morally abhorrent. The absence of emotion is hence crucial for legitimate moral decisions in Kantian sense.

In summary, the role of the sentiment in Kantian deontology and in ethics of care differs drastically; the former rejects it completely, while the latter embraces its inevitability and central importance.

II. The relation between the moral agent and the subject

The second important point is the relation between the moral decision-maker and object/subject of moral decisions, meaning from which perspective I look at moral situations. In the case of Kantian deontology and ethics of care, there is a clash between partiality and impartiality that results from two differing approaches to morality – whilst reason can be universally applied to every situation to the same extent, emotion cannot, it is not boundless.

Noddings acknowledges that as individuals become more and more anonymous, barely noticeable ripples of concentric waves at the periphery, put poetically, we care less about them. Our caring disposition towards a random third world country's homeless man is much weaker (some might even argue that it is non-existent, which might explain why foreign charities never have enough money, heh?) than our caring disposition towards a family member. This implies our partiality in ascribing moral importance to moral subjects and Mary Raugust's seven tenets of ethics of care state this explicitly. She claims that the subject of moral consideration is not an impersonal, unknown stranger, but a specific individual, bound in their life context. Moral decisions stem from particulars, not universals, and they are accepting rather than transformative – each should receive the care they need. A moral agent is bound in the network of relations among people who give and receive care. However, this is once again an entirely different approach to ethics and it may come across as troublesome for many philosophers who embrace the Kantian paradigm of impartial morality.

For Kant, every person is of the same moral importance, because every person possesses the dignity inherent to their autonomous personhood, hence, when making moral choices, they should be universally valid. Moral decision-maker is the impartial observer that experiences the same moral duty towards his family member and a stranger on the street. This gives his narrative a prominent amount of plausibility, because morality is often understood as a set of moral laws, and laws apply to all individuals in the same manner. Additionally, this universal approach to ethics is insanely attractive, because it establishes a common denominator to ethical decisions that should supposedly provide all the answers.

However, a potent issue for Kant is that the categorical imperative does not genuinely provide all of the answers (as in the case of conflicting duties, e.g. life vs. honesty), and that the answers it does provide sometimes seem absurdly counter-intuitive. The proverbial issue of friendship remains one of the most pressing matters in regard to Kantian deontology for me, because I am aware of how much of myself I invest in my friendships and of the status they have on my priority list. This is why ethics of care holds a strong intuitive appeal, because it explains my experience of a friendship being morally relevant, not only because it is a lawful

relation between one individual and another in the Kantian sense of fulfilling my duty, but also because it is so multifaceted and rewarding. It is absolutely true that if I were to witness a friend and a stranger drowning, I would save my friend first without thinking twice, because the emotional bond we have is obliging in itself, not because of the categorical imperative.

On that note, some critics point out that ethics of care does not genuinely escape the Kantian notion of duty, albeit it stems from a different mechanism. By forming caring relationships, we are bound to deliver care where it is needed, if we are to nurture our caring character, and this establishes a duty-like relation that camouflages itself as care. This is not problematic per se, however, some critics take this further and reproach ethics of care of being a type of slave morality, reminiscent to what Nietzsche is describing, where relations among people are asymmetrical to the extent that care-givers are being exploited at the hand of care-receivers, convoluting our willingness to help into mindless submission of perpetual self-repression. Whilst this may be a relevant point for specific cases, e.g. a daughter taking care of her elderly mother because of the familial connection and her caring character, who in turn abuses and manipulates her emotionally, however, ethicists of care were quick to refute such an exaggeration by claiming that albeit the power status in a caring relation is asymmetrical, it is not by necessity non-reciprocal. Reciprocity is established with gratitude, acknowledgment of our care etc.

On the other hand, as asymmetric power relations are inevitable in life, Kantian reasoning may not be sufficient. His type of morality was designed with some sort of egalitarian individuals in mind, where everyone is equally capable of rational thinking, following the categorical imperative and being responsible for his moral judgements. However, this may not be the case. Perhaps a bit ironically – as Kohlberg describes the stages of moral development, he seeks out differences in the extent of moral comprehension. Carol Gilligan then goes on her merry way to re-interpret those findings and write *In a different voice*, claiming that there is an alternative moral outlook that has previously been neglected due to the prominence of justice oriented-ethics. Hence, if there truly are different moral paradigms (that are not gender-bound), how can Kantian deontology persist in its search for universally applicable moral laws?

Admittedly, Gilligan does not claim that duty ethics are inferior to ethics of care, quite the opposite; one should be complementary to the other.

III. On the stimulus title

The second section of my essay, the relationship between the moral agent and the object/subject of moral decisions being impartial in Kantian deontology and partial in ethics of care, is my stimulus for the third section, where I am going to consider the implications of both theories for the chosen title in relation to (compassionate) governance.

The values emphasised in ethics of care often directly clash with values to be found in Kantian deontology, namely, interdependence is contrasted with autonomy, particularity with universality, intellectual disposition with caring disposition, contextual with abstract. On the basis of this a certain dichotomy can be established, namely that Kantian deontology is justice morality of strangers, whilst ethics of care is intimate, care-oriented morality of particular individuals.

Now, the question is – can compassionate attitude of care function as a mean of governance, can this intimate sphere expand itself to the point of accommodating a nation? Typically, something akin to Kant's categorical imperative is pursued to establish laws that hold universally for all citizens, however, certain elements of ethics of care can be noted. In ethics of care, moral decisions are based on specific situations that require context to be applied, similarly, some court case – albeit following the procedural, standardised process, allow for special circumstances to be taken into account. However, this does not genuinely address the question at hand, does it?

The title implies that compassionate government facilitates successful governance; hence it is more relevant to ask whether Kantian deontology and ethics of care can establish a compassionate government.

Governance on the Kantian foundations is certainly pragmatic, because it is in line with the ever-so-popular axiom of the democracy, namely the equal position of all citizens before

the law and the state. However, it is probably not the paragon of compassion, because in its haste to universalize, abstract and follow procedures, the individual can get lost. Additionally, it was previously questioned to what extent we can ensure such equality and impartiality Kant visualises, quite possibly only as an ideal.

Ethics of care certainly builds on care and compassion it entails, but as I am trying to apply the moral experience of caring to governing, it is proving to be tricky. Ethics of care are convincing in their narrower spheres where relations can be meaningful, but as soon as we move onto the larger, grander masses of people, the sentiment is diminished. Nonetheless, isn't the idea of a compassionate government attractive in times of manifold political turmoil?

Very well then – if I refer back to Gilligan's statement that the approaches should be used as complementary – could we get a functioning compassionate government? After all, the second formulation of the categorical imperative (never treat others as means only, to paraphrase it) does offer some insight into how relations among people should be constructed and even offer a possible point of synthesis between Kantian ethics and ethics of care – perhaps my twisted mind could interpret treating people as ends in themselves as entailing caring for the other in a way that is more profound than a near-contractual duty? Perhaps this could mean that Kantian governance is almost ... compassionate? Then again, how does a compassionate government manifest itself?

In (final) conclusion, the above discourse has sparked some ideas, but personally, the most notable outcome was the sole experience of writing it. Just as I was amidst of explaining the ethics of care and what is that they are advocating, a girl sitting next to me asked for water that was never delivered, so I gave her mine, and thinking about my reasons for doing it – duty or care – well, let's just say that no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings of the others, heh.

