Carol Gilligan: *In A Different Voice*

Remaining Questions: Courtesy Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought*

1. To what extent is it the case that Gilligan has characterized the ethic of caring by theme and not gender? Does she in fact avoid identifying the ethic of caring to women and the ethic of rights/justice to men? Her literary examples and research data communicate the notion that men focus on rights, claims, self-interested demands, strict duties, obligations, burdens, and limits on autonomy, whereas women focus on responsibilities and the importance of responding empathetically to others, showing concern in close relations, and nurture and give aid.

2. Gilligan’s failure to focus on the differences among women in her study: a sign that she was, despite her disclaimers, intent on establishing that men’s moral reasoning is different from women’s. How did differences among the women in her sample affect their style of moral reasoning? Gilligan also failed to raise questions about men’s moral attitudes toward abortion.

3. Are there negative consequences of associating women with an ethics of care? Even if women are better “carers” than men (for whatever reasons), it might still be epistemically, ethically, or politically unwise to associate women with the value of care. To link women with caring is to promote the view that women care by nature. It is also to promote the view that because women can and have cared, they should always care no matter the cost to themselves.

4. Sandra Bartky: *Femininity and Domination*. Bartky points to a number of concerns. Do women’s experience of feeding men’s egos and tending men’s wounds ultimately disempower or empower them? Could the kind of emotional work practiced by women lead to self-estrangement, an inability to identify one’s own emotional states? Even if women find the experience of caring empowering, subjective feelings of empowerment are not the same as the objective reality of actually having power. Does women’s care of men amount to a collective genuflection of women to men, an affirmation of male importance that is unreciprocated. Bartky also notes the worrisome nature of the epistemic and ethical consequences of women’s unreciprocated care of men. The more emotional support a woman gives a man, the more she will tend to see things as he sees them.

5. Bill Puka: “The Liberation of Caring.” Puka claims that care can be interpreted in Gilligan’s way as a general orientation toward moral problems and a track of moral development or it can be interpreted as a sexist service orientation, prominent in the patriarchal socialization, social conventions, and roles of many culture. Puka interprets G’s stages as coping mechanisms or defensive strategies that women use in a patriarchal world structured to work against their best interests. Within a patriarchy, women learn men will reward, or at least not punish, the women who faithfully serve them. Insofar as a woman is rationally calculating her chances of surviving and possibly even thriving within a patriarchy, level-three moral reasoning constitutes a degree of cognitive liberation for her. It does not, however, signal personal liberation for her. As long as society remains patriarchal, women will not be able to strike an appropriate and abiding balance between rights and responsibilities in their moral lives. On the contrary, women
will tend to practice not so much the moral virtue of care as either its vicious excess or slavishness or its vicious defect of self-preservation.

6. Insofar as we are interested in the issue of female subordination, psychoanalytic accounts such as G’s do not provide a total explanation. Legal, political, and economic institutions and structures must also be taken into account.

7. Do we need to recognize differences between distortions of caring and undistorted caring? A person cannot truly care for someone if she is economically, socially, or psychologically forced to do so. Thus, genuine or fully authentic caring cannot occur under patriarchal conditions characterized by male domination and female subordination. Only under conditions of sexual equality and freedom can women care for men without men in any way diminishing, disempowering, or disregarding women. Until such conditions are achieved, women must care cautiously. Sheila Mullett argues that women must ask themselves whether the kind of caring in which they are engaged:
   a. Fulfills the one caring
   b. Calls upon the unique and particular individuality of the one caring
   c. Is not produced by a person in a role because of gender, with one gender engaging in nurturing behavior and the other engaging in instrumental behavior.
   d. Is reciprocated with caring, and not merely with the satisfaction of seeing the ones cared for flourishing and pursuing other projects
   e. Takes place with the framework of consciousness-raising practice and conversation