

**Issues in Bioethics**  
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**Module No #03**  
**Lecture No #15**  
**Ethics of Care, Gender Concerns and Feminist Perspectives**

Welcome back, to this course, Issues in Bioethics. This is the Unit five of Module Three. This unit, we will focus on the theme; Ethics of Care, Gender Concerns and Feminist Perspectives. So, when we discuss the theoretical frameworks of Ethics, we have left out the Ethics of Care. I did that because, I thought, we can discuss it, when we discuss gender concerns. So, I will try to do this, by outlining some of the fundamental concerns of Ethics of Care. And then, try to see, how this actually emerge from the context of certain gender concerns, which have become prominent, particularly in the 20th century, with the feminist perspectives becoming important. So, this is what, this lecture is trying to address.

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## The Care Perspective in Ethics

- Advocated by feminist ethicists.
- Our relationships give us obligations: eg., parents, friends, children etc.
- **We have obligation toward those particular persons with whom we have specific and valuable relationships.**
- Morality calls for attending and responding to the good of particular individuals whose companionship we value.
- Feminist criticism of healthcare professions, practices, and policies: new perspectives to understand and assess the situation.



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So, when you try to understand from the very outset, what is this care perspective in ethics. We can see that; it is advocated by the feminist ethicist. And, it is primarily addressed two things. Number one to criticize critique, and criticize the available theoretical frameworks, which have originated in the European tradition. And, the prominent ones are, we have already seen the

Deontology and Utilitarianism. There are certain things common about these two theoretical frameworks. And many others, which have emerged in the western tradition. Many others like even Relativism and many others. Though there are, I have taken the examples of Utilitarianism and Deontology, because they are the most prominent perspectives, which have emerged after enlightenment.

See, there are certain things common about these two perspectives, that in spite of the differences, the very important differences, they both are very rational. They both try to present a rational view. And, according to them, it is very important to adopt an impartial attitude. See for instance, for Utilitarianism, the ultimate criteria to decide, what is good is a utility, the maximum good for the maximum number of people. So, let us imagine a situation, where two people have met with an accident. And, you can save only one of them. And, one is your close friend, the other one is of very famous cardiac surgeon.

So, you can save only one of them. Take it as, say suppose both of them have fell into the water. And, you can save one of them or they are in another some other kind of a danger. Now, what will you do. If you save your friend, you are giving importance to your emotional considerations, your relationship with your friend, and many other factors, which are non-rational. But, if you decide ultimately to save the surgeon, who is in no way related to you, but you give importance to certain other considerations, like the surgeon, can save the lives of many other people. And, as far as utility is concerned, the surgeon has more utility than your close friend.

So, if you are a Utilitarian, ideally you should save the surgeon and allow your friend to die, which is a very complex situation, I know. I am not going to say that, one has to do this or do that. But, the rational principle of utility never allows you to consider the other option, that, saving your friend, giving importance to your relationship, your emotional link with your friend. The Feminist Ethicist were trying to invite, they in fact urge us to look back to these aspects, because they are so central to our moral considerations as human beings. So, they would say that, what is more important to be treated, when it comes to morality or emotions, love, friendship and of course, the context of relationship, in which we are placed in.

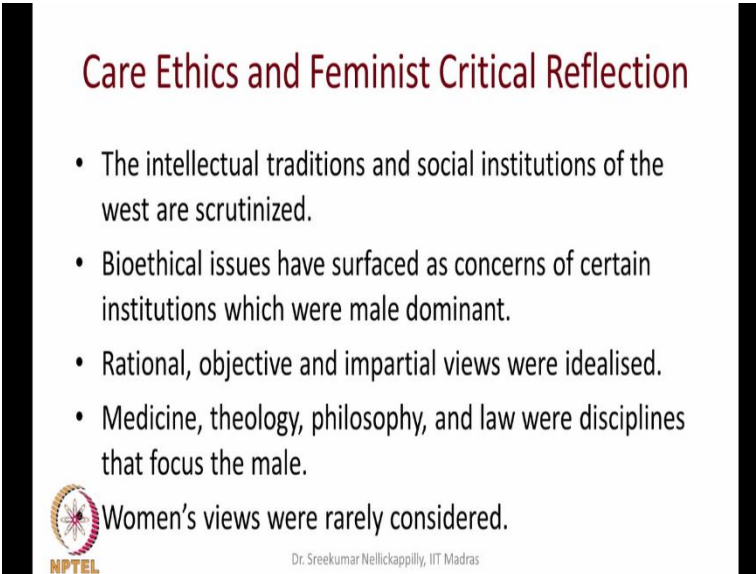
But, at the same time, we should also keep in mind that, they are not telling us that, you should confine yourself to your close relationships. They would rather urge us to expand the field of our relationships to, from our very close friends and family members to a community, and from there to possibly to the entire humanity. The important point according to them is to give importance to the aspect of care and concern for other people, which they believe is so central for all human being.

Now, the very central principle is this, that our relationship gives us obligations to parents, friends, children, etcetera. I have given cited two, three examples like this, because they are quite obvious that, my relationship with my parents are not just a very external kind of a relationship, but they are so linked up with a set of obligations, mutual obligations. But, at the same time, seen from my perspective, I have certain obligations to them. I have certain obligations to my friends and children and friend and other people, who are associated with me, all my companions. So, my relationship is not based on certain calculations or certain very objective rational principles. But, they are obviously based on the network of relationship in which, I find myself.

So, this is a probably the central theme. We have obligation towards those particular persons with whom, we have specific and valuable relationships. So, the most important point here is, valuable relationships or relationships are valuable. And, what is this, how do you respect this value of relationship. We respect this value by means of care. We have care. We care for them. We care for other people. So, there are different types of care, which we will discuss slightly later.

And, morality calls for attending and responding to good of particular individuals, whose companionship, we value. So, there is of course, one can ask, you say that, there is this reference to the companionship of people, whom we value. So, only to the people whom we value. We do not have to confine ourselves to that. We can actually expand our domain of value. We can expand it to other people as well, who are even strangers and gradually to the community and all, which I have already mentioned. So, what makes the care perspective in Ethics important is that, they are actually inviting us for, to inviting us to deviate from the existing paradigms, which are so prominent in the European tradition, particularly the post-enlightenment European tradition.


So, it is very important to understand the feminist criticism in this context. At least some picture about the feminist criticism and its importance in our society in our intellectual tradition today. So, feminist criticism of healthcare professions practices and policies. They introduce new perspectives to understand and assess the situation in a better manner. So, they are probably, we can argue that, they are trying to argue or they are pointing out something, which we lack, something, which we have neglected the care aspect, which is so central. No doubt. (Refer Slide Time: 07:41)



### Care Ethics and Feminist Critical Reflection

- The intellectual traditions and social institutions of the west are scrutinized.
- Bioethical issues have surfaced as concerns of certain institutions which were male dominant.
- Rational, objective and impartial views were idealised.
- Medicine, theology, philosophy, and law were disciplines that focus the male.

Women's views were rarely considered.

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Now, before we really get into the care perspective. We will just have a look at the feminist critical reflection and its importance. So, what the feminist have done is that, the feminists critique or criticism is against the intellectual traditions and social institutions of the west. They have scrutinized it, and they were trying to see, how just these traditions are, or how fair these traditions are towards women, and in that way attaining a balance.

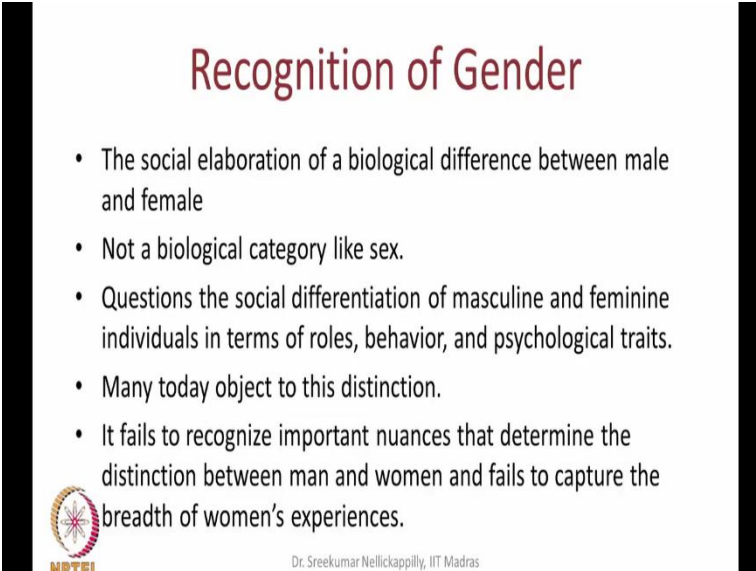
So, bioethical issues have surfaced as concerns of certain institutions, which were male dominant. So, when it comes to specific issues. Say for instance, many of the bioethical reflections have originated basically from two disciplines. One is medicine, the practice of medicine of course.

But, the other one is, we have the resources. We have the intellectual resources to develop bioethical reflections and disciplines like philosophy, law, then political science, economics and various other disciplines, sociology, and all that. So, the feminist try to point out that, how these

disciplines, by examining the historical evolution of these disciplines. They try to point out that, how they are emphasizing more and more on the male concerns or how they are male centric and is quite insensitive to the concerns and needs and requirements of women. And, they are in that way, they construct themselves as rational, objective and impartial institutions and views.


And such views were idealized from the very beginning, we can see this. From the very beginning of the intellectual tradition in the west, this rationalization, the emphasis on objective impartial views are quite visible. And, as we have seen these are all disciplines, which focus the male but not the women. And women's view were rarely considered by many of these disciplines.

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**Recognition of Gender**

- The social elaboration of a biological difference between male and female
- Not a biological category like sex.
- Questions the social differentiation of masculine and feminine individuals in terms of roles, behavior, and psychological traits.
- Many today object to this distinction.
- It fails to recognize important nuances that determine the distinction between man and women and fails to capture the breadth of women's experiences.

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Now, it would be interesting to see a little bit of historical evolution of the feminist criticism or the feminist perspective. At some point of time, the feminist have started distinguishing gender from sex. Of course, this distinction itself is questionable nowadays. But, it would be interesting to see, how they have evolved. So, gender is a technical term, which refers to the social elaboration of a biological difference between male and female.

So, in that sense, it is not just a biological category. But, it also bears the social and political and economic implications. And, sex on the other hand is a biological category more or less. So, the feminist in that sense, here in this context, by introducing such important distinctions. They

question the social differentiation of masculine and feminine individuals, in terms of roles, behaviors and psychological traits, which have been there in the European tradition from its very beginning and which are so central to the European intellectual tradition.

This categorization of roles, the masculine and feminine on the basis of roles and behavior. And many, as I mentioned do not subscribe to this distinction between sex and gender today. Because, it fails to recognize according to those people. Very important nuances that determine the distinction between man and women. So, we cannot just understand this distinction between man and women by making gender or making gender prominent in our discourse. We need certain other forms of criticism as well.

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### The Significance of Gender Perspective

- To understand the practice and institution of health care with a focus on gender differences.
- How unjust approaches and practices creep into the distribution of healthcare and its access.
- How oppressive structures deny them to women.
- How power relations operate in health-care institutions and practices.
- Invites attention to the political and social contexts of the moral issues relevant in the practice of medicine.

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Now, again to understand the practice and institution of healthcare with a focus on gender differences becomes relevant for us. Because, this would probably explain, how unjust approaches and practices creep into the distribution of healthcare and its access. So, these two distribution of health care and the access of healthcare are very important as far as the question of justice is concerned. If it is not fairly distributed or if access is denied, then there is injustice in the system. We all talk about unfair distribution and injustice, lack of access and various other issues, that prevail in the healthcare sector. But, it would be interesting to see, what are the other factors, which make these injustices look a slightly different or rather to look into such injustices from different perspectives.

So, the gender perspective, the general dimension provides us a very interesting perspective to understand this whole notion of fair distribution and healthcare and its access. So, we can also in that way understand properly, how oppressive structures deny them to women. In the society, there exist certain oppressive structures. The feminist criticism is trying to bring out these oppressive structures and show us, how they deny certain very important things to women, certain very important facilities to women. How power relations operate in healthcare institutions and practices. And, it invites attention to the political and social context of the moral issues relevant in the practice of medicine. What the significance of gender perspective in bioethical reflections would try to tell us.

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## Healthcare Institution and Gender

- **Gender inequality and discrimination** in profession: traditional Western stereotypes of femininity and masculinity function as **women to care and man to cure**.
- **Exploitation and abuse** of women patients.
- Women may receive a **lesser quality of health care** than men with similar conditions.
- **Failures of respect**: not being taken seriously as authorities on their own experience and preferences; not being properly informed about their condition and treatment options; and generally not being accorded the rights of competent adults to decide about their own health care.

[Jan Crosthwaite: Gender and Bioethics]

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I am just trying to summarize the views put forward by Jan Crosthwaite, in her article Gender and Bioethics, which appears in that Cambridge companion. So, what she says is that, there are several aspects, she tries to bring out. The first one is gender inequality and discrimination in profession. This is from the very beginning rampant, quite rampant in the profession of medicine, where traditional western stereotypes of femininity and masculinity function as women to care and man to cure.

So, this we can see. The roles of women are more or less confined to giving care, nurses. While on the other hand, doctors, most of the physicians are male. Their fundamental responsibility is

to cure. Some more importance is given to the aspect of cure rather than care, which is actually an unjust imbalance, that exist in the system. Now again, when it comes to exploitation, abuse of women patients, which is also quite rampant in the profession. And, women may receive a lesser quality of health care than men with similar conditions. So, we can cite a lot of examples to strengthen this argument.

Then again, the most important one, probably from certain other perspectives would be this, that the failure of respect not being taken seriously as authorities on their own experience and preferences. Because on most occasions, in certain context, women are understood as creatures, who lack autonomy. So, their decision-making is done by others. On certain occasions, on many occasions, husbands or fathers or mothers or other people, though we talk about autonomy a lot in medical Ethics.

Not being properly informed about their condition and treatment options. This is also because, we do not respect the autonomy of women. We do not recognize that; they are autonomous beings. Again, and generally not being accorded the rights of a competent adults to decide about their own health care. So, these are some very important problems, that women might face even today in the practice of medicine.

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## Criticism of Bioethics

- Bioethics is concerned with the issue of patient autonomy and power imbalances between patient and physician, but not about the relevance of such issues in the context of gender differences.
- Bioethicists never dealt with the unethical experimentation on women, including the therapeutic use of drugs which have not been adequately tested for effects on women.
- Women have been under-represented in, and excluded from, studies concerning illnesses which affect them as well as men
- Women's health issues are seen essentially as related to reproduction, a reflection of a long tradition of identifying women with their reproductive biology.





Bioethics is concerned with the issue of patient autonomy and power imbalances between patient and physicians. But, not about the relevance of such issues in the context of gender differences. As I mentioned, one of the fundamental concerns of modern Bioethics, this power imbalance that exist between physician and patient. So, because there would be such an imbalance of power, there is a possibility of coercion and exploitation, which needs to be very urgently addressed. And principles of autonomy and various other principles are devised for this sake.

But, the problem is that, these issues actually acquire a new dimension and certain new depths, if you try to understand and approach them from a gender perspective. Or rather, to put it in other words, gender differences add to this. They give a different dimension to the entire problem of power imbalances and autonomy issues. But, unfortunately these aspects are not being discussed elaborately by bioethicist. Another one is, bioethicist never dealt with unethical experimentation on women including the therapeutic use of drugs, which have not been adequately tested for effects on women.

So, there again, the agency of women were not treated properly. And, also the respect for person is also not honored, as far as women is concerned. So, their safety is under stake under such circumstances. And then, when it comes to research, there is a gross under-representation of women. And, there is a tendency to exclude them from studies concerning illnesses, which affect both men and women. And, it is quite interesting to also note that, certain medicines will have certain other impacts on women or certain diseases manifest slightly different ways in the case of women. And, women also face certain diseases or certain peculiar health conditions, which are not faced by men.

So, no proper research is done or their representation of women in research is much less compared to men. So, these are, these actually call for a lot of concern from the side of society. And, women's health issues are seen essentially as related to reproduction. This is another thing, a stereotyping of women. Whenever, there is a mention to women, it is reproduction. A reflection of a long tradition of identifying women their reproductive biology, so this is another very gross injustice done to women.

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## Care Ethics and Other Moral Theories

- Very close to virtue ethics.
- Emphasis on some virtuous character traits such as compassion.
- Antithetical to Utilitarianism and Deontology. Which stress impartiality in judgement and universality of moral rules.
- Such principles stressing impartiality are irrelevant and vacuous.
- They are rational, care ethics emphasizes compassion and love.
- They are ineffective in moral life.
- They fail to see the value of concrete relationships.
- Fail to acknowledge the virtues of character traits like compassion, love, sympathy, fidelity, friendship etc.



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The intellectual traditions as a whole of the west, which includes the scientific and philosophical traditions, and also other political, social and economic traditions of the west. The feminist were trying to develop a unique perspective, which would reflect some of the concerns, some of the gender concerns, and concerns of injustice done to women in various societies, particularly in the western society. Because in the western society that, what I mean by particularly in the western society is that. In the western society, these ethical reflections, which became prominent by the first half of 20th century. They give a lot of importance to the individual. As we have already seen, the concern is the individual. To protect, the individual from the coercion, from exploitation, from suppression and injustices done to them, from by others.

But, at the same time, the concerns of women are hardly addressed. So, lot of oppression and injustice are inflicted upon women by the social structures, that exist. I do not mean by men. But, the social structures that exist, which is created by both men and women. Of course, the situation in other cultures are also a matter of concern or rather more a matter of concern than some of the western societies. Because, in other societies, in particularly in India and all, the situation of women is rather more pathetic than compared to the European countries.

So, when we try to understand the Care Ethics perspectives, we need to situate it in the context of other moral theories. The prominent moral theories are, I am just taking up in this context are Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism and Deontology. There is a reason for that. Virtue Ethics has

originated, as you know in the ancient tradition, the Ancient Greek tradition. And Deontology and Utilitarianism are post-enlightenment theories.

But, among these theoretical frameworks, we can see that the Virtue Ethics framework is much closer to the framework of Care Ethics. Because, there is an emphasis on character on both. But, of course this emphasis, they do in different ways. So, it is very close to Virtue Ethics. Because, the emphasis on some virtuous character traits, such as compassion. Because, one of the important aspects of Care Ethics is the idea of compassion, the idea of empathizing with the other person. And, you can empathize with the other person only with compassion.

So, it is antithetical to the Utilitarianism and Deontology, which are rational theories, which are post-enlightenment ethical theories, which emphasizes a lot on impartiality in moral judgements and universality of moral rules. We have seen that the concept of rule, universal rule is so central in Deontology. Utilitarianism urges you to be impartial as much as possible. So, the universality, the objectivity, the impartiality aspect of these theories are quite objectionable for the Care Ethics perspective. Such principles stressing impartiality are irrelevant and vacuous according to them and they are of course, rational. Care Ethics emphasizes compassion and love, which are non-rational.

Why do you love a person? There is no reason, why you love a person, according to them. Why do you care for another person? Because there is lot of compassion and love. But then, why do you have compassion and love? Why do you empathize with another person? There is no answer to that question. You cannot rationalize your empathy with the humanity. You feel very concerned about certain people. For example, refugees, the Syrian refugees in Europe and other places. Why do you feel compassionate about them? Why do you feel consent about them? There is no answer to that. That is something, which is so fundamental to our being human, that we care for others.

As far as the rational frameworks of Utilitarianism and Deontology are concerned. Though, they might help us in certain situations. But in general, they are ineffective as far as our moral life is concerned. Day today moral life is concerned, we have to, we face, we encounter problems, very

concrete problems, which involve people and their issues. So, you cannot really try to approach these issues from the perspective of these rational theories, which emphasize on impartiality. They fail to see the value of concrete relationship. The example, which I have mentioned. Your close friend and a great scientist, both of them facing a danger and you can help only one person. If you are a Utilitarian, you might have to help the scientist.

But, if you value compassion and love and friendship, you may opt the other one. What would be the right perspective? Fail to acknowledge the virtues of character traits like compassion, love, sympathy, fidelity, friendship, etcetera. See, just one question. What would be life without these ideas, without these experiences of love, compassion, fidelity, friendship, etcetera. Life will be very dry and very boring for all of us. So, since we value our life, since we consider that, there is a lot of meaning in living. What adds meaning and value to life are these things. Compassion, love and friendship and other forms of relationship.

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## Care Ethics and Other Moral Theories

- Sees the moral self essentially from the context of relationships.
- Unlike rational theories where self is autonomous and rational.
- Moral decisions are not purely rational decisions made independent of concrete situations and people involved.



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Now again, the unique perspective of Care Ethics tries to see the moral life and the moral self essentially from the context of relationships. So, there is no autonomous rational self as it was advocated by the Deontological frameworks. Or, there is no calculating rational self as it was understood by the Utilitarians. Their self is not a rational abstract entity, an autonomous entity. The self will always find itself in the context of a network of relationship with other people. And, when you talk about relationships, relationships are not just based on contracts as a social

contract theorists would argue. Relationships are always linked with emotions and passions and compassions and empathies and other things.

So, moral decisions are not always purely rational decisions, which people make on the basis of cost benefit analysis. They are not independent of concrete situations or life, where people are involved. But, we make decisions based on all these concrete factors taking into account of emotional and other factors also.

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**The Importance of Care Perspective**

- Care is a basic human capacity: a natural capacity to empathise with others' feelings, emotions, sufferings and needs.
- We understand and respond to the needs of others.
- We regulate ourselves as we are aware of the fact that our behaviour affect others: good or harm.
- We have a natural urge to help others.
- This natural basis for care shapes our moral perspective.

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So, the care perspective in that way is urging us to look back to the aspect of care, which we are increasingly losing, when we emphasize on aspects like rational, self and autonomy of the self. Care is a basic human capacity. It is a natural capacity to empathize with others feelings, emotions sufferings and needs. It is something, which is so basic to all human beings.

So, in that way again, it is very close to the Virtue Ethics framework, which also talks about human nature. Here, there is the reference is not human nature, but to a fundamental human capacity, which we can see even amongst small kids. As far as children are concerned, small little children are concerned, we do not consider that, they are autonomous. Their autonomy is yet to be manifested in them. They are not fully rational. But, at the same time, we can find the care aspect present in them. That, if you see one child crying, another child will also start crying, which is one way in which, the child exhibits its care towards the other child.

We understand and respond to the needs of others. So, this is, what is so fundamental to care, a concern for others and responding to the needs of other people. We regulate ourselves, as we are aware of the fact that, our people, our behavior affect others. So, we know that, each of our behavior will have an impact on other people. So, we know this, when we behave, when we talk and when we act, and we accordingly regulate our behavior. All moral considerations emanate from this aspect that, we care for other people. We know that, our actions will have certain impacts on other people's life. So, we accordingly regulate it. So, that is a fundamental moral consideration, we have, which is rooted in the idea of care. And, we have natural urge to help others. This natural basis for care shapes our moral perspectives.

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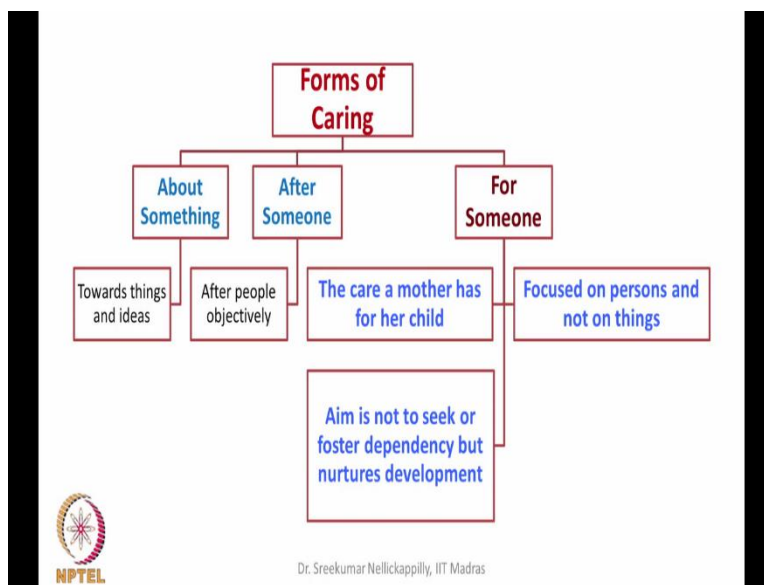
**Moral Perspective Based on Care**

- For doing the right thing.
- Recognizing right actions.
- Not just to people close to us but to extend this to include larger systems of relationships and communities.

Now, the moral perspective based on care is for doing the right thing, recognizing the right action. And it is not just to people close to us, but to expand this, include larger systems of relationships and communities. So, this is, what I said. When you emphasize on relationships, very close relationships like family relationships and friendships, does it lead to a kind of parochialism, where we are confined to our own small little world. The Care Ethicist would argue that, there is always a possibility that, we can expand the domain, the border of our relationships to other people as well to our community or communities and to the entire human community. So, that possibility is there rooted in our very nature.

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So, let us now see, what are the forms of different forms of caring. There are basically three types of caring, we are concerned with. When we care about something or after someone or for someone. Out of the three, we are directly concerned about the care, which is for someone. The Care Ethicist are not concerned about other two types of care. About something, where you care about some object, there is towards certain objects or ideas, you have some care. So, which is not a very personal kind of a care. And when it comes to, care after someone, here the best example, we can site is an officer has care. He cares for his subordinates, which is a very formal type of a care, which need not be personal.

So, that care can be executed in a very objective manner as well. But, the other one, the ethically relevant kind of a care, which we are talking about is care for someone. Where we refer to the care, which the mother has for her child. That is the best example for this kind of care, which is ethically relevant. Here, she does not expect anything back from the child. There is a unconditional absolute care for the child. Here the care is directly focused on persons and not on things. So, it is a very personal kind of a care, which is so intimate to the person, who cares. And, the objective of this care is not to make, not to foster dependency.

But, to make that person independent, nurtures development of that person. For example, when I care for my son, my objective is not to make him dependent on me. But, rather to make him independent, to make him an individual, who would be capable of making his own choices in life. So, this is a higher kind of care, which ethicist are concerned with, according to a Care Ethicist.

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## Ethics of Care and Bioethics

- Sensitive to the emotional and other non-rational elements present in clinical contexts and decision-making situations.
- Sensitive to the vulnerability and loss of autonomy people experience.
- The situations that make people dependent on others.
- Not a mere objective respect of others.
- Feelings for others.

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And now, let us conclude. We will see the kind of relationship, which Ethics of Care has with Bioethics. In what way, this would be relevant. Because, Bioethics as we know, it deals with the domain of medicine, the practice of medicine. And here, the Care Ethicist should urge that, we should be sensitive to the emotional and other non-rational elements. Because, there are a lot of things, which are non-rational. When you even, when you take a decision, even the process of decision-making in a typical clinical context is not necessarily a rational process.

Because, there are a lot of other emotional factors, economic factors, social and cultural factors, religious factors, everything is involved here. So, to care for another person is not just to be absolutely rational. It is also to be sensitive to his emotional self. To the person's emotional aspects and other aspects, which he or she considers constitute his being. So, one has to be sensitive to the emotional and other non-rational elements present in clinical contexts and decision-making situations.



And here, sensitive to the vulnerability and loss of autonomy people experience. In a typical medical condition, this is quite rampant. That people are quite vulnerable. People are so dependent on others. People feel that, they lost their autonomy. They lost control over their life. Illness is a situation, where you occasionally lose control over your lives. So, under such situations, what is more required is not a rational approach but an approach, which is fostered by care, which is actually rooted in care. Again the situations, that make people dependent on others, and not a mere objective respect to other people. Respect to other person is a very rational process.

It can, that is the way, it is understood by the Deontological tradition. But, here you should respect other people. But, the respect should be demonstrated by means of respecting the other person's emotions as well. So rather than the word respect, the word empathy would be more relevant in this context. So, it is not just a mere respect to the other people, to the patient, the person of the patient. But, rather empathizing with the patient, feelings of other people, one should be sensitive to the feelings of other people. So, we will wind up this lecture here. So, this lecture and made an attempt to understand the Care Ethics perspective by contextualizing it in the broader context of feminist criticism. Feminist critic of medical institution on the one hand and also ethical reflections on the other hand. So, we will wind up this lecture now. Thank you