COMMENT/REPLY

Her Terrain Is Outside His "Domain"

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A Response to Puka's "The Liberation of Caring: A Different Voice for Gilligan's 'Different Voice' "

Is there a single "domain" of moral development, a domain that can be defined as belonging to a "lord" so that all that falls within it falls under his sphere of influence and thought? Or is there something existing beyond what has been mapped out as the domain of moral development, something that has yet to be fully described? Could there be a *terrain* of moral development? In "The Liberation of Caring: A Different Voice for Gilligan's 'Different Voice' " (*Hypatia* 5(1)), Bill Puka critiques the findings reported in Carol Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice* (1982). Puka's argument places him squarely in the one domain of what he calls "basic cognitive structure" (Puka 1990, 64) and places Gilligan outside that domain.

Gilligan's work focuses on how women make moral decisions, a subject basically overlooked in Lawrence Kohlberg's famous studies outlining six stages of moral development. Gilligan describes the goal of her study as follows:

> For women, I hope this work will offer a representation of their thought that enables them to see better its integrity and validity, to recognize the experiences their experience refracts, and to understand the line of its development. My goal is to expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out [women] in the construction of [moral] theory to call attention to what is missing in its account. Seen in this light, the discrepant data on women's experience provide a basis upon which to generate new theory, potentially yielding a more encompassing view of the lives of both sexes. (Gilligan 1982, 3-4)

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Bill Puka, on the other hand, wants to find a place in his "domain" for Gilligan's ideas. Her view of moral developments would not occupy a primary position within that domain but would serve as a kind of helpmate to current theory. His "care as liberation" hypothesis makes Gilligan's thesis of care an auxiliary, though important, observation on the development of women's moral behavior, a development that is nonthreatening to the current domain.

Puka seems to base his argument on the following implicit premises which I will attempt to make explicit and explore:

1. There exists a value-free domain where cognitive structure develops, and this structure is discoverable by scientists who study it.

2. What previous moral theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg documented and "measured," cognitive aspects of moral development, are the most important structures that control moral development, to the exclusion of more personal and individualized experiences.

3. The voice that Gilligan discovers is a sick voice that is the result of malnourishment in a sexist society and not one worth listening to.

4. If women were living in a nonsexist society, they would choose to devalue care just as the men in power presently do.

5. Gilligan's attempt to identify a "different voice" is the equivalent of a full-blown theory of moral development.

I. Value-Free Domain

Puka's primary assumption is that in the process of moral development, a person must go through certain stages within a cognitive structure. This structure seems in Puka's mind to be an a priori, perhaps even Kantian, category that is the same in all of us, men and women alike. Where women fall short is that because of sexism in society they cannot freely climb Kohlberg's ladder of moral development to the top of that structure and must find ways to cope. The mechanism of care, then, is not, as Gilligan states, a fundamental part of moral development but is simply a coping mechanism that is the result of socialization. This distinction, says Puka, is the heart of his "care as liberation" hypothesis (Puka 1990, 65). But what if the subject matter of our inquiry should be not just the "domain" (territory cut up for the purpose of domination) but rather the "terrain" (the character of the land of morality)? Is it possible to ignore the man-made boundaries of the structure of cognitive development and look at the whole character of moral development, which can include rather than exclude personal experiences? Gilligan, I think, would answer yes. Puka would say no. He claims that the " 'principles' of cognitive construction . . . encompass some reflective processes . . . but they will not be determined by the peculiar shape of one's experience and socialization or the particular styles and discoveries of personal insight" (Puka 1990, 75).

Here we see an absolute value placed on abstraction as the key to Puka's kind of moral development. But a closer look would show that abstraction itself is something we learn to do through socialization and through a particularly Western style of thinking. Gilligan's observation is that girls in general have a different mode of moral reasoning from boys that "shifts their judgment away from the hierarchical ordering of principles. . . . This insistence on the particular signifies an orientation to the dilemma and to moral problems in general that differs from any current developmental stage descriptions" (Gilligan 1982, 101).

If, rather than assuming that there is some value-free, abstracted cognitive structure, we view the structure itself as value-laden, it becomes easier to see that socialization plays a huge role in the development of moral thinking. We somehow believe that what we should try to emulate is moral cognitive development that gets us closer to abstraction. We are predisposed to reject a different approach that acknowledges that it is not possible to get outside ourselves to any kind of objectivity but instead emphasizes the need to look at the particulars of each case in order to do a thorough job of making a moral judgment. Marilyn Chapin Massey highlights the difference between these approaches: "Women's way of thinking does not seek, therefore, as does male thinking, to measure finite forms in terms of a single fixed norm of identity. It is the male preoccupation with this fixed norm of identity that generates an abstract norm of sameness." (Massey 1985, 8)

Using this analysis, we may be able to say that there is no one "discoverable" structure of moral development and that all forms of moral development are coping strategies, not just the coping that women adopt to deal with sexist oppression. It could be said that the development of such mechanisms as Kohlberg's levels are ways that we (and particularly men) make the world manageable. When we get away from the idea that moral structure is somehow "discoverable" and realize that what we have are humans who learn to cope with the world in various ways, the Kohlberg description can be seen as one way to cope and what Gilligan uncovered can be seen as another. There are many suppressed voices such as those of various ethnic groups and cultures (other than European), lesbians and gay men, prisoners and the aged that could further enlighten us on this subject.

When Gilligan sees women in the throes of making decisions about abortion, she finds that women do not seem to progress neatly from stage one to stage two to stage three. Instead the women seem to jump from one stage to another without the kind of progression or teleology required in Kohlberg's analysis. The decision they make depends heavily on the situation they are in. Here Gilligan is not working with a Heinz dilemma, which is deliberately *not* something the subject is experiencing at the moment. Instead she leaps into the fray with real live moral dilemmas and chronicles this stage-jumping. Gilligan wants to determine not how far back the women stand in order to

make judgments but how they actually make the decisions facing them. These are not abstract decisions; they are real and practical, and while they do not fit neatly into one category or another, they *do* describe several ways of making moral decisions.

Puka implies that Kohlberg's levels are objective tools that measure levels of moral development and that the problem for women is that they live in a sexist society that does not allow them to develop to their fullest potential, presumably Kohlberg's level six. He suggests that women organize politically to liberate themselves from this stunted growth so that they may walk hand in hand with men up the ladder of moral success.

Puka states, "Still, the evolution from somewhat duped and debilitated in some domain to somewhat disabused and functional in that domain differs from steadily progressive development in general competence" (Puka 1990, 64). In other words, Puka seems to be stuck within the domain that has been staked out for centuries: he does not venture outside that domain to discover whether what he sees as "disabused and functional" is not actually within the terrain of mature moral development.

II. Mind Versus Emotions

Puka assumes that what has been studied and chronicled before, using "scientific" techniques, is what needs to be studied now, that is, he would have us focus as much as possible only on the cognitive structure of morality. In such a study, what can be empirically known is what is important. If Gilligan cannot provide more abstracted information, such as reliable statistics, about care, then care is not basic to understanding moral development. For science relies heavily on abstraction.

In *The Tao of Physics* Fritjof Capra examines the preconceptions that we have regarding science:

> Abstraction is a crucial feature of this framework. It consists . . . of a system of concepts and symbols which constitute a map of reality. This map represents only some features of reality; we do not know exactly which these are, since we started compiling our map gradually and without critical analysis in our childhood. (Capra 1977, 19)

Clearly, Gilligan is attempting to critically analyze that map and expand it to include more terrain.

Much more than any of her predecessors, Gilligan relies on narrative data and elicits specific information on the emotional side of decision making. In her view that information is as critical to any theory of moral development as it is to actual decision making. But Puka believes that such information is tangential and perhaps a sign of sickness caused by sexism. That part of human

beings that cannot be abstracted and universalized, that emotional, highly individualized part of each of us, does indeed play a large role in moral decision making. It is, of course, not easily quantifiable and does not flow smoothly through discrete levels.

Marti Kheel takes the view that moral theory without reliance on feeling of some kind does not exist:

> What seems to be lacking in much of the literature in environmental ethics (and in ethics in general) is the open admission that we cannot even begin to talk about the issue of ethics unless we admit that we care (or feel something). (Kheel 1985, 144)

Similarly, underlying moral development could very well be a feeling of care that Gilligan uncovered, rather than simply a cognitive, scientific structure.

Puka seems to want to maintain the dominant way of finding knowledge and in so doing completely mistakes Gilligan's most basic ideas that question the authority of that system. French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous points out that "subordination of the feminine to the masculine order appears to be the condition for the functioning of the machine" (Cixous 1981, 92). Puka may question the validity of the type of machine, oil or gas, capitalist or socialist, but he is unable to see the inhumanity of the machine itself.

III. Sick Voice

Another of Puka's assumptions is that the voice we are hearing from women is a voice made sick by a sexist society. The voice itself needs to be "cured," brought into the mainstream, made to sound, perhaps, more like a male voice. It is not a voice we should listen to because it is merely a symptom of a sick society. Moreover, the words that challenge the domain are not important because they are simply a manifestation of "coping strategies."

Puka would probably never say that women's sickness is their own fault. Rather, it is the fault of sexism, and he advises women to focus on political and institutional barriers "out of which a sense of solidarity with other women and a need for cooperative social action might derive" (Puka 1990, 63). The theory, then, is that if women could bring down those barriers that keep them from fully participating in this society, their problems would be solved, but until then, we should make sure that we do not attribute wisdom where sickness instead lies.

Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* considered a similar dilemma about whether or not women writers are worth listening to despite their years of subjugation:

> For women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. But this creative power differs greatly from the creative powers of men. And one must conclude that it would be a thousand pities if it were hindered or wasted, for it was won by centuries of the most drastic discipline, and there is nothing to take its place. (Woolf 1957, 91)

In contrast, Puka believes that women are "legitimizing subjugation to gender in a misguided attempt at self-affirmation" (Puka 1990, 58). That, he says, is a "typical pitfall for oppressed groups, especially in 'personal consciousness-raising' approaches to liberation" (Puka 1990, 58). But this statement reflects a misunderstanding of the value and role of consciousness-raising groups. The self-affirmation that he speaks of is not an affirmation that the oppressed group is better by virtue of its oppression but an affirmation of the selves that exist in spite of the oppression. Finding commonalities in oppression does not legitimate the subjugation but allows the discoverers to understand what is imposed on them from the outside and identify what is left that is strength-creating. In these groups women can discover that they have choices, that they do not have to accept the status quo. The development of the consciousness to the point where it feels that it has the power to choose, a prerequisite to Gilligan's stage three, is crucial to Gilligan's idea of moral development. Consciousness-raising groups give women the strength to choose, and the articulation that arises from such groups is worth heeding.

I hear the voice saying that we need to care about each other, that we need to change fundamentally the way society functions so that the major paradigm of domination and control (and abstraction) is replaced or at least balanced by one of cooperation and understanding. The voice is not sick; the society is sick and self-destructing. Perhaps the most revolutionary action that could take place is for all of us to listen to that voice, because that is the one thing that has not been tried. We have tried to organize, to politicize the personal, to attack the inequalities of our society. We have our Molly Yards (president, National Organization of Women) who go before the Senate confirmation hearings and demand equal time to state women's positions. But what we do not have is those in control listening to the voice and understanding the message. It is outside the "domain," where Gilligan's studies are focused that revolutionary thought lies.

IV. Devaluing Care

Puka also seems to assume that if women lived in a nonsexist society and could make decisions freely, they would choose to devalue care. This assumption comes through most clearly in his section headed " 'Slave Morality' and Other Ideologies" (Puka 1990, 64ff). Puka's argument is that Gilligan accepts the oppressor's message because the highest stage, stage three, is seen as an acceptance of the care ethic, precisely the ethic that society thrusts upon women. He views this acceptance as an over identification with the oppressor, a phenomenon observed among enslaved groups.

Inherent in his argument, however, is a twisted sort of reasoning. Key to Gilligan's third stage of moral development is the woman's realization that the decision is hers to make and the outcome is not forced on her by survival needs (stage one) or the desire to please others (stage two). At stage three the woman realizes that she has the choice to make her own moral decision. If we grant that the woman has the choice and realizes that fact, if she picks care over other options, she is choosing to place a higher value on care than on, say, justice. The fact that she does not devalue care as it has been devalued in this society by those in power does *not* imply that she is simply accommodating the power structure. On the contrary, to accommodate herself to the power structure's values would be to mindlessly throw care out the window as soon as the choice is given because that is what the prevailing value system would have her do.

To Puka, the idea that a woman could freely choose care over whatever value he would prefer to have her choose is unthinkable. That is because he has not gone far enough in questioning the dominant values of this society. In *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly speaks of the need for a "transvaluation of values":

> Intrinsic to the re-creative potential of the women's movement, then, is a new naming of values as these have been incarnated in society's laws, customs, and arrangements. This means that there will be a renaming of morality which has been false because phallocentric, denying half the species the possibility not only of naming but even of *hearing* our own experience with our own ears. (Daly 1973, 100)

It is not a sick voice that is trying to be heard. It is a voice that has been oppressed for centuries and has learned that the goal in life is not to join up with the dominant class in a reign over others and over nature but to gain understanding of oneself, others, and nature and cooperate to achieve the betterment of the quality of all our lives.

V. Gilligan as Theorist

Finally, Puka assumes that Gilligan is asserting a theory of moral development for women. This assumption goes farther than I think Gilligan intended. She states in her introduction: "No claims are made about the origins of the differences described or their distribution in a wider population, across cultures, or through time" (Gilligan 1982, 2).

Gilligan does her share of exploring and speculating on how these differences are manifested and tries to categorize them. But to assume that her study is a self-contained moral theory is a mistake. Gilligan's work identified a little-known and never-documented difference in the way men and women approach moral problems and appear to go through a different development toward maturity.

Her study demands further research and data to come anywhere near to being a full-blown theory. Her main contribution as I see it is to take moral theory out of the current one and only "domain" and open it up so that we can then study, explore, listen to, and appreciate the expansive and variegated *terrain* of moral development.

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