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# Care Ethics: A New Perspective of Resolving Contemporary Moral Indifference

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of China's reform and opening up and the continuous development of the market economy, interest-driven makes moral individuals present a phenomenon of moral indifference. The moral indifference separates the moral participants into independent individuals, ignores the interpersonal interaction and assembly, and leads to the alienation of human relations and the mistrust between people, which affects the harmony and development of society and has become the bottleneck of restricting China's moral development. How to resolve moral indifference is a social issue that is urgently needed to be solved in China. This paper tries to propose a theoretical possible solution of resolving contemporary moral indifference, that is, Care ethics. The concept of "Care Ethics" was first put forward by professor Nel. Noddings of American Stanford University in 1980, which highlights the perceptual level of care and emphasizes the intrinsic relational care. The basic idea of care ethical solution to resolve moral indifference performs in four aspects: highlighting the displacement of caregiver's moral motivation based on moral emotion; emphasizing the construction of the ethical relationship between self and others based on the relation; meeting the real psychological needs of the cared person in a targeted manner; consolidating care behavior based on contextual factors. This paper finally finds that these possible paths will help to liberate the human nature that is currently suppressed, get out of the moral indifference, establish a good social and moral relationship, and achieve harmonious social development.

**Keywords:** Care Ethics, Moral Indifference, Relation

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## 1. Introduction

Along with the development of science and technology, people's material life is extremely rich, and the spiritual realm is greatly improved. However, when material wealth and spiritual realm can meet people's needs to the greatest extent, moral problems emerge in an endless stream, especially moral indifference becomes the bottleneck that plagues moral development. Moral indifference phenomena such as "seeing death with saving action", "falling infants", "good deception" and so on are very common. Moral indifferent people are insensitive, their values have a great destructive effect on the human spirit, unwittingly encroaching on the human spiritual world, and making it go to desertification. In this case, the spiritual pillar of the person is tilted, the intimacy between people disappears, and the happiness of the person drops sharply. This phenomenon affects the harmony and development of society and has become the bottleneck of

restricting China's moral development now. So how to resolve moral indifference has become a social issue that is urgently needed to be solved in China, which has arisen the attention of the academic circle. Scholars have proposed feasible paths to govern moral indifference from different levels, such as building moral theory, strengthening moral education, perfecting moral mechanisms, and optimizing moral environment. These studies have enriched relevant research [1-6]. However, the existing research mainly focuses on the path of resolving moral indifference from the practical level, while the solution from the theoretical level is relatively weak and needs to be strengthened. Therefore, this paper tentatively proposes a possible theoretical path to resolve the moral indifference from the perspective of "care ethics", hoping to contribute to the research and development of moral indifference in China.

## 2. Moral Indifference and Its Characterization

Moral indifference is a concept of moral psychology. It refers to “a barrier and loneliness in interpersonal moral relations, and the resulting indifference, mutual disobedience, and mutual exclusion and negation of moral behaviors” as existentialist philosopher Sartre described ‘disbelief’ and ‘others are geography’”. [7] Moral indifference is different from general emotional indifference, but the obstruction of human-person moral consciousness communication, moral and psychological mutual sympathy lack of moral loss, and mutual concern in moral behavior. Moral indifference separates each other into independent individuals, ignoring interpersonal interactivity and assembly. The representation of moral indifference are as follows.

### 2.1. People's Moral Help Behavior Is Indifferent

People's moral help behavior is indifferent: that is, when people face the care object, the sense of morality is missing. In the normal moral track, facing the dilemma, they should have a sense of compassion and turn moral emotions into moral aids. However, in the front of people in distress, people's emotional consciousness often appears exceptionally numb, and Indifference is not sensitive to the needs of others, as if they are heterogeneous in another world, and unfortunately it is difficult to sympathize with empathy and issue proper care. “Middle-aged man wants to jump off the building in the rainy night, there are onlookers saying ‘jump, jump’”, “The driver protects the passengers with five knives in the luggage, passengers show indifference”. This shining moment is the actual reappearance of the current sense of moral indifference.

### 2.2. People's Moral Support Is Indifferent

People's moral support is indifferent. That is to say, when people encounter difficulties in real life, they are eager for the care of moral power in the subconscious, but in the apparent consciousness, they tend to choose to reject the input of external moral power. Negative moral psychology projections in real life often makes people feel that expectation is illusory. The illusory craving, even if the intention is perfect, and is objectively needed, and people will be rationally suppressed and show indifferent. “There will be such a good person now!” The moral aid recipients were very shocked afterward, vividly expressing the state of people's moral support, and indifference is almost close to annihilation.

### 2.3. People's Doubt About the Dignity of Moral Behavior

People are skeptical about the dignity of moral behavior. That is to say, in real life, there are many phenomena of borrowing good deeds, which lead people to worry about whether there are hidden traps behind moral assistance behavior. Therefore, the response to moral care behavior often has doubts about the motives of the helpers. The

vigilance of the act of assisting replaced gratitude and praise. “Three children helped to fall over the old woman, and they were accused of being trapped.” “Driven and hit people, and good people are being rescued.” Such incredible behavior increases people's contempt for moral behavior, and it is not surprising that they are suspicious of moral dignity.

### 2.4. People's Sense of Indifference and Numbness in Moral Obligations

The fulfillment of moral obligations is an act that is exceptionally noble and motivates people's moral enthusiasm. If for some reason, the moral obligation is not fulfilled, the conscience often feels uneasy and embarrassed. However, in real life, good deeds are riddled with all kinds of dilemmas. The ridicule of moral and mental darkness, the misunderstanding of the motives of good deeds by people who are good at a profit, gradually puts people in fulfilling moral obligations and heavy shackles. The enthusiasm and nature of people fulfilling their moral obligations will be replaced by indifference and numbness.

Based on the above overview of the characterization of moral indifference, it is not difficult to find that the moral indifference in contemporary Chinese society has developed to the extreme and has become a bottleneck restricting China's moral development. Therefore, contemporary China urgently needs to resolve moral indifference, and the paper believes that “care ethics” is a valid path.

## 3. The Connotation and Characteristics of Care Ethics

### 3.1. Care Ethics's Proposing

Since the beginning of history, ethics has been constructed by male philosophers. For example, the moral ethics of Aristotle in the Greek and Roman era, the moral emotion theory of modern Hume, the obligation theory of Kant, and the ethics of Kohlberg's justice theory. It was not until the 1980s that Nel Noddings, a female professor at Stanford University, systematically explored feminism in a new book, *Caring: A Feminist Perspective of Ethics and Moral Education*, published in 1984. Care Ethics is the reflection and balance between the ethics of obligation and Kohlberg's justice ethics, Noddings constructed a theoretical framework of care ethics with both femininity and universal humanity. Feminist ethics “try to theorize the connection between people and think that the separation of self-concept is problematic. The use of autonomy as the cornerstone for solving psychological and moral problems marks the separation of emotions from relationships and the blindness of relationships themselves. Sex, this will inevitably lead to psychological and political troubles.” [8] Noddings did not teach moral choice through rationality, but examined the meaning of caring and cared, and how to care for another person is related to a broader moral scene.

### 3.2. The Connotation and Characteristics of Care Ethics

#### 3.2.1. The Connotation of Caring Ethics

The core of Noddings' care ethics is caring. Her understanding of care first uses the general dictionary explanation: a state of "betting or wholeheartedness," that is, a state of mental responsibility, for somebody or something. From this point of view, care covers two primary meanings: First, care and responsibility are equal. If a person is concerned about a particular situation and is troubled by it, he is caring for this matter; second, if one is looking forward to or paying attention to someone, and she notices someone's point of view or change, she is caring for this person. As a kind of relationship quality, care ethics can only be established by the following logic [9]:

- i. W Cares X (as we describe the care party);
- ii. X admits that W cares X. (When people emphasize B, it refers to X sincerely accepting care)

From the above logical relationship, the moral elements of care ethics include the following points: The first moral element is the concern. If W doesn't care about X, then it will not understand the X's needs and give X care; the second moral element is responsibility, If W is not responsible for X, then he can't issue care according to the actual needs of X; the third moral element is ability, whether W has the ability to issue behavior to help X and promote the realization of its interests; the fourth moral element is response, which aims to emphasize whether X has the ability to perceive and respond to W's care, which directly affects the continuity of care.

#### 3.2.2. The Characteristics of Care Ethics

##### (i). Ontological Characteristics

The main feature of care ethics in ontology is to emphasize self-identity in the relationship and to explain self-autonomousness. Traditional ethics is willing to identify ourselves through the separation of self and others, and the individual is considered to be a separate, individual, and dual self. Care ethics attempts to identify itself through connections, care, and relationships. The self is connected. The more you connect with others, the more self you have. Therefore, care ethics is a horizontal and flat network of relationships. The self is in the center of the network and spreads around. The more extensive the network, the more valuable the self is.

##### (ii). Epistemological Characteristics

- (a) Emotional characteristics. Care ethics pays special attention to moral emotions, emphasizes the internal driving role of moral emotions, and believes that principles are not enough to generate moral motives, and moral emotions are needed as support. Ethical care comes from two kinds of emotions: the direct feeling of others and the memories of the emotions of the first love, from which emotions lead to care behavior.
- (b) Relationship characteristics. The essence of care is the

relationship between caring and cared person. Therefore, care is a kind of relationship quality. Whether the care relationship can be maintained and whether it can continue to flow to the cared person depends to a large extent on how the caring person maintains the relationship and the perceived ability of the cared person.

- (c) Targeted features. Care is the responsibility of the caring person to the mentally or materially of the cared person. It is the reality of the caring person's reference to others, and to meet the needs of the cared person to the maximum extent, to meet the needs of the cared person, and to provide care through his actions. Behavior and a series of processes that are responded to by the caring person.
- (d) Contextual characteristics. Care ethics does not resort to the abstract universal moral principles, but only to whether it is possible to establish and maintain a caring relationship in a specific context. Care ethics requires attention to relationships in a particular context, requiring identification of injuries, pains and needs, and then reacting effectively.

In short, care ethics builds a relationship ethics through the interaction between the self and the other through the relationship to blur the boundaries between reason and emotion, highlighting the characteristics of moral emotion, situation, and relationship. The root of moral indifference is that traditional ethics is too much to separate the connection between ontology and object, strongly advocate the separation of self from others, realize the subjectivity of self-identity through separation, and regard self as a personal, dual self. This will inevitably lead to indifference to the needs of others and loss of morality. Therefore, care ethics is undoubtedly a supplement and repair of traditional ethics and a theoretical leader in resolving moral indifference in contemporary society.

## 4. Basic Conception of Resolving Moral Indifference with Care Ethics

Aiming at the separation of moral indifference, it is of great theoretical significance to regard care ethics as a possible mode of resolution. Therefore, the basic idea of care ethics to resolve moral indifference is as follows:

### 4.1. Highlighting the Displacement of Caregiver's Moral Motivation Based on Moral Emotion

People with moral indifference lack moral emotions, caregivers lack moral ideals, knowledge, feelings, beliefs, and intentions are difficult to internalize into real actions. The ability of pro-social helping people are low. Facing difficulties, people often look at the world and respond with indifference. Emotional consciousness has been painful to motivate them to flow their care motivations to the cared person, and the driving force and initiative of caring have fallen to very low point. However, care ethics pays special

attention to moral emotions, emphasizes the motive effect of moral emotions, and believes that moral principles are not sufficient to generate moral motives, and moral emotions are needed as support. "Facing evil, we must be disgusted; when we see the pain of others, we must feel the desire to eliminate or alleviate these pains. We must be shocked to face the intention of hurting others." [10] Therefore, in the face of the rapid improvement of the sensibility of the care of the environment, the empathy is integrated into the inner world, and moral emotions begin to give birth to the desires and motives of caring for carers. When the caring person is sympathetic to the sympathy, he will reveal the true feelings driven by the moral and emotional factors of caring ethics, accepting others as themselves, and observing and feeling with others. This feeling is like the mother feels like her baby. Naturally, natural care stems from emotions of love. This is the natural love that cares for the inner circle. However, when the care party is placed outside the natural care, it needs to recall the emotions of the first love, so that their love has transcendence and time and space, and let the outer circle enter the care as a potential caring person. Ring. In this way, the moral affective factor touches the caregiver and is ready to care. The motivational energy of the caring party will flow to the cared person, and the goal pursued in the broader boundary, that is, the so-called motivational displacement, is initially completed. The infectivity and internal drive of caring for ethical and emotional genes will undoubtedly have a specific melting and softening effect on the current moral indifference to the extreme and moral numbness. The moral and emotional awareness of the ontology will be awakened, breaking the freezing point of moral indifference and rekindling the flame of moral enthusiasm.

#### **4.2. *Emphasizing the Construction of the Ethical Relationship Between Self and Others Based on the Relation***

To a certain extent, moral indifference is that people deal with the relationship between the self and the other in a separate attitude, ignoring the dependence of the self on the other, and it's even the result of the rejection of the others. People with moral indifference are good at separating each other into independent individuals, no longer considering the mutual needs between the self and others, and misinterpreting the original likes as the fragmentation of loneliness separated from the ontology. Care ethics emphasizes the relationship quality, recognizing that the self is a relationship and a series of encounters. In the framework of caring ethics, in order to highlight the self and the construction of the other, we describe the self at a particular moment as a relationship—a series of encounters [11]:

$$At = \{(A1, B), (A2, C), (A3, D), \dots (A4, e), (A5, f) \dots\}$$

Among them, A represents various descriptions of the self before time t, uppercase letters (B, C, etc.) represent others, and lowercase letters (e, f, etc.) represent factors other than

things, ideas, and others. The rules for meeting the pair are brief and vague: a) At the moment of encounter, the self is always one of the factors, but not necessarily the first factor; b) the encounter must have an influence or meaning for A. From this we can see that the self is always an organic part of the encounter, it is not an isolated existence, always embedded in the relationship with the living beings, and always enjoys the fulcrum of resonance with the other, which shows itself Close contact with the other. Caring ethics treats people, people and nature, people and society, and strangers as an interdependent coexistence. Therefore, caring ethics breaks the repulsive and harmful retreat between self and others through the construction of relational self, and narrows or eliminates the sense of distance from moral indifference with the interdependence between people, using its perfect emotion. The factors fill the gap between moral indifference and nakedness. The gradual enlargement of the sense of spiritual distance caused by moral indifference is a kind of elastic contraction. Care ethics is undoubtedly the perfection and correction of the separation of moral indifference self and others. The current moral indifference is divided. The trend of atomization and isolation will once again reshape the image of the iron plate.

#### **4.3. *Meeting the Real Psychological Needs of the Cared Person in a Targeted Manner***

The morally indifferent people's spiritual intentions are weakened, and the pro-social helping ability is low. In the face of the dilemma, they are always extraordinarily indifferent and insensitive, and the moral sense is severely lacking. They cannot satisfy the embarrassed people's moral support expectations and lose each other. Intersection points, thus turning into lonely individuals. In the framework of caring ethics, caring is defined as an interactive relationship between carers and carers. Caring for caring behavior, meeting the real psychological needs of the cared person, and being cared for by the caring person Responses and feedback, the response and feedback can genuinely show the completion of this caring behavior. Of course, "caregivers" and 'cared people' are not permanent labels that are attached to two different types of people stably and differently. They are a label in a continuous relationship or a series of labels on both sides." [12] Therefore, both sides may have a role change at any time. Based on the relationship traits of caring ethics, only by caring for the true psychological needs of the cared person can the smooth completion of the first level of caring behavior completion, even if the two roles change, will not affect the sub-care The behavior continues, but a harmonious and orderly benign encounter relationship. In this way, lonely individuals in the ethical indifference situation are no longer the fixed points of the division, alienated from each other, but form an interactive network of relationships, rushing out of the morally indifferent siege and out of the predicament of moral indifference. Satisfying the psychological needs of the cared ones is the key to care ethics to deal with moral indifference. Let us walk into the reality of moral life to prove the importance of care ethics,

from the deadly lonely events in China [13] to the growing number of lonely deaths in Korea [14], and then to the “Japanese old man’s ‘Lonely Death’ incident” [15], more and more lack of care and immoral behavior is shocking, coupled with China’s peak in the aging stage, This has increasingly called us to meet the real psychological needs of the cared for, in order to develop a harmonious and orderly society, rather than losing human morality.

#### 4.4. Consolidating Care Behavior Based on Contextual Factors

Caring ethics is a kind of relationship quality. In the process of caring, there will be various inevitable conflicts. It may be a conflict between what one imagines and another desires; a conflict between what the caregiver wants and the caregiver feels, etc. In the case of conflicts, the principles don’t provide accurate guidance. Only by specific people in the situation, specific needs, and specific reactions and experiences can the decision be made. Therefore, care ethics is a kind of contextual ethics. The so-called contextual principle is to implement caring behavior according to the needs of the actual situation. It requires us that “in the specific care ethics practice, we cannot treat the rules abstractly and can’t go to the ‘regular theory’, but must use the rules flexibly according to the actual situation”[16]. Care ethics emphasizes flexibility and contextual, but it doesn’t completely negate the principles. Its basic connotation is to make a reasonable response to complex and specific situations through a person’s imagination, character, and behavior on a specific occasion, and to eliminate the rules as a morality. The single criterion of judgment is to realize the multi-edge of moral value judgment. Aristotle once proposed the concept of ‘smart’ that is, a wisdom that considers both the specific environment and reality in practice. In the case of Aristotle, “the virtue makes us determine the purpose, and wisely makes us choose the right means to achieve the purpose.”[17] In other words, the moral purpose in particular, but we can The environment is flexible in choosing moral means, and not just like traditional ethics. It is only fixed in a rigid rule circle. The attribute of caring ethics is more inclined to a kind of relationship behavior, that is, in the process of caring behavior, caring people should always watch. Caring for the ultimate role in the object of caring, and adjusting the way of caring for the cared person’s needs and changes at any time, which requires the caring person not only to realize the self-will as the focus of behavior in the moral life. Instead, it is necessary to incorporate the needs of others and the influence of moral behavior on others into caring behavior and maintain an equal and mutually beneficial care model. It can be seen that the contextual factors of caring ethics expand moral concerns from oneself to the other and care. It is more suitable for the cruel reality of moral indifference and the resolution of various moral problems. It is the ruthless moral judgment and general moral law. It adds more sense of reality and realism and satisfies the diversity and dynamics of moral life.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, the interests drive the individual to show moral indifference, moral indifference separates the moral participants into independent individuals, ignoring the interactivity and assembly of interpersonal interactions. Care ethics not only emphasizes the care of people’s perceptual level but also emphasizes the inner relationship of people. Based on this, the paper believes that care ethics can effectively eliminate the phenomenon of social moral indifference, which is realized through the transplantation of moral motivation, the co-construction of ethical relationships, the satisfaction of psychological needs, and the consolidation of care behavior. These possible paths will help to liberate the human nature that is currently suppressed, get out of the moral indifference, establish a good social and moral relationship, and achieve harmonious social development.

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