

Hearing the difference: Theorizing connection*

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Hearing the difference between a patriarchal voice and a relational voice defines a paradigm shift: a change in the conception of the human world. Theorizing connection as primary and fundamental in human life leads to a new psychology, which shifts the grounds for philosophy and political theory. A crucial distinction is made between a feminine ethic of care and a feminist ethic of care. Voice, relationship, resistance, and women become central rather than peripheral in this reframing of the human world.

Kew words: Patriarchal voice, relational voice, connection, feminine ethic, feminist ethic, resonance.

El hecho de escuchar la diferencia entre una voz patriarcal y una voz relacional define un cambio de paradigma: un cambio en la concepción del mundo humano. Teorizar la vinculación como un aspecto primordial y fundamental de la vida humana conduce a una nueva psicología que modifica el terreno en el que operan la filosofía y la teoría política. Se establece una distinción decisiva entre una ética femenina y una ética feminista del cuidado. La palabra, la relación, la resistencia y las mujeres adquieren un lugar central, en vez de periférico, en esta reformulación del mundo humano.

Palabras clave: voz patriarcal, voz relacional, vinculación, ética femenina, ética feminista, resonancia.

When I began the work that led to *In a Different Voice* (1982), the framework was invisible. To study psychology at that time was like seeing a picture without seeing the frame, and the picture of the human world had become so large and all-encompassing that it looked like reality or a mirror of reality, rather than a representation. It was startling then to discover that women for the most part were not included in research on psychological development, or when included were marginalized or interpreted within a theoretical bias where the child and the adult were assumed to be male and the male was taken as the norm.

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Bringing women's voices into psychology posed an interpretive challenge: how to listen to women in women's terms, rather than assimilating women's voices to the existing theoretical framework. And this led to a paradigm shift. Men's disconnection from women, formerly construed as the separation of the self from relationships, and women's dissociation from parts of themselves, formerly interpreted as women's selflessness in relationships, now appeared problematic. Framed within an ethic of care, disconnections and dissociations which had been taken as foundational to conception of self and morality appeared instead to be careless and harmful. This is what I meant by a different voice, on a theoretical level.

It is said that a tuning fork, tuned to a particular pitch, will stop the vibrations in eight or nine others that are tuned to a different frequency (Noel 1995). Listening to human voices, Noel finds that one voice, speaking in a particular emotional register can stop the emotional vibrations in a group of people so that the environment in the room becomes deadened or flat. When this happens, she observes, it looks like silence but in fact the feelings and thoughts—the psychological energy—often move into the only place they can still live, and vibrate in silence, in the inner sense, until it becomes possible to bring them back into the world (Noel 1995).

I began writing about a different voice when I heard what George Eliot called the «still, small voice» speaking in a different psychological register. The voice that set the dominant key in psychology, in political theory, in law and in ethics, was keyed to separation: the separate self, the individual acting alone, the possessor of natural rights, the autonomous moral agent. Because the paradigmatic human voice conveyed this sense of separation as foundational, it was difficult to hear connection without listening under the conversation.

I was listening at the time to women who were pregnant and thinking about abortion in the immediate aftermath of the *Roe v. Wade* decision. Women's concerns were often driven by experiences of disconnection which rendered relationships difficult to maintain, but their voices carried a sense of connection, of living and acting in a web of relationships which went against the grain of the prevailing discourse of individual rights and freedom. Speaking of connection, of responsiveness and responsibility in relationships, women heard themselves sounding either selfish or selfless, because the opposition of self and other was so pervasive and so powerfully voiced in the public discourse. It was as if women's experience of connection was unnatural, unhealthy or unreal. But it was also ironic, because the Supreme Court had given women a legal voice in a matter of relationship and at the same time had framed that voice within a discourse of rights which made it impossible to speak about relationship, except in terms of justice—equality, fairness, reciprocity— or in terms of contractual obligation, neither of which had much bearing on many women's situation. In developing a different voice as a key to a new psychology and politics, I found that human voices and also relationship became more resonant and more vibrant.

On a theoretical and political level, on a personal and psychological level, this change in voice seemed essential. The existing paradigm was patriarchal; it was built on a disconnection from women which became part of the psychology of women and men. Theories of psychological and political development took this separation as foundational to the development of a sense of self, and as a result, the separate self and the selfless woman—the artifacts of a patriarchal psychology and politics—appeared natural and inevitable, necessary and good.

I come then to a crucial distinction: the difference between a feminine ethic of care and a feminist ethic of care. Care as a feminine ethic is an ethic of special obliga-

tions and interpersonal relationships. Selflessness or self-sacrifice is built into the very definition of care when caring is premised on an opposition between relationships and self-development. A feminine ethic of care is an ethic of the relational world as that world appears within a patriarchal social order: that is, as a world apart, separated politically and psychologically from a realm of individual autonomy and freedom which is the realm of justice and contractual obligation.

A feminist ethic of care begins with connection, theorized as primary and seen as fundamental in human life. People live in connection with one another; human lives are interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways. A feminist ethic of care reveals the disconnections in a feminine ethic of care as problems of relationship. From this standpoint, the conception of a separate self appears intrinsically problematic, conjuring up the image of rational man, acting out of relationship with the inner and outer world. Such autonomy, rather than being the bedrock for solving psychological and moral problems itself becomes the problem, signifying a disconnection from emotions and a blindness to relationships which set the stage for psychological and political trouble. This reframing of psychology in terms of connection changes the conception of the human world; in doing so, it establishes the ground for a different philosophy, a different political theory, a change in ethics and legal theory.

From this perspective, it becomes easier to see how the disconnection of the self from relationships and the separation of the public world from the private world define a realm of human activity which can only be maintained as long as someone cares about relationships, takes care of the private world and feels bound to other people. Historically this labor of caring has been the special obligation and unpaid labor of women, or the poorly paid labor of women who by virtue of class or caste difference are doubly excluded from the general domain of human freedom. Women living in patriarchal families, societies, and culture are bound internally and externally by obligations to care without complaint, on pain of becoming a bad woman: unfeminine, ungenerous, uncaring. Following women's psychological development, I found that for a woman to free herself from these moral strictures generally involves undoing a process of psychological dissociation and retrieving a voice that has been driven into silence (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Rogers and Noel, 1992; Jack, 1991; Linnklater, 1976). When this inner voice surfaces and comes into relationships, it sets off different vibrations and resonances. Then a discourse of relationship can replace the patriarchal construction of relationships. The tension between a relational psychology and a patriarchal social order is caught by a paradox: living within the structures of patriarchy, women find themselves giving up relationship in order to have relationships (Gilligan, 1990b; Gilligan n.d.b.; Miller, 1988). A feminist ethic of care became the voice of the resistance.

This brings me to my central point. Theorizing connection as primary and fundamental in human life directs attention to a growing body of supporting evidence which cannot be incorporated within the old paradigm. Studies of the infant as a member of a couple refute the depiction of the infant as locked up in egocentrism and provide compelling data showing that the desire for relationship, pleasure in connection, and the ability to make and maintain relationship are present at onset of development. Research on women and girls provides evidence of psychological capacities and relational knowledge that raises the most fundamental questions about the nature of cognitive and emotional and social development; otherwise, it would seem impossible that women and girls know what they know. These psychological studies of infants and women recast the understanding of the developmental process in relational terms; they

have relied on new research methods and they demonstrate the power of a relational approach in research as well as in psychotherapy (Murray and Trevarthen, 1985; Stern, 1985; Tronick, 1989; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Kreider, and O'Neill n.d.; Jordan *et al.*, 1991; Miller and Stiver, 1994; Relke 1993).

In *History After Lacan*, Brennan describes the ending of the ego's era. It began with the joining of the Cartesian self and capitalism in the seventeenth century. Brennan characterizes the separate self or the autonomous ego as a foundational fantasy which does not appear as a fantasy as long as the ego's omnipotence and control are socially constructed as reality, wrapping the imperial «I» in a cultural cocoon.

«To allow that my feelings physically enter you, or yours me, to think that we both had the same thought at the same time because it was literally in the air, is to think in a way that really puts the subject in question. In some ways, the truly interesting thing is that this questioning has begun» (Brennan, 1993, p. 41).

I am interested in women's relationship to this societal and cultural transformation because the history of this relationship is in danger of being buried. Listening to women's voices clarified the ethic of care, not because care is essentially associated with women or part of women's nature, but because women for a combination of psychological and political reasons voiced relational realities that were otherwise unspoken or dismissed as inconsequential. A patriarchal social order depends for its regeneration on a disconnection from women, which in women takes the form of a psychological dissociation: a process of inner division that makes it possible for a woman not to know what she knows, not to think what she thinks, not to feel what she feels. Dissociation cuts through experience and memory, and when these cuts become part of cultural history, women lose the grounds of their experience and with it, their sense of reality.

In studies of girl's psychological development, my colleagues and I have witnessed the onset of dissociative processes at adolescence (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Brown, and Rogers, 1990; Rogers, 1993). Girls at this time face a relational crisis or developmental impasse which has its parallel in the relational crisis of boy's early childhood. Freud called this crisis the Oedipus complex and theorized it as a turning point in psychological development, marking a definitive intersection between psychological development and the requisites of civilization. The resolution of the Oedipus Complex structures the connection between inner and outer worlds.

I have come to theorize a similar crisis in girl's lives at adolescence as a crisis of voice and relationship, also marking a definitive joining between psychological development and civilization. This is the time when girls are pressed from within and without to take on the interpretive framework of patriarchy and to regulate their sexuality, their relationships, their desires and their judgments in its terms. As for boys in early childhood, this internalization of a patriarchal voice leads to a loss of relationship or a compromise between voice and relationships, leaving a psychological wound or scar. The asymmetry I have posited between boy's and girl's development finds confirmation in the considerable evidence showing that boys are more psychologically at risk than girls throughout the childhood years and that girls' psychological strengths and resilience are suddenly at risk in adolescence (see Gilligan n.d.a.; Debold, 1994).

Girls' initiation into womanhood has often meant an initiation into a kind of selflessness, which is associated with care and connection but also with a loss of psy-

chological vitality and courage. To become selfless means to lose relationship or to lose one's voice in relationships. This loss of relationship leads to a muting of voice, leaving inner feelings of sadness and isolation. In effect, the young woman becomes shut up within herself.

When the release of women's voices in the 1970s put an end to this house arrest and brought the disconnection from women out into the open, women revealed the startling omission of women from psychology and from history and also discovered the extent of women's dissociation: women's ignorance of their bodies, themselves and other women. The association of women with care became problematic for many women because when care is framed as a ethic of selflessness and self-sacrifice in relationships it enjoins these inner divisions in women and catches women in a psychological and political trap. Claiming human status, women brought themselves and their concerns about relationship into the public arena, placing high on the political agenda relationships with children, family relationships, relationships with the environment, relationships with the future as developed through education and health care, and above all, the problem of violence in domestic as well as national and international relationships. In this way, women reframed women's problems as human concerns.

Any discussion of a care ethic, then, has to begin with the issue of framing. What is the framework within which we will compare and contrast justice and care? When I hear care discussed as a matter of special obligations or as an ethic of interpersonal relationships, I hear the vestiges of patriarchy. When I listen to care versus justice debated as if there was no framework, I hear the implicit patriarchal framework silently slipping back into place.

In analyzing psychological theory and women's psychological development, I have attempted to show how a feminist ethic of care repudiates a feminine ethic of care on the grounds that a feminine ethic of care rests on a faulty notion of relationship. This fault erupts in women's lives in the form of a psychological crisis. A paradox then becomes evident: women are «doing good and feeling bad» (Miller, 1976); women are silencing themselves in order to be with other people; women are giving up relationship for the sake of having relationships, and then missing themselves and missing relationship or feeling stranded in a confusing isolation which is often filled with self-condemnation (Gilligan, 1977; Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1990b; Jack, 1991; Miller, 1988; Miller, 1991; Stern, 1990).

Hearing the difference between a patriarchal voice and a relational voice means hearing separations which have sounded natural or beneficial as disconnections which are psychologically and politically harmful. Within a relational framework, the separate self sounds like an artifact of an outmoded order: a disembodied voice speaking as if from nowhere. In the absence of relational resonances, the exposure of an inner voice is psychologically dangerous because its openness to vibrations heightens vulnerability. Hearing a relational voice as a new key for psychology and politics, I have theorized both justice and care in relational terms. Justice speaks to the disconnections which are at the root of violence, violation and oppression, or the unjust use of unequal power. Care speaks to the dissociations which lead people to abandon themselves and others: by not speaking, not listening, not knowing, not seeing, not caring and ultimately not feeling by numbing themselves or steeling themselves against the vibrations and the resonances which characterize and connect the living world.

The talking cure or cure through relationship which Freud and Breuer discovered to be so psychologically powerful and effective finds its analogue in the public

arena which Arendt saw as essential to the health of a democratic society: a place where people can come and speak freely. The antidote to psychological repression is the antidote to totalitarianism. When a relational voice sets the key for psychology, political theory, law, ethics and philosophy, it frees the voices of women and men and also the voices of the disciplines from patriarchal strictures.

Hope is a dangerous emotion because it creates such vulnerability to disappointment, and the process of change is never straightforward. The desire for relationship may jeopardize relationships; the desire to speak will heighten vulnerability and may lead to psychological harm. The psychological knowledge that has been gained in the past quarter century provides a map for the resistance and a guide to relationship, marking the pitfalls of disconnection and dissociation. However arduous the terrain and however conflicted the journey, however strong the pulls toward repetition and return, a different voice has been heard and a new direction charted.

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