

Introduction

Why do we *care* for others even when we are not connected by personal relationships? Why do we fight for *justice* even when it does not concern us directly? In short, what are the motivational foundations that push us to act ethically and adopt socially empathic behaviors?

Since its inauguration a few decades ago, with the publication of Carol Gilligan's book *In a Different Voice*, the debate on care and justice has taken on such proportions as to discourage any new attempt to address its complex and multiple implications, be they psychological or political, ethical or legal.¹ One could legitimately affirm that all possible ethical and normative responses to the social pathologies and great challenges of our time can be summarized in these two paradigms: on the one hand, we need justice in order to face up to inequality and exploitation, humiliation and poverty; on the other, we are discovering the urgency of care to combat atomism and indifference, the erosion of the social bond, the neglect of the living world, and the dramatically declining conditions of the environment. In other words, any unilateral and oppositional vision between the two ethical perspectives—of which we find undeniable traces in current reflections²—needs to be overcome in order to propose a clearer and more reciprocal integration between the two.

I would like to point out, however, that I will address the topic from a specific point of view that appears barely present in the contemporary debate: that is to say, from the point of view of a form of *moral psychology*³ that not only reaffirms the importance of emotions on a cognitive level but also questions the emotional roots of ethics, thereby allowing us to tackle the problem of the affective motivations⁴ behind both the demand for justice and the disposition to, and practice of, care. Reflecting on the role that passions and feelings play in both ethical perspectives is,

in other words, a *via regia*, a royal path. By following it, not only can we rethink them beyond stereotyped images but we can also fearlessly undermine even their potentially negative aspects and fully enhance their emancipatory aspects and unexpected twists.

First of all, let us think about the idea of *justice*. What the theorists of care have in common in this regard (from Gilligan to Held, from Kittay to Tronto)⁵ is the radically critical approach to liberal theories of justice and, in particular, to the model proposed by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*.⁶ They contest not only the undisputed and alleged hegemony of this model over the span of modernity, but also its abstract and rationalistic character, which has ended up obscuring other possible ethical (and political) perspectives. In other words, to the justice paradigm, founded on the values of an abstract individualism, of rationality, and of the subject's autonomy and independence, they oppose the care paradigm, based on the values of concreteness and affectivity, interdependence and relationality.

Insofar as it denounces the one-sidedness of the ethical paradigm of modernity, this is, undoubtedly, the strong point of care ethics. Yet, in my view, it also represents its weak point, since it ends up boxing the idea of justice into its prevailing and consolidated image, precluding the possibility of a different theory of justice. To propose the relationship between care and justice in these terms is to emphasize a purely formal idea of the latter and neglect the problem of the motivations that inspire the demand for justice, namely, *affective* motivations, which originate in certain passions and therefore do not exclusively belong, I argue, to the care perspective.

It is precisely in this direction that, for example, Martha Nussbaum's reflections seem to be oriented when she attributes an important role to moral sentiments—and, in particular, to compassion on the part of those who witness unjust situations—in making up for the shortcomings of the contractalist model of justice, which is based on the sole criterion of mutual benefit.⁷ However, as we shall see, Nussbaum's limit is that she proposes a vision of care that is not autonomous but is actually incorporated in, and subordinated to, the paradigm of justice.

Taking the *passions for justice* seriously also means changing, even more radically, the perspective from which the problem is addressed. It means renouncing, as Amartya Sen proposes, an ideal and perfect model of justice, such as that which inspires the Rawlsian paradigm, and starting instead from the concrete claims of individuals and groups

that arise from the perception of injustice.⁸ In other words, we must start from injustice and our desire to fight it, and mobilize those feelings, such as humanity and generosity, righteousness and indignation, which characterize us as human beings.

This is undoubtedly true for those who witness unfair situations, practices, and behaviors. Yet, it also applies to those who suffer these situations personally and fight for the defense of their rights and dignity insofar as these struggles contain an emancipatory and normative potential that crosses the boundaries of pure individual interest and involves an entire social structure and the interest for the common good. The “experience of injustice,” as Emmanuel Renault calls it,⁹ is in fact what gives rise, through the sharing of a “feeling of injustice” on the part of victims, to the claims and struggles of the various social movements, in which we can recognize a normative model of society that is an alternative to the existing one. In this regard, it is useful to recall some protest movements that have become the bearers of emancipatory action. Among them are the movements of revolt fueled by a just anger that, a few years ago, motivated the Arab world with legitimate demands for democracy, so much so that we speak of an “Arab spring”; the global movement of the Indignados that, starting from Spain, has spread to the entire Western world; the various Occupy movements that are multiplying around the planet; the unprecedented growth of gender-oriented petitions such as those of MeToo and the LGBTQIA associations; and the anger of the *gilets jaunes*, despite their undeniable ambiguity.

To address the problem of the aforementioned negative aspects, however, we must not underestimate the fact that, today as always, there are movements and revolts that hold up regressive claims and destructive objectives (such as the various fundamentalisms and racisms, whose extreme fringes form the breeding ground for violent identity conflicts and drifts into terrorism). Recognizing the different nature of the affective impulses underlying social movements and collective struggles gives us a precious tool to distinguish between *legitimate* and *illegitimate* claims. I show how this is possible by dwelling, as a significant example, on the link between two passions that are not always easily distinguishable, namely, *indignation* and *envy*.

In short, focusing attention on the emotions allows us to think of a different idea of justice. But this is not all. It also allows us to understand better the motivations that inspire the disposition to *care*, which is often defined through an all too general and hasty equation

with the affective dimension. In other words, it is necessary to question ourselves more deeply about the nature of the passions and feelings that are at the origin of the ethics of care. This necessity is due to at least three fundamental reasons: first, to remove care from a purely altruistic and self-sacrificing vision and instead bring it back to the condition of human *vulnerability*; second, to highlight the extent and differentiation of the contexts in which it is able to operate, be it in the private, professional, or social sphere, in which care is anything but free from negative feelings such as resentment and disgust (which is, unfortunately, quite common in the field of care and assistance for those in need); third, to enhance the aspects that distinguish it from the ethics of justice. In fact, if the motivations and objectives of justice remain inscribed in what, with Paul Ricoeur, we can call a “logic of equivalence,” by mobilizing feelings such as attention, generosity, and love, care prompts a “logic of superabundance”¹⁰ that, in my opinion, has its roots in the awareness of the reciprocity of *debt* and the circularity of the gift.

It is therefore a matter not of opposing the two ethical perspectives in a mutually exclusive way, but of proposing a desirable integration between the two, which translates into a sort of productive division of labor. In this division, the ethics of justice continually seeks to restore equality and symmetry through fights against injustice, impartial defense of rights, and fair distribution of resources, whereas the ethics of care tends to affirm what I would like to call the value of bonds and relationships by recovering gratuitousness and the gift-giving dimension inspired by the awareness of (one’s own and the other’s) vulnerability and free from resentful impulses. In other words, whereas, in the case of justice, the emphasis on emotions allows us to distinguish or, at least, to orient ourselves between *legitimate* and *illegitimate* claims, in the case of care it allows us to distinguish between *good* and *bad* care.

This division of labor arises again, as we shall see, in the face of that unprecedented challenge of our time—one on which I have placed particular attention—and that I propose to summarize in the figure of the *distant other*, who can be either distant *in space* or distant *in time*. A figure peculiar to the global age, the distant other strongly tests both ethical perspectives and poses even more questions on the possible emotional and motivational foundations of just, attentive, and supportive action toward someone who lives in far-off places and is forced by increasingly extreme causes to cross our borders (the example of migrants is all too obvious) or toward some, like future generations, with whom we apparently

have no ties, as they are suspended in the dimension of the “not yet.”

Suggesting the need for integration between the two different ethical perspectives is therefore equivalent to challenging Aristotle’s well-known statement in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: if there is friendship, there is no need for justice, whereas, if there is justice, we still need friendship.¹¹ The fact is that, on the contrary, we always need both.

While all this obviously presupposes that an *ethical* function can be attributed to emotions, the paths and strategies to be adopted for this function to take shape and operate effectively are less clear. If, on the one hand, there seems to be increasing agreement over recognizing the cognitive and communicative function of emotions, which various disciplines have by now long released from obsolete and erroneous accusations of irrationality or from the myth of unchangeability, the task of recognizing and showing their ethical potential seems to be more difficult. The difficulty comes from the fact that this task presupposes a subject capable of assuming a critical and reflective stance with respect to its own inner “upheavals”—an individual capable of knowing how to find its way in the complexity and ambivalence of emotions, of dwelling in their unpredictability, of knowing how to welcome the new that comes from them, and of fostering or generating the best.

To this end, then, it is necessary, as I propose in the final chapter of this work, to engage in a sort of *paideia* of the emotions that promotes, together with their ethical quality, their ability to produce the *metamorphosis* of the subject. It is true that today it has become more imperative than ever, as Peter Sloterdijk reminds us, to radically change our lives, our relationship with others, ourselves, and the world.¹² However, it is my belief that this change must be the work not of a sovereign and isolated subject, a *maître de soi*, who is capable of ascetic and rational self-control, but of a subject who perceives itself as constitutionally related, that is, a subject who transforms and re-generates itself through the provocation prompted by the emotional relationship and the adherence to emotion’s unpredictability—a subject who responds to the appeal, whether silent or loud, provocatively made by the other in his, her, their, or its infinite forms and epiphanies.