

48 IMAGES OF RELATIONSHIP

Carol Gilligan

Examining Western moral traditions from a standpoint outside of these traditions may reveal various ways in which these traditions unknowingly incorporate hidden and narrow biases, that is, the way in which undefended and unanalyzed hidden assumptions unwarrantedly determine a particular picture of moral behavior. But such distortions are not evident only from a cross-cultural perspective. Inasmuch as most philosophical ethicists have been males, it would not be surprising if this fact has shaped and contributed to their moral reflection. Even if they had the best of intentions, the social differences between men and women suggest that standard moral theories ought to be critically examined for evidence of a male bias.

Carol Gilligan (1936–), a moral psychologist at New York University, in the process of studying adolescent moral development, developed a detailed and far-reaching analysis of standard moral theories. Her book *In a Different Voice*, published in 1984, had an immediate impact on both the field of moral development and philosophical moral theory. In that book, she proposed that men and women tend to conceptualize moral problems differently: Men tend to use a ‘justice’ voice while women tend to use a ‘care’ voice. Each voice differs partly due to a different conception of the self. These differences are rooted in distinct patterns of psychological development. (Gilligan’s view is similar to that of Nancy Chodorow in Chapter 4, Reading 17 of this book.) Insofar as males, due to the processes that determine their psychological development, consider themselves as separate atomistic individuals, they tend to characterize morality in terms of roles and responsibilities. Consider this analogy. If persons were like automobiles—that is, if persons were essentially separate, self-directed,

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* by Carol Gilligan, pp. 24–32, 51–55, 57–59, 62, 63, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1982, 1983 by Carol Gilligan.

and independently directed in the same way that cars are—what system of morality would best suit them? One that prevents them from running into each other, that is, a system of laws, rules, and rights. But females, Gilligan discovers, typically have a different conception of the self, viewing themselves as part of a web of connections. In this case, morality takes the form of preserving relationships and of responding responsibly to the needs of others—that is, caring for others.

In this selection, Gilligan describes how boys and girls have different responses to distinct moral dilemmas. She uses a standard investigative technique developed by Piagetian moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg to evaluate a child's or adult's level of moral development. Subjects are asked to respond to a hypothetical dilemma, called the Heinz dilemma. Based on their answers, they are scored on a scale from zero to six. Gilligan's research led her to believe that not only do women have basically different responses to this dilemma than men, but, more important, the scale used to evaluate moral development was itself conceptually biased, constructed upon a deeply male conception of morality and self-identity. While Gilligan's critique is primarily and initially aimed at Kohlberg's theory, philosophers were quick to realize that her critique could be extended to most Western moral theories, especially those theories that assumed a narrowly defined conception of the self—a conception that generalized only from the collective experience of males.

Reading Questions

1. How does Freud respond to the difficulties of fitting women's experience into his theory? Why does this difficulty arise?
2. How does Jake respond to the Heinz dilemma?
3. How is Jake's response scored on Kohlberg's scale? What type of moral thinking does Jake exhibit?
4. How does Amy respond to the Heinz dilemma?
5. How is Amy's response scored on Kohlberg's scale? Does this fit her own impression of herself?
6. How does Amy's response challenge the way Kohlberg's interviews are conducted?
7. Characterize the differences between Amy's and Jake's separate approaches to conflict and choice.
8. How does Claire's response to the Heinz dilemma change over time? Does this correspond to changes in her moral life?
9. Describe Claire's "guiding principle of connection."
10. How is abortion a problem of relationships for Claire?

In 1914, with his essay "On Narcissism," Freud swallows his distaste at the thought of "abandoning observation for barren theoretical controversy" and extends his map of the psychological domain. Tracing the development of the capacity to love, which he equates with maturity and psychic health, he locates its origins in the contrast between love for the mother and love

for the self. But in thus dividing the world of love into narcissism and "object" relationships, he finds that while men's development becomes clearer, women's becomes increasingly opaque. The problem arises because the contrast between mother and self yields two different images of relationships. Relying on the imagery of men's lives in charting the course of human

growth, Freud is unable to trace in women the development of relationships, morality, or a clear sense of self. This difficulty in fitting the logic of his theory to women's experience leads him in the end to set women apart, marking their relationships, like their sexual life, as "a 'dark continent' for psychology."

Thus the problem of interpretation that shadows the understanding of women's development arises from the differences observed in their experience of relationships. To Freud, though living surrounded by women and otherwise seeing so much and so well, women's relationships seemed increasingly mysterious, difficult to discern, and hard to describe. While this mystery indicates how theory can blind observation, it also suggests that development in women is masked by a particular conception of human relationships. Since the imagery of relationships shapes the narrative of human development, the inclusion of women, by changing that imagery, implies a change in the entire account.

The shift in imagery that creates the problem in interpreting women's development is elucidated by the moral judgments of two eleven-year-old children, a boy and a girl, who see, in the same dilemma, two very different moral problems. While current theory brightly illuminates the line and logic of the boy's thought, it casts scant light on that of the girl. The choice of a girl whose moral judgments elude existing categories of developmental assessment is meant to highlight the issue of interpretation rather than to exemplify sex differences per se. Adding a new line of interpretation, based on the imagery of the girl's thought, makes it possible not only to see development where previously development was not discerned but also to consider differences in the understanding of relationships without scaling these differences from better to worse.

The two children were in the same sixth-grade class at school and were participants in the rights and responsibilities study, designed to explore different conceptions of morality and self. The sample selected for this study was chosen to focus the variables of gender and age while maximizing developmental potential by holding constant, at a high level, the factors of intelligence, education, and social class that have been associated with moral development, at least as measured by existing scales. The two children in question, Amy and Jake, were both bright and artic-

ulate and, at least in their eleven-year-old aspirations, resisted easy categories of sex-role stereotyping, since Amy aspired to become a scientist while Jake preferred English to math. Yet their moral judgments seem initially to confirm familiar notions about differences between the sexes, suggesting that the edge girls have on moral development during the early school years gives way at puberty with the ascendance of formal logical thought in boys.

The dilemma that these eleven-year-olds were asked to resolve was one in the series devised by Kohlberg to measure moral development in adolescence by presenting a conflict between moral norms and exploring the logic of its resolution. In this particular dilemma, a man named Heinz considers whether or not to steal a drug which he cannot afford to buy in order to save the life of his wife. In the standard format of Kohlberg's interviewing procedure, the description of the dilemma itself—Heinz's predicament, the wife's disease, the druggist's refusal to lower his price—is followed by the question, "Should Heinz steal the drug?" The reasons for and against stealing are then explored through a series of questions that vary and extend the parameters of the dilemma in a way designed to reveal the underlying structure of moral thought.

Jake, at eleven, is clear from the outset that Heinz should steal the drug. Constructing the dilemma, as Kohlberg did, as a conflict between the values of property and life, he discerns the logical priority of life and uses that logic to justify his choice:

For one thing, a human life is worth more than money, and if the druggist only makes \$1,000, he is still going to live, but if Heinz doesn't steal the drug, his wife is going to die. (*Why is life worth more than money?*) Because the druggist can get a thousand dollars later from rich people with cancer, but Heinz can't get his wife again. (*Why not?*) Because people are all different and so you couldn't get Heinz's wife again.

Asked whether Heinz should steal the drug if he does not love his wife, Jake replies that he should, saying not only is there "a difference between hating and killing" but also, if Heinz were caught, "the judge would probably think it was the right thing to do." Asked about the fact that, in stealing, Heinz would be breaking the law, he says that "the laws have mistakes, and you can't go writing up a law for everything that you can imagine."

Thus, while taking law into account and recognizing his function in maintaining social order (the judge, Jake says, “should give Heinz the lightest possible sentence”), he also sees the law as man-made and therefore subject to error and change. Yet his judgment that Heinz should steal the drug, like his view of the law as having mistakes, rests on the assumption of agreement, a societal consensus around moral values that allows one to know and expect others to recognize what is “the right thing to do.”

Fascinated by the power of logic, this eleven-year-old boy locates truth in math, which, he says, is “the only thing that is totally logical.” Considering the moral dilemma to be “sort of like a math problem with humans,” he sets it up as an equation and proceeds to work out the solution. Since his solution is rationally derived, he assumes that anyone following reason would arrive at the same conclusion and thus that a judge would also consider stealing to be the right thing for Heinz to do. Yet he is also aware of the limits of logic. Asked whether there is a right answer to moral problems, Jake replies that “there can only be right and wrong in judgment,” since the parameters of action are variable and complex. Illustrating how actions undertaken with the best of intentions can eventuate in the most disastrous of consequences, he says, “like if you give an old lady your seat on the trolley, if you are in a trolley crash and the seat goes through the window, it might be that reason that the old lady dies.”

Theories of developmental psychology illuminate well the position of this child, standing at the juncture of childhood and adolescence, at what Piaget describes as the pinnacle of childhood intelligence, and beginning through thought to discover a wider universe of possibility. The moment of pre-adolescence is caught by the conjunction of formal operational thought with a description of self still anchored in the factual parameters of his childhood world—his age, his town, his father’s occupation, the substance of his likes, dislikes, and beliefs. Yet as his self-description radiates the self-confidence of a child who has arrived, in Erickson’s terms, at a favorable balance of industry over inferiority—competent, sure of himself, and knowing full well the rules of the game—so his emergent capacity for formal thought, his ability to think about thinking and to reason things out in a logical way, frees him from

dependence on authority and allows him to find solutions to problems by himself.

This emergent autonomy follows the trajectory that Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development trace, a three-level progression from an egocentric understanding of fairness based on individual need (stages one and two), to a conception of fairness anchored in the shared conventions of societal agreement (stages three and four), and finally to a principled understanding of fairness that rests on the free-standing logic of equality and reciprocity (stages five and six). While this boy’s judgments at eleven are scored as conventional on Kohlberg’s scale, a mixture of stages three and four, his ability to bring deductive logic to bear on the solution of moral dilemmas, to differentiate morality from law, and to see how laws can be considered to have mistakes points toward the principled conception of justice that Kohlberg equates with moral maturity.

In contrast, Amy’s response to the dilemma conveys a very different impression, an image of development stunted by a failure in logic, an inability to think for herself. Asked if Heinz should steal the drug, she replies in a way that seems evasive and unsure:

Well, I don’t think so. I think there might be other ways besides stealing it, like if he could borrow the money or make a loan or something, but he really shouldn’t steal the drug—but his wife shouldn’t die either.

Asked why he should not steal the drug, she considers neither property nor law but rather the effect that theft could have on the relationship between Heinz and his wife:

If he stole the drug, he might save his wife then, but if he did, he might have to go to jail, and then his wife might get sicker again, and he couldn’t get more of the drug, and it might not be good. So, they should really just talk it out and find some other way to make the money.

Seeing in the dilemma not a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships that extend over time, Amy envisions the wife’s continuing need for her husband and the husband’s continuing concern for his wife and seeks to respond to the druggist’s need in a way that would sustain rather than sever

connection. Just as she ties the wife's survival to the preservation of relationships, so she considers the value of the wife's life in a context of relationships, saying that it would be wrong to let her die because, "if she died, it hurts a lot of people and it hurts her." Since Amy's moral judgment is grounded in the belief that, "if somebody has something that would keep somebody alive, then it's not right not to give it to them," she considers the problem in the dilemma to arise not from the druggist's assertion of rights but from his failure of response.

As the interviewer proceeds with the series of questions that follow from Kohlberg's construction of the dilemma, Amy's answers remain essentially unchanged, the various probes serving neither to elucidate nor to modify her original response. Whether or not Heinz loves his wife, he still shouldn't steal or let her die; if it were a stranger dying instead, Amy says that "if the stranger didn't have anybody near or anyone she knew," then Heinz should try to save her life, but he should not steal the drug. But as the interviewer conveys through the repetition of questions that the answers she gave were not heard or not right, Amy's confidence begins to diminish, and her replies became more constrained and unsure. Asked again why Heinz should not steal the drug, she simply repeats, "Because it's not right." Asked again to explain why, she states again that theft would not be a good solution, adding lamely, "if he took it, he might not know how to give it to his wife, and so his wife still might die." Failing to see the dilemma as a self-contained problem in moral logic, she does not discern the internal structure of its resolution; as she constructs the problem differently herself, Kohlberg's conception completely evades her.

Instead, seeing a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules, she finds the puzzle in the dilemma to lie in the failure of the druggist to respond to the wife. Saying that "it is not right for someone to die when their life could be saved," she assumes that if the druggist were to see the consequences of his refusal to lower his price, he would realize that "he should just give it to the wife and then have the husband pay back the money later." Thus she considers the solution to the dilemma to lie in making the wife's condition more salient to the drug-

gist or, that failing, in appealing to others who are in a position to help.

Just as Jake is confident the judge would agree that stealing is the right thing for Heinz to do, so Amy is confident that, "if Heinz and the druggist had talked it out long enough, they could reach something besides stealing." As he considers the law to have "mistakes," so she sees this drama as a mistake, believing that "the world should just share things more and then people wouldn't have to steal." Both children thus recognize the need for agreement but see it as mediated in different ways—he impersonally through systems of logic and law, she personally through communication in relationship. Just as he relies on the conventions of logic to deduce the solution to this dilemma, assuming these conventions to be shared, so she relies on a process of communication, assuming connection and believing that her voice will be heard. Yet while his assumptions about agreement are confirmed by the convergence in logic between his answers and the questions posed, her assumptions are belied by the failure of communication, the interviewer's inability to understand her response.

Although the frustration of the interview with Amy is apparent in the repetition of questions and its ultimate circularity, the problem of interpretation is focused by the assessment of her response. When considered in the light of Kohlberg's definition of the stages and sequence of moral development, her moral judgments appear to be a full stage lower in maturity than those of the boy. Scored as a mixture of stages two and three, her responses seem to reveal a feeling of powerlessness in the world, an inability to think systematically about the concepts of morality or law, a reluctance to challenge authority or to examine the logic of received moral truths, a failure even to conceive of acting directly to save a life or consider that such action, if taken, could possibly have an effect. As her reliance on relationships seems to reveal a continuing dependence and vulnerability, so her belief in communication as the mode through which to resolve moral dilemmas appears naive and cognitively immature.

Yet Amy's description of herself conveys a markedly different impression. Once again, the hallmarks of the preadolescent child depict a child secure in her sense of herself, confident in the substance of her

beliefs, and sure of her ability to do something of value in the world. Describing herself at eleven as "growing and changing," she says that she "sees some things differently now, just because I know myself really well now, and I know a lot more about the world." Yet the world she knows is a different world from that refracted by Kohlberg's construction of Heinz's dilemma. Her world is a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response. Seen in this light, her understanding of morality as arising from the recognition of relationship, her belief in communication as the mode of conflict resolution, and her conviction that the solution to the dilemma will follow from its compelling representation seem far from naive or cognitively immature. Instead, Amy's judgments contain the insights central to an ethic of care, just as Jake's judgments reflect the logic of the justice approach. Her incipient awareness of the "method of truth," the central tenet of nonviolent conflict resolution, and her belief in the restorative activity of care, lead her to see the actors in the dilemma arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend. Consequently her solution to the dilemma lies in activating the network by communication, securing the inclusion of the wife by strengthening rather than severing connections.

But the different logic of Amy's response calls attention to the interpretation of the interview itself. Conceived as an interrogation, it appears instead as a dialogue, which takes on moral dimensions of its own, pertaining to the interviewer's uses of power and to the manifestations of respect. With this shift in the conception of the interview, it immediately becomes clear that the interviewer's problem in understanding Amy's response stems from the fact that Amy is answering a different question from the one the interviewer thought had been posed. Amy is considering not *whether* Heinz should act in this situation ("should Heinz steal the drug?") but rather *how* Heinz should act in response to his awareness of his wife's need ("Should Heinz *steal* the drug?"). The interviewer takes the mode of action for granted, presuming it to be a matter of fact; Amy assumes the necessity for action and considers what form it

should take. In the interviewer's failure to imagine a response not dreamt of in Kohlberg's moral philosophy lies the failure to hear Amy's question and to see the logic in her response, to discern that what appears, from one perspective, to be an evasion of the dilemma signifies in other terms a recognition of the problem and a search for a more adequate solution.

Thus in Heinz's dilemma these two children see two very different moral problems—Jake a conflict between life and property that can be resolved by logical deduction, Amy a fracture of human relationship that must be mended with its own thread. Asking different questions that arise from different conceptions of the moral domain, the children arrive at answers that fundamentally diverge, and the arrangement of these answers as successive stages on a scale of increasing moral maturity calibrated by the logic of the boy's response misses the different truth revealed in the judgment of the girl. To the question, "What does he see that she does not?" Kohlberg's theory provides a ready response, manifest in the scoring of Jake's judgements a full stage higher than Amy's in moral maturity; to the question, "What does she see that he does not?" Kohlberg's theory has nothing to say. Since most of her responses fall through the sieve of Kohlberg's scoring system, her responses appear from his perspective to lie outside the moral domain.

Yet just as Jake reveals a sophisticated understanding of the logic of justification, so Amy is equally sophisticated in her understanding of the nature of choice. Recognizing that "if both the roads went in totally separate ways, if you pick one, you'll never know what would happen if you went the other way," she explains that "that's the chance you have to take, and like I said, it's just really a guess." To illustrate her point "in a simple way," she describes her choice to spend the summer at camp:

I will never know what would have happened if I had stayed here, and if something goes wrong at camp, I'll never know if I stayed here if it would have been better. There's really no way around it because there's no way you can do both at once, so you've got to decide, but you'll never know.

„In this way, these two eleven-year-old children, both highly intelligent and perceptive about life, though in different ways, display different modes of

moral understanding, different ways of thinking about conflict and choice. In resolving Heinz's dilemma, Jake relies on theft to avoid confrontation and turns to the law to mediate the dispute. Transposing a hierarchy of power into a hierarchy of values, he defuses a potentially explosive conflict between people by casting it as an impersonal conflict of claims. In this way, he abstracts the moral problem from the impersonal situation, finding in the logic of fairness an objective way to decide who will win the dispute. But this hierarchical ordering, with its imagery of winning and losing and the potential for violence which it contains, gives way in Amy's construction of the dilemma to a network of connection, a web of relationships that is sustained by a process of communication. With this shift, the moral problem changes from one of unfair domination, the imposition of property over life, to one of unnecessary exclusion, the failure of the druggist to respond to the wife.

...

Claire, a participant in the college student study, was interviewed first as a senior in college and then again at the age of twenty-seven. When asked, as a senior, how she would describe herself to herself, she answers "confused," saying that she "should be able to say, 'Well, I'm such and such,'" but instead she finds herself "more unsure now than I think I have ever been." Aware that "people see me in a certain way," she has come to find these images contradictory and constraining, "kind of found myself being pushed, being caught in the middle: I should be a good mother and daughter; I should be, as a college woman, aggressive and high-powered and career-oriented." Yet as the feeling of being caught in the middle has turned, in her senior year, into a sense of being constrained to act, of "being pushed to start making decisions for myself," she has "come to realize that all these various roles just aren't exactly right." . . .

...

Caught by the interviewer's request for self-description at a time when she is resisting "categorizing or classifying myself," she finds it "hard to start defining what I'm in the process of undefining," the self that, in the past, would "try to push my feelings under the rug" so as not to create any "repercussions." Describing herself as "loving," she is caught

between the two contexts in which that term now applies: an underground world that sets her "apart from others, apart from their definitions of me," and a world of connections that sets her apart from herself. In trying to explain her sense of herself as at once separate and connected, she encounters a problem with "terminology" when trying to convey a new understanding of both self and relationship:

I'm trying to tell you two things. I'm trying to be myself alone, apart from others, apart from their definitions of me, and yet at the same time I'm doing just the opposite, trying to be with or relate to—whatever the terminology is—I don't think they are mutually exclusive.

In this way she ties a new sense of separation to a new experience of connection, a way of being with others that allows her also to be with herself.

...

Again Claire is caught, but in a different way, not between the contradictory expectations of others but between a responsiveness to others and to herself. Sensing that these modes of response "aren't mutually exclusive," she examines the moral judgment that in the past kept them apart. Formerly, she considered "a moral way of looking" to be one that focused on "responsibility to others"; now she has come to question what seemed in the past a self-evident truth, that "in doing what's right for others, you're doing what's right for yourself." She has, she says, "reached the point where I don't think I can be any good to anyone unless I know who I am."

In the process of seeking to "discover what's me," she has begun to "get rid of all these labels and things I just don't see on my own," to separate her perceptions from her former mode of interpretation and to look more directly at others as well as herself. Thus, she has come to observe "faults" in her mother, whom she perceives as endlessly giving, "because she doesn't care if she hurts herself doing it. She doesn't realize—well, she does realize, that in hurting herself, she hurts people very close to her." Measured against a standard of care, Claire's ideal of self-sacrifice gives way to a vision of "a family where everyone is encouraged to become an individual and at the same time everybody helps others and receives help from them."

Bringing this perspective to Heinz's dilemma, Claire identifies the same moral problem as the

eleven-year-old Amy, focusing not on the conflict of rights, but on the failure of response. Claire believes that Heinz should steal the drug ("His wife's life was much more important than anything. He should have done anything to save her life"), but she counters the rights construction with her own interpretation. Although the druggist "had a right, I mean he had a legal right, I also think he had the moral obligation to show compassion in this case. I don't think he had the right to refuse." In tying the necessity for Heinz's action to the fact that "the wife needed him at this point to do it; she couldn't have done it, and it's up to him to do for her what she needs," Claire elaborates the same concept of responsibility that was articulated by Amy. They both equate responsibility with the need for response that arises from the recognition that others are counting on you and that you are in a position to help.

Whether Heinz loves his wife or not is irrelevant to Claire's decision, not because life has priority over affection, but because his wife "is another human being who needs help." Thus the moral injunction to act stems not from Heinz's feelings about his wife but from his awareness of her need, an awareness mediated not by identification but by a process of communication. Just as Claire considers the druggist morally responsible for his refusal, so she ties morality to the awareness of connection, defining the moral person as one who, in acting, "seriously considers the consequences to everybody involved." Therefore, she criticizes her mother for "neglecting her responsibility to herself" at the same time that she criticizes herself for neglecting her responsibility to others.

Although Claire's judgments of Heinz's dilemma for the most part do not fit the categories of Kohlberg's scale, her understanding of the law and her ability to articulate its function in a systematic way earn her a moral maturity score of stage four. Five years later, when she is interviewed at the age of twenty-seven, this score is called into question because she subsumes the law to the considerations of responsibility that informed her thinking about the druggist, Heinz, and his wife. Judging the law now in terms of whom it protects, she extends her ethic of responsibility to a broader vision of societal connection. But the disparity between this vision and the justice conception causes her score on Kohlberg's scale to regress.

During the time when Claire's moral judgments appeared to regress, her moral crisis was resolved. Having taken Kohlberg's course, she suspected that what she had experienced as growth was not progress in his terms. Thus, when she received the letter asking if she would be willing to be interviewed again, she thought:

My God, what if I have regressed. It seems to me that at one stage of my life, I would have been able to answer these dilemmas with a lot more surety and said, "Yes, this is absolutely right and this is absolutely wrong." And I am just sinking deeper and deeper into the mire of uncertainty. I am not sure if that is good or bad at this point, but I think there has been, in that sense, a direction.

Contrasting an absolute standard of judgment with her own experience of the complexity of moral choice, she introduces the question of direction, the interpretation of her own development.

The question of interpretation recurs throughout the text of her interview at age twenty-seven when, married and about to start medical school, she reflects on her experience of crisis and describes the changes in her life and thought. Speaking of the present, she says that "things have fallen into place," but immediately corrects her phrasing since "that sounds like somebody else put them together, and that's not what happened." The problem of interpretation, however, centers on describing the mode of connection. The connection itself is apparent in Claire's description of herself which she says, "sounds sort of strange," as she characterizes herself as "maternal, with all its connotations." Envisioning herself "as a physician, as a mother," she says that "it's hard for me to think about myself without thinking about other people around me that I am giving to." Like Amy, Claire ties her experience of self to activities of care and connection. Joining the image of her mother with that of herself, she sees herself as a maternal physician, as preparing, like Amy, to become a scientist who takes care of the world.

...

Impatient now with Heinz's dilemma, she structures it starkly as a contrast between the wife's life and the druggist's greed, seeing in the druggist's preoccupation with profit a failure of understanding as well of response. Life is worth more than money

because “everybody has the right to live.” But then she shifts her perspective, saying, “I’m not sure I want to phrase it that way.” In her rephrasing, she replaces the hierarchy of rights with a web of relationships. Through this replacement, she challenges the premise of separation underlying the notion of rights and articulates a “guiding principle of connection.” Perceiving relationships as primary rather than as derived from separation, considering the interdependence of people’s lives, she envisions “the way things are” and “the way things should be” as a web of interconnection where “everybody belongs to it and you all come from it.” Against this conception of social reality, the druggist’s claim stands in fundamental contradiction. Seeing life as dependent on connection, as sustained by activities of care, as based on a bond of attachment rather than a contract of agreement, she believes that Heinz should steal the drug, whether or not he loves his wife, “by virtue of the fact that they are both there.” Although a person may not like someone else, “you have to love someone else, because you are inseparable from them. In a way it’s like loving your right hand; it is part of you. That other person is part of that giant collection of everybody.” Thus she articulates an ethic of responsibility that stems from an awareness of interconnection: “The stranger is still another person belonging to that group, people you are connected to by virtue of being another person.”

Claire describes morality as “the constant tension between being part of something larger and a sort of self-contained entity,” and she sees the ability to live with that tension as the source of moral character and strength. This tension is at the center of the moral dilemmas she has faced which were conflicts of responsibility that pertained to an issue of truth and turned on the recognition of relationship. The problem of truth became apparent to her when, after college, she worked as a counselor in an abortion clinic and was told that, if a woman wanted to see what was evacuated from her uterus she should be told “You can’t see anything now. It just looks like jelly at this point.” Since this description clashed with the moral turmoil Claire felt while working at the clinic, she decided that she “had to face up to what was going on.” Thus she decided to look at a fetus evacuated in a late abortion, and in doing so, she came to the realization that:

I just couldn’t kid myself anymore and say there was nothing in the uterus, just a tiny speck. This is not true, and I knew it wasn’t true, but I sort of had to see it. And yet at the same time I knew that’s what was going on. I also believed that it was right; it should have happened. But I couldn’t say, “well this is right and this is wrong.” I was just constantly torn.

When she measured the world by eye and relied on her perceptions in defining what was happening and what was true, the absolutes of moral judgment dissolved. As a result, she was “constantly torn” and mired in uncertainty with respect to the issue of abortion, but she was also able to act in a more responsible way:

I struggled with it a whole lot. Finally, I just had to reconcile myself—I really do believe this, but it is not an easy thing that you can say without emotions and maybe regret—that, yes, life is sacred, but the quality of life is also important, and it has to be the determining thing in this particular case. The quality of that mother’s life, the quality of an unborn child’s life—I have seen too many pictures of babies in trash cans and that sort of thing, and it is so easy to say, “Well, either/or,” and it just isn’t like that. And I had to be able to say, “Yes this is killing, there is no way around it, but I am willing to accept that, but I am willing to go ahead with it, and it’s hard.” I don’t think I can explain it. I don’t think I can really verbalize the justification.

Claire’s inability to articulate her moral position stems in part from the fact that hers is a contextual judgment, bound to the particulars of time and place, contingent always on “that mother” and that “unborn child” and thus resisting a categorical formulation. To her, the possibilities of imagination outstrip the capacity of generalization. But this sense of being unable to verbalize or explain the rationale for her participation in abortion counseling, an inability that could reflect the inadequacy of her moral thought, could also reflect the fact that she finds in the world no validation of the position she is trying to convey, a position that is neither pro-life nor pro-choice but based on a recognition of the continuing connection between the life of the mother and the life of the child.

Thus Claire casts the dilemma not as a contest of rights but as a problem of relationships, centering on a question of responsibility which in the end must be faced. If attachment cannot be sustained, abortion

may be the better solution, but in either case morality lies in recognizing connection, taking responsibility for the care of the child. Although there are times when "killing like that is necessary, it shouldn't become too easy," as it does "if it is removed from you. If the fetus is just jelly, that is removed from you. Southeast Asia is further removed from you." Thus morality and the preservation of life are contingent on sustaining connection, seeing the consequences of

action by keeping the web of relationships intact, "not allowing somebody else to do the killing for you without taking the responsibility." Again an absolute judgment yields to the complexity of relationships. The fact that life is sustained by connection leads her to affirm the "sacred tie" of life rather than "the sacredness of life at all costs," and to articulate an ethic of responsibility while remaining cognizant of the issue of rights. . . .
