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Why do we care? The enlightenment from Confucian's explanation of "Ren"

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Abstract:

Political practice and philosophical reflection are two sides of care ethics. We should continue to reflect on the philosophical ground of care when we emphasize the importance of political practice. The degree of the reflection on the philosophical ground of care restricts its scope and depth. As a complete normative ethics, care ethics need to explain why we care from the philosophical point of view. This involves a key step, that is, how to derive the moral value of care from the facts of care activities, or how to derive "ought" from "is". Otherwise, care ethics will not be able to overcome the naturalism fallacy. The test of moral psychology can only describe the psychological state of the moral agent. There is no convincing explanation for why care is happening. The third person's description of the facts, no matter how detailed it is, is still a study of "is" rather than "ought". To answer this fundamental question, it is not enough just from the perspective of moral agent. We need to reflect on the general relationship between human and other beings from the perspective of moral metaphysics, and build the foundation of morality on the general understanding of the whole universe. From a greater perspective, it is possible for us to lay a normative moral foundation for the ethics of care, so that care has a greater scope of application. The Confucian ethics is famous for its benevolence, which named Ren in Chinese, sharing some significant common grounds with care. In Confucian ethics Ren is a category of rich connotation. From the Confucian theory that "human is an integral part of Tian", which provides the metaphysical foundation for Ren, can bridge the gap between "is" and "ought". This dialectical thinking method from the East can give some inspiration to solve its theoretical predicament .

Keywords:

ethics of care, Confucianism, Ren, caring, Tian, universal, philosophical ground

Philosophical reflection after breaking moral boundaries

Since the rise of the ethics of care in the late twentieth Century, it has shown great theoretical potential and has gradually become an alternative moral theory that can compete with Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and other mainstream moral theories. In the theory area, political scientists and philosophers are actively exploring the rationality of ethics of care as a normative theory; In the application

area, care ethics is used to analyze the more specific ethical issues in education, health care, public policy, state relations, environment and so on.

The ethics of care, as a normative theory which is different from the mainstream normative moral theories. "Normative" means "ought" to do. Care ethics as a normative theory, that means, caring as a universal moral value should be pursued by individuals and social life. Before defining care ethics as a normative theory, we need to answer the question of why we care, which requires us to get back to the origin to think. Only by answering this question can we understand how caring can be one of the most important moral values equal to traditional mainstream values such as justice, rightness, fairness and so on.

The metaphysical foundation of moral is very important for any normative moral theory. Whether it is Kantianism or utilitarianism or virtue ethics, there must be a prescribed proposition as the reason for action to prescribe what the correct course of action should be. However, care ethicists insist traditional metaethics as away from practices that can not provide real ground for care. Tronto point out, care is distorted if we separate the principles of care from the particular practices of care in a given situation (Tronto 1993,153). Tronto attempts to break through the traditional moral and political boundaries, starting from the experience studies of social and political history, rather than from abstract philosophical deduction, reveals how the political power structure the reality of moral concepts. Tronto believes only through the political practices can we understand and realize the value of care. Therefore, in some care ethicists' point of view, the core issues of care ethics is not about moral epistemology. Care ethics is not mainly about how to establish universal moral principles, but how to achieve the political ideal of care through political practices.

What I want to point out is that despite the fact that the political practices is crucial, the philosophical inquiry of why we care are still important today. Otherwise we cannot provide reasons for care and convince people to extend their ability of care from the personal to non-personal relationships. Philosophy here is to give a moral metaphysical foundation for care, but this does not mean that we can only start from the priori deductive way that Kantism used. We need to explain where the motives of care come from. Is it inherent human nature or something else? We cannot answer: Because we are caring, we ought to be caring. Therefore, before caring for others, we need to have a prescriptive reason, which is not from the descriptive facts. As Hume said, from "is" to "ought" we must provide more explanations (Hume 2009, 715-716). Care, as a "fact" that we experienced in our daily life, how to transformed into a moral "value", which need us to explain the logical transformation process. Otherwise we cannot respond to the criticisms of the naturalistic fallacy on care ethics.

My intention here is not to redraw a boundary for politics and morality. For the ethics of care, political practice and philosophical introspection are two inseparable sides as a whole. The degree of philosophical reflection restricts the scope and depth of care. Similarly, the metaphysical ground of care can only be confirmed by ceaseless reflection in practice rather than through a priori deduction. As a complete moral theory that different from the mainstream ethics, we first need to overcome the naturalism fallacy of care and explain how care transform from "is" to "ought". My

intention is that after breaking the boundaries of morality and politics, on the one hand, we need to continuously approach the political ideal of care in political practice; on the other hand, we also need to introspect the metaphysical foundation of care in a philosophical way. This kind of introspection does not mean that we are looking for any abstract human nature or transcendent rational laws, but rather to give a convincing reason to be caring. Only through philosophical reflection and clarification of the core concepts, such as "relationship" "principle" in care ethics, can we respond to criticism from other mainstream ethics. As Tove Pettersen proposed, "in order to further develop the political implication of the ethics of care, as well as to obtain its rightful place among other ethical theories, the endeavor of sustaining and developing the ethics of care with a sound philosophical fundament must Continue." (Pettersen 2008, x)

The Hard Problem of "Is" and "Ought" in Care Ethics

To explore the moral foundation of care from the philosophical dimension, we must first overcome the naturalism fallacy. G.E. Moore, in his *Principia Ethica* (Moore 1993, 90) proposed that, to discuss certain theories of what is good in itself, are based on the naturalistic fallacy. This problem can be traced back to Hume's distinction between the "is" and "ought" propositions. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, he said :

"instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible." (Hume 2009, 715-716)

Hume proposed that from the descriptive proposition of "is" to the prescriptive proposition of "ought", we need to give more explanations. One of the criticisms of mainstream moral ethics against care ethics is care, as a natural fact observed in the private area, cannot be a moral value that should generally be pursued. In other words, there is a gap between "is" and "ought" exist in care ethics cannot be crossed.

Care ethics begins with Carol Gilligan's studies of gender-based moral development psychology. Gilligan mentioned in her foundation work *in a different voice* (1982) that women think differently from men when they consider ethical issues: Women prefer "equate moral responsibility with caring rather than with not hurting" (Gilligan 1982, 148); "women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility" (Gilligan 1982, 173). Gilligan's tests of moral psychology of women reveals that caring activities have long time been ignored by mainstream moral theories. From this neglected fact, Gilligan advocated the necessity to develop the ethics of care. Care, in this process, has risen from a fact that is widespread in the female and private spheres to a universal moral value. How to derive "value" from "fact", or how to derive "ought" from "is", Gilligan have not given more detailed explanation of the logical transformation process.

Pettersen argue that Gilligan's psychological developmental theory cannot be purely a description of some phenomena or other since her moral developmental theory is based on an assumption that progress and changes take place. (Pettersen 2008, 38) This argument I think, is still based on a priori expectation of development of certain human nature. This is still based on the "is" or "fact" of the

moral agents. Although it proposed human nature is developable and changeable, it is still presupposed a certain teleology. In order to figure out why we “ought” to be caring, we need to expand our horizons and understand the human nature in a broad relationship with other beings outside. This kind of relationship between human and other beings in the universe should be in an extensive philosophical meaning rather than any kind of specific actual relationship. In my view, human nature is not derived from the induction of experience or the abstract deduction. Human nature is gradually clarified through cultivation and introspection in the practices of caring for other human and non-human beings. The exploration of the moral basis is a ceaseless process that can not be obtained through a priori hypothesis.

Slote also used a lot of psychological studies to prove his point of view. Unlike Gilligan, Slote finds that all human beings have a universal sentiment ‘empathy’. Slote believes that the metaphysical ground of care can be established by demonstrating the universal existence of empathy in human beings. Slote asserts:

“allow an ethics of caring that brings in empathy – an ethics of empathic caring – to give a fairly general account of both public/political and private/individual morality”. (Slote2007,16)

Slote believes that we can understand why we care for other people only if we have more description of empathy from a moral psychological point of view. (Slote2007,12) when he explaining why we can be caring in non-personal relationships, Slote quotes the studies of Hoffman’s theory of the development of empathy. Hoffman observed children by the time they reach adolescence have learned to empathize with groups or categories or classes of people who either are suffering or are disadvantaged in one way or another. Slote quoted the results of empirical observation to explain why we have obligations to (groups of) people we don’t know (Slote2007,29).

We can find that Slote's interpretation of empathy is based on a series of moral developmental psychology tests. Through the facts that empathy are widespread in human beings, Slote tries to establish a universal moral foundation. This sentimentalism approach has been opposed by some people. Because if the moral foundation based on empathy, people with sentimental deficiency will not be able to perceive and perform their moral obligations. As Julia Driver revealed that persons with autism can perform morally praiseworthy or blameworthy actions even though they possess an empathy deficit disorder. (Julia2010,20-27)

Starting from the results of the psychology of agent to inquire the moral metaphysical ground, according to Moore's point of view, committed a naturalism fallacy. That is to find the good in itself. Whether Gilligan’s test of the caring psychology of women or Slote’s inquiry of the empathy in everyone, they both believe that caring is aroused from some kind of inherent human nature. Natural care, what they found that at first, usually takes place in the personal relationship. We need to explore how to extend it to the non-personal relationships so that it can become a universal moral value. There is a gap between “is” and “ought” here. The fundamental reason is that moral psychology can only describe the moral psychological phenomena. Although it describes the process in detail, we still need to explain from a philosophical perspective why this psychological phenomenon arises and why

it can be extended to the strangers. At present, moral psychology still uses the third-person description method to investigate from moral agents' perspective. In fact, no matter how detailed the description is, it is still the description of the "is". We still do not know how moral psychology emerged from nothing and what played a decisive role.

What I want to point out is the approach just starting from the perspective of moral psychology will not work. Empirical science couldn't provide a convincing answer to the "ought" problem of philosophy. It is not enough just looking into the general human nature. Some care ethicists may defend that the reasons for care are to maintain or strengthen caring relationships(Held2006,28) . Some scholars have also pointed out that the ethics of care has developed a new relational ontology (Pettersen2011). Although this strategy considers that the ground of morality is based on relationships rather than inherent human nature. However, the "relationship ontology" lacks a clear definition or explanation itself. It can be said that the concept "relationship" has always been described as an too abstract, too general concept.If we regard "relationship"as the ontology of care ethics, we cannot just draw from the observation of any actual specific relationship. We need to use the philosophical way to introspect and reflect the "relationship" including its scope and boundaries. We need to clarify if the care relationship only limited to interdependent humans? Can other animals, plants and non-living existence around us be included in our care relationships? Some scholars also believe that we strengthen and maintain our relationship in order to pursue the highest value or some kind of basic human goods. Just as Collings proposed,

"Good or our pursuit of basic good. For instance, Collings believes that the maintenance of the relationship involved the participants' well-being, and the maintenance of the relationship therefore has an instrumental value. Because our relationships to distant others have value to us And them – mostly, in this case, instrumental value regarding the participants welfare ".(Collins 2015, 45)

The problem we encounter here is that we also need to define the "highest value" or "basic good", which is easy to make the mistakes of circular definition.We can neither just start with "is", nor start from "ought" to explore the moral foundation of care.It is necessary to think dialectically about the relationship between "is" and "ought".If we define the "basic good" or "highest value" in terms of certain human nature, it is easy to fall into a circular definition.I suggest a broader understanding of the fundamental relationship between human and other beings in a philosophical perspective can help us get out of the cycle definitions.

The inspiration from Confucian's explanation of Ren

I will introduce a Confucian understanding of "relationship" which can give us some inspirations.Confucianism is also called "the philosophy of Ren" ("Ren Xue"). The question of whether Confucian ethics is compatible with care ethics has been discussed by scholars before (Li, Chenyang1994: 70-89, Star, Daniel 2002 :

77-106, Herr, Ranjoo Seodu 2003: 471-489). I agree with Chenyang Li that the ethics of care and Confucian ethics of Ren are compatible. They do share some philosophically significant common grounds. Such as they are both the highest moral value; They both have no general principles; They both have gradations. (Li, Chenyang 1994, 70-89) Although there are indeed some differences between the care ethics and Confucianism, I think that simply comparing their differences or similarities is not our goal. The most important thing is to promote the communication between the two, and to promote the mutual development in theory. Especially in the way of thinking, they should learn from each other.

The Confucian interpretation of "Ren" may provide some inspiration for care ethics to help solve the hard problem of "is" and "ought" that exists in it. First of all, the Confucian thought that the philosophical ground of "Ren" is the unity of Tian and human. In the thought "human is an integral part of Tian", there is no gap between "is" and "ought". This theory formed in the pre Qin period has been described in a large number of ancient Chinese classics. Both the Confucianists and the Taoists take the unity of Tian and human as its fundamental spirit. But in Confucian's view, the activity of the moral agent is very important to the union of Tian and human beings. That is to say, the harmony and unity of the whole universe depends on the moral practice of human. On the contrary, the concept of unity between Tian and human beings in Taoism means that people must live in harmony with the laws of nature and give up any subjective efforts.

The unity of Tian and human beings of Confucianism mainly has two meanings. First of all, it means that all things interconnected as a whole through the flowing Qi which represents the vitality in the universe. All things are interconnected through the common Qi, just as a living body with circulated blood. Zhang Zai, a Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty, put forward a famous words: "People are my brothers and all things are my kinds" (Zhang Zai 1978, 62). Another Confucian scholar, Wang Yangming of Ming Dynasty says:

"Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun, moon, star, bird, beast, grass, wood, mountain, river, earth, stone, and human are originally a unity. All things are connected because they share the common vitality of Qi. Therefore, they have mutual induction with each other." The Confucianists believe that it is precisely because all things are connected through the mutual vitality of Qi, which as we are living in a large body, so we can perceive the pain of all things. ((Ming) Wang Yangming 2011, 122).

Confucians believe that the foundation of morality is the relationship with all beings in the universe. This kind of relationship has a metaphysical meaning which does not refer to any concrete relationship in reality. Tian represent both metaphysical and realistic meaning of universe or nature. The Confucian believes that the entire universe is a living body, and human beings occupy the core position, just like the mind in the body. The concept relationship in Confucianism is an overall, metaphysical, dynamic relationship that contains all natural beings, not a concrete personal or non-personal relationship in reality. The "relationship" in Confucianism means that our entire universe is fundamentally a vital and interconnected whole. Therefore, the object of Ren is not limited to relatives, friends, but also strangers and all natural beings.

Secondly, people should improve their moral cultivation and always introspect himself/herself through caring and loving for all beings in our universe. A famous word in The four books of Confucianism *The doctrines of the golden mean* goes that "one can help to promote other beings' lives through cultivate one's own morality" (1977, the doctrine of the twenty-second chapter, 57-58). Cheng Hao, the Song Dynasty Confucian scholars, once pointed out: "One can be called Ren because he/she can regard the universe as a whole" (Cheng Hao 1981, 15.) What the means is that only human beings can regard everything as a whole, and realize the Ren that potentially exist in everything through actual caring actions. Confucianism believes that the entire universe is a connected living body, and all parts of the body are connected through blood circulating. For instance, Wang Yangming also said:

"People, the heart of all things in the nature; the mind, the master of all things in the universe". (Wang Yangming 2011, 238)

The status of human in this living body just like the position of mind in the body. Only human can recognize that he/she is the moral agent and shouldering the moral responsibility of caring all parts of the body. That is to say, in the natural state, though everything is connected in the sense of ontology, they often separate from each other and even hurt each other in reality. Many people limited by individual interests, do not be caring or even hurt other beings, forgetting that we are a whole originally. We should recover from the separated state to the original unified state. Only through the personal ethical caring for everything can we recognize and realize the value of caring. Ren, the highest value in the universe, which is originally a potential value would achieve its reality through the actual caring activities performed by human beings.

The Confucian thought of "human is an integral part of Tian" can afford some inspirations to solve the hard problem of "is" and "ought" in care ethics. Because in Confucianism, the thought of the unity of Tian and human beings contains both the "is" dimension and the "ought" dimension. There is no gap between "is" and "ought". When Confucians talk about "is", they refer to the ceaseless vitality of Tian but the vitality of creation can be realized as a realistic virtue named Ren by moral agent. That is to say, all things inherit the ceaseless vitality character of Tian, but they are all in an unconscious state and couldn't perceive it by themselves. Only human beings can realize the nature of creation, and cultivate the inherent vitality of creation into a moral realm belong to both human and Tian. From the nature of Tian to the moral ideal, which is consistently process from "is" to "ought". Because human inherit the goodness of the universe and have the possibility and ability to realize it into a moral ideal Ren. Through the moral cultivation and caring practices in reality, human beings make the all beings in the universe separated each other get back to the original whole.

From the viewpoint of Confucianism, "is" contains the descriptive meaning and the ontological meaning which are dialectically unified. For instance, people are limited by their selfish desires and couldn't see themselves with other beings as an organic whole. The state of "is" is always a separated state in reality. Therefore, we "ought" to restore to the original ontological "is" through the caring practise for all things. This requires people to overcome the erotic desires of the "ego" and to realize

a great “self”.

The moral foundations of Confucianism are based on larger and more profound "relationships" which refer to philosophical existential relationships. The existential relationships means the real, dynamic ,changeable relationships, which are not fixed relationships based on cognition. This original existential relationship is a prerequisite for morality and a source of action. This understanding of relationship is neither an induction through experience nor a transcendental deduction. Instead, it is comprehended through personal experiences in the real life and maintained and repaired through personal introspection and caring practices. By comprehending the philosophical meaning of the integrated "relationship" in personal practices, we can reflect the unreasonable actual relationships in the real world and then take caring actions to return to the original connected whole. This kind of logic is similar to what Noddings put forward. Noddings distinguishes two kinds of caring which are natural caring and ethical caring. She believes that natural caring is generated by responding directly to the needs of the cared person, and that ethical caring is similar to Kant's obligatory caring. Noddings proposed by placing natural caring above ethical caring, ethical caring is instrumental in establishing or restoring natural caring (Noddings2002,30). Noddings and Confucianism both advocate the restoration of natural caring. But when Noddings explains why we care,she put that we believe that the needs of others are always the basic source of our response and the expansion of moral ideals (Noddings2002,28). The purpose of care is to establish, maintain, and strengthen caring relationships. (Noddings2002,284) Noddings does not provide a more detailed analysis of the relationship between self and other beings in a philosophical dimension. Therefore, when she interpret the motivation and obligation of care givers, it is only based on the needs of the care-receivers or an obscure relationship concept,which still faces the problem of how to derive “ought”from “is”.

When Confucians explain why we should be a “Ren”person,they made a dialectical explanation of the relationship between “is” and “ought”. The relative concepts of "is" and "ought" are not separated from each other. Both "is" and "ought" are gradually clarified in the process of moral practice. Moral practice highlights the positive role of human beings and integrates "is" and "ought" as a whole. Confucianism believes that the motivation of care comes from the overall relationship in which human beings have a special moral status. Therefore, Ren is neither derived from abstract human nature nor from the rational law similar to Kant. Instead, people are consciously comprehend the relationship with other beings through taking their responsibility. The moral foundation of Ren is not an abstract law derived from transcendental deduction, nor a knowledge of phenomena based on experiential observation. Our understanding of the relationship between self and others is not a kind of objective knowledge, but the personal comprehension of ontological relationship through personal practice. This kind of comprehension is based on individual personal practice. It is not a moral knowledge but a wisdom based on practice.

Besides, Confucians believe that all human and non-human beings, should be under the care of moral agents. However, the implementation of Ren in real life is

gradational. It starts with the closest loved ones such as our relatives and friends. In this point, both Confucian ethics and caring ethics emphasize the importance of special relationships. However, Confucianism believes that our relationship with all things is dynamic and changeable. There is no absolute personal and non-personal distinction. The Confucian believes that the realization of Ren in real life must begin with the closest ones and gradually expand to people unknown. This order cannot be reversed.

Wang Yangming, the Confucian scholar of the Ming Dynasty once put:

“Ren represents the inexhaustible vitality of the universe. It is filled with all human beings and non-human beings. However, the development of Ren is in accordance with the gradation, which just like the growth of trees, they must germinate, grow out of the trunk, and then grow leaves. It is because of the order of growth that the trees can maintain their vitality. If trees don't germinate first, how can they grow trunks and leaves? Trees can sprout and grow because the roots are underground. With a root tree to grow, otherwise it will die. How can trees germinate without roots? The affection with our parents and brothers and sisters is like the root of Ren. Starting from caring for our loved ones, we can care people unknown and natural beings in whole universe. Mohism scholars maintain that we should treat strangers like parents and families. It is like trees have no roots and cannot last long.”(Wang Yangming 2011, 29-30)

The meaning of this paragraph is that morality always starts from the closest relationship. Otherwise, morality would be abstract rules, just like a rootless tree. Confucianism criticized an undifferentiated Ren. In daily life, care always starts with blood relationship and friendship. However, in case of emergency, people as moral agents must make different responses according to the condition. Mencius once gave an example, if a man suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress.(Mencius1962,7) In this emergent situation, people will be more caring for the strangers in front of them. As Mencius said, they will feel so, not because a ground on which they may gain the favour of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbours and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing. In this emergent situation, people perform caring for the strangers suffered from misfortune is reasonable and natural. Just as any part of the body suffering from pain, the most important thing at this time is to stop it.

In short, Confucian understanding of relationship is multi-dimensional. At the metaphysical dimension, all beings are interconnected. Therefore, we should be Ren to all human and non-human beings. In our daily lives, the relationship is concrete in realistic dimension. It is changeable according to the context. In normal situations, being caring for their loved ones and friends is more than caring for people unknown. However, in an emergent situation, the relationship between strangers and moral agents becomes the primary relationship need to be considered. Because the choice of moral agents will have a huge influence on strangers in front of them. Therefore, Confucian understanding of relationship in reality is based on situational judgment. In daily life, relatives, friends, etc. are prioritized. This is natural and reasonable. But when we encounter strangers even non-human beings suffering from misfortune, it

can also arouse our sympathy. We can't wait to save them. It's also natural. Because, fundamentally, Confucian scholars believe that all human and non-human beings are connected and inductive in a living body.

Conclusion

The analysis of the philosophical foundation of care ethics is still necessary. The extent and depth of political practice is restricted by the degree of reflection on the philosophical ground. But our analysis of the philosophical ground of care must cross the gap between "is" and "ought". Firstly, the moral ground of care can not only come from the induction of experiential phenomena, otherwise, the care ethics will be criticized for committed the naturalism fallacy. Secondly, the moral basis of care should not from a priori "ought"."Ought" cannot be proved through transcendental deduction, which is the care ethics put against mainstream moral theories. Care ethics can not make such a mistake again. This article holds that moral psychology, from the perspective of the third-person description, cannot solve the philosophical problems of ethics of care. As an empirical science, moral psychology cannot give a philosophical explanation of the motivation of care. Because moral psychology is mainly start from the perspective of moral subjects, it is easy to neglect the dialectical relationship between care-givers and care-receivers. The definition of relationship in care ethics always be too general and rough which lack of a unified philosophical definition. Therefore, we need to clarify the boundaries and scope of the relationship in the philosophical perspective, and then go further to explain how moral obligation derived from the relationship. Confucian ethics and care ethics share significant common grounds, including the highest moral ideals, moral gradations and the contextual moral responses. The interpretation of Confucian category "Ren" can provide us some inspirations, especially in response to the hard problem of "is" and "ought" faced by care ethics. Because the Confucianists think the moral foundation of Ren comes from the proposition of the unity of Tian and human beings: On the one hand, the Ren nature of human comes from Tian. Tian represents the whole of the universe, and it is the abstract philosophical concept of the universe as a whole. Because the entire universe, as an organic living body, all things are connected in it, embodies the ceaseless creation and vitality. On the other hand, only human beings can perceive and realize the potential Ren of the universe by caring for all beings in our universe, and bring the whole universe into a moralized ideal realm. The moral practice of human beings is the channel of "is" and "ought". From "is" to "ought", it is a ceaseless process of caring practice. Therefore, "is" comes from the creative nature of the Tian which is potential virtue of Ren, will be realized through human's personal practices. In the process of constant philosophical reflection and practice in the real world, everyone gradually comprehend the wisdom what "ought" to do. If the dialectical thinking pattern in Confucianism be used to solve the hard problems in care ethics, it will make it more convincing and complete.

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