NEL NODDINGS' *CARING*: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

BY

Eileen Margaret SOWERBY

M.B., CH.B., Liverpool University, 1969

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1988

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Department of PHILOSOPHY

The University of British Columbia
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will provide a critique of the positive contributions and limitations of Nel Noddings' ethics of caring. My thesis is that although the ethics of caring approach has an important contribution to make in ethics, in Noddings' version it is limited by its inability to account for the possibility of moral relations with strangers. Noddings' ethics of caring, I shall suggest, suffers, not only from an inability to account for ethics in the public domain, but also from an unavoidable potential for a reduction to caring for only one other "cared-for". That it does not appear to be vulnerable to the latter problem in Noddings' explication is because, I suggest, she is relying implicitly on an abstracted though still personal "ethical ideal". An exposition of this ethical ideal will suggest how caring can be legitimately enlarged, not only to a larger private domain, but also to the public, or non-intimate, domain to produce a more adequate ethics.

Nodding's ethics of caring is described in her book Caring A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education. I give a summary of this book in Chapter One, relying heavily on quotations from Noddings herself.

In the following two chapters I focus on criticisms of Noddings' ethics. They tend to fall into two main groups: criticisms about her claim that her ethics is an alternative to mainstream ethics while lacking any universalization component; and, secondly, the inability of her ethics to

account for ethical relations with the non-intimate, i.e. in the public domain.

In Chapter Four I focus on a criticism, not discussed in the literature to date, that there is an inherent risk of shrinkage to the dyad in her ethics. By closer examination of the ethical ideal I show how Noddings' ethics of caring can be enlarged into the public domain. In Chapter Five I describe a moral dilemma which demonstrate how the use of this new ethical ideal produces a more adequate ethics of caring.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I contrast the roots of Noddings' ethics with mainstream ethics to emphasize the radical departure of Noddings' ethics from mainstream ethics, and I mention briefly the important problem of autonomy of the caring agent which is not addressed by Noddings.

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INTRODUCTION

It is Noddings' contention that the feminine side in ethics has been ignored in favour of an ethics based on "justification, fairness and equity". It is time, she suggests, to redress the balance (1984,1). The latter ethics, one of principle and rule, is the mainstream, traditional and masculine ethics and it is characterised by impartiality: it is the ethics of the public domain. It is the ethics of Kant and Mill, amongst many others, and it has been powerfully reflected in our social systems, both academic and political.

How is Noddings' ethics different? The main difference - that the basis of her ethics is found in relation (discussed in Chapter Six) - is paramount to an understanding of how radical a departure from traditional ethics Noddings' proposal is. When she says that the caring *relation* is ethically basic this is in marked contrast to the individual, rational, impartial adult *agent* standing alone, that is usually found in mainstream ethics.

In the first chapter I summarize her ethics. I wish to make three points about this chapter. First, to repeat, the ethical root of Noddings' ethics is one of relation, and she says that the caring relation is ethically basic (1984, 3). Her view of basic reality is one of relatedness (1984, 133) and she locates "the very wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response" (1984, 3).

Second, Noddings uses the word "reciprocity" in a specially defined way. It does not mean, as it usually does,

"mutual action, principle or practice of give-and-take". Noddings uses the word specifically to express the cared-for's response within the caring relation by growing and becoming "more fully himself" (1984, 73). Reciprocity is necessary in maintaining the caring relation.

The traditional ethicist may be tempted to ask abstract questions about this caring relation. For instance, can I care for someone who is unconscious? Can I care for someone who is absent? However, and perhaps fortunately, Noddings resists this type of hypothetical questioning - she refers to it as game playing (1984, 105). Her ethics is a concrete one: it exists only in each specific caring relation. Hence, she would claim, one cannot say in the abstract whether one can care for an unconscious person, because, according to her, too many questions arise, especially concerning reciprocity, that can only be answered in the concrete, or actual, situation. (See also Chapter Five of this thesis and her stance on abortion "in general" in Chapter One.) Her ethics is radically contextual: whether one's actions are right or wrong can only be decided by an examination of one's personal experience and history in relation to the choice now.

The third point concerns Noddings' use of the word "engrossment". When the "one-caring" is engrossed in the "cared-for" there is a motivational shift to a receptive mode, the characteristic mode of consciousness in caring (1984, 33-34). The fear that feminists have concerning this mode of consciousness (because of the threat to the agent's autonomy - especially for a female in this society) is not addressed by

Noddings in her book.

Chapter Two addresses her claim that her ethics is an alternative to the masculine and traditional ethics. This brings in feminist concerns about Noddings' ethical framework and the difficulty with having a, so-called, "alternative ethics" that has no universalization component.

The third chapter addresses concerns about the adequacy of Noddings' ethics to non-intimates, concentrating on her reference to starving children in Africa, and, continuing to discuss questions of adequacy concerning other species, nature, and ideas and principles. Several suggested solutions to the inadequacy are examined.

In Chapter Four I focus on a criticism of Noddings' position, not dealt with by her critics to date, to the effect that her ethics cannot adequately account for relations amongst a circle of intimates. That this does not seem to be feared by Noddings and is not mentioned by her critics is, I suggest, because of an unexplicated, and mostly unaware, underlying reliance on an abstracted personal "ethical ideal" that reaches out continually to enlarge her ethics. By bringing this to our attention and using it more adequately, we can see how her ethics may be enlarged into the fullness of the private domain and to the public realm as well.

In Chapter Five, using the moral dilemma, I show how Noddings' ethics may conflict with an apparent need to use ethical principles in the public domain. By bringing in a more adequate ethical ideal I suggest how the conflict may be alleviated.

In Chapter Six I discuss other problems - particularly the recurring one of autonomy which is not addressed by Noddings.

ONE

NEL NODDINGS' *CARING*

Noddings begins her book by stating that:

> Ethics, the philosophical study of morality, has concentrated for the most part on moral reasoning. (1984,1)

After asking "What does it mean to be moral?", traditional moral investigation immediately jumps to a discussion of moral judgment and moral reasoning. Noddings' suggestion is that this - a rational-cognitive approach - is neither the only, nor the best, starting point, to answer the question posed above. As she puts it:

> [For, not only do we] miss sharing the heuristic processes [,but] when we approach moral matters through the study of moral reasoning, we are led quite naturally to suppose that ethics is necessarily a subject that must be cast in the language of principle and demonstration. (1984, 8)

Noddings claims that approaching ethics in this manner, that is, through principles and proposition, is the way of the father, arising out of masculine experience. The result is an ethics of principle which she rejects on the grounds that it is:

> ambiguous and unstable. Wherever there is a principle, there is implied its exception and, too often, principles function to separate us from each other. We may become dangerously self-righteous when we perceive ourselves as holding a precious principle not held by the other. The other may then be devalued and treated "differently". (1984, 5)

The ethical view expressed by Noddings is a feminine one. Of it she writes:

> This does not imply that all women will accept it or that men will reject it. It is feminine in the deep classical sense - rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. It does not imply either that logic is to be discarded or that logic is alien to women. It represents an alternative to present views, one that begins with the moral attitude or longing for goodness and not with moral reasoning. (1984, 2)

Her feminine view is expressed mainly by women who tend not to approach moral problems formally. Instead, they attempt to place themselves:

> as nearly as possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choices to be made. They define themselves in terms of *caring* and work their way through moral problems from the position of one-caring. (1984, 8)

This approach to moral problems was researched by Carol Gilligan (1982), an early collaborator of Lawrence Kohlberg (1987). (The latter's well-known stages in moral development are described, by Noddings, as "a hierarchical description of moral reasoning" {1984, 96}).

THE CARING RELATIONSHIP

The universally accessible foundation of an ethical response is, for Noddings, caring and the memory of being cared for. She writes:

> [This caring] attitude which expresses our earliest memories of being cared for and our growing store of memories of both caring and being cared for, is universally accessible. (1984, 5)

Relation, for Noddings, is "ontologically basic" (1984, 3). This simply means that a person acknowledges that "human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence" (1984, 4). She also sees the "caring relation [as being] ethically basic" (1984, 3). This is an important point to note since it contrasts with other kinds of ethics where aloneness and emptiness are at the heart of existence. An example of the latter kind is the existentialist view of Jean Paul Sartre "whose ontology posits a lonely emptiness trying to actualize itself" (Noddings 1984, 133). The affect which accompanies this view is the realization of one's loneliness. This makes anguish the basic human affect, whereas "our view, rooted as it is in relation, identifies *joy* as the basic human affect" (Noddings 1984, 6).

There are two parties to the caring relationship: the first member is the "one-caring"; the second, the "cared-for" (1984, 4). Though Noddings consistently addresses the "one-caring" as "she", and the "cared-for" as "he", she says this is to maintain balance and to avoid confusion. However, she believes that, in the basic caring relation, the sex of each party is irrelevant (1984, 4). Moreover, she says that, though females may have easier and more direct access to caring "through biologically facilitative factors" (1984, 130), because of both males' and females' personal histories, we all have access to caring and memories of caring.

In the kind of caring relationship described by Noddings, both parties contribute to the relation. As she puts it:

> my caring must be somehow completed in the

> other if the relation is to be described as caring. (1984, 4).

In most of Noddings' examples of caring relations, the parties are of unequal power: mother/child, teacher/student. Rarely are they equal parties, such as two, equally powerful, adults.

RECIPROCITY

Noddings states that "possibly the most important problem that we shall discuss" (1984, 4) is the reciprocity of the relationship which anchors caring in the concrete, and, moreover, in the personal. For her, reciprocity means that the cared-for receives the caring from the one-caring and responds to it, not necessarily by gratitude or by direct acknowledgement, but:

> either in direct response to the one-caring or in spontaneous delight and happy growth before her eyes that the caring has been received. The caring is completed when the cared-for receives the caring. (1984, 181)

Because of reciprocity, the cared-for uniquely contributes to, and completes, the caring relationship. Thus, in Noddings' ethics, a caring relationship is restricted to beings who can respond to the one-caring in the required way. However, she distinguishes between the one-caring *caring for*, in the reciprocal caring relationship, and, another type of caring, *caring about*, which happens when we care about many living entities, inanimate things, and ideas. Noddings maintains that "caring about" does not constitute the ethical caring relationship, because there is no reciprocity.

Since the caring relationship is always personal,

extension of relationships takes place through direct acquaintance. There is no public domain as such, and there cannot be one, to Noddings' ethics. Her ethics is extended through concentric circles and chains of relatedness.

However, though the more formal "chains of caring" (1984, 47) may link unknown individuals to those who are already in the inner circles (future sons-in-law and future students being examples of such extensions), one's "obligation can only arise on encounter" (1984, 152). So, although a person cannot engage in an ethics of caring in such instances, on the grounds that one cannot *care for* the human being not yet met, one can still *care about* him or her. But Noddings brushes aside "caring about" as too easy. She says:

> I can "care about" the starving children in Cambodia, send five dollars to hunger relief, and feel somewhat satisfied. I do not even know if my money went for food, for guns, or a new Cadillac for some politician. This is a poor second-cousin to caring. "Caring about" always involves a certain benign neglect. . . . So the one-caring acknowledges her finitude with both sadness and relief. (1984, 112)

Noddings' ethics does pose difficulties when trying to answer moral questions involving the public domain, the starving people in the Third World, strangers, non-human sentient beings, the environment, and, our obligation to unborn generations. However, it does add an interesting and enlightening perspective to the problem of abortion:

> Operating under the guidance of an ethics of caring we are not likely to find abortion in general either right or wrong. We shall have to inquire into individual cases . . . It is not a question of when life begins but of when relation begins. (1984, 87 and 88)

THE ETHICAL IDEAL

What does it mean to be moral? What does it mean to meet the other morally? The structure of Noddings' answer is based on natural caring, "the relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination" (1984, 5). She gets to ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, from natural caring by desire. We consciously or unconsciously perceive the human condition of natural caring as "good". As she puts it:

> It is that condition towards which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring to be in that special relation - that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring. (1984, 5)

One important point to grasp is that, for Noddings, ethical caring is not superior to natural caring. Rather, because the former is built on the latter, it is dependent on it.

A commitment to care is the guide to an ethical ideal; this ideal Noddings describes as:

> [the] realistic picture of ourselves as one-caring that guides us as we strive to meet the other morally. (1984, 5)

Of this ethical ideal, Noddings says that it is both:

> constrained and attainable. It is limited by what we have already done and by what we are capable of, and it does not idealize the impossible so that we may escape into ideal abstraction. (1984, 80)

The virtue described by the ethical ideal (Noddings talks about not letting "virtue" dissipate into abstract "virtues") is built up in the caring relation: "It reaches out to the

other and grows in response to the other" (1984, 81). Clearly, it is not the virtue of the solitary holy man.

In the ethical caring relation, I move out of my personal frame of reference into the other's: "I try to apprehend the reality of the other" (1984, 14). As part of this self-displacement, my "attention [and] mental engrossment is on the cared-for not on [my]self" (1984, 24). For an observer, then, caring is acting, not by fixed rule, but by affection and regard.

One of the distinctions which Noddings makes has to do with differentiating between the physical self and the ethical self (1984, 14-5). A sense of my *physical* self is what provides me with the knowledge of what it is that gives me pleasure and pain. This cognition precedes my caring for others. The *ethical* self, which is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one-caring and cared-for, is, says Noddings:

> born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself. As I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself. (1984, 49)

Thus, ontologically, ethical caring for others is prior to ethical caring for one-self. But Noddings does not discuss how this eventuates in our present society. That is, she does not address the possible difficulties of self-actualization, particularly for women, in our society.

Noddings calls caring "essentially nonrational" in that it requires a "constitutive engrossment and displacement of

motivation" (1984, 25). The self is no longer formulating rules, but this does not mean that caring is an arbitrary and capricious behaviour. Rather, her suggestion reflects an Emersonian-type inconsistency:

> [It is] a broad and loosely defined ethic that molds itself in situations and has a proper regard for human affections, weaknesses and anxieties. . . . [i]t allows for situations and conditions in which judgment (in the impersonal, logical sense) may properly be put aside in favor of faith and commitment. (1984, 25)

In a natural caring relation the moral "I must" arises in the following situation:

> When I recognize that my response will either enhance or diminish my ethical ideal . . . I am obliged . . . to accept the initial "I must" when it occurs and even to fetch it out of recalcitrant slumber when it fails to awake spontaneously. The source of my obligation is the value I place on the relatedness of caring. (1984, 83-84)

Sometimes it is difficult to decide for certain whether the caring response is natural or ethical.

Noddings places an ethical ideal above principle as a guide to moral action, because of the problem she perceives as associated with the "universifiability" of moral principles. (She seems to use "universifiability" as meaning "universalizability".)

"Universifiability" is defined, by Noddings, thus:

> If I am obligated to do X under certain conditions, then under sufficiently similar conditions you also are obligated to do X. (1984, 84)

Though "universifiable" principles may guide us in abstract moral thinking, they yield "no real guidance for

moral conduct in concrete situations" (1984, 85). Noddings claims that this is because, in trying to identify the "sameness" of various concrete predicaments,

> we often lose the very qualities or factors that gave rise to the moral question in the situation. (1984, 85)

Because each person brings a different history, project, aspirations, and ideals to the moral problem, what may be right for one may be wrong for another. But Noddings does not see this as:

> cast[ing] us into relativism, because the ideal contains at its heart a component that is universal: Maintenance of the caring relation. (1984, 85)

CARING AND EDUCATION

As an educator, Noddings is particularly involved, and interested, in how to educate people to be ethical, although she stresses that "we all bear a responsibility for the ethical perfection of others" (1984, 171). She rejects the jargon of "stages" of moral development and, for reasons already stated, does not dwell on moral reasoning. But this does not mean that she dismisses thinking and reasoning from ethical conduct. As she puts it:

> It is a matter of emphasis and of origin . . . I put my best thinking at the service of the ethical affect. (1984, 171)

The one-caring has one great aim which is:

> to preserve and enhance caring in herself and in others with whom she comes into contact. This quite naturally becomes the

> first aim of parenting and of education. (1984, 172)

Not surprisingly, Noddings recommends that the public school system be redesigned so that caring has a chance to be initiated "in the one-caring and completed in the cared-for" (1984, 182). She discusses how schools and teachers can nurture the ethical ideal through dialogue, practice, and confirmation. And, she makes specific, practical suggestions, including: smaller schools; removal of junior high schools; external examiners for grading all work; and, career educators teaching the same group of students for three years and then spending a fourth year in administrative work or study. Some of her suggestions, like students having the same teacher for several years, are being implemented in the Year 2,000 Program in British Columbia's public schools.

Regarding the interpretation of rules, as they apply to the public school system, Noddings' position is that they should be interpreted as guidelines towards desirable behaviour. Hence, the student's aim is to respect law and order, since they contribute towards a maintenance of caring. However, she believes that we must unceasingly work at critically evaluating laws and rules that "will allow us to sort ethically among them" (1984, 201).

TWO

AN ALTERNATIVE ETHICS ?

In the eighteenth century, David Hume (1984, 263) proclaimed it to be a false hypothesis that reason was the sole source of morals. In this century, Rodger Beehler said that "caring about others is integral to 'the moral point of view'" (1978, 155). Annette Baier (1985b) attempted to attach "caring" to the picture of the fully autonomous and independent adult with some success, while Agnes Heller stated that care for other human beings is "the universal orientative principle of morals" (1990, 41). However, caring is usually considered, in philosophical circles, to be a feeling, and, as such, to be subjective, relative, often capricious, and difficult to discuss rationally and objectively.

The publication of Nel Noddings' book, in 1984, heralded a change in the *status quo*. Yet it received scant attention until very recently when, perhaps due to the growing interest in feminist theory, the subject of caring in general is being addressed. Alison Jaggar puts it thus: "writing on the so-called ethics of care has become a small industry within academia" (1991, 83).

GENERAL REVIEWS OF *CARING*

Nodding's book, inasmuch as it deals with such a seemingly subjective topic, makes criticising it difficult. This is particularly so, in that she does not claim to *prove*

anything about moral knowledge or truth (Noddings 1984, 3). And, as pointed out by Rosalind Ladd (1985, 356), such an ethics, in that it disclaims any status as a theory, is difficult to assess.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, Noddings does claim a feminine-based ethics of caring to be an *alternative* to the traditional and masculine ethics which is founded on principle. This is an important claim. What makes evaluating it carefully a matter of some urgency is that the world is presently plagued with interpersonal and international conflicts where, as Noddings says, violent deeds are often done in the name of "principle" (1984, 1).

The reviewers of Noddings' book generally agree that she opens up an important and timely topic in prescriptive ethical theory and practice, and, that she brings a thought-provoking and neglected part of our ethical make-up to our attention. Some of the critics who have viewed Noddings' work in this light include Judith Andre (1986), Sarah Lucia Hoagland (1991), Alison Jaggar (1991), H.J. John (1984), Rosalind Ladd (1985), and Sheila Mullett (1987). Andrea Boyea suggests that caring has been "invisible" as a morality, and that its legitimacy as a source of moral knowing has been suppressed (1991, 335).

Given that the final chapter of Noddings' book is about moral education - a topic of particular interest to her, given that she is an educator - it has been suggested by Ladd (1985, 456) that this might have been the whole point of the book. If this is true, it does not lessen the book's importance, since

the study of moral education, like that of caring, has been neglected in traditional ethics. (In a lecture given December 5, 1991, at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, which the writer attended, Noddings informed her audience that she was in the process of writing a book on how to educate for caring in the public school system.)

On the issue of moral education, Noddings' reviewers proffer differing views. Her ideas about caring in education are considered to be "salutary" (Andre 1986, 90); "challenging" (Goldstein 1989, 48); and "well argued" (Rendleman 1986, 149). But Ladd finds them somewhat "innocuous [and] romantic in tone" (1985, 356). And, Isa Aron (1988, 132-133) thinks that they could result in profound and far-reaching changes, but that her avoidance of rules in schools is unrealistic.

TWO MAJOR CONCERNS WITH NODDINGS' ETHICS OF CARING

Criticisms of Noddings' ethics fall into two main categories which are inter-connected. The first includes concerns about the claim that her ethics of care is an alternative to the traditional and masculine view. Is it an alternative, and, what does this mean? The second centres around Noddings' rejection of involvement with the distant stranger (her example has to do with starving children in Africa) and the uneasiness produced in readers by her rejection. Can this part of her ethics be improved, in the sense of dealt with more adequately? Both sets of concerns involve the more basic problem of Noddings' proclaimed lack of

universalism in her ethics.

Relative to the first of these two concerns, the objection given by her reviewers is that, if her proposal constitutes an *alternative* ethics, then it should have a universalizable component to cover all aspects of the moral life. (It will be recalled that universalizability is a component of mainstream or traditional ethics.) Regarding the second concern, some principle is required to deal with the stranger or non-intimate, and this means that some universalizable, or abstract, concept is necessary.

Feminist theorists have focussed particularly on the first concern, which centres around Noddings' claim to have an alternative ethics to the traditional one. It will be this issue which will concern me in the remainder of this chapter. The second concern will be addressed in the third chapter.

FEMININE AND FEMINIST

Sarah Hoagland challenges the idea of basing an ethics on the feminine in our society, or, as she calls it, on the "masculine model of the feminine" (1991, 247). Her point is that, since the feminine is born of the masculinist framework, Noddings' work, at a deep level, does not represent any change (presumably, change to the *status quo*). Furthermore, in that Noddings is still working within the paradigm of a masculine society, her ethics condones and continues the oppression of the female.

Noddings does not mention the word "feminism" in her 1984 book. In one recent article, she talks about using a

"feminine-feminist" perspective (1987b, 177). In another, in reference to discussing her rejection of impartiality in her ethics, she had this to say about Jaggar's objection to her use of "feminine" rather than "feminist":

> She is right to object (and I wish I had never used the word), but the idea was to point to a difference in experience, not to a biological difference. (1990, 31)

Yet, for Noddings, caring is clearly a *feminine* ethics (see Susan Sherwin 1992, 42-3) which is presented as an alternative to a *masculine* ethics (Noddings 1984, 2). That it may be born of oppression, and exists in oppression, is irrelevant to Noddings' thesis here, for she is deliberately apolitical. She gives the approach of the mother whose sphere is a personal one. Yet, she sees no reason why men should not embrace it also (see Noddings 1984, 2). Her aim is to achieve "an ultimate transcendence of the masculine and feminine in moral matters" (Noddings 1984, 6).

How will this transcendence take place? Noddings gives no plan. Whether one should work, as Noddings does, inside the dominant male paradigm, or challenge it more basically, as Hoagland suggests we should, remains to be seen.

Hoagland's criticism is a feminist one, where feminist ethics is born of a refusal to endure sexist environments (Claudia Card 1991, 4). Furthermore, because of challenges to the dominant power structure, some philosophers (Seyla Benhabib 1986, 405; Roger King 1991, 82; Susan Sherwin 1992, 49; and others) consider that feminist ethics is inextricably bound up with the political.

Hoagland criticizes Noddings' ethics of lacking a political or public aspect, indeed of "a withdrawal from the public domain" (1991, 260). Moreover, she says her criticism

> is a lesbian criticism: caring cannot be insular and it cannot ignore the political reality, material conditions, and social structures of the world. (1991, 260)

Can an alternative ethics ignore the public domain? As earlier mentioned, Hoagland's position is that Noddings' ethics is only an alternative *inside* men's traditional ethics, with the latter being the political and powerful one. As such, it will be allowed by man to co-exist as a part of our moral practice. But it is overwhelmingly female and dependent on the male and his mainstream ethics for its agency. While Hoagland charges Noddings' "one-caring" with withdrawing from the public domain, she also does not believe that the present masculine public domain, relying on principles, is a better one in which to solve ethical problems. Rather, both demonstrate a "lack of experience in the world" (Hoagland 1991, 260).

For an ethics of caring to be morally successful in replacing traditional ethics, it must, according to Hoagland, deal with what is foreign: that is, it must deal with the proximate and distant stranger. It must consider analyses of oppression, and acknowledge the duality of self as both related and separate. It must also have a vision of change.

Hoagland writes:

> Further, as long as we exist within a context of oppression, an ethics relevant to us must function under oppression. (1991, 261)

Hoagland suggests that what is needed is the caring of amazons

- one that will challenge the inequities resulting from the "values of the fathers" (1991, 260-1). Her reference to "amazons" is, presumably, a semi-mythical one comparable to Hobbes' and Rousseau's references to man in a "state of nature". How much this helps us deal with the "stranger" problem remains to be explored.

DOMINION AND CARING

Andrea Boyea's (1991) feminist criticism of Noddings' caring is concerned with a more basic level of concepts: namely, with language and naming. Boyea (1991, 336) claims that, through the work of Gilligan and Noddings, an ethics of caring, which has been a source of morality for longer than we know, has finally been named. This enables the traditional ethics to be seen for what it is. And what it is, according to Boyea, is an ethics of domination.

Boyea believes that many societies have cast legitimate ethical being in male terms and in male experience: these have been the dominant voice in ethical thought. In naming what was unnamed, that is to say, in naming the ethics of caring, we provide new metaphors, new "existential primaries", for understanding human ethical response, which broaden the range of moral consideration (Boyea 1991, 336). The two metaphors of *dominion* and *caring* "are each a source of ethical vision and give form to two divergent moral realities" (Boyea 1991, 335).

Boyea would generally accept that Noddings' ethics of caring is an *alternative* to the traditional one. It is an alternative in the sense that it is not in opposition to

traditional ethics, but rather its equal. (I discuss later the sense in which she would not see it as an alternative.)

In clarifying an ethics of caring, Noddings, according to Boyea, demonstrated the gendered aspects of morality and sharpened awareness of the gendered aspects of traditional ethics. (See also Benhabib 1986.) However, once it is named and explicated in theory (as Noddings has done with caring), once it is called into being, there arises the problem of where to place it amidst what is already visible (Boyea 1991, 339). To co-opt the language of caring, to use it within the dominant ethics, or, to show where the dominant ethics already includes it, is to fail to recognize its claim - its "gender resonance", as Boyea calls it (1991, 339).

Boyea emphasizes that the ethics of dominion and of caring are not opposites. She sees them as diverging from a common human base of bonding and receptivity. There is a tension between them because of different experiential premises or "metaphors" and because different priorities and movement of affect are set (1991, 341). But both have equal status as a source of ethical ideals and response.

Nevertheless, Boyea does not see them as fully separate: caring "fills in", both in the public and private sectors, to make a more complete picture of the ethical self (1991, 341). It is in this sense that Boyea would not accept Noddings' ethics as an alternative: that is, as an either/or choice. Rather, she takes it to be an equal status 'enlarger' of both men's and women's ethical repertoires. Boyea reiterates that caring and dominion each contribute to our ethical vision, and

cautions that each, alone, or taken to excess, has inherent dangers (1991, 343). In naming dominion she hopes to balance "the centring power of the father with the nurturing power of the mother" and hopes for "creative dialogue" between men and women (1991, 343). What she does not consider is what would prevent this from disintegrating into an hierarchical paradigm (losing track of the supposedly equally powerful paradigms).

Julie Duff's (1991, 344-347) reply to Boyea is to ask for a definition and explanation of "dominion" and "existential primaries". And, she raises the question of whether there are only two kinds of ethical thought. Further, Duff suspects that Boyea's argument is an essentialist one (i.e. that sex determines an essential or given nature); a state of affairs which makes it contestable (see also Code 1991, 18). She asks whether caring, taken to its extreme, is still caring or a distortion of the theory. And, importantly, in my opinion, she stresses that:

> [T]he adequacy of an ethic of care as a moral theory must also be evaluated separate [*sic*] from its connection to gender. (Duff 1991, 347).

This statement invites comparison with Hoagland's claim to the effect that Noddings' ethics develops the masculine model of the feminine. Duff believes that we need to take seriously the question of care's existence in oppression and subordination. But she does not comment on whether she thinks Boyea obscures or clarifies an ethics of care by opening up so many questions.

Although Hoagland hints that *Caring* is insular, neither

she, Boyea, nor Duff, discusses the problem of shrinkage in Noddings' personal ethics. This is my major concern, relative to Noddings' ethics of care, and I address it in Chapter Four. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the criticisms made by Charles Love and Sheila Mullett.

UNIVERSALIZATION AND CARE

Starting from a traditional position, Love (1986) makes a radical criticism of Noddings' ethics. Because the "caring" way of making decisions is not universalizable, it is not seen as "morally legitimate" by those who "look for the universal in the particular case", says Love (1986, 73). Therefore, he claims, its ethical status is unwarranted.

Two arguments are given by Love as to why the "ethics of caring" is not really an *ethics* at all: the "definitional argument, and the "subjectivity" argument.

Love's first objection is that a *moral* decision is subject to moral judgment, which necessarily involves universalization: that is, it involves the inter-changeability of individuals in similar situations (1986, 74). His second is that, since the one-caring resolves moral quandaries herself, the "so-called ethic of caring must be sunk in a radical individualistic subjectivity" (1986, 75). He asks: "Can an ethic permit everything?" (1986, 75).

Love anticipates and replies to two of the objections which could be levelled against the "definitional" argument. One is that Noddings could reply that, since the definition does not reflect the experience of women, it should be changed

(1986, 75). He suggests that this rebuttal is based on a "different language" appeal which is probably insufficient to support a "legislated" change in our use of moral words (1986, 79).

The other is that Noddings could remind objectors that she actually claims that a fundamental universality is necessary in her ethics to escape relativism, and that she, in fact, has one: the caring attitude, caring and commitment, which form "the universal heart of the ethic" (Noddings 1984, 5). Love's rebuttal is that, since Noddings says that it is an *attitude*, not a principle, it is non-rational: it is right or wrong depending on its roots in caring, not dependent on its outcome (Noddings 1984, 5). This explanation, in turn, permits Love (1986, 76) to argue that it differs in kind from the "universalization" characteristic of traditional ethics.

Love (1986, 76) believes that both Gilligan and Noddings assert the primacy of individual decisions over general principles, and thus that this type of ethics is still personal. Love compares the type of decision-making which he associates with the ethical views of Gilligan and Noddings, with two traditional forms of ethical reason: utilitarianism and Kantianism. In the former, the individual *qua* individual is transcended and decisions are made on the total "utilities". In the Kantian model, the individual, though central, decides using an abstract formula or principle. Central to both forms of ethical reasoning is the idea of impartiality. He notes that this, the moral point of view, may even amount to an attack on our very selves. As he puts it, an

attack on the "very organization of our personalities" (1986, 78).

Then, he makes a radical suggestion aimed at meeting the "definitional" objection: namely that the moral point of view could be seen as "*a* point of view rather than *the* point of view when it comes to the decision-making crunch" (Love 1986, 79). Thus, a moral decision, being another point of view, is not paramount and may be overridden when our very personhood is at stake:

> Thus, for an ethic of caring, our connections to others, our standing as 'one-caring' to a 'cared-for', can take precedence over the conclusions of a piece of moral reasoning. (1986, 79)

But how does one meet the "subjectivity" objection? How does one avoid radical subjectivity? For, with acceptance of subjectivity, Love points out that we could not criticize a person whose projects were monstrous (he mentions Hitler). But he goes on to suggest that, because we all share certain experiences (such as caring), these become central in the organization of ourselves. So, with the rising acceptance of our feminine side, this could end the "kind of denial of self that put[s] caring in a position inferior to justice" (Love 1986, 80).

Love's position can be summed up thus. He does not accept the ethics of caring as an *ethics*, because it is grounded in the personal. Its lack of universalizability is fatal to its status as an ethics. Hence, not being an ethics, it cannot be an alternative to any ethics - let alone traditional ethics.

Relative to the "definitional" argument, Noddings' (1986, 84ff) rebuttal is framed around the following three points which I think are important ones. One: the universalizability requirement has always been questioned, has always had dissenters, and has only become a central tenet in ethics in the last few hundred years. Two: the "power to name" is an enormous one. It is held by those we recognize as "authorities". Feminists are aware of this situation and much research is going on into it (see Boyea's remarks cited above). Three: if something more compelling grounds the moral, then it must be something that the moral grows out of. Otherwise, if there is no grounding in the caring attitude, other positions "beyond morality" could be used to justify horrendous activity (Noddings' examples are Abraham agreeing to kill his innocent son Isaac because God ordered him to {Noddings 1984, 43} and Nietzsche's war and enslavement {Noddings 1986, 85}).

Apropos of the "subjectivity" argument, Noddings (1986, 87) reiterates that a person practising an ethics of caring is not independent of others. Instead, the moral agent is bound "inextricably to others". Thus, her ethics is both situational and relational. The one who decides is a relationally-defined entity, not an isolated one. She makes the important point that it is not a denial of self that has made caring inferior to justice, but a denial of relation.

Can anything be said, then, about the requirements needed in an *alternative* to traditional ethics? Sheila Mullett, in her review of Noddings' 1984 book, gives a brief outline of

what she thinks are these general requirements. She suggests that the alternative ethics must be:

> a robust, enriched description of forms and varieties of goodness, the virtues necessary to achieve them and their role in the creation and recreation of human community. (1987, 493)

It is Mullett's contention that Noddings starts off in the right direction, but that she lacks the "equipment" to continue.

Notwithstanding the vagueness of Mullett's statements I agree with her that Noddings starts off in the right direction. Furthermore, I think that the "equipment" needed to produce a *new* ethics may come through ongoing criticism of such a proclaimed alternative ethics as Noddings'.

In fact, some of the "equipment" has already been mentioned briefly in this chapter. This includes: examining how an ethics of caring has arisen; what is its significance in, and to, a context of oppression; acquiring an understanding of gendered roles; and, finding out how the new ethics forces a re-examination and re-evaluation of traditional ethics. More will come to light in the next chapter when criticisms of, and suggested solutions to, the second major concern with Noddings' ethics of caring are examined.

THREE

AN ADEQUATE ETHICS ?

The second major concern which reviewers have about Noddings' ethics of caring pertains to the latter's stating that, generally, we are not obliged to care, that is, to summon the "I must":

> *if* there is no possibility of completion in the other. I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa because there is no way for this caring to be completed in the other *unless* I abandon the caring to which I am obligated. (Noddings 1984, 86; italics added)

As reported in the first chapter, Noddings differentiates between *caring for* and *caring about*; the latter being a "poor second-cousin" to caring in her view, since it always involves "a certain benign neglect". (The reader will recall from Chapter One that she gives, as an example of "caring about", my sending five dollars to famine relief in the Third World. To do so makes me feel "somewhat satisfied" {Noddings 1984, 112} even though I have no way of ascertaining whether or not the money will go to my chosen charity.)

Concern for the inadequacy of Noddings' ethics in dealing with the distant stranger also brings in two other related worries. One: the possibility of her ethics being inadequate because it does not deal with other species and with nature in general. Two: the possibility of inadequacy because her ethics eschews principles. (This connects with the "universalization"

discussions undertaken in Chapter Two.) I begin by discussing concerns with Noddings' specific example of starving children in Africa.

THE STARVING CHILDREN IN AFRICA

Several philosophers are concerned with how Noddings deals - or, rather, does *not* deal - with the "stranger". Andre says that the grounding of caring in personal relationships, and their centrality as an ethical ideal which excludes any compelling concern for those one does not physically encounter, is "chillingly parochial" (1986, 90).

Ladd (1985, 355-6) thinks that Noddings' central notion of caring is not an adequate explanation or prescription to cover the whole range of real-life situations in the modern world. She speculates whether Kant's philosophy, which stipulates that we must act ethically towards others whether or not we have a natural inclination to do so, might not be more genuinely caring when dealing with those to whom Noddings claims we have no obligation.

Hoagland (1991, 260), too, is concerned with the adequacy of Noddings' ethics, given that it ignores both distant and proximate strangers. She remarks that this lack of concern is especially pertinent to people in the Third World because we are responsible, to varying degrees, for the conditions that produce starving children there. (Presumably because of arms dealers and the First World's economic insistence on cash cropping in the Third World *inter alia*.) She refers to Claudia Card's (1990, 102-5) article in which the latter states that,

since technology has made it possible to affect people we never meet, but are connected to "*by relations of cause and effect*" (Card 1990, 105), we need an ethics that will deal with this connection. Hoagland concludes that an ethics must provide for the possibility of ethical behaviour in relation to what is foreign. Yet, she says, and here she agrees with Noddings, that the ethicist should not appeal "to principles to solve these problems" (Hoagland 1991, 260).

Isa Aron (1988, 129-132) discusses the same problem in more detail. Referring to Noddings' Third World example she asks:

> Is there no ethical imperative to make the world a better place, even if one does not happen to be in relationship [intimate or direct] with those who *are* suffering? (1988, 129)

Giving the example of living in a middle class suburb which has no park benches and, therefore, no homeless people, she queries whether this means that "I have no obligation to help the homeless who sleep on benches in other parts of the city?" (1988, 129). (It should be noted that, for Aron, "in relationship" means "intimate or direct relationship". This begs the question of an adequate relational ethics, relative to strangers. In Chapter Four, I show that a relational ethics can include a relationship with, and a caring for, non-intimates or strangers.)

Aron discusses Noddings' answer to the problem of the distant stranger in need: namely, that a cry for help is responded to at the first circle of caring that is able to hear it. It is obligatory then to respond when the one-caring

hears the cry: "Only a chain of trust links me to the far away other" (Noddings 1984, 153). Quite understandably, Aron brings up the obvious rejoinder that not everyone is operating under an ethics of caring (1988, 130). (So, presumably, some cries for help may never be heard.) Also, very rarely do those who help the homeless, or work towards the prevention of nuclear war, do it because the moral imperative has impinged upon them in the way Noddings describes and demands. She goes on to argue that Noddings does, in fact, use principles in some of the examples that she gives (besides the basic one of her universalization of the natural attitude of caring that I mentioned in the second chapter) and that principles, as "formal, abstract, and simplified generalizations of the caring response", (1988, 131-2) are critically important in social situations. They serve as a reminder and have a (psychological) "mildly coercive power" to the one-caring.

Aron suggests a partnership of the morality of principles with the ethics of caring. An important point to note is that the partners are not equal, in that the former should always defer to the latter. Furthermore, if principles conflict, the "ethical ideal" should be brought in to decide between them (1988, 132).

Barbara Arnstine (1988, 137-8) asks for clarification of the connection between social responsibility and caring. Referring to Aron's park bench example, she reiterates the reason given by Noddings for not becoming involved with those far away: that I cannot complete the caring unless I abandon my previous caring obligations. This means, according to

Arnstine, that it would be immoral to abandon those immediately in my care to help those far away. By giving this as a reason, Arnstine claims that Noddings is using an abstracted "either/or" solution to explain "obligation", when she (Noddings) consistently emphasizes the need for *details* in determining the moral grounds for caring (1988, 137).

Arnstine states that Aron reduces the problem of social responsibility to a conflict between moral principles and caring. Then, she creates a false distinction between her own and Noddings' position by "discovering" moral principles in the latter's examples to resolve the conflict. But in so doing, Aron is using language to abstract and recast Noddings' moral problems,thereby changing the meanings. Arnstine suggests that we abandon an "either/or" distinction between principles *and* caring. Instead, we should return to a concern for the development of a social conscience, which is needed to support the ethical ideal of caring. In focusing our attention on relationships à la Noddings, we can see how economic and socio-political circumstances impede our development as caring persons. She finishes with the somewhat vague statement that a "new social order" may be needed to sustain an ethics of caring (1988, 138).

Deane Curtin (1991, 66) is also concerned with the lack of an ethics of caring for the stranger or non-intimate. Regarding the homeless, she suggests that an ethics of care that is not politicized (for example, Noddings') risks being "*localized in scope*". Thus, it could be taken to mean that one should not care for the homeless unless one's son or daughter

happened to be homeless.

In her 1990 article, Noddings, in reference to her rejection of impartiality, reiterates that we need to establish "chains of concrete connection". Understandably, it is not possible to care *meaningfully* for everyone, but we should:

> behave politically in ways likely to establish structures that will support concrete caring relations. (Noddings 1990, 32).

This seems to be an interesting addition to the position she takes in her 1984 book.

Noddings' claim to the effect that the finite abilities of the one-caring confine her to caring relationships in her immediate vicinity may often be reasonable, but I think that they (the finite abilities) may also be used as an excuse. What is it that gives the one-caring any impetus to enlarge, from even one all-engrossing caring relationship, to more? As Aron has noted, a person's concern for larger moral problems (like the homeless and nuclear war) usually does not stem from direct "impingement" on the person *qua* one-caring. But Aron does not discuss what actual "impingements" should be acknowledged and become cared-fors, if I already have one cared-for that is, to me, completely engrossing? I discuss this issue further in the fourth chapter.

For now, I want to examine another concern with Noddings' ethics: namely, the criticism levelled against her ethics' dealings, or *lack* of dealings, with other species, except perhaps for certain chosen ones - some cats for example. Here,

though Noddings claims she has an ethical responsibility towards all cats because of her relationship with her pet and says (of her pet) "Puffy is a responsive cared-for", Puffy has no intellectual or spiritual growth for Noddings to nurture, and her response is a restricted feline one. The question of whether the caring relationship could be completed by a cat seems to be left open by Noddings (1984, 156 and 181). Notwithstanding this, the reason one cannot have a caring relationship generally with other species is not the over-riding obligation to one's personal cared-for(s), but rather that the caring relationship cannot be completed, and so it cannot become an ethical one because there is no possibility of reciprocity.

This lack of a voice for caring in the domain of other species, and for nature in general, is particularly disturbing to environmental ethicists such as Deane Curtin (1991) and Roger J.H. King (1991).

CARING ABOUT NATURE

Curtin (1991, 66-8) attempts to combine caring for distant strangers with caring for nature in her discussion of the Chipko movement (where women in a village in India hugged trees to save them from being logged). She states:

> [I]n the mosaic of problems that constitute women's oppression in a particular context, no complete account can be given that does not make reference to the connection between women and the environment. (Curtin 1991, 85)

Curtin's suggestion is that an ethics of care must be

politicized; that *caring for* can still be contextualized (remain with the concrete other), yet be expanded through feminist political insights. She thinks that *caring about* is viable as a generalized form of care that may have specific recipients (for example, caring about the women in the Chipko movement). And, it may lead to the kind of actions that bring a deep relatedness which can be described as a *caring for*: "caring for particular persons in the context of their histories" (Curtin 1991, 67).

Also discussed by Curtin is Noddings' demand for reciprocity, which precludes a politicized version of caring for community development or for (most) non-human animals, because reciprocity is either "inappropriate or impossible" (Curtin 1991, 67). She states that many of the special interests of ecofeminists are precisely those where reciprocity cannot be expected, for instance, working to relieve the oppressive consequences for certain women's lives because of the destruction of their immediate environment (the women in Dalit village, India, for example). She asks: "Is it really caring for if something is expected in return? What would be appropriate in return?" (1991, 68).

I believe that Curtin may have misunderstood Noddings' ethics of caring in two ways. The first is in thinking that it is the lack of politicization *per se* - what Curtin calls the *localization* - of caring that prevents us from becoming involved with the non-intimate, whether in one's own town or in India. According to Noddings, it is the impossibility of practically caring for the non-intimate *and* the ensuing

neglect of our immediate relationship(s) that prevents this wider involvement.

Curtin may have also misunderstood Noddings' concept of reciprocity, when she asks if it is really *caring for* if something is expected in return. This is because reciprocity is, for Noddings, not a form of "contract" or "repayment", but rather a relationship where engrossment is a necessary condition. The one-caring is engrossed in the cared-for, where joy, on being aware of the growth of the cared for, is the basic affect. The cared-for must recognize the one-caring (Noddings 1984, 78) in order to constitute the relation, but he is "free to be more fully himself in the caring relation" (Noddings 1984, 73). (Although Card {1990, 106} questions whether Noddings' "reciprocity" should not, less misleadingly, be called "complementarity" when dealing with equals, my criticism remains.)

Hence, concerning the environment, it is the lack of engrossment - the key term in Noddings' reciprocity - that is the main reason for the impossibility of there being an ethics of caring towards the environment: there is no concrete "cared-for" who can respond in the required and very specific way that Noddings demands.

Nevertheless, Curtin reveals something important, and that is the lack of an ethical voice of caring for the environment. Although to some extent it may be answered in the one-caring working politically on behalf of the environment (see Noddings 1990, 30, mentioned in the previous section), and even if nature could reciprocate in the required way, one

suspects that there would always be the immediate obligation to one's intimate(s) to over-ride any caring for the environment. Curtin's conclusion is that ecofeminism, with its politicized feminist ethics of care, is needed consciously to "expand the circle of caring for" (Curtin 1991, 71).

I will now discuss King's (1991) views on caring and nature. His concerns are mainly about the defects in the ecofeminists' essentialist (see Chapter Two) and conceptualist ("that normative force emerges from the personal narrative of lived experience" {King 1991, 85}) positions, but he does briefly refer to Noddings.

As part of his discussion regarding the inadequacy of both essentialist and conceptualist "strands" of ecofeminism in expressing an ethics of care, King (1991, 78-87) comes to the conclusion that, in drawing on a language of care and relationship (that is, in actual concrete relations with non-human nature), conceptualism holds more promise. But, if it is to have moral significance for ecofeminism, it needs to be shown how nature itself can benefit from human caring. Referring to Noddings, King stresses that it is not that nature must reciprocate or acknowledge the care that we extend to it. Rather, there should be some practical implication for nature of our caring (1991, 85).

For King, moral principles are not the way to expand the boundaries of morality beyond beings that are like us - that is, beyond the anthropocentric view. He admits that the conceptualist strategy does help avoid the oppressive human/non-human dualism, but that our imagination needs to be

educated to:

> a "loving perception" of the nonhuman world as a member of the moral community of difference and an object of care. (1991, 87)

How this is to be achieved is not discussed by King in his article.

CARING FOR PRINCIPLES

Noddings eschews principles in her ethics on the grounds that their history is suspect: evil deeds are often done in the name of "principle" (Noddings 1984, 1). Thus, she fears that an introduction of abstract principles, or of a universalization criterion, will destroy the relational basis and personal nature of a caring ethics. Yet it is difficult in real life to remain true and committed to Noddings' demand, since this disavowal of principles, and hence of any abstract criteria in her ethics confines it to the immediate and personal: it *localizes* it, as Curtin would say.

Although I think this does not deny Noddings' ethics the status of being *an ethics*, there is, besides the question of adequacy, the danger of abusing or ignoring such a narrowly defined ethics by confining it to the private or domestic sphere, while the traditional and masculine-derived public ethics is retained in a mainly masculine-led public sphere. (Hoagland *et al.*)

The majority of Noddings' critics claim that, if her ethics is to be adequate, it needs more empowerment. That is, it needs to enlarge its sphere. If not principles, then at

least some kind of abstract component or idea is usually needed to accomplish this.

There have been many criticisms of the ethics of caring in general. Most centre around Gilligan's findings and claims; some, however, also refer to Noddings' ethics. Andrew Mason (1990), Bill Puka (1991), Daniel Putnam (1991), and Robin Dillon (1992) discuss ethics of caring in their articles. Their main concern is with the question how to enlarge an ethics of caring by seeking some kind of reconciliation between caring and principles (such as justice, rights, and respect). Mason and Puka address themselves to Gilligan's views, not to Noddings', but they do make some comments about caring that have implications for the latter's position (especially in view of her 1990 article).

Mason's (1990, 175-177) article is political. He claims that a libertarian perspective is not compatible with a *genuine* concern for those incapable of taking care of themselves, because it is not just. He suggests that genuine participation in democratic decision making could be, and perhaps is, an indispensable part of exercising concern for other community members. Hence, an integration of rights and care would produce, "broadly speaking", a socialist perspective. This, if necessary, could be legislated (in taxation laws, for example) to force "some people to help others" (1990, 177).

Puka (1991, 205-207) calls for a "savings approach" in ethics in general, in order to avoid premature acceptance, or dismissal, of alternative moral views "in their theoretical

infancy" (1991, 201). (This is something which would, perhaps, tend to soften the adversarial approach used by some philosophers {See Moulton 1983, 153}.) He suggests, with his "care as liberation" hypothesis (car-lib) (1991, 201), that care and justice be seen as "different kinds of psychological and ethical phenomena" that do not necessarily interfere with or complement one another (1991, 205). Yet, he faults Gilligan's concept of "mature care" for its lack of "political sensibility or institutional focus" (1991, 207). It is not clear, in Puka's article, how care will be "saved". And, its being "saved" at the expense of being co-opted under the auspices of politics or principles remains a risk. That is something which would be anathema to Noddings.

Daniel Putnam's (1991, 232-234) aim is to tie caring and relational ethics into virtue theory. He discusses caring from an appraisal of the works of Baier, Gilligan (1982), and Noddings (1984). His claim is that, for relational ethics to be an "historical corrective" in philosophy, it must have a standard image of the individual by which to correct that past (1991, 231). (I return to this issue in Chapter Four.)

Regarding Noddings' position, he questions where the impetus to commit ourselves to a caring attitude is, when she rejects any universal foundation for this ideal (1991, 231). Even if we reflect on our past caring, why should we commit ourselves to respond to others in this way? In his view, Noddings must be using some "metaphysical concept of the individual" (1991, 232). This ethical ideal would supersede the natural. It is tied to a common human potential, and that

is where we get our virtues in particular situations. Putnam sees caring as virtuous for the following reasons: it increases our repertoire for ethical acts; it increases the individual's potential; and it liberates the agent to participate fully in the practice.

Inasmuch as he is using words and concepts from traditional ethics, and in that he is approaching caring from that ethical basis, Putnam is not addressing Noddings' "caring as relation being basic". Rather, he begins his ethical criticism of Noddings from a basis of the individual as separate. And, to quote Noddings:

> [it is] this difference in language and direction of reference that forms the difference between an ethic of caring and an ethic of principle. (1984, 45)

Putnam states: "it is precisely a universal concept of a person that makes caring a rational way to act" (1991,234). So, although his concept of the individual as separate might align itself with Baier's views (as an ethical scholar from the traditional school), it is a misconstrual of Noddings' individual. It is precisely the relational foundation of her ethics ("*relation* [is] ontologically basic" {1984, 4}) that is the source of the concept of the individual in Noddings' ethics. As she puts it:

> My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality. (1984, 51). (See also Carter 1992, 101.)

Furthermore, as well as being essentially relational, Noddings' caring is essentially non-rational, because it requires a "constitutive engrossment and displacement of

motivation" (Noddings 1984, 25).

Putnam also claims that Noddings defines the essence of a person as empathic. But Nodding does not say this in *Caring*. What she does suggest is essentialism; she talks about a woman's "natural inclination to mother a newborn" (1984, 128). However, it is of interest to note that she disclaims essentialism in her 1990 (25-6) article.

Putnam (1991, 235-238) also discusses the important situation where the urge to care is diminished (for various specific reasons), and contrasts a Kantian perspective on this situation with Noddings'. In both cases, he claims, the internally imposed Kantian duty and the obligation:

> to accept, and even call forth, the feeling "I must" [of Noddings, achieve the same result because] their will recognizes and acts upon the inherent goodness in the act. (1991, 236)

For Noddings, the "I must" always takes place in a personal context where there is a potential for a caring relationship, and it is never an abstract futuristic proposal. Indeed, according to Noddings, one cannot, and should never, judge the caring relation by any abstract principle, as Kant would do.

Ladd makes the point that Kant's and Noddings' attitudes towards the stranger are very different. While ethics towards the stranger is the paradigm situation for Kant, it does not exist in Noddings' ethics (1985, 355-6).

Putnam suggests that virtue theory, which now should include caring as a virtue, is advantageous to traditional ethics because it brings the aesthetic back into the moral sphere. Caring, and relational ethics in general, are a

"corrective" to complete the picture of the "harmonious and integrated individual." According to him, Noddings *et al* are proposing that:

> the beauty of a well-rounded human character is intimately tied to the quality of ethical decisions such a person makes. (Putnam 1991, 237-8)

I suspect that Putnam's suggestions may exemplify the co-option that feminists feared (Hoagland, for example). Indeed, the power of Noddings' views in *Caring* risks being submerged in Putnam's ideal ethics. It is doubtful that Noddings would ever agree to such a marriage - let alone so soon after the birth of her ethics - since she envisages an "ultimate transcendence of the masculine and feminine in moral matters" (Noddings 1984, 6). (Dillon refers to Baier's proposal for a marriage between "the old male and the newly articulated female . . . moral wisdom" {1992, 105}.)

Dillon's (1992, 107-122) attempt at "conjugal bonding" is, perhaps, more subtle than Putnam's. She suggests the wedding of respect and care, two "apparently dissimilar modes" (1992, 105-6). Inspired by Kant, Dillon's proposal is that we view caring for a person as a way of respecting her or him. In this model, care becomes a kind of respect owed to all persons. As part of her complicated "care respect" model, she suggests that there is a variety of respect called "recognition respect", where one respects a person simply because he/she is a person (1992, 112).

Respect for persons, in Dillon's model, involves taking account of our "connectedness, interdependence and

distinctness." She claims that her "care respect" for persons is a suitable anchor for a more integrative and "cooperative" theory (1992, 116). Respect for personhood is not for some abstracted generic personhood, but for the individual and concrete *me*, which, according to Dillon, "compares interestingly" with Noddings' account of caring (1992, 117).

Dillon also states that her conception of "care respect" grounds the intrinsic moral worth in the human "me-ness." It involves simultaneously viewing the person in the abstract (the person in the individual) and the specific, concrete individual "me" (the individual in the person). The abstract establishes commonality in all persons; the concrete, the richness of distinguishing details (1992, 118-9). The most powerful aspect of "care respect" is the ability to maintain what Dillon calls a "constructive tension" (1992, 122) between the value of a person as an individual among others, and the value of the individual as *special*. (Boyea {1991, 341}, and Carter {1992, 106} also talk about there being a "tension" between traditional ethics and an ethic of caring.)

It is difficult to imagine the implementation of "care respect" without a great deal of re-education, intuition and faith. So, although Dillon's hypothesis might have some application for caring relationships between equals (which Noddings hardly discusses), it is difficult to apply it to the prototype of Noddings' caring relationship (which is the mother and child relationship). This prototype epitomizes natural caring upon which ethical caring is dependent (Noddings 1984, 79-80). (I criticise Noddings' concept of

"natural" caring in Chapter Six.)

In this chapter, I have examined complaints about the inadequacy of Noddings' ethics in dealing with the non-intimate (whether human or non-human). As demonstrated above, the solutions proffered by various critics tend to involve some kind of a "merger" of Noddings' ethics with traditional ethics.

In the next chapter I will try to show that no merger or synthesis of caring and justice values is possible without a re-examination of the limitation of Noddings' position. Her critics have been trying to enlarge the domain of her ethics from the private to the public, yet they have all assumed the stability, or more or less adequacy, of the ethics of caring in the private domain. But, as I shall try to show, Noddings' ethics has an unavoidable potential for shrinkage from the privacy of a circle of intimates to the minimal inter-relational privacy of the dyad or couple.

Unless Noddings' ethics can be enlarged from the intimate dyad to *at least* a circle of intimates, no further enlargement is possible, and so this problem, ignored by Noddings' critics to date, must be dealt with prior to a full discussion of synthesis, mergers, or enlargement.

FOUR

A SHRINKING ETHICS

In previous chapters, I examined the two major criticisms levelled against Noddings' ethics of caring by her reviewers. Both objections are connected to a more general problem, which is that her ethics lacks a basis for universalization. I am particularly concerned with what I consider to be a specific fault of Noddings' ethics of caring which need not, necessarily, be a fault of an ethics of caring otherwise. This is the problem of shrinkage.

In Chapter Three, I discussed Putnam's query, why we should commit ourselves to caring. By way of replying to him, I pointed out that he may have been missing Noddings' point (of relation being basic to her ethics), by beginning his ethical appraisal from the point of view of an individual adult who had not had his/her ethical roots anchored firmly enough in caring.

But Putnam's question leads me to ask another of Noddings' ethics. If I accept her claim to the effect that the impetus to care comes from my natural caring, where does the impetus to enlarge my caring domain come from? When it is possible for me to fill my "firmament" (Noddings' {1984, 32 & 74} terminology) with only one cared-for, why should I enlarge my ethics of caring to care for even one other person, particularly since there is the concomitant risk of neglecting, possibly even failing to fulfil, my immediate

caring obligation to my original one cared-for if I do so? Should I, and if so why should I, commit myself to care for more than one person?

For Noddings the immediate obligation of the one-caring to the cared-for is "first and unending" (Noddings 1984, 17). It is also absolute. She says that there are two criteria which govern our obligation in caring relations:

> [T]he existence of or potential for present relation, and the dynamic potential for growth in relation, including the potential for increased reciprocity and, perhaps, mutuality. The first criterion establishes an *absolute obligation* and the second serves to put our obligations into an order of priority. (Noddings 1984, 86; italics added)

But what is the criterion for adequacy in the primary caring relation? When have I devoted enough time to my sole cared-for that I can involve myself in other caring relations? How should I measure out my "caring" time?

To illustrate my concern, I will make use of Noddings' stray cat dilemma.

THE STRAY CAT DILEMMA

A stray cat appears at Noddings' door. She asks herself whether she ought to receive this cat. She answers this question thus:

> If I have pleasant memories of caring for cats and having them respond to me, I cannot ethically drive a needy one away from my back door. A chain has been forged. A stranger-cat comes to me formally related to my pet. I have committed myself to respond to this creature. (Noddings 1984, 156)

Before describing the dilemma, I want to mention a criticism concerning Noddings and cats. There are cat-lovers and non cat-lovers in the world. Noddings clearly falls into the former category, and she refers to cats several times in her book (1984, 13, 24, 90-92, 126, 155-7). At times she risks mawkishness (see 1984, 52-3, for two other examples). As Andre (1986, 90) pointed out, there are instances where Noddings' words are inappropriate. One such occasion has to do with her saying that she has incurred an obligation to her own cat: "Puffy is a responsive cared-for" (Noddings 1984, 156).

Her love of cats explains why Noddings allows these animals, and not others, to enter into her caring domain as pets, and her dislike of rats, for example, explains her refusal to regard any of the latter as potential members (see 1984, 156-7). By allowing for a caring relationship with any cat (because she has happy memories of past relationships with them), but eschewing any possibility of the same thing happening with rats, Noddings is being egocentric and arbitrarily anthropomorphic: she is making an overly personal and socially-conditioned generalization about the limits of her caring ethics. Her ethics seems to me to be too rigidly circumscribed by one's personal past experiences.

Furthermore, I am suspicious of an ethics where I may incur a moral obligation to any strange cat that approaches me, yet have no such moral obligation to distant *human* strangers who are starving, and, who, due to circumstances beyond their control, cannot actually approach me for help.

It is because Noddings has prior *personal* experience of

caring for cats that she claims to have an obligation to any stray cat that appears at her door: her population of cared-fors has extended to include that species. But what if I have had no past personal caring experiences with cats, and the hapless cat arrives at my doorstep, not at Noddings'? Or, what if I have had past experiences with caring for pet rats, and a stray rat appears at Noddings' door, not mine? (In the second of these two situations, the poor rat would be the one to lose out, since Noddings informs her readers that, not only would she refuse to enter into a relation with it, she would "shoot it cleanly if the opportunity arose" {1984, 157}). Or, what if a member of an extra-terrestrial species shows up at Noddings' door? And what if this non-humanoid "E.T." looks more like a rat than a cat?

The caring relationships, in Noddings' ethics, seem to be rigidly and permanently set. It would seem, then, that the potential for Noddings to have a caring relationship with a rat-like creature is non-existent on the grounds that her caring lines or limits have already been laid down. However, the fact that her ethics allows me to have a caring relationship with a rat, if my past experiences dictate it (for there is no universalization in her ethics), does nothing to help the animal who has the misfortune to arrive at the "wrong" doorstep.

Fortunately, our past experiences of natural caring for and by other humans is universal. Hence, the *potential* exists for a relationship to develop as a result of a human approaching closely enough to us. This state of affairs partly

explains Noddings' dread and fear of the proximate stranger, since it creates the kinds of conditions under which an ethical engagement on my part might be required (1984, 47,85).

Returning to the stray cat dilemma, suppose I am a cat-lover. Why should I open my door and take on another obligation, when my firmament is filled by one caring relation already? Since Noddings' obligation is geographically *localized* to the extreme, personal contact being necessary, perhaps I could avoid opening my front door and so not incur this obligation. I may be legitimately busy, sick, or just "doing a Descartes". (Noddings {1984, 125-6} refers to Descartes' almost life-long habit of remaining in bed, thinking and writing, till noon.) Alternatively, I may believe that people often put stray cats on cat-lovers' doorsteps, and I do not wish to be taken advantage of in this manner.

The above are only a few of the many rationalizations which could be proffered as an explanation of why I will not place myself in the position of risking incurring a new obligation. But, surely, the best rationalization has to do with the neglect that I fear will happen vis-à-vis my original caring relation. This is where there is an inherent tendency to shrinkage in Noddings' ethics. The tendency is for the person to be inwardly-oriented rather than outward-looking. That is, her ethics inclines one to concentrate on one's nuclear circle rather than to look outwards and thereby risk more caring involvements. I think that this tendency suggests a "lifeboat" attitude in Noddings' ethics, which makes it impossible ultimately to account for any enlargement of caring

from the dyad or couple.

LIFEBOAT ETHICS

The phrase "lifeboat ethics" comes from Garett Hardin (1971, 279-291). It is, in my view, an apt metaphor to use, because it describes the *localization* aspect and the dread and fear of the proximate stranger, which are important parts of Noddings' ethics. I see it as a metaphor for the family which consists of two people (the one-caring and the cared-for) stranded in a lifeboat of caring. They have no moral obligation to actively search for other drowning humans, but they dread the obligation that will be incurred if a drowning stranger reaches out to touch their lifeboat. Since there is only a limited amount of caring to go around, some ugly decisions may have to be made by the one-caring in the lifeboat about whether she extends a helping hand to a drowning stranger who reaches out his hand to touch the lifeboat. In real life, do we, and should we, constantly fear the hand that reaches out to clasp ours because we think that our "caring" is already being accounted for, and, therefore, that we do not have any spare "caring" to go around?

Noddings' position - uncomfortably, for some - addresses our fears at a subjective level. There is the question of the fulfilment of our primary caring relationship(s). This can easily become the fear that our caring, as the ones-caring, is not adequate. In her 1989 article, She quotes Jean Paul Sartre on the "present paradox of ethics":

> [I]f I am absorbed in treating a few chosen

> people as absolute ends, for example, my wife, my son . . . if I am bent upon fulfilling my duties towards them, I shall spend my life doing so; I shall be led to pass over in silence the injustice of the age, the class struggle, colonialism. (Noddings 1989, 101)

In the cited passage, Sartre is expressing the fear that the work entailed in family relations is never finished. Applied to Noddings' ethics, this means that the one-caring never fulfils the caring obligation, since it is open-ended and ongoing.

Noddings does not discuss this fear, which is especially likely to occur in women who, as the main care-givers in our society, are often insufficiently autonomous and unable to stand back far enough from a specific caring relationship to breathe in a little liberating objectivity. Lack of female autonomy, leading to self-sacrifice (see Bonnie Strickling, 1988), seems to be due largely to socially imposed gender differences affecting how one is raised. Here there is a meeting of psychological and ethical issues (see Nancy Chodorow, 1978, and Dorothy Dinnerstein, 1977). It seems that if a sense of autonomy (including feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, ability to make choices freely) has not been adequately developed in the care-giver, the latter risks being overwhelmed by the needs and demands of others, and thus psychological survival may depend on not allowing many others into one's circle of cared-fors. (I discuss the problem of autonomy further in Chapter Six.)

Given that it is difficult to decide how to limit incurring too many obligations at any given point in time,

this can become a fear of the proximate stranger. Noddings' position of this issue is the following:

> Our obligation is limited and delimited by relation. We are never free in the human domain, to abandon our preparedness to care; but, practically, if we are meeting those in our inner circles adequately as ones-caring and receiving those linked to our inner circles by formal chains of relation, we shall limit calls upon our obligation quite naturally. (1984, 86)

In actual practice, I fail to see how her ethics allows us to limit "calls upon our obligation" to our family "naturally" because I do, to varying extents, have to choose my obligations. Perhaps my gaze would have to be permanently directed inwards, rather than outwards, so as to focus on the "inner circles" and, thereby, avoid incurring more caring relations. That, in turn, leads to the risk of practising a "lifeboat" ethics.

Noddings offers one possible solution to how one selects one's cared-fors. I will discuss it by using the stray cat example.

Suppose that I am a cat-lover and that I open my door. What if the stray cat is not there because it has fallen off the step and I hear it meowing somewhere in the garden? Or, what if it is injured and cannot reach my door but lies in the gutter in my street which is full of non cat-lovers except for me? Or, what if I see it in a nearby street where it might be on its way to my doorstep? Or, perhaps, I may visit the cat shelter, where stray cats are always to be found in need of a home? How should I limit my obligations in such instances?

Noddings' reply is that my obligations are limited

through physical (in the sense of "geographic") parameters. But the point is that I can easily change my physical movements to avoid approaching the stray. Similarly, I could continue to avoid other (potential) obligations simply by changing my physical peregrinations. Thus, I could cross the street and avoid the beggar, live in the suburbs and avoid coming into contact with the homeless sleeping on city benches, and so on. Since there are numerous ways to avoid my incurring further caring obligations, it could be that Noddings is actually legitimizing my excuses by stressing the *localization* aspect of caring and one's obligation to one's original caring commitment. In an age of hyper-mobility, and with the global repercussions attached to many of our localized activities, Noddings' exposition of ethical caring hardly seems to be an adequate solution.

I suspect that many, perhaps most, of us do not assess potential caring confrontations/situations in the manner that Noddings suggests we should: that is, on a geographic basis. Her point, to the effect that a caring ethics is an *activity* which starts at home, is well made. Nevertheless, I think that, in actuality, we decide whether to engage in caring relations, or simply to care, based on something deeper and more abstract than localization.

It is *my* ethical ideal of myself as a caring person that is working when I cross the street to help an injured person or an injured cat or bird; when I involve myself in work for the homeless in other parts of town; when I work for nuclear disarmament (Aron 1988, 130); when I go "out of my way" to

rescue a child from drowning (*c.f.* Singer's {1979, 168} example); or, when I inform the clerk in the super-market that a stranger has left his/her lights on in the parking lot. It is this awareness of, and subconscious referral to, one's ethical ideal that prevents the ethical shrinkage that Noddings' ethics condones, if not encourages.

A closer examination of my own ethical ideal will help to demonstrate how it does so.

MY ETHICAL IDEAL

Noddings main points, relative to her extensive discussions of the "ethical ideal" in caring, were summarized in the first chapter. The reader will recall that she builds up the ethical ideal from the natural caring relation, and that she sees the ethical ideal as realistically attainable. My goal, in this section, is to examine the ethical ideal from a more personal perspective. When *I* think of *myself* as a caring person, what does this entail for *me*?

In the previous section I gave, as one of my examples of practical applications of the caring ethical stance, my informing the super-market clerk about a car whose lights were left on. If someone were to ask me why I was undertaking this action, I might reply that it is a case of (anticipated) reciprocity: my doing this for someone would lead me to hope that someone would do the same for me if the need should arise. This answer could be considered a version of the Golden Rule. But, there is also another reason that I might give as well, if I think about the matter more closely. While engaged

in this undertaking, I have, in the back of my mind, an image of myself as a caring person. I think of myself as one who obviously cares about a person who is a complete stranger to me. Perhaps this is "stroking" my caring ideal, but the point is that, in so doing, I am re-energizing my ideal of myself as a caring person in my own mind, and (perhaps) in the mind of the super-market clerk. No other "thank you" is necessary. The internal "boost" to my ethical caring ideal suffices for me. (It may be countered that, on a deeper level, it is really my ideal of myself as a good person that I am envisaging. Be that as it may, being a "good" person entails my being a "caring" person, by description.)

Unlike Noddings, then, I see my own ethical caring ideal as something never actually reached: it is an abstracted ideal that I continually reach for, but never attain. This state of affairs does not necessarily lead to a Sartrean burden of duty, because a *robust* sense of my autonomy prevents this from happening (see Mullett 1987, 493, cited in Chapter Two). My vision of myself, as a truly caring person, is rather like a Platonic Form of myself as a perfect caring creature. To put this another way, by trying to attain my own ethical caring ideal, I remain with the concrete and personal me yet constantly strive towards the *ideal,* and necessarily abstract, caring *me*.

My own ethical caring ideal includes more than the Noddings-defined "caring for" type of relationship. It includes "caring about", care-taking, as well as "caring for". Of necessity, there is always some kind of relation present,

out of which grows my caring, but it is not as rigidly and as concretely defined as Noddings'. Instead, it has been abstracted. Thus, my personal ethics includes caring about and caring for: other humans; other living creatures; nature in general; ideas; and objects. Admittedly, my caring activity would, in numerous cases, be better described as "caring about" Yet, as suggested by Curtin (1991, 66-7, cited in Chapter Three), some instances could lead to a Noddings type of "caring for", if there is the potential for reciprocity to occur. Nevertheless, I would not exclude my caring ethics from involving non-human creatures, nature in general, or ideas and things, just because of a lack of reciprocity, because reciprocal instances constitute only one aspect of my ethical ideal of caring.

One of Noddings' fears is that "caring about" often means ineffectualness. If it does, then it is surely a personal problem. Yet, by excluding "caring about" from her ethics of caring, Noddings is prematurely dismissing it - to the detriment of all concerned. Furthermore, she is narrowing down "caring" unnecessarily, and, making unnatural and arbitrary anthropocentric cut-offs to our ethical boundaries.

In contrast to Noddings, I see the ideal of *myself as caring* as being the impetus to instigate new caring relationships of many kinds: concretely, caring is produced in relation, abstracted, it is what motivates forming new relations. Thus, when I work to prevent nuclear war, or cross the street to help any kind of injured being, or work to help the homeless in my city, or pick up litter from public areas,

I can be doing all these activities from an ethical "I must" which forms a part of my striving to become the caring person of my ethical ideal.

Noddings is (rightly, in my opinion) wary of applying principles to ethical systems. But I did not use any principle to formulate the notion of the "complete ethical caring person" outlined above. Rather, this was achieved by using the *idea* of a caring ideal.

By restricting caring to the (mostly human-to-human) reciprocated relationships, Noddings unnecessarily excludes us from whatever else it means to be a "caring person". It limits our ethical activity, a situation which is ultimately to our own, and to our planet's, detriment. (See Jonathan Schell 1982, 174-5.)

In Chapter Three, I introduced Puka's call for a "savings approach" which would have as its goal not prematurely dismissing (or accepting) alternative moral views while still in their infancies. The proposal just outlined may be perceived as just such a "savings approach" for caring: it solves the problem of shrinkage in Noddings' ethics while leaving open the possibility that certain principles can still serve, but in the capacity of "tools" or "expressions" of the caring ideal. Furthermore, it permits enlarging an ethics of caring without, at the same time, diluting it to ineffectualness (which is what Noddings fears), because caring still remains an ethical activity which is personally, socially, and politically useful. Moreover, it provides the basis for a multiplicity of "cared-fors", which was the

immediate problem to be solved, as well as for an enlargement of the ethical domain from the private to the public. Finally, my proposal could have far reaching effects, since it helps to "open up" the concept of ethical caring.

Having shown one possible path for saving a caring ethics from dyadic reduction, we have the basis on which the caring ethics can also function within the public realm. Now I want to examine in more detail this functioning, in relation to a justice and rights tradition. Stated in more general terms, I will be assessing a caring ethics as it applies in the public domain.

FIVE

A PUBLIC RELATIONAL ETHICS

As discussed earlier, Noddings is wary of the use of principles in ethics. (Jean Grimshaw {1991, 494} states that Noddings argues "that a morality based on rules or principles is in itself inadequate.") In her book, she does not completely eschew using rules or principles, but rather places "an ethical ideal above principle as a guide to moral action" (Noddings 1984, 84). Her concern is that uncaring acts may be justified by an appeal to "principle" (1984, 1-20). Two striking examples, given by Noddings, of principles over-riding caring, concern the stories of Abraham (who was prepared to kill his young son because God had ordered him to {Noddings 1984, 43-4 and 97-8}) and Manlius. Manlius was a Roman commander who:

> laid down harsh laws for the conduct of his legions. One of the first to disobey a rule about leaving camp to engage in individual combat was his own son. In compliance with the rules, Manlius ordered the execution of his own son. (Noddings 1984, 44)

Manlius' dilemma is a paradigm situation of a caring ethics conflicting with an ethics of principle (with the principles of justice and fairness in this particular instance). But how often does such a conflict, involving as it does such a stark choice between caring and justice, actually arise? Usually, principles are related to a "public" ethics. Admittedly, it is questionable whether there should be a strict separation of

public and private domains in ethics. (Code 1991, 194,243, and 279, criticizes the resulting genderized dichotomy.) Nevertheless, there are two obvious realms associated with ethical dealings: the intimate, and the non-intimate (stranger) domains. In this chapter, I will use the word "public" to address the latter domain.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Noddings' ethics is a personal one. By her own definition, it is impossible that there can be any public domain to her ethics. This is because her caring ethics is born of direct intimate relation. Without this direct personal contact, there can be no place (no location) for her ethics. However, situations do arise in the public domain which call for ethical consideration where an intimate caring relationship would be impossible or inappropriate. For example, this can, and does, happen in many workplace situations, especially those involving persons in positions of power. Mainstream ethics uses principles of justice and rights to deal with these sorts of ethical problems. (Some may even want to argue that such principles were, in fact, developed to deal with these instances.) So, for Noddings to ignore the public realm leads one to question the adequacy of her ethics.

It is not enough to say that such hierarchically produced, and (often) *power-over* situations, should not arise. Their impact may, on occasions, be somewhat reduced (as will be demonstrated below), but these situations are, at the present time, very common in the public domain. Examples

include the politician who represents thousands or millions of citizens, and the business person who has power over the jobs of hundreds of workers. How, then, does the caring politician or the caring business person function in these non-intimate situations?

Noddings' ethics is of little help in formulating an answer to this question. She comes closest to discussing caring in the public domain in her discussion of caring in the teaching profession (it will be recalled that Noddings is, herself, an educator). But, even in this instance, Noddings (1984, 175 *et passim*) argues for the teacher being one-caring. The teacher is potentially (and, ideally, actually) in a caring relationship with all her students.

It is interesting to note that, when any public decisions regarding students' performances have to be made, Noddings (1984, 195ff) suggests "outside" appraisal: she proposes that strangers mark her students' exams, for example. She also suggests that supervisory, disciplinary, and administrative, work should be rotated amongst all the teachers. Presumably, these suggestions are made because, in the public world (of which the public school system is a part), principles of dispassion (objectivity) and fairness have to come in in some way. But, by making these suggestions, Noddings is tacitly admitting that the one-caring cannot, and should not, attempt to be fair, because she must always put the interests of her individual cared-for first.

In a democratic society such as ours, elected politicians represent anywhere from hundreds to millions of people,

thereby making it out of the question for them to have a caring relation with each one of their constituents, and (Noddings') circles of caring are quickly increased to imperceptibility. How, then, does a *caring* politician function in a democratic society? (Or, how does an ethically *caring* person function in the public realm?)

This is a question Noddings' relational ethics is unable to answer. According to Noddings' ethics of caring, the politician cannot, and should not, attempt to be ethically caring in a public situation. Simply put, there is no possibility of reciprocation and, in any case, attempting this would mean neglecting the politician's original cared-fors. Yet, has the politician any option in her public life, other than to appeal to an ethics involving some kind of principles, when she has to make public ethico-political decisions? Perhaps the principles of justice, fairness and rights could be perceived as *tools* which the person makes use of to deal equitably and ethically with the non-intimates. Our use of laws, in this society, is one such *tool*.

This possibility, although worthy of further study, does not address the issue of what happens when a conflict exists between the private and the public domain. How can conflicts between public roles and intimate relationships be *ethically* resolved? This is a question Noddings' relationship ethics is unable to answer. Yet, is it so rare for a Manlius-type dilemma to occur that it can be safely ignored, or, does an ethics of intimate caring conflict often enough with principles in the public domain as to require detailed

examination of these situations?

Our experience points to there being enough actual instances of such conflicts happening to warrant further examination, and I will be making use of one such plausible moral dilemma in my discussion. Before doing so, however, I want to briefly discuss the use of moral dilemmas in ethics.

THE MORAL DILEMMA AND ETHICS

Gilligan (1982) has been instrumental in highlighting the inadequacies of the *practical* use of moral dilemmas. (She criticized Kohlberg's use of six dilemmas in his assessment of the moral development of children.) More recently, feminists have objected to the use of moral dilemmas in ethics, primarily because of their inherent dichotomous construction (see Code 1991, 28-31). Notwithstanding the inevitable concerns over data interpretation, there is also the more general concern that, without contextualization of moral dilemmas (without fleshing them out), their meaning and relevance are of questionable importance. Furthermore, attempts at abstraction (in the name of objectivity) to pin down the moral story to a stark, bare-boned, binary, choice, risk the production of such counter-intuitive examples as the "fat man in the cave" dilemma of Kai Nielsen (1989, 132). (A fat man is stuck in the only entrance to a cave. The tide is coming in, and the rest of the group is still inside the cave.)

Noddings is critical of the way moral dilemmas are presented in the philosophical and psychological literature.

She also questions the analysis of such dilemmas as an aid towards ethical behaviour in real life. She writes:

> Our real moral problems do not appear clearly constrained and decked out like so many textbook problems in algebra -problems in which, also, we are deliberately set free from actual conditions. (Noddings 1984, 105)

Then, and somewhat enigmatically, she adds:

> Having registered our objection, however, let us agree, somewhat reluctantly, to play the game. Does everyone understand that it is a game? The perpetual confusion of games with real life tempts us to give up on games entirely. (Noddings 1984, 105-6)

(This statement is reminiscent of Baier's {1985a, 54} admonishment of prisoners' dilemma game-playing by philosophers.)

Nevertheless, moral dilemmas do occur and are quite common in everyday life. Gilligan (1982, 3) discusses the real-life choices that her pregnant subjects have to make regarding whether or not to have an abortion, to mention only one common case. There are many real dilemmas involving biomedical, political, social, and economic choices. I will now consider a moral dilemma where there is an apparent clash between caring and principles.

THE POLITICIAN'S DILEMMA

The majority of a politician's constituents inform her that they want her to introduce a private member's bill banning clear-cutting of primary growth forest in their district. The politician has been assured by her colleagues they they would support her bill were she to table it.

However, when the owner of the local pulp-mill hears about this forthcoming presentation, she informs the politician that, if the bill is passed, she will be forced to shut down her mill. One of the workers at the mill is the politician's brother. He has three young children and his salary is his only source of income. What should the politician do?

If she follows Noddings' ethics, she will put her brother and his family first, for her brother is already in the circle of her cared-fors. Thus she will refuse to introduce this bill, and her brother will keep his job. Yet, as a democratically elected representative, surely she should carry out the will of the majority of her constituents, should she not? (We will assume that the politician cannot get out of this dilemma by pleading conflict-of-interest. Indeed, under a strict construal of Noddings' ethics of caring, such a plea, being utility or deontology based, is inadmissible.)

Given that she must make a choice, it would seem that, *prima facie*, a relational ethics of caring conflicts with principles of fairness and justice to her constituents. Hence the dilemma: does the caring politician help her brother, or does she follow her public mandate?

Noddings' choice is obvious: as the one-caring, my ethical duty is always first to my cared-fors. Hence, as the caring politician, I must put my brother before the (non-intimate) constituents, and, therefore, refuse to introduce this bill. Noddings might even re-enforce her position by disclaiming any ethical obligation to future generations (in this instance, caring for the primary-growth

forests on their behalf). This is because, according to Noddings, we can have concerns about future generations, but not *ethical obligations* to them, for the latter only arise in intimate encounters. (This would also mean the politician would have no ethical obligation to her non-intimate constituents.)

Her justification, in this regard, is partly the following:

> we cannot be certain about consequences. What is likely today may not be likely years hence; what is waste today may be a resource tomorrow. . . .[P]ossible consequences of our acts . . . do not entirely determine the ethical goodness of our acts. (Noddings, 1984, 152)

Alternatively, a principle of utilitarian ethics would seem to justify putting the considerations of the majority of the politician's constituents before the few hundred who will lose their jobs. According to this ethical stance, the politician should table the bill.

Another alternative, in formulating a solution to this dilemma, would be to make use of a Kantian moral imperative: The politician is a democratically-elected representative of the people. As such, she has promised to uphold the majority wishes. If she is to keep her promise, then it is her duty to introduce this bill.

These alternatives place *primacy* in principles to resolve the politician's dilemma. But, can principles find expression within a vocabulary which places *primacy* in the notion of the caring person? If I were to refer to my ethical ideal of myself as a caring person (as developed in the previous

chapter), could this be of help in resolving this particular problem?

Under the ethical ideal of self stance, the politician could "consult" her own ethical ideal, and ask herself: "What should I do as an ethical caring person in this specific situation?" Admittedly, there is a real risk of watering down "caring" to abstracted generalizations and impotence, as Noddings fears, for, in what practical and meaningful way can the politician be said to *care* for *all* her constituents?

Nevertheless, I believe that the politician could demonstrate that she is caring for the wishes of the majority of her constituents, caring for the forests, caring for future generations, and/or caring for the democratic process, by tabling the bill in question. All of these caring concerns could go into her consideration of herself as a person trying to live up to her ethical ideal. Furthermore, she could also express caring for/to her brother and his children. One of the advantages of Noddings' ethics is that caring relationships are concretized: they already exist and are "on view", as it were. Hence, the politician could help her brother out financially, she could help care for his children, she could help him find another job, and so on. In a concrete and intimate caring ethics, such as Noddings', close familiarity with the situation enlarges the one-caring's options.

Looking at a more general picture, concerns about power dynamics in public roles (because of the concomitant authority challenges and risk of abuse in hierarchical situations) could be addressed. The caring person may fear that power corrupts

care. Therefore, one possible contribution an ethics of caring could make is to suggest some political directions. Perhaps a politician's individual power could, and should, be lessened by extending the democratic process directly to the constituents. It would then be the constituents themselves who are empowered to make public decisions affecting them.

To achieve this goal, Robert Paul Wolff (1970) suggests some kind of device attached to one's television set which could register each citizen's choice when political collective decisions need to be made (although the risk of process abuse because of lobbying and biased information may be more difficult to control). Another way (admittedly expensive) would be to call for binding referenda, as the Canadian Government did in 1992, when it asked Canadians to vote on constitutional changes.

In summary, although the strict separation of our ethical life into public and private realms is somewhat contentious (and, indeed, may encourage the conflict of caring with principles, in complex ways), occasions do arise when choices between the two have to be made. In the politician's brother vs. constituents dilemma, I retained the primacy of "caring" in the making of the politician's decision, but it can be argued that I am really using a principle, and that it is a principle of caring! Be that as it may, my goal is to keep caring as central in my ethical repertoire; whenever a choice is made, caring should over-ride other principles. Hence I remain striving towards the ideal of myself as a caring person, first and foremost. Principles such as justice, rights

and fairness, do come in, but they function as tools in the hands of the caring person.

SIX

OTHER PROBLEMS

We have seen how the problem of shrinkage can be addressed through the ethical ideal of the caring person, and how a relational ethics can be enlarged thereby to the public domain. I now want to mention briefly two final concerns: first, I wish to examine the roots of two ethical systems (traditional and Noddings' relation ethics), to emphasize that Noddings' ethics gives a better account of the origins of ethical sentiments and moral people than traditional ethics; second, I want to outline my concern with the autonomy of the caring person - a concern which is not addressed by Noddings.

ETHICAL ROOTS

Traditional ethical theories have tended to see the ethical person as an already defined, discrete, and independent adult devoid of a childhood. Noddings' work is seminal, in that she proposes a fundamental change in this, one of our basic concepts in ethical theory. She argues that relation is basic to her ethics, and thus, that relation is basic to the formation of the individual as a moral person. As Carter so aptly puts it:

> [Noddings] concludes, I think rightly, that we are basically related rather than alone, and as a result fundamentally caring rather than alienated and fearful. (1992, 101)

The person is born into relationship, and he or she becomes

the individual he or she is *through* relationship. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, states:

> It is not the "I think" that constitutes the "we think" but the "we think" that makes it possible for me to think. (1985, 100)

In contrast, two metaphors can be of use in demonstrating how traditional ethical theories construe the formation of the moral individual. The first comes from the Greek myth about Athena, chief of the three virgin goddessess, and the embodiment of wisdom, reason, and purity.

> She was the daughter of Zeus alone. No mother bore her. Full-grown and in full armor, she sprang from his head. (Hamilton 1940, 29)

The second comes from Thomas Hobbes:

> Let us consider men . . . as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other. (Benhabib 1986, 409-410)

Benhabib (1986, 408) says that this state-of-nature metaphor of Hobbes, this vision of men as mushrooms, "is an ultimate picture of autonomy." Though she may be conflating autonomy with independence (see below), her point is that we inherit certain "philosophical prejudices", and one of these is that men are originally autonomous and independent.

Metaphors like these, together with other philosophical ideas such as the Aristotelian concept of the woman as a receptacle (see Mahowald {1978, 62}, Vetterling-Braggin {1982, 35), and Gould {1976}), have done much to down-play the relational roots, and aspects, of what it means to be human. In my view, this is why, prior to the publication of Noddings'

book, ethicists such as Singer (1979, Chapter 10), Baier (1985b), Heller (1990), Von Wright (1963), and Putnam (1991), have had difficulty trying to pin *fundamental* attitudes, dispositions and (even more difficult) sentiments onto an already independent, rationally-oriented, self-interested, adult man.

I do not think that it can be done: one cannot get to an ethics of caring, symbolized by the truly caring and interdependent person, starting from a rational, self-interested, and independent person. Most persons concerned with ethical development will agree that sentiments fit in "somewhere"; that is to say, that natural, in the sense of *both* "biological" and "normal" (see below), tendencies or dispositions to goodness are necessary in order to form the *higher* virtues (usually very early on). For example, referring to compassion, Immanuel Kant says:

> this feeling, though painful, is one of the impulses placed in us by nature for effecting what the representation of duty might not accomplish by itself. (1983, 457)

Yet, I think Kant may be conflating the two meanings of "natural" and, hence, missing the importance of the study of natural tendencies in ethical theorizing. "Natural" may mean "biological, instinctive, automatic, innate". If we have such tendencies we can never know them because, in attempting to know them, one alters them. (Alasdair C. MacIntyre {1984, 161} says: "Man who has nothing but a biological nature is a creature of whom we know nothing"). "Natural" may also mean "normal, common or usual", and such "natural" tendencies are

the result of social development. Again, when Noddings talks about natural caring being automatic to mothers (1984, 79), I think that she is confusing the normal or usual ability that females have to mother (which is socially conditioned) with some innate ability to mother of which we have no proof. Indeed, from Harlow's studies of primates, and from psychological examination of adults abused as children, we have contrary evidence that there is no such innate ability in humans.

AUTONOMY

The risk of abuse and/or the instilling of guilt in caring relatioonships may be more likely to occur in male-female relationships in a male-dominated society such as ours (see Miller 1986). Noddings' ethics, being a *feminine* ethics, may be particularly prone to this problem (Barbara Houston 1987, 352-3). Feminists, especially, are aware of, and concerned about, these possible manifestations (see Benhabib 1986, 418; Code 1991, 208; Curtin 1991, 66; Hoagland 1991, 250-2; and, Mullett 1987, 493).

As the success of Gloria Steinem's recent book (1992) demonstrates, a presently "popular" stance consists in putting the problem down to a lack of female autonomy and/or independence, and then attempting to change this situation by empowering women. Notwithstanding its widespread appeal, this solution may risk throwing out the baby caring in the abusive bathwater.

However, the problem of autonomy of the caring person is,

I believe, a recurring one in any ethics where relationship has primacy. How autonomy eventuates is not completely understood, yet the problem needs to be addressed.

The interrelational aspect of autonomy with dependence is complex. Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), one of the thinkers who made an excellent attempt at discussing the ontology of autonomy, has this to say about the issue:

> [At one end of the spectrum, autonomy] connotes a radical independence from others, mapping closely onto an interpretation of *objectivity* that implies a reductive disjunction of subject from object. . . . [T]he tendency to confuse autonomy with separation and independence from others is itself part of what we need to explain. (Keller 1985, 97)

Keller goes on to develop a concept of a *dynamic autonomy* which:

> leaves unchallenged a "potential space" between self and other [which] allows the temporary suspension of boundaries between "me" and "not-me" required for all empathic experience. (1985, 99)

I share Keller's concerns with the term "autonomy": it needs a more carefully-worded definition. Given its importance, the issue of autonomy needs to be extensively explored and discussed from both psychological, and philosophical, perspectives. This cannot be done within the scope of this paper. But there is no reason why "autonomy" cannot be encompassed in an ethics of caring. In fact, I think that it is necessary that it be included, in order to prevent the risk of abuse and/or guilt in caring relationships.

Noddings does not address the issue of autonomy in her

book. In particular, she does not deal with the ramifications of its absence, something which is a constant risk in any caring ethics.

Given the present socio-political milieu, it is difficult to be a caring person and also to develop one's autonomy. This may be why women, who are usually perceived as being the carers in our society, complain more than men about their lack of autonomy. (See Tormey {1976, 206}.) Bonnelle Lewis Strickling (1988) makes the point that for genuine self-abnegation, there must first be a self to abnegate. This problem, which Keller is aware of, seems not to be adequately addressed in mainstream philosophical treatises on autonomy (see Blum {1976, 222-243}).

Notwithstanding the difficulty associated with developing one's autonomy in our society, some people (women and men) do become autonomous *and* caring persons. How autonomy and care are nurtured is an important topic which, as already mentioned, needs a full inquiry of its own.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, initial attempts to marry caring and justice can be illuminated by an examination of the demands of any ethics which avoids reduction to the dyad. Noddings' original goal is to transcend the male/female split, which is the justice/caring split. Presumably such a transcendence implies some kind of synthesis.

I have suggested using a "savings approach" with Noddings' ethics: one that would unite an augmented "caring" with justice, by compassion (in the sense of "feeling with"), through the ethical ideal (that is, the ideal of the caring person).

For an ethics that relies so heavily on one's own development of attitudes and feelings, it is essential that the family be one in which caring dispositions are nurtured. Sadly, in our society, there are far too many dysfunctional families. Thus, there is a need for external-to-the-family "safety nets" for those who do not have the advantage of growing up in a caring home environment. This is one of the reasons why Noddings' work on moral education in the public school system needs to be taken very seriously, and I share her views regarding the importance of education. (In three recently published articles {1987a, 1987b, 1989} Noddings discusses how to educate for caring in our society.) There are also some social activities, in particular conflict resolution techniques and dealing with aggression, that may be easier to

learn at school.

It is to be hoped that the dialogue begun by Noddings in *Caring* will continue, *and* that it will receive the attention it deserves (see Aron 1988, 126-7). Noddings has publicly admitted (at her lecture of December 5,1991, which the writer attended) to desiring to make several changes in her book, were she to re-write it. I would encourage her to undertake this project which would generate some revisions, and (perhaps) the enlargement, of her ethical theory. For, as Noddings says:

> One must meet the other in caring. From this requirement there is no escape for the one who would be moral. (1984, 201)

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