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LIFE, WORKS AND PHILOSOPHY OF NEL NODDINGS

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ABSTRACT

Critically acclaimed for her works in educational philosophy and theory, Nel Noddings is hailed worldwide. The academician turned feminist is received with applauses in not only the west, but has also become a major area of study in the Asian countries in the recent times. Noddings sheds light and provides a new dimension on the abstract concept of ‘care’. Our paper is a sober attempt to disclose the life, works and theory of Nel Noddings. This appraisal is an honest approach to Noddings’ views and relation to care and preference. While doing this we have elaborated with instances the ethics of care, its significance and problems arising out of one-care.

Keywords: Nel Noddings, Ethics of Care, Education, Child Education.

INTRODUCTION

Nel Noddings an American Educator, Philosopher and Feminist, is hailed globally for her contribution to the educational theory, philosophy of education and ethics of care. Securing a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and Physical Science from Montclair State College in New Jersey, USA, Noddings also possess a master’s degree in mathematics from Rutgers University, with a Ph.D. in education from the Stanford Graduate School of Education. She worked on various areas and dimensions of the education system. As an elementary and high school mathematics teacher and school administrator, she devoted more than seventeen years before she earned her Ph.D. Her next venture made her work as an academician in the fields of ethics, theory of education and philosophy of education. She was hailed for her work in ethics of care. Noddings graced being the member of the Stanford faculty in 1977. In 1992 Noddings was honoured being the Jacks Professor of Child Education, which she continued until 1998. Nel Noddings was awarded for teaching excellence thrice, in 1981, 1982 and 1997. She became the associate dean of the School of Education. After quitting her services from the Stanford University, she joined Colgate University and Columbia University. Noddings chaired presidential position of the John Dewey Society and the Philosophy of Education Society. Noddings honoured the John W. Porter Chair in Urban Education at Eastern Michigan University during 2002-2003. Noddings chaired Lee L. Jacks Professor of Education, at the Stanford University. She retired in 1998.

WORKS

In 1984 Noddings published *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* her first sole-authored book. Her next venture was accompanied by Paul J. Shore in 1984 and authored *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education*. Noddings continued to grip on to ethics and published *Women and Evil* in 1989. *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* in 1992, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief* in 1993 and *Philosophy of Education* in 1995, sheds Noddings’ ideas and thoughts on the philosophy of education, theory and continues to elaborate her concept of educational philosophy. Nel Noddings shares her works parallelly on social psychology. In 2015 she penned and published *A Richer, Brighter Vision for American High School and Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach* published in 2006 are another visionary works in the field of education.

ETHICS OF CARE

“Everywhere we hear the complaint “Nobody cares!” and our increasing immersion in bureaucratic procedures and regulations leads us to predict that the complaint will continue to be heard. As human beings we want to care and to be cared for. Caring is important in itself.” - (Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, p.7)

Nel Noddings’ book, caring: *A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, elaborates notable and accomplished points. According to Noddings, we mostly conclude to the dictionary connotation of ‘Care’ which asserts that “is a state of mental suffering or of engrossment: to care is to be in a burdened mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or solicitude about something or someone.” (p.9) Care has much to do with preference. As a matter of choice, it can also be added that one has care for someone or something, or to be specific, if one is inclined towards it or them. Taking instance if one possesses an inclination toward literature, s/he might voluntarily employee quality time with it. Similarly, if one has regard for you, what you desire, think and feel, will definitely be a matter of concern. At the same time, ‘to care’ might also add meaning to the dictionary connotation, that is, to be charged with the maintenance, welfare or protection, of someone or something.



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Significantly, the definitions associated with care, mirror various uses of ‘care’. To provide a sharp contradiction to this, in the most intimate human sense, it can be observed that “elements of each of them are involved in caring” (p.9). Thereafter, sense varies and one might equate ‘care’ along with ‘burdens. For instance, somebody might conclude that possessing cares in certain issues related to personal, public or professional, might be burdensome or worrying, “if I fret over current and projected states of affairs” (p.9). To conclude in a different sense, care can be an inclination towards something or someone, likewise, if A cares for B, A will definitely take interest in B’s views.

It is important to note though we at times judge ‘care’ from the external point of view. We look at them as ‘third-persons’. But when we do so it becomes rather effortless to observe that there are two major and vital elements which can be located between the care giver and the one cared for. Milton Mayeroff in his book *On Caring* describes ‘caring’ vividly through the arena of one-caring. Mayeroff pens down, “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (p.9).

Noddings here observes this equation of caring under certain heads. For instance,

- Is direct, externally observable action necessary to caring?
- Can caring be present in the absence of action in behalf of the cared-for?

We take an instance here for a clearer explanation. Noddings appropriately here mentions the case of a pair of lovers unable to commit into a conjugal life, since they are parallelly regimented into honourable marriages. During this phase the male counterpart discovers that his beloved is ailing. His instincts pose ardent cry to be present by her side. Yet, he fears the trouble he might invite for both of them or from his appearing by her side. He might choose to stay away from the lady. Surely, considering this case we would definitely not conclude that the lover does not ‘care’. The lover might be in a mental state of anxiety and suffering internally. His duty to protect his lover is denied. In this case, the lover denies his own need to protect his lover and spare her from embarrassment. Thus, his care means, not to act directly while responding to the beloved experiencing physical pain. “The one-caring, in caring, is present in her acts of caring. Even in physical absence, acts at a distance bear the signs of presence: engrossment in the other, regard, desire for the other's well-being. Caring is largely reactive and responsive” (p.19) Considering the action while we talk about the component of depth and caring. We might expect him to talk about his crisis. But clearly this may or may not happen. There is no denial of the fact that the lover cares, but we can certainly assure that something is missing in the relationship.

WHAT IS THE CASE OF INDIRECT CARING?

To explain such cases Noddings puts forward sets of probable queries making this elaborate yet explainable. “What shall we say about college students who engage in protests for the blacks of South Africa or the ‘boat people’ of Indochina or the Jews of Russia? Under what conditions would we be willing to say that they care? Again, these may be questions that can be answered only by those claiming to care. We need to know, for example, what motivates the protest. Then, as we shall see, there is the recurring problem of ‘completion.’ How is the caring conveyed to the cared-for? What sort of meeting can there be between the one-caring and the cared-for?” (p.11). It is therefore not actually possible to answer all these with typical sense of certainty and conformity, and neither we are heading towards a systematic approach towards creating certain criteria for care. According to Noddings, the trials with systematizing care is often unsuccessful. We can probably sort things with a small instance as Noddings put it, “A cares, B does not care, C cares but not about D, etc.” Caring is not only intricate and complex but also subjective. Caring also sometimes induces pain. Thereafter in a country of billions where everybody puts effort and time in caretaking for something, we hear a complaint too that “Nobody cares.” We have to agree that difficulties are involved, yet there is a need to a discussion on behavioural parameters of caring, and while doing so, one need to be concerned about problems involved in care, of assigning and monitoring care taking (p.12).

CARING ACTS AND THE "THIRD-PERSON" VIEW

The third-person is important to analyse. Till here, there has been a discussion about the ‘action component of caring’. But we have not yet reached to a state to determine a set of criteria. “Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the others. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves” (p.24) If we take an instance here, let us take up care and engrossment needed and expected to be found in the one caring. Therefore, Mr. X, whose ‘care’ seems to be at the best exclaims, ‘I care’. Now we can surely investigate into what he meant by this? But doing so we can only assume, since Mr. X is only responsible to speak here, though he might mean:

- (1) He does care. He thinks of his mother very often and worries about her. (Here, it seems to be an awful burden.)
- (2) He does care. He should visit her more often. But he is engaged into a busy professional and personal life.
- (3) He does care. He pays the bills. He has siblings who could also share the responsibility.



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These are meant to be suggested meanings and strictly do not limit Mr. X's possibilities. But interestingly enough, they definitely provide us with something to work upon.

THE INITIAL CASE SUGGESTION

In the preliminary case, it can be concluded that Mr. X falls short of care for his mother. Mr. X might be weighed down with cares for her. But here the concentration has displaced inwardly and converted into his worries. We can aptly term this to be a risk of caring. "There exists in all caring situations the risk that the one-caring will be overwhelmed by the responsibilities and duties of the task and that, as a result of being burdened, he or she will cease to care for the other and become instead the object of 'caring.' Now, here and throughout our discussion on caring-we must try to avoid equivocation." (p.12) As a mark of note, several common meanings can be traced for the term 'to care,' but none of these conclude to the depth and sensibility, which we are urging for. It becomes clear that "caring, refers to one of the restricted senses, or when we are not yet sure to what it refers, I shall enclose it in quotes. In the situation where Mr. Smith is burdened with cares, he is the object of caring" (p.13).

In another case, there can be a justifiable conclusion that Mr. X does not care. Mr. X's amusement is in equity. Mr. X wishes to invite a possible substitute for caring by performing something. This brings us to a point, acknowledging the actions we perform depends upon not on rules. It depends on equitable terms of conditions that is viewed through the eyes of both the one-caring and the one cared-for.

PROBLEMS ENGULFED INTO ONE-CARING

Noddings explains what she feels when she cares, she talks about what her mind actually feels and frames it. For Noddings "caring is always characterized by a move away from self. Yet not all instances of caring are alike even from the view of one-caring. Conditions change, and the time spanned by caring varies. While I care for my children throughout our mutual lifetimes, I may care only momentarily for a stranger in need. The intensity varies. I care deeply for those in my inner circles and more lightly for those farther removed from my personal life. Even with those close to me, the intensity of caring varies; it may be calm and steady most of the time and desperately anxious in emergencies" (p.16).

There are problems which arise here are the involvement of intensity, particular and formal aspects related to caring and time spans. There is always a moulding of these kind of formal chains which readily place us into a state of care. Therefore, caring can be instead described caring of various sorts, which might occur at various levels and degrees. Interestingly, there is a common base for all which is, the involvement of engrossment. Engrossment is much essential item, which might or might not be intense, but its presence is most essential. Formal constraints might be included along with the fundamental essentiality, at the same time not replacing or weakening it.

Both guilt and conflict might be added to the increasing number of problems which concerns the analysis of caring. Dividing of engrossment gives birth to conflict. During this phase numerous cared-fors try to accomplish decisions which are fully or partly incompatible from us. There are also other sorts of conflicts which occur when the need of the cared-for is in opposition to the care giver. This might turn caring into 'burdens.' These conflicts might induce 'guilt'. Tillich quotes, "A profound ambiguity between good and evil permeates everything he does, because it permeates his personal being as such. Non-being is mixed with being in his moral self-affirmation as it is in his spiritual and ontic self-affirmation. The awareness of this ambiguity is the feeling of guilt. (p.143-44)

CONCLUSION

Noddings credits her philosophical and educational developments to her kins. She also shares the credits for the same with the early teachers with whom she shared her workspace. Michael Katz assets Noddings as "one of the most efficient people", a "consummate teacher-scholar," living according to the "do it now" philosophy and "never lets her status as a famous scholar and lecturer and author interfere with treating everyone with the same kindness, thoughtfulness, and consideration that she would expect people to show her, regardless of her status or position." Noddings' theory to the 'ethics of care' is often regarded as 'relational ethics. Noddings' is of the view that caring is 'rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness' and is often a fundamental, organised and desired approach to ethics (Caring 1984, p.2). It shares its concern for relationships.



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