

Pusong Mamon:
Nel Noddings's Care Ethics
in the Filipino Educational Setting

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Abstract

This paper evaluates Nel Noddings's view of moral education in the context of teaching in a Philippine university. It first presents the key aspects of Noddings's ethical theory, identifying her three strategic moves as follows: the dissolution of the public/private split, the replacement of justice-based punishment system with a caring system, and the promotion of care work as the core of education itself. Through a discussion of two cases of academic dishonesty, the author assesses the merits of these strategies and recommends a re-conceptualization both of care ethics and the existing educational paradigm.

Key terms *Nel Noddings, pusong mamon, care ethics, justice, academic dishonesty*

In this paper, I evaluate Nel Noddings's view of moral education in the context of my own experience of teaching in a Philippine university. I first present the key aspects of Noddings's philosophy, which is based on care ethics. I identify her three strategic moves as follows: the dissolution of the public/private split, the replacement of a justice-based punishment system with a caring system, and the promotion of care work as the core of education itself. I assess the merits of these strategies through a discussion of two different cases of academic dishonesty,¹ in which I have been forced to weigh the competing demands of care and justice. Building on an analysis of a relevant Filipino phrase, "*pusong mamon*" (soft-heartedness), I recommend a re-conceptualization both of care ethics and the existing educational paradigm.

Nel Noddings's Care Ethics

Care ethics, long identified with feminism, arose out of criticisms of traditional psychological theories of moral development. From these traditional perspectives, women have been seen as morally inferior. For example, Freud described femininity in terms of the lack of a penis.² Meanwhile, in his description of the stages of moral development, Kohlberg claimed that girls rarely advanced beyond the conventional level, specifically the third of six stages, preferring social approbation over universal ethical principles.³ Feminists like Gilligan have critiqued such frameworks as masculine-identified, attributing their assertion of women's moral inferiority to sexist bias. Feminists argue that two different moral orientations have developed from gendered experience: the masculine ethic

¹ These represent an amalgam of cases I have encountered in my decade of teaching in De La Salle University in Manila. The names of the students have been changed to protect their privacy.

² Sigmund Freud, "Lecture 33: Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Standard Edition, vol. 22 (Place: Publisher, 1933), 136–57.

³ Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, vol. 2, *The Psychology of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

of justice and the feminine ethic of care. In patriarchal discourse, the former has been privileged at the expense of the latter.⁴

Since the publication of Gilligan's book, there have been various refinements, applications, and criticisms of care ethics. In the context of philosophy of education, it finds its most comprehensive articulation in the work of Nel Noddings.

Noddings describes the caring relation as one between one-caring and one cared-for. The primary action of the one-caring is engrossment in the reality of the one cared-for, such that she is motivated by the goals of his best self.⁵ Meanwhile, the minimal role of the one cared-for is to respond in concrete ways to the one-caring. Although this acknowledgement is a gift that cannot be demanded by the one-caring, without it, the caring relation cannot be complete.⁶

The one-caring's attention is based on feeling; it thrives in particularity and rejects abstraction. She appreciates the concrete individuality of the one cared-for, not allowing it to be superseded by rules or principles. Indeed, the purpose of rules is to "make it easier for those-who-would-care to fulfill the minimum requirements of caring." Moreover, "I must know when to abandon rules and receive the cared-for directly."⁷ This eschewing of universal ethical principles may be contrasted with Kant's deontology and Rawls's idea of justice. The latter two conceive of moral selves as essentially *the same*. Blindness to particular circumstances is encouraged or even required. This makes it possible to apply apparently rational universal

⁴ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁵ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 33. Although Noddings uses feminine pronouns for the one-caring and masculine ones for the one cared-for, the one-caring can be either male or female, as can the one cared-for. See Noddings, *Caring*, 4.

⁶ Noddings, *Caring*, 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

formulas in the resolution of specific moral cases, discounting sentiments or desires. But for Noddings, the one cared-for is never to be sacrificed in the name of a principle. Echoing Hume, she writes,

In arguing from principles, one often suppresses the basic feeling or longing that prompts the justification. One is led to suppose that reason produces the decision. This is the ultimate and tragic dishonesty, and it is the one that we shall try to avoid by insisting upon a clear-eyed inspection of our feelings, longings, fears, hopes, dreams.⁸

The prominence of affect is understandable given the socialization of people traditionally assigned the role of caretakers, such as women, people of color, and the poor. In order to survive, they have had to master the virtues of empathy and accommodation. Inevitably, feminist re-appropriations of these “virtues” have to deal with the complex ways in which they have stemmed from, and may reinforce, oppression. Noddings’s critics point to the dangers of the one-caring’s possible complicity with evil in her identification with the projects of the cared-for,⁹ the uni-directionality of the caring relation,¹⁰ and the risk of such a relation abetting exploitation.¹¹ Hence, other values have also been offered as possible correctives to care, such as autonomy and justice.¹²

Noddings addresses these criticisms mainly by designating caring as a moral activity for *all* people, not just women. Her prescription of an alternative framework to justice rests on the claim that ethical caring arises from natural caring, that all human beings are capable of this morality. We instinctively care for others or can draw from our memories of having

⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁹ Claudia Card, “Caring and Evil,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 1 (1990): 101–9.

¹⁰ Sarah Hoagland, “Some Concerns about Nel Noddings’ Caring,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 1 (1990): 109–15.

¹¹ Barbara Houston, “Caring and Exploitation,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 1 (1990): 115–20.

¹² Victoria Davion, “Autonomy, Integrity, and Care,” *Social Theory and Practice* 19, no. 2 (1993): 161–82.

been cared for.¹³ Ultimately, the goal of caring relationships is the promotion of more caring. Regarding to the problem of ethical justification, we must raise the question of whether it is the non-caring attitude, rather than caring, that has to be justified.¹⁴ After all, to care is a natural human impulse.

In this context, the status of the one-caring is ontologically different from that of the forced caregiver of the patriarchal tradition. Elevated from the ghetto of feminine/feminized labor, caring itself is seen as a universal virtue. Furthermore, Noddings distinguishes her view from agapism—which is based on the divine command to love—since the one-caring makes a deliberate choice to care.¹⁵ This basic self-concern entails vigilance against exploitation. We are ethically called to stop abuse since it is a perversion of caring.¹⁶

From the perspective of Noddings's care ethics, moral education has four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.¹⁷ In modeling, the teacher shows herself to her students as one-caring, as one who lives her ethics. In dialogue, she is attuned not just to the response of the one cared-for, but more importantly to his continued involvement with the subject matter. In practice, she develops in the student the skills

¹³ Noddings, *Caring*, 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵ The term "agapism" as it is used here concerns the debate between Hoagland and Noddings. Hoagland characterizes Noddings's care ethics as an ethics of agape primarily for its unidirectionality and its basis on the motherhood model, whereby the child is not ethically mandated to reciprocate the mother's caring. See Hoagland, "Some Concerns," 109. Noddings meanwhile disagrees with Hoagland's reading. She distinguishes her care ethics, which views persons in terms of relations, from agapism, which views them as primarily individuals. "When we define human beings as relations . . . we see that we are not 'monadic,' what we do for others, we do, in part at least, for ourselves because 'we' are products of relation, not mere constituent parts. Agape is lovely in many ways. But it rests on permanent and individual souls seeking salvation through obedience to a command to love others. It has produced saints (and who could be more individual than a saint?), separation, and soul-sickness in those who could not meet its demands. Caring rejects the notion of ontological otherness and invites us to participate in the creation of new relational 'selves.'" Nel Noddings, "A Response," *Hypatia* 5, no. 1 (1990): 124.

¹⁶ Noddings, "A Response," 123–4.

¹⁷ George Noblit, review of *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, by Nel Noddings, *Educational Studies* 24, no. 4 (1993): 370.

necessary to become one-caring. Finally, in confirmation, she attributes the best possible motive to the one cared-for. These components of moral education ground the following specific recommendations for the school system.¹⁸ I submit that these recommendations may be classified into three strategic moves.

First strategy: The dissolution of the opposition between the public and private spheres. Instead of organizational hierarchies, Noddings suggests “circles” or “chains” of caring, whereby administrators can assume the role of teachers and vice versa in alternating cycles. She advocates the de-professionalization of education inasmuch as the promotion of learning is a community obligation.

Noddings explains that her use of the term “deprofessionalization” should not be read as meaning a decrease in the caliber of teaching or the relaxation of educational standards, but as

an attempt to eliminate the special language the separates us from other educators in the community (especially parents), a reduction in the narrow specialization that carries with it reduced contact with individual children, and an increase in the spirit of caring—that spirit that many refer to as “the maternal attitude.”¹⁹

The reorganization that Noddings speaks of actually promotes the intensification of teaching skills, since the relational structures of caring entail one-on-one dialogues. For example, she points to the advantage of a personal mentorship between a “master teacher” and an “apprentice teacher,” as opposed to the practice of institutional credentialing.²⁰

¹⁸ Noddings, *Caring*, 171–201 passim. Also Nel Noddings, excerpt from *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*, in *Philosophical Documents in Education*, 3rd ed., ed. Tony W. Johnson and Ronald F. Reed (Boston: Pearson Education Inc., 2008), 223–31 passim.

¹⁹ Noddings, *Caring*, 197.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

Furthermore, families are to be actively involved in their children's learning, while the school becomes a second family. In order to achieve more intensive interaction, economies-of-scale policies have to be relaxed. Extended contract plans for teachers will ensure longer contact between them and their students.

Second strategy: The replacement of a justice-based punishment system by a caring system. Noddings is generally against traditional grading, whereby the progress of the student is publicized and evaluated based on universal standards. Subscribing to the theory of multiple intelligences, she sees the grading practice as inimical to a student's special talents or attributes. This obliteration of differences and immunity to context find an echo in a rule-based environment where penalties enforce conformity. Noddings argues that punishment only shows *that* something is wrong, but prevents the one cared-for from understanding *why* it is wrong. A punitive setup also breeds guilt and rationalization.

As an alternative, Noddings points to Buber's concept of the *I-Thou* relation as a model for the teacher-student relation, incorporating dialogue and extended commitment as discussed above. She highlights Buber's remarks about the role of the teacher being restricted to influence (as opposed to interference), in *Between Man and Man* (1965). She adapts his concept of "inclusion," in which the self shares in the subjectivity of the other. Specifically, the teacher takes in the subject matter through the student's point of view, "accepts *his* motives, reaches toward what *he* intends, so long as these motives and intentions do not force an abandonment of her own ethic."²¹

Third strategy: The promotion of care work as the core of education itself. Noddings redefines education as *moral* education, not so much in the religious as in the ethical sense. Influenced by Dewey and Freire, she puts a premium on the education of the whole person, on intellectual life in the

²¹ Ibid., 177.

service of practical concerns. In concrete terms, this entails a couple of things. First, Noddings rejects of the traditional hierarchical and methodological approach to curriculum and classroom management. She cites Dewey's advocacy of students' involvement in constructing the objectives of their own learning, as well as classroom collaborations that anticipate activities in a workplace setting.²² Second, with regard to moral education, the teacher must prioritize relatedness and caring, so as to impress upon the student the ethical ideal. Such an ideal is not separate from the abstract concepts learned in the classroom. "Everything we do, then, as teachers, has moral overtones What the teacher reflects to [the student] continually is the best possible picture consonant with reality."²³

Moral education also incorporates caring apprenticeships for students, in which they are encouraged to apply their knowledge to the service of others and of their own ethical ideals. Finally, along with a pedagogy of the oppressed, a "pedagogy of the oppressor" is also integrated into the curriculum. The latter acquaints members of privileged groups with the ways that their cultures and lifestyles have caused the suffering of others, with a view to correcting the imbalance.

Care Ethics in the Filipino Educational Setting

In many ways, care ethics mirrors values, attitudes, and traits commonly associated with Filipinos. Some of the most salient concepts include *hiya* (shame), *loob* or *kalooban* (inner or authentic self), and *pakikisama* (cooperation).²⁴ *Hiya* underscores the influence of the group or community in the construction of individual identity. *Loob* points to the importance of

²² Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (New York: Teacher's College Press 1992), 11.

²³ Noddings, *Caring*, 179.

²⁴ For comprehensive philosophical discussions of these cultural traits, see Rolando Gripaldo, ed., *Filipino Cultural Traits: Claro R. Ceniza Lectures* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005), and Leonardo Mercado, *Filipino Thought* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2000).

integrity, as indicated by harmony between one's soul and the cosmos. Finally, *pakikisama* demonstrates the impact of relatedness on one's choices or actions.

Linguistically, the Filipino capacity for caring is encapsulated by the evocative phrase "*pusong mamon*." Literally, it means "heart like soft bread." Thus, a person who has such a heart tends to be inclined toward empathy and pity, and generosity and altruism. He or she may be very hesitant in or averse to enforcing strict rules or meting out punishment, especially in the face of minimal infractions. Although in certain contexts the phrase may involve the negative connotation of "emotional" or "weak-willed," it may also be seen in a positive light. The object to which the heart is compared is pleasant and desirable. It may even be considered a compliment. It is very close in meaning to the English phrase "heart of gold," though the Filipino version does not emphasize material value so much as the ideas of *softness* and *sustenance*.²⁵ "*Pusong mamon*" may describe the outlook of both males and females, although it is generally considered a maternal attribute or virtue.

An application of Noddings's care ethics in the Filipino educational setting would not constitute too much of a leap from the background culture. Nonetheless, it would help in rendering in philosophical language some of the moral dilemmas that a Filipino teacher may face in relating with her students. It also points to the indispensability of the ethic of justice and principle-based thinking in any balanced care work.

I will discuss here two cases of academic dishonesty, which I have had to resolve personally, as the persons involved were my students. In both cases, I have had to weigh two apparently competing considerations. One is the caring work to which I'm committed as a teacher, and another is the obligation to enforce the policies of my university. Academic dishonesty,

²⁵ It is worth noting that the idiom's antonym, "heart of stone," has a literal meaning that is the same in both English and Filipino (i.e. "*pusong bato*").

which broadly covers both cheating on exams and plagiarism in research work or written assignments, is considered a major offense. The handbook considers the class of major offenses punishable by a failing grade and either suspension or expulsion, depending on the gravity of the act. In actual practice, many professors exercise their own discretion in dealing with transgressors. If they decide to go through the formal grievance process, a committee is formed which is tasked to implement the guidelines. Some teachers prefer to go by the book, while others are more lenient and either impose penalties less severe than those indicated in the handbook or do not bother to report the offense at all. However, it is generally recognized that, in principle, cheating and plagiarism entail the same disciplinary measures. Students are oriented about the rules upon entering the university, and teachers are supposed to oversee their implementation. In what follows, I will be arguing against the tacit assumption that lumps together all instances of academic dishonesty. It is outside the scope of my paper to recommend detailed changes in the student handbook, but I hope that my discussion would provide the rationale for making such changes.

In each case of the cases I discuss, I arrived at a resolution by applying Noddings's notion of the caring relation and re-conceptualizing it to incorporate elements of justice ethics and the idea of autonomy.²⁶ I will first present the cases and my decision in each one. Afterward, I shall explain why I arrived at such decisions and the moral concepts I used as a framework in guiding my actions.

The first case involves plagiarism. Given the proliferation of digital sources, it has become fairly common for students to copy passages from the internet and to paste these, without acknowledgement, onto their own

²⁶ In particular, I draw from the ideas of the following: James Scott Johnston, "Does a Sentiment-Based Ethics of Caring Improve Upon a Principles-Based One? The problem of impartial morality," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 3 (2008): 436–52; Virginia Held, "The Meshing of Care and Justice," *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 128–32; and Davion, "Autonomy, Integrity, and Care."

work. Plagiarized passages range from a few verbatim or paraphrased lines to pervasive lifting. The usual explanation offered is that the student has forgotten to cite the sources and that, therefore, the plagiarism was unintentional. Since the definition of violations of scholarly standards disregards intent, usually the ruling on plagiarism merely depends on *prima facie* evidence. The stigma against plagiarism has been reinforced by cases in recent years in which prominent individuals have been disgraced, forced to resign from their positions, or stripped of their academic degrees. Thus, it is imperative now more than ever to educate students about the issue.

The plagiarism committed by Lawrence was of the non-pervasive kind. Three or four sentences were lifted from an online article and inserted into the last part of his paper. The paper was submitted to me as an optional work for bonus points. Upon realizing what he had done, I met with him and discussed the matter. I explained the university policy with regard to plagiarism. He did not deny what he did and appealed for leniency. He was scheduled to graduate the following term, and if I were to follow the penalty indicated in the student handbook, he would have to repeat the course, hence delaying his graduation. I decided to give him a failing grade for the paper he submitted, but not for the course as a whole. I also did not file a disciplinary case that could lead to a permanent record of a major offense. I talked to him earnestly about the gravity of his mistake and counseled him about the importance of properly citing his sources. This implied our commitment to moral integrity and basic respect for other people. Near tears, he thanked me and swore that he had learned his lesson.

The second case concerned cheating during a major exam. Cheating in exams may involve copying from or sharing one's answers with another, leaking exam questions or taking advantage of leaked questions, consulting one's notes while the exam is ongoing, and other similar acts. In the case of Joshua, I caught him surreptitiously reading his notes during an essay exam. I had to approach him to stop the act, which caught the attention of the whole class. I took his paper and his notes and requested him to leave the room, telling him we would talk when the exam is over. During our meeting, he said that he had lost his composure and had resorted to

peering at his notes. I explained the university's policy on cheating. I told him that although I would not file the requisite disciplinary case that could lead to a major offense for him, I had no choice but to give him a failing grade.

There are a number of salient differences between the two cases which led to a unique resolution for each one. Both plagiarism and cheating are acts of academic dishonesty, and the university has a uniform policy for such acts. Nonetheless, following the concern for particularity emphasized in Noddings's care ethics, I considered specific circumstances relevant to decision-making. I treated each student differently. However, in neither case did I feel that the student deserved the permanent black mark of a major offense on his record. In my moral estimation, the official penalty for academic dishonesty is too onerous. Its implications for students' future are too grave and are surely not warranted by a momentary and all-too-common mistake.

In saying this, I do not mean to trivialize academic offenses, deny students' responsibility for their own actions, or ignore the obvious uses of discipline. Rather, I argue for a more personal (as opposed to institutional) process of rectifying behavior, without recourse to punishments with lasting consequences. In fact, the caring attitude shifts the focus away from punishment and toward more constructive ways of educating the one cared-for about right and wrong. The fact that a punitive system is in place is not necessarily a guarantee of moral awareness. One could imagine the all-too-common situation wherein a person follows the rules, not because it is the right thing to do, but because he or she desires to avoid punishment. Such a fear- and shame-based system discourages moral reflection and seems to reward slyness instead.

Since the one-caring also owes it to the one cared-for to teach him, by example, about responsibility, some measures for behavioral correction were definitely called for. Though I hesitate to call these measures "punishments," nonetheless, they may have felt punitive given the effort they demanded. In Lawrence's case, I had to reject his entire paper on account of the plagiarized passage. In Joshua's case, he had to repeat the course. The exam he had cheated on constituted a huge percentage of the

final grade, and an entire class was witness to what he did. I had the additional obligation of strongly discouraging everyone else from emulating him. Compare this with Lawrence's case, in which the schoolwork he had been dishonest about was not actually a course requirement. The plagiarized part also constituted one short paragraph. Perhaps my decision would have been different—he would have gotten a failing grade, for example—if he had committed plagiarism in a final paper, if the extent of his plagiarism were pervasive, or if he were to repeat the act.

To this care-based approach, a couple of objections may be raised. The first concerns its apparent predilection for differential treatment, which could cause outrage or sap motivation. The second concerns what may be the undue influence of feelings, sentiments, or intuitions in decision-making. Can the one-caring be accused of making irrational choices?

To the first objection, I argue that what may be perceived as differential treatment may in fact be the caring response to the unjust effects of uniform policies. Sameness does not always redound to fairness, and may frequently vitiate it. Justice is popularly represented as a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales. Unfortunately, such an image conceals the ways that blindness may itself be unjust. In light of these considerations, it is important for us to revisit the traditional care/justice dichotomy and re-conceptualize both terms.

Johnston's critique of Noddings is illustrative. He questions her outright rejection of the categorical imperative, arguing that a certain reading of Kant shows that his notion of justice contains elements that are consistent with the care paradigm. Moral imperatives are less abstract formulas than "rules of moral salience," which in turn are constructed and applied within close networks of people.²⁷ The rules of moral salience are part of the individual's upbringing, whereby he or she realizes that *duties* are owed to others we come in contact with and that *maxims* are situational.

²⁷ Johnston, "Sentiment-Based Ethics of Caring," 445–46, adapting Barbara Herman's phrase.

Without this lifelong commitment to the practice of our duties, human life would be brutish. “Without already-present ethical principles existing in our webs of family and community that are then internalized, practiced and made habitual, we would have little more recourse than self-interest.”²⁸ He summarizes his defense of Kantianism against Noddings’s criticism of principle-based ethics as follows:

inasmuch as our moral development and practice always takes place within a deliberative field (to use Herman’s term) that includes our maxim formation regarding the relationships we have to others, we cannot but make room for the distinction between strangers and those closest to us. With our “rules of moral salience” to guide us, developed as they are (in part) in the manner Kant discusses in the *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, we are already attuned morally as to what to do in specific contexts and circumstances with others. When we see Kantian ethics this way, maxim-formation that varies according to circumstance and context but does not contradict itself logically or practically predominates. Thus, we do not need, in most instances, recourse to an external principle; the principle is already a part of us. Nor do we worry or fear that, somehow, we will be less sensitive to the needs of strangers than to those most important to us.²⁹

Thus, the kind of reasoning entailed by obedience to policies becomes less abstract when we consider what policies are for. For example, the policy of a failing grade for academic dishonesty benefits the one cared-for through an unforgettable lesson in the value of integrity. It falls to the teacher to enforce policies in a caring way. Care—as the most basic moral

²⁸ Ibid., 448.

²⁹ Ibid., 450–51.

value necessary to life—is the wider moral framework into which justice should be fitted. Held writes, “Within a network of caring, we can and should demand justice, but justice should not then push care to the margins.”³⁰

To the second objection that care ethics is unduly biased towards the affect as opposed to the intellect, we may also respond by deconstructing this dichotomy. Emotions *are* rational; the intellectual mode is not mutually exclusive with the affective mode. They may even enhance each other. As Noddings writes, “in caring, my rational powers are not diminished but they are enrolled in the service of my engrossment in the other.”³¹ Indeed, feminists have long since pointed to the usefulness of emotions as epistemological tools.³² Besides, one may wonder whether a completely emotionless state could be achieved, and whether one may even call it “rational.” For example, the fearless driver who goes over the speed limit on a mountain highway on a moonless night is certainly not being rational. One of the clinical conditions of psychopathy is the incapacity to experience normal human emotions. Finally, with regard to the educational setting, the most effective teachers have consistently been the ones who could emotionally relate with their students. Absent this emotional connection to the teacher and the subject matter, the student can hardly be motivated to learn.

But while emotions are necessary to wise decision-making, it is important not to romanticize them. We must not ignore the ways in which certain emotions like empathy may be detrimental unless anchored on a

³⁰ Held, “Meshing of Care and Justice,” 132.

³¹ Noddings, *Caring*, 36.

³² The idea that emotions lead us astray is based on an uninformed view that confuses them with *feelings*. Feelings may be symptoms of an underlying emotion. For example, anger may be felt as sadness or depression, especially in the case of women who are socialized to internalize, rather than vent, their dissatisfactions. Unless we overhaul our epistemological framework, much of our reasoning may appear to us to be objective or logical, when in fact it may have already been hijacked by the passions. See Alison Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” in *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York: Routledge 1996).

healthy sense of self or autonomy. I think Noddings is mistaken in claiming that the failure or refusal to care diminishes the ethical ideal, or that it is an evil. She writes, “when caring must retreat to an inner circle, confine itself, and consciously exclude particular persons or groups, the ideal is diminished, that is, it is quantitatively reduced.”³³ I concur with Davion that care should not be viewed as an absolute value, and that not all caring relationships are automatically good.³⁴ It is important for the one-caring to maintain healthy boundaries. This is especially true if her identity has been partly shaped by the experience of oppression, e.g., as a woman or as a person of color. The impulse to please, to avoid confrontation, or to try to prevent hurt at the expense of truth, must be resisted. If a student has to repeat a course because he or she has not acquired the minimum skills, a teacher must not give in to the tearful plea for a passing grade. To do so would be a distortion of caring. The one-caring can practice empathy even as she denies what the one cared-for wants, or even foils his plans. As Davion writes, “some things are wrong, no matter who does them. This is incompatible with an unconditional commitment to support another’s goals, no matter what they are.”³⁵

Davion sees moral integrity and autonomy as correctives to care.³⁶ Diana Meyers’s account of autonomy as competency, which Davion highlights, is particularly instructive for one who has *pusong mamon*. Based on “responsibility reasoning,” this account of autonomy makes the one-caring ask, “Can I bear to be the person who can do that?”³⁷ This forces her to draw the line between what she is willing to do and what she is not willing to do for the one cared-for, based on an integrated sense of her moral self. Above all, one must not betray oneself. For instance, a teacher

³³ Noddings, *Caring*, 114–15

³⁴ Davion, “Autonomy, Integrity, and Care,” 173.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

may be moved to consider giving a passing grade to the diligent student who misses the mark by a few points. But for the one who has missed it by a lot, she must not compromise her academic standards by giving him a higher grade than he deserves.

Conclusion

This special brew of care and justice, empathy and autonomy, and emotion and reason constitutes my re-conceptualization of Noddings's care ethics in the Filipino educational setting. The correctives to care that I have outlined, drawing from the work of some critics of Noddings, are necessary if we wish to avoid distortions of the caring relationship. People who experience interlocking oppressions, such as Filipino women, have to be especially vigilant about such distortions. We will not be doing anyone a favor if we don't adopt a critical and considered approach to that which feels most natural to us—caring itself.

In view of the recent criticisms of Noddings, and of care ethics in general, I have outlined the ways in which principle-based morality or the ethic of justice may be reread or reconceptualized. The result is a more nuanced view that balances the concerns of relationality and egoism, the affect and reason. Lest these suggestions be dismissed as too pat, I refer the reader to my discussion of the two specific cases of academic dishonesty, since my arguments will not be intelligible outside of their specific context. I submit that a formulaic account of the application of care ethics to the Filipino educational setting cannot be undertaken without a requisite discussion of particular situations. We can, however, describe ethical tendencies or directions in broad strokes, which I have summarized in terms of Noddings's three main strategies in moral education. I hope that this exposition would encourage further discussion about and research into the affinities between Filipino culture and care ethics, leading to a philosophical grounding of concepts and practices that are actually already in use in our milieu.

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