
CARING IN SCHOOLS IS NOT ENOUGH:
COMMUNITY, NARRATIVE, AND THE LIMITS OF ALTERITY

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INTRODUCTION

"Care" theory has become a staple of educational scholarship over the last decade, growing from Carol Gilligan's careful rethinking of Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development in *In a Different Voice*, and Nel Noddings's in depth examination of what a practice of caring might entail in her *Caring*. Each year brings a range of new work on different aspects of "caring" and schools. Care scholars address issues ranging from moral theory and the experience of women, to the relation between caring and critical thinking, to service learning.¹ In the midst of this diversity, there is no single monolithic "theory" of care. Yet, "care" can, at times, become a relatively vague place-holder for those who wish to promote a more nurturing approach to schooling. Therefore, this essay focuses in on the work of perhaps the field's richest, and most complex thinker: Nel Noddings. In a sense, this essay attempts what Peter Elbow has called the "believing game,"² an effort to "see" through the perspective of Noddings's caring — given the limits of my own experience — as I try to map out the possibilities and limits of caring from the "inside," as it were, focusing on the implications of Noddings's caring as a foundation for school communities.

In her writings, Noddings rejects what she calls "justice" or "principled" approaches to ethics because she argues they represent essentially masculine practices that treat human beings as classifiable and comparable objects instead of unique beings.³ In caring, in contrast, we treat each situation and each cared-for as unique. Many of Noddings's critics have argued, however, that caring alone, without an accompanying ethic of justice to supplement it, is too weak an ethic to resist systemic oppression or to ensure a moral commitment to those who cannot be cared for directly, among other problems.⁴ Although Noddings responds, in part, that

1. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Moral Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Barbara Thayer-Bacon, "Caring and its Relationship to Critical Thinking," *Educational Theory* 43, no. 3 (1993): 323-40; and Carol Maybach, "Investigating Urban Community Needs: Service Learning from a Social Justice Perspective," *Education and Urban Society* 28, no. 2 (1996): 224-36.

2. Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

3. See, for example, Nel Noddings, *Women and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 43 and 184-87. Her point (see p. 184) is not that principles themselves become entirely unimportant, but that they become considerations among many others in the larger ethical activity of caring that I describe below.

4. See, for example, the symposium in *Hypatia* 5, no. 1 (1990). See also Jean Grimshaw, *Philosophy and Feminist Thinking* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and Deimut Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), among many others.

"reducing everything in moral theory to caring is indeed likely to be an error — as are most reductionist attempts — and I did not intend to do this,"⁵ she nonetheless seeks in her writings to *minimize* the "abstracting" effects of an ethic of justice as much as possible.⁶ Since the argument that caring cannot operate without justice has been addressed extensively in the literature, I focus on a different issue here. What kind of local community, I ask, does the practice of caring enable and what does it exclude?

Noddings explores the issue of caring's relation to community herself in a recent article, in which she asks if caring might serve as the basis for a mode of community in general (and for schools in specific) that escapes what she calls the "dark" sides often entailed in liberal or communitarian approaches. In her article, Noddings rejects "liberal" approaches like that of John Rawls for a number of reasons, stressing liberalism's focus on contract-like, universalized, "justice" oriented "formal rules and rights." "The emphasis on negative duties" in liberal theory, Noddings says, "has eroded not only a sense of responsibility for one another but even our understanding of human sociality."⁷ If liberalism fails because it promotes a society of atomistic individuals with protected rights and few communal connections, however, she thinks communitarianism is equally dangerous for the opposite reason. Communitarian models threaten to create societies where the individual is lost in a mass subjectivity. For Noddings, "communitarian" approaches are shadowed by extreme interpretations like that of Adolph Hitler, for example, who argued that the Aryan "willingly subjects his own ego to the life of the community" (*OC*, p. 255) — although she is not arguing that communitarian approaches will necessarily lead to fascism.

Noddings cites a number of characteristics she thinks an "authentic" community must include. She wishes to escape community's "tendencies toward parochialism, conformity, exclusion, distrust (or hatred) of outsiders, and coercion" (*OC*, p. 258). Yet at the same time, she realizes it is critical that communities foster individual commitment as they serve "the great human need to be part of something significant beyond the self," and "the equally human desire for unity — a self that can meet the world as both individual and part without loss of integrity" (*OC*, p. 260). A community, as well, she says, must "stand for something. 'We' refers to a certain kind of person, a vision of the good life, and a way in which life should be lived" (*OC*, p. 259). She declares, then, that "at the philosophical level, our problem is to reconceptualize the self in a way that avoids as nearly as possible the split into

5. *Hypatia*, 121.

6. Running through Noddings's argument in *Women and Evil* is her conviction that the neglect of relation, the "separation" involved in, for example, becoming emotionally distant judges with respect to those we affect, is a central component of "the basic states of consciousness associated with evil" (p. 229).

7. Nel Noddings, "On Community," *Educational Theory* 46, no. 3 (1996): 252. This article will be cited as *OC* in the text for all subsequent references.

individual entity and member of groups" (OC, p. 261), escaping the "dark" sides of liberalism and communitarianism, but that maintains the important aspects of community. Noddings says that "a doubt arises whether care (any more than justice, liberty, or equality) can provide a *center* for community," although it "seems to be a *quality* of community that might keep its darker propensities from emerging" (OC, p. 265). She concludes, nonetheless, with the hope that studies of different communities will, in fact, show that "nonviolence and care...may provide a center for community" (OC, p. 267).

Caring does seem to avoid the "split into individual entity and member of groups" because it encourages the formation of individuals whose selves are defined relationally. Yet, as this essay will show, caring as a practice tends to avoid the issue of groups, of any kind of coherent collective, almost entirely. Focused on a myriad of unique relations with multiple others, a theorist, teacher, or policymaker operating only from the ethical standpoint of caring, I will argue, has no tools for conceptualizing what Hannah Arendt terms a "public space."

The next few sections explore the kind of practice Noddings seems to have created in caring, attempting to plot out its limits and possibilities. I then look to the work of Arendt, noting that despite its own limitations, Arendt's theory of the "public" seems to present solutions to many of the dilemmas and limitations presented by caring. The paper concludes by arguing that we must look to *multiple* practices in our effort to create communities in schools. Each practice has its own limitations and possibilities — each has its own "dark side."

AN OVERVIEW OF CARING

Noddings's caring is based largely on a unique relation between two individuals that maintains the "otherness" of each of the participants, and it draws fundamentally on Noddings's belief that every human being is absolutely unique.⁸ In caring, the carer receives the cared-for in an attitude of "engrossment"; the cared-for "fills the firmament." At least initially as carers "we receive what-is-there as nearly as possible without evaluation or assessment" from the cared-for.⁹ "Although I can never accomplish it, entirely," Noddings says, "I try to apprehend the reality of the other" (C, p. 14). At the same time, caring also involves what Noddings calls "motivational displacement on the part of the one-caring," where "I receive what the other conveys, and I want to respond in the way that furthers the other's purpose or project."¹⁰ "My rational powers are not diminished," she says, "but they are enrolled in the service of my engrossment in the other" (C, p. 36). In caring, one becomes the motive power behind the dreams and desires of another. Caring interactions, then, are always unequal, although in balanced relations individuals alternate fluidly between carer and cared-for (CCS, p. 91).

8. Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995). This book will be cited as *PE* in the text for all subsequent references.

9. Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 34. This book will be cited as *C* in the text for all subsequent references.

10. Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 16. This book will be cited as *CCS* in the text for all subsequent references.

The "cared-for" also has a part to play in sustaining caring, and completes the caring relation by essentially being herself. "To behave ethically in the potential caring relation, the cared-for must turn freely toward his own projects, pursue them vigorously, and share his accounts of them spontaneously" (C, p. 75).¹¹ It is this free reciprocity, this honest disclosure of self and acceptance of the nurturing of the carer that allows the relation to continue and grow (C, p. 48). Without response, the caring relation is stunted and in danger of disappearing. This need to have the caring response completed also places limitations on the scope of caring. One cannot care for someone distant, with whom the possibility of completing the caring relation does not exist (C, p. 86), a point about which, as I have already noted, many have criticized her.

Noddings developed caring as an essentially "feminine" response to what she perceived as the "male" ethic of justice that has permeated human history.¹² She denies that caring is a principle- or rule-governed ethic, a form of moral reasoning she describes, after Friedrich Nietzsche, as dependent "on a concept of 'sameness'" (C, p. 85) because it seeks to discover similarities between different moral conflicts in an attempt to place all conflicts under the same abstract rubric. In justice, *rules* remove the unique qualities of situated ethical conflicts, even though "in doing this, we often lose the very qualities or factors that gave rise to the moral question in the situation" (C, p. 85). Rules and principles, for Noddings, create essentially "artificial situations contrived in a parallel world of abstraction" (C, p. 109) where those who judge are supposed to judge from a position of disinterest.

Noddings seeks an ethic that can exist not "ideally" but in "practice." Caring cannot "idealize the impossible so that we may escape into ideal abstraction" (C, p. 80). Caring is a "tough" ethic that seeks to preserve "both the group and the individual and, as we have already seen, it limits our obligation so that it may realistically be met" (C, p. 100). Carers must, for example, maintain themselves, or they will be unable to continue caring (C, p. 105). While caring does not operate, like justice, under abstract principles, it *is* guided by what Noddings calls "criteria." Caring for another often requires action; carers must grapple with difficult ethical conflicts *with* and sometimes *for* the cared-for in complex situations. Noddings notes, for example, that "there seem to be two criteria [for assuming obligation to others]: the 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" (C, p. 86). Perhaps the most crucial criterion of caring requires that carers nurture an attitude of caring among those who are cared-for, ensuring that they become carers in turn.

Therefore, despite its openness to the other, caring is not simply a permissive ethic. Carers help cared-fors actualize their better selves, selves that are themselves

11. In her earlier work, Noddings decides to represent the carer consistently with feminine pronouns, while she represents the cared-for with masculine pronouns (C, p. 4). I will use the female pronoun as the generic.

12. See Noddings, *Women and Evil*, especially.

oriented toward caring, that define themselves relationally and draw much of their self-definition from caring relations with other people. Noddings writes that, "from the perspective of caring...we are ethically called to stop abuse — not to encourage it by supposing we deserve ill-treatment. Accepting such behavior is a perversion of caring for it encourages uncaring behavior from the abuser."¹³ Encouraging ill treatment from another does not help this other develop a "better," more caring self, nor does it show potential for growth in relation with this person in the future — thus it is not caring. "Letting the other be," she says, discussing Jacques Derrida, "does not mean neglecting the other or abstaining from any intervention or attempt to persuade" (*PE*, p. 194).

Although Noddings asserts that caring has a naturalistic basis, she is nonetheless careful to establish a philosophical basis that allows us to treat it as a cultural practice. In fact, Noddings's "naturalistic" argument appears extremely tenuous. With Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, I wonder if it might not be better to argue that children "come to treat people with care not because the impulse to care has developed, but because they have learned that this is appropriate behavior under certain circumstances."¹⁴ Despite Noddings's belief in caring's "pre-cultural" basis, it is because caring is a practice into which individuals must be apprenticed that Noddings argues that schools, for example, should be organized around it. Because I do not have the space to argue the issue here, however, it is important to note that I am bracketing the issue of whether caring is natural or only cultural, treating it simply as a learned social practice like any other.

COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CARING?

In the sections that follow, I will explore caring more theoretically. However, I think one can see the effect of not being able to theorize a public space or common projects in the specific examples of caring that Noddings's presents in her work. For example, the following dialogue represents Noddings's effort to describe effective "interpersonal reasoning" that is oriented towards caring. "As Norma Haan describes it," Noddings tells us, "interpersonal reasoning involves 'moral dialogue between agents who strive to achieve balanced agreement, based on compromise they reach or on their joint discovery of interests they hold in common.'"¹⁵ The caring dialogue Noddings is describing with the Haan quote takes place between Mary Jane (M.J., the carer) and Carolyn (C., the cared-for). Carolyn tells Mary Jane that she "plans to cut school in the afternoon to counsel her boyfriend, Robbie, who is depressed and threatening to run away":

M.J.: I don't think that's such a good idea. You can't just cut your classes when you're doing so well and your academic status really matters to you. Robbie never did care about school, but he ought to realize that you do.

13. Noddings, "Response," 125.

14. Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, "Essay Review," *Teachers College Record* 8, no. 2 (1985): 281.

15. Nel Noddings, "Stories in Dialogue: Caring and Interpersonal Reasoning," in *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, ed. Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 158.

C.: He isn't thinking about school at all. I'm worried that he'll do something crazy. I'm not asking you to cover for me or anything.

M.J.: Can't it wait until tonight or the weekend?

C.: I don't think so.

M.J.: Well,...I've just got to say this. Robbie isn't worth the risks you take.

C.: You may be right...But I can't just ignore how miserable he is right now

M.J.: Your sense of responsibility! Tell you what. Go now. I can cover for you...long as you get back in time for math. Old Lady Biggs will never buy it, and you've got a shot at the math prize. Don't blow it! Okay?

C.: Thanks, Mary Jane. I'll be back for math.¹⁶

As a carer in a unique situation, Mary Jane agrees to cover for Carolyn, even though it is against the rules. Noddings emphasizes that the dialogue above does not represent "logico-mathematical reasoning" guided by rules and points out that, as is usual in caring, "both girls seem tacitly to have established two goals: to maintain their own relation of trust and affection and to seek a resolution of the problem that will be satisfactory to Carolyn. Mary Jane recognizes her friend's need."¹⁷ However, while the dialogue seems clearly an example of caring, it does *not* match with her quote from Haan. Carolyn's problem is Carolyn's, and involves her openness to yet another, Robbie. There is no *common* problem involved here, except in the sense that Mary Jane is worried about Carolyn; Mary takes on Carolyn's problem as a carer in an effort to deepen and extend their relationship while encouraging Carolyn's efforts to become a carer. It is not an example that promotes, as Haan says, the reaching of a compromise through the discovery of "joint interests." It is not a case of two individuals taking principled stances with respect to each other on a common issue, as Arendt will demand. Instead, as is required in caring, Mary Jane gives her motive force over to Carolyn's project. In my reading, nearly all, if not all, of Noddings's examples operate in the same manner, following the strictures of the practice of caring.

In other areas where one would expect Noddings to speak of some common project — for example, in "caring" for the environment — Noddings does say that students should join groups, but when she explains concretely what she means, she recommends only that students "need to be involved in a personal, concrete way, and they need to know how to vote and which groups deserve support" — all couched in fairly general language (*CCS*, p. 135). In the actual projects she describes in more detail, she does say that students "should contribute to the maintaining of gardens in parks and school yards," but again, when she speaks specifically about students working together she notes that "some service activities can be fruitfully combined as older students work with younger ones on various environmental projects" (*CCS*, p. 136), following, again, the "paired" and unequal structure of caring. Noddings's actual description of what a caring school would look like, in *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, tends to focus on *individual* student projects that are supported in a caring way through the efforts of carers. My point here is not that Noddings says explicitly that students in a caring school should not work together on projects. As she does in

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 159.

these examples, she alludes at times to this need. And in her recent work, Noddings speaks more directly of the need for collaboration on common efforts, noting, for example, that "students from different cultures need opportunities to work together not only on intergroup problems and disputes but also on activities with a common aim" (*PE*, p. 193). I will try to show, however, that the practice of "coexploration" is, in many ways, antithetical to the practice of caring. Noddings's focus on the uniqueness of each individual paradoxically makes a common space where individuals might act together in this way impossible to achieve. Her avoidance of collaboration, I will argue, is not accidental, but internal to the very structure of caring itself.

CARING AND COMMUNITARIAN THEORY: NARRATIVE AS "HORIZON"

As I noted in my introduction, in her essay "On Community" Noddings takes a stance in opposition to the "communitarian" model of community, and she cites Alasdair MacIntyre as an important representative. Yet, on closer analysis, caring actually resembles the kinds of "communitarian" practices MacIntyre describes in a number of ways.

In essence, MacIntyre argues that human behavior would be utterly incoherent if it were not situated in the context of a cultural tradition, or set of cultural narratives. He says that "narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions,"¹⁸ and for MacIntyre, these shared cultural narratives provide "roles" within which individuals can act out their lives. He maintains that "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"¹⁹ One must know what characters one is supposed to play and what characters others are playing to be able to respond and act coherently.

Authentic human lives and human communities, MacIntyre says, are organized around "practices," by which he means "any coherent and complex form of socially established human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence" that are defined by the practice. A practice (architecture for example) is too complex to be defined in rules. The practice of architecture is developed and renewed at each moment in the process of participation. One achieves the "good" in architecture by performing the practice with excellence, and "virtues" are learned dispositions that sustain this quest for the good. Thus, like caring, the good is internal to the practice and not aimed at something beyond it. To participate in architecture is to join a conversation — each building designed is meant as a skillful "move" within the narrative tradition.

On a certain level, then, caring seems quite similar to what MacIntyre describes. Caring is clearly a learned practice, acquired through apprenticeship with others more skilled. Noddings herself says that "I have not used the term 'practice' lightly.... My engrossment and motivational displacement push me to acquire skills

18. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. 2d ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1984), 208.

19. *Ibid.*, 216.

in caretaking" (C, p. 122). Caring seems to operate as a coherent practice, with internal goods, virtues, "excellences," and criteria that are defined loosely by the practice itself and which take on specific meaning only in concrete contexts. As Noddings notes, in education the goal of enhancing caring "functions as end, means, and a criterion for judging suggested means. It establishes the climate, a first approximation to the range of acceptable practices, and a lens through which all practices and possible practices are examined" (C, p. 172-173).

Yet it is here that the similarity with MacIntyre ends. For MacIntyre, a shared practice creates a common framework within which individuals might both judge and act *together*. Action in a common practice is meant to be comprehensible to the entire group of participants, providing a "horizon" within which certain kinds of conversation "make sense" to all. They create, in some sense, an intersubjective background within which participants can have coherent disagreements. MacIntyre says he believes individuals are unique because they are "the subject of a history that is [their] own and no one else's, that has its own peculiar meaning,"²⁰ and that an individual's acts are ultimately made intelligible by "a *particular* individual's history of action, belief, experience and interaction."²¹ However, in practice this belief in individual alterity is not generally pursued. At times it seems almost as if the practices themselves do the arguing, unencumbered by the unique individuals that "carry" them. Often MacIntyre describes traditions almost as if they were mass subjects, perfectly capable of developing into the future without any help from individual humans.

This, of course, is the aspect of communitarianism that Noddings fears. Caring is such an odd practice, because Noddings is quite clear that the *goal* of caring is to help others actualize their "alterity," or absolute otherness, in some sense to help them *escape* from a common horizon of this kind. If MacIntyre's theory aims at the creation of a shared structure of judgment, Noddings strives for *unique* relations between individuals, actualizing unique selves, creating, as we will see, unique and not communally shared narratives. Each carer judges uniquely in each situation with each person (C, p. 83). A "caring" action, I will argue, does not constitute a "move" within a larger cultural tradition as MacIntyre has defined this.

Caring, then, is a shared practice that does not operate within a communal narrative. It aspires to create something that MacIntyre, I think, would say cannot coherently exist. And yet it draws on possibilities inherent in MacIntyre's own description of a communal practice. Where MacIntyre stresses the common nature of the "virtues," Noddings stresses the unique nature of these virtues as they are appropriated by each individual and then applied to each particular context.

"CONFIRMATION": RECONSTRUCTING A UNIQUE NARRATIVE OF SELF

How is this "practice" possible? To understand how caring operates, I want to look closely at an example of a "caring" act that will give a sense of the deep

20. *Ibid.*, " 217.

21. *Ibid.*, 29, italics mine.

complexity and subtle process caring entails. As I noted already, Noddings argues paradoxically *both* that caring must leave the other free to be who she chooses, *and* that a carer will help the other choose a “better” self as defined by the practice of caring itself. Embedded in caring, then, is a theory of self-construction.

An important aspect of caring is what Noddings calls, drawing from Martin Buber, “confirmation,”²² where the carer reveals to the cared-for “an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts” (C, p. 193). When we confirm someone, Noddings says, we attribute

the best possible motive consonant with reality. When someone commits an act we find reprehensible, we ask ourselves what might have motivated such an act. Often it is not hard to identify an array of possible motives ranging from the gross and the grubby to some that are acceptable or even admirable. This array is not constructed in abstraction. We build it from a knowledge of this particular other and by listening carefully to what she or he tells us. The motive we attribute has to be a real, a genuine possibility. Then we can open our dialogue with something like, “I know you were trying to help your friend...” or “I know what you’re trying to accomplish....” It will be clear that we disapprove of this particular act, but it will also be clear to the other that we see a self that is better than this act. Often the other will respond with enormous relief. *Here is this significant and perceptive other who sees through the smallness or meanness of my present behavior a self that is better and a real possibility* (CCS, p. 25).

What she seems to be advocating in this aspect of caring is that carers help cared-for reconstruct their past selves into ethical selves. The carer provides a narrative framework, drawn from caring, that the cared-for can draw upon to structure her actions. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre describe something like this when they show how people continually “position” each other in conversations by placing others into a story, into a narrative framework under which their actions take on a specific meaning.²³ Out of a multitude of possible narratives about the “reprehensible” act, the carer constructs a narrative that most closely matches the kind of ethical struggle represented by the practice of caring. In helping the cared-for reconstruct her past, the carer helps the cared-for see that she already contains the seeds of an ethical, caring self. “Confirmation,” Noddings says, “lifts us toward our vision of a better self” (CCS, p. 25).

This does not mean, Noddings says, that one changes what “really happened” into some fantastic and imaginary past. This is because we have access to our past only by reconstructing it in narrative. Karl Kroeber notes, for example, that no one’s narrative of the past appeals “transparently, directly, to an actuality other than that of his linguistic fiction.”²⁴ In a sense, there “is” no past that can be grasped without a narrative structure within which we can make it comprehensible. So Noddings seems to be recommending only that the carer provide for the cared-for a different yet still plausible structure for organizing and retrieving her past, a narrative that represents a “real possibility.”

22. Sec, especially, Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), chap. 3.

23. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre, “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 20, no. 1 (1990): 48.

24. Karl Kroeber, *Rereading/Retelling: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 106; see also Louis Mink, *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 186.

Yet, the way Davies and Harre describe this kind of narrative "placement" of another, it still seems to involve a level of domination. They argue that by locating another within a narrative in a conversation, participants "make (or attempt to make) their own and each other's actions socially determinate," they give a kind of social sense to the action being discussed.²⁵ *This*, participants seem to say, *is the shared cultural narrative under which your actions make sense*. How, then, can caring, in helping the other, avoid initiating the other into a narrative of the carer's making? How does such an act preserve the alterity of another?

To some extent, some level of domination of the other, of initiating the cared-for into the traditions of one's community, seems inescapable. Noddings herself notes that caring is "not unconcerned with individual rights, the common good, or community tradition, but it de-emphasizes these concepts and recasts them in terms of relation."²⁶ Elsewhere she says that MacIntyre "rightly rejects the possibility of a neutral stand — a perspective outside all traditions" (*OC*, p. 256). Again, Noddings means caring to be an entirely realistic ethic — treating each person and situation as a singularity is only an ideal that is made concrete within the limitations of every particular occasion.

However, it is through a vision of narrative much different from MacIntyre's that the carer makes a precarious contact with the otherness of the cared-for. And this vision of narrative raises questions about the extent to which "traditions" are actually "shared." There is, I noted already, a deep yet relatively unacknowledged tension in MacIntyre between narratives as culturally shared and narratives as personal and uniquely appropriated. One can see this tension in other theorists of narrative self construction as well. Jerome Bruner, for example, also describes a mode of self-construction that attempts to achieve a level of uniqueness that nonetheless remains within the sense-limiting bounds of the shared narrative horizon of one's community. The "rightness" of a self-narrative, he argues, "is what one can live with among those with whom one interacts in the setting where one must operate."²⁷

In the practice of caring, however, the "setting within which one must operate" is *not* an entire culture or a social group, but the open presence of the carer — a person who initially accepts "who" I am regardless of what I think or what I have done, and who will not stop trying to care for me even if I do not respond. In the ideal, at least, there are fewer social pressures to limit my self-construction. In fact, Karl Kroeber, among others, is convinced that theorists like MacIntyre and Bruner have overemphasized the limiting, "horizon-like" activity of narrative. Kroeber emphasizes, instead, narrative's ability to concretize the *unique* aspects of our world. Kroeber argues that "the very act of narrating," unlike conceptual thinking, "pushes abstract principles into the dust, heat, and pollution of the arena of contingent experience."²⁸

25. Davies and Harre, "Positioning," 45.

26. Noddings, "Caring from a Feminist Perspective," in *Ethics for Professionals in Education*, ed. Kenneth A. Strike and P. Lance Temasky (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 45.

27. Jerome Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25, no. 1 (1991): 77.

28. Kroeber, *Retelling*, 34.

Narrative, he says, "creates patterns that do not diminish the fortuitiveness of the contingencies they organize"; it does not reduce all of past events into categories of the "same," but instead makes contingency and difference comprehensible.²⁹ Narrative, then, can provide a form with which to "grasp" the alterity of an individual's past without reducing it necessarily to the "shared," or the "same." One can receive the other, as other, into oneself by listening carefully to her story, by creating a space in which *whatever* story she tells will be accepted and cared for.

In the act of confirmation, then, the carer *first* listens carefully to the cared-for's story. "What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student — to each student — as he addresses me," Noddings argues. "The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total" (*C*, p. 180). In a truly caring school, this carer, perhaps a teacher, would have known the cared-for over a period of years (*CCS*, p. 23). The carer "withholds judgment until she has heard the 'whole story'" (*C*, p. 92).³⁰ In this state of reception, the carer does not simply replace the narrative initially presented by the cared-for with a communally or personally established narrative of caring. Instead, the carer helps the cared-for alter her narrative of the "reprehensible" event to fit the practice of caring within the possibilities and unique attitudes presented by the cared-for's initial narrative and personal history. Confirmation, then, represents an attempt to help the cared-for construct, from "inside" as it were, an ethic of caring that does not do violence to her own idiosyncratic self.³¹

However, confirmation often goes farther than this. In the example of confirmation that began this section, Noddings assumes that the cared-for being confirmed has hurt some other "other," saying, "I know you were trying to help your friend...." Thus the carer attempts to see through the eyes of the cared-for into the eyes of yet another cared-for. Helping the cared-for actualize her unique self in caring means helping the cared-for actualize a unique self *by actualizing other unique selves*. Thus confirmation reaches out to a myriad of unique others, through the perspective of the cared-for that is present at this moment. The cared-for learns to construct a relational self that is responsive as a carer to every other she meets. Thus, in caring one constructs a dispersed and shifting self. To be open to a cared-for is to be open to being changed. In participating freely in the caring relation, in spontaneously being herself, the cared-for contributes to the alterity and development of the carer as much as to herself, while the carer builds her own alterity by joining her story to the stories of a myriad of cared-fors.³²

29. *Ibid.*, 53; see also Mink, *Historical Understanding*.

30. See also, Carol Witherell, and Nel Noddings, "Prologue," in Witherell and Noddings, *Stories Lives Tell*.

31. To be an effective carer, however, a one-caring's knowledge of the other must extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom into their community and culture. Jaci Webb et. al. noted that in the school they examined, caring was "not negotiated across the various cultural and political borders that marked the social terrain of the neighborhood"; Jaci Webb, Bruce Wilson, Dickson Corbett, and Rhonda Mordecai, "Understanding Caring in Context: Negative Borders and Barriers," *The Urban Review* 25, no. 1 (1993): 37. In fact, the practical knowledge demands of truly ideal caring are so great that some level of domination and even oppression in caring (especially for students who are marginal to a school community) is probably unavoidable, and in some (perhaps many) cases may make truly effective caring untenable.

32. For an exploration of the idea of the relational self in feminist theory, see Susan J. Heckman, *Moral Voices. Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

The practice of caring, then, is a shared practice, but one learned in the context of multiple caring relations where each carer aims to maintain the otherness of the cared-for, and encourage that otherness, while helping the cared-for reach out to others who are also unique.

ENGROSSMENT: THE LOSS OF A COMMON SPACE

It should be clear by now what an odd practice caring constitutes. On the one hand, caring is a shared practice. On the other hand, caring in each specific instance is uniquely appropriated to fit the singular context and relation in which it operates. Caring does seem, as Noddings has required of an "authentic" practice of community, to break down the distinction between the individual and that individual's relations with others. It is a communal practice that allows each person a communal, dispersed kind of alterity. But what kind of community does it enable? Does it actualize the kind of community that Noddings herself desires for schools? I will argue that it does not.

As I noted above, in caring two identities are not merged into one, nor do two different selves face each other at some "mappable" distance. Instead, the carer attempts to feel with the cared-for, to be the motive power suffused into the cared-for's world. The carer leaves her reality behind and receives the reality of the cared-for. The carer sees from two poles, but only in the sense that she seeks to perceive what caring "means" in this new reality of the cared-for.

This relation is also utterly exclusive — it has room only for two. Noddings is clear that one cannot bring two different cared-fors into the same caring relation. There is no place for what Emmanuel Levinas, whose project Noddings recognizes as similar to her own (*PE*, p. 194), calls a "third" in the caring relation.³³ Being "invaded" by the cared-for is indeed like being invaded by a fundamentally different reality, and each "other" represents an utterly different, incomparable reality. The cared-for's others appear only through the lens of the cared-for's perspective — for these others to appear "equally," the carer would have to establish a unique relation with them as well. And the two realities of two different cared-fors are incomparable, cannot "appear" on the same plane, in the same space. Thus, Noddings quotes Buber who notes that in the I-Thou relation the cared-for "is no longer He or She, limited by other Hēs and Shēs, a dot in the world grid of space and time" (cited in *C*, p. 74). Because the cared-for is the world in an important sense, she is, Buber says elsewhere, "Neighborless and seamless, he is You and fills the firmament"; others are not located "around" the cared-for as other equal cared-fors, but, as we have seen in the examples above, are perceived through the filter of the cared-for's perspective, the cared-for's world.³⁴ It makes sense, then, that Noddings tells us we cannot *care* about a group — only specific individuals. There is never a clear answer in caring to a dilemma in which a carer is faced with a conflict between equally close cared-fors (see

33. See Emmanuel Levinas: *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

34. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1970), 59.

C, p. 55); caring cannot grapple with conflicts between two equally demanding "realities."³⁵

Thus an ethic of alterity, even a "realistic" one like caring, is an ethic of "worlds" and not of a common world. There is no common space, no place where, as Arendt will demand, we can all "appear" to each other as different and yet equal. If the geometry of the conceptual world, the world of "justice," is of a gridlike "space" where individuals appear with respect to each other because they are placed in categories (and can thus be judged with rules that reduce them to the principle of the "same"), what is the topology of "caring," of an ethic of alterity? Clearly, the self that is actualized by the carer in caring is not isolated, not alone. As I have noted, the narrative structure of caring demands a self that is "relational." However, in caring I place my motive energy, my rationality, my interest into the service of a reality that is not my own. I "disappear" so that the other might become a more uniquely caring universe of her own. As carer I help the cared-for actualize herself by helping her actualize others. I see these others through her eyes as she tries to care for these others, tries to receive them as I am receiving her. Caring creates, then, a realm of infinite progression, as I take into myself worlds opening onto worlds onto worlds. Like a tesseract, a cube in four dimensions, it cannot be imagined. There is no comprehensible common place to stand together. "We" are together, and yet there is no collective "we." As carers, each "I" puts her self at the service of the projects of individual others; each "I" opens itself onto an infinity of other worlds, *through the perspectives of these other worlds*.

Levinas is the "alterity" philosopher who grapples most extensively with the problem of the "third," of building a community in the midst of a multitude of incomparable "others." Yet, unlike Buber and Noddings, Levinas does not believe that a practice like Noddings's caring can be actually achieved by individuals.³⁶ Unlike Noddings, Levinas is not seeking a limited, humanly achievable relational practice, but instead presses the implications of the ungraspable "alterity" of individuals to the farthest logical extreme.³⁷ For Levinas, what he calls the preconceptual "saying" of an other cannot ever be "grasped" conceptually; it cannot appear in language. When we try to grasp the "saying" of the other, it invariably becomes the "said" and is essentially transposed into Buber's "It" world. Levinas is not seeking a "practice" of caring; instead, he appeals to the alterity of all "others"

35. By equal I am referring to the level of "relation" with the cared for, which for Noddings is the key criterion. Bubeck notes an example that she asserts shows Noddings using a principle of "least harm" to decide between cared-fors, see Bubeck, *Care, Gender, and Justice*, 201. But in the case Bubeck cites, Noddings creatively escapes having to compare two cared-fors by deciding that helping one cared-for also helps the other cared-for become a one-caring (in giving up what he wanted for another) (C, p. 53).

36. Robert Bernasconi notes, "Levinas is not working with a pair of alternatives in opposition to each other, as Buber is when it is always a case of *either* I-Thou *or* I-It...[Levinas' concepts of] the saying and the said are such that each accompanies, supports, and yet subverts the other," in "Failure of Communication as Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue Between Buber and Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 128.

37. Levinas has been accused by Paul Ricouer of engaging in "hyperbole, to the point of paroxysm," of taking his philosophy of alterity to the farthest excess: Paul Ricouer, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 338.

as the basis for a "just" society: "Levinas does not want to reject the order of political rationality and its consequent claims to universality and justice; rather he wants to... show how the order of the state rests on the irreducible ethical responsibility of the face-to-face relation."³⁸ Levinas argues that the need to take responsibility for all these "thirds" *at the same time* leads us to "the domain of the state, of justice, of politics...the intervention of some form of equality and measure.... The relationship between me and the other must this time leave room for the third, a sovereign judge who decides between two others."³⁹ As Adriaan Peperzak explains, "the society that arises from the universality of the third is a community of rights and interests where the relations of love and intimacy are submitted to an impartial justice."⁴⁰ Of course, this is exactly the solution that Noddings is trying to avoid.

In seeking a solution to the problem of the "third" that allows her to retain the practice of caring, Noddings instead looks to Buber, on whose conception of the "I-Thou" relation Noddings's caring is largely patterned. Buber argues that "the real beginning of a community is when its members have a common relation to the centre overriding all other relations" (Buber cited in *OC*, p. 259). Noddings hopes that caring might provide such a center (*OC*, p. 267), and Buber, in his own writings, clearly felt that his "I-Thou" relation would allow such a center. But given what I have shown about the "spatial" limits of caring, what does Buber mean? How could individuals have a "relation to the centre overriding all other relations" (to each other) without destroying the practice of caring itself? Cognizant of the problems I have raised, Buber looks to theology to achieve such a center. He imagines a God that cannot be concretely imagined. This God that is Buber's center is "supra-contradictory."⁴¹ "How is it possible," Buber asks, "for man's You-relationship to God, which requires our unconditional turning toward God, without any distraction," as with any relationship to a Thou, "nevertheless to embrace all the other I-You relationships of this man and to bring them, as it were, to God?"⁴² Only a supra-contradictory relation could allow all these unique worlds to be brought together.

Buber's vision of a living collective rooted in the I-Thou ultimately *supports* my contention that there is an immense gulf between the practice of caring and the kind of community Noddings desires — a gulf that only a supra-contradictory vision of God, a God who gathers all the unique worlds of an infinity of others into the single body of Herself without thereby assimilating them, could hope to bridge.

38. Simon Critchley, in Levinas, *Basic Writings*, 161.

39. Levinas cited in Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 113; see also Levinas, *Basic Writings*, chap. 10.

40. Adriaan T. Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 128. Levinas's complete vision of a "fraternal" society is much more complex than I have space to discuss thoroughly here. See Peperzak, *Beyond*, chap. 7 for a succinct summary.

41. Buber, *I and Thou*, 180.

42. *Ibid.*, 180. Levinas also looks to God, in his own way. See Bernasconi, "Failure of Communication," for a comparison of Buber and Levinas.

NARRATIVE AS CENTER: ARENDT'S PUBLIC SPACE

What I am seeking is a mode of community that fits Noddings's requirements for individual commitment to the collective, a sense of "we" that does not exclude new members from joining and that allows the construction of a self that "avoids as nearly as possible the split between individual entity and member of groups" (OC, p. 261). It must be, as well, a community practice that does not resort, as Levinas does, to the abstractions of rule-based justice. Arendt's work, I will argue, contains at least the beginnings of an answer to some (not all) of these challenges, but her vision of the "public" requires a shift away from many of the ethical and practical assumptions involved in caring.

Like Noddings, Arendt believes that every human being is utterly unique.⁴³ And she is no stranger to the general arguments of "alterity" philosophy, as there were aspects of this view both in the work of her mentor, Karl Jaspers, and of her husband and philosophical partner, Heinrich Blücher. She knows, for example, that one can only care for an individual, not a group.⁴⁴ Although Arendt's work does not delve deeply into the dialogic, relational issues Noddings explores, she is nonetheless deeply concerned with the threat utterly unique visions of the world present for the creation of anything "common." She and Jaspers both worry that the achievement of true uniqueness runs "the risk of ruling out of existence all that humans *qua* humans have in common."⁴⁵ She has serious doubts that Buber's I-Thou "can be extended and become paradigmatic for the political sphere."⁴⁶

Therefore, in opposition to what she sees as the nonspatial intimacy (HC, p. 69) of approaches like caring, Arendt promotes a model of what she calls "public space," which allows a myriad of *relatively* unique individuals to appear to each other in a common arena. To constitute political action, she argues, there must be what she calls an "in-between," or a "common project."⁴⁷ Unlike Buber's center, this in-between is made up of a set of common issues that must "be seen by man in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity" (HC, p. 57). In other words, each individual must be able to arrive at her own unique interpretation of the group's common project, yet not interpret it so uniquely that its "common" nature is lost. Because they have something common to talk about and act on, these interpretative acts allow those in this space to "appear" to each other in coherently diverse perspectives, different "locations," with respect to their common issue. Although the common issues of the public define the common space, individuals can take up an infinite number of possible positions relative to that issue. And those in the public

43. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8. This book will be cited as HC in the text for all subsequent references.

44. Hannah Arendt, "A Reply," *Review of Politics* 15 (1953): 68-76.

45. Sandra Hinchman, and Lewis Hinchman, "Existentialism Politicized: Arendt's Debt to Jaspers," *The Review of Politics* 53 (Summer 1991): 445.

46. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 200.

47. I draw the idea of the "common project" from Maxine Greene.

not only take positions "around" common objects, but choose what issues the public will be concerned with, will constitute itself around.⁴⁸ The interpretive acts of each person actually change the nature of their common effort.

To participate in the public, however, one must be willing to "see" others as relatively unique "positions" on common projects instead of completely unique "worlds" of their own. Only what is "relevant" can enter a public space and coherently contribute to the joint effort underway. The public does not imprison individuals into abstract "categorical" identities as justice does, but neither does it allow individuals to "appear" in their full uniqueness. Instead, it brings these different "worlds" into precarious contact in a common space. If MacIntyre's vision of a "practice" requires a *narrative that acts as a horizon*, a background within which all actors operate; and if Noddings's "caring" encourages the nurturing of *unique individual narratives* that appropriate the concept of caring to fit their own singular experiences of relation; Arendt's public, as a third coherent "practice," draws on yet another vision of narrative as "center."

To achieve the status of a coherent practice like both MacIntyre's "practice" and Noddings's caring seem to have done, the public requires its own internal "logic" of action. The central criterion of caring requires the enhancement of the other as a unique relational self, as a carer of her own. The public, in contrast, is dependent on a complex criterion of "principle," although not the abstract, rule-based principle that Noddings opposes in justice. Because the public actor acts in a space filled with other unique agents, she cannot act with some specific goal in mind, for that would amount to an attempt to treat others as objects to be influenced rather than unique selves to be communicated with. And in contrast to Jürgen Habermas, for example, the public actor is not trying to reach consensus with others.⁴⁹ Not consensus but productive dissensus is the goal of Arendt's public; she promotes action "in concert" where differences between individuals are retained. Paradoxically, then, in the ideal at least, "action, to be free, must be free from motive on the one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other" (*BPF*, p. 151). In the public one must tell as honestly as one can how one sees the issue at hand. One is inspired in this action by principles that "inspire, as it were, from without," but these principles, like MacIntyre's virtues, only become "fully manifest in the performing act itself" (*BPF*, p. 152). Where caring is motivated by a love of other and a desire to actualize the other's ethical self, the public is motivated by a "love of the world." Acting in public must be concerned with maintaining the space for action itself into the future, and in nourishing the ability of all to participate. As Susan Bickford notes, however, action in public is not *only* aimed at maintaining a common space. While Arendt's actors must "not act in such a way that makes future action together impossible,"

48. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 2d. ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 223. This book will be cited as *BPF* in the text for all subsequent references.

49. See Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," *Political Theory* 11, no. 1 (February 1984): 105-16 and Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

Bickford says, they also aim outward at other goals for the community (*HC*, p. 182).⁵⁰ Thus, unlike caring, public spaces “simply cannot afford to give primary concern to individual lives and the interests connected with them; as such the public realm stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our private domain....Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the [common] world is at stake” (*BPF*, p. 156).

As in caring, the public actor must be willing to listen to the unique voice of the other and be prepared to be changed by what she hears.⁵¹ And this vision of group action emphasizes the unpredictable nature of the public. One becomes an “agent” in Arendt’s scheme not because one can achieve one’s ends, but because one can participate in a collective project one cannot control. One is an agent because one’s voice is heard, because one’s voice matters to other agents in the public space, because one’s unique position on a common issue is taken into account.

In a public space, then, people act with others, either by beginning something completely new or by bringing their unique potential to bear upon an already started common project. Power, for Arendt, is created through this action “in concert” where each participant is neither autonomous nor simply a cog in a machine, generating an immense force for unpredictable change (See *HC*, chap. 5). One is moved from individual “strength” to collective (and yet unpredictable) “power.”

In Noddings’s caring, students are initiated into the practice of caring through the experience of being cared for and being encouraged to care in similar ways for others. Arendt herself, however, did not have much to say about initiating students into the practices of the public. In her few writings on education, she tended to conceive of schools as essentially “private” spaces, where children’s individual uniqueness is nourished, and where children are taught about the “world” they are about to enter — where they are provided with cultural “narratives” around which they might later form public spaces (*BPF*, chap. 5). As some have noted, however, Arendt’s few writings on education are extremely problematic. In fact, as Jean Elshtain points out, Arendt’s major essay on education, “The Crisis in Education,” was meant more as a response to the storm of protest raised by an earlier essay, “Reflections on Little Rock” (which, among other things, conceptualized school as a social, not political issue, and opposed the use of children in struggles over desegregation) than it was an attempt to write a general educational theory.⁵² Arendt’s vision, in “Crisis,” of schools as places where children are isolated away from the forces of the “public” can, when taken to the extreme, deprive children, and the adults they will become, of the dispositions that would enable them to enter (and create) public spaces. For the implications of Arendt’s work for education, then, I think we must look to the educational philosopher who draws on her work more than any other: Maxine Greene.

50. Bickford, *Dissonance*, 171. For an interpreter who thinks action in Arendt’s public is merely aesthetic, see Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

51. See, especially, Bickford’s discussion of the importance of “listening” in “public” in *Dissonance*.

52. Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Political Children,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995). This essay provides a rich discussion of the complexities involved in politicizing children and the many different ways this can be defined.

Unlike Arendt, Greene argues that students must be “enabled” to “name” collectively the obstacles that prevent their own becoming.⁵³ As with caring, students need to be initiated into the practices of “public” action, but, I would argue, this requires engagement in carefully constructed “public” projects that teach them how to fit their own projects with others who are different from themselves. This does not leave children to their own devices, nor does it require a radical politicization of children — both of which Arendt feared. While Arendt is surely right that educators must take on a “temporary” authority over students in schools (*BPF*, p. 191), Greene, I think, would expand this authority to a larger community, and would, as well, respect the ideas and personal and social resources that students bring with them into classrooms. Given that the idea of the “public,” like that of caring, must be appropriated into every specific context in which it is initiated, Greene is clear that to succeed in helping students form public spaces, “a teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own.”⁵⁴ Thus, while teachers cannot refuse some level of authority, they can only succeed in helping students realize the possibilities of “public” freedom by struggling *together* with them to understand what this *means* with these students at this time in this place. This vision of education would not only provide students with the “world” of the past, as Arendt recommends, but would, as well, encourage students to create their own projects, their own points of contact, their own publics.⁵⁵

Clearly, the practices of caring and the public are as contradictory as the practices of justice and caring. They represent very different modes of operating in a community. Yet, although the public and caring represent different practices, they can also be mutually supportive. The public, as a space of contention, may be strengthened by preestablished caring relations. As Noddings says, “when people have loving regard for one another, they can engage in constructive conflict — although it is by no means easy, even then.”⁵⁶ In her own way, Arendt also appears to have understood this.⁵⁷ However, Arendt was also clear that individuals could form a public together even if they did not, were unwilling to, “care for” each other.

53. Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), 5.

54. *Ibid.*, 14.

55. I have only lightly sketched the implications of Arendt's work for education, here. I have attempted a fuller exploration elsewhere. See Aaron Schutz, “Creating Local Public Spaces in Schools: Insights from Hannah Arendt and Maxine Green,” *Curriculum Inquiry* (in press). Anne Ruggles Gere and I argue, in “Service Learning and English Studies: Rethinking ‘Public’ Service,” *College English* 60, no. 2 (1998), that an approach to service learning, reconceptualized as “public” service, might help initiate students into the kinds of practices Arendt envisioned.

56. Nel Noddings, “Conversation as Moral Education,” *Journal of Moral Education* 23, no. 2 (1994): 115.

57. See Eleanor Honig Skoller, *The In-Between of Writing: Experience and Experiment in Drabble, Duras, and Arendt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 111 and Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 211. The public/private distinction in Arendt, contrary to the reading of some in the past, does not represent an attempt to isolate women into the private, although, as Mary Deitz points out in “Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt,” in *Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), her relation to feminism remains problematic.

Arendt's public is no panacea, no utopian answer to the problems of community Noddings describes. The practice of the public, like the practice of caring, the practice of justice, MacIntyre's "practices," and other practices, has clear limitations. Arendt is quite clear, for example, that one must have a depth of knowledge about the common project if one hopes to join the community as an equal member — excluding those who do not. If those in a public space do not perceive one's contribution as "relevant" — perhaps by not "listening" carefully enough — one may be excluded as well. At the same time, as Nancy Fraser and others have noted, only a myriad of different, often conflicting publics could hope to represent the multiplicity of our society today — Arendt's vision of equality in public that overcomes all of the social marks of difference we carry was not only unrealistic, but probably detrimental to any kind of real diversity in society.⁵⁸

MULTIPLE PRACTICES OF COMMUNITY

At this point, it would be reasonable to wonder, "What, if anything, of the ethic of care can be salvaged in this alternative conception?"⁵⁹ I would argue, however, that this question itself is problematic, containing within it the assumption that the job of theorists is to discover the single, monolithic practice that might encompass all the activities of schooling. Instead, I think we should envision schools as places where a myriad of different contradictory practices are engaged in at different times for different purposes.⁶⁰ The point is not that part of caring must be left behind, or dismantled somehow, but that caring alone cannot serve as the foundation for vibrant school communities. In fact, a recent book by Seyla Benhabib finds evidence for a kind of alternating, fluid space of multiple practices in some of Arendt's earliest work. The German salon, in Arendt's early book on Rahel Varnhagen, Benhabib argues, is a place where individuals can get to know each other intimately, but which can form, at any moment, into common spaces of public action.⁶¹ It is this fluidity, extended to a multiplicity of different practices addressing a multitude of needs, that I think we must encourage in schools.

Yet these different practices, as we have seen, construct people into different kinds of "selves." The caring self, either carer or cared-for, is fundamentally different from the "located" self of the public or the abstract self of justice. Each kind of self operates within different ethical "criteria." But if this is so, how does one decide which self is the correct self at the moment? How does one choose between *ethics*, between *selves*? For this, I can only turn to Paul Ricouer, who says, in agreement with

58. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

59. A question posed by one of the reviewers for this journal.

60. Other care theorists have made similar observations about the need for individuals to have access to multiple practices of engagement. See, for example, Carol Gilligan, Annie Rogers, and Lyn Mikel Brown, "Epilogue: Soundings into Development," in *Making Connections*, ed. Carol Gilligan, Nona P. Lyons, and Trudy J. Hanmer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 314-329.

61. Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism*, 20. Benhabib argues the space of the salon is a "transgression" of public/intimate boundaries, which goes farther than I do here.

MacIntyre, that we must see our life as a whole as a project, as our ultimate ethical project. We must "pursue the search for adequation between what seems to us the best with regard to our life as a whole and the preferential choices that govern our practices" at each particular moment.⁶² We are never relieved of, as Arendt would say, the responsibility to think, to consider each moment to see if our practices are adequate to the singularity of the events of our lives. One must take a principled stance not only within practices but between them. This cannot exclude the possibility that choices for different practices may be influenced by oppressive structures in society — when women, for example, choose to care because of their social positioning.⁶³ And the need to choose cannot, as well, escape the fact that different practices tend to retain allegiances to the cultures and classes from which they have emerged.⁶⁴ There is never a neutral, safe place to stand. This means, I think, that we must do more than simply apprentice students into multiple practices in the schools. Teachers and students must explore how to make difficult choices *between* practices: when a student dies, and the chemistry teacher decides that today is not a time to be "chemists," but to care; when teachers go on strike and collectively oppose the institution of the school; when a student has been wronged and the student body gathers together to respond collectively.

Sometimes we must decide *not* to care, in the rich sense that Noddings means this; we must decide *not* to see the other as absolutely unique in order that we might join collectively together to care for the common "world." I agree with Noddings that "we ought to be cautious...in pushing for collective goals and demanding a collective identity" (*OC*, p. 267), in the sense that we must carefully ask what *kind* of collective is ethically called for at this moment, to respond to this unique situation. Unlike Noddings, however, I cannot give simply a "qualified 'yes'" to communities in schools (*OC*, p. 266), despite the inherent dangers involved. No communal practice escapes a "dark side." It is by exploring with students the dangers and possibilities of different modes of community that we will come to understand, as Noddings says, "what it means and can mean to belong to a community" (*OC*, p. 267). And I think combining Arendt's vision with Noddings's and MacIntyre's (and there are many others) represents the only possible path toward communities that balance out — and yet never escape — the different "dark sides." As we initiate students into the practices of caring, we must also develop with them the skills that we need to respond collectively to oppression, to what Greene calls the "obstacles" in the way of our self-*and* collective becoming. Failing to engage in practices of the "public" with our students, even though these are practices that require a shift away from the

62. Paul Ricouer, *Oneself*, 179.

63. Joan C. Tronto, "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," *Signs* 12, no. 4 (1987): 644-63 and Julia T. Wood, *Who Cares? Women, Care, and Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

64. Paul Lichtenman, in *The Search For Political Community: American Activists Reinventing Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), shows that what look much like Arendtian "public" practices seem to reflect educated, professional ways of being in the modern world. Audrey Thompson, in "Surrogate Family Values: the Refeminization of Teaching," *Educational Theory* 47, no. 3 (1997): 315-39, makes a similar point about caring.

engrossment of caring, represents, paradoxically, a failure on some level to *care* for them and their futures in an often unforgiving world.

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