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## Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, and "The Good Life of Teaching"

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## **Electronic Article**

### **Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, and “The Good Life of Teaching”**

**Marissa Silverman**

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## Virtue Ethics, Care Ethics, and “The Good Life of Teaching”

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In *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice*, Chris Higgins (2011) reminds us that “self-interest and altruism, personal freedom and social roles, and practical wisdom and personhood” have been ancient philosophical topics that remain vitally important in the practice of contemporary teaching and learning (10). One of the most fundamental questions Higgins raises is this: “How do we reconcile self-regard and concern for others?” (2–3). Higgins echoes John Dewey’s concern for “balancing the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service” (Dewey quoted in Higgins, 6). In other words, and educationally speaking: What does it mean to live “the good life” as an educator? And what occurs when we connect our answer to two related questions: “Why teach?” and “How should I live?” (10). In answering these questions, Higgins combines arguments put forward by MacIntyre, Arendt, Dewey, Gadamer, and others, and considers human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), ethics, and the internal goods of practices—combined concerns that music and music education philosophers often neglect.

While Higgins is centrally concerned with the quest for “the good life,” he is equally concerned with the idea that “professional ethics should concern the needs, desires, aspirations, and welfare of practitioners themselves” (177). “The flourishing of the teacher,” Higgins asserts, “is crucial to the educational enterprise” (205). Education is a social practice, he argues, and social practices and *virtue ethics* are inextricably intertwined:

Practices are in fact our ethical sources: they are sites where aspects of the good are disclosed to us as well as the primary scenes of our ethical education. Thus, if applied ethics carries findings worked out in the philosophy seminar to the various practices, practical ethics turns to practices themselves to learn about goods and virtues, in their variety, as they are disclosed through the particular terms and problematics of each practice. Virtue ethics therefore needs teaching as much as teaching needs virtue ethics. (10)

In the course of his argument, Higgins probes the needs—emotional, social, psychological, etc.—entangled in selfhood. He argues that while teaching is often conceived as a helping profession and an altruistic practice, this is misguided, if not potentially harmful:

“I counter the notion that teaching could or should be solely altruistic with an exploration of how altruism can devolve into asceticism and lead to such a problem as teacher burnout” (11). Put differently, Higgins seeks to explore the social practices of teaching with a concern for replacing the “selflessness,” which he thinks is often implicated by the notion of teaching as a helping profession, with *selffulness* (170).

I am extremely supportive of the general claims of Higgins’s detailed and erudite discussion, and I find quite persuasive his emphasis on the importance of virtue ethics in education. In this essay I intend to focus primarily on his claim that “*virtue ethics...needs teaching as much as teaching needs virtue ethics*” (italics added, 10). I wish to proffer sympathetically that additional concepts of selfhood and ethics may have a place in Higgins’s project, in discussions of educational ethics, and in ethics for music education. Specifically, I intend to introduce key themes from the relatively recent fields of *enaction* and *care ethics*, explaining what I think they might contribute to our understandings of ethics (and virtue ethics) in music education.

Also, and notwithstanding my positive disposition towards Higgins’s thesis, I am somewhat uncomfortable with the distinction between self-interestedness and the interests of others, which has figured prominently in the thought of some ethicists (e.g., Bentham 1789, Stuart Mill 1861, Rand 1964). I suggest that this distinction represents an unnecessary and harmful dualism that often finds its way into discussions of virtue ethics. Additionally, some interpretations of virtue ethics tend to represent human flourishing as a “good” (or “end”) in itself, without accounting for the ways our actions (or character) affect others.

Through *care ethics* I will argue that “self-fulness” and “self-lessness” are not as distinct or oppositional as we may be tempted to think. Higgins worries that asceticism often results when “one distances oneself from one’s own project of becoming in the name of the good of others” (157). But to me, this concern stems mistakenly from the implicit assumption that one’s “project of becoming” always begins with the self (that is, with character building) and then expands outward. I am not so sure. Perhaps we should consider another perspective advanced by Pettersen (2011): “With an alternative moral ontology, where the starting point is human connectedness and interdependency as it is in an ethics of care, the welfare and growth of one individual is seen as intertwined with the flourishing of others” (5). Before pursuing my points, I wish to explore briefly the concept of “enaction.” Enaction provides a

useful way of understanding selfhood, an understanding that is foundational for any discussion of ethics.

According to several contemporary scholars in both contemporary cognitive science (e.g., Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991; Stewart, Gapenne, and Di Paolo 2010) and philosophy (e.g., Gallagher 2005, Johnson 2007, Thompson 2007), the self can only be understood in relation to others. Thompson (2007) argues that “self and other enact each other reciprocally through empathy,” that “human subjectivity is from the outset intersubjectivity, and no mind is an island” (383). He continues:

My body is lived by me in the first person, but it also appears to you in the third person (or second person), and in empathetically grasping that experience of yours, I experience myself as an other to you . . . . If the “I” were to appear only in a first-person singular format, then it would not be possible to have any nonegocentric understanding of the “I” as a bodily individual in a public intentional world that transcends the self. (400)

I believe that an ethical theory of/for teaching needs therefore to be grounded in a concept of ethics that is *relational*. Because virtue ethics starts with the “individual self” and then works outward (and even the more “communal” virtue ethicists such as MacIntyre appear to begin their argument this way), I feel it important to frame an understanding of the self that is “relational.”

### **Enactive Views of Selfhood**

Maturana and Varela (1992) use the term “enactive” to “confront the problem of understanding how our existence—the praxis of our living—is coupled to a surrounding world which appears filled with regularities that are at every instant the result of our biological and social histories” (241). In other words, the term “enactive” advances a “view of mind with its emphasis on the role of embodied experience, autonomy, and the relation of codetermination between cognitive agents and the world” (Di Paolo, Rohde, and De Jaegher 2010, 33). As Noë (2009) puts it, “Brain, body, and world form a process of dynamic interaction. That is where we find ourselves” (95). Noë’s concept of “human being” as brain-body-world is at the core of the enactive approach. Before providing more details, let me trace this concept historically.

According to Di Paolo, Rohde, and De Jaegher (2010), scientific predecessors of the enactive concept of mind trace back as far back as Poincaré’s research (1907) on spatial perception, Piaget’s work (1936) on sensorimotor equilibrium, and Goldstein’s investigations

(1934) of self-actualization. Certain features or principles of enactivism can be found in the thoughts of others, too. Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925/1958), for instance, emphasizes embodied ways of experiencing the "unattained possibilities" and potentialities of human experience. Similarly, enactive principles are evident in Dewey's emphasis of the body's transaction with the world whereby body, mind, and world coalesce and collaborate in acts of meaning-making. Still other philosophical roots of enactivism can be traced to the phenomenological work of Heidegger (1962, 1968, 1969), Husserl (1960, 1980, 1989), and Merleau-Ponty (1948, 1962, 1964).

Certain aspects of contemporary cognitive science converge with enactive accounts, as demonstrated in Hutchins (1995) and Beer (2003). Hutchins maintains, for instance, that cognition is culturally constituted. Neuroscience shares commonalities with enaction, too, as evident particularly in the work of Damasio (1994), Clark (1997, 2006), Hurley (1998), and LeDoux (2002). While these scholars do not necessarily use the term, enactive assumptions often underlie their research. LeDoux (2002), for example, argues synapse formation is "influenced by our worldly experiences. Genes, environment, selection, instruction, learning—these all contribute to the building of the brain and the shaping of the developing self" (96). Thus, despite LeDoux's description of the self as "synaptic," he believes, like enactive thinkers, that the self is multidimensional: the self, says LeDoux, consists in the constant interplay among thinking, emotion, motivation, experience, and memory as these all develop through nature and nurture.

Recent scholarship by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), Noë (2004), and Thompson (2007) advances significantly our understanding of enactive principles. According to Noë, perception and consciousness are processes or interactions among brain, body, and world. Take away one of these components, and there is no consciousness, no systematic understanding of perception, no sense of self. In Thompson's (2007) view, autonomous human agents "enact or bring forth their own cognitive domains" (14). Thompson argues that cognition is the "exercise of skillful know-how in situated and embodied action" (14). The contributions of these scholars are particularly important because of the alternatives they offer to dualistic accounts of selfhood or personhood: "A cognitive being's world," writes Thompson, "is not a prespecified, external realm, represented internally by its brain, but a *relational domain* enacted or brought forth by that being's autonomous agency and mode of coupling with the environment" (14, emphasis mine).

Johnson (2007) appears to concur. He argues that there are three requisite dimensions that inform us who we are: brain, body, and environment. “Without a brain,” he writes, “there is no meaning. Without a living, acting body—no meaning. And without organism-environment interaction—no meaning” (175). The brain is not the mind and the brain is not the person (or, in the context of this essay, the “self”). The brain is only one aspect of an embodied organism and self-hood (or, alternatively, personhood). It is an integral component, but, as Johnson writes, a brain operates in and for “a living, purposive body, in continual engagement with complex environments that are not just physical but social and cultural as well” (175). These inseparable components of enaction constitute the foundation of human consciousness, selfhood, and personhood.

Thus, I would argue that the self can only be understood in relation to embodied others who enact the world. If this is the case, then I believe we need a concept of ethics that places major emphasis on the relational nature and the inseparability of self and other. Hence, my appeal to care ethics. Before addressing care ethics more extensively, however, I want to discuss briefly the quest for the “good life,” since this is key to virtue ethics in general, and to Higgins’s argument in particular.

### **The “Good Life”**

What does it mean to live a good life? For the Greeks, the answer involved the concept of *eudaimonia*. This term derives from “eu,” meaning “good” or “well,” and “daimon” translates as “a spirit,” or “one’s personal fortune.” Literally, then, it means something like “having a good guardian spirit,” or “a good divine power,” or “good fortune.” Most often, the term is translated as “human flourishing.”

According to Aristotelian ethics, human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) and intellectual happiness were the rewards for a life of virtue. Aristotle wrote: “Then why not say that the happy person is the one who expresses complete virtue in his activities, with an adequate supply of external goods, not just for any time but for a complete life?” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1101a15–18, 26–7). When we use the word “happy” we should remember, then, that in Aristotelian ethics happiness rested on a foundation of virtue.

Additionally, for Aristotle, *eudaimonia* describes someone who possesses excellence: who lives for the betterment of himself (herself) and his (her) community, maintaining thereby a feeling of contentment, well being, and comfort.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle wrote: “The human

good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue, and if there is more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete . . . it will be in a complete life" (1098a12–21). There are also certain "goods" that help one achieve eudaimonia: goods of the soul, including moral and intellectual virtues, and education; strength, good health, beauty, and good senses; and wealth, friends, good children, good reputation, and so forth. According to Kingwell (2000), eudaimonia is a kind of "rational satisfaction with one's character and actions: a form of reflective rationality that looks back on a life and—always in a provisional way of course. . . [and] pronounces it worth living." Eudaimonia is "complex and really a form of self-assessing cognition, a passing of positive judgment on oneself and one's projects" (105).

By asking the question, "what does it mean to live the good life," Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (among others) laid a foundation for ethics. While Greek thinkers did not create a unified ethical theory, they have been grouped together under "virtue ethics." Questions these thinkers asked and attempted to answer include: What is the meaning of virtue? What character traits are considered virtues? Why should one consciously work toward being virtuous? While their answers differed, there are some similarities. Ethics was the reflective, logical, and thoughtful pursuit of living the good life. Through such pursuit, reason and sensibility lead one to virtuous and moral living. As such, virtue is both a course of action and a matter of personal choice.

The basis of virtue ethics as pursued by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others, was less concerned by the needs of society (the needs of others) than with the project of individual or personal reform. How could a person become good, then? Through personal transformation; the development of virtuous character. By working on one's sense of personal responsibility and character, virtue and well being could be established. Virtue, here, is a habit that is learned. Expressed in contemporary terms, we might say that "good education" involves "character building": it is by developing good character that one comes to live a good life.

Only, within discussions of character building and the good life, the issue of care should arise. Some scholars argue that "ethics of care" or "care ethics" is best understood as a category of the broader domain of virtue ethics. However, others believe that the principles and foundations of Aristotle's virtue ethics may not necessarily make for a good "marriage" with care ethics. As Chappell (2011) notes about Aristotle particularly: "It is a notorious fact about Aristotle that there is something rather ruthlessly bright-eye-and-gleaming-coat about



his conception of *eudaimonia*, and that—not unconnectedly—he seems to have had little room in his ethics for the notion of pity” (23). The problem with linking care ethics with virtue ethics is that “care”—as understood in care ethics—is not instilled in us through training or moral reasoning. Sander-Staudt (2006) writes, for instance: “Put in a care-ethical way, the marriage of these theories requires a more equitable balance between the need to care about virtue and the need to care about care. Ultimately, a fruitful union of care ethics and virtue ethics is possible, but not under conditions that are unnecessarily diminutive, assimilative, or exclusive” (37).

### **Ethics of Care**

Ethics of care is, for the most part, subsumed by the larger category of feminist ethics. Until recently, virtue theories paid relatively little attention to practices of caring as engaged by women and what these might imply for ethical theory. In discussing his concern about the potentially ascetic nature of “helping professions,” Higgins points to Jessica Benjamin’s (1988) claim that “in one developmental theory after another, the mother is not ‘regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child’” (in Higgins, 169). In “the cultural construction of mothering,” Higgins explains, citing Benjamin, we can see “the human flight from the demands of intersubjectivity”—“a broad cultural strategy,” Higgins writes, “for coping with the challenges of mutual recognition” (169). Clearly, then, Higgins sees “helping” and selfhood as interrelated in important ways. Indeed, he writes persuasively elsewhere of “the interplay of altruism and self-interest” and expresses serious worry about the tendency to segregate participants into “subjects and objects, agents and helpers . . . .” (9).

Still, I wonder if in the broader scheme he is too “virtue”-oriented, placing much emphasis on the ego. He seeks “an argument for the importance of first-personal, eudaimonistic concerns for an ethics of teaching” (170) rather than celebrating the relational in teaching and learning. Higgins writes: “Good teaching itself requires a first-personal answer to the first-personal question: what am ‘I’ doing in this classroom?” (173).<sup>2</sup> By turning to care ethics, I think we can change this question and abandon the first-person pronoun. Does not “what are ‘we’ doing in this classroom?” mean something different? Is not an “I” present in the pronoun “we”? And isn’t the “self” actually a part of the larger “us”? I believe Higgins would agree with this, as he does go to great lengths to discuss self-care (albeit, without really discussing the nature of “care”), and to suggest that through self-care,

we can care for “the other.” However, although the ethics of care may arrive at similar conclusions, it has a very different starting point.

By way of history, feminist approaches to ethics trace back thousands of years. For example, Gargi, daughter of Vachaknavi (circa 1500 B.C.) is honored as a philosopher in the *Upanishads*. The late Pythagorean, Aesara of Lucania (between 425 B.C. to 100 A.D.), created a theory of “natural law” that sought to examine individual morality, morality of family, and morality of social institutions (Waithe 1987, 19). More “recent” accounts of feminist ethics go back a few hundred years (e.g., Astell 1694, Macauley 1783, Wollstonecraft 1792, Warren 1805). From ancient times through the present day, women from around the world have sought to redefine concepts of liberty and justice by means of poetry, drama, and academic prose (see Rogers 2004, Waithe 1987). Feminist ethics has sought to rethink ethics in relation to women’s moral experience (e.g., Ruddick 1980, Butler 1990, Nussbaum 1992, Walker 2007). Accordingly, while there is neither a “single” feminist ethic, nor a unified feminist moral theory, feminist ethics is a major discipline within the much broader field of moral philosophy.

Early traces of an ethics of care can be seen in the work of Aesara of Luciana and others<sup>3</sup>. Aesara claims that morality and justice are inclusive of love and care (see Waithe 1987). Guided primarily through the Pythagorean principal of *harmonia*,<sup>4</sup> Aesara’s *On Human Nature* suggests that one should live a life that integrates kindness and justice.

Other scholars argue that care ethics emerges from the work of Gilligan (for a detailed analysis, see Kittay and Meyers 1987, Okin 1989, Kroeger-Mappes 1994, Sevenhuijsen 1998). Gilligan’s celebrated book, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982), seeks to bring “women’s voices into psychology. . . to listen to women in women’s terms, rather than assimilating women’s voices to the existing theoretical framework” (Gilligan 1995, 120). Because Kohlberg,<sup>5</sup> whose theoretical framework was predominant, had used male subjects in his research, Gilligan argued that his data were biased, and his stages of moral development were invalid. In her view, morality could not be universal or hierarchical, as Kohlberg had claimed. Gilligan’s work discusses what she sees as characteristics of women’s distinctive ethical “voice.” Rather than grounding their understandings of morality on justice (as Kohlberg’s theory seeks to do), Gilligan argues that women base their moral decision making on relational realities. From this it follows that care, rather than justice, should be ethically foundational.

Held (2006) argues that the importance of Gilligan's work lies in her alternative perspectives on decision making when handling moral problems: in contrast to a "justice perspective," which emphasizes "moral principles and how they can be applied to particular cases," a "care perspective . . . pays more attention to people's needs and how actual relations between people can be maintained or repaired" (27–28). In short, Gilligan is more interested in the relational aspect of decision making, the process of moral reasoning, than in the person's sense of self and character. Still, Gilligan's ideas did not in themselves amount to ethic of care. For this, we need to examine Noddings's (1984) work.<sup>6</sup>

While some consider Noddings a feminist scholar, her work on care did not stem from feminism. In fact, it begins with Judeo theology and especially the writing of Buber.<sup>7,8</sup> As if re-writing the opening line of the Old Testament, Buber (1970) says: "In the beginning is relation. . ." (18). He continues: "For the inmost growth of the self is not accomplished, as people like to suppose to-day, in man's relation to himself, but . . . in the making present of another self and in the knowledge that one is made present in his own self by the other" (1965, 61). With these ideas in mind, Noddings formulated a theory of ethics that is relational insofar as there is *the one-caring and the cared-for*. For Noddings, as for most care ethicists, a caring relation occurs when we take responsibility and attend to the needs of others. It is a view that sees persons as relational and interdependent. This differs from the focus on individuals' dispositions and actions that one finds in at least some approaches to virtue theory.

Noddings argues that the carer seeks out the needs of the cared-for. Higgins appears to argue that seeking out the needs of the cared-for threatens to deliver the carer into a state of selflessness. For Noddings, however, this amounts to a misinterpretation. Both roles (carer, cared-for) are equally important. Without recognition by the cared-for, says Noddings, the caring relation is incomplete. Thus, Noddings's ethics of care is emotionally (motivationally) charged toward caring for particular others.<sup>9</sup> Noddings claims that we cannot be caring towards others we do not know because the relationship required for caring does not exist. When being moved (motivated) to be "kind" or "charitable" toward strangers, we are, instead, acting on behalf of an ethic of justice (in *Caring*, Noddings held "care" and "justice" to be separate; however, her thinking has changed, as I will explain shortly). In other words, one cannot act from an ethic of care when claiming to "love the world and all its peoples" because, says Noddings, real care requires real encounters with known individuals.

Care ethics had its share of early critics and has subsequently evolved. Dalley (1996) suggests that if we understand ethics in terms of caring, and if this sense of care stems from women's experience, the result is an expectation that women perform "caring" tasks. Such expectations, according to Dalley, will coerce women into subservient domains. Interestingly, this is the very point made by Higgins when drawing upon Benjamin (noted earlier) to challenge the labeling of teaching as a helping profession. Dalley writes:

A view that holds women to be caring to the point of self-sacrifice is propagated at all levels . . . . And once this central tenet—of women's natural propensity to care (in contradistinction to men's nature)—is accepted, the locus for that caring then becomes determined. With woman as carer, man becomes provider; the foundation of the nuclear family is laid. It becomes the ideal model to which all should approximate. (21)

Other critics of care theory (e.g., Card 1990, Hoagland 1991, Houston 1987, and Willett 1995) agree with Dalley. To hold women responsible for caring makes of caring a "woman's job," leading to subordination. Indeed, Hoagland (1991) goes so far as to state that any kind of relationship that proposes that one cares unconditionally for another is oppressive. Critics often allege that gendering morality reinforces and perpetuates female stereotypes of all kinds. Tronto (1995, 1998) urges care ethicists to question such gendering, to broaden their perspectives, and to consider additional aspects of judgments and justice. Sevenhuijsen (1998) notes that care is primarily a concern in private spheres whereas concepts of justice are developed and deployed in the public sphere. Again, and in these additional ways, "women's concerns in relation to care are marginalized" (53).

In order for care ethics to be taken seriously, critics argue that care ethicists must think more deeply about the *connections* between "care" and "justice," resisting the temptation to consign them to gendered categories. Justice-based approaches have typically avoided the application of emotion (stereotypically feminine) to moral reasoning, whereas care ethics regards emotions as a necessary. Held (2006) writes:

the ethics of care values emotion rather than rejects it . . . . In contrast with the dominant rationalist approaches, such emotions as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness are seen as the kind of moral emotions that need to be cultivated not only to help in the implementation of the dictates of reason but to better ascertain what morality recommends. (10)

Because care ethics is relational, it includes and depends on emotions, for emotional reactions are central (or should be) in guiding action in interpersonal situations and scenarios. Rather than being liabilities, emotions help us determine what is best to do. But, does justice factor

into this? Are the private and the public reconcilable within an ethic of care?

While some theorists believe that justice has no place in care ethics, others disagree. An important distinction is found in the “unequal” relationship between the carer and the cared-for. Noddings (2007a) addresses this.

First, “carer” and “cared-for” are not permanent labels attached in stable and distinct ways to two different sets of people. They are labels for the parties in an encounter or in a series of encounters in a continuing relationship. Except in structurally unequal relationships (e.g., parent-child, teacher-student, physician-patient), both parties are expected to act as carers when they are so addressed by another. . . . The ethic of care binds carers and cared-fors in relationships of mutual responsibility. (224–25)

Indeed, as Pettersen (2011) suggests, from a care perspective both “self-sacrifice” and “selfishness” are exaggerations. She argues for “mature care” (a term coined by Gilligan): “Mature care seems to highlight the relational aspect of the persons involved in the caring relationships of which each of them partakes” (11). About this, Pettersen notes that the term “mature” indicates that:

caring skills can be developed in most people (as opposed to being innate in all women), and that the mature care point of view transcends both mere self-interest and the narrow focus on one (or a few) particular other(s). In this conception of care, one starts by emphasizing a fundamental equality and underlines that even if other-concern is mandatory, self-care is not by definition unethical, and that excessive altruism may be unethical. (12)

Held (2006) writes that “justice and care as values each involve associated clusters of moral considerations, and these considerations are different. Actual practices should usually incorporate both care and justice but with appropriately different priorities” (41). She adds, however, that care is much more fundamental to humanity than justice. There can be care without justice, but not the reverse: “There has historically been little justice in the family, but care and life have gone on without it. There can be no justice without care, however, for without care no child would survive and there would be no persons to respect” (17). Why the need to include justice in an ethics of care, especially when justice is typically focused on rights rather than needs, fairness rather than trust, abstract principles rather than caring relationships? Jaggard (1995) claims that an ethics of care is neglectful and falls short when it comes to social injustice—that justice takes into account the larger world and its institutions, seeking to confront laws that foster inequality. This leads us to a consideration of the difference between “caring-about” and “caring-for.”

Noddings (e.g. 1984, 2010) claims that “caring about” may serve us well

when considering issues of justice. Because an ethic of care is relational, and because we cannot care directly for everyone, we need to think about how a theory of ethics would treat issues of social justice. Noddings (2010) writes, “When there is no provision for direct encounter and reception of the all-important response of the cared-for, we try to employ some form of justice in our policies. Justice does not become irrelevant when we embrace an ethic of care” (50). Though, we might consider the needs and the rights of another a bit differently, she continues: “*Caring about* may inspire *caring for*” (51).

Sevenhuijsen (1998) apparently holds the same view:

All phases of the care process have relational dimensions, although these will be most apparent in the phases of *caring for* and *receiving care*. This is where the direct interaction takes place in which feelings of self and other and connection between people is expressed . . . Moral considerations arise in the assessment of needs and in the way in which these must or can be met, if they can be met at all. They arise when the person providing care has to find a balance between his or her own needs and those of the person receiving care . . . Care is, after all, not simply a matter of distributing ‘goods and services’; it has to do primarily with quality of life, and how we experience and interpret this . . . What counts as good care will be evaluated differently from the perspective of the care-givers and care-receivers. And these positions are not fixed, but circulate among individuals and groups. (70, 82–89)

### **Caring and Self-fulness**

In the chapter entitled “The Hunger Artist: Pedagogy and the Paradox of Self-Interest,” Higgins draws from Kafka’s “The Hunger Artist” and Salinger’s *Franny and Zooey* to create a “possible” portrait of a “specific kind” of teacher as someone who knows not herself. Although this teacher enters the profession with idealistic intentions, she sacrifices so much of herself to caring for her students that she becomes a detriment to herself and to the students she is trying to serve. This example prompted me to think about various characterizations of teachers in fiction and film that correspond to Higgins’s portrait of teachers and teaching. Ichabod Crane, from “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” immediately came to mind. Gangly and ridiculous, Irving’s character is socially subservient, a timid, homeless schoolmaster, who is not interested in his students or in furthering his own learning. Emily Sparks, from *Spoon River Anthology*, loved her students more than her own life; she never married and remained steadfast in her selflessness. Mrs. Hughes, in “The Anointed,” was a pianist turned music teacher, who sacrificed her dreams of concertizing to be become a teacher (another unfortunate instance of the unfounded performer-educator dualism).

Because these examples came to mind so readily, I considered studies of teacher



portrayals in fiction. The following is an excerpt from Niemi, Smith, and Brown's (2010) study that examines teacher portrayals in young adult literature:

- These stories conveyed strong themes of students acting as agents in teachers' identity work. We found that in the texts of children's literature, it is the children's objective to reveal or unmask teachers, to see who they really are;
- A student (or students), suspicious of the teacher's unorthodox behavior, investigates the teacher's outside-of-school life and discovers that the teacher is really an alien, masquerading as a teacher;
- A student sees evidence that his/her teacher interacts with the outside-of-school world (see her in a store or other public place), and tries to reconcile his/her belief that the teacher lived in the school all the time. (63–64)

Meskill (2007), in a cleverly titled article, "Through the screen, into the school: Education, subversion, ourselves in *The Simpsons*," notes the following about teacher portrayals: "Mrs. Krabappel is quite often a frightening display of schizophrenia. Where one can see just below the surface a woman once enthusiastic about working with children, Mrs. Krabappel frequently suffers mid-life loneliness and disenchantment, classic burnout" (41). Mrs. Krabappel takes teacher burnout—or to use Higgins's term, "burn-in"<sup>10</sup>—to a new level. When Bart is about to destroy the school with a tank (Episode: "Brother's little helper"), she says to him with a monotone and completely indifferent inflection: "No, stop, think of the children." Of course, there are many more teacher portrayals, including those who never face burnout, working tirelessly for the good because they supposedly "feed off" altruism. Hollywood films offer many examples (e.g. *Dead Poets Society*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Dangerous Minds*). As Higgins demonstrates, though, extreme caricatures like these really do little to help us unpack the ethical complexities of teachers' lives, actions, and motivations.

As I have observed, care ethics is based upon needs rather than rights. But in light of Higgins's discussion of selfhood, we need to ask: When do the needs of the teacher get met? Because the teacher-student relationship is unequal, how is the teacher served in this caring relationship? This is, as Higgins rightly argues, an issue that deserves very serious consideration. It is also a courageous question to ask: one that scholars and teachers rarely raise because of the assumption that teaching is a helping profession, and altruism a duty, a required end. And as Higgins points out, in schools where the teacher's flourishing is disregarded or abandoned, teacher burn-out is inevitable.

This may be true in part, but for me—a former New York City teacher in a large secondary school—there is much more to the story. In the remainder of this essay, I will

attempt to explain how and why.

### Reflections

To this point I have mapped a position that discusses the nature of human interdependency and stresses self-other coupling. I believe that this enables us to conceive of “living the good life” in terms of relationality. A “good life,” I submit, depends on the ways I relate to and with others: on my success at achieving my caring best. However, as my urban teaching experiences taught me, it is difficult to do my “caring best” when no one reciprocates my caring, when the institution of “schooling” is not caring or care-directed, but rather skills- and measurement-directed. As Higgins rightly observes, many of our institutions have been hijacked by administrators and managers who have failed to recognize that one of their most fundamental responsibilities is to create and sustain an environment in which care (both for and of, both student and self) can thrive. In a bad marriage, divorce may be a good thing, but what can we do in schooling? Urge students to leave, suggest that teachers resign, work with parents for change? What should teachers in such situations do?

When a school operates with appropriate attention to respecting and caring for teachers and students, Noddings’ next point is crucial. When we enter the teaching profession, Noddings (1984) argues, we should enter knowing that we are engaged in a very special relationship: the caring relationship. “No enterprise or special function I am called upon to serve can relieve me of my responsibilities as one-caring” (175). Indeed, she continues, if something arises that prevents a teacher from acting upon her caring best, she must refuse to participate. Caring for the other is part of the craft of teaching. In Noddings’ words, “As teacher, I am, first, one-caring” (176).

Drawing from Buber, Noddings emphasizes the “meeting” (I-Thou) and the attendant idea of *inclusion*— when “the one-caring” tries to teach the “cared-for”:

In “inclusion,” the teacher receives the student and becomes in effect a duality. This sounds mystical, but it is not. The teacher receives and accepts the student’s feeling toward the subject matter; she looks at it and listens to it through his eyes and ears. How else can she interpret the subject matter for him? As she exercises this inclusion, she accepts *his* motives, reaches toward what *he* intends, so long as these motives and intentions do not force an abandonment of her own ethic. Inclusion as practiced by the teacher is a vital gift . . . . The special gift of the teacher, then, is to receive the student, to look at the subject matter with him. Her commitment is to him, the cared-for, and he is—through the commitment—set free to pursue his legitimate projects. (178)



Through inclusion, the student becomes the teacher's apprentice and teacher and student work towards achieving something together. Through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation,<sup>11</sup> the teacher helps the student become a better version of herself (Noddings 2002).

Part of this work together is the give-and-take of caring that stems from either *instinctual* or *ethical* caring. From the perspective of instinctual caring, the carer (e.g. a loving mother) determines naturally and intuitively what the cared-for (i.e. her infant) needs in a given situation and responds accordingly. Motivated by love and concern, the carer feels and responds to the needs of the other. Ethical caring may include reflective thinking, intentions, and an "I must" focus that is not engaged in instinctual caring. In ethical caring, we enact caring as a vision of our best ethical selves. One of the purposes of ethical caring is to restore the natural order of things and return to the ideal state of instinctual caring. When teachers and students embark on this journey together, the one caring, whether instinctually or ethically, "contributes to the growth" of the cared-for and maintains conditions within which caring "can flourish" (Noddings 2007b). When in situations that are difficult, trying, and taxing to our self-growth or self-needs, we have recourse to ethical caring which, ideally, will sustain the caring relationship despite difficult conditions. As long as the cared-for feels and recognizes this care, the carer and cared-for are in it together. This recognition seems particularly important, and is an area that Higgins, following Benjamin, does not seem to acknowledge. And the recognition of caring by the cared-for does not have to be elaborate or grandiose. Sometimes, a sincere smile can be enough. In fact, a good example of the recognition of caring by the cared for is the cooing an infant emits when "singing along" with her mother. In short, and as emotion researchers explain, "maternal singing is an actual expression of felt love, and the infant's emotional response is reciprocally loving" (Elliott and Silverman 2012, 54).

Noddings (2007b) argues, "In most cases, when I care for another, I care for myself. Carer, cared-for and relation are all sustained." Noddings notes that this mutuality is important when relationships are unequal (e.g. doctor-patient, teacher-student, mother-child) "because it may help to avoid burnout" (2007b, 46). She writes:

Teachers should choose methods that contribute to their own happiness and growth. As carers, they will, of course, be concerned with the growth and happiness of their students but, because so much depends on the health of teacher-students relations, teachers should reflect continually on the effects of their choices on themselves as

well as their students and their relations. (46)

This is not to say that the “goods” of teaching are solely or entirely relational. Music education must include the development of students’ awareness of their responsibilities as democratic citizens, the enhancement of their artistic and academic growth, their personal well being, and so forth. But, it seems to me doubtful that any of these goods can grow or thrive in an uncaring school environment. As Bowman (2009) says, education is, first and foremost, *relational*. My key point is this: When we engage in relational care as teachers, when we are at our caring best, we do not need to invest inordinate amounts of energy because our actions and reactions are motivated by empathy, compassion, and concern.

Again, what do we do when we find ourselves in situations that are not supportive or conducive to this state? Garrison (1994) reflects on this question:

Problematic social conditions are problems for us in our school and classroom environment. Because we are connected, we care best for ourselves only if we care for others, and care for others only if we care for ourselves. In a holistic, organic, and growing world, good care is expansive. Expansive caring is loving bestowal. It bestows value not only on others but also on ourselves. If we are vulnerable we are open to loss, but we are also open to becoming, growth, the need to care for ourselves, and the need to be needed. (68)

While Higgins clearly concurs with most of the ideas I have been outlining here, I believe that because his starting point is with the “self” and virtuous character rather than the relational, he may be missing an opportunity to reclaim importance in teaching of things like feeling<sup>12</sup> and love. As Chappell (2009) writes, “Love is something that can take us . . . beyond the whole idea of morality” to what Chappell calls an “ethical outlook”<sup>13</sup> (223). Among teachers’ important responsibilities is the obligation to act *in loco parentis*. Given that, it is difficult to conceive of teaching and learning without love. As Martin (2004) puts it:

The truth is that we can no longer assume—once again, perhaps we never could assume this to be true—that home is children’s primary provider and teacher of love or that home all by itself is capable of blocking the inheritance of cultural liabilities that stunt the next generation’s healthy development. (31)

## Conclusions

What does this discussion imply for music education? Foundationally, music education should be “needs based.” A music classroom should be founded on reciprocity between the carer and the cared-for, despite the asymmetrical relationships that undemocratic school environments tend to impose on teachers and students. A central aim should be “mutual respect, attention, and recognition of equal worth” through which, Pettersen (2011) suggests,

both the carer and the cared-for “contribute to the caring relationship” (16). Teachers and students need to work together, then, to create spaces of trust, community, and commitment, where the educational and personal needs and desires of both students and teachers are acknowledged and respected. Where an ethic of caring and mutuality is central, the carer (the teacher) should find ways to engage students in discussing safely their feelings, dispositions, and attitudes toward issues, controversies, tensions, and consequences that arise in the music classroom.

Music educators would profit from understanding that identity formation and the interrelatedness of self-and-other does not reside solely “in the head.” Selfhood is “of the world” of personal relationships as much as it is genetic, psychological, and so forth. The interrelatedness of musical, social, emotional, and biological identities emerges from collaborative processes of music making and music listening. Facilitating caring relationships in collaborative classrooms enhances opportunities for transformative musical-affective experiences, for positive interpersonal relationships, and for democratic agency.

If these points are valid, perhaps we need to acknowledge the possibility that school music may not be “right” for all students everywhere—any more than, say, dance or physics are suited to the needs and desires of every student. In a caring relationship, the degree of a student’s commitment to music (or dance, or physics) is not the measure of the student’s personhood. Caring curricula should be individualized and personalized as much as possible. From a care-ethic perspective, unless the carer and cared-for acknowledge that a given curriculum matters, there is a real danger that schooling will become forced and counterproductive. As Pettersen (2011) says:

Portrayed as if the carer and the cared-for have a common goal, reciprocity consists basically of both having to make an effort to achieve that goal. From time to time they will need to exchange something directly, such as knowledge, information, and emotions in order to achieve the goal in the right way. Sometimes both must contribute individually. They must, however, expect from each other mutual recognition and a commitment to the common cause. (17)

Teachers and students often find themselves in circumstances that are inimical to care and caring. To speak to this, I will draw upon some of my own experiences as a secondary school teacher in New York City (Silverman 2009). I taught in a very large school originally intended to hold 2,500 students, but then housing approximately 4,300. The student body spoke fifty-eight languages beyond English. In addition to teaching instrumental music and

English literature classes at every grade level, I regularly taught a course called “Music Appreciation.” My school administration labeled the majority of the students in this class “at risk or reluctant learners,” which I deeply resented. Their ages ranged from 14–20. Their ethnicities were diverse—Puerto Rican, Jamaican, Haitian, Indian, Pakistani, Greek, Mexican, Korean, and so on. About ten percent were recent immigrants, and many required instructional support services (i.e., “special education”).

I found the more I engaged my students in discussions about the “what,” “why,” and “how” of music class, the more we created an environment that was conducive to education *through* music. For example, after discerning the students’ musical and dance abilities, I shared my knowledge with them. I taught them the musics and dances of the waltz, jazz swing, the twist, and the Charleston. Then *they taught me*. Through my students, I learned how to listen to and dance salsa, bachata, and merengue. A Tibetan student brought a video of national Tibetan dancing, and a Bengali student brought Indian hip-hop music and taught us the dancing that goes on in clubs in India. The students became very comfortable with me, and I with them. We reached a place and space where everyone felt welcome, where no one’s music was better than another, and where we cared about and cared for not only each others’ musics, but our intersubjective sense of “self” as a class.

Thus, I found that when I introduced the students to unfamiliar music making and listening (castrati singing, for example; or French, German, and Italian Baroque music; or Beethoven’s evolutionary and revolutionary role in the history of Western Classical music; or 21<sup>st</sup>-century “new” music) they were comfortable, open, and eager to learn. We had grown together in acknowledging, welcoming, and understanding new musics. I was not the only teacher in the room: my students, my young colleagues, were continuously excited and proud to teach me “their musics.” Thus, a lesson on musical virtuosity was not dedicated only to Liszt or Paganini; they brought in Eminem and Jay-Z. I introduced them to Wynton Marsalis; they brought in Daddy Yankee. I played and discussed Vladimir Horowitz; they explained the musical style-features of Mary J. Blige. I did not replace their cultures; I embraced them. I did not neglect their cultures; I tried to enrich them, as they did mine. In the process, we quickly forgot that the classroom was seriously overcrowded (55 students make a large general music class under any conditions), that the CD player sometimes did not work properly, and that many dangers existed beyond our classroom walls from which our general music “community” could not protect us.

Additionally, I found that I was much more than these students' teacher. I was their confidant, their creator of a "safe" space. Let me illustrate with a few examples. Many times we listened to albums such as *A Tribe Called Quest's* "Low End Theory." We listened not only for enjoyment, but for the purposes of creating our own rap-responses. One student said: "This is my favorite class. I really love coming here." Some teachers might treat this comment lightly, or as superficial, or as praise. I usually asked more questions to find out about the "life values" that students received from their participation in our class. As it turned out, for this particular student at that time, music class was the only joy in his life. Ten days prior to this remark, he confided to me that he had come home from school to find his youngest brother dead after suffering from AIDS related complications. Another student said to me: "Beethoven's my favorite composer. He's just like me. He had to deal with a lot of crap; he lived a really hard life. I downloaded his 'Moonlight Sonata' and I listen to it on my iPod whenever my dad gets in my face. This music makes me feel better." Another student said to me: "I love that Bach piece<sup>14</sup> you played for us. It makes me feel like I'm back at home in Brazil. I really miss being home. I really miss my father. I won't get to see him again for another six months. Do you think I can find this music online?"

These stories are similar to those of the "altruistic" teachers I explored earlier. Only I did not (and do not) consider my motivation to be "altruistic" in nature because I cared and I continue to care about these young people. When we realized that we needed each other, this reciprocity completed the circle of care.

I believe it is imperative for teachers, parents, and students who care about themselves and education to focus on personal and public caring, happiness, and joy. When someone is cared for, she is loved. This, for me, is self-fulness.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's ethics treated men and women unequally, and they were therefore believed to achieve eudaimonia differently. However, I will not engage in that discussion here.

<sup>2</sup> There are a variety of ways to interpret this question. Does Higgins mean: What does it mean to be "me" in this classroom? Who do I "serve" in this classroom? What am I getting from being here? I believe he means a combination of all these, and all are "self" directed. I believe we can address the self, while still addressing the needs of others. Higgins would probably agree, though because of his foundation on virtue ethics, I'm not certain of this.

<sup>3</sup> According to Waithe (1987), one can trace moral theory to female philosophers such as: Phintys of Sparta (circa 400 B.C.) and Perictione I (Plato's mother).

<sup>4</sup> *Harmonia* was understood in both structures of state and family: "A woman might apply that principle in raising children to become just, harmonious individuals, and how a woman might apply that principle in other areas of her daily life. This wasn't home economics, this was applied ethical theory, complete with a psychology of moral development, a theory of family obligation, and much, much more" (Waithe 1987, xi).

<sup>5</sup> Kohlberg's theory of moral development was based, in part, upon Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Kohlberg tested moral reasoning skills by posing hypothetical situations where a character has a moral decision to make (for example: a husband stealing a drug to save his wife's life). Kohlberg was not so interested in the answers children gave as the reasoning behind their decision-making process. Hence, he created a theory of moral reasoning. Kohlberg claims there are six stages of moral development that can be grouped into three main stages: Level I, *pre-conventional morality* (stage 1, obedience and punishment orientation or "how can I avoid punishment?"; stage 2, self-interest orientation or "what's in it for me?"). A child might say at this level, "He should steal the drug if he loves his wife"; Level II, *conventional morality* (stage 3, interpersonal approach or "what's the 'golden rule'?"; stage 4, social order orientation or "what are the outside forces or laws that govern my action?"). At this level, the child might say, "He shouldn't take the drug because it is wrong to steal and people will think he's a bad person"; Level III, *post-conventional morality* (stage 5, social contract driven or "what is the greatest good for the greatest number of people?"; and stage 6, universal principles or "what abstract reasoning will be used to do the 'right thing'?"). At this level, the child might say, "Sometime people have to break the law if the law is unjust." For Kohlberg, moral reasoning was cognitive in orientation.

<sup>6</sup> In a footnote, James W. Walters (2003) observes: “When *Hypatia*, a feminist journal of philosophy, addressed the care ethic in 1990, the editors appropriately singled out Noddings’s book as the basis for its multiauthored critique. Similarly, when philosopher Virginia Held collected essays for her book on the ‘continuing debate’ in feminist ethics, *Justice and Care*, she excerpted from Noddings’s book *Caring* for her first chapter” (77).

<sup>7</sup> Rose Graf-Taylor (1996) writes about the influence Buber had on feminist research. She states the following: “We become who we are in relation with others. There is no isolated entity called a human being, “no *I* taken in itself” (*I and Thou*, 4). There are only persons-in-relation. Psychology has focused on individuals and, following the subject-object split, treated their relatedness as an *external* factor . . . . The feminist approach goes a decisive step further in its attempt to understand the connectedness of human life . . . . The similarities between Buber’s philosophical statements and the conclusions from feminist research regarding the development of self in women is often astounding” (“Philosophy of Dialogue and Feminist Psychology” in *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, 327-28).

<sup>8</sup> As this is not a paper on the values of Buber’s work on education, I will not go into detail. But I do want to suggest that Higgins does not seem to acknowledge Buber’s intersubjective self-other orientation. Higgins (2002) states that Buber claims teaching to be a “lofty asceticism.” However, I’m not so sure this is fair. Buber writes that the educator “must try to live through the situation in all its aspects not only from his point of view but also from that of his partner. He must practice the kind of realization that I call embracing. It is essential that he should awaken the I-You relationship in the pupil, too, who should intend and affirm his educator as this particular person; and yet the educational relationship could not endure if the pupil also practiced the art of embracing by living through the shared situation from the educator’s point of view” (*I and Thou*, 178). Noddings elaborates on the role of the teacher in this regard. She (1984) writes: “The teacher, as one-caring, meets the student directly but not equally. Buber says that the teacher is capable of ‘inclusion,’ and this term seems to describe accurately what the one-caring does in trying to teach the cared-for . . . . In ‘inclusion,’ the teacher receives the student and becomes in effect a duality” (177). For Noddings, this is not “lofty asceticism” but mutual growth and development. She continues: “This working together . . . produces both joy in the relation and increasing competence in the cared-for . . . . The one-caring as teacher, then, has two major tasks: to stretch the student’s world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world” (178). In other words, the teacher’s world is in some way glorified and gratified in the caring relation.

<sup>9</sup> In regard to being motivationally rather than rationally “driven,” care ethics and virtue ethics are somewhat similar.

<sup>10</sup> For Higgins, “burn-in” is far worse than teacher burn-out. Burn-in is when teaching devolves into asceticism, and rather than drop-out of the profession, such a teacher continues to teach. Instead of burning out the teacher burns in (152).

<sup>11</sup> Noddings has described these four components of moral education in various writings (e.g., 2002, 2005, 2010). Modeling serves to demonstrate “care”: “We do not ‘care’ in order to

model caring; we model care by caring” (2010, 147). Dialogue is open-ended insofar as the carer and the cared-for work together to solve problems. “Even when dialogue does not result in a mutually acceptable solution – perhaps especially when it does not do so – it should end in a way that sustains the caring relation” (2010, 147). In a caring relation, good teachers allow students to “practice” both natural and ethical caring. For this component to be successful, the teacher should acknowledge when the student is at her caring best. “Again, we can see that successful practice in caring depends in the caring relation between master-carer and the one learning to care. One must learn (consciously or unconsciously) what it means to be cared for before one can learn to care for others” (2010, 148). The final and fourth component, confirmation, “points a person toward a better self. . . Its aim is to bring out a better self already present in potential, shadowy for. The caring relation makes confirmation possible” (148).

<sup>12</sup> Further to this point, Dewey’s *Human Nature and Conduct* states: “The conclusion is not that the emotional, passionate phase of action can be or should be eliminated in behalf of a bloodless reason. More ‘passions,’ not fewer, is the answer. To check the influence of hate there must be sympathy, while to rationalize sympathy there are needed emotions of curiosity, caution, respect for the freedom of others—dispositions, which evoke objects which balance those called upon by sympathy, and prevent its degeneration into maudlin sentiment and meddling interference. Rationality, once more, is not a force to evoke against impulse and habit. It is the attainment of a working harmony among diverse desires.” (170-71)

<sup>13</sup> He completes his claim about ‘getting beyond the whole moral outlook’ with these words: “. . . though to say that love *transcends* the moral need not be to say that love is *immoral*.”

<sup>14</sup> This student was referring to Jordi Savall’s viole de gambe pizzicato version of J.S. Bach’s Bourrée BWV 1010 (Sol majeur).

### About the Author

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