

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES AND THE ETHICS OF CARE

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In dealing with moral philosophy, one productive method of analysis is the examination of the metaphorical presuppositions behind a given system or approach to ethics, an examination of the author's basic paradigm. In the case of the "ethics of care" or "feminine" ethical approaches, the most common metaphorical background for discussion is the "mothering" paradigm, or the model of a productive, growth-fostering positive relationship. I would like to contend that this is possibly in error, in that it further supports certain stereotyped attitudes towards the "feminine" and in some senses may invalidate (or at least severely weaken) the argument for an ethic of care. I would like to propose an alternative metaphor, that of the role-playing game, primarily because role-playing involves, as Ernest Goffman writes, "a cycle of face-to-face social situations with *role others*, that is, relevant audiences" (E, p. 5). This is, in many senses, precisely what "feminine" moral approaches are all about.

I

What does it mean to apply an "ethic of care"? For a number of years, in the fields of both cognitive psychology and philosophy it meant that the moral agent in question had not yet matured enough morally to use the "higher," more abstract forms of ethical reasoning (decisions based on concepts of "justice"), an assumption based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget in designing patterns of moral developmental stages.¹ On the Kohlberg scale, people who functioned with care for others as their primary moral guideline scored at level three (out of six, six being the highest), and most of the people scoring three or lower on this scale were women. This, to Carol Gilligan, was indicative of a serious problem in psychological

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¹The stages of development, according to Kohlberg's Socratic-inspired model are: 1) Punishment and Obedience, 2) Instrumental Exchange, 3) Interpersonal Conformity, 4) Social System and Conscience Maintenance, 5) Prior Rights and Social Contract and 6) Universal Ethical Principles.

research, namely an attitude that created “recurrent problems of interpreting women’s development” due to “repeated exclusion of women from the critical theory–building studies of psychological research” (Gilligan, p. 1). (All of Kohlberg’s test subjects were male, a common practice in psychological research). In order to counteract this error, Gilligan did a number of studies of moral attitudes and decision–making processes, using subject–groups ranging from children at different developmental stages to a group of women considering abortion, as well as a study of female college students involved in a class on “moral and political choice” (Gilligan, pp. 2–3).

What Gilligan discovered, in the course of years of interviews, was a “different voice” in moral behavior, one which, while “not characterized by gender,” was nonetheless most often empirically observed in women (Gilligan, p. 5). Supported by Nancy Chodorow’s work on developmental psychology, specifically her thesis that women, due to their connection and identification with the mother, would more naturally tend towards a “relational” moral framework, Gilligan found an alternative moral standpoint to the morality of justice. It involved the following three necessary elements: Contextual Relevance (all actions and choices must be considered within the context of a concrete situation), Maintenance of Relationship (priority is given to action which allows for the continuation of positive relations with others) and Conception of Identity (“I” am a composite of myself and others as a social being and must behave as such) (Gilligan, pp. 25–68).

The synthesis of these three elements (contextual relevance, maintenance of relationship and conception of identity) revealed for Gilligan a picture of people who spoke with an ethical voice characterized as a discourse detached from principle, focused on relations in particular contexts, where this discourse was considered a mature, intelligible, productive moral standpoint rather than a juvenile, incomplete approach. The question invariably arises, however, as to where this alternative outlook can fit in to usual moral views given the frequent references made by many of the individuals interviewed to obligations and values that were not necessarily solely constituted as a matter of “care.” While Gilligan, adhering to Chodorow, writes of mother–contact as the fundamental developmental basis for the “caring” response, it is also productive to examine Gilligan’s information in terms of other factors, and it is in

these other comments that we can understand the place of care-ethical directions within the conventional moral realm of description.

One such alternative hypothesis is that the ethic of care may be seen "as a set of circumscribed coping strategies for dealing with sexism" (Puka, pp. 58-82). According to Bill Puka (in attempting to deal with the feminist criticism of Gilligan that shows "caring" as "a sexist service orientation"), there are three developmental levels in Gilligan's hypothesis: self-protection, caring for others (where self-defense is "selfish" and "irresponsible") and self-balancing care for others (Puka, p. 59). Progress from one level to another is a matter of growing self-confidence and competence, and since these feelings are not always present, Puka claims, "women progress and regress in care, rather than following an invariant progressive sequence;" women suffer from feelings of vulnerability and impotency in a masculine world, and are thus often forced to regress to a "lower" moral level (Puka, p. 60). In this way, when women are faced with rejection, domination and other damaging behaviors, they have the option of swinging between the levels, depending upon how they feel best able to cope with these "attacks." The difficulty inherent in this, as Puka sees it, is that there will often occur a reversion to the "slave mentality" of the second level, serving only others above oneself, an example of excess in the areas of sacrifice and relationship maintenance (Puka, p. 62). Women, and in fact anyone dependent upon a care-ethical approach of the sort shown by Gilligan, would find themselves constantly faced with the possibility of such a potentially harmful regression to a submissive standpoint.

How are we to deal with this very apt criticism? It seems to walk hand in hand with the sentiment that Gilligan's findings, which make a definite differentiation between the justice and care standpoints based on a noticeable correlation with sex difference, merely enforce the stereotype of the submissive, emotional, "irrational" female, even as Gilligan attempts to defuse this implication of immaturity (Gould, pp. 411-415).² The danger exists that an ethic of care, posited as a "feminine" institution, can actually be harmful rather than helpful. This point may be refuted in part by emphasizing Gilligan's insistence that her "different voice" is a "theme," rather than a necessary empirical characteristic, and that it exists in both

² This is one of the better of several different articles emphasizing this point.

male and female subjects (Gilligan, p. 6). A more definitive refutation is to be found, however, in expanding the scope of the analysis beyond sex differences to include differences in age and social position as well. In various similar studies of moral orientation, age and status had as much to do with the sexual differentiation as anything else. In one study, for example, it was discovered that adults who were parents showed a definite sex–role differentiation in their moral standpoints, while adults who were not parents did not (Pratt, pp. 373–391). In another study of college students, moral focus was less related to sexual differences and found to be more closely tied to a certain high level of idealistic and non–relativistic thinking (Forsyth, pp. 243–248). When these additional factors are added to Gilligan’s original thesis of gender–specific ethical outlooks, the stereotypical femininity may safely be ignored in favor of more complex circumstances; the caring orientation in answering ethical dilemmas may be seen to be influenced strongly by many factors in addition to gender.

Having moved away from specifically “feminine” typecasting for the ethic of care, how then are we to deal with Puka’s problem of “regression” in care? Gilligan herself provides the framework for identifying a balanced, intelligible ethic of care (Puka’s third level) with validity as a “mature” orientation alternative to that Justice–based ethic, but she does not identify the lower stages as such—her concern is with the understanding of the mature stage only, just as Kohlberg’s work is primarily concerned with the identification and direction of the most mature level of justice–based moral discourse.

Keeping in mind the variations in moral “maturity” influenced both by age and by social–relational status (as well as idealism, relativism, etc.), one way to get around Puka’s objection is to consider the presence of care as a virtue, as per the teachings of virtue–theory in ethics. To do this we must move from the descriptive realm to a more normative design, as found in the work of Nel Noddings.

II

Given the above descriptive background, what shape would a normative theory of ethical caring take? For Nel Noddings, it would be additionally supplemented by expanded ideas of reciprocation, empathy and specific forms that relationships can take. Noddings

begins her account of caring, as Gilligan did indirectly by invoking Chodorow, with the concept of mothering. It is the mother-child relationship that is the paradigmatic case for her system, with the roles of the mother, or "one-caring," and the child, "cared-for," with each role entailing special obligations toward the maintenance of a caring interrelationship.

According to Noddings, the first thing required to establish a properly ethical caring relationship is knowledge of what precisely this care entails, above and beyond the basic concerns of context, relationship and self-definition. Caring can be many things, and she differentiates among caring for people, an "aesthetic" care for things and ideas and the ultimately undesirable form of care as a burden or onerous obligation (Noddings, p. 9). Caring, in the aesthetic sense, is comparable to the idea of preference, or caring for one thing over another, or having an interest in a particular idea or object rather than another person. Caring as concern or burden also deals with objects, in the sense of there existing an obligation to attend to these objects in a certain way (such as "caring" for one's lawn or some other personal possession). It is a mistake, however, to substitute either of these two forms of the concept for proper ethical caring; for Noddings, ethical care should neither involve an abstract, aesthetic preference for certain persons nor an attitude of onerous obligation (such as in caring for one's elderly, infirm grandmother as if she were a burden) (Noddings, pp. 12-13). According to Noddings, the inclination towards caring for people interactively, which is the "mothering" paradigm's primary component, is the basic "pre-moral" virtue of care upon which most care-ethical considerations should be based (Noddings, pp. 13-15).

The ethical ideal that supports this virtue is rooted in "the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other and the longing to maintain, recapture or enhance our most caring and tender moments" (Noddings, p. 104). The effort required, first and foremost, is the holding of a "caring attitude," where care is as per the previously stated ideal, rather than a matter of trouble (Noddings, p. 13).³ To show how this attitude should be applied, Noddings divides the caring interrelation into the roles of "one-caring" and "cared-for."

³ The example of care as burden is twofold, either where care is equated with worry or where caring for someone becomes worry, such as is seen with Noddings' Mr. Smith, who must care for his ailing mother who is in a nursing home.

The role of the “one-caring” is primarily the keeping of this attitude in such a way that the “cared-for” is the total of all of the one-caring’s attention in those matters in which they must relate to one another. The one-caring is obliged to do whatever is necessary to help the cared-for grow as a person and fulfill herself (Noddings, pp. 60–74). In any relation, the approach of the one-caring is one of engrossment, of an almost complete empathy with the cared-for’s best interests and needs. The one-caring is perceived by the cared-for as one who “accepts, embraces and leads upward,” a presence of ultimate support and belief; in short, it is the role of the mother, and for Noddings, the ideal teacher (Noddings, p. 67).

The caring attitude, however, is not something incumbent upon the “one-caring” alone—reciprocation is required in Noddings’ conception of care. In her “mothering” example, the cared-for gives back receptivity of the one-caring’s efforts, and it is the capacity to respond in this fashion that delimits where the possibility for a caring relation begins and ends (Noddings, p. 86). The cared-for has, in a sense, a certain obligation to grow and flourish under the one-caring’s ministrations; this is the only way in which a caring relation can continue, such that the one-caring’s absorption remains engaged. The role of the cared-for as respondent is what sets caring for persons apart from caring for animals or material objects or ideas—none of the latter are really capable of the full responsiveness of a human being, which allows the capability for caring as interaction rather than as concern or inclination (Noddings, pp. 148–170).⁴

How does one make a decision as one-caring? The root desire for the one-caring (our ethical agent) is attention to the needs (and specifically the possible pain) of the cared-for(s) involved. Then she must consider the situation. All of this is supported by Gilligan and Noddings alike. It is supplemented, however, by Noddings’ understanding of care as a virtue and care as a direction based not only on fear of hurt or maintenance of connection or empathy, but also a positive absorption in the situation of the cared-for by the one-caring; Gilligan shows empathy, but not absorption. This can be seen in the way in which Noddings presents care-ethical solutions to ethical dilemmas, and indicates the possibility of needing to involve

⁴Our relation to animals and plants can be caring, but only to the limits of their responsiveness, and our relation to objects and ideas is more distant still.

oneself in an un-caring response to a problem, which Noddings calls action under a "diminished ethical ideal" (Noddings, pp. 113–115).

The primary example that Noddings gives is the case of the abused wife who kills her husband, faced with choosing the maintenance of a relationship with him and his continuing well being over her own health and safety, as well as that of her children. She is obliged as one-caring to consider the needs of all concerned, and yet she is trapped if she does this—her situation is such that the only way to continue a caring relationship with her children and herself is to cease to behave as one-caring towards her husband (Noddings, p. 114). She cannot (to use Noddings' words) "receive" him (empathize with him, treat him as one-caring) to change his habits (or so the author would have us assume for the sake of argument), since all of his responses have only an abusive direction to go in. She must choose to act then without reception, and without caring reciprocity, and is thereby able to kill him to save herself and her children.

From the possibility of a "diminished" ethical capacity, we may see the extreme complexity that a care-ethic entails. For the battered wife, there is no simple decision (children and self over husband). As one-caring, she must attempt to approach all parties involved, the antagonistic husband as well as the children, in a caring, receptive, absorbed fashion; this is comparable to some of the difficulty faced by the women in Gilligan's abortion study, who were forced to approach the fetus, their friends, family, lovers, etc., to make the decision appropriate to their situations, as well as doctors and other official presences. Around the ethical one-caring, there are "circles and chains" of connected lives and personalities that must be accounted for in any decision, and there is no simple one-caring/cared-for relationship to go on; one-caring is also one cared-for in many cases, and the state of the relationship between a person and her/his spouse is different from the same person's relationship to her/his child, or to a doctor or other "official" type (Noddings, p. 27).

In light of Gilligan's earlier revelations about the caring voice in moral orientation, what Noddings presents would seem to be precisely the proper sort of form for a care ethic to take. It is inclusive of relationship, of the positive nature of continuing relation to others that gives attention to specific contextually relevant aspects of any problem, encourages (in fact, requires) empathy, defines the self in relation to others within an ethical framework and strongly empha-

sizes the importance, relevance and strengths of caring as a moral standpoint. It does, however, stand with a flaw that should be dealt with, namely the beginning assumption of mothering. This, as in Gilligan, leaves Noddings' work open to the feminist criticism of caring as the slave-mentality of women rather than an alternative method open to many. Noddings' model of mothering additionally provides the difficulty of caring as a superior-inferior relationship model, so that the attitude of the one-caring, although it is possible that Noddings did not intend it to seem so, may be seen as patronizing or paternalistic even in its attention to reciprocation. Her mother/teacher is in many senses much like the classical model in Greek philosophy of the Lover/Beloved distinction, which most definitely posits a superior-to-inferior, subject-to-object orientation.⁵ It presents a version of the care ethic that is convenient for exposition, but possibly faulty in practice.

The problem of derogatory "femininity" and of superior/subject to inferior/object relation models can, of course, be replied to by Gilligan's original contention of theme, and by the understanding that Noddings intends to show a more complete reciprocity in simple terms. A better way, however, to get around the sex-based objections to both of these is to remove the caring system's basis from the mothering metaphor and instead examine it in a way that more completely expresses what both Gilligan and Noddings attempted to demonstrate in a care-ethic. This can be achieved by changing to the metaphor of care-ethical action as a role playing game.

III

Most of us are familiar with one or another type of role playing game, ranging in complexity from the simple design of "cops and robbers" to more mechanically complex role-playing fantasy games or the type of role-playing exercises that actors use in the everyday practice of their occupations. However different in scope they might be, however, all of these games have some crucial features in common, and it is these features which, when connected, will provide us with a clearer metaphor for the ethics of care.

The first important matter at hand for role playing games, as for

⁵ Plato, the *Symposium*.

any game, is the question of the rules. In the case of any role playing game, there are some which, no matter what the rest of the game may be about, remain constant and this is particularly relevant because of what rules serve to do: rules create the world of the game, and, like the laws of nature, determine what is and is not possible within the game itself for the players (*E*, p. 27). The idea of rules as "laws of nature" is especially important in a role-playing game, however, because of the peculiar lack of physical limitations (such as a game-board and pieces) to the sphere of game-reality. The rules, specifically in the sense in which they regulate what the game's "characters" may do in a given situation, thus define the context of the situations of play, above and beyond simply designating the means and proper procedures leading towards victory.

Games of any kind usually have a goal of some sort for the players to achieve, thus constituting "victory" and the completion of the game. In role-playing games, however, it often appears that the game is open-ended—there is no specific moment, at the end of a chain of actions, that constitutes a "win." Take a very simple game, for instance, such as that ever-popular mainstay of childhood, "cops and robbers." The first thing that becomes apparent, within the very simple explicit rules of the game itself, is that there are either many small victories possible (cop catches robber; robber evades cop) such that any protracted amount of play-time consists of many "games" of "cops and robbers," or no real, defined point of "victory" at all. This line of thought assumes that it is a specific chain of actions towards a pre-arranged goal that players must reach in a particular manner, so as to claim success, which is naturally the way most other sorts of games (chess, solitaire, Parcheesi, etc.) function. In the case of a role-playing game though, success is defined, not in terms of a directional goal, but in terms of a developmental one; to be a good role-player, one must develop one's "character" within the framework of the rules of game-reality.

Characters, in role-playing games, are the roles in play which the participants take on and attempt to fulfill. In "cops and robbers," the roles are the "cops and the robbers," obviously, and victory in this game is defined in terms, not of the achievement of specified success, but in terms of being a good cop, or a good robber. The rules of the game are simple, vague and aimed only at constructing the roles—children who play the game often create whole "plots" within which

their character-development can maneuver. In more complex role-playing games, the idea of “characters” and their interaction with a “plot” is explicitly set forth as the primary directive of play (such as in mass-market role-playing games).

The basic strategy of play in such a game, where the character and its development is the ulterior end of all game-action, is something to be approached primarily on the level of constructing an identity in relation to the other players and the collectively created plot, by way of the specific units of play-movement, those being interactive situations. From the beginning of the game, the rules specify the character’s general attributes, positions, possessions, etc. (the cops always have guns and radios, and are motivated towards the protection of the law and all other attitudes that go with that motivation), and her/his basic situation relative to the other players and their roles. Beyond that, however, pretty much anything goes. In the more complex role-playing games, a plot is often created to give the players a more explicit framework within which to develop their characters, but plots begin and end. Player-characters go through many plots, until their existence is terminated, either in the course of play or by the player’s wishes, and these plots provide situations that allow the characters to become further developed, in both physical and psychological attributes.⁶ Again, the point of the game is character development, a feature of role playing that carries over even to role-playing exercises used for more businesslike purposes (such as role-playing to learn about sexual harassment, where character development takes on an added meaning).

As previously mentioned, the basic “unit” of play in a role-playing game is a situation; in “cops and robbers,” it may be the criminal act that caused the character roles to intersect, while in another game it might be something as mundane as a meeting in a park or as violent as hunting down monsters. Within this unit

⁶ In fantasy role-games, for example, the player-characters usually begin their “lives” at Level One, with some few possessions and an understanding of their basic abilities and traits. In the course of play, characters acquire new abilities and knowledge, new possessions and accumulate “experience points” towards the goal of reaching another Level of character development, at which they can acquire more and more abilities, knowledge, possessions, etc., and are able to go on ever more difficult (and potentially profitable) adventures. Additionally, many of these games also provide for psychological advancement (“Vampire: The Masquerade” is one of these).

situation, the characters exercise their roles and their capabilities in reaction to the situational context, and to each other—one can seldom find a role-playing game that one may play alone.⁷ Role development depends on types of relationship to external factors. In “cops and robbers,” the opposition of the two primary roles is the basic developmental focus; in cooperational, rather than oppositional games, teamwork is grist for the character development mill. The important thing to remember to win (i.e. to continuously create and improve upon the details of the character) is how one’s character can function in relation to others, because character growth is largely dependent upon the outcomes of situational interactions.

How does this type of game become a metaphor for care-ethical attitudes and procedures? There are some obvious fundamental similarities to the three elements of Gilligan’s care-ethic, such as the importance of contextual relevance and relation to others, but it would appear to lose some of Noddings’ weight upon personal absorption, as well as only very roughly approximating Gilligan’s concern of personal identity formation. It becomes necessary to find some way in which role-playing can be connected, not only to the basic rudiments of psychological care-procedures, but also to an ideal, a basis for the application of said psychological influences. We are also provided with the opportunity to expand the discussion beyond the realm of masculine/feminine oppositions, as well as the chance to explore and give greater importance to Noddings’ “circles and chains” of relation, free of the trap of superior-inferior/subject-object relational modeling as a rigid standard.

To begin with, it is important that we examine the shape the role-playing metaphor gives to Gilligan’s original thesis. This can best be done by bringing forth the theatrical side of our metaphor, as used in the work of Erving Goffman, specifically in the sense that role-playing as a game and role-playing as theater are fundamentally

⁷ The only ways that I could imagine to have role-playing without live role others are the “Choose Your Own Adventure” format books, which pre-set your options within a specified, predetermined role, and computer role-playing games, which, depending on the sophistication of the program, can either be CYOA formats or actually involve a looser, more freely played opportunity. In both cases, however, only the rudimentary mechanical development of character takes place; one cannot, with most computer games for example, undertake a personal change in one’s life outside of the “you must find x by surviving the maze and killing off the monsters” sort of controlled situation.

similar in their usage of the presentation of specific roles in a controlled context. When Gilligan's subjects who used the care-ethic described themselves and their moral lives, they spoke of, as mentioned above, the need to relate to others, via an often externally determined identity, in determinate situational cases. What this means, in Goffman's terms, is that people who use this ethical method can be said to be "on stage" (where the stage is roughly the same as the contextual game-field created by the rules in a role-playing game), acting their parts both with other "performers" and with "audiences" (Goffman's examples include relations between shopkeepers and clients and between the staff and passengers on a luxury liner, as well as less formal cases of people visiting each other's homes for tea) (*PS*).

Instead of characterizing interactive behavior in terms of its positive or negative perceived psychological value or gender connection, Goffman begins and ends his study with observations of people interacting with each other, stated in terms of a theatrical framework; he claims to study "social life" in terms of the theater (*PS*, introduction). His primary starting point is the "social establishment," "any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception [places of business, homes] in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place" (*PS*, p. 238). Within the social establishment, roles are assumed, such that there is performed behavior and "backstage" behavior; in role-playing as a game, we might say that there is, likewise, a division between character action (activity of the player-in-character) and player action (action out-of-role or out of play). Performers and audiences make up "teams," such that everyone is, to some degree, a performer and a member of the audience all at once, and performances are interactions between teams taking on both functions (*PS*, pp. 178-180). In the same way, players of a role-playing game interact as "teams" with the situations of play—cops and robbers relate to each other both in and out of character, and with different agendas in mind, and fantasy-gaming involves the interaction of teams of players/characters with non-player personalities portrayed by a "game-master" or "storyteller."

Contextual relevance, maintenance of relationship and conception of identity take on a slight twist, seen through Goffman's lens. Contextual relevance, in addition to indicating a tendency to deal with concrete situational cases instead of abstractions, can also be

seen as the practice of functioning *in* context instead of trying to escape from it, or, metaphorically, acting/moving/performing on stage or in the game. It indicates the great importance of the numerous, almost overwhelmingly complex parts of any situation that necessarily effect decision-making procedures. Maintenance of relationship, too, gains an added meaning, in the sense that it entails not simply the attempt to continue a relation, but a situation as well; it is the practice of staying "in character," and keeping the plot of the game alive, and additionally serves as the major vehicle by which roles are exercised in context.

The most powerful and clarifying addition of Goffman to Gilligan, however, lies in the field of determination of identity. Like the student in Gilligan's study who spoke of herself as having layers of self, like an onion, Goffman presents an idea of self that is often externally determined identity—elements combined with more internal, personal self-concepts (Gilligan, pp. 67–68). Instead of setting them up in a confusing opposition, Goffman separates the two into character and performer (character and player): "The self, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising from a scene that is presented ..." (*PS*, p. 253). Characters and impressions change from situation to situation, as the player plays them out, and they develop into different things over time and given varying situational experiences, just as players themselves change and grow. Gilligan's student might just as well have expressed her confusion about her identity as a question of where the character and the player aspects of herself begin and end.

Based on Goffman and Gilligan, we find an ethical care role-player who functions by (as Noddings says) "receiving" the impressions of others in complex determinate situations, as well as projecting (performing) role-impressions to others. The behavior is meant to maintain the medium of the interaction (maintain the relationship, keep the game going), both by using certain aspects of a character and attempting to further develop and perfect that character.

If this is in fact the case, however, where does the moral motivation lie? It is one thing for a player, once engaged in play, to wish to continue the game. It is an entirely different motivation that leads a player to begin the game in the first place, and that is where Noddings and Goffman meet. Noddings, in providing the idea of the

desire to continue positive “caring” relationships with others, gives a viable motivation to become a performer/player in this particular game, although she only relates the fulfillment of this need through the somewhat problematic forms of the mother–child, teacher–student relationship models. While she alludes to a multitude of possible roles for ones–caring and cared–for’s, (“circles and chains”), Goffman’s contribution is the addition of an understanding of the shifting quality of characters and role–identities (“effect[s] arising from a scene that is presented”), such that, while relationships differ as to when one acts as performer or audience, (one–caring or cared–for, in a loose comparison), they are not necessarily superior–inferior in design. The desire to continue the game has more to do, in this case, with the desire to continue and learn to manage character impressions, to create new opportunities for interrelation in different ways.⁸

As an ethical procedure, care as role–playing is based in a virtuous ideal (if we are to approach it as a mature and intelligible moral standpoint in the way that Gilligan and Noddings would advocate) of positive concern for others, and its methods are actions designed to permit the growth and continuation of that care, via role–activity in relation to the particular situations of oneself and others. To “win” this game (i.e. to be a positive or “good” moral agent in the care–ethical system), one must develop one’s role–relations with others in a fashion that fosters further relationship (when applicable) and self–development on all sides, thus maintaining the game. The action of play revolves around focusing the virtuous caring ideal (seen in Gilligan as the desire to avoid harm to others and shown in Noddings as an empathy intended to be helpful) through the lens of relationship and reception (as performer and as audience). Through the metaphor of the role–playing game, the care–ethic is seen as a moral view incidentally, but not solely, dependent upon the gender of the agent (since people, as social creatures, interact regardless of gender), free of the problematic “feminine” mothering–orientation’s tendency towards stereotypical “female/inferior” interpretation.

⁸ The chapter on “Impression Management” is especially relevant here.

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