

Care Ethics and Refusal of Abstraction

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Abstract

My purpose of this study is to clarify one of the characters of the care ethics of Nel Noddings, that is to say, particularity. For this purpose, I examine Noddings' criticism against Simone Veil's argument about "attention".

Noddings and Veil, they share certain similarities in assuming that human beings are weak and vulnerable. Noddings, therefore, evaluate highly Veil's consideration about 'attention'. Care ethics of Noddings is based on the relations between the carer and the cared-for. In such relations, 'attention' is an essential characteristic. With this 'attention', the carer tries to understand the needs of the cared-for. According to Noddings, most of traditional ethics suppose an image of person that is autonomous and separated. And she thinks that this tradition has neglected the importance of 'attention' to the person with whom one is together, but that Veil is "an outstanding exception" (Starting at Home). We can find a question to a wounded man, "What are you going through ?" in Veil's 'Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God'. Asking someone in such a way, "the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive the being it is looking at". In Noddings' view, this receptive attention acts as a foundation for moral life.

Then, why does Noddings criticize the Veil's concept of 'attention'? Noddings says that Veil's analysis of attention is carried out in the context of the "right use of school studies" in developing a love of God and fellow human being. But, according to Noddings, Veil is wrong in two ways. 1) There is no convincing evidence that people capable attention to, for example, mathematics are more attention to God than they would have been without that capacity. 2) Attention to God only sometimes enhances a love of fellow human being. To put it simply, Noddings doubt whether the capacity of attention to the school studies can be transformed to the one of attention to living human beings.

In Noddings' criticize against Veil, there seems to be a refusal of something abstract and universal in the domain of ethics. In this presentation, examining the argument of Veil and Noddings' criticism to that, I would like to clarify the refusal of abstraction as a characteristic of Noddings' care ethics. To do so, I also try to use some conceptions of Toju Nakae, a Japanese thinker of Edo period.