



HAL
open science

IS IT POSSIBLE TO LEARN ETHICS OF CARE?

Guillaume Cuny

► **To cite this version:**

Guillaume Cuny. IS IT POSSIBLE TO LEARN ETHICS OF CARE?. EUGLOH Global Health in humanities and social sciences, Sep 2021, Paris, France. hal-03410727

HAL Id: hal-03410727

<https://hal.science/hal-03410727>

Submitted on 1 Nov 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO LEARN ETHICS OF CARE ?

CUNY Guillaume

PhD student in Centre Pierre Naville, University of Paris Saclay

cunyguillaume1@gmail.com

PhD supervisor : HAMUS-VALLÉE Réjane

rejane.vallee@univ-evry.fr



Abstract : Taking care of others is a learning process, which is why there are courses such as the Bac Pro ASSP. This program allows young girls from working-class backgrounds, most of whom are immigrants, to continue their studies despite their poor academic performance. They saw it as a way to engage in a field close to what they were used to do in their families and to find the respectability that comes from taking care of others (Skeggs, 2002) They therefore enrolled in this field according to a certain gender conformity and assumed values which, during their training, gave way to the discovery of complex relational professions. Through the situations they experienced during their internships, they had to (re)construct a professional ethic based on the altruistic component of these professions. But not all are equal when it comes to developing an ethic of care; psychological, emotional or social obstacles prevent some from accessing others. Through this paper, we wish to highlight the different stages of this learning process and to reflect on the conditions for its success.

Key-words : ethics of care ; vocational school ; gender

This proposal of communication is based on a research carried out within the framework of a PhD in visual sociology. For three years, we have followed students in the Bac Pro ASSP (accompaniment, care, services to the person) program in a high school in the Paris suburbs, from the 10th grade to their final exam. This program, created in 2011, is open to young girls from working-class backgrounds and mostly from immigrant families. In France, vocational training does not enjoy a good image (Palheta, 2011) and the general education stream remains the legitimate way to continue one's studies. Thus, students who turn to vocational education often do so under duress because of academic results deemed insufficient, these academic results being directly correlated to their place in the social space. Our initial hypothesis was that an orientation by default in a care and support field where a real vocation is expected from future professionals could induce a cognitive dissonance in students. Indeed, can one take care of others in a satisfactory manner if the desire is not there? The first results of our survey allowed us to see that our hypothesis was wrong. In fact, the ASSP field of study escapes this rule of default orientation since most of the students chose it as their first choice of orientation. This fact redirected us to a new research hypothesis according to which the students saw in this field an opportunity to move towards a familiar field (Cartier, 2012). Indeed, the interviews showed us that the vast majority of students had already taken care of their siblings to help their parents. These experiences made the students feel responsible and respectable. The Bac Pro ASSP was thus perceived as a familiar and reassuring field for students who have a conflicting relationship with the school institution. The fact that 98% of the students in the program were girls did not seem to surprise either students or teachers. We quickly noticed in our survey that the skills required to care for others were associated with the female gender, which is considered to be more gentle and patient.

The social predispositions to care for others were then all present in these girls, but the interviews and observations of the work placements made us aware that not all of them were equal when it came to learning about otherness. We believe that this stems from the fact that they are not all at the same level in their construction of meaning around their orientation and we think that one of the ways to appropriate this orientation is to remember its altruistic dimension. In this way, we believe that it is through the construction of an ethic of care that students will be able to truly make sense of their training. While Kohlberg's work may have provided us with an interesting framework for analysis with its different stages of development of moral sense, his methodology and results are not satisfactory because he does

not integrate the socialization of students into his study (Kohlberg, 1987) Carol Giligan, for her part, despite her tendency to define the skills of care as specifically feminine, has allowed us to understand the ethic of care as an ability to consider the points of view of all persons in a situation (Giligan, 1993) This definition of the ethic of care seems relevant to us and fits perfectly - thanks to its concrete aspect - to the study of our field.

Thanks to this theoretical basis, we have been able to follow the construction of this ethic of care over the years. Through this paper we would like to propose some steps in the learning of the ethic of care. We will develop three of them: the capacity to consider the other as a person, the capacity to take into account the points of view of the persons present in the situations and the distancing of emotions through emotional work (Hochschild, 2003) We use the term learning on purpose because we are convinced as sociologists that caring for others is not innate and does not depend on gender, social origin or race. We will also insist on the need to experience situations in professional settings to build this professional ethic. Learning in the family or within the walls of the school does not allow the student to position him/herself autonomously with regard to the situations experienced.

We will also ask ourselves the question of the objectification of the learning of the ethics of care. The evaluation grids of the school institution do not allow to evaluate or even to focus on the relational dimension of learning. The pedagogical actors identify the relational dimension only through the obscure concept of "maturity" which encompasses the capacity of students to detach themselves from themselves in order to turn towards the others. In doing so, the school institution is banking on the fact that it is by growing up that students will be able to access the relational dimension of their professions. However, the interviews and observations forcefully show that age is not the only factor: psychological and affective blocks and the obstacles linked to precariousness are determining elements in the construction of an ethical sense. The moments of reflexivity and exchange between teachers and students that would allow for the co-construction of this sense of direction are cruelly lacking and we will ask ourselves how these could be improved.

Our exploratory work confirms the thesis that the ability to care about oneself is linked to the ability to care about others (Foucault, 1982) (Lee, 2019) We use the term ability deliberately because it emphasizes the need to activate these skills. To care about oneself is to consider oneself as an autonomous and responsible actor who makes a choice of orientation. It also means being able to ask ourselves where our desire lies. It is only once this capacity is

activated that the individual will be able to access the other, no longer being hindered by his or her resistance or projections. The ethics of care, in order to be built, must therefore find its conditions of happiness, which are not always met, for the reasons we have mentioned. The approach based on capabilities therefore seems to us to be the most suitable for identifying how this capacity to reach out to the other can be activated in each individual (Sen, 1999) (Nussbaum, 2014).

References

BOLTANSKI, Luc, 1990. *L'amour et la justice comme compétences: trois essais de sociologie de l'action*. Paris, France : Éditions Métailié.

CARTIER, Marie, 2012. Le caring, un capital culturel populaire ? *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. 15 avril 2012. Vol. n° 191-192, n° 1, pp. 106-113.

FOUCAULT, Michel, EWALD, François et FONTANA, Alessandro, 2008. *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres: cours au Collège de France 1982-1983*. Paris, France : EHESS : Gallimard : Le Seuil.

GILLIGAN, Carol, 1993. *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge (Mass.), Etats-Unis d'Amérique, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord.

LAUGIER, Sandra, 2010. L'éthique du care en trois subversions. *Multitudes*. 2010. Vol. 42, n° 3, pp. 112-125.

LEE, Shao-Fen, 2019. *Enquêter sur la capacité à se soucier des autres. Le travail des aides-soignantes en institution pour personnes âgées dépendantes en France et à Taïwan*. These de doctorat. Paris, EHESS.

NODDINGS, Nel, 2013. *Caring: a relational approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley, California, Etats-Unis d'Amérique, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord.

NUSSBAUM, Martha Craven (éd.), 2014. *Capabilities, gender, equality: towards fundamental entitlements*. Cambridge, Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord : Cambridge University Press.

OGIEN, Ruwen, 2011. Les tendances moralistes et inégalitaires de l'éthique du care. *Travail, genre et sociétés*. 2011. Vol. 26, n° 2, pp. 179-182.

PAPERMAN, Patricia, 2004. Perspectives féministes sur la justice. *L'Année sociologique*. 2004. Vol. 54, n° 2, pp. 413-433.

PAPERMAN, Patricia et MOLINIER, Pascale, 2011. L'éthique du care comme pensée de l'égalité. *Travail, genre et sociétés*. 2011. Vol. 26, n° 2, pp. 189-193.

SEN, Amartya, 1999. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford University Press.

SKEGGS, Beverley, 2014. *Des femmes respectables: classe et genre en milieu populaire*. Marseille, France : Agone.

TRONTO, Joan C., 2008. Du care. *Revue du MAUSS*. 2008. Vol. n° 32, n° 2, pp. 243-265.