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REASON AND CARE: CONSTRUCTING AN
INCLUSIVE MORAL THEORY FOR CIVIC
EDUCATION

BY
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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

My thesis tackles the debate regarding (in)compatibility of rational moral philosophy and caring theory. My thesis argues and demonstrates that by unifying Noddings' caring theory with ethic(s) of care presented by scholars from social and political science, in both practice and on relational grounds, the new caring theory not only is compatible with rational moral philosophy, but is also more inclusive and capable of facing challenges derived from the modern age of information technology.

My thesis first identifies four core components presented by various caring theorists and then integrates them into what I call a neocaring theory. These four components are: caring nature, caring as activity, contextuality or motivation replacement, and relational ontology. Second, I apply both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising to bridge the gap between Noddings' caring theory and Tront-Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature. This new relational ground or relational ontology, therefore, expands to embrace three characteristics of human existence: first, that the fabric of human existence is the synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, as well as rationality and affectivity; second, human life is an ongoing process of becoming and synthesizing; and third, humans and sociopolitical activity are interconnected and interdependent with each other, and thereby, they are mutually conditioned and supplementary.

Based on the four core components and three characteristics of neocaring theory, I construct my neocaring theory of autonomy, and meanwhile demonstrate the ways in which Kant's moral autonomy is included in this new theory. In the final chapter, I conclude my thesis by showing the differences that the neocaring theory of autonomy can make, compared to the theories of Kant and neoliberalism, with respect to tackling problems emerging from the modern digital age, and administrating higher education, respectively. Lastly, my thesis shows the ways in which a moral education will affect our society and the formation of citizenship, and the ways in which this neocaring theory of autonomy can help to nurture students' caring minds and ability to reflect on the interdependent nature of human existence to become positive netcitizens in the digital age.

The dedication goes to all the teachers and friends who teach, encourage me, challenge me and care for me.

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INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH FOCUS, THESIS STRUCTURE, AND CONTRIBUTION

Research focus

In the past two decades, one of the most significant events in moral philosophy has been the initiation of a debate between caring theory and the Kantian rational moral philosophy that undergirds modern social justice and rational liberal theory. The debate between these two influential theories has always been formulated in a dichotomous way. For instance, in the earliest stage, the issue was seen as a debate between feminist views and a masculine perspective, whereas in a later stage, the focus became debating the public principle of social justice versus the private relation/virtue of mothering care. In the process of this debate, some scholars, such as Tronto, Clement, Held and Bubeck, tried to reconcile these two theories by proposing that one could perform social justice within the framework of caring, but this reconciled view is rejected by Slote. Slote (2007) claims that the foundation of caring theory is empathetic caring, which is incompatible with that of rational moral philosophy, i.e., the rational thinking of autonomy, equality and freedom. Held (2006), although not explicitly rejecting this compatibility, says that these two are “separated moral theory which used in different domains”. This implies that in Held’s view, caring theory can co-exist with, but is not compatible with, rational moral philosophy. Both Slote’s and Held’s views indicate that in the recent development, caring theory is conceived of as being incompatible with rational moral philosophy on the foundational level.

Formulating the relationship between caring theory and rational moral philosophy as such, a fear of incompatibility between these two theories is generated and a dilemma as whether to use caring theory or rational moral philosophy to guide our teaching, schooling, as well as social and political practice is produced. This dichotomous view, in turn, seems to have

become orthodoxy. However, on re-reading and re-examining caring theorists' and Kant's primary writings, and the literature on the debate regarding this (in)compatibility, I found that the dichotomous view is derived from at least three problems: first, the lack of a unified caring theory; second, a not-yet-fully developed relational ground that serves as the ontological foundation of caring theory; and third, some misinterpretation of the core elements of caring theory and rational moral philosophy.

My thesis, therefore, aims to re-visit the debate and tackle the (in)compatibility of these two most influential moral theories. My thesis contends and demonstrates that by combining Noddings' caring theory and ethic(s) of care, presented by scholars from social and political science, on the practical level, it is possible to identify some core components to unify caring theories presented by various theorists. Also, with the help of both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising, the different characterizations of relational foundations constructed by Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky can be bridged and enhanced. With the unified caring components and an enhanced relational ground or relational ontology, my thesis demonstrates that it is possible to form a neocaring theory of autonomy, which not only is compatible with that of Kant's rational moral autonomy, but also is more inclusive and effective to cope with problems emerging from the modern information technology age.

Thesis Structure

In the first chapter, my thesis reviews the debate and development of the (in)compatibility of caring theory and rational moral philosophy. Then, I discuss my methodology and the philosophical framework used in my thesis. In the second chapter, I analyze and clarify the

various definitions of caring concepts, and different characterizations of relational ground presented by different caring theorists. Then, my thesis goes on to identify four components to unify Noddings's caring theory and Tronto-Hankivsky's ethic(s) of care. The new caring theory is named neocaring theory. In the second part of chapter two, my thesis also reveals the core components that have or have not been studied by caring theorists. In the third chapter, my thesis continues the second chapter's discussion, and applies both Merleau-Ponty and Nāgārjuna's philosophies to connect and enhance Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky's relational ground. In the fourth chapter, I build on the four core components of unified neocaring theory, and my enhanced relational ground to construct a neocaring theory of autonomy. In the final chapter, my thesis presents the differences that this new theory can make, compared to Kant's moral autonomy and neoliberalism's personal autonomy, regarding the problems emerging from the modern digital age, and a better way to administrate higher education.

Contribution

The reason my thesis focuses on investigating the (in)compatibility of caring theory and rational philosophy is because these two theories are the most influential moral theories that shape and guide modern moral theory in education and sociopolitical activities. The separation of these two presents us with a great dilemma, not merely in teaching and schooling, but also in social and political practices. Through my thesis, I hope to bridge the gap between these two theories. Based on Merleau-Ponty's theory of subjectivity and Nāgārjuna's dependent co-arising, my thesis contends and demonstrates that rational thinking is not necessarily in opposition to affective feelings, and that subjective experience is not incompatible with objective factors, because all are intrinsic components of human life. The key rather lies in how to clear theoretical

space for both components—which I argue are both necessary to any robust moral theory—while remaining aware of their limitations or insufficiencies. Particularly, such an approach will enable us to utilize critical thinking firmly rooted in humane caring. It is, thereby, possible to establish a more caring and inclusive neocaring theory for the modern information technology age. In my view, guided by this neocaring theory, we would take a more inclusive and humane view, and bring a broader, and more effective way of thinking to the resolution of disagreements and conflict in the social and political arena. As educators we should not take rational theory to be the only “right” way to tackle moral issues and dismiss any theory that rests on affect. In a liberal democratic society, people’s lives and capacities are diversified. It is insufficient to adapt a moral theory that utilizes a “one size fits all” approach to evaluate and develop the minds of our youth. Furthermore, such a neocaring theory should contribute to a deeper engagement with and appreciation of other cultures within a global context.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH PROBLEMS, METHODOLOGY, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review Regarding the (in)Comparability between Caring theory and Rational Moral Philosophy

In the past two decades, one of the most noticeable phenomena in the field of philosophy of education is the emergence of theory of caring, and the ethic(s) of care (hereafter, I will use caring theory/ethic(s) as a shorthand for these two theories)¹. Since Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings published their ethic of care and caring theory in 1982 and 1984, respectively,² the caring theory/ethic(s) has attracted great attention from various disciplines, such as education, feminist theory, medical care, social work, political science, philosophy, and so forth. Caring theory/ethic(s) has been so well received that many scholars suggest that it should be the alternative theory, in both moral education and social and political practice, to the rational moral reasoning theories presented by Immanuel Kant, Lawrence Kohlberg, and John Rawls.³ In

¹ In my dissertation, caring theory indicates Nel Noddings's theory; the term "caring theories" refers to the different caring theories presented by different scholars, including Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan, Joan Tronto and other caring theorists. Also, the term "caring theory/ethic(s)" is used as an exchangeable term of caring theories because Gilligan, Tronto, Held and so on, sometimes, use both caring theory and ethic(s) of care or caring ethic to indicate their theories. Ethic(s) of care represents both ethic of care and ethics of care, because some caring theorists, such as Tronto and Hankivsky, use ethic of care to refer to their caring theories whereas other scholars Gilligan and Slote use ethics of care for their theories.

² See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1982); and Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Los Angeles: university of California Press, 1984).

³ See Nel Noddings "An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Practice," (1994), 171.; Joan C. Tronto "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care," *Signs* 12(4) (1987): 644-663 and "Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments", *Hypatia* 10 (2) (1995): 141-145. Also see Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 40; Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3; Maurice Hamington, *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Feminist Ethics* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 11; Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and so on.

another camp, however, strong opposition also exists to conceiving of caring theory/ethic(s) as a moral theory, let alone treating it as an alternative that can replace the rational moral philosophy that undergirds modern social justice theory and rational liberal theory.⁴ Many factors contribute to this opposition; and the debate focus seems to alter as the theories have developed. More often than not, the relation between caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy, particularly social justice theory, is formulated in dichotomous terms, although some scholars try to reconcile them. Most recently, the two representatives of caring theory/ethic(s) Virginia Held (2002, 156-59) and Michael Slote (2007, 1-9), still partially or entirely reject the compatibility of caring theory and rational moral philosophy.

The development of caring theory in relation to its compatibility with rational moral philosophy can be roughly classified into three stages, based on each theory's focus. In the first stage, caring theories are conceived as advocating the idea of a female perspective that differs from the male view regarding moral judgment and decision. In the second stage, caring theories are considered to be able to assist social justice theory or vice versa. In the third stage, whereas Noddings and Hankivsky argue that ontologically speaking, caring theories are compatible with rational moral philosophy, Slote and Held either entirely or partially reject the compatibility.

In the earliest stage (between 1980 and 1989), caring theory was seen as an ethic(s) derived from a feminist and feminine outlook, since the studies in Carol Gilligan's research are all based upon female students and Nel Noddings's caring model is grounded upon mothering care. Hence, the central issue of the debate was whether caring theory can be a universal ethics;

⁴ See Philip Warelow, "Is Caring the Ethical Ideal?" *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 24 (4) (October 1996): 655-61, and Phyllis Rooney, "A Different Voice: On the Feminist Challenge in Moral Theory," *Philosophical Forum* 22 (4) (1991): 335. In fact, Tronto also points out the limitation. See Tronto *Moral Boundries*, 62.

because, if caring theory is derived from private and partial perspectives—i.e., mothering and feminist viewpoints—it cannot reach the level of impartiality that rational moral philosophy has achieved.⁵ Hence, the argument goes, it is incompatible with rational moral philosophy. In Carol Gilligan's breakthrough book, *In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality* (hereafter, *A Different Voice*), she points out that, in contrast to Kohlberg's cognitive stages of moral development, which ranks moral stages based on abstract moral principles, women usually prioritize social relations and contextualize their moral judgments and decisions according to empirical conditioning. Gilligan calls the female moral attitude the "ethics of care" or the "caring ethic."

Gilligan's ethic of care clearly differs from the mainstream view proposed by Kohlberg, which emphasizes the development of a moral hierarchy corresponding to whether one can perform a moral act based upon reasoning through different levels of moral principles. Although Gilligan (1982) does not conceive the ethics of care as a category based on gender difference (2),⁶ many feminist scholars interpret it as showing that women view morality differently than men do. For instance, Linda Kerber states that "by emphasizing the biological basis of distinctive behavior ... Gilligan permits her readers to conclude that women's alleged affinity" or "relationships of care [are] both biologically natural and a good thing."⁷ Similarly, Catherine Greenon and Eleanor Maccoby note, "The fact remains, however, that Gilligan claims that the views expressed by women in her book represent a *different* voice—different, that is, from men."

⁵ See Tronto's "Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care", 644-663.

⁶ Gilligan says that "The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme." See Gilligan's *A Different Voice*, 2.

⁷ Linda K. Kerber, "Some Cautionary Words for Historians," 304-320.

Carol Stack, as well, conceives of Gilligan's work as representing "a female model of moral development."⁸

Similarly, in this earliest stage of caring theory, Noddings formulated her caring theory as exemplified by mothering and the feminist viewpoint, or that which is characterized by feminine perspective in contrast to fathering, or a masculine perspective of rational moral philosophy. Noddings (1984) explains that, traditionally, moral reasoning is formulated in the father's language—i.e., in rational terms—whereas, in reality, natural caring (such as mother caring), the memory of being cared for and feelings are the foundation of morality for most people (2). Virginia Held agrees with Noddings and suggests that moral characteristic derived from the motherly caring relationship is a wiser moral framework than the traditional contractual views of human relations.⁹ In the same manner, Sara Ruddick writes that an ethic of care develops from maternal work that prioritizes the preservation, growth, and acceptance of one's children, leads to the development of the virtues of scrutiny, cheerfulness, humility, and commitment in the context of the realities of life.¹⁰

The feminine origin and feminist perspective of caring theories are, therefore, explicit in the earliest writings of caring theories. Hence, caring theories, as initially conceived by many scholars, propounded the idea of a female perspective that differs from the male view regarding

⁸ See Carol B. Stack, "The Culture of Gender: Women and Men of Color," in "On 'In a Different Voice': An Interdisciplinary Forum," in *Signs* 11 (2) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Winter 1986): 321-324; Greeno and Maccoby, "How Different Is the 'Different voice'?" *Signs* 11(2) (Winter 1986): 310-316; and Stack, "The Culture of Gender," *Signs* 11 (2) (winter, 1986): 321-324.

⁹ Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Cultural, Society and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Held, "The Meshing of Care and Justice," *Hypatia* 10 (2), (Spring 1995): 128-32.

¹⁰ See Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 213-30. Also, see Ruddick, "Preservation, Love and Military Destruction," in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. J. Trebilcot (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 239.

moral judgment and decision. This earliest view, although it found many feminist supporters across such disciplines as social work, education, medicine, and political science, received much criticism toward the end of its first stage of development. The criticisms chiefly focus on two issues: First, the applicability and impartiality of using caring theory as a universal ethic. That is, if caring theory/ethic(s) was derived from the views of women alone, it was gender specific. As such, caring theory/ethic(s) would be insufficient as a universal ethic on an equal footing with rational moral philosophy. Tronto (1987, 659-660) argues that if caring theory/ethic(s) relates only to the care of those who are emotionally, physically, and even culturally closer to us, the ethic(s) of care could become a defense of caring only for one's own family, friends, and group. As such, caring theory/ethic(s) would become a justification for any set of conventional relationships, thus possibly leading to the reinforcement of existing sectarianism and raising the question of relativism. As the second focus of criticism, several researchers proposed that caring theory/ ethic(s) is not necessarily gender specific or even gender related. For instance, Tronto (1987) mentioned that Robert Coles's¹¹ research showed that Chicano, Eskimo, and Indian children criticize Anglos' inattention to proper moral concerns, including their lack of care for other people and for the earth (650). Tronto (1987) said that John Langston Gwaltney¹² also noticed that African American culture tends to share the same views as the children in Cole's study, because that culture honors basic respect for others, a commitment to honesty, general respect for the choices of others, and so on (ibid.). Tronto thereby contends that the caring ethic is not gender specific but, rather, a social construction (ibid).

¹¹ Robert Cole, *Eskimos, Chicanos and Indians* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1977).

¹² John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (ed. New York: Random House, 1980).

These criticisms led many caring theorists, including both Gilligan and Noddings, to defend the caring theory/ethic(s). Gilligan,¹³ continuing to carry out psychological studies based on her findings in *A Different Voice*, discounted some of her previous findings by saying that although caring social relations were gender related—i.e., most females cared more about relation than men did—they were not gender specific. Specifically, she found that when her research questions were formulated in different ways and using different terms (such as not using the word “dependence” but using “be with”) the positive answers from males regarding caring relations increased. (1988, 3-9) Thus, a caring nature might be not as biologically related to female as both Noddings and Gilligan originally had assumed; rather, it was a result of socialization through education and sociopolitical construction. Gilligan’s new findings were clearly in line with Tronto’s previous statement that a caring nature was not limited to females; but the gender-related view was also wrong when examining caring relations in ethnic groups other than European Americans, as noted earlier.

The conclusion of the first stage of the development of caring theory/ethic(s) is well-represented by Tronto’s (1987) view, which urged caring theorists to reinvestigate the meaning and implication of the caring theories in order to have an impact on social and political practices. Tronto says that if the ethic of care is to be taken seriously as a moral position, then what advocates need to explore are the assumptions on which such moral position is founded. She maintains that “[u]nless the full social and philosophical context for an ethic of care is specified, the ethic of care can be dismissed as a parochial concern of some misguided women” (677).

¹³ Carol Gilligan, “Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images of Self in Relationship.” In *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women’s Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education*, ed. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, and Jill McLean Taylor with Betty Bardige (Massachusetts: Center for the Study of Gender, Education, and Human Development, Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1988): 3-9.

As a result of these criticisms, many caring theorists reformulated the central issue at the heart of the debate between caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. Thus, in the second stage of the theory's development (1990–1997), the issue, as caring theorists saw it, was the public principle of social justice versus private relations (or disposition) of caring. During this stage, caring theory/ethic(s) was redefined as theory of “caring virtue,” “caring disposition,” “caring attitude,” “caring relation,” and caring as a practice or activity.¹⁴ These definitions are particularly relevant to medical care, as well as social and political sciences, where the foremost issue is whether social justice or empathic caring should be ranked first when making a political, social, or medical decision.

Many excellent papers and books have been published related to this debate.¹⁵ The shared finding of these papers and books was that caring theory/ethic(s) does not necessarily conflict with rational moral philosophy: one can think rationally with the virtue of a caring attitude or one can treat people rationally with an ethic(s) of caring, while working for social justice within the framework of caring. For example, Tronto (1993) suggests that “since caring rests upon the satisfaction of needs for care, the problem of determining *which needs* should be met show that the care ethic is not individualistic, but must be situated in the broader moral context. Obviously, a theory of justice is necessary to discern among more or less urgent need” (138). Diemut Ellisabet Bubeck (1995) also points out that, in fact, the “considerations of justice are at the very heart of what to any feminist surely must be a version of the ethic of care that is preferable to the

¹⁴ See Tronto (1993) and Held (1993).

¹⁵ To name just some of the most prominent: such as Held (1993), Tronto (1993), Diemut Ellisabet Bubeck, *Care, Gender and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Grace Clement, *Care, Autonomy, and Justice: Feminism and the Ethic of Care* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), Selma Sevenhijzen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

self-less version” (194-95), because it is necessary for women to consider themselves as “deserving of equal moral concern, respect, or consideration if they are to move from the self-less second to the self-inclusive third state of the ethic of care” (ibid.). Therefore, in both Tronto and Bebuick’s view, as well as the view of others, including Noddings, Clement, and Held,¹⁶ locating the concept of social justice within the framework of caring theory or the ethic(s) of care is indispensable to a developed social justice theory.

In the third stage of the development of caring theory/ethic(s) (1998–2008), the question of its compatibility with rational moral philosophy and social justice theory is further developed into three different views. These three views all related to the ontological grounding of caring theory and the ethic(s) of care. The first view is represented by Grace Clement (1998, 121) and Held (2006, 16), who attempt to integrate social justice and caring theory by suggesting that these two theories should work hand in hand in the same society. They found, however, that social justice and caring theory can only be integrated when they are applied in different domains (i.e., public or private)—not fully integrated. Full integration cannot occur because, although an interconnection and an interdependent relationship exists between human life and sociopolitical activity, the method, priority, and ontological foundation upon which caring theory is grounded are different from those of rational moral philosophy. For instance, Clement (1998) maintains that it is conducive to think of *care* and *justice* as distinct ethics, “which can be integrated in the sense that they can jointly determine deliberation in public as well as personal contexts” (121). Yet, we need to acknowledge that care and justice are different because caring theory and

¹⁶ Held, “The Meshing of Care and Justice,” *Hypatia* 10 (2), (1995): 128-132; Clement (1998) and Noddings, *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

rational moral philosophy possess different ontologies, methods, and priorities (120). Similarly, Held (2006) suggests that a more adequate and comprehensive moral theory would include “the insights of both the ethic of care and the ethics of justice” (16). However, she rejects the earlier stage’s reconciled view that suggesting caring theory can be “incorporated into the [rational moral philosophy] in the sense of supporting” and “it can provide the grounds for judgments characteristically found in the other” (ibid). Rather, Held proposes to integrate care and justice in a way “to keep these concepts conceptually distinct and to delineate the domains in which they should have priority” (ibid.). In other words, although both Clement and Held accept that care and justice are equally significant for constructing a moral theory, they could not find the grounds on which to merge or integrate them because of the different methods, priorities, and ontological foundations of each. Hence, care and justice need to be kept as distinct concepts that are prioritized in either public domains or private domains, respectively.

The second view of caring theory/ethic(s)’s compatibility with rational moral philosophy is presented by Noddings and Olena Hankivsky¹⁷, who disagree with Clement and Held’s rejection of such compatibility with regard to method, priority, and ontology. They both argue that the ontological grounds of the two are compatible when considered from the viewpoint of the interrelatedness, interconnection, and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity. Noddings (1984) points out that “[t]he ethical self is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one-caring and cared-for” (49-50). As such, our fundamental recognition of relatedness, i.e., that which connects us naturally to others, enables us to reconnect through the other back to ourselves. The fact is that as we care for others, we also are cared for by others. As such, my caring for others, in effect, also leads to my being cared-for

¹⁷ See Olena Hankivsky, *Social Policy and The Ethic of Care* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 30 and 111-112.

(*ibid.*). Furthermore, Noddings (1984) suggests, although in the web of relatedness, we are free to reject the impulse of caring, we would feel lost in the wilderness of strangers and loneliness and leave behind all whom we cared for, and even ourselves, if we moved away from the world of “caring relation” (51). The reason for that isolation is that we, as humans, are not naturally alone. Rather, we are naturally in relationships and obtain nourishment and guidance from our relatedness. Our individuality is defined within a set of relationships that are the basic reality of human life. Noddings, thereby, maintains that the ontological ground of an ideal ethic should be characterized by that interrelatedness, i.e., caring relation, represented by the ideal caring self. She also proposes that since caring relationships are at the core of human existence, we should redefine social justice theory in terms of caring. By so doing, the caring quality would prevail in justice theory and the justice concept would penetrate caring theory. The two moral theories, then, coexist as a whole.

Similar to Noddings’ interrelated ontological view, Hankivsky expands Tronto’s view and argues for the compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy on the basis of the interconnection, and interdependent nature, of human life and sociopolitical activity. Tronto’s (1995) original statement maintains that, in order to reconsider how caring theory can inform a different political view from that of rational moral philosophy, we must reformulate our account of human nature. That is, “[p]eople qua people are interdependent rather than independent” (142). This is because individuals act politically—not based merely on their self-interest, but also as a result of “the particular constellation of caring relationships and institutions within which they find themselves”(ibid.). Families, welfare states, and the market are all institutions that provide care. Hence, people’s identities and interests are greatly shaped by the culture of these social and political groups and institutions. In the same vein, Hankivsky (2004,

34) contends that the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s) reveals how individuals' identities, social status, and needs are shaped by their intersection with a range of social and institutional arrangements (private and public), since humans are interdependent with each other (111-12). At different points in people's lives and in different contexts, they alternate between providing care and needing care. Accordingly, "human being are interdependent and in need of others for their growth and survival"(105).

Both Tronto's and Hankivsky's arguments clarify the ways in which individuals' lives are intrinsically interconnected to social and political policies, structures, arrangement, and other factors, all of which have the power not merely to shape people's social identities but also to affect them on a day-to-day basis. Tronto and Hankivsky, thereby, suggest that social and political policies and activities should be directed toward the interests of the cared-for, or should care about the contextual reality of the cared-for. In this sense, social justice cannot be actualized without caring theory; and caring theory cannot be fulfilled without taking justice into account.

However, the third view of these theorists' compatibility, presented by Slote, rejects the partial and full compatibility presented by Clement, Held, Noddings, and Hankivsky. Slote, after closely examining the core element that serves as the foundation of a caring attitude/activity and rational moral theory, respectively, rejects the notion of compatibility between the caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. Slote¹⁸ argues that the foundation of caring theory/ethic(s) is grounded on empathetic care or affective feelings, whereas rational moral theory is grounded on rational thinking about individual rights, autonomy, and social justice; these two foundations are in conflict with each other. Those scholars who suggest, as Slote (2007) points out, that caring theory can work harmoniously with rational moral philosophy, in

¹⁸ Michael Slote, *Ethics of Care and Empathy* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-9.

fact, place caring theory in a supplementary position to assist rational theory, or vice versa (1-9). Slote (2007) himself argues that empathetic caring not only is capable of being the foundation of a moral theory, but also is a better foundation than that of rational moral theory (ibid.). The compatibility of caring theory and rational moral philosophy, thereby, is rejected by Slote at the end of the third stage.

Research Problems

The third stage, in the development of caring theory/ethic(s), could be considered as the pinnacle of the evolution of caring theory and the ethic(s) of care to date. It not only summarizes the problems and the possible solutions involved in the first- and second-stage developments of the theory, but also reveals a deeper and more fundamental problem. To briefly summarize these problems and proffered solutions: Ontologically speaking, while Noddings and Hankivsky suggest that caring theory/ethic(s) is compatible with rational moral philosophy based on the interrelatedness and interdependent nature, Clement and Held, hold that both caring theory/ethic(s) and social justice, though could be applied to tackle the same moral issue, are incompatible with regard to their ontological grounds. Slote is in line with Clement's and Held's view and rejects the compatibility of the ontological foundation of caring theory/ethic(s) and that of rational moral philosophy. He insists that, at the level of ontological grounding, caring theory/ethic(s) is incompatible with rational moral philosophy since they are based upon two incompatible foundations—respectively, empathetic caring or affective feelings, and rational thinking concerning autonomy, social justice, and equal rights. Slote's view to a certain extent can be seen as the continuation of the debate between the masculine view and feminine/feminist view presented in the first stage of the development of caring theory/ethic(s). This dichotomous

formulation can also be considered as the dual view of rationality versus affectivity. Clement's and Held's views, on the other hand, imply the incompatibility of public principle (or objectivity) and private relation (or personal disposition/virtue/attitude, i.e., subjectivity).

Noddings and Hankivsky are the only two caring theorists who see rational moral philosophy and caring theory/ethic(s) as fully compatible. They suggest that the relational ontology of the interrelatedness of human life and sociopolitical activity is the key to overcoming the suggested incompatibility of the two philosophical systems. However, both Noddings's and Hankivsky's theories of relational ontology have not attracted as much attention from caring theorists as they deserve. Both Gilligan (1987) and Tronto (1995), although in the earlier development of the caring theory/ethic(s), briefly mentioned that caring theory/ethic(s) is a better moral theory than rational moral philosophy if one considers the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity, they two did not go further to develop their views. The rest of caring theorists, with the exception of Noddings and Hankivsky, have not pursued that line of reasoning at all.

Clement's, Held's, and Slote's rejections of the compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy clearly reveal this negligence. Clement and Held, although they attempt to integrate Noddings's caring theory and Gilligan's and Tronto's ethic(s) of care, still overlook possibilities inherent in the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s). Slote, likewise, ignores the relational ontology of human life and sociopolitical activity suggested by Tronto, Noddings, and Hankivsky. Slote's book, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (2007), articulates the dichotomous view of affective feelings vis-à-vis rational thinking offered by David Hume, but does not investigate the relational ontology suggested by caring theorists.

One of the most fundamental problems that results in the negligence of relational ontology of caring theory/ethics is that Slote, Clement, Held, Noddings, and Hankivsky all use different sources to articulate the ontological ground of caring theory/ethic(s) without taking notice of their differences. In Slote's case, his investigation is exclusively focused on caring nature/virtue and ignores the relational ontology of interrelatedness as presented both by Noddings and by Tronto and Hankivsky. Clement and Held, on the other hand, pay more attention to the objective factors of the relation of sociopolitical activity and human life, but overlook the subjective experience of the caring nature/virtue presented by Noddings. Clement and Held both conceive that caring (as a practice or activity) can be carried out either in a rational manner or based on affective feeling, but not both.

Noddings and Hankivsky are the only theorists who provide a way to solve the hypothesized incompatibility of caring theory and rational moral philosophy, but they two also define the relational ontology in different terms. Both Noddings's and Hankivsky say that in view of the interrelated and interdependent ontology of human existence, caring is not simply an activity or practice, it is also a quality and relation; i.e., caring disposition/virtue and caring relationship. Hence, carrying out a social work or a political act based on a caring mind/virtue and caring relationship is compatible with performing a social justice activity. However, they define and characterize relational ontology in different terms. Whereas Noddings defines relational ontology as the caring relation that occurs in human encounters, Hankivsky characterizes it as the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity. Neither Noddings nor Hankivsky clarifies the differences between their relational ontologies. In fact, no caring theorists to date have delved into the meaning of ontological ground of relations, and its potential ground for solving the incompatibility dilemma vis-à-vis

caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. Hence, my aim in this dissertation is to bridge this gap by firstly investigating and clarifying the different definitions of their relational grounds, and then integrating, and enhancing the relational ontology presented by Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky.

The difficulties that hinder the investigation of integrated project

Three difficulties complicate the integrated project: first, the absence of a unified version of caring theory/ethic(s) and an one-sided characterization of the meaning of caring; second, the different definitions and formulations of the relational ontology; and third, different views about whether the relational ontology of interrelatedness and interdependent nature is simply a different epistemological holding from rational notion of autonomy or an ontological grounding of human reality.

The contributions of many scholars, from various disciplines, have greatly enriched caring theory and ethic(s) of care. These contributions, in turn, have led to diverse ways of characterizing and defining the content of caring theory. For instance, scholars from the field of education and philosophy—such as Noddings and Slote—tend to look at the mental phenomena of subjective experience manifested in caring activity and loving relationships, and define caring components as caring nature, caring relation, receptivity, responsibility, relatedness and motivation replacement. They name their theory “caring theory.” Another group of scholars—such as Gilligan, Tronto, Clement, Hankivsky, and Held—are from psychology and the social and political sciences. They define and characterize “caring” as a practice or activity, and emphasize the social and political factors related to caring activities, such as social and political policies, arrangements, work, and so on. This group of scholars calls their theories primarily an

“ethic of care” or “caring ethic.” Sometimes, they also loosely use “caring theory” as term interchangeable with “caring ethic.”

Hence, we have at least two kinds of caring theories: one is the caring theory put forth by Noddings and Slote, who focus on the subjective experience of caring nature and caring relationship. The other theory is ethic of care, offered by Gilligan, Tront, Clement, Hankivsky, Held, and others, which highlights the caring factors related to social and political activity. These differing characterizations and emphases reveal two things: first, caring theorists from different disciplines have used—and confined themselves to—different expertise for their research. Second, and more important, these theorists’ formulations are deeply affected by the traditional Cartesian dichotomous view that separates mind from body and subjectivity from objectivity.

The Cartesian dichotomous view, as Thompson, Locander, and Pollio point out, assumes, first, that external factors (outside the human mind) are objective; and internal (mental) activities, such as thoughts, feelings, and the like, are subjective. It assumes, second, that “[m]ind is an entity that manipulates symbols representing the external world,”¹⁹ and these manipulations, although bringing the external world to internal consciousness, are the cognitive processes where the mind has its own domain. Hence, the cognitive structures and functions of the human mind can be isolated from the external world and studied in a “decontextualized manner.” And, third, this view assumes that objects in the world are empirical entities, independent of human subjective experience, and, therefore, this empirical reality can be described without considering the subjective experience, such as feelings and so on (1989, 134-35). It is because of this deeply rooted dichotomous view that caring theorists from different

¹⁹ See Craig J. Thompson, William B. Locander and Howard R. Pollio, “Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-Phenomenology,” *The Journal of Consumer Research* 16 (2), (Sep., 1989):133-136.

disciplines still characterize their caring theory/ethic(s) as based on a one-sided factor: either a mental phenomenon of subjective experience only, or an objective sociopolitical activity alone.

The influence of this traditional Cartesian view can be illustrated not only in the way caring theorists formulate their concepts, but also in the way they reconcile caring theory and justice theory. As previously described, Noddings and Slote define and characterize their theories' ontological ground based on the subjective factors of caring nature/disposition and motivation replacement, as well as caring relationship; while Gilligan, Tronto, Clement, and Hankivsky depend chiefly on the objective components of social and political practices. And in terms of reconciling theories, while several caring theorists (particularly Noddings, Tronto, Clement, Hankivsky, and Held) attempt to integrate different characterizations and definitions, their efforts are confined to using similar wordings; they do not tackle the differences in their caring contents. That is, these theorists may share the same phrases—such as “caring relation,” “care as a practice/activity”—but, at the root of their theories, they are confined by the expertise and research methods of their disciplines to separate social and political activity from a moral agent's subjective experience or affective feeling. This separation, in turn, leads not only to the intellectual formulation of dualism, but also to notion of the incompatibility of subjectivity and objectivity (as well as of rationality and affectivity) at the ontological level.

The case in point can be illustrated by both Clement's and Held's integrations of caring theory and the ethic(s) of care. Even if Clement and Held suggested to put social and political activity under the check of the caring quality or vice versa, the caring quality would still be seen by them as a separate quality that differs from the rational nature of social and political activity. They do not mention that social and political activity can be grounded on a person's caring mind. This separation is clearly revealed when Clement and Held (2002, 16) maintain that the ethic(s)

of care and social justice theory should be considered as distinct domains; and that caring theory is only used to inform justice theory, and vice versa. Clement (1998) argues that care and justice “should be understood as checks upon one another, such that both of the ethics are necessary for an adequate approach to morality”(90). What Clement means by “as checks upon each other” is that either the ethic(s) of care is informed by justice concerns or justice theory is informed by care concerns (ibid.). That is, their relationship is solely informational; it does not reflect that caring mind and sense of justice are both intrinsic elements that together constitute a moral theory. This is the major criticism that Tronto makes about Held’s book, *The Ethics of Care*.²⁰ Tronto says that, although Held suggests that justice theory should work together with caring theory, there is no assurance that justice theory will be carried out caringly, because the caring quality is only a wish, not a necessity, in Held’s writing.

The second difficulty of investigating the compatibility between caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy derives from the diverse definitions and dichotomous characterizations of relational ontology. These definitions and characterizations distract the focus of the investigation from the identification of the relational ontology of caring theory/caring ethic(s). Similar to the first difficulty, these definitions and characterizations also confined to one-sided characterization, and are deeply shaped by dichotomous views and formulations of objectivity versus subjectivity, rationality versus affectivity, public principle versus private relation/disposition/virtue, and abstraction versus concreteness. The different ways in which Noddidngs, Gilligan, Tronto, Clement, Hankivsky, and Slote define relational ontology can illustrate this point.

²⁰ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2006).

Noddings (1984), according to the subjective experience of caring nature and caring relation, defines the relational ontology of human existence as a caring relationship that occurs in human encounters, such as a mother-child's relationship or intimate circles of social members, such as family and friends (3-4). Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky, on the other hand, based on the social and political factors, define and characterize relational ontology of human existence as the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity. Gilligan (1987, 8), though aware of the significance of caring relations in human social networks, focuses only on the social and political factors—not the moral agent's caring nature, disposition, or virtue; i.e., not the subjective experience of caring. Hence, the interconnection, for Gilligan, seems to occur only in social and political activity. Tronto (1987) and Hankivsky (2004), although they connect subjective experience and sociopolitical activity, still characterize the relational ontology of the interconnection and interdependent as an one-sided link that connects sociopolitical policy, institutions, and so on to an individual. Specifically, they both highlight the way social policy and political activities condition human life, instead of the other way round. That is, Tronto and Hankivsky overlook how a moral agent's caring nature, disposition, and virtue may affect social and political policymaking, structures, and other conditionings.

These theorists' characterizations of the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s) indicate that, yet again, they are confining relational ontology to one part of human reality, be it subjective caring experiences or objective social and political activities. As such, the incompatibility of subjectivity and objectivity regarding the ontological ground of caring theory/caring ethic(s) is still hidden in their formulations. This is different from one's empirical life. In reality, one's personhood cannot be formed without social and political activity; similarly, social and political activity requires individuals' participation.

Slote presents another dichotomous formulation of relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s), arguing that the ontological foundation of caring theory is empathetic caring or affective feeling; whereas that of rational moral philosophy is the concept of justice, autonomy, and equal rights. The other theorists' formulations of relational ontology, noted above, all reveal Slote's dichotomous view of the affective feeling and rational thinking, though they do not explicitly or systematically deal with that dichotomy. Thus, should the ontological ground of caring theory/ethic(s) be defined and characterized in concrete terms, such as "caring relation," "empathetic caring," "affective feeling"; or in abstract terms, such as "interrelatedness" and "interdependent nature"? These theorists' dual view of concreteness and abstraction also challenges the compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. For instance, Noddings and Held criticize rational moral philosophy's use of abstraction to formulate a moral theory; this criticism seems to suggest that abstraction is incompatible with concreteness.

The last difficulty of investigating whether caring theory and rational moral philosophy are (in)compatible is that different scholars conceive the relational ontologies presented by caring theorists either simply as epistemological holdings different from rational thinking of autonomy, or as ontological foundations that constitute the very existence of human life. Gilligan, Tronto, Clement, and Held, for example, treat the question of the interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity as a matter that is open to different viewpoints. Their treatment indicates that such interconnectedness is merely an alternative way of seeing the world, or of being in the world, and not necessarily the reality of human existence. Yet, for Noddings, and Hankivsky, caring relations, interconnection, and interdependent nature are the intrinsic components that constitute human personhood and social and political reality. These two different views inevitably lead to the debate about whether humans can function well if they

possess rationality without affective feeling; or whether social and political activities can be carried out without being affected by personal feelings, values, anger and the like. For, if one posits the relational ontology such that interdependence is simply an epistemological holding, then one is saying that people could exist without interdependence upon others. However, if one defines the relational ontology such that interrelatedness is the intrinsic component of human life, then, according to this theory, people cannot exist without being interrelated. Hence, the different viewpoints of the interdependent nature of human life—as an epistemological holding or as ontological grounding—affect the question of whether rationality can coexist with affectivity.

In sum, three problems need to be solved prior to discussing the (in)compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. The first problem is to synthesize Noddings's caring theory and Gilligan-Tronto's ethic(s) of care into a unified neo-caring theory. Second, the synthesized neo-caring theory has to take into account the intersubjectivity and interobjectivity of human life and sociopolitical activity/factors. Third, this neo-caring theory has to solve the conflict between rationality and affectivity, subjectivity and objectivity, and public principle and private relation (or personal disposition/virtue). Furthermore, the new caring theory needs to clarify the compatibility of the concrete caring relation and the abstract interdependent nature, as well as resolve the question of a relational ontology that is both an epistemological holding and an ontological ground. Only when these problems are solved, can we go further to investigate the compatibility of caring theory and rational moral philosophy with respect to the relational ontology of caring theory.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The methodology I use in this dissertation is philosophical interpretative. Philosophical interpretative is a reflective approach that uses a particular school of thought as a theoretical/philosophical framework to understand, analyze, explain and clarify the studied subject. It also serves as a philosophical foundation for bridging and overcoming the deficiencies of the theories in question, i.e. caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy. The philosophical theories in this dissertation are primarily based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity of existential phenomenology and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising. These two philosophical theories aim to eliminate the dualism rooted in both Western and Occidental rationalism and empiricism. Both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising systematically and thoroughly reveal the interrelatedness and interdependent nature of human experience, i.e., subjectivity, and the sociopolitical and natural world, i.e., objectivity.

Merleau-Ponty ([1965], 2004) explains that the connections between an individual and the lived world are through at least two means—body and language. Regarding the first: he argues that the human body is a “lived body,” not simply an “objective body”; the lived body is the flesh field through which one experiences the world. The body provides individuals with a lived connection between themselves and their social, political, and natural environments. Merleau-Ponty uses the term “body schema” to describe the link that connects an individual's subjective experience (or mental activity) to the environment of the world. Merleau-Ponty ([1965], 2004) says, “[i]n so far as I have sensory functions, a visual, auditory and tactile field, I am already in communication with others taken as similar psycho-physical subjects.”²¹ This

²¹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans by Colin Smith, (London and New York: Routledge, 1965), 411-12.

means that as soon as one's gaze falls upon a perceivable object, such as a table, dog, or man, the objects surrounding it immediately take on a fresh layer of significance, for the perceived object is no longer simply what he or she could make of it—the perceived size, shape, color, distance, and so on,—but the surrounding conditions that make what the perceived object look like. The reason for this is that any perceivable object is conditioned by a context of relation (353). When one sees a table in his/her room, the size and shape of the table is not a fixed law that governs the parade of phenomena, and an invariable relationship. For every change of the perceiver's distance or orientation, a corresponding change of the table's shape and size will follow, because there exists a constancy of relationships as the perceived object's basis (*ibid.*). Merleau-Ponty argues that, for science and objective thought, the table seen from a hundred yards away is not different from the table seen from ten yards away. Yet, in real life, the former looks much smaller than the latter (351). According to Merleau-Ponty, this is because, as humans, we possess a body, which, in turn, let us come into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to worldly objects. Sizes and shapes of any perceivable object, such as a table, merely provide a modality for a comprehensive hold on this world (353).

Merleau-Ponty posits language as another intersubjective medium through which an individual is connected to natural world and others. He (225) suggests that

[l]anguage certainly has an inner content, but this is not self-subsistent and self-conscious thought. What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather it is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term 'world' here is not a manner of speaking; it means that the 'mental' or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must have its basis in the subject incarnate. (225)

The passage reveals that although every individual is an autonomous entity who is physically separate from social and natural world, while using language to express one's thoughts, the individual has to root upon the structure of social and natural world to express

his/her thoughts. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty points out that different individuals also merge into each other's world through dialogue and discussion. He says that

In the experience of conversation and dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground, my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world. (413)

Merleau-Ponty's explanation shows that an individual's life always interacts and intersects with others through the language, discussion and dialogue. As such, the world is constituted not simply by an individual alone. Rather, it is through the interconnected and interacted action and communication. Together, the interdependent activities of different individuals contribute to weave the fabric of human existence and the sociopolitical world.

A similar message with a different approach is Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising (or dependent origination), which explains that every activity of human life, including both mental and physical activities, results from many factors. The factors are interconnected and interdependent. Nāgārjuna' lays out this theory in his masterpiece, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MKK). Specifically, Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising or dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*) characterizes the nature, structure, and constitution of human existence, describing human life and existential activity as a process of merging experience of things that we normally perceive.²² The core tenet of this philosophy articulates the interdependent nature and interconnection of an individual and other people and activities. According to the philosophy, no entity, including both animate and inanimate things, can exist isolated from other

²² A. M. Padhye, *The Framework of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy* (India: Sri Satguru, 1988), 34.

conditions—whether the conditions are material or mental—because of the absence of *svabhava* (self-nature, or own-being).

The fact is that no person, thing, activity, and so on, comes into being through a single or a fixed entity. Rather, the emergence of a life, an event, et cetera, is through a process of becoming; and, in the process of becoming, many factors come to assist. Hence, the existence and emergence of an entity is dependent on and conditioned by many supplementary factors. In *MKK*, Nāgārjuna discusses this theory by investigating two questions related to the concept of motion: What is the locus of motion (i.e., where is the motion taking place)?; and, What is the object of motion (i.e., what is it that has the property of moving)?²³ By asking these questions, Nāgārjuna shows that a motion and a mover are mutually dependent on and defined by each other. The motion is the property of the mover; whereas, the mover is the agent of the motion. A motion cannot be called a “motion” without the moving action of a mover. The mover, on the other hand, would not be called a “mover” if (s)he does not take the action of moving. Hence, they are mutually dependent upon and define each other. This interdependent nature of existence is called “dependent co-arising” or “dependent origination”.

According to Nāgārjuna, dependent co-arising does not merely occur in relation to an event or activity, but also in relation to an individual’s self-identity and construction of knowledge. Nāgārjuna argues that every individual is constituted at least by five components: the physical body (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*viññāna*), intellect (*samskāra*) and consciousness (*viñjana*). The individual self, Nāgārjuna suggests, cannot identify solely with one of the five components, such as the body or consciousness; nor can it separate from them, or only

²³ Jan Westerhoff, *Nagarjuna’s Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

contains part of them, or be part of the five components (Westerhoff 2009, 155), Human life is a process of emerging/becoming; and the sequential process involves both mental and physical activities. These activities are interdependent upon each other in order to constitute an individual's life undergirded by the five components. Hence, even if an individual looks like an autonomous entity who is physically isolated from other human beings and from sociopolitical activity, by its very nature, (s)he is constituted by many factors.

To further illustrate the interdependent relation between self and other factors, Nāgārjuna discusses the nature of epistemology and knowledge in *MKK*. According to Jan Westerhoff (2009), the significance for Nāgārjuna in discussing the theory of knowledge is that “objects of knowledge and means of accessing them form an essential part of our conceptualization of the world and our place in it” (155). Westerhoff explains that “objects of knowledge” indicate objects which are perceived, and “means of knowledge” indicate perception, inference, recognition of likeness, and testimony. Thus, means of knowledge is the instrument that an individual uses to understand objects of knowledge, which connect one's inner world with the world outside her/him. Nāgārjuna's investigation starts from the assumption that both the perceived objects and the means of knowledge possess independent self-natures or own-being, i.e., *svabhāva*. Yet, through his investigation, he found that no independent perceptions (or “means of knowledge”) can perceive an object without its referent, nor any independent, perceivable substance that, by itself, can give people knowledge without the help of perception and other means of knowledge, such as inference, and recognition of likeness. The means of knowledge and the objects perceived have to work together to make knowledge possible: without means of access, objects cannot be recognized; and without perceivable objects, the means of

access cannot produce knowledge. Thus, human personhood and other activity/existence are interdependent and mutually conditioned by each other.

Reason to apply Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies as the philosophical framework

There are four reasons why I apply both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent origination to investigate, analyse, explain and enhance the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s). First, these two philosophical theories are capable of articulating the interrelatedness that most caring theorists have not yet fully spelled out. The existential account of relational ontology—although mentioned by Tronto, Noddings and Hankivsky—is still far from being completed. Both Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies can bridge this gap; the meaning of interrelatedness and interdependent nature of personhood and human life and socio-political activity are the primary focus of both Merleau-Ponty's existential philosophy and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising. Their philosophies provide me with a clearer lens to clarify and analyze the relational ontology presented by Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky. Also, these philosophies serve as the theoretical framework for my dissertation—not only to eliminate deficiencies of the caring theory/ethic(s) ontological viewpoints, but also to bridge the dichotomous gap between caring theory and rational moral philosophy. For this reason, these two philosophical theories are very helpful.

Second, the primary criticism that caring theorists—Noddings and Gilligan, in particular—direct at rational moral philosophy is its lack of attention to existential and empirical reality relating to moral reality. That is, in these caring theorists' view, rational moral philosophy pays too much attention to the abstract moral principle and a fixed, universal rule while ignoring

the concrete conditions of a moral reality. Always at the core of the concerns of caring theory and ethic(s) of care, on the other hand, are the relational conditions of human existence, including the moral agent's experience and sociopolitical reality. For instance, Noddings argues that her approach to caring theory is based on both existential reality and individual mental phenomenology that reveal a moral agent's needs/wants and related conditions. Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky, while not highlighting the individual's mental phenomenology of needs and wants, emphasize the requirement of caring components vis-à-vis the corresponding social and political conditions. In this sense, the contextuality (or the relevant conditions) of a moral reality and the moral agent's subjective experience of needs and wants are among the most essential components that constitute the ontological foundation of caring theory and ethic(s) of care. Hence, the theoretical framework applied to investigate, analyze, explain, clarify and enhance the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s) has to be characterized by the existential concerns. These concerns, in fact, are the major themes articulated in Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising.

Third, most of the caring theorists—particularly Gilligan, Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky—although aware of the interrelatedness and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical reality, still confine their formulations of caring theory or ethic(s) of care either to personhood or to social and political activity. Connection and interdependency, although mentioned in their writings, are limited either to personal caring nature and caring relationship or to the caring activity of social and political practice. Hence, a bias toward the dichotomy and incompatibility of subjectivity and objectivity still implicitly lurks in their writings. This implicit dichotomy or incompatibility becomes explicit when these theorists discuss the compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy with respect to their ontological ground.

This shortcoming, fortunately, can be mended with the help of both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity of existential phenomenology and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising, because these two philosophies systematically focus on explaining and illustrating the intersubjectivity, interobjectivity, interrelatedness, and interdependent nature of humanhood and social and political reality.

Fourth, the theoretical conflict between epistemological holding and ontological grounding, discussed above, confuses many caring theorists. The confusion sometimes is so great that they lose sight of the merits of caring theory/ethic(s) and treat it as simply an alternative view to rational moral philosophy. They conceive that the interdependent nature and interrelatedness of human life and sociopolitical activity is solely an epistemological holding, not an ontological foundation. The puzzling question of epistemological holding versus ontological grounding, as well as the consequence of one's viewpoint in relation to these two, is explicitly explained and illustrated in both Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies. Their philosophies provide very good resources for me to explain and illustrate human's epistemological holding and ontological grounding are interconnected and mutually define and condition each other. This explanation and illustration, in fact, will also shed light on the relation between abstractive principle and concrete reality, which is raised as another problem by Noddings, Held and other caring theories.

Therefore, on this issue, as well as the three described above, in next chapter, I will investigate, analyse and clarify the major shared components that are included in both Nodding's caring theory and Gilligan-Tronto's ethic(s) of care. Then, my thesis will synthesize these shared components to form an unified neocaringtheory. Finally, I will point out and explain the non-

shared element between these two theories, (i.e. relational ontology) and the philosophies which I will apply to bridge the gap between them.

CHAPTER 2: TOWARD CONSTRUCTING A UNIFIED NEOCARING THEORY

In the previous chapter, my thesis revealed that the caring theory/ethic(s) has been uncovered and enhanced by scholars from different disciplines, using different characterizations. Accordingly, caring theory/ethic(s) is characterized by two features. On the one hand, education and human sciences scholars, such as Noddings and Slote, emphasize the subjective experience of a caring nature and caring relations; on the other hand, social and political science scholars, including Gilligan, Tronto, Hankivsky, Held, etc., underscore caring as an activity/practice and outline the social and political factors related to the ethic of care(s), such as social policy, structure, arrangement, and institution. It is because of these contrasting characterizations that the (in)compatibility between caring theory and rational moral philosophy has not yet been fully resolved. Alternatively put, although the aforementioned caring theorists share the same words, the implications and referents for their caring theory/ethic(s) are rather different, and vice versa. Hence, the primary task for this chapter of my dissertation is to clarify and identify a shared conceptual framework and ontological ground for caring theory and the ethic(s) of care in order to form an integrated neocaringtheory.

For this purpose, three objectives have to be met: first, to identify a shared conceptual framework of caring theory and the ethic(s) of care by clarifying the differences and similarities between the conceptual frameworks presented by caring theorists, such as Gilligan, Tronto, Hankivsky, Noddings, Held, and Slote. Then, I discuss to what extent the shared conceptual framework has already been developed by these theorists, and in which area work remains to be done. Second, based on the shared conceptual framework that has been identified, my thesis will investigate further possible shared ground on the basis of the relational ontology mentioned by

Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky (hereafter Tronto-Hankivsky). I will also examine the differences and similarities between these characterizations. Third, I will apply both Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity—as shown in his existential phenomenology—and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising to connect Noddings' caring theory and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature. In this manner, my dissertation will integrate, enhance, and establish a more comprehensive and inclusive relational foundation for the ethic(s) of care and caring theory. Based on the shared conceptual framework that has been identified, and the integrated inclusive and comprehensive ontological ground of caring theory/ethic(s), my dissertation will then have a more solid and complete ground to investigate and discuss the (in)compatibility of caring theory/ethic(s) and rational moral philosophy in subsequent chapters. In this chapter, my thesis will focus on discussing the first two objectives that have been described here, and leave the third issue to next chapter .

Identifying a More Comprehensive and Inclusive Conceptual Framework for Unifying Noddings' Caring Theory and Tronto-Hankivsky's Ethic of care

First, identifying a more comprehensive and inclusive conceptual framework for the integrated neocaringtheory: as mentioned previously, at least two different definitions and characterizations of caring theory/ethic(s) are found in the caring theorists' writings. That is, education and human sciences scholars, such as Noddings (1984 and 2002) and Slote (2007), conceptualize caring theory through human subjective experiences of a caring nature and caring relations; on the other hand, psychology, social and political sciences theorists, such as Gilligan, Tronto, Hankivsky, and Held, tend to define and characterize the ethic(s) of care through objective factors and the interconnected relations of personhood, and sociopolitical activity.

However, this does not mean that there is no shared ground between these two characterizations. In fact, as theories have developed, caring theorists from both sides have made efforts either to reconcile or integrate these different characterizations. However, their integration and reconciliation falls short in that it only adopts similar wordings and integrates part of the conceptual framework. For example, initially, the core components at the heart of Gilligan's (1982) ethic(s) of care included caring relations and the contextual deliberation of a particular event, regarding how female students make their moral judgments and decisions. After Gilligan, in Noddings' (1984) original version of caring theory, the components and contents of caring theory were enhanced to articulate a caring nature, motivation replacement, receptivity, responsiveness, relatedness, and responsibility. Noddings' caring theory clearly focused more on uncovering the subjective experiential factors involved or manifested in the caring nature. Subsequently, Noddings (2002) added and emphasized caring relations as the ontological ground of caring theory. Slote (2007) continues Noddings's notion of caring nature and exclusively focuses on articulating the manner in which an ethic based on sympathetic caring is better than modern political liberalism presented by John Rawls. The subjective aspect of caring theory, up to and including Noddings's modified version of caring theory (2002) and Slote's (2007) sympathetic caring ethic, has established a rather comprehensive conceptual framework. This framework comprises responsibility, responsiveness, relatedness, a caring nature and caring relations. However, the social and political dimensions of caring theory are not clearly articulated in Noddings's theory. Slote, although describing how to apply caring theory, specifically focusing on empathic caring in the social and political arena, fails to pay attention to the relational ground presented by Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky. Hence, he describes empathetic caring rather than relational ontology as the ontological ground of caring theory.

On the other hand, Gilligan's ethic(s) of care is enhanced and enriched by scholars from social and political sciences, such as Tronto, Sevenhuijsen, Bubeck, Hankivsky and Held. Tronto, Hankivsky, and Held are particularly relevant to my project, because their caring theories contribute greatly to clarifying the meaning of care and caring relations, from both social and political perspectives. Their characterizations of caring share some similarities with those of Noddings', but are not identical. For example, Tronto (1987, 1995, 1998) defines care as an activity or practice that reveals the interconnected and interdependent nature of human life and socio-political activity. She suggests that caring activity involves four components: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. Similarly, Hankivsky (2004) highlights caring as a practice, contextual sensibility, and the interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity, such as policy, constitution and arrangement. Held (2006) also characterizes caring activity under the rubric of practice; however, she emphasizes the caring relations presented by Noddings, rather than the interdependent nature emphasized by Tronto and Hankivsky. In a sense, Held tends to integrate Noddings' caring theory and Tronto's ethic(s) of care because she adopts Tronto's view and defines ethic(s) of care as a practice and value (perspective in Tronto's term), but applies Noddings's caring relations, instead of interdependent nature, to characterize the relation between personhood and sociopolitical activity. In this manner, Held is able to integrate part of Tronto's ethic(s) of care into a part of Noddings' caring theory. I say "part of caring theory" because Held leaves out the interdependent nature and interconnection of Tronto and Noddings' caring nature. On the other hand, Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky completely ignore the significant role that a caring nature plays in caring theory/ethic(s).

To sum up, the conceptual framework mentioned by the caring theorists, iteratively speaking, comprises four components: relational ontology (including caring relations and

interdependent nature), caring nature, caring as an activity/practice, and contextuality/motivation replacement. However, there are shared and non-shared components of this conceptual framework. I summarize the shared and non-shared major components in Table 1.

Scholar	Caring relation/ interdependent relation	Disposition, attitude/caring nature	Practice/activity (attentiveness, responsiveness, responsibility, caring nature and relational ontology)	Contextuality/ motivation replacement
Gilligan	X		X	X
Noddings	X	X	X	X
Tronto	X		X	X
Hankivsky	X	Sensibility	X	X
Held	X	(x)	X	
Slote		X	(x)	X

Table 1: Summary of shared and non-shared components of caring theories.

Note: The elements in parentheses indicate that these components are not explicitly mentioned in those caring theorists' writings, although they may implicitly include these components in their caring theories.

Caring as an Activity

From the above table, some shared components can be detected in the apparently diverse definitions and characterizations of caring theory and the ethic(s) of care. At least three shared components can be identified: caring as activity, relational ontology, and contextuality or

motivation replacement. Caring nature is the only component that is not shared.²⁴ The first shared component is caring as an activity/practice. All the scholars explicitly or implicitly agree that care is a practice or activity. Tronto, Hankivsky, and Held explicitly use the rubric of caring as practice/activity to articulate caring theory, whereas Gilligan, Noddings and Slote, although not using the term “caring as practice/activity”, elaborate the manner in which caring practice is performed in the context of daily life and in social and political arenas. Although Gilligan and Hankivsky do not include a sub-heading of caring as activity in their book, they articulate the way in which care is performed in social works, policy, arrangement, etc. Hence, caring as an activity/practice can be seen as the first shared component of caring theory/ethic(s) among these caring theorists.

With regard to the content of caring as a practice, Noddings and Tronto identify four components of caring activity. Yet, these include shared and non-shared factors. For Noddings (1984, 2-6), these four components are receptivity, responsiveness, relatedness, and responsibility; in Tronto’s view, these four factors are attentiveness, responsiveness, responsibility, and competence. Apparently, Noddings and Tronto only share two components, responsiveness and responsibility, but do not share the other two components—receptivity and relatedness in Noddings’ list or attentiveness and competence in Tronto’s terms. However, a careful examination of their definitions of attentiveness and receptivity reveals some shared features, because these two terms describe the mental activity of paying attention to the one who is cared for, or the thing that is cared about. The difference between these two terms is the manner in which attention is given. Attentiveness indicates a conscious and neutral way of

²⁴. I did not include Held because she defines care as an activity or a caring relation rather than the affectivity or loving kindness and sympathy suggested by Noddings and Slote.

mental involvement for the one who attends to the care. The one who cares is not entirely engrossed in the situation of the cared-for and cared-about. However, receptivity denotes an involvement with the entire acceptance of the one who is cared-for or the thing that is cared-about. This shows that different degrees of attention are paid to the cared-for and the cared-about.

The different degrees of attention of these two terms show that Noddings' caring theory is a strong version of caring because she describes the mental involvement of caring as an engrossment or motivation replacement. These two terms imply that the person who cares is deeply involved in the situation of the cared-for one because the motivation of the cared-for is the most important concern of the caring-one. This kind of caring, although good, has a narrow concern, for the cared-for is the only concern of a caring activity. As such, the caring may lead to not only overlooking other affiliated people and factors, but also to doing something harmful to the cared-for. For example, if a mother only cares for her child, but not the child's friends, none of the child's friends would really like to be the child's friend. This is because whenever an accident occurs, the child is the only concern of the mother, but not other children. Hence, in order to broaden the notion of concern, I will use attentiveness of receptivity as one of the four core components of a caring activity. This attentive receptivity indicates that the caring one attends to the cared-for's situation with not only receptive care, but also with a concern for those corresponding people and factors. This can help avoid the narrow focus of Noddings' caring mode and does not overlook the caring nature that the receptivity of caring activity needs to embody. However, this notion of caring nature related to receptivity is overlooked by Gilligan and Tronto.

With regard to another last two terms, relatedness (Noddings) and competence (Tronto), these are the only two components listed in Noddings' and Tronto's caring activity that do not share common ground. However, if the meaning of relatedness is closely examined, defined by Noddings as an intimate caring relation, it is plausible to say that it shares common ground with the meaning of relational nature/ontology, as mentioned by Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky. Hence, my thesis includes this term in relational nature/ontology, and treats it as included in both Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnected/interdependent nature. Noddings' theory has no equivalent to the term competence, which is listed in Tronto's caring components. However, the meaning of this concept is included in Noddings' motivation replacement and Gilligan and Hankivsky's contextuality. The reason for this is that Tronto defines competence as the capacity to understand the one who is cared-for, and to solve the cared-for's problem effectively. The first meaning of understanding the one who is cared-for effectively is similar to the goal of contextuality (Hankivsky) and motivation replacement (Noddings). That is, to attempt to understand the cared-for's problem in relation to what a cared-for really needs. The second meaning of solving a problem effectively, unfortunately, is more difficult to resolve because solving a problem effectively requires not simply the competence of the cared-for, but also his/her personality and other corresponding conditions, such as the way in which to carry out a problem-solving plan, and who participates in this plan. I categorize the shared meaning of Tronto's competence into neocaring theory and conceive it as included in contextuality or motivation replacement. However, I eliminate the non-shared meaning. I will explain the reason for this in the following section, which considers contextuality.

Contextuality

The second overlapping component of the conceptual framework recognized by caring theorists is contextuality, in Tronto's terms, and motivation replacement, in Noddings' list. Apparently, there is no common ground for these two terms; however, from their implications, we can detect some similar mental phenomena. Motivation replacement describes the idea of taking an individual's situation into account closely, to the extent that one's thoughts are entirely replaced by the cared-for's situation and motivation. Similarly, the mental activity of contextuality indicates situating the case or the cared-for in a particular context in order to make a moral judgment or decision. If we replace the cared-for's motivation and situation with the particular condition of a case or a person, then it is evident that the mental phenomena of the motivation replacement involves an activity similar to that of contextuality. That is, both activities situate a case or an individual in a particular context with respect to their corresponding conditions in order to make a moral judgment or decision. Hence, it is plausible to say that contextuality and motivation replacement denote a similar caring activity but from different perspectives, that is, either from an individual's subjective perspective of motivation or from objective social and political conditions. As mentioned above, Tronto's competence emphasizes the capacity of the caring one to implement the activity of contextuality, but, in both Gilligan and Noddings's caring theory, capacity, although important, is not as significant as the actualization of contextuality and motivation replacement. This is why I did not use Tronto's term of competence, and instead used contextuality to indicate contextual understanding of the situation of the cared-for person. Therefore, I will use both terms (contextuality and motivation replacement) to indicate that this category can be used either to consider a human agent's motivation, or a social and political factor, that is, contextuality.

Relational Ontology

The third component of caring theory that is recognized and accepted by all the caring theorists is the relational foundation/ontology²⁵ of caring theory/ethic(s). All the caring theorists realize that certain kind of relationship is involved in a caring activity, although this has been defined by them in different ways. Noddings and Held identify and characterize this relationship as caring relation, whereas Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky characterize it as an interconnection (or interrelatedness) and the interdependent nature of human life and social and political activity. The meanings and implications of these two different characterizations are complex and will be discussed thoroughly in my later section on the ontological ground of caring theory/ethic(s).

Caring Nature

The only caring component listed in Noddings' caring theory that is not explicitly mentioned by Gilligan, Tronto, Held, and Hankivsky is caring nature. This component clearly plays a major role in Noddings and Slote's caring theory. Hankivsky seems to be aware of the significant role of caring nature, but uses a neutral term, contextual sensibility, to describe the affective feeling involved in the caring activity. Similarly, occasionally, Held's writing also describes the significance of care, but she tends to define care as an activity and as a caring nature. Her definition clearly differs from that of Noddings and Slote, as the latter define a caring nature as an affective feeling and empathetic caring, respectively. For example, Held (2007, 136) says that "[i]n a caring society, attending to the needs of every child would be a major goal and doing so would be seen to require social arrangement offering the kinds of economic and

²⁵ In caring theories writings, relational ontology is used as exchangeable word of relational ground, relational foundation or ontological relation. Hence, I also use these words as exchangeable terms.

educational and child care and health care support that members of communities really need.” Here, the concepts of childcare, health care, and even caring society all indicate that, in Held’s terms, care refers to an activity that attends to either a child or health, and the needs of the members of communities, rather than considering affective feeling and empathetic caring, as emphasized by Noddings and Slote.

It is understandable that social and political science scholars, that is, Gilligan, Tronto, Held, and Hankivsky, omit caring nature/disposition and solely focus on articulating the objective factors of personhood and sociopolitical activity. The reason for this mainly derives from the traditional dichotomous view that separates objectivity from subjectivity, as many scholars tend to conceive that the social and political sciences only aim to study the objective factors that construct our social and political structure, policy, arrangement, etc. These factors, in appearance, have nothing to do with subjective experience. Hence, they assume that it is not necessary to take subjective experiential factors into account. In addition, the term caring nature/disposition not only connotes a feminine or feminist origin, but also implies the involvement of subjective feelings. Downplaying this component makes the caring theory that is applied in social and political practice sound objective and neutral. As such, this kind of caring theory can bypass potential tensions, difficulties, and incompatibilities related to both care and social justice.

These reasons for not including a caring nature in a caring ethic sound justifiable because they suggest that we should not or need not show caring feelings while tackling a social and political problem. Yet, paradoxically, this neutral-sounding position strays from the concerns and essence of caring theory to a certain extent. As both Gilligan and Noddings indicate, rational moral philosophy is lacking in that it only pays attention to the objective mechanism, principle,

and policy, but fails to attend to the human agent's needs and human empirical conditions. Accordingly, rational moral philosophy is insufficient for tackling social and political problems, let alone human affairs, from a moral perspective. Noddings even spells out that a caring theory without a caring nature is empty. Therefore, it is necessary to include a caring nature/disposition in an integrated version of my neocaring theory.

Keeping the notion of caring nature as a concept in an integrated theory has at least two advantages. First, a caring nature is one of the positive factors of human life, which one cannot live without. If we keep it, it can add significantly to the neocaring theory. This dimension, more often than not, has been ignored by moral theory in the modern era, particularly John Rawls' social justice theory, and neoliberalism's political theory. Since human life is different from lifeless machines or computers, including a caring nature would facilitate and ensure that we do not overlook or ignore the sensibility of human life and the essence of humanity. Moreover, by including the element of the caring nature, the neocaring theory will have a more inclusive and comprehensive ground for characterizing and constructing a moral theory. The constructed moral theory, then, will be able to come closer than rational moral theory to the empirical condition of human reality. Second, social and political practice is established and constructed by humans, for humans, and of humans. Leaving out the subjective core factor of human affective life is analogous to discussing a lamp without caring about its light, or playing a violin without attending to its music. In a sense, that would entirely eliminate the essence of caring quality. Hence, it is necessary to include the notion of caring nature in a neocaring theory, as it will help enable us to discover how a subjective experience and value may affect an individual's moral judgment, decisions, and behavior, both in personal life and social and political activity.

Based on the above discussion, a shared conceptual framework with four principal components has been identified for the integrated neocaring theory. These four principal components are: caring as a practice/activity, relational ground/ontology, contextuality or motivation replacement, and a caring nature/disposition. Strictly speaking, this conceptual framework is not limited to these four core factors. Many factors can be added, such as a caring attitude, sympathy, etc. However, these four core factors will serve as the most important parameters by which we can evaluate a caring theory/ethic(s). These four are analogous to the four core pillars of the unified neocaring building, which cannot be reduced without affecting caring quality. Whatever caring theory is implemented in a social, political, or educational arena, these four factors are the yardstick for ensuring that the essence of true caring activity is retained. Metaphorically speaking, if the human world as a whole is a caring building, caring nature is the very substance of the constitution, which permeates every part of the existence. Caring activity is the event-dots for constructing the fabric of the building. Contextuality is the relational link connecting every dot together to form a whole. Relational ontology is the principle or ground that undergirds the interdependent nature of the previous three components.

The Different Characterizations of Ontological Relations or Relational Ontology of Caring Theory

In the previous section, I identified and integrated a conceptual framework for my neocaring theory/ethic(s). This conceptual framework comprises four components: caring as activity, relational ontology/ground, contextuality/motivation replacement, and caring nature. Among these four core components, three – caring as activity, contextuality, and caring nature – have been discussed by the aforementioned caring theorists. For example, caring nature has been

thoroughly explained and discussed by Noddings and Slote, whereas caring as an activity/practice has been illustrated by Tronto, Held, and Hankivsky. Contextuality has also been discussed to a great extent by Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky. Motivation replacement is one of the major themes of Noddings' caring theory. The only remaining component is relational ontology, as mentioned by both Noddings and Hankivsky. Relational ontology is as important as the other components of a conceptual framework of caring theory because it relates to the nature and ontological foundation of caring theory. If the other three components of the conceptual framework are the flesh of caring theory, relational ontology is the backbone and skeleton that lays out the possible ground for constructing a caring theory/ ethic(s).

Traditionally, ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being, existence or reality, and the basic categories of being and their relations. It deals with questions concerning whether entities exist or can be said to exist, and how such entities can be grouped, related within a hierarchy, and subdivided according to similarities and differences.²⁶ That is, ontology is the study of what constitutes human existence and sociopolitical reality. Many classical philosophical questions are related to the ontological problem, such as the question of whether there is a God, or the problem of the existence of universals, or whether a certain thing, or more broadly, entity, exists. There are also ontological questions that correspond with the most general features and relations of the entities that do exist. For example, an ontological question could be the problem of how a universal relates to something particular (assuming there are universals and particulars), or the problem of how an event like David eating a cookie relates to the particulars of David and the cookie, and to the relation of eating, assuming there are events, particulars and relations. In other words, we have "at least two parts to the overall philosophical project of

²⁶. "Ontology." *Wikipedia*, accessed October 2010, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology>.

ontology: first, what there is, what exists, what the stuff is made out of, what reality is; second, what the most general features and relations of these things are.”²⁷

It is plausible to say that the ontological ground discusses the most fundamental constituents of human existence, and the manner in which the state of human life is made possible, and its relation to other corresponding people and sociopolitical factors. In western tradition, this ontological problem is inevitably related to the transcendental Being or God because of the influence of Christian-Judaism, which suggests that the universe is created by God. Yet, in both existential philosophy and oriental philosophy, such as Taoism and Buddhist philosophy, the ontological issue is inseparable from daily reality. Let us take Taoist philosophy as an example from the first chapter of *Dao De Jing*, one of the most important books of Taoism.

The truth that may be told is not the everlasting Truth. The name given to a thing is not the everlasting Name. Nothingness is used to denote the state that existed before the birth of heaven and earth. Reality is used to denote the state where the multitude of things begins to have a separate existence... These two states, though bearing different names, have a common origin. Both are mysterious and metaphysical. They are the most mysterious, and form the gateway to all mysteries. (Yang, 1961, 2-5)

This passage describes the inseparable relation between the ontological *dao* and its empirical diverse realities. It says that although the *dao* is not equal to the perceivable empirical realities, it is inseparable from them. This is because, whereas the invisible ontological *dao* is the ground-base of diverse realities, the empirical reality is the manifestation of the ontological *dao*. This example shows the relation between ontological ground and empirical manifestation. This is a pervasive concept regarding the relation between ontology and empirical realities in Asian philosophy.

²⁷. “Logic and Ontology,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed March 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-ontology/#3.1>.

My thesis will define ontology in accordance with the existential and Asian philosophical view and conceive that ontological ground is inseparable from daily reality. This ontological ground is one of the foremost essential issues of caring theory, for different ontological grounds will provide different components for constituting existential being. This different being of human existence will inform us to construct different kinds of social and political structures, organization, arrangement, and so on. This difference in construction will lead us to characterizing a moral theory differently. It is precisely the ontological ground and the aforementioned conceptual frameworks that differentiate the integrated neocaring theory from rational moral philosophy, and unfolds a more comprehensive foundation for a modern moral philosophy.

However, the relational ontology/ground of caring theory/ethic(s) has been overlooked by most caring theorists, except for Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky. For example, Gilligan articulates how to situate a moral event within its context, that is, contextuality. Held particularly emphasizes caring as a practice and caring relation. Slote primarily underscores the caring nature as empathetic caring, and treats it as the ontological ground of caring theory. Yet, none of them concentrates on explaining the relational ontology of caring theory, be it caring relations or the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity. Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky are the scholars who have paid attention to relational ontology. However, they define and characterize the relational ontology of caring theory/ethic(s) in different ways. Noddings defines the ontological relation as a caring relation, whereas Tronto and Hankivsky characterize it as the interconnected relation and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. In order to clarify these two different definitions and characterizations, and find a shared ground for their discrepancies, my thesis addresses four questions.

First, the meaning of relational ontology: does relational ontology refer to caring relations, as Noddings and Held suggest, or interconnections and interdependent nature, as Tronto and Hankivsky maintain? Second, what is the difference and relationship between caring relations and interconnected and interdependent nature? Are they compatible with each other? Third, is the caring relation and interdependent nature an ontological ground or epistemological holding of caring theory? If it is an ontological ground, is caring relation or interdependent nature more suitable to form the ontological foundation for caring theory? Fourth, what is the implication of either caring theory or interdependent relations being the ontological ground, particularly in terms of a moral theory? The answers to these four questions will unveil not only the ontological ground of caring theory, but also the key factor of whether caring theory is compatible with rational moral philosophy.

Different Characterizations of Relational Ontology

Noddings and Held's Caring Relation

First, the meaning of relational ontology: as mentioned previously, the relation involved in the caring theory is defined and characterized in two different ways. One is presented by Noddings and Held, who define and characterize an ontological relation as a caring relation of human encounters. Another definition is given by social and political scholars, such as Gilligan, Tronto, and Hankivsky, who characterize and define relation as the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activities. The case in point can be illustrated by the way in which these caring theorists define the relational ontology of caring theory. For example, Noddings defines the caring relation as an ontological ground that is “a set of ordered pairs generated by some rules that describe the effect—or subjective experience—of

the members” (3-4). In the relation, “we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence.” (4) In Noddings’s view, relation is the affective response occurring in a human encounter, which describes the “[s]ituations of relatedness,” and reveals “a picture of one-caring from a collection of concrete and unique situations” (33). These concrete and unique situations are characterized on the basis of the components of caring relations that are formed within a house, between mother-child and intimate family members. Noddings (2002, 230) says that, although not being home, some of the attitudes that would be more familiar at home are encountered in the outside world. This could include “ways of responding, of controlling encounters, of coming to understand.” These ways of understanding, responding to the needs of the cared-for, and the responsibility of carrying out the care, are the core components of caring relations that can be applied to inform us how members of society should care for each other and establish a caring society. Noddings indicates the following in this regard:

As we have wrestled with problem of ethicality, however, we have been led to identify something more basic—something from which both happiness and perfection spring, toward which they tend. For the one-caring, this “something” is the special relatedness of caring. To receive and to be received, to care and be cared-for: these are the basic realities of human being and its basic aims (1984, 173).

This passage explicitly reveals that the caring relation, including receiving and being received, caring and being cared for, constitutes the basic components and goal of human ethics. Moreover, Noddings (3) points out that the foundation of caring relations is derived from an affective response. Hence, we should locate “the very wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response,” and remain in touch with the affectivity throughout our discussion of ethicality. Noddings explicates that although a caring ethic is not necessarily based on sentiment,

it is necessary to give an “appropriate attention and credit to the affective foundation of existence.” Noddings says,

Ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, will be described as arising out of natural caring—that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring will be identified as the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as “good.” It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring—to be in that special relation—that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be moral in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one—caring (4-5).

This passage shows that since we are in the world characterized by relationships, we naturally recognize and long for relatedness out of natural caring or inclination. We are motivated to respond to others with natural caring, both consciously and unconsciously, because we want others to care for us and consider maintaining the caring relation as a good value. This is because, in the relational world, human existence consists of not simply an awareness of and commitment to what we are doing and how we are living, but also living with a heightened awareness that my existence cannot merely receive others, the world, and myself. It is also in need of directing my attention to that which I have already received. It is through the subjective-receptive mode that I see clearly what I have received from the other, decide to implement the responsibility of care, and sustain the caring relation. Hence, this caring relation or relatedness forms the foundation of a caring ethic (35).

Noddings (1984, 51) argues that although we are free to reject the impulse of caring in the web of relatedness, we would feel lonely, as if surrounded by strangers when we move away from the world of caring relations. This is because humans are social by nature and obtain nourishment and guidance from a caring community. When one is alone, either because one has detached oneself or because circumstances have wrenched one free, one naturally seeks to

reestablish relatedness. This is because our individuality is defined in a set of relations and this is the basic reality of human life. Thus, Noddings maintains that the ontological ground of an ideal ethic should be characterized on the basis of a caring relation unfolded by the ideal caring self. Noddings says that “[t]he ethical self is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one—caring and cared-for.” Our fundamental recognition of relatedness—that is, that which connects us naturally to another—enables us to reconnect, through the other, back to ourselves. The fact is that as we care for others, we are also cared for by others. In other words, my caring for others, in effect, also leads to my being cared for (49-54). It is the interaction of caring relations that gives rise to the thought of “I must care for others.” That is, one is willing to assume the caring responsibility because it responds to the call of the ideal caring self. Noddings explicates that “[i]t is this caring that sustains me when caring for other fails, and it is this caring that enables me to surpass my actual uncaring self in the direction of caring.” (49-50). In short, it is through the caring relation, being a caring one and being cared-for, that my life is sustained and a care ethic becomes a necessity of human existence. Noddings’ elaboration shows that the ontological relation of caring theory is a caring relation because it gives rise to an interactive, affective response between the caring one and the cared-for, as well as the thought of willingness to assume the responsibility of care.

Similar to Noddings, Held, although not directly defining caring relations, presents a characterization of caring relations and says that “[t]he ethics of care values caring relations and their associated concerns of trust and mutual responsiveness.” Held (2006, 158) explains that care must attend to others’ needs with caring. Recipients of care sustain caring relations through their responsiveness. For example, a caring society has the responsibility to take care of its children and others who are dependent. That is, to enable the best possible up-bringing and to

educate its future generations, with appropriate response to its members in need of health care, and so on (159). Held's elaborations show that hers and Noddings' views of caring relations are shared. In other words, in Held's view, caring relations refers to carrying out the responsibility of care and the affective response, such as trust, between the one who is caring and the cared-for. In order to sustain the relation, the caring one responds to the needs of the cared-for with caring motivation and responsibility, whereas the cared-for responds to the caring one affectively. It is through the caring relation of mutually affective response between the caring one and the cared-for, as well as the carrying out of caring responsibility, that our existence and society are able to be sustained.

Tronto and Hankivsky's Interconnection and Interdependent Nature

Noddings' and Held's characterizations and elaborations of caring relations as the ontological ground of caring theory are different from Tronto and Hankivsky's view. For Tronto and Hankivsky, the ontological relation refers to the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and social and political activity. Tronto (1995, 142) maintains that in order to reconsider how caring theory can inform a different political view from that of rational moral philosophy, we must reformulate our account of the nature of human existence. That is, "people qua people are interdependent rather than independent," because an individual acts politically, not merely on the basis of their self-interests, but also as a result of "the particular constellation of caring relationships and institutions within which they find themselves". The fact is that families, welfare states, and the market are all institutions that provide care. People's identity and interests are greatly shaped by the culture of these social and political groups and institutions. Alternatively put, human existence relies on people who are mutually dependent on each other

and sociopolitical activity is constituted by the shared interests of various individuals. Hence, there is an interconnection and interdependent nature between personhood and sociopolitical society as a whole. According to Tronto, these two factors are the most fundamental factors that define the ontological ground for caring theory. Similarly, Hankivsky (2004, 34 and 111-112) contends that the ontological relation of human life is the interconnection and interdependent nature, for these two factors show us how an individual's identity, social status, and needs are shaped and constructed through their intersection with a range of private and public, social, and institutional arrangements. Hankivsky explicates that we alternate between the roles of care-provider and being the one who is cared-for at different periods of our lives and in different contexts. Accordingly, "human beings are interdependent and in need of other for their growth and survival" (105). Occasionally, one's development and survival also depends upon mutual assistance and others' help. At other times, we provide our help for another's existence. Therefore, interconnected relations and interdependent nature are the two major factors that the ontological relation of caring theory/ethic(s) is based upon. Both Tronto's and Hankivsky's arguments unfold the way in which an individual's life and sociopolitical policy and other factors are intrinsically interconnected with each other. Sociopolitical factors, such as social and political arrangement, policy, and structure, have the power not merely to shape our social identity, but also to affect our daily lives. Therefore, for Tronto and Hankivsky, the relational ontology (or relational foundation) is characterized by interdependent nature and interconnection rather than the caring relation proposed by Noddings and Held.

The Relation Between Caring Relations and Interconnection and Interdependent Nature

The abovementioned two different characterizations of the relational ontology of caring theory lead us to the second question, that is, what is the relation and difference between caring relations and the interdependent nature and interconnection of personhood and sociopolitical activity? Are they compatible with each other? As evident from the above discussion, these two characterizations are apparently very different from each other. However, a close examination of Noddings, Held, and Tronto and Hankivsky's writings shows that the affective responsiveness and responsibility of caring relations are not only compatible with the interconnection/interdependent nature of human life, but also supplement them. The affective responsiveness and the responsibility of care describe the subjective experience of caring and an intersubjective caring relationship. On the other hand, the interdependent nature and interconnection portray the objective factors of social and political interaction and the interdependent nature of human existence. Caring relations can be conceived as the micro-aspect of human psychological activity, whereas interdependent nature and interconnection of human life are the macro-aspects of human social and political interactions and intersections. These two characterizations are the two sides of the same caring life. Caring relations are the concrete manifestation of caring theory, whereas the interconnected/interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical life are the underlying relational ground of caring theory. They are complementary because these two characterizations reveal different concerns and factors of caring theories with regard to human existence.

However, none of these caring theorists have thus far articulated how these two different characterizations of relational ontology can work together. Hence, there is a need to unfold a common ground on which these characterizations of the ontological ground can be bridged and connected. Therefore, it is the major task of my dissertation to delve further into the major

components/features underscored by Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature in order to uncover the possible similarities between them.

Three Factors of Noddings' Caring Relations

There are three features that Noddings' caring relation aims to articulate, which are overlooked by rational moral philosophy. These three are affective feeling or natural caring, the centrality of the needs of the cared-for (i.e., moral agent), and the interactive process of seeking a solution. First, affective feeling, and natural caring in particular, plays a significant role in human ethical life. Yet, more often than not, it is overlooked or entirely omitted by modern rational moral philosophy. In order to bridge this gap, Noddings' caring relations focuses on describing the subjective experience of caring and intersubjective caring relations. Noddings (1984, 8) indicates that the disposition or attitude of caring can activate a complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities in an ethical act. In the process of moral decision-making, caring would concretize, rather than be abstract, the conditions of those who are cared-for. The fact is that because of caring, we can recognize and understand the other's reality as a possibility for us to make a difference, such as to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce pain, to fill the need: in caring, we actualize their reality. Owing to affective caring, we arouse in us the feeling of "I must do something" to enable others to deal with their hardship. In Noddings' view, to act as someone caring means that we pay special attention to the particular person with regard to his/her concrete situation. This act is not to earn a good reputation or benefit for ourselves, but to protect and enhance the welfare of the cared-for (24). This is because as a caring person, we will try to

comprehend the other's reality and feeling as closely as possible. This is the essential quality that enables us to become caring.

Noddings further explicates the reason for using caring nature to amend the problem of only using rationality to conceptualize a moral theory. She says that there is a danger of using a rational-objective mode to make a moral judgment or decision. The danger is that we may jump into a presupposition too fast and, thereby, impose our own thoughts on the cared-for's problem before we fully inquire deeply into the conditions of the cared-for. Noddings suggests that it is better that we suspend our rational analysis for a while and "in favor of subjective thinking and reflection, allowing time and space for *seeing* and *feeling*" the reality of others to arise. If we switch into objective-analytical mode too early, we would find ourselves "deeply, perhaps inextricably, enmeshed in procedures that somehow serve only ourselves." As such, our thoughts are separated, and completely detached from the original objects of caring (26).

Noddings further spells out that although some scholars may conceive an affective receptive mode of reaction, that is, caring, as a degradation of consciousness, a response with affective feeling or caring is "qualitatively different from the analytic-objective mode in which we impose structure on the world" (34). This is because the affective response is a procreative mode characterized by outer quietude and inner voices and images through absorption and sensory concentration. The caring one is engrossed in listening, looking at, and feeling the cared-for's reality and problem. In caring, we respond, express ourselves, make plans, and execute them to solve a problem. We gather what we have received from the cared-for and turn it into a problem that needs to be solved. However, in the process of the objective-analytical mode of thinking, we move away from the cared-for. We clean up the cared-for's reality and problem and strip them of complex and bothersome qualities in order to think through the problem.

Consequently, the cared-for's reality and problem become lifeless data to be analyzed, studied, and interpreted. Then, we infer a situation that may be irrelevant to the cared-for's reality and impose our own assumption and solution on the cared-for (36). Not only does this imposition not solve the problem for the cared-for, but also adds to the cared-for's burdens. The problem is that although this objective-analytical mode of thinking aims to solve the cared-for's hardship, it fails to recognize and understand the cared-for's condition. In contrast to the objective-analytical mode of thinking, a caring receptive response would facilitate us to move back to the concrete reality of the cared-for. As such, we can recognize and understand the needs and problems of the cared-for more adequately.

The second feature/component of Noddings' caring relation is that the chief concern of caring is centered on the needs of the cared-for, that is, the human agent, rather than an impersonal problem or moral principle. The case in point can be illustrated by Noddings' criticism of the rational moral philosophy that focuses on abstraction, principle, and rules of morality. Noddings (1984, 36) says that in the process of discussing a moral issue, we have to keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at our heart. If we fail to do this, "we can climb into clouds of abstraction, moving rapidly away from the caring situation into a domain of objective and impersonal problems where we are free to impose structure as we will." This indicates that when we conceptualize the needs and problems of the cared-for, we need to be aware of the dangers of abstraction. Otherwise, we not only lose sight of the cared-for, but also lose sight of ourselves as one caring because in the process of abstraction, we care about the principle instead of the person.

Noddings indicates that wherever there is a principle, it implies an exception. Hence, it is insufficient to only place our focus on moral principle, as more often than not, principles

function to separate us from each other. The needs of the cared-for may be devalued and treated with a solution that is irrelevant to the cared-for's problem. Yet, as opposed to paying attention only to moral principles and rules, the ethic(s) of care will not permit this to happen because caring or affective feeling would lead us to recognize the fear, anger, or hatred of the cared-for. We will, thereby, treat them with understanding (5). In the process of solving a moral issue, if we do not take the human agent's feeling regarding the problem into account, and exclusively focus on the principles, what we see in others is not their reality. Rather, it is a pre-selected factor in relation to our own needs and desires. As such, we are ethically both empty and finished (15), because we concentrate on moral rules formulated prior to our understanding of the reality of the cared-for. The characteristic variation in response to the needs of the cared-for may fade away. Accordingly, Noddings points out that, those who are entrusted with caring may focus on satisfying the formulaic requirements for caretaking and fail to be emotionally present in their interactions with the cared-for. Thus, caring would disappear and only its illusion would remain (25-26). Noddings' view clearly shows that paying attention to the needs of the cared-for is more important than caring only for the moral rule and principle that were established prior to understanding the cared-for's problem.

The third feature of caring relations is the interactive process of solving a moral problem. This can be illustrated by Noddings' emphasis on mutual response between the cared-for and the caring one. Noddings indicates that a human ethic is a manifestation of one's social relationships. An ideal ethical life is not simply carried out by an individual. Rather, it is the interaction, particularly the affective response, which makes one willing to go beyond the confinement of being self-enclosed. Noddings (1984, 24) says that "[c]aring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of

view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us.” As such, our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves only. Therefore, our actions are influenced by the other’s wants and desires and the objective elements of their problematic situation. Noddings uses the example of voluntary euthanasia to illustrate her point. According to her, the decision of voluntary euthanasia needs to be decided by a team—medical staff can provide professional information and advice and family members can also participate in the discussion; however, the primary choice of the patient should be respected. Noddings says that “a stable, well informed decision to die, when death is inevitable from the sufferer’s condition, should be respected. Any other response bypasses the patient and addresses itself to a rule or principle” (239).

The example illustrating the interactive process of a caring relation can result in a better solution. In other words, an interactive process of solving problems between the caring one and the cared-for is a better ethic for solving a problem because both the caring one and the cared-for would have an opportunity to step out their frame of reference, that is, their personal pre-assumption and obsession, and seek a better solution. When the caring one accepts the requirement of the cared-for, the cared-for in return accepts to invite doctors, or other professional people and family members, to discuss his/her choice, concern, advantages, and disadvantages regarding the decision of the cared-for. Thus, both the caring one and the cared-for gain a better understanding from the discussion and a more satisfactory solution for both can be identified. Both Noddings’ elaboration and example show that the interactive process is the third major feature of her caring relation.

Three Features of Tronto-Hankivsky’s Interconnection and Interdependent Nature

Like Noddings's caring relation, Tronto and Hankivsky's interdependent nature and interconnection also possess three different features. First, defining caring theory from social and political perspectives; second, emphasizing the interconnection of an individual's life and sociopolitical factors/activity, and third, elaborating on the interdependent nature of human existence. With regard to the first feature, in contrast with Noddings characterization of caring through a subjective experience of caring and intersubjective caring relation, Tronto and Hankivsky define caring from a social and political perspective as well as an interpersonal connection. The case in point can be illustrated by the definition of caring given by Tronto and Fisher (1991, 40). They define care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible." Tronto explains that caring consists of taking care of our bodies, ourselves, our environment, and all of what we seek to interweave in a complex and life-sustaining web. This definition clearly shows that caring is defined as a social and political activity that maintains, continues, and repairs our world, rather than describes the mental phenomena of a caring nature and affective feeling, as Noddings does. Tronto explicates that the ethic(s) of care involves a process of four phases of care, that is, caring about (attentiveness), taking care of (responsibility), care giving (competence), and care-receiving (responsiveness). Compared to Noddings' caring theory mentioned previously, these four processes not only leave out the caring nature, but also focus on articulating the mechanism and ability of caring, such as attention, capacity, and activity, rather than caring affection. These characterizations and emphases clearly differ from those of Noddings' caring nature and caring relation.

Tronto mentions the following two reasons for characterizing the ethic of care(s): first, to define caring as an activity having the advantage of opening the caring ethic(s) to be analyzed;

second, showing that a caring ethic(s) is not necessarily confined to a private or individual experience. By doing so, an ethic(s) of care can be proved to be as capable of being a moral theory for social and political practice, if not more so, as Kant and Rawls' rational moral philosophy. Thus, it is evident that Tronto's concern differs from Noddings' emphasis of affective feeling and a caring nature. Therefore, the ontological ground for Tronto and Hankivsky is not only limited to the social encounters of human relationships, but also comprises the interconnection and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. Tronto points out that in order to investigate the need of an ethic(s) of care, we can analyze the nature and factors that constitute human life and sociopolitical activity. Specifically, this analysis begins from a different understanding of human nature and human interaction. Instead of seeing people as rational actors who pursue their goals and maximize their own interests, we must conceive of people as constantly enmeshed in relationships of care. This can be illustrated by the previously mentioned example that people act politically, not simply based on their self-interest. Rather, people act as a result of the particular constellation of caring relationships and institutions.

This indicates that the existence of an individual relies heavily on social and political groups and institutions. These groups and institutions are either families, the welfare state, or markets that connect to our lives. An individual's life, including self-identity, social status, and economic life, is, accordingly, closely intersected with and dependent upon these groups and institutions. Hence, these social and political groups and institutions play a very significant role in an individual's life. Therefore, it can be said that they are one of the most important factors that constitute the ontological foundation of human life. Hankivsky clearly is in line with Tronto, because she also articulates the way in which social policy, political arrangement, and the like, can shape and define an individual's social identity, status, and welfare. This is because, as

Hankivsky points out, the interdependent nature and interconnection of personhood and sociopolitical activity are the relational ontology of human existence.

The second and third features of Tronto and Hankivsky's ontological relation are the interconnection and interdependent nature of human life and sociopolitical activity. In both Tronto and Hankivsky's accounts, interconnection and interdependent nature are placed in the same category, that is, interdependent nature. However, if we think carefully in conjunction with related philosophy, such as Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity of existential phenomenology, and Nāgārjuna's interdependent nature of dependent co-arising philosophy, it is clear that these are two separate concepts and have distinct implications. Hence, in order to differentiate the different implications of these two terms and unfold the deeper meaning of interdependent nature, my thesis treats them as two different characteristics and discusses them in turn. That is, the interconnection of personal life and sociopolitical activity is the second feature, and the interdependent nature of human existence is the third feature of Tronto and Hankivsky's relational ontology.

The interconnection of human life and sociopolitical activity indicates the connection between two or more entities, including humans and things. It is a link of interaction and intersection that connects different individuals, including an individual and sociopolitical activity/factors. To a certain extent, this interconnection overlaps with Noddings' caring relation, except that, while Noddings' caring relation emphasizes the subjective experience of human caring relations, Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection underlines the intersection and interconnection between personhood and sociopolitical activity/factors. The example illustrating the interconnection presented by Tronto-Hankivsky is that a country that has a social policy of healthcare for all citizens is different from a country that does not. The citizens in the former

country do not need to worry that their family may suffer from bankruptcy when a family member gets severely sick. However, for citizens of the latter country, worry is inevitable because of expensive medical costs. This example shows the intersection of social and political policy and daily human life. An individual's life is closely related to a social and political policy set up by the country where this individual lives.

The third feature of Tronto and Hankivsky relational ontology is the interdependent nature of human existence. This does not simply refer to the interconnection or interconnected relation between two or more entities, but also to the mutual reliance, co-emergence, and interpenetration of human life and sociopolitical activity. It includes the interconnection, but goes further to include a deeper meaning. That is, these connections are not the external links that connect individuals, things, and sociopolitical factors. Rather, these individuals, things and sociopolitical factors are interwoven into the very structure, fabric, and substance of an individual's personhood as well as social, economic, and political life. The interdependent nature implies that these social and political factors and activities do not occur in the arena of social and political constitutions completely outside of one's life. Rather, these factors are the substantial sources that contribute to forming one's identity and sociopolitical life. The case in point can be illustrated by what Tronto and Hankivsky said about the way in which culture, social policy, political groups, and institutions, as well as political arrangement, not only can affect our daily lives, but also shape and define our social identity. In this sense, these social and political factors are not simply the connection between two or more entities. Rather, they are intrinsic components, and part of the very substance of human existence, that form an individual's identity, social status, and sociopolitical life.

The Shared and Non-shared Elements of Noddings' Caring Relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's Interdependent Nature and Interconnection

Comparing the three major features/components of Noddings' caring relations to those of Tronto and Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature, I have found more non-shared elements than shared. For example, while Noddings emphasizes caring relations, Tronto and Hankivsky highlight the interdependent nature of human and social and political activity. Moreover, while Noddings underscores human agents, Tronto and Hankivsky underline social and political factors. In addition, although both Noddings and Tronto-Hankivsky conceive that there is an interconnected relation between humans' lives, Noddings fails to mention the interdependent nature that is underscored by Tronto and Hankivsky. However, the non-shared elements do not necessarily indicate that Noddings' caring relations is incompatible with Tronto and Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature. In fact, my thesis will contend that both caring relations and interconnection and interdependent nature are not only compatible with each other, but also represent two sides of the same coin, that is, a caring ethic. In other words, while Noddings' caring relations underscores the subjective caring nature and caring relations between two or more individuals in human encounters, Tronto and Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature highlight the social and political interaction and intersection between personhood and sociopolitical activity. Since human existence comprises not merely personal lives, but also social and political activity, an inclusive caring theory needs to include these two dimensions and attitudes. The following are the main reasons for this:

First, as my analysis of the different features shows, the first two features of Noddings's caring relation focus on describing the mental phenomena of caring with respect to the carer and the needs of the cared-for. In contrast to these mental factors, Tronto and Hankivsky's

interdependent nature concentrates more on articulating the social, economic, and political factors related to a caring activity. In this sense, Noddings and Tronto-Hankivsky aim to describe different aspects of caring theory. Noddings' description is the micro-psychological aspect of care manifested in a moral agent, whereas Tronto-Hankivsky's description is the macro and sociopolitical aspect of how caring activity should be conducted in a society. These two aspects of a caring theory, although different, are not in conflict with each other. In effect, they supplement each other and form a more comprehensive and inclusive caring theory.

With regard to human life, our existence is not simply informed by personal experience, but is also shaped and affected by social and political conditions. The subjective psychological aspect of care reveals the affective feeling and quality of loving-kindness that a moral agent needs to cultivate. On the other hand, objective social and political conditions reveal the framework that a caring theory needs to provide for a social and political structure, arrangement, institution, etc. These are two sides of the same caring ethic. In a caring society, both are needed in order to actualize a caring practice. That is, one cannot be truly cared for if no sufficient food and other daily needs are provided or if all citizens are not treated equally. On the other hand, even if a society abounds with food and other material resources, if people do not care for each other—for example, if they are frequently abused and treated violently by others—this society cannot be characterized as a caring society. Hence, a comprehensive and inclusive caring theory needs to include both elements and pay attention to both nurturing a caring agent and developing a humane and just sociopolitical society.

Second, although both Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection emphasize different features of human existence, which a caring theory needs to attend to, their examples show that both the subjective experience of caring, and the objective aspect of social

and political activity play a significant role in human life. Hence, for a more comprehensive and inclusive caring theory, it is necessary to include both components. For example, Tronto indicates that care needs both physical materials and psychological care. For physical care, we need to have enough food, shelter, clothing, and a rich complex of material resources to provide these essentials. In addition, depending on the type and quality of the interaction, care also needs to attend to a number of psychological issues, such as rage at the powerful care-giver, fear of the care-giver, anger at the care-receiver, or idealization (of either a positive or negative type) of others in the care relationships. In other words, care requires that “humans pay attention to one another, take responsibility for one another, engage in physical processes of care giving, and respond to those who have received care” (1995, 144-145). This example clearly illustrates that although Tronto’s characterization of relational ontology only emphasizes the relation between personhood and sociopolitical activity, she does notice that a comprehensive and inclusive caring theory needs to consist of not simply attending to the sociopolitical policy and arrangement to secure material needs, but also engaging a caring mind. The engagement of caring activity cannot be actualized if no caring mind is involved. Similarly, Noddings tends to focus on articulating the human caring relation as the foundation of a caring ethic(s), although she does recognize that the needs of the cared-for are more than simply what is desired. Rather, they include people, things, and sociopolitical conditions. In discussing the needs of the cared-for, Noddings shows how to maintain a balance between the expressed needs of the cared-for and the inferred necessity of something that occurs in an educative setting. According to Noddings, for those parents who take education seriously in the home, although they may disapprove of their children watching a violent movie, occasionally, they should allow their children to watch it. The entire family may watch a deplorably violent movie and then discuss it. Noddings says that the

discussion needs not be spoiled by moralizing. Rather, both children and parents can express their opinions freely and question one another. Such a discussion can be a way of cultivating children's aesthetic and moral judgment without imposing judgments in an authoritarian manner. This example shows that Noddings does notice that there are factors apart from human caring relation that can affect a child's life, such as watching a violent movie, their parents' discussion of the movie with their child, and so on.

From these two examples, it is plausible to say that although Noddings and Tronto emphasize different aspects of the relational ontology, their examples demonstrate that both the subjective experience of caring, and the objective aspects of social and political activity, have a significant influence on human existence. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that a comprehensive ontological ground has to include both subjective caring experience and objective social and political activity. Alternatively put, the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection of personhood and sociopolitical activity can be bridged. The problem is how can this be done?

Neither Noddings' caring relation nor Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection answers this question satisfactorily. In fact, they theorize only one aspect of the relational ontology of caring ethic(s) indicates that Noddings and Tronto may have difficulty in conceptualizing the shared ground between the subjective experience of caring and objective factors of social and political activity. After all, the traditional dichotomous view that separates mind from body, subjectivity from objectivity, and the public from the private, is deeply rooted in our intellectual thought, and is conceived as an insurmountable gap. However, this is not necessarily the case because the deeper meaning of interdependent nature can solve the problem. Unfortunately, neither Tronto nor Hankivsky provides a clear definition of interdependent nature and the way in which it

differs from Noddings' caring relation and their own notion of interconnection. They both seem to treat interconnection and interdependent nature interchangeably and overlook the deeper implications involved in interdependent nature. Hence, in the next chapter, my thesis will first clarify and unfold the different meanings and implications of interdependent nature and interconnection. Then, I will apply both Nāgarjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising and Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity to illustrate the way in which the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature can be bridged, and a shared ground between them is established. Lastly, based on Nāgarjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, my thesis will reveal the characteristic components that an inclusive relational foundation needs to embrace for constructing a moral theory.

CHAPTER 3: APPLYING MERLEAU-PONTY'S AND NĀGĀRJUNA'S THEORY OF INDEPENDENT NATURE TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN NODDINGS AND TRONTO- HANKIVSKY'S RELATIONAL ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

In previous section, my research shows that among the four most essential shared components that constitute the conceptual framework of caring theory, the relational ontology or ontological foundation has not yet been fully developed. Hence, in order to form a more inclusive and comprehensive ontological ground for what I call neocaring theory, the primary task of my thesis in this chapter will apply both Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of intersubjectivity to bridge the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tonto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature.

The fact is that although Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky agree that the relational ontology is the fundamental ground that undergirds the caring theory/ethic(s), they characterize the relational ontological ground with different concerns and almost in a non-related way. Whereas Noddings highlights the subjective experience of caring relation, Tronto and Hankivsky underscore the interconnection and interdependent nature of humanhood and sociopolitical activity. Accordingly, there is a gap between these two characterizations. Yet, as my thesis pointed out in the previous chapter, although these two different characterizations are featured with different concerns and emphases, they are not incompatible. The reason is that while Noddings' caring relation describes the micro-aspect of subjective experience of human agent's caring nature and social encounters, Tronto and Hankivsky portray the macro-aspect of the interconnection and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. Since human existence is in need of both subjective experience and sociopolitical activity, these two different characterizations are the two sides of the same caring coin. They both are true and

needed for human existence. In fact, even though both Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature emphasize different characteristics of human caring life in their theories, the examples given by them, as my thesis showed in previous chapter, reveal that the actualization of a caring theory requires paying attention to both subjective experience of caring relation as well as the objective aspect of social and political interconnection and interdependency.

The real problem in their theories which remains unsolved is how the gap between these two different characterizations can be bridged and a shared ground can be established. My investigation of both Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature reveals that neither of their theories can solve this problem satisfactorily. It is, therefore, the major task of this chapter to apply both Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of intersubjectivity to clarify the nature of existence, and bridge the gap between these two different characterizations. Thereby, a more comprehensive and inclusive ontological foundation can be established. This comprehensive and inclusive foundation, in turn, will bring new light to moral education, both in theory and practice. Yet, before my thesis delves into the way in which both Nāgārjuna and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies can be applied to bridge the gap and form a shared ground between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interconnection and interdependent nature, it is better to expound the problems that hinder Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky's theories to have a shared ground.

The problems are threefold: first, the two characterizations are made based on the separation of the objectivity and subjectivity. Second, these two characterizations imply different views of connection between the public and the private. Third, the caring theorists possess different views regarding whether the interconnection and interdependent nature is simply an

epistemological holding, i.e., different views held by different scholars, or an ontological ground which together with other factors constitutes the human reality. Since in both Tronto and Hankivsky's writings, interdependent nature includes the meaning of interconnection, I will use interdependent nature to represent both interdependent nature and interconnection in later writing.

The first problem: (that creates a gap between Noddings' caring theory and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature) is the separation of subjectivity and objectivity. As my previous chapter revealed, in Noddings' view, the relational foundation is confined to the field of human encounters. Neither social factors nor political structures and arrangement are mentioned. As such, Noddings' caring relation seems to suggest that only human agents matter but not other factors. Tronto and Hankivsky's interdependent nature, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the social and political factors but fails to articulate the significant influence of the way in which a human agent's care may affect the public wellbeing. Characterizing the relational foundation based on these two extreme views, the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature is inevitably formed.

The second problem: is the different implications of the way in which an individual or an entity is connected to others. These two different characterizations indicate that they describe the relation between the public and the private differently. For Noddings, the connection is an external relation that links two or more atom-like entities or individuals together. The relation is simply a loose link that connects two or more individuals or entities. The individual possesses the autonomous freedom and right to choose and design what (s)he wants and needs in his/her life; the social and political factors, such as policy, organization and so on, have very little influence on an individual's life. Yet, the interdependent nature described by Tronto and

Hankivsky indicates the nature of mutual reliance and interpenetration is not simply an external link between two or more individuals or entities. Rather, it is part of the intrinsic components that constitutes the fabric and structure of personhood and human social, economic and political life. Characterizing the relation as such, an individual's life is not entirely decided by his/her autonomous choice or freedom. Rather, the choice would be conditioned and defined by the social and political context that the individual inhabits.

Take a group of family members as an example. In Noddings' description, caring relation between the family members refers to the intimate connection between parents and children or other close family members. Under their parents' caring relation, the children can choose what they want and need freely even when they are outside the family in a school. Yet, in view of Tronto and Hankivsky's interdependent nature, the relation between the parents and their children is not merely regarding the intimate and loving relation, but also includes the family's wealth, social policy and the mutual influences that affect and define each member of the family. That is, the parents' marital situation would lead the children to be called a child coming from a happy family or a single parent family and the like; or vice versa, a father or mother described as having an excellent son/daughter or a dishonest child and so forth. Moreover, the family's social and political condition would determine whether their children have allowances to spend, or if they can afford to send their children to a private school.

The implication of these two characterizations is distinct. Noddings' external link implies that an individual is an atomic and independent entity that is free from other social members' and factors' influence except those who are closely related to him/her. Even if in the situation of interacting with others, the children can still keep his/her own way of doing things and maintain their self-identities. In this sense, the public factors play an insignificant role in an individual's

private life. Yet, in both Tronto and Hankivsky's view, the connection between an individual, other social members and socio-political activity is not simply an external link. Rather, the connections would shape one's identity, define one's social status, and the way that an individual is cared-for under a particular kind of social and political structure, policy, arrangement, and so forth. In this way, the public factors play a significant role in conditioning an individual's private life. That is, as Hankivsky (2004, 115) points out, caregiving is affected by changing demographics and social trends because decreased family size, increased geographic mobility, rising numbers of women entering the workforce, and elevated divorce rates are all factors that change the availability or willingness of family members to provide care. Hankivsky's example clearly shows that an individual's private life is deeply affected by the change of the public factors, such as demographical changes and the social trend toward of small-sized families. These social factors, therefore, are not simply an outer link that connects two entities, i.e., individuals and social factors. Rather, they are part of the intrinsic elements that constitute the fabric of an individual's private life. These two different characterizations of the way in which human life is connected clearly have different ethical implication for the relation between the public and the private as well as whether we can establish a more inclusive and comprehensive moral theory.

The third problem that creates a gap between these two different characterizations of relational ontology is the different views of either seeing the interdependent nature as an ontological ground or an epistemological holding. The former is the prerequisite condition of human life whereas the latter is a belief or view that may or may not be necessary for human existence. The ontological problem is related to what are the most fundamental components and relations that constitute and condition the way in which an individual's life and sociopolitical

reality work. Narrowly, ontological ground consists of the factors involved in human personal life and sociopolitical activity. Broadly, it also includes the economy and natural environment, such as plants and inanimate objects and so on. In this thesis, I only focus on considering the narrow part of human life, that is, the relation between personhood or human nature, and sociopolitical activity.

Epistemology, on the other hand, is regarding one's knowledge, value, viewpoint or perspective about the world. It is related to what counts as a valid knowledge and understanding, which reveal the situation and component of the world and the factors that affect our action and behaviors. Ontological ground is that which we cannot live without, whereas epistemological holding may be believed to be true in one society but unknown or believed to be not true in another society. Hence, epistemological holdings are not prerequisite factors of human life but ontological factors are. For instance, in ancient China, people conceived that July was the month that all evil spirits, such as ghosts, would be released from hell to entrap the soul of the living. Consequently, a lot of taboos were established to avoid the attack of the evil spirits. Many Chinese people avoided swimming, traveling and doing other dangerous things in July just to avoid attacks by evil spirits. Yet, this belief does not exist in modern America. This shows that a belief or worldview although held as true epistemologically in one society, such as ancient China, is not necessarily conceived to be true in another society.

The ontological elements, such as air and water, on the other hand, are the very substantial factors that make human existence possible. Chinese could not live without these two elements, neither could modern Americans. Universally, we cannot live without air and water regardless of different temporal periods and locations. By the same token, if we conceive interdependent nature as an ontological ground of human existence, it implies that an

individual's life, social relation and political activity cannot exist and sustain without depending upon other people and things. This interdependent nature, therefore, is a prerequisite condition for the existence of an individual's life, let alone the social and political activity. In contrast, if the interdependent nature is simply conceived as a different perspective, it implies that a human can live isolated from others. In this framework, no family members, friends, other related human beings or things are needed for one to have a social life and political activity. Although this sounds absurd, it is exactly the way modern neoliberalism defines and characterizes human life. That is, an individual becomes a free and autonomous entity who needs not to care for other fellow beings with care of any kind. Accordingly, the social and political policy informed by this view pays a lot of attentions to an individual's freedom and rights, but overlooks how to sustain a society as a whole with a caring mind. This drawback results from the ignorance of the interdependent nature of human life, particularly, in a democratic society that emphasizes the social and political policies made by citizens' participation. If every citizen ignores the common good and focuses on his/her self-own interest, the democratic life would turn into political battlefield in which everyone fights for his/her interests rather than for the well-being of everyone and society as whole. In a worse scenario, the confusion of ontological ground as an epistemological holding may lead to dehumanization. The case in point can be illustrated by issues regarding gender and racial discrimination. We can either simply push these issues away as different views or treat them as social and political problems, and improve these problems accordingly. If we consider that racial and gender issues are simply different epistemological holdings, we may ignore the problems related to those underrepresented groups, and hence, treat them unjustly and with inhumane manner.

Among the caring theorists, two different views with respect to whether interdependent nature is an ontological foundation or an epistemological holding can be found. Most of the caring theorists mentioned above, recognize the interdependent nature of human life and socio-political activity. Yet, they tend to conceive it simply as a different epistemological holding, i.e. different perspectives of different scholars, rather than an ontological reality that constitutes the very substance of human existence. The case in point is that all the above caring theorists, except Slote, to a certain extent mention the interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. Yet, the majority of scholars from social and political sciences, including Gilligan, Tronto and Held, tend to conceive that such interdependence is simply a “different perspective” or “a different way” of characterizing and conceptualizing social and political life, but not an intrinsic constituent of human existence. Both Gilligan and Tronto explicate that what makes caring theory differ from rational moral theory is that caring theorists construct caring ethic(s) through a view of interdependency and interconnection. This view differs from rational moral philosophy, which formulates a moral theory based upon the concept of an independent and atomic individual’s life. Gilligan says that framing the moral problem in different terms suggests different ways of organizing the basic elements of moral judgment, self, others and the relationship between them. Hence, considering a social or political policy and arrangement through an interdependent view would be entirely different from that based on the concept of autonomy, independence and freedom. A similar view is shared by Held (2006) because she uses the term “value” to characterize caring ethic(s). The term “value” indicates that caring ethic(s) is constructed through a particular belief or worldview of caring relation, which may or may not be true for human existence.

This epistemological treatment is different from that of Noddings and Hankivsky. Noddings claims that caring relations are ontological grounds of caring theory because they are the most basic constituent of our existence. Without the relatedness, human life cannot be sustained. Alternatively put, a caring relation is the very being of our existence rather than a “perspective” or different “value” or belief. Similarly, Hankivsky also conceives that any relation is the ontological ground of caring ethic(s) although her relation refers to an interdependent nature rather than to a caring relation. Hankivsky explicates that human beings are dependent upon each other not simply for social and political interaction but also for survival. The fact is that sometimes we may become ill, injured, frustrated or weakened. We need to depend on family members, friends or others’ care to recover from illness and get back our physical and mental strengths. In this sense, an interdependent nature is not simply a concept presenting different views of social relation and interactions. Instead, it is the characterization of human reality that describes the way in which an individual’s moral life is interconnected and intersected with social and political activity and factors. A person’s private life cannot be entirely separated from his/her social and political realities whereas his/her social and political activities cannot exist without the participation of other individuals. Personhood and sociopolitical practice, thereby, are interdependent upon each other.

However, Noddings and Hankivsky’s articulations of the ontological characteristics of relatedness and interdependence do not attract as much attention as they deserve from other caring theorists. Hardly do we see any article or book written by the above scholars tackling the different implications of characterizing interdependent nature either as an ontological ground or as an epistemological holding. Ironically, the ontological relation is one of the foremost keys that can unlock the problem of whether caring theory is compatible with rational moral philosophy by

its very nature. If the ontological relation is simply an epistemological holding, there is no need to discuss whether or not caring theory is compatible with rational moral philosophy, for this conception would simply be a different perspective on a moral theory constructed by different scholars. In a diverse society, different people are entitled to have different views. Hence, it is insignificant to argue the differences. Yet, if the interdependent nature is an ontological ground, it is necessary to examine which moral theory, be it caring theory or rational moral theory, provides a more inclusive and comprehensive moral foundation to characterize human reality.

The above three problems that create a gap between the characterization of Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature, apart from the deeply rooted dichotomous view of the division of subjectivity and objectivity, which I mentioned in the second chapter, another three factors can be illustrated by Noddings, Gilligan and Tronto's worries. The worries are that first, Noddings does not want to reconcile the unique role of individuality, or particularity or autonomy of a person. That is, every individual is unique and worth a whole world of attention. If we emphasize too much of the interdependent nature on human life, we may arrive at a communitarian view, maintaining that our social, culture and political lives constitute personhood and leaving no room for individuality. Second, Tronto worries that if caring theory focuses on characterizing the subjective experience of caring nature and caring relation, it cannot be openly analyzed. Hence, in order to show that caring theory can be openly analyzed and is not necessarily confined to private, or an individual's experience, we have to emphasize the social, cultural, and political factors. Third, for Gilligan and Tronto, the argument of the interdependent nature of human existence is only partially true, that is, the interactions and interdependent nature of human existence are only parts of human life not the

whole. Hence, they should be conceived only as an alternative perspective but not an ontological ground.

These three worries to a certain extent are justifiable, but only partially, because these three views fail to see the thorough meaning of this interdependent nature and the different implications of treating it as an ontological component or as an epistemological holding. In response to Gilligan and Tronto's view, interaction and interdependence although characterizing only a part of human life, does not mean that they are not a reality, or there is no need of them in our lives. They are only incomplete. Incompleteness is not equal to non-existence. This is analogous to saying that the development of human life does not simply rely upon food, but also requires intellectual and spiritual cultivation. This saying does not imply that human development has no need of food. What it means to say is that food is not the only thing that human development needs. The problem of considering the interdependent nature simply as a different perspective may lead to the confusion that it may or may not be necessary for human life. The risk of this view is like treating racial and gender discrimination as a different epistemological holding and ignoring these issues altogether. In this way, it may lead to dehumanization. If the interdependent nature were not an intrinsic component of human existence, it would indicate that an individual could survive without depending upon any people or things, such as family, friends, and food. Yet, this clearly is a false view. No one can live without eating food from originated from externals. This is also true for the clothes, and shoes that we wear, the roads we take, the house we live in and the like. We exist separately from but interconnected to them.

Tronto's worry of characterizing the subjective experience of caring nature and caring relation reveals that she overlooks the significant influence that an individual's experience may

have on sociopolitical policy making and practice. Many factors, in fact, counter her view. Take one of the most challenging problems many school districts face as an example. The case is that many school teachers found that they do not know how to handle the demographical change of the student body. Many schools are registered with white students but now, because of new housing policies, many Latino and other ethnic students are moving into the district. Consequently, almost half of the student body is constituted by non-white students. However, the teachers found that they have difficulties speaking to these non-white students. The reason is not simply because the teachers cannot speak Spanish or other languages. Rather, they lack the experience of both teaching and interacting with those students. Accordingly, those students are left without proper care, both in teaching and learning. This case shows the significant role an individual's experience plays in making a proper educational, social and political policy. Thanks to the absence of subjective experience in teaching different ethnic groups other than white students, the school teachers are unable to alter the school curriculum and find a proper way to teach non-white students. This case clear shows that an individual's subjective experience plays a very important role in shaping and defining educational and social policy. This significant role is overlooked by Tronto. Accordingly, she fears characterizing caring theory in subjective terms.

Noddings' fear of losing individuality or autonomy of a person reveals another problem. That is, Noddings' fear is a lack of proper understanding of the meaning of interdependent nature. Interdependent nature emphasizes the co-emergence and mutual reliance of human beings and other factors, but it does not mean that one cannot have freedom and autonomy. In fact, as many examples presented by Tronto and Hankivsky show, the interdependent nature not only provides a more holistic view for us to consider the various corresponding factors, but also unfolds that different components will constitute different realities. As such, one can have more

chances to choose how to live a more hopeful and autonomous life. As Hankivsky points out, the understanding of interdependent nature provides more chances for an individual to develop autonomy and freedom, because the understanding provides us a clear map for designing our own lives without upsetting other's lives. For instance, Hankivsky says that a proper understanding of the interdependent nature will help us to understand that people from different cultures or orientations possess different ways of knowing, seeing, and understanding the way in which the world operates. Hence, they have different ways of developing their social policies. Understanding this interdependence, we can empower the marginalized persons to articulate their experiences, needs, and goods by not abstracting and generalizing their realities. As such, the marginalized people become more autonomous to in deciding the social policies that work better for them.

The above misunderstandings of the interdependent nature of human existence, and the dichotomous view separating subjectivity from objectivity disclose that there is a need to delve more deeply into the implication and constituents of interconnection and interdependent nature. The next section of my thesis, therefore, will apply Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of intersubjectivity and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of interdependent nature to clarify the meaning of interdependent nature and to illustrate the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private as well as epistemological holding and ontological foundation.

Nāgārjuna's Philosophy of Dependent Co-arising Theory and Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Intersubjectivity

The reason for me to use Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies to bridge the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature is not simply because the non-dual, interrelated and interdependent nature of an individual's experience and sociopolitical reality is the primary themes of their philosophies, and they explain these themes in a very systematic and thorough way. Rather, it is because their philosophies come closest to the characterizations what Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky intend to articulate but have not yet fully spelled out. The fact is that the term "interdependent nature" utilized directly by Tronto and Hankivsky is the core element that Nāgārjuna's dependent co-arising philosophy illustrates. The caring relation of existential phenomenology presented by Noddings, on the other hand, is the major theory revealed in Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity although Noddings does not explicitly mention his name. Furthermore, never have I seen a philosophical theory that expounds the interdependent nature and inter-relation between human subject and external world in such a clear and thorough way. Neither John Dewey nor the deliberative philosophies have shown such profound insight as Nāgārjuna and Merleau-Ponty regarding interdependent nature. These two philosophical theories, therefore, are most suitable to interrogate in what way caring theory and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature fall short, and in what way these two relational ontological theories can be bridged, particularly, in terms of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, as well as epistemological holding and ontological foundation.

Nāgārjuna's Philosophy of Dependent Co-arising

Nāgārjuna is one of the most influential Indian Buddhist philosophers in Asian philosophy. His position in Asian philosophy has been compared to that of Kant, analytical

philosophy and Wittgenstein by scholars from comparative philosophy.²⁸ In particular, both his dialectic reasoning method and philosophy are frequently compared to those of Kant. Nāgājuna philosophy of dependent co-arising not only channels ancient Indian Buddhist philosophy, but also serves as one of the most fundamental components of modern Asian philosophy that are deeply rooted in Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan thought. Specifically, the two major theories of his philosophy, i.e. dependent co-arising and the absence of self-created nature (theory of *śūnyatā*), are the core constituents of Madhymika (school of Middle Way) and Zen Buddhist philosophy, that prevail and undergird the philosophy of East Asia and Tibet. Most scholars who study Nāgārjuna's philosophy, such as Robinson, Yinshun, Bulgault, and Huntington, agree that philosophy of dependent co-arising allows Nāgārjuna to deconstruct and reconstruct ontology and epistemology at the same time. What Nāgājuna aims to deconstruct is the empiricism (or realism) and intellectualism (or idealism) in his time.²⁹

The realists maintained a sort of radical pluralism, analyzing all mundane experiences into a precisely determined number of ultimately real, discrete atomic constituents, called *dharma*s. Idealists, on the other hand, reduce not only the individual "I" to a reified concept, but all aspects of every day experience, both subjective and objective, are emptied of any ontological content (17-18). Nāgājuna intends to bridge the gap between empiricism and idealism through the philosophy of dependent co-arising by means of re-interrogating the nature, structure,

²⁸ According to Andrew Tuck (1990), Nāgārjuna's philosophy has been compared to that of several western philosophers'. In brief, it consists of three phrases. The first phrase is the Kantian phrase, then is analytic phrase and third, a post-Wittgensteinian phrase. The first example is that Theodore Stcherbatsky interprets Nāgārjuna's philosophy as dividing the world into appearance and reality as Kant does in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. This view is further interpreted by T.R. V. Murti (1955) as the Absolute and the world of phenomena. In the second phrase, Richard Robinson's article "Some logic aspects of Nāgārjuna's system" (1957) analyzes and compares Nāgārjuna's dialectic argument (*catuskoti*, the four alternative positions of reasoning, or tetralemma) to the modern symbolic logic. The third phrase can be seen in Frederick Streng's *Emptiness* and Chris Gudmundsen's *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*. These two underscores the similarities between Nāgārjuna and the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.

²⁹ See Waldo (1975) and Huntington (1989).

constituents and relations between individuals, individuals and society, as well as individuals and the world. The major tenet of Nāgārjuna's dependent co-arising theory is presented in his masterpiece, *Mūlamadhyamika Kārikā* (hereafter *MKK*), and other treatises³⁰. Some scholars compare dependent co-arising to the theory of relativity and quantum theory³¹ but perhaps, Michael Berman's (2004) comparison of it to Merleau-Ponty's relational social ontology and theory of intersubjectivity comes closest to the essence of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising. Berman points out that both Merleau-Ponty and Nāgārjuna concern themselves with the nature of existence, and underscore the significance of experience and perception which are in and of the world. In a sense, these two philosophers "rely on *existential analysis* of our lives as situated beings in the phenomenal world." Nāgārjuna's relational origination, i.e. dependent co-arising, and Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity delineate the immediate "mutual relations between us situated beings and the experienced world".

Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising (*pratītyasamūtpada*) primarily consists of three major components, that is, two theories and a dialectical interrogation of four alternative positions of reasoning (i.e., tetralemma). The two major theories are the theory of *śūnyatā* (the absence of self-created nature) and dependent co-arising (*pratītyasamūtpada*), whereas the four alternative positions of reasoning indicate affirmation, negation, both affirmation and negation and neither affirmative nor negation. Nāgārjuna's use of four alternative positions of reasoning is inseparable from his philosophical theories of *śūnyatā* and dependent co-arising. Through the

³⁰ Such as *Vigrahavyavartan*, *Shunyatasaptati* and so on.

³¹ See L. M. Roth, "Buddhist Madhyamika Philosophy as Therapy Realistic views" *Fundamental Questions in Quantum Mechanics: Selected Papers from the Symposium*, (Albany, New York, April 12-14, 1984); and Robert Allen Paul. "Spacetime Ontology: Kant, Einstein and Nagarjuna," accessed April, 2010, <http://robertpaul.name/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/r-a-paul-spacetime-ontology-2006.pdf>. Also, see Christian Thomas Kohl. "Buddhism and Quantum Physics: A Strange Parallelism of Two Concepts of Reality," accessed April, 2010, <http://www.worldprayerfoundation.com/Buddhism%20and%20Quantum%20Physics.pdf>

four alternative positions of reasoning, Nāgārjuna shows that no entity in the world, including human, animate, and inanimate objects, can simply be defined by a dichotomous formulation of “yes” versus “no” or “this is” vis-à-vis “this is not”. That is, an entity cannot be defined simply as arising or ceasing, permanent or impermanent, identical or non-identical, coming or going, and the like. The nature of human existence or any given entity, in Nāgārjuna’s view, is an ongoing process within which a major cause depends upon many related factors to make the life of an individual, or an entity, operate properly. Hence, the definition of the nature of an existing entity needs to be characterized in relation to the major cause and its related conditions that work together in the life process of the entity. For instance, the existence of an apple tree that we see now is a consequence of an apple seed and other related conditions, such as good soil, water, light and the like. It is, therefore, unreasonable to characterize the existence of an apple tree simply based upon a static picture or fragmentary period of its life. Rather, the nature of the existence of an apple tree has to be characterized in relation to its developmental process and the related conditions, such as soil, water, sunlight and so forth.

In other words, for Nāgārjuna, the nature of human existence or an entity consists of three characteristics: first, it is an ongoing process rather than a static state of life, and second, it depends upon not merely a major cause but also other related factors. Third, the development of major cause (such as an apple seed), although it is the factor that decides the manifest form of an existing entity (apple tree), is conditioned and defined by its related factors. Also, the major factor and corresponding conditions are mutually supplementary to each other. These three features are presented through two major theories of Nāgārjuna philosophy, i.e., theory of dependent co-arising, and theory of *śūnyatā*.

The theory of dependent co-arising and theory of *śūnyatā* are two sides of the same coin. Whereas the former reveals the manifestation of the phenomena in the world, the latter indicates the absence of a self-sufficient and self-created nature of all the existences, be it a human, animal, thing or an event. These two theories aim to reveal that the very existence of an individual (or entity and event) depends on the co-emergence of a particular major cause and its related conditions, but the major cause and related conditions also mutually define and supplementary to each other. In *MKK*, Nāgārjuna utilizes twenty-seven subjects to interrogate the nature of all existence and to show the interrelated relation and interdependent nature of humanhood and natural, social and political world. The subjects interrogated consist of the nature of existence, cause and effect, time, space, movement, selfhood or self-identity, mental activity, behavior and other social and political activity. For instance, Nāgārjuna interrogates the nature of existence through the concept of cause and effect. Nāgārjuna discloses that the nature of an existing entity is neither constituted by itself alone, nor created by non-related factors, such as gods, or the combination of two independent entities, or made from nothingness. Rather, the emergence and existence of an entity relies upon the cooperation of a major cause and its related conditions.

In the first chapter of *MKK*, Nāgārjuna first agrees with the view that the substance-*svabhāva* (or self-created nature) exists in both cause and effect. That means, cause and effect are both independent entities which can create themselves and exist autonomously without depending upon other factors. Nāgārjuna, then, interrogates whether or not a cause is identical to its effect. Nāgārjuna asks if the cause is identical to its effect, why it is named cause rather than effect? On the other hand, if the cause is not identical to its effect, what kind of relation exists between them? Does the effect exist prior to the cause or after the cause (i.e. when the cause

disappears)? Or do both the cause and effect co-exist as two independent entities? Nāgārjuna found that no positive answer can be given to any of these interrogations satisfactorily, because there is an interdependent and mutually defining relation between cause and effect. The relation is analogous to the relation between a fire made by a piece of wood. The wooden fire (effect) is not identical to its causal factor, i.e. the wood. Nor does the fire exist entirely independent from the wood. If the fire and the wood exist as two independent and unrelated entities, Nāgārjuna asks, what makes the burning of a wooden fire possible, and why do we need the wood to make a wooden fire? Moreover, the wooden fire does not exist prior to the wood, because before the burning of the wood, not a trace of fire can be seen. Nor can a wooden fire come into being after the wood is burned out, because if not a piece of wood exists, what provides the material sources for the burning fire? Through these interrogations, Nāgārjuna shows that cause and effect, or wood and wooden fire cannot exist independently. Rather, they exist interdependent upon each other. This philosophy, ontologically, is called the theory of *śūnyatā*, and phenomenally, is named theory of dependent co-arising.

The theory of *śūnyatā* (theory of absence of *svabhāva* or theory of the absence of self-created nature, or the theory of emptiness) articulates that the nature of existence is not formed by a single, unchangeable factor. Thanks to English using the word of emptiness to translate the word *śūnyata*, sometimes, it is misunderstood as a theory positing that nothing exists in the world. This is an entirely false view. For Nāgārjuna, *svabhāva* (self-created nature or own nature) consists of three meanings: essence-*svabhāva*, substance-*svabhāva* and absolute-*svabhāva* (Westerhoff, 20). The first two meanings of *svabhāva* are the primary focus of Nāgārjuna's discussion, and the third one is defined as the true nature of an existence, which in *MKK* is dependent co-arising. Since the third view is covered by my introduction of Nāgārjuna's

philosophy of dependent co-arising, in this part, I will only discuss essence-*svabhāva* and substance-*svabhāva*. Essence-*svabhāva* indicates a specific quality or property of an object by which an individual or entity is individuated, thereby rendering it recognizable and nameable. This specific property or quality of an entity is the unique factor that distinguishes the entity from all others. It is the essential property that an entity cannot lose without ceasing to be what the entity is. It is analogous to the heat of fire, the fluidity of water and the openness of space or the personality or individuality of a man or woman.

Nāgārjuna does not deny the existence of this essence-*svabhāva*. What Nāgārjuna rejects is the second *svabhāva*, i.e., substance-*svabhāva*. Substance-*svabhāva* is defined as the solo factor that exists objectively, and its existence and qualities are independent of other objects, human concepts or interests. The Sanskrit commentator, Candrakīrti, characterizes substance-*svabhāva* as changeless, not originated from and not dependent on something else. In other words, substance-*svabhāva* is a factor that is neither produced by causes and conditions, nor is changeable. Rather, it comes into being without relying upon any other factors (Westerhoff, 41). In Nāgārjuna's view, this substance-*svabhāva* does not exist in reality, because all existences come to exist dependent upon causes and conditions. If an entity, including an individual, is produced from conditions and causes, it would be something artificially created. Then how could we say that the *svabhāva* does not depend upon anything else? (MKK, chapter 15).

In contrast to theory of *śūnyatā* is theory of dependent co-arising which explains the way in which an individual, or an entity is formed. This theory consists of two kinds of dependent relation and four fundamental components---physicality (or space), temporality (time), becoming/changing (movement), and essence-*svabhāva* (agenthood or essence of a thing). The two dependent relations characterize the relation between an entity and other entities or

individuals as well as to its related conditions or factors. These two dependent relations are existential dependence and epistemic dependence. The existential dependent relation refers to a necessary prerequisite factor for an entity to exist, such as the apple seed to its apple tree. Without the apple seed, there would never have an apple tree. Yet, the relation of an apple tree to an apple seed is epistemic dependence. Epistemic existence indicates the relation between A and B, although B does not affect A's existence like an apple tree to an apple seed, the reference of A and B cannot be understood without the existence of both A and B. For instance, the term "a cause" cannot be understood if there is not a concept of "effect". So do the concept of "father" and "son". The father is named because his son was born. If no child was born because of the man, he would not be called as "a father". Similarly, the term of "the past" is understandable because of the concepts of the present and the future. If both terms of the future and the present refer to nothing, then the reference of "the past" is unrecognizable. Hence, there is a relation of epistemic or conceptual dependence between these terms. These two dependent relations are equally important to human life. The existential dependence is the prerequisite factor that is interwoven into the fabric of human existence whereas the epistemic dependent relation is the reality reference or conceptual designation that we conventionally use in our daily social and political activity.

According to Nāgārjuna's investigation of the nature of human existence, at least, one kind of these two dependent relations has to exist between an entity and its related factor whatever the entity is a person, an animal, a thing or an event. In fact, for the empirical reality, two kinds of relational dependencies are always involved although through an objective observation, no visible connection can be found between two entities. This is because existential dependent relation is an intrinsic factor that together with other components constitute the fabric

(or foundation) of the existent entity. On the other hand, the epistemic dependence exists conceptually which may or may not have empirical reference. Its relational connection cannot be found physically, and yet, without the epistemic dependence, our language will lose its function as a reality-reference or conceptual designation. As such, we would be unable to communicate with each other, let alone to establish a social network and political community. Hence, these two dependent relations are the basic threads that interweave all the entities together in the world and make the social and political activity possible. It is because of these two dependent relations that the nature of human existence is conceived as interdependent in Nāgārjuna's philosophy.

Apart from the two dependent relations, according to Nāgārjuna's investigation, the emergence and existence of every entity in the world also relies upon at least four factors--temporality, spatiality, becoming (the dynamic and on-going process of becoming, moving and the like), and being in itself (the agenthood or essence-*svabhāva* or major cause of an entity). These four factors depend upon each other to make the emergence and existence of a particular entity possible. The relation between the major cause and the other factors are not simply interdependent but also mutually defining each other. Nāgārjuna uses the movement of gone as an example to illustrate the case. Nāgārjuna asks: if we say someone is gone, where is the movement of gone? In the place prior to someone's leaving, or in the movement of her/his leaving or after her/his leaving? These questions cannot be satisfactorily answered simply by the "it is" or "it is not" dichotomous formulation, for several factors are involved in the movement of gone. These factors consist of an agent who moves, a series of moving actions, temporal concept of the past, present and future, as well as the space of here and there and so on. The fact is that if no agent moves, how can we say someone is gone. In addition, if there is not a successive series of moving actions from here to there, how can we detect the movement of gone. Lastly, if no

concept of the past, present and future exists, in what way we can say that someone is gone, because “gone” in this sentence implies someone was here previously but now is no longer here.

To sum up Nāgārjuna’s philosophy of dependent co-arising, it consists of two relational dependences (existential dependence and epidemic dependence) and four basic components of existence (temporality, spatiality, becoming and agenthood or being in itself) as well as three characteristics. In other words, Nāgārjuna’s theory of interdependent nature is not simply a linear link between two or more entities. Rather, it is a relational network constituted by multiple layers of connection and interdependencies. Within an individual entity, various components and conditions comes together to make the being of an entity possible. External to the entity, there also connections link the entity to other entities. Lastly, since the life of an entity is an ongoing process, various conditions also assist the life process working properly. The diagram of the nature of human existence with respects to Nāgārjuna’s philosophy of dependent co-arising would look like the following social network posted in the Facebook,³² which portrays the way in which an individual connects to others.



In fact, all twenty-seven chapters of *MKK* aim to illustrate the two interrelated relations, four interdependent constituents and three characteristics of human existence,

³² See “Facebook.” Accessed June 2010, <http://www.facebook.com/>. Facebook is one of the largest social network online.

including the nature of autonomy, personhood, and the relation between personhood and the social, political and natural world. Take autonomy, selfhood and epistemology for example.

In chapter Fifteen of *MKK*, Nāgārjuna interrogates the nature of autonomy and points out that “[t]he occurrence of self-nature through causes and conditions is not proper, [for] self-nature that has occurred as a result of causes and conditions would be something that is made.” This means that for a self-created entity who claims to be autonomous, emergence or existence should not be contingent upon other factors. If his/her emergence and existence depends upon other factors, it is unreasonable to say that the entity is autonomous. This is analogous to a person who claims to be an autonomous self, but in reality, his/her existence cannot be maintained or separated from social, cultural, political and natural conditions. (S)he not only needs food and clothes made by others, but also needs family, friends, education and other social and political activities to develop his/her personality, intelligence, mentality and the like. Hence, the so-called autonomous self is a concept that overlooks the interrelated and interdependent nature of human personhood and the social, political and natural world.

In Nāgārjuna’s view, the nature of autonomy is formed as dependent upon a relational foundation. The concept of autonomy, hence, needs to be defined based on relational grounds rather than as an isolated entity who is not related to any family, friends and things made by others. That is, autonomy is defined as an individual who has the autonomous right to make choices with an awareness of related conditions. Here awareness means that choices are made by free will rather than by others or external forces. Also, the individual is conscious of the corresponding responsibilities and possible consequences related to a choice. Alternatively put, the concept of autonomy, for Nāgārjuna, includes two kinds: essential-*svābhava* and substance-*svābhava*. He accepts the first, but rejects the second one. Specifically, Nāgārjuna agrees that

every individual has the right to choose and create his/her life as far as (s)he is able to take on the responsibility of fulfilling tasks and facing consequences. Yet, he rejects the definition that the autonomous individual is one who can do whatever (s)he wants, or can have whatever (s)he desires without taking into consideration the related responsibilities and consequences. The reason, as mentioned previously, is that in Nāgārjuna's interrogation of the nature of autonomy, no entity can be isolated from others and not related to anyone or anything, be it existentially or conceptually. An individual is always related to others. Since one is always related to others, the change of one's position or condition certainly will result in the change of other affiliated factors, be they great or small. One cannot do whatever (s)he wants because of these related conditions. An individual's free will or rationality, though it plays a leading role, is not the only set of factors that composes the world of an existent entity. These are corresponding factors. The existence and becoming of an entity and its corresponding factors are mutually conditioned, shaped and defined by each other.

Let us take the structure of an individual's selfhood as an example. A self, for Nāgārjuna, is constituted not by one single component alone. Rather, it is constituted by mind and body, affectivity and rationality as well as subjectivity and objectivity. The components of a self, Nāgārjuna asserts, consist of at least five components: physical body, feeling (or affectivity), intelligence (or rationality), volition and consciousness. These five components form a dynamic life process of physical and mental activities. Hence, the self cannot be identified only with one of the five components, be it physical body, affectivity, rationality, volition or consciousness. Nor can it be separated from any of them. This is because human life is a process of emerging and becoming, both of which require a sequence of mental and physical activities working together. In this life process, both body and mind, and affectivity and rationality as well

as volition and consciousness, depend upon each other to make one's life operate properly. In addition, these physical and mental activities are characterized as having a particular trait that makes an individual's life coherent as a whole and distinct from that of other individuals.

Apparently, an individual is an atomic-life entity that is not physically related to others. Yet, by its very nature, (s)he cannot exist and perform any activity if the basic five components of selfhood do not work together. This is like an individual who is very good at mountain climbing but is weak physically. (S)he cannot go too far no matter how strong a will the individual has or how rational (s)he is. This is because the fulfillment of a wish or desire needs the cooperation of physical strength and mental capacity as well as rationality and affectivity.

Similarly, the world we live in cannot be entirely controlled by an individual, because our experienced world does not simply exist for any particular individual. Nor does the world exist objectively in the outside world, waiting for the human agent to take advantage of it. Rather, the experienced world that we live in and live by is formed by an agent's subjective experience, sensing faculty and external objects. The experienced world includes subjectivity and objectivity as well as public and the private life. A case in point can be illustrated by Nāgārjuna's examination of sense faculty and the prior entities in chapters three and nine of *MKK* respectively. Nāgārjuna found the functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and feeling (i.e., the six faculties) cannot be separated from the objects perceived and the one who perceives them. Nāgārjuna (Kalupahana 1986, 137) explains that "[a] seer does not exist either separated or not separated from seeing. When a seer does not exist, whence can there be seeing and the object of seeing?" This means that the action of seeing involves at least three factors: an agent who sees, an object perceived and the sensing faculties. If no agent can see, such as in the case of someone who is blind, or someone who does not exist, where is the function of seeing

coming from? Similarly, if no object can be perceived, such as in an empty room, in what sense can we say that a chair is seen? Also, if a seer does not possess a healthy sense faculty, such as a color-blind person, how could (s)he perceive colors correctly? These examples show that an interrelated and interdependent relationship between an individual and his/her surrounding world exists. A man with six healthy faculties cannot see, hear, smell, taste, touch or feel anything, if there are no objects to be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched and felt. Hence, the apparently unrelated external world existing outside an individual's body, in reality, is one of the intrinsic components of human existence.

The above connection also related to the way in which our worldview or the knowledge of our world is established. The knowledge of our world is also an important issue for Nāgārjuna because the objects perceived and our means of accessing them form an essential part of our conceptualization of the world and our place in it. Means of knowledge are instruments used by the self in order to apprehend objects perceived. They connect our inner world with that of the outside world. Our knowledge of the world and perceived objects, according to a science textbook, can exist objectively, independent from subjective experience. This view is very different from Nāgārjuna's epistemology. For Nāgārjuna, objects perceived, in general, and the formation of our knowledge of the world, in particular, cannot be separated from an individual's subjective experience. The fact is that our recognition and understanding of the world and objects perceived always depend on at least four means of knowledge. These four means of knowledge not only make the objects perceivable and understandable to us but also synthesize the objects perceived into our knowledge system, and thereby, allow us to make use of them. These four means are: perception, inference, recognition of likeness and testimony.

The first means, perception, attends to objects, presenting a mental image of the objects perceived. Through inference, we then figure out the possible relationship between the objects perceived and their function in our lives. After perceiving this object, we further make a connection between it, and those we have known by identifying the likeness between them. Lastly, we testify to the object recently perceived, and synthesize it into our knowledge system. These are the four means of knowledge that we depend upon in our cognitive process of formatting knowledge of the world. In this way, our knowledge of the world is impossible to separate from an individual's subjective experience. This is because although perceiving an object is purely a sensing process, the object perceived has to go through three further processes—inference, recognition of likeness and testimony. These three processes are done in relation to the knowledge system that we have already established in memory. For instance, a new mathematics problem for a child in grade school, may not be a new problem for a high school student. This is because the knowledge foundations of these two students are different. Since the acquisition of knowledge of the world always proceeds in contrast to an individual's knowledge system, one's knowledge of the world is impossible to be separated from one's subjective experience.

However, in appearance, no objective connection between two objects can be seen by observing their physical bodies. This is because, as philosopher David Hume points out, no connection can be seen between a cause and its effect, such as the smoke and fire, or the first billiard ball and the second billiard ball. Although Nāgārjuna is aware of the invisible physical connection between a cause and its effect, he does not deny the inference of a connection between a cause and its effect, such as smoke and fire or how a billiard ball may hit another ball. Conversely, Nāgārjuna conceives that the mental inference of a cause and its effect is one of the

most fundamental ways we interweave fragmentary objects perceived to form a knowledge system. Without mental connections such as inference, recognition of likeness and testimony, objects perceived would play a very insignificant role in human life. If we see smoke but never further infer that there will be a fire, we will never take precautions to prevent smoke from turning into a fire. If this was truly the case, daily life would be a disaster. In fact, without the mental connections made by inference, recognition of likeness and identification, the development of scientific research and civilizations would be impossible, for everything that we perceive would not be seen as related to anything else.

This is clearly not the case in reality. No matter in our daily activities, a research lab, or in making a social and political policy, we always make inferences about and connections between things. For instance, in a lab experiment, when a researcher observes a data change in his/her experiment, (s)he needs to infer the meaning of this change, and further to identify the value of making another experiment or concluding this research. Similarly, lawmakers need to evaluate old policies in comparison to new suggestions through a process of inference in order to judge whether the older policy or the new one will work better for the public. Through the above examples, it is clear that our acquisition of knowledge of the world cannot be separated from subjective experience. In this sense, the fabric of human existence is characterized by the interweaving of subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the public and the private.

Merleau-Ponty's Intersubjectivity

Similar to Nāgārjuna's critique of intellectualism and empiricism in his time, Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity grounded upon existential phenomenology also intends to bridge the gap between intellectualism and empiricism. Merleau-Ponty (2004, 33) points out that

whereas empiricism is deficient in explaining the internal connection between an object and the action it triggers, intellectualism is lack of contingency in occasions of thought. Alternatively put, while empiricism focuses on the perceivable part of a particular event or entity and overlooks the corresponding factors and relationships that undergird the emergence of an entity or event, intellectualism pays too much attention to conceptualizing not-yet-fully formed factors, and ignores the contingency between the perceivable and a not-yet-fully formed reality. Hence, both empiricism and intellectualism are in accordance with each other in that “neither of them can grasp consciousness in the act of learning, and that neither attaches due importance to that circumscribed ignorance, that still ‘empty’ but already determinate intention” (33). This means that whereas empiricism refers to the perceivable side of a particular event or entity, such as learning as activity or result, intellectualism sticks to the invisible side, such as the idea or concept of learning and the like. They both lose sight of the shared ground of the ongoing process of learning, which interconnects and synthesizes both perceivable factors and a not-yet-fully formed conceptual reality.

This ongoing process of interconnecting and synthesizing, according to Merleau-Ponty, can be illustrated by our sensations, which are a state of consciousness, and a consciousness of a state of existence. As a state of consciousness, this presents the object perceived to our minds, and meanwhile, as the consciousness of a state, it attends to the ongoing events of our lives. In this way, although sensation is still empty in its tangible reality, it is determinate and possesses the power to create a reality or event. Since existence is an ongoing process of emerging and becoming, the concrete part of it synthesizes with newly emerging factors and becomes a new perceivable entity. As such, the existence of any concrete entity or perceivable reality interrelates with the invisible, but ongoing emerging factors to form a new reality. The visible and the

invisible factors, hence, work together to make the emergence of an existent entity possible, be it an event, a thing, or an individual. This is very similar to Nāgārjuna's view of the interrelated and interdependent nature of cause and its effect.

Yet, different from Nāgārjuna's application of an alternative reasoning method to contend and unfold the interrelated nature of human existence, Merleau-Ponty utilizes a *gestalt* psychological method to reveal the interrelated relationship between human life and the natural and sociopolitical world. The interrelatedness of human personhood and the natural and sociopolitical world is presented via several important themes. My thesis chooses four of the most important ones to illustrate Merleau-Ponty's tenets. These four are: first, the lived body as the intermediary or interconnected ground for individuals and things in the external world; second, that sense experience functions as a synthesized horizon of humanhood and the perceived; third, life processes integrate the perceived object into personhood as a whole; and fourth, the interrelated nature of personhood and the sociopolitical world.

First, the lived body as an interconnected field of personhood and the world: in Merleau-Ponty's view, the body of an individual should not be compared to a physical object, but rather to a work of art. This is analogous to a picture, a poem or a novel, whose ideas and beauty are communicable by means of the display of colors, sounds and other artistic factors. Merleau-Ponty points out that when we analyze Cezanne's paintings, if one particular painting is chosen and displayed in front of us, the sight of this painting provides us with the specific presence of Cezanne's painting, and therein our analyses find their full meaning within this painting. Similarly, although a poem is made up of words, the metaphors, meter and rhythm conveyed by this poem also play a crucial role in our understanding of the reference and meaning of the poem. This is just as how spoken words are significant not only through the medium of individual

words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture and facial expression. These additional aids and meanings can reveal the source of the speaker's thoughts and his/her fundamental manner of being. So does a poem whose underlying meaning and reference are revealed not simply by words but also by the meter, rhythm and imagery utilized in the poem. In the same manner, the task of writing a novel is not solely to explain ideas or even to analyze the main character, but rather to depict an inter-human event, revealing it to us without making ideological commentary. Making any change in the order of the narration or choice of viewpoint would alter the literary meaning of the novel.

All these examples refer to individuals, or beings for whom expression is inseparable from the thing expressed. Their meaning is accessible only through direct contact, radiating from a particular artistic form, language, description or even temporal and spatial narration and depiction. It is in this sense that our bodies are comparable to works of art, for the lived body is a nexus of living organisms that make the invisible a living meaning, and subjective experience manifest to the public and to the outside world, like the artistic form and narration of a poem, a novel or a painting. Without the lived body, our thoughts, feelings, even our being, would have no means to unfold and be known to the world. Neither would we have an avenue to connect and interact with people in social settings. With a lived body not only can we reveal our being to the world and interact with others, we can also connect to things in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 174-175). It is in this sense that the lived body is an intermediary that connects our inner experience and the outside world.

Merleau-Ponty points out that the intermediary function of our bodies can be illustrated by the way in which our perception interprets the size or shape of an object in the world. Our view of the size or shape of an object is affected deeply by the location and orientation of our bodies.

If an object is kept at a distance from our bodies, it is different from an object presented before our eyes. The fact is that when I perceive before me the furniture in my room, the desk, with its shape and size, is not a law or rule governing the parade of phenomena for me. Neither does it possess an invariable relationship with other furniture in my room. Rather, it is because I perceive the desk with its definite shape and size that I presume it to be at a certain distance and orientation. Every change in the distance or orientation of my body is followed by a corresponding in shape and size. Far from it being the case that the desk is reducible to constant relationships with other furniture in any determinate size, the constancy of relationships regarding its size always has the location and orientation of our bodies as its basis in any distance.

The implication of this finding is very different from what science and objective thinking usually assume. Science and objective thinking conceive that an apparently small object, perceived from a hundred yards away, is the same size as the object seen at ten yards' distance. But, in reality, for a perceiver, the size of a perceived object at a hundred yards away is much smaller than that which is perceived at ten yards' distance. I can identify all of the object's positions, distances, and appearances at ten yards but not at a hundred yards (351-353). This example shows that our lived body plays an intermediary role in the way that we perceive an object in the world. Similarly, our perception also plays a significant role in recognizing the quality of a thing. For example, qualities such as color, hardness or weight, through the sense organs of our body, teach us much more about an object than its geometrical properties (354). The smooth texture of a table remains smooth throughout despite the varied play of natural or artificial lighting. This is because smoothness is felt by hands, and lighting does not inform me of the quality of smoothness.

Our bodies don't only play a significant intermediary role in the way we perceive the size, shape and the quality of things in the world, but they also play a role in our understanding of other people in the world. This is because the anatomical organization of our bodies can function as a natural sign which produces "a correspondence between specific gestures and given states of mind". The fact is that the behaviors associated with anger or love are not the same in a Japanese as they are in an American; more specifically, the different behaviors correspond to different emotions. It is not only gestures that are contingent to the body's organization, but also the manner itself in which we meet and live in a particular situation. An angry Japanese may smile, but a westerner may go red and stamp his foot or hiss his/her words. These social expressions and human social interactions cannot be understood if we assume that a human is simply constituted of the mechanisms of organs and nervous system (219). The above examples show that objects in the world, do not appear to us as composed only of shape, size and quality. Rather, they are recognizable and cognized in a particular way. This is because humans have a body and perception as the intermediary and transactional synthesized field that makes objects recognizable and understood by us.

Second, sense experiences function as a synthesized and transactional field of subjectivity and objectivity. In Merleau-Ponty's account, similar to Nāgārjuna's view, our sense experiences are not an independent, subjective mental state that is separated from the outside world. In fact, the world, one's body and one's empirical (psychological) self together constitute the whole system of our experiential world. That is, there is an interconnected relationship or interdependence between oneself, the natural world and sociopolitical practice. A case in point can be illustrated by the effects of our sense experiences, i.e., sensation. Merleau-Ponty (242) expounds that, according to inductive psychology, the effect of sense experiences, i.e. sensation,

is neither a state or a quality, nor the consciousness of a state or of a quality, which stands in opposition to the world with no connection at all. Rather, sensation is a perceptual field, and a surface in contact with the world that is permanently rooted in the world. The fact is that the world ceaselessly discloses itself and surrounds our subjectivity as waves wash around a wreck on the shore. As a result, all knowledge takes place within the horizons opened up by our perception (245-246). The relationship of a sentient being to sensation, according to Merleau-Ponty, is analogous to that of the sleeper to his/her slumber, for sleep comes when a certain voluntary attitude received from outside is in accordance with the being of the sleeper. For instance, the sleeper breathes deeply and slowly in order to summon sleep, and then a certain rhythm of respiration, which a moment ago the sleeper voluntarily maintained, becomes his very being and then, a sleepy sense sneaks into the sleeper's consciousness. In the same way, the sensation is not only of vital significance, but also a way of being acted upon by our bodies. Sensation, hence, is literally a form of communion or "a power which is born into, and simultaneously with, a certain existential environment, or is synchronized with it" (245-246).

Yet, traditionally, Merleau-Ponty spells out, sensation is conceived of or defined as either a stimuli by physics or as a state of qualities that we are conscious of by intellectualism. In these two definitions, sensation is detached from subjectivity and purely characterized either in material terms or in conceptual terms. Merleau-Ponty says that both are mistaken, for if the sensation of seeing and hearing is involved in extricating oneself from the impression in order to grasp it, and stopping perception in order to know, then it is illogical to say that "I see with my eyes" or "I hear it with my ears." This is because in these definitions, eyes and ears are themselves entities in the world outside subjectivity. They are incapable of remaining on the side of the subjectivity from which they see or hear (246-247). When I say that my eyes see, that my

hand touches, that my foot is aching, my subjectivity is already included in these expressions. In fact, my subjectivity is the very thing that does the seeing and hearing. So do the expressions, “I know that the light strikes my eyes, that my shoe hurts my foot.” In these expressions, I distribute through my body perceptions which really belong to my subjectivity, and put perception into the thing perceived (247). Hence, Merleau-Ponty maintains (247-248) that “we must re-examine the dilemma of for itself and in itself, which involved putting ‘significances’ back into the world of objects and freeing subjectivity, as absolute non-being, of any kind of inherence in the body.” Also, this is the reason for Merleau-Ponty to define sensation as co-existence or communion, because the sensation of blue is not simply the knowledge or assumption of a certain identifiable *quale* throughout all the experiences of it which I have made, as the geometer’s circle of geometry. Rather, it is an interaction and transaction between the perceiver and the perceived object. Merleau-Ponty (148) points out that “[t]he sensor and the sensible do not stand in relation to each other as two mutually external terms, and sensation is not an invasion of the sensor by the sensible.” Rather, there is a transaction between the subject who senses and the perceived. It is false to hold that one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers significance on the other. The perceiver and the perceived are interrelated with each other to form the being of our existence. The experience of an I is not in the sense of absolute subjectivity, but rather it cannot be separated by the course of time in relation to its relational factors. Merleau-Ponty says that the unity of either the subject outside or the object-to-be is not a real entity, but a presumptive unity on the horizon of experience (255).

Third, our life process integrates things in the world into our humanhood as a coherent whole: in Merleau-Ponty’s view, our life process is a temporal process or ongoing process of synthesizing the horizons of human life and existing objects of the world. At any moment, the

synthesis of our life process takes place as we take in the related factors, which come close to our bodies and merge them into our life process. For instance, through our perceptive field, there is a spatial horizon, and we are present to our surroundings and co-exist with all the other landscapes which stretch out beyond it. All these perspectives together form a single temporal wave, one of the world's instants. Although the landscape before our eyes may only show the features of the one which is hidden behind the hill, it does so only subject to certain degree of indeterminacy and in a particular temporal spot. We may now only see that here are meadows, over there are woods, or see here is land or sea. Yet, when I move forward across the land in different times, I see either open sea or frozen sea, and beyond that either earth or sky and so forth. This is because along with my life process, and my change of movement, my view of the landscape discloses and merges into my perceptual and synthesized horizons (385-386). In the same vein, the past of my life although progressively enclosed in its entirety within the past, because of the interlocking of intentionalities and consciousnesses, the past degenerates, and the earliest years of my life are lost in the general existence of my body. Yet, a nature similar to the one which I saw previously is now in my presence (386). This shows that human life is an ongoing temporal process whether or not we are aware of it. It ceaselessly moves forward from the past to the present, from the present to the future. Along with this process, our life process takes in the related factors of perceived objects and synthesizes them into our life process as a whole. This view, in fact, is similar to Nāgārjuna's view that the nature of human existence is an on-going process and dependent upon major causes and related factors to make an entity's life function properly.

Fourth, the interrelated nature of personhood and the sociopolitical world: in Merleau-Ponty's view, the social world is "not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence". Merleau-Ponty says that even if we may be able to turn away from the

social world, we cannot cease to be situated relative to it. Our relationship to the social world is deeper than we really thought. To place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, or to place society within ourselves as an object among other objects (i.e., as an object of thought), is a false view. They both are mistaken in treating the social and ourselves as an object. Merleau-Ponty explains that we have to “return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification.” The fact is that objective and scientific consciousness of the past and of civilizations would be impossible had we not learned them through the intermediary of our society, our cultural world and their horizons (422). In addition, if they are not there to be known, indeterminate but pre-existing, and if we did not find in our own lives the basic structures of history related to our society, our cultural world and their horizons, there would be no way for us to know them (422). This is because we experience a certain cultural environment along with behaviors corresponding to it, and we interpret these behaviors by analogy with our own, and through our inner experience. This inner experience teaches us the significance and intention of perceived gestures and the actions of others because they are always understood through our own interpretations. This is the way our social understanding works. In addition, between my consciousness and my body as I experience it, between this phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from the outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system. The fact is that the social and political world which we inhabit is not simply constituted by myself or one individual alone. Rather, it is because others exist. Merleau-Ponty (410) points out that in so far as others reside in the world, and are perceivable to us, they form a part of our perceptual field. The perceived other is never an Ego who is independent from my existence and I myself alone am the whole world for myself.

Furthermore, a society is not simply an existence involving two or more independent individuals. It is rather constituted by the co-existence that involves an indefinite number of consciousnesses who dialogue and communicate with each other for a common goal (406). Merleau-Ponty says that in the experience of dialogue, there is a constituted and shared ground between the other person and myself. My thought and his/her thought are inter-woven into a single fabric, and my words and those of the people with whom I communicate are called forth by the state of our discussion. These words and thoughts are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the sole creator. “We have here a dual being, where the other is for me no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world” (406).

Both Nāgārjuna’s dependent co-arising theory and Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology disclose that individual life and subjective experience are closely related to the social and political environment in which an individual lives. In appearance, we are not connected to other individuals and the social and political factors physically; in reality, it is because the human possesses a body, can speak a language and is endowed with perception and other conditions that enable an individual to understand the world, perceive objects and interact with others in the world. Alternatively put, it is because the individual’s body, perception, subjective experience, and language serve as intermediaries to connect our inner subjective world and outer objective sociopolitical reality that human’s existence becomes possible and sociopolitical activity become meaningful.

Bridging the Gap Between Noddings' Relational Ontology and Tronto-Hankivsky's Interconnection and Interdependent Nature

In light of Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's explanation of interdependent nature and interconnection between personhood and sociopolitical activity, we can see the deficiencies of Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependent nature. The core issue of these theories lies in that Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky define and characterize their ontological relations based upon a traditional dichotomous view that separates subjectivity from objectivity, rationality from affectivity and the public from the private. Their theories fail to consider that subjective experiences or mental presentations are grounded in the external perceivable objects that constitute the foundation of our daily reality-reference. On the other hand, objects perceived in the outer world are recognizable and accessible because they are interpreted through our subjective experience.

Applying Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's Philosophies to Bridge the Gap between Noddings' and Tronto-Hankivsky's Relational Ground

Based on the above discussion of Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's clarification of the interdependent nature of and connection between personhood and sociopolitical activity, it is plausible to suggest that there are four factors which can not only bridge the gap between Noddings' caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky's interdependence, but also can solve the three problems hidden in these theories. These three problems are: first, the separation of subjectivity from objectivity; second, the division between the public and the private, and third, seeing the interdependent nature of human existence as simply an epistemological holding, i.e. a different perspective, rather than an ontological foundation, i.e. human reality. The four factors that can

solve these three problems, revealed by Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, are: first, the nature of human existence is constituted of a synthesized field of mind and body, subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the public and the private. Second, human life is an on-going process of the synthesizing and becoming. Third, human agents and sociopolitical practices are mutually defined and conditioned by each other. Their relationship is interdependent. Fourth, the interdependent nature of human existence is both an ontological ground and an epistemological holding.

First, the nature of existence is constituted of the synthesized field of mind and body, subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the public and the private. As Nāgārjuna points out, a self is constituted of at least five components, which include both mind and body, rationality and affectivity, as well as subjectivity and objectivity. These factors are physical body, feeling (affectivity), intelligence (rationality), volition and consciousness. Furthermore, the lived, experienced world is perceivable because of the synthesized field formed by an object (objectivity, or the public), our sensing faculties, and subjective experience (subjectivity, the private). In any absence of these three conditions, perception cannot be formed. That is, the recognition of a chair is composed of a seer's healthy sensing faculty, his/her experience of recognizing this chair and a chair that really exists. If one is blind, or the chair does not exist, or the seer cannot recognize the object as a chair, the formation of a recognition of the chair would be impossible. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty (2004, 412) also asserts that, in so far as we have sensory functions, be it visual, auditory or tactile fields, we are already in communication with others and interact with them. No sooner have we perceived a living body in the process of acting than the objects surrounding it immediately take on a fresh layer of significance. They are no longer simply what we ourselves make of them. Rather, they are the synthesized fabric made

of both others and ourselves. As such, perceived objects and their surroundings become parts of my existence. That is, through our sensing faculties, subjective experience, and the perceived object, our experienced world is formed. Hence, the relation between subjectivity and objectivity is not separated but rather interrelated and interdependent. Specifically, they are not incompatible factors so that while one exists, another has to be canceled. They are supplementary components that depend upon each other to constitute a whole. The relationship between them is interdependent and dialectical. That is, sometimes, affective components may be more perceivable than rational factors, whereas at other times, rational components take first priority and affective factors sink to the background. Yet, no matter what the situation is, both affective and rational components co-exist and never disappear from one's life.

Second, human life is an on-going process of synthesis and becoming. In both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's view, the nature of human existence is not static. Rather, it is a dynamic process of synthesis and mutual interpenetration of subjective experience and objective factors. A case in point can be illustrated by Nāgārjuna's example of "someone is gone," which consists of four fundamental components: temporality, spatiality, becoming and essence-*svabhāva*. If there is not a series of moving actions, or a temporal course through which a human agent can move from here to there, then we cannot say someone is gone. The word "gone" implies someone was here but (s)he is not here right now. In fact, if no temporal factor was involved human life, an individual would never grow up to be a teenager or an adult, but rather (s)he would stay as a new born baby forever. This is similar to Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the vision of a landscape which will unfold gradually as a whole also because of the temporal process. This is because when a car moves forward, to a different location, a different landscape is seen. In this sense, the temporal process plays a very significant role for

our lives in merging new elements with an already existing system. Sometimes, this emergence can go as far as to put apparently opposite components together, such as the public and the private, as well as subjectivity and objectivity. The fact is that the public and the private are two sides of one coin rather than incompatible factors. This is because of the multiple roles that an individual plays in his/her life. Sometimes, we are our children's parents whereas at other times, we are schoolteachers or administrators of organizations. Within our families, we have a private life, but in school or an organization, we live a public life. Yet, all of these are components of one's life process.

Hence, in both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies not only the components of the public and objectivity (such as space and time) are important, but also the private and subjective factors of the lived body and subjective experience are crucial. The implication is that it is incomplete to characterize human reality solely based upon one aspect of human life, be it subjectivity, objectivity, the public or the private. The fact is that human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the public and the private. They both depend upon each other to form the experienced world. Also, since human life is an on-going process, it needs both subjective and objective factors as well as the public and the private if our lives are to work properly.

Both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies reveal that temporal factors are one of the most essential components for the emergence and becoming of an entity. Without these components, an entity would never develop or grow. Nor would the entity change from one thing to another, such as from water to ice or from a child to an adult. More importantly, the entity would exist fragmentarily and never form as a whole from momentary life states. Hence, temporal factors play a very significant role in characterizing human reality. Without this

component, we can only form an incomplete picture of human life. Both Nāgārjuna and Merleau-Ponty clearly see the significant role temporal processes play in human life, for within them opposing factors, such as subjectivity and objectivity, and public and the private life, can co-exist and even be synthesized into a whole. However, this temporal condition clearly is not seen in both Noddings and Tronto-Hankivsky's relational ontology. Accordingly, this is one of the essential factors that make both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's interdependent nature more thorough and closer to human reality.

Third, human agents, and our cultural, sociopolitical environment are interdependent and mutually conditioned and supplementary. For Nāgārjuna, the existence of any entity, whether human, animal, or inanimate object, is constituted by a major cause and its affiliated environmental conditions. The growth of an apple tree doesn't only require a cause, i.e. an apple seed, but also the related conditions, such as good soil, sunlight, water and the like. Hence, the living entity is always conditioned by its related environmental factors. For example, whether an apple seed can grow into an apple tree depends upon there being enough sunlight, water, good soil and the like. So does human identity and perspective. One is called a 'doer' because (s)he is doing something. One's vision of the world always depends upon what has been presented to one's perception, subjective experience and the kind of social and cultural environment that one inhabits. An individual who lived five decades ago would not possess the same perspective on race, gender or sexuality that we have in the twenty-first century. Even in the same era, people in different places, such as America and China, also possess different views on the concept of democracy. Merleau-Ponty explains that one's vision of the world is situated by the angle and location of one's physical body. Any perception of the shape and size of a thing is inseparable from the location and direction of our bodies. The understanding of a social gesture or a

scientific or historical event is dependent upon the knowledge system that one has built up previously. The shaking head gesture in America may signify “no” whereas it means “yes” in India. Without background knowledge, one may interpret the same gesture in the wrong way. This shows that related elements have power to condition a particular thing. In fact, there are many modern scientific theories that reveal a similar message. Take quantum theory as an example. Quantum mechanics indicate that, in different spots of time, the physical systems of an entity are altered. In other words, the quantum state of an entity can be represented as a wave of arbitrary shape and extending through space as a wave function. The shape of the quantum will alter its position according to the different momentums.³³ This is also similar to the case in which water, when placed where the temperature is lowered than zero degrees Celsius, becomes ice. On the other hand, when it is placed in a pot whose temperature is higher than 100 degrees Celsius, the water becomes vapor. However, these social and political factors are not absolute but conditioned. For instance, the concept of computer literacy twenty years ago would not have been an issue, but now because of the digital divide, it is an important issue which any modern society cannot ignore. Otherwise, those citizens who do not know how to use a computer will have difficulty filling in a form on an online application, let alone using the Internet to gain information for job-searching. This shows that although the major cause is the leading factor in deciding the form reality takes, related elements also possess the power to shape and define the manifestation of a reality.

The above three factors undoubtedly solve the problem that divides subjectivity from objectivity, affectivity from rationality, and the private from the public. The fact is that since the existence of an entity is constituted by a process of emerging and becoming, involved factors

³³ Details see “quantum Mechanics.” *Wikipedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_mechanics#Free_particle.

always interact with each other, and depend upon each other to make the operation of existence work properly. In this process, one's life is not confined to a fixed role as a student forever; neither does it use one single intellectual capacity, such as rational reasoning. Rather, in different times, one plays different roles and uses different intellectual capabilities. When doing a math assignment, we may rely more on our capacity for rational reasoning, but for a social worker who works as a consultant, effective feelings are more relevant to provide sympathetic understanding, which can lead a suffering client to speak without fear. Therefore, it is improper to say rationality belongs only to public affairs, whereas effective caring is limited to private life. A holistic and more complete view of human life should include both rationality and affectivity, as well as subjectivity and objectivity.

The deficiency of both Noddings' and Tronto-Hankivsky's account of their relational ontology is that they only articulate and define the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence based upon a partial, incomplete characterization of human life, be it Noddings' subjective experience or Tronto-Hankivsky's objectified social and political activity. Their characterizations fail to see that human existence is an on-going and synthesized process of emerging and becoming. As such, the process of life depends upon not only subjective experiences, but also objective factors. Hence, their characterizations cannot tell the whole story of human life and our moral reality.

Lastly, the interdependent nature of human existence in both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is not simply an epistemological holding which shows the different opinions of various scholars. Rather, it is both an epistemic holding and an ontological ground for empirical reality. For instance, Nāgārjuna points out that human existence cannot be separated from two kinds of dependent relations: existential dependence and epistemic dependence. The

first dependent relation is analogous to the relationship of an apple seed to its apple tree, whereas the latter indicates mutually defined concepts, such as the terms “long” and “short”, “son” and “father”, “cause” and “effect”. These two dependent relations are the two fundamental threads that interweave one entity with another, and make sociopolitical activities possible. They are the connections that undergird the fabric of human existence. Hence, human life cannot exist without these two dependent relations. Merleau-Ponty’s articulation of the way in which our body is the intermediary that connects our inner world with surrounding objects also reveals that interdependence is both ontological and epistemological. The fact is that the location and vantage point of our bodies would affect our vision of the objects perceived, such as the shape and size of a desk. A chair from ten yards away looks very different from that is perceived when I stand one hundred yards away. This is because the location of one’s body has an interdependent relation with the object, i.e., the chair, perceived. Furthermore, as Leonard Lawlor Barbaras points out, vision or touching in Merleau-Ponty’s writing reveals “a corporeal reflexivity that is essentially incomplete.” This is because a seer cannot perceive himself without becoming the object of vision, and consequently not a perceiver anymore. This is because the structure of a vision indicates “an inseparability from or ontological kinship with the world.” In other words, the reflexivity of sensibility shows the intertwining of subject and world. Merleau-Ponty’s usage of the terms “the visible” and “the invisible” reveals that “fact” and “essence” are chiasmatically intertwined. The chiasm of fact and essence, of sense and sensible shows that, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, being is as its own negation and existence. That is, visibility is an unconcealment of the invisible.³⁴

³⁴ Renaud Barbaras (1991, p.xii).

If we apply both Nāgārjuna's dependent co-arising theory and Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity to interrogate the view that conceives of the interrelated connection and interdependent nature of human existence as an epistemological holding, which may or may not be true, several questions can be raised. First, in terms of view, when we said that "someone is gone," does this mean that a mover may or may not be involved in the movement of "gone?" Also, does this imply that the temporal concept of the past and the present may or may not be included in a series of movements? If these two assumptions are true, then we can name a movement to be "someone is gone." If a single movement alone can be considered to be the event "someone is gone", then it is also reasonable to say that a mover alone can be conceived as "someone is gone". Clearly, the answers are both absurd and confusing. The factual reality is entirely distorted.

This is because we think that some of the intrinsic components of the event "someone is gone" are only different views that need or do not need to exist, such as the mover, the temporal concept of the past, and so forth. Similarly, if interdependence is only a different way to organize and characterize our knowledge, and it may or may not be true, as Gilligan's and Tronto's views imply, the example presented by Merleau-Ponty regarding the sight of a table that stands hundred yards away being the same as that of ten yards away should be true. If we interrogate further, we can say that the knowledge of geometry that a normal (non-genius) elementary school student possesses would be the same as that of a professor of geometry. This is because the interrelated connections between and interdependent nature of related factors, such as ten yards distance versus one hundred yards distance, and a professional's knowledge of geometry versus a novice's knowledge, are not necessarily to be connected to the comparison mentioned above. After all, the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence is

only a different perspective on human reality that may or may not be true. Again, this is absurd and confusing. If we characterize and construct a moral theory based upon this confusing view, deficiencies are inevitable. However, mainstream thought privileges modern rational moral theory, such as Ayer's ethical theory, which is based upon mathematical logic, and Rawls' social justice, which exclusively focuses on the fair procedure. The view of interdependence as simply an epistemological holding is complex and influential with respect to the way in which a moral theory is characterized. My thesis will discuss this issue in detail in the next chapter. In particular, I will use the notion of autonomy as an example to illustrate the way in which my unified neocaring theory is not only compatible with Kant's rational moral autonomy, but also more capable of facing problems emerging from the digital age.

CHAPTER 4: FORMING A THEORY OF AUTONOMY BASED UPON THE UNIFIED NEOCARING THEORY

In the previous three chapters, my thesis argued that a unified caring theory with an enhanced relational ontology (or relational foundation) not only is compatible with rational moral philosophy, but also more comprehensive and inclusive than previously. I have called this newly integrated caring theory “Neocaring Theory”. The new theory consists of four fundamental components and embraces three characteristics of human existence derived from Nāgārjuna’s and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies. The four components are: caring nature, caring as an activity, contextuality (or motivation replacement), and relational ontology. The three characteristics are: (a) human existence as a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the private and the public, and affectivity and rationality; (b) human life is an ongoing process of becoming and synthesizing; and (c) human agents and social, cultural and political environment as mutually conditioned, supplementary. They are interconnected and interdependent.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that (and how) neocaring theory is not merely compatible with rational moral philosophy, but also more inclusive than it. I will focus on one of the most important aspects of social and political theory—autonomy—in order to discuss the differences made by neocaring theory. This is because autonomy is one of the most essential cornerstones upon which rational moral philosophy and neoliberalism justify their social and political policy. In this chapter, my discussion will focus on, first, the way in which caring theorists criticize the meaning of autonomy as defined by rational moral philosophers, such as Kant, Rawls and the neoliberals. Second, I will explain the shortcomings of the notion of autonomy as presented by caring theorists; third, I will construct a more inclusive theory of

autonomy, which is not only based on the core components of Kant moral autonomy, but also the three characteristics of human existence and four major components of unified neocaring theory mentioned above.

Caring Theorists' Criticisms of the Kant, Rawls, and Neoliberals' Notions of Autonomy

Autonomy is a core element to not only Immanuel Kant's rational moral philosophy, but also John Rawls's liberal political theory and the theory of neoliberalism. It is also one of the major factors criticized by caring theorists, such as Noddings, Tronto, Held, and Hankivsky. This is because autonomy plays a key role both in social and political philosophy, and in liberal educational theory. Broadly, autonomy is related to the extent to which a student or citizen possesses rights and freedom in either educational or sociopolitical arenas. For some scholars, autonomy is related to moral and legal responsibility, whereas for others, it concerns a criterion of political status, in which autonomous agency is necessary for the condition of equal political standing, and as a protection to unchecked paternalism, including to prevent paternalistic interventions in people's lives in the personal and informal spheres as well as in the legal arena. Moreover, from the perspective of social and political policy, autonomy is related to the social and political conditions that victimize women and other potentially vulnerable people (Christman 2009).³⁵

The modern concept of autonomy is generally defined as the capacity to be one's own person, and to live a life one's own freely chosen ethical principles, not principles manipulated or distorted by external forces. It stands in opposition to external control or coercion, which it

³⁵ John Christman, "Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy," *Stanford encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified August 11, 2009, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/>.

marks as a sign of oppression, coercion, or manipulation. Hence, autonomy is an indispensable element in a democratic society (*ibid.*). Autonomy is at the core of Kant's rational moral philosophy and Rawls's liberal political theory. It is also a foundation-base of neoliberalism, which dominates the modern American social, political, and economic arenas, as well as the educational field. In reality, the meaning of autonomy has been interpreted in a very different ways in the course of the concept's development. Yet, its most influential forms in terms of its effect on social, political, economic, and educational policy are: (a) Kant's moral or transcendental autonomy; (b) Rawls' liberal political autonomy; and (c) the neoliberals' personal autonomy.

Caring theorists including Noddings (2002, 109-112), Held (2006), Tronto (1993, 9) and Hankivsky (2004, 22-24) have criticized the concept, primarily focusing on three issues: first, the abstraction of human relations it assumes is not identical with empirical reality; second, the universalization of social and political activity and needs is inappropriate to solve real social and political problems; and third, defining the meaning of autonomy as the personal desires of an independent self is oversimplified and fails to capture the interconnection between a social self and political activity.

First: Noddings (2002, 109-112) points out that the autonomy presented by Kant is related to a "transcendental subject," and does not map perfectly onto the everyday freedom that we usually think of. Rather, it indicates "freedom from the authority of church and state." This seems a reasonable construction. Yet, the locus of authority presented by Kant was not shifted to "an empirical, individual self but to a stern and abstract self," that is, a universal law or pure practical reason. Noddings questions it by saying that all that were involved make a free and well-considered choice, but the will is grounded upon a transcendental pure reason that ignores

the needs and desires of ordinary people. If this is the case, autonomy cannot possibly form a foundation for morals, because the will is cut off from the real world (ibid.).

Similarly, Tronto (1993, 10) criticizes as problematic Kant and Rawls' use of abstraction and universalized principles as the foundation of moral judgment. Tronto says that moral judgments made from a standpoint that is distant and disinterested with regard to social and political reality cannot accurately represent empirically moral life. This is because, first, under this approach morality becomes a realm beyond the world of emotions and feelings, limited to that of reason. Second, if morality is disinterested in this way, it is not related to local sociopolitical activity, customs, or habits but is as universal as the capacity of humans to reason. Third, it implies that moral philosophers only need to concentrate on the nature of moral thought, not how to make certain that human agents act morally. If these three rules really are the way to construct a moral theory, then "any account of morality that draws upon emotion, daily life, and political circumstance, will necessarily seem corrupted by non-rational and idiosyncratic incursions within this world" (ibid.). In this sense, moral theory has nothing to do with our daily life and empirical, social, or political reality. Rather, it is a universal law constructed by pure thought and exists only in the rationally constructed mind.

In a similar vein, Hankivsky (2004, 22) criticizes this kind of abstract, transcendental autonomy for overlooking three factors: first, humans are, by nature, connected to one another; and second, humans are embedded in a range of involuntary and voluntary social relations through which their identity is defined, structured, sustained, and limited; third, an abstract autonomy overlooks care, which is a core element of the human condition—alternatively put, a core manifestation of the basic truth that all people are vulnerable, dependent, and finite.

Therefore, we all have to “find ways of dealing with [care] in our daily existence and in the values which guide our individual and collective behaviour” (ibid.).

Hankivsky’s (23-24) criticism of Rawls’ theory of justice is a case in point. She points out that Rawls’ theory of justice as fairness contains several limitations from the perspective of an ethic of care. For instance, abstract rules and rights that assume equality and sameness would obscure human differences and their significance to the legitimacy of moral claims because “the outcome of impartial reasoning congruent with objective fairness can lead to indifference towards others’ needs.” Hence, our political obligations and expectations towards others should not always be reduced to abstract rules and rights. Instead, we should understand people’s lives, and recognize the conditions of inequality, disadvantage, and discrimination, awareness of which is particularly essential to respond adequately and responsively to gender, racial, ethnic, cultural, and class differences and oppression. Hankivsky (24) says that she shares Iris Marion Young’s view, which maintains that it is insufficient to use a traditional liberal model of distributive justice to respond to issues of violence, discrimination, racism and sexism, “because beyond rights are the caring responsibilities that arise between human beings in the course of their lives” (ibid.).

The third criticism of the rational notion of autonomy is regarding personal choice and self-determination. Caring theorists say that there are two problems with this definition: first, the identity of a self must include both the self-concept and other factors, because self-identity is constructed through education and socialization. In this sense, the authentic self is a social self that is deeply shaped and rooted in a particular social and cultural milieu rather than living in isolation. Second, the relation between personal choice and autonomy does not always go hand

in hand. Personal choice does not necessarily mean that one has more autonomy. Likewise, autonomous states do not necessarily come from self-choice or self-decision.

Noddings (109-117) says that the most contentious issue regarding the concept of autonomy at this point is about decision-making. That is, an autonomous person is conceived as be able to make a choice about what (s)he really wants to do, regardless of whether the decision is good or evil. Noddings questions this definition of autonomy and says that everyone wants to make his/her own decisions and be free of coercion. Yet, even in daily life, our power of control is limited. For instance, Noddings says that when she was a dean of a department and simultaneously responsible for household duties, she had to make decisions based on factors other than her heart's desire. As a homemaker, she could live in a more autonomous life because she could schedule things to suit herself, and she found joy in taking care of her loved ones. Conversely, as a dean, her schedule was planned by others, and she disliked many of these tasks. But, if she had been asked to choose one or the other exclusively, she would probably have chosen being a dean, she said, because the tasks of the dean were closer to and advanced her ability to perform the academic work that she really wanted to do. Noddings therefore concludes that it is unclear which choice can be counted as more autonomous, for we make decisions and choose our needs and demands in relation to the condition or circumstance of the moment, and rationalize a plan only in retrospect (*ibid.*).

Noddings' example reveals that what we genuinely need and what we truly want are not always compatible. Sometimes, they may conflict with each other, as with Noddings' situation. Moreover, the choice that we make is not necessarily the one we plan to make or the one we truly desire. Hence, a definition of autonomy as the ability to choose what one desires or decide on one's own is over-simple and not aligned with the human reality. An adherent to this

inadequate concept of autonomy is either misled into making a wrong decision or becomes frustrated and disappointed by their failure to have complete control over their choices. Noddings (109-112) says that this definition of autonomy becomes even more questionable if we interrogate it with regard to our relational self, because then the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy becomes increasingly blurred. If a self is related to a family and also connected to a professional identity, it is difficult to tell how autonomy and heteronomy can be said to differ here. We are influenced by encounters with others who provide the building blocks for our personhood. Even if we prefer not to be “led around by the nose” and resist manipulation, sometimes, we still need to listen to advice and guidance. More importantly, we have to allow ourselves to be emotionally affected by the needs and predicaments of others in order to care for them. In this sense, the “independent self” meanings of autonomy defined by Kant and by the neoliberals are riddled “with paradoxes.” Noddings (116-117) hence concludes that the self is a relation, constructed in connection to other selves, objects, and events in the world. Neither the constructing subject nor the fully constituted self is capable only of subjective feeling in the immediate moment; the self has attributes, and it has a substantial continuity. Defining the self’s autonomy as independent from other people and from sociopolitical realism is riddled with difficulties. In order to avoid these difficulties, “we need to explore more fully how this relational self develops and what norms we want to establish for it.” Noddings (117) thereby maintains that reflective thinking is perhaps the most important and useful element of autonomy. Held’s critique of rational autonomy is in line with that of Noddings, and focuses on articulating the reality of the relational self. Held (2006, 12-14) points out that moral theories “built on the image of the independent, autonomous, rational individual largely overlook the reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls.” In the caring theorists’ view, as expressed by

Held, humans are considered to be relational rather than self-sufficient and independent, in both the moral and the epistemological senses. As children, we depend on others to provide us care, and even when we grow up, we still remain interdependent with others throughout our lives. This is because everyone is particularly tied to a family or friends. These social relations, in turn, constitute part of our identity. In addition, our responsibility is also manifested through our embeddedness in familial, historical, and sociopolitical contexts. Hence, the independent, self-sufficient, autonomous individual pictured by rational and neoliberal theory fails to accurately represent the reality of the interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity.

The Shortcomings of the Caring Theorists' Notions of Autonomy

The caring theorists' criticisms of the definitions of Kant, Rawls, and the neoliberals, although justifiable, do not compensate for the fact that they fail to either present a complete theory of autonomy or demonstrate in what way their theories of autonomy are compatible with those of rational moral philosophy. Noddings, Tronto, Hankivsky, and Held were inclined to criticize the deficiencies of rational notions of autonomy perhaps at the expense of their own complete theory of autonomy. Clement, Meyers, and Slote are the three major scholars who tackle the task of defining an autonomy based upon caring theory; yet Clement's and Meyers's theories of autonomy focus on articulating how a caring person or a feminist can be autonomous, and they do not really come to grips with the (in)compatibility of caring with the notions of autonomy presented by Kant, Rawls, and the neoliberals. Slote (2007), however, tackles the issue of compatibility between caring theory and rational autonomy, but substitutes for the major tenet of relational autonomy his empathetic caring theory.

In other words, Slote (2007), although he articulates a relationship between caring theory and autonomy (particularly in Kant's concept of respect; Slote, 55-65), also maintains that a caring interference can be conceived of as respecting the interfered-with agent's autonomy only if it is based on empathy, not on any relational ontology/foundation (57). In fact, in several passages, Slote questions the compatibility of the caring theorists' notion of autonomy (which is based on "sentiments") and Kant's notion of respecting an agent's autonomy. Slote (2007) says that "[t]he notions of caring about and concern for (the welfare of) others are widely regarded as different from that of respect" (55), because "[c]are ethics is a form of moral sentimentalism, and it is difficult to see how respect for others can be grounded in (mere) sentiments, emotions, or feelings" (ibid.). Then he points out that "if we enrich the notion of caring so as to make it include empathy, then the ethics of caring will be in a position to account for respect" (57). From these passages, it is clear that Slote rejects the compatibility of the caring relation presented by other caring theorists with the rational notion of autonomy. For him, it is in the domain of empathy, which "is typically regarded as not involving the merging of two souls or personalities"(57), that the caring and the rational notions of autonomy are compatible.

Among the caring theorists, Meyers and Clement (1998, 22-44) present the most complete theory of autonomy based on caring. Yet they both alter the normative meaning of autonomy presented by rational philosophy instead using the concept of autonomous thinking capacity to interpret autonomy. Although Meyers may be the first to use autonomous reflective competence as a lens through which to interpret autonomy, her theory focuses more on the feminist view rather than on caring theory. It is Clement who takes Meyers's view further to demonstrate the way in which a caring person can also be autonomous. Hence, I will focus on articulating Clement's theory.

Clement's book, *Care, Autonomy and Justice* (1998), not only expands the meaning of autonomy from an individualistic psychological viewpoint, but also tackles the problem intrinsic to the notion of the autonomy of a socially constructed self. Clement (22) argues that autonomy is "not merely an internal, or psychological characteristic, but also an external, or social" characteristic. This is because autonomy requires that one be free of coercion in one's decision-making process, and this coercion may come from either one's own principles or perceptions or from social norms. The fact is that the freedom to make decisions for oneself does not mean that these decisions are not motivated by (e.g.) ignorance, inner compulsion, or alienation. Clement (22-44), therefore, maintains that how to think reflectively or critically about one's choices is an important factor in determining whether a choice is really autonomously made. Whereas the ability to make decisions by one's free will is the internal factor of autonomy, critical reflection on one's choice is related to external factors. This is because critical reflection is shaped by a social norm, belief or value—in other words, by the process of socialization.

For the individualistic approach, which conceives of the human being as an isolated and independent entity, Clement suggests that we are not only defined by our relationships to other but also socially constituted: "[w]e can only make sense of our own experiences through concepts which themselves make sense only in a social framework." In this sense, autonomy cannot ignore the social factors that shape and define one's life. For those who adopt a social approach, emphasizing the maintenance of caring relations is the first priority; Clement suggests that they need to be aware that the caring relation has to be a healthy relation rather than a self-sacrificing one. Clement (44) says that "reconciling care and autonomy requires moving beyond these ideal types and finding the right balance between the connections and separations between

individuals.” Clement uses Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey’s (1993) work to illustrate this view. Frazer and Lacey (178) say that

[t]he notion of the relational self, in contrast to both atomistic and inter-subjective selves, nicely captures our empirical and logical interdependence and the centrality to our identity of our relations with others and with practices and institutions, whilst retaining an idea of human uniqueness and discreteness as central to our sense of ourselves. It entails the collapse of any self/other or individual/community dichotomy without abandoning the idea of genuine agency and subjectivity.³⁶

Clement’s theory of autonomy has done a great job of addressing the need for a formulation of autonomy in relation to caring and the carer. Accordingly, her theory contributes greatly to demonstrating that one can care for others while keeping one’s autonomy. If we accept this argument, we can conclude that caring theory does not conflict with the notion of autonomy, as some scholars have thought.

However, Clement fails to articulate whether her notion of autonomy is compatible with the rational notion of autonomy, or whether her theory can provide a better model than those of Kant, Rawls, or the neoliberals for modern education. The major reason that this point is missed is because caring theorists, including Clement, overlook the differences and implications that Kant’s moral autonomy, Rawls’s political autonomy, and the neoliberals’ personal autonomy make to social and political practice. Neither Clement nor other caring theorists mention about these differences between the scholars they critique, let alone the different implications these three rational notions of autonomy may have for social and political activity

The Different Meanings and Implications of Kant’s, Rawls’s, and the Neoliberals’ Theories of Autonomy

³⁶ Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community: A feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate* (Tronto: university of Toronto Press, 1993).

The difference between Kant's moral autonomy, Rawls political autonomy, and the neoliberals' personal autonomy can be briefly described as follows. Kant's definition of autonomy (1785) consists of two levels and three major components. The two levels of autonomy are: (a) autonomy in the negative sense (or "basic autonomy"); and (b) autonomy in the positive sense (or "advanced autonomy"). The three major components are freedom (or free will) to choose or make a decision, universal law, and rationality. The difference between basic autonomy and advanced autonomy depends upon whether one's choice or decision is in harmony with the universal law. In addition, free will is neither influenced by one's own desire or impulse nor is it coerced by external factors, be they personal, legal, political, or whatever. If one's choice is under the influence of personal inclination, impulse, or state law, this is a situation of "heteronomy." The Kantian notions of autonomy, heteronomy, and the difference between basic autonomy and advanced autonomy can be explicated as follows:

Autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of duties in keeping with them; heteronomy of choice, on the other hand, not only does not ground any obligation at all but is instead opposed to the principle of obligation and to the morality of the will. That is to say, the sole principle of morality consists in independence from all matter of the law (namely, from a desired object) and at the same time in the determination of choice through the mere form of giving universal law that a maxim must be capable of. That *independence*, however, is freedom in the *negative* sense, whereas *this lawgiving of its own* on the part of pure and, as such, practical reason is freedom in the *positive* sense. Thus moral law expresses nothing other than the autonomy of pure practical reason, that is, freedom and this is itself the formal condition of all maxims, under which alone they can accord with the supreme practical law. If, therefore, the matter of volition, which can nothing other than the object of a desire that is connected with the law, enters into the practical law as a condition of its possibility, there results heteronomy of choice, namely dependence upon the natural law of following some impulse or inclination, and the will does not give itself the law but only the precept for rationally following pathological law (30).

In this passage, we can see not only Kant's definitions of autonomy as a whole, heteronomy, and the two kinds of autonomy, but also detect the key component that makes one autonomous, that is, "pure practical reason." In other words, the factor that decides whether one's choice or decision is based in autonomy or heteronomy is the pure practical reason that motivates one's

free will to make a choice or decision. If one's free will is moved by one's inclination or desire, it is heteronomous. Conversely, if it is motivated by pure practical reason, (including rational thinking and universal law), it is autonomous. Thus, Kant makes it clear that "[t]he ideas of reason, freedom and autonomy are tightly connected" (16).

Neither Rawls's liberal political autonomy nor the neoliberals' personal autonomy is identical to Kant's moral autonomy. Superficially, both Rawls's and the neoliberal's autonomy are similar to different parts of Kant's moral autonomy. That is, whereas Rawls's autonomy focuses on the objective factor of political autonomy, the neoliberals' personal autonomy pays attention to personal freedom of choice. Yet a close examination shows that by removing one of the core components, pure practical reason, from the equation of basic and advanced autonomy, The Rawlsian and neoliberal notions of autonomy lose the essence of Kant's moral autonomy. The fact is that Kant's theory requires an individual independent or transcendent from all kinds of influences, be they personal desires, state law, or anything else. It is simply constructed from pure practical reason—in other words, rational thinking based upon the universal law. Only when an individual can do so, can (s)he ensure political autonomy. Yet, Rawls's political autonomy brackets personal values and beliefs, and replaces them with constitutional procedure. As such, Rawls's political autonomy removes not merely personal belief, but also the moral, self-reflective foundation, which serves as a yardstick to keep political practice in check. Consequently, the foundation of Rawls's political autonomy becomes unclear, with rules entirely defined and decided by those in power. The aforementioned criticisms made of Rawls's theory by the caring theorists and Amartya Sen. That is, first, an individual's rights are reduced to very little because the significant actors who have the ability to change the constitutional law under Rawls's political autonomy are politicians in different parties, not free-acting individual. Second,

constitutional procedure cannot be warranted to be fair, because it is set up by the party in power, not other parties or underrepresented groups. Hence, the nature of Rawls's political autonomy is different from that of Kant's moral autonomy, which emphasizes the connection between freedom of choice, pure practical reason (rational thinking and universal law), and autonomy. The difference between Kant's and Rawls's notions of autonomy, in essence, is qualitative: Kant's moral autonomy requires going beyond personal desires whereas Rawls's political autonomy does not warrant this quality.

In the same vein, neoliberal personal autonomy based upon personal freedom of choice is almost diametrically different from Kant's moral autonomy. Kant's moral autonomy emphasizes transcendence of one's desires in harmony with the universal law. Personal autonomy, conversely, emphasizes following one's wants and interests, without mentioning the universal law. The case in point can be illustrated by the neoliberal Hodgson's (2005) claim that individuals are the best judges of their own economic interests and that these interests are most effectively accomplished through a market system involving private ownership (126). In this definition, the moral agent is not concerned with personal morality, public virtue, or government's role, because in unison with Hodgson's statement, Friedman maintains that "morality is [...] an individual matter [...] not the responsibility of one class (the present generation) to another class (the earlier generation)" (Friedman 1972, 39-40).

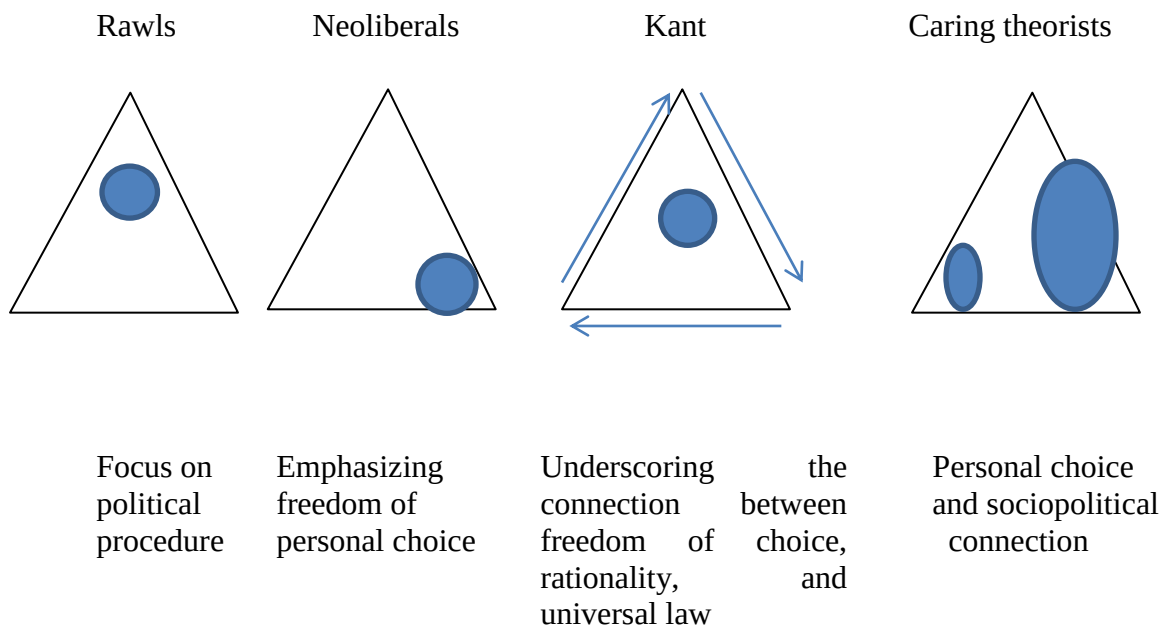
Friedman's statement is in the way of trying to set up a policy for "Social Security" (see below). His definition of personal autonomy not only expands an individual's freedom to the greatest degree, but it also restrains the government's right to fulfill its social and political responsibilities. This notion of autonomy implies that the government should abstain from intervention and does not engage with the power struggle between the rich and poor. The

neoliberals' notion of autonomy and its implications is different from Kant's moral autonomy, which emphasizes one's free will, based upon rationality, and the use of pure practical reason to form the foundation of the universal law—a rule for social and political activity. As Allen Wood points out, for Kant, “the will of every rational being is necessarily bound to [the practical rule] as a condition” (Wood, 2002)

If we compare the caring theorists' views of autonomy to the above three rational notions of autonomy presented by Kant, Rawls, and the neoliberals, we can see that it falls between personal autonomy and Kant's moral autonomy, but closer to Kant. This is because Kant's moral autonomy consists of three components—freedom of choice, rational thinking, and universal law. Similarly, the caring theorists' notions of autonomy include two noticeable components (personal choice and interconnected relationships between the self and sociopolitical factors) and one implicit factor (reflection or reflective thinking). Take Clement's theory of autonomy as an example. Clement suggests that the individual's concept of autonomy need to expand to include social factors, whereas the notion of the socially constituted self has to take into account the well-being of a carer. In this sense, the notion of autonomy consists of both an individual's choices and interconnected social and political factors. Noddings, Tronto, and Hankivsky, although they do not make this view as explicit as Clement does, suggest that an individual needs to expand his or her identity-concept to include defining social and political factors. The individual will need to do this to make a choice from a caring perspective, to ensure that the choice is not harmful to the interconnected and interdependent society as a whole. Hence, it is reasonable to say that in most caring theorists' view, the notion of autonomy needs to include both a moral agent's choice and sociopolitical factors. Apart from these two components, a third

component, i.e. reflection or reflective thinking,³⁷ is mentioned by Noddings (2002) and Meyers (1989).³⁸ The most obvious utilization of this component is in Meyers (1989), who focuses exclusively on articulating how to develop autonomous capacity (or autonomous competency in Meyers's term) in general and reflective thinking skills in particular. The component's importance in Noddings's (2002) works is less evident, but after criticizing the Kantian notion of autonomy and interrogating the definition of autonomy as "making a choice by oneself," she concludes that the most important factor in being an autonomous person is perhaps reflection.

If we use diagrams to represent the core elements of autonomy presented by Kant, Rawls, the neoliberals, and caring theorists, they may appear as follows:



Constructing a More Inclusive Theory for Autonomy

³⁷ Originally, Noddings uses the word reflection, but I treat it as an exchangeable word of reflective thinking.

³⁸ Diana Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1989).

In the previous section, I mentioned that caring theorists' criticisms of the notions of autonomy presented by Kant, Rawls, and the neoliberals can be justified, at least in three aspects. First, Kant's abstract, transcendental, or moral autonomy is insufficient to represent empirical moral reality and beyond the reach of the ordinary majority. Second, although Rawls's political autonomy replaces Kant's universal law with an empirical political procedure of fairness, his universalization of constitutional procedure overlooks the differences between various social and political groups as well as between the rich and the poor. Third, the neoliberals' personal autonomy, which aims to maximize personal freedom, fails to perceive that selfhood is not simply constituted and defined by oneself but also by social and political activity. However, caring theorists fail to see the differences between Kant's moral autonomy, Rawls's political autonomy, and the neoliberals' personal autonomy. Accordingly, the caring theorists are not adequately able to see the different implications that these three rational notions of autonomy may have to social and political practice, and therefore, are unable to configure a more inclusive theory of autonomy that not only is compatible with that of rational moral philosophers but also transcends it. Hence, in this section, I will propose to construct a more inclusive and comprehensive theory of autonomy that does not merely embrace the good elements of both the rational and the caring theorists' views of autonomy, but is founded as well on the three mentioned characteristics of human existence and the four major components of the integrated neocaring theory.

I will utilize the three characteristics of the enhanced relational ontology/ foundation as my conceptual framework. The enhanced relational foundation is constituted by the caring theorists' relational ontology, Merleau-Ponty's (1965) theory of intersubjectivity, and Nāgārjuna's philosophy of dependent co-arising (see MKK). It consists of: (1) the fabric of

human life as a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, and rationality and affectivity; (2) human life is an ongoing process of synthesizing and becoming, and (3) human agents and social and political activity, mutually defined and conditioned as well as interdependent upon each other. Specifically, in this section, I will focus on using the first characteristic, human life is a field of subjectivity and objectivity, to interrogate, analyze, and clarify the components that need to be included in the neo-caring-based theory of autonomy with reference to the issues raised by the aforementioned theorists (both rational theorists and caring theorists). After this clarification, I will integrate and add the component that is still missing from the schema of caring theory mentioned above (caring nature, caring as an activity, and contextuality). The missing component is a caring mind of loving-kindness.

The major reason to employ the three characteristics of the enhanced relational foundation as a conceptual framework to examine the theories of autonomy presented by Kant, Rawls, and the neoliberals is because the enhanced relational ontology is the foundational ground of human reality. It is also the ground on which integrated neocaring theory is formed. In other words, it is a fabric of horizontal and vertical linking threads that interweave and prevail in every part of human activity and life. These threads penetrate through the other three aspects of integrated neocaring theory—contextuality, caring as an activity, and caring nature. Contextuality is a substantial locator, which facilitates the use of neocaring theory to identify and concretize the conditions related to an agent and to social and political practice. Caring as an activity is the actualization or embodiment of a caring mind in an individual's life and in social and political practice, whereas caring nature, in my terms, is a caring mind of loving-kindness, which is the heart of neocaring theory. I contend that it has to be nurtured in an agent's life (in all our lives) if we really want to have a better quality of life or build a caring society. Whereas the

relational foundation is the backbone of neocaring theory, contextuality, caring as an activity, and caring nature are the flesh and blood. Together these four components actualize an integrated neocaring theory. In the following, I will use the first characteristic of the enhanced relational ontology to show the different components of the theory of autonomy that have to be embraced according to the integrated neocaring theory in contrast to those of rational moral philosophy and caring theory.

Why Do We Need Both Subjectivity and Objectivity to Define a Theory of Autonomy?

The first characteristic of human reality unveiled by the enhanced relational foundation is that the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field constituted by subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, and rationality and affectivity. If we use this characteristic to interrogate the four theories of autonomy (those configured by Kant, Rawls, the neoliberals, and caring theorists), only Kant's and the caring theorists' notions of autonomy include the components of subjectivity (or the private) and objectivity (the public; rationality and objectivity will be discussed later). Hence, a question that can be raised is why it is insufficient to construct a theory of autonomy through either objective factors or subjective experience alone?

This question can be answered both philosophically and practically. Philosophically, it requires us to consider the nature of human life, or alternatively put, what constitutes the fabric of human existence and what components are at the core of selfhood or personhood. In concrete terms, can an individual's life operate well without the participation of family, friends, education, and sociopolitical activity? Although the answer can be a yes, this cannot occur in modern democratic society. In fact, even in the Stone Age or in ancient agricultural societies, family, friends and other social, cultural, and environmental factors still played a significant role

in one's life. If no family, society or political activity had existed in the Stone Age or ancient times, not only would the progress of civilization have been impossible, but human survival would also have been questionable, because no offspring would have been produced. Hence, it is unrealistic to say that one can live without other people or social and political activity. Therefore, defining the notion of autonomy simply based on personal freedom of choice, as in the neoliberal conception of personal autonomy, is incomplete and one-sided. Similarly, if we define a theory of autonomy as grounded on political procedure alone, as in Rawls's theory, this approach is also incomplete and impractical, because without human agents, social and political activity is empty and meaningless. In fact, social and political activity cannot even exist without human agents.

Using the one-sided theory of autonomy, whether personal autonomy or political autonomy, to characterize human life is analogous to using a black pen to draw scenery. It differs greatly from utilizing multiple colors, colors representing both subjectivity and objectivity, to paint it. The picture drawn by the black pen, no matter how detailed it is, cannot reveal as many qualities as multiple colors do, regardless of its validity and verisimilitude. The one-sided autonomous theory presented by Rawls and the neoliberals is like the one-color picture, which cannot catch and characterize the human reality to an adequate extent. Hence, it is necessary to include both subjectivity and objectivity in a theory of autonomy.

In reality, the relation between subjectivity (human agents' beliefs, knowledge, capacity, and experiences) and objectivity (social and political practice) is more closely tied than is usually thought, because they both are part of the intrinsic components of human life. That is, the fabric of human existence is constituted by both subjectivity and objectivity. This nature is clearly articulated in both Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies, as presented in the previous chapter. Briefly, according to Nāgārjuna, neither human life and human existence is constituted

by a single factor. Rather, they are constituted by time, space, subjectivity, and other corresponding elements. An individual's agency is not formed solo, but is also nurtured by social, cultural, and educational factors. A child born and educated in America speaks English and receives an American-specific curriculum at the K-12 level, whereas a child born in Taiwan speaks and is educated in Chinese. These two examples show that the agency of a child is shaped, defined, and nurtured by the social, cultural, and political environment that (s)he was born into. It is impossible to discuss different behaviors and thinking without considering different cultures, educational experiences, and sociopolitical environments. Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the way in which one's physical orientation to a picture or object such as a table affects one's perception of what it looks like also demonstrates that the external location of one's body would intrinsically affect one's vision of the world. Hence, in order to form a more complete and inclusive theory of autonomy embracing both subjective (an agent's values, knowledge, capacity, and experiences) and objective (social and political) factors is prerequisite.

Practically, in defining the theory of autonomy, we need to include both subjectivity and objectivity, because as the caring theorists' previous criticisms have demonstrated, selfhood is not constituted by an individual alone rather, it is influenced and shaped by social, cultural, and political environments. Sen points out further that although Rawls suggests that one refrain from the free application of one's personal beliefs and values to the construction of political autonomy, in practice, one's understanding of (e.g.) law and policy is deeply affected by one's experience. A white male politician born into the middle class possesses a very different view of the concept of freedom from an African American female born into poverty. This example shows a close relation between one's subjective experience and objective social and political activity.

The Deficiency of Defining the Notion of Autonomy Through Non-Intervention in Personal Choice (Concentrating on Subjective Choice)

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize winner in economic sciences and a philosopher of economic ethics, has written several books and articles interrogating and criticizing both the Rawlsian and neoliberals' notions of freedom with regard to political procedure and personal choice. Sen (1985)³⁹ provides practical evidence that the notion of autonomy needs to include both subjective and objective factors. He says that the neoliberal definition of personal autonomy focuses on a very negative and narrow sense of freedom, because it emphasizes non-interference and self-decision regarding one's own welfare. Non-interference, according to Sen, is a negative sense of freedom that does not allow a responsible adult to do what (s)he thinks is significant and meaningful in his/her life and the society as a whole. In addition, Sen notes that personal freedom of choice does not warrant that the result is actually the best for the choose, because the notion of "freedom to choose" involves several complex concepts. For instance, the goal of freedom consists of at least two kinds of freedom: "well-being freedom" and "agency freedom." The former refers to "a person's capability to have various functioning vectors and to enjoy the corresponding well-being achievements." The latter indicates that an individual "is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (203). Well-being freedom assumes that well-being is the only goal that an agent pursues, whereas agency freedom suggests that the agent's freedom has to include not solely one's own well-being but also one's goals, objectives, allegiances, obligations, and concept of the good (ibid.). In this sense, well-

³⁹ Amartya Sen, "Being, Agency and Freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984," *The Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 4 (1985):169-221.

being freedom captures only one choice among many. Yet, in neoliberal theory, human freedom is measured solely through the terms of well-being, especially economic well-being.

Friedman and Hodgson's "Social Security" policy mentioned above can illustrate Sen's point. The policy defines the significance of an individual's existence and social relation to parents, friends, and fellow citizens purely in economic terms, because (the policy maintains) that a younger generation does not have responsibility for older generations; likewise, the upper socioeconomic class is not responsible for the middle or lower classes. Friedman and Hodgson propose that the younger generation and the rich need not be responsible for paying for Social Security through taxes, since Social Security is depended on by older citizens and those with fewer financial resources.

However, human relations and social responsibility are not as simple and narrow as Friedman and Hodgson assume. If their assumption is right, then it is reasonable to say that the parents' generation does not need to care for their children, and the taxes paid by the middle and lower classes should not be used to help the big corporations owned and controlled by the rich in economic recession when they are at the edge of bankruptcy; or, more fundamentally, no infrastructure such as the public school system or other public facilities should be open to the wealthy. If a society really operated in this way, its civilization and development would be at risk, because no one would care for others or support the public infrastructure. On the other hand, if Friedman and Hodgson reject the theory that older or poorer groups have no responsibility for younger or richer groups, then one can ask why there are double standards for treating these different groups? Does this mean that their policy takes advantage of older and poorer people? This is by no means a justifiable policy, also, it reveals the unjustifiable logic of defining the meaning of human existence, social relationships, and public responsibility solely in

economic terms. I think that this is why Sen says that defining freedom of personal choice in merely economic or well-being terms is a negative and narrow way to conceptualize the notion of liberty and freedom (209).

Another criticism of freedom of personal choice is that personal choice is not necessary in the individual's best interests. The reason is that the action of choice involves an individual's knowledge and capacity to exercise that choice. In Hodgson and Friedman's conception, an individual is the best one to make decisions about his or her own Social Security. Yet in reality, this is not true. Rojhat B. Avsar (2008)⁴⁰ explains that many older citizens do not understand the complex operation of the economic system, nor do they have enough knowledge to figure out the best plan for themselves. In addition, I would argue, as indicated by the above discussion, that personal choice is conditioned by social, economic, and political policy. Even if one works hard and wants to save money for his/her later life, the policy does not exempt him/her from paying taxes. In addition, a big corporation where the middle and lower classes work may at some point enter bankruptcy, when in consequence, those middle-class and poor people's 401K savings tended by the corporation will be gone with little or no compensation. The famous Enron scandal of 2001 is a case in point.⁴¹ Hence, freedom of personal choice, though good in theory, cannot be carried out fully in practice unless personal capacity and knowledge as well as social, economic, and political policy are all designed to support it. Otherwise, the hidden factors mentioned above not only do not benefit the individual, but in fact hurt him or her deeply. Government administrators, on the other hand, are experts selected to take care of the public good. They should have the right to design a better policy for elder citizens under the supervision of the

⁴⁰ Rojhat B. Avsar (2008) "A Critique of 'Neoliberal Autonomy': The Rhetoric of Ownership Society." *Journal Forum for Social Economics* 2 (2008):125-134, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/j65x6768r2529150/>.

⁴¹ See Robert Bryce, *Pipe Dreams: Greed, Ego, and the Death of Enron* (United States:PublicAffairs, 2002).

public. In this context, limiting the goal of autonomy to personal interest and non-interference is a narrow and negative way to define autonomy.

The Shortcomings of Defining Autonomy Through the Freedom of Procedure Alone (Focus Only on Objectivity)

Another one-sided theory of autonomy criticized by Sen as narrow and negative is freedom of procedure control as presented by Rawls. Sen says that the means (or “power” in Sen’s term) to achieve freedom is not confined to constitutional procedure. Rather, legitimate ways to exercise freedom of choice include both an agent’s effective power of choice and lawful regulation to ensure these rights. The agent’s effective power refers to the fact that the agent “is free to achieve one outcome or another” and “his or her choices will be respected and the corresponding things will happen,” while lawful procedure indicates that the law protects the agent’s power of choice. The agent is actively “doing the choosing in the procedure of decision and execution” (208-209). In other words, freedom of procedure control indicates that one follows a procedure to make a choice that has already been set up by a state constitution. The agent’s effective power, on the other hand, means that an agent has the power to achieve whatever (s)he thinks is meaningful and significant. Rawls’s political autonomy is in favor of the procedure of control freedom. I am in agreement with Sen when he says that an agent’s effective power to exercise freedom of choice is more important than procedure control, because procedure control entails a negative sense of freedom that highlights that “one’s obligations should take the form of not interfering with other people’s control over spheres of their lives rather than the form of duties to help positively.” In particular, if procedure control is combined with a constraint-based approach of “do not interfere with other people’s control over some

specific business,” the adequacy of the freedom entailed is questionable, because it excludes other choices and restricts freedom to non-interference only (209). Hence, Rawls’s political autonomy is also a narrow, negative conceptualization of autonomy and freedom, because an agent does not have the freedom to decide the content of the choice.

Through the above discussion and through attention to Sen’s criticisms and clarifications of the components involved in defining the theory of autonomy, such as freedom of choice, the goal of freedom of choice, and the method to achieve freedom of choice, it is clear that the notion of autonomy is not merely related to social and political policy but also to an individual’s value, knowledge, capacity, and power to exercise freedom of choice. In particular, the positive sense of freedom of choice always involves a human agent’s knowledge, capacity and power. In other words, it is the human agent rather than the political procedure alone that lets real autonomy flourish. Hence, it is plausible to conclude that given Sen’s criticisms and clarifications of freedom of choice and the observations of Merleau-Ponty and Nāgārjuna, a more complete way to define the notion of autonomy has to include a subjective component (the human agent) and objective social and political factors. Specifically, the human agent’s knowledge, capacity and power play a key role in determining whether freedom of choice is defined in a positive or negative sense.

Combining the Three Key Components of Kant’s Moral Autonomy with the Three Core Factors of the Caring Theorists’ Notion of Autonomy

The above discussion shows that neither Rawls’s political autonomy, which is based upon the objective factor of political procedure, nor the neoliberals’ personal autonomy of subjective choice is capable of providing a complete theory of autonomy. This finding leads us to

ask another question—what about the Kantian and the caring theorists’ concepts of autonomy, which consist of both subjectivity and objectivity? Which theory is most appropriate for modern education?

In light of the above discussion and Merleau-Ponty’s and Nāgārjuna’s philosophies, which underscore the point that the fabric of human life is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity as well as affectivity and rationality, I propose that we should include both rather than choose only one of these. The fact is that in human life we sometimes need to think rationally in order to solve a sophisticated social and political problem, whereas another time, rational thinking alone may not be sufficient to tackle a social or educational issue such as how to nurture a child to become a prosocial and well-balanced adult who is not merely intelligent but also has the empathetic capacity to understand and communicate effectively with other people. If we take a close look and ponder through the elements in the caring theorists’ and Kant’s notions of autonomy, we can combine them into a more comprehensive and inclusive theory of autonomy, because they cover different areas of significance for an individual to be autonomous.

Inspired by Kant’s moral autonomy, which forms a connection between personal choice, rationality, and universal law, I ponder the three components (personal choice, reflection and interconnection between individuals, and sociopolitical activity) suggested by different caring theorists, such as Noddings, Tronto and Clement, and the relationships between these components. I propose to combine the three components put forward by the caring theorists to form a more complete theory of autonomy, and then use these three components as a conceptual framework to integrate the good parts of the Kant’s, Rawlsian and neoliberals’ theories of autonomy. After integrating these good components, I will examine the theory of autonomy that results using the four components of the integrated neocaringtheory: relational ontology, caring

as an activity, contextuality, and a caring nature. I will then add the missing, implicit component: a caring mind of loving-kindness. Hence, four components will be included in my theory of autonomy.

The reason that I have adopted the three components of autonomy presented by caring theorists instead of those presented by Kant relates to the evolution of human perception of reality and the three characteristics of human existence in neocaring theory. The evolving trend in question moves from abstraction and universal principles to empirical and personal practice. The fact is that from the previous discussion of the three rational notions of autonomy and caring theorists' criticisms, we can detect at least two evolving features: first, the core element of autonomy moves from the abstract, transcendental, and universal toward social and political policy, as well as personal freedom in social and political context; second, Kant's definition of autonomy involves subjectivity and objectivity, while subjectivity is separated from objectivity in Rawls's political autonomy (objective political procedure) and the neoliberals' personal autonomy (subjective personal freedom). In caring theory, the combination of subjectivity and objectivity re-emerges, because caring theorists' concept of autonomy requires personal choice and the interdependent relation between an individual and sociopolitical practice to be taken into account.

The first point shows that modern theories of autonomy require attention to both empirical reality and individual freedom. The second reveals that both subjectivity and objectivity are necessary to define the concept of autonomy. I have discussed the second issue above; From the perspective of the first point, the caring theorists' construction of autonomy does better than the Kantian and the other views, because its major tenets focus on calling attention to empirical social and political lives as well as the individual's needs and wants.

Actually, this is the major reason for them to criticize the Kantian and Rawlsian notions of autonomy, which use abstraction and universalization to flesh out the concept. Thus, caring theory becomes more capable to face and tackle the challenges of the modern world and liberal democratic society. Yet, there are also some good elements of the Kantian and Rawlsian notions of autonomy that we can adopt to enhance the caring theorists' view. In what follows, I will use Kantian moral autonomy as an example, integrating its good components into an integrated neocaring theory of autonomy.

The three components included in Kant's and the caring theorists' notions of autonomy, though different, are not incompatible; in fact, they share several broadly similar points. First, Kant's freedom to choose and the caring theorists' personal choice both emphasize the individual's right to choice. Yet, whilst Kant underlines the *freedom of choice* made by one's rational free will, the caring theorists highlight the choice of *personal needs and wants*. Kant's claim of freedom to choose connotes a normative tone, which requires lawful protection. In particular, when freedom of choice is defined in a positive sense, it is expected to be in accordance with universal law. That is, it is capable of acting as social and political law. Presumably, this is the reason Rawls uses constitutional law to replace and concretize Kant's universal law. Hence, Kant's freedom of choice and Rawls's political autonomy remind us that a normative freedom is important to personal freedom.

The caring theorists' notion of personal needs and wants, on the other hand, encompasses many things, such as personal values, knowledge, capacity, interests, and material substance. In a sense, it emphasizes the agent's effective power of freedom, as Sen mentioned previously. Personal needs and wants may not necessarily have a lawful claim, but needs like that for basic material goods for survival, or the opportunity to develop one's capacity and knowledge in order

to live with basic dignity, are legitimate moral needs that deserve policy-makers' attention. Hence, I agree with Sen, Drèze, and Smith⁴², all of whom suggest the expansion of the concept of freedom of choice to include human capacity, political freedom of choice, and economic choices. Both Sen and Drèze suggest that we should expand basic freedoms to include "the ability to live long, read and write, to escape preventable illnesses, to work outside the family irrespective of gender, and to participate in collaborative as well as adversarial politics," because this capacity not only affects "the quality of life that the people can enjoy, but also effect[s] the real opportunities they have to participate in economic expansion." Smith also suggests that the concept of freedoms needs to encompass both political and economic freedoms. Political freedoms here mean the opportunity for people to decide who should govern and on what principles, and also "include the possibility to scrutinize and criticize authorities, to have freedom of political expression and an uncensored press, to enjoy the freedom to choose between different political parties, and so on." They also include "opportunities of political dialogue, dissent and critique as well as voting rights and participatory selection of legislators and executives" (Smith, *ibid.*) The concept of "economic freedoms" here indicates that an individual has the right "to utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange" (*ibid.*). Apart from these factors, I suggest that the law needs to attend to the distribution of resources in a society, which ensures individual accessibility to basic financial needs in the face of the corporate free market, which maximizes competition and free trade achieved "through economic de-regulation, elimination of tariffs, and a range of monetary and social policies favorable to business and indifferent toward poverty, social deracination, cultural

⁴² Justin Smith, "Civic Capabilities." Public sphere Project, accessed December, 2011, <http://publicsphereproject.org/drupal/node/284>.

decimation, long term resource depletion and environmental destruction” (Brown 2010, 2). This is the normative right of freedom, which constitutes one of the core elements of autonomy. This enhancement of economic access and development of capacity and knowledge means that there should be room for the individual to express personal needs and wants, and pursue them if the individual can find resources to do so not at the public expense. In other words, personal needs and wants would have political and psychological support from constitutional law. Yet, financial support is dependent on to what extent personal needs and wants, including corporate needs and wants, are related to the public good and to underserved people. The higher the relevance of the connection is, the higher opportunity to obtain the financial support.

In other words, the first components of Kant’s freedom of choice and caring theorists’ personal choice of needs and wants show that we need to expand the meaning of freedom of choice to include political freedom, personal capacity development, and economic access. Political freedom allows a responsible individual to do and speak whatever (s)he thinks meaningful and significant to his/her life; further, however, it needs to address the basic financial needs of all citizens and secure their capacity to live a good life. If there is a conflict between a big corporation’s freedom to pursue excessive wants and the majority’s daily material needs, the principle of political freedom should place majority necessity over corporate needs.

I suggest this on the basis of Sen’s *On Ethics and Economics* (1987), which shows that the maximization of a nation’s or a corporation’s long-term financial plan must focus on the public benefit as well as profits, since ignoring the public good will inevitable backfire. I think that the current global economic crisis can illustrate Sen’s view. The recession shows the deficiency of the neoliberal view, which concentrates exclusively on the free market without considering the establishment of a solid foundation for human, social, and cultural development.

As Wendy Brown (2005) demonstrates, neoliberal economics is indifferent to poverty and leads to the decimation of culture, the deracination of people from their society, and neglect of the destruction of the environment. Consequently, it leaves no resources of any kind for society's future development, and may also result in social and political upheaval that aims to overturn oppressive institutions, as the recent Occupy Wall Street protest demonstrates. Moreover, as I have argued, the significance of human life and social relationships cannot be reduced to that of a "social capital." This is because although human agents are conditioned by their social and political environment, they also possess the power to shape and define social, political, and economic practice. Unfortunately, the interdependent nature of and mutual influence between economic development and human agents are overlooked by the neoliberals, because their role and ideology is to advocate from the economic perspective alone, neglecting human capacity and social and cultural capital. If the concept of freedom of choice is enhanced to encompass political freedom, capacity development, and people's basic access to economic facilities, then care for the majority's well-being should come first, before the benefit of a few big corporations.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the caring theorists' notion of personal choice of needs and wants needs from a moral perspective to be enhanced to include political freedom of choice, basic financial accessibility, and the development of human capacity. Alternatively put, autonomy should consist of two levels of freedom: personal freedom of choice and political freedom. Personal freedom allows an individual to speak and do whatever (s)he thinks is meaningful and useful to his or her life and to society as a whole without causing any harm to him or herself or to others. Political freedom, on the other hand, protects the legal rights of personal freedom, political freedom as conceived by Sen and Smith, basic accessibility to financial resources, and the development of human capacity. Thus, I rename the first component

of my theory of autonomy to “an agent’s effective power of personal and political freedom.” “Effective power” means that freedom here is defined in a positive sense, and since it is not limited to making choices, I use “freedom” instead of “choice.”

Second, on the issue of Kant’s rational thinking vis-à-vis the caring theorists’ reflective thinking: Kant does not specify the exact meaning of rational thinking, and sometimes the term is used as a synonym for rationality or reason. The term can be interpreted conceptually if not grammatically as either a “verb” or a “noun”. The former denotes the process of reasoning according to the maxim, “[a]ct only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law” (xviii). The latter is the pure practical reason, the maxim itself. In Kant’s view, rational thinking is an intrinsic component of human nature. Human goodwill or human dignity, in fact, are rooted in natural processes of rational thinking to formulate a moral judgment by following either duty or a maxim.

Yet, this way of defining rationality is too vague. Later scholars apply mathematical logic to replace the Kantian maxim. Alfred Ayer (1952 [1936])⁴³ is a leading figures in applying logic to ethical judgment. Nowadays, training students to think logically has become the major way to develop their rational thinking. However, Wittgenstein(1958),⁴⁴ William James (1971 [1909]),⁴⁵ and Noddings (1982) all criticize as deficient the use of logical reasoning to tackle moral issues or characterize human reality.

⁴³ See Ayer Alfred, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

⁴⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (NJ: Preatice hall, 1958).

⁴⁵ James Williams, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971):165-68.

Let take Noddings' criticism as an example. Noddings' (1982) critique of the moral reasoning model by the purely logical reasoning model or mathematical reasoning logic focuses on three problems:

Noddings' critique of the mathematical moral reasoning model focuses on three problems: (1) The mathematical moral reasoning model uses only normative symbols to interpret its proposition and ignores psychological terms and descriptions of moral experiences that are closely associated with daily life, ethical feelings, and practices. (2) The mathematical moral reasoning model concentrates on making its moral reasoning argument fit into the logical reasoning formula rather than accounting for the human factor and living occurrences of ethical reality. (3) The mathematical moral reasoning model prioritizes the mathematical reasoning rule as the highest and universal law by which to select, organize, and represent all kinds of human activities, but ignores the diversity of moral experiences in relation to the human condition. Consequently, Noddings opines that that the mathematical moral reasoning model is insufficient and not inclusive enough to articulate ethical philosophy fully.

Both Wittgenstein's (1958) and Nelson Goodman's (1968)⁴⁶ philosophy of language support Noddings' critique because they reveal that the meaning or reality-reference of a word is multiple and contextualized. Sometimes words can be interpreted as a normative symbol whereas other times they are the descriptions of human experiences and feelings. Both normative and descriptive symbols are equally qualified to define human activity and living experiences with regard to ethical life. For example, the word "mouse" can indicate an animal or metaphorically refer to the timid character of a man. In light of this view, mathematical reasoning model that claims only a normative term is acceptable to define ethics and construct moral philosophy, such

⁴⁶ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: an Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis : Hackett, 1976).

as the model presented by Ayer, is too narrow and too limited to construct a complete ethical philosophy.

Second, according to Wittgenstein and Goodman, the mathematical reasoning model carries different linguistic property and reality-references from daily language used in living ethical practices. Mathematical or pure logical reasoning model accepts a single, fixed rule to govern everything, and contends that the meaning of any given X and X' is clear-cut, e.g., 3 is distinct from 4. Yet, this is not the cases of everyday speech used in human empirical ethical life. Both Wittgenstein and Goodman discover that multiple ways and various notational systems have been used in daily language to select, organize and arrange social reality and human life, such as the way to compose a musical score is different from the way to draw a picture or write a poem. Using normative meaning alone to define and conceptualize human moral reality, as Ayer suggests, clearly overlooks the complexity of human reality and moral life. This is similar to use an electrocardiogram to represent a picture. The representation undoubtedly reduces all the different properties and qualities of the picture. Only the black and white syntactical or semantic diagrammatic lines are seen; no color other than black and white, nor are any detailed syntactical and semantic shapes, sizes, and subtle differences of multiple colors in the picture disclosed. Likewise, the moral reasoning model which uses mathematical reasoning formula alone to present ethical philosophy reduces both the quality and quantity of human ethical life to the extent that it only reveals a small portion of moral reality.

Third, logical reasoning formula assumes that logic is the highest principle, which can govern all the humanity. By imposing one single, fixed rule (i.e., principle of logic) to order, organize and categorize our ethical activities, the mathematical moral reasoning model fails to see and tackle the real problem of ethical practices. The case can be illustrated by using logical

proposition “this is true/false.” to interpret the phrase “this is how things are.” If the phrase “this is how things are” is read in relation to its context, it means things have different ways of being the ways they are. Yet, when the pure logical reasoning imposes the statement “this is true/false” to interpret it, this phrase becomes that there is only one “correct” way to do things, that is, the way justified by mathematical reasoning logic. Imposing the mathematical reasoning rule as the universal law to present all kinds of human reality is similar to say that in a chess game only the king’s movement is right and, hence, every other chess piece, whether queen or pawn or the like, must follow the way the king moves. The imposition of mathematical reasoning rule alone to interpret and formulate ethical/moral philosophy can also cause such a false view in our daily understanding of ethical practice, namely, only a logically acceptable rule is the “correct” rule to define, judge and guide ethical behaviors. Any rule other than a logically acceptable one is not a right way; for example, a rule to love your neighbor even if (s)he is unfriendly to you is wrong because it is illogical.

The caring theorists’ concept of reflective thinking or reflection, on the other hand, can avoid the inadequacies of following logical reasoning alone to justify a moral issue. I define reflective thinking as the process of reasoning that a moral agent goes through in relation to a particular situation in which (s)he thinks contextually about connected and interconnected points including (but not limited to) personal relationships, sociopolitical factors, and so on. For instance, Noddings says, if a child wants to watch a violent movie, his or her parents can watch and then discuss the film with him or her. The discussion, Noddings says, does not need to be a moral lecture, but should rather focus on asking open-ended questions or letting the child see that different perspectives exist. By creating this situation, the parents have allowed the child to exert his or her freedom of choice but also get a chance to reflect on the movie and grow.

Meyers also provides an example to illustrate her view of reflective thinking. She says that an autonomous person needs to possess autonomy competency (or reflective thinking), which is “the repertory of coordinated skills that makes self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction possible.” The repertory of coordinated skills is an individual’s capacity to ask and answer such questions—“[w]hat do I really want, need, care about, believe, value, etcetera?”

⁴⁷Further, the individual can act on the answer and correct themselves when they get the answer wrong (Meyers 1989, 77). Meyers uses the desire of one of her interviewees, “Ellen,” to become a surgical nurse as an example to illustrate the concept of autonomy competency. Ellen has decided to become a nurse and enrolled in a medical school. Yet she found that she was more squeamish about gore than the other students. In order to fulfill her goal, Ellen therefore needs to reflect on her own weakness and choose either to overcome it or change her career. In this sense, Ellen is conceived as possessing autonomous competence. Similarly, the girl interviewed by Gillian was also trying to decide whether to have an abortion and striving to take all related factors, such as personal relationships, financial situation, moral beliefs, and so on, into account. This is also a method of reflection. The shared factor between these three examples is that the child, the student nurse, and the pregnant girl think through the related factors before making a choice.

My theory of reflective thinking is intended to build on the groundwork of Noddings’s, Meyers’s and Gilligan’s theories to include not just thinking about conditions in which one has a direct interest, but also the interconnection and interdependent nature of one’s self and one’s sociopolitical environment, and the three characteristics of the enhanced relational foundation. In

⁴⁷ Diana Meyers, “Personal Autonomy and the Paradox of Feminine Socialization,” *the Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 84, no.11 (1987): 627.

addition, I argue that collective, constructive reflection is important to help an individual to clarify an issue, as long as it does not coerce the individual to follow an outside suggestion. In other words, reflective thinking does not include one's own thinking alone, but may and should also include the participation of other people, who can be family members, friends, teachers, or professional experts, dependent upon the nature of the issue.

Analyzing and thinking through an issue in relation to its corresponding factors differs greatly from reasoning a case using the formulas of mathematic logic. This is particularly true if we treat the logical reasoning principle as the highest rule governing all realities and use it to make moral judgments. The deficiency of using logical reasoning as the highest principle by which to make moral judgments can be illustrated by the following discussion.

Next, we consider Kant's universal law vis-à-vis the caring theorists' idea of interconnected relationships and interdependent natures: Kant himself does not explicitly provide a clear definition of universal law, which he sometimes calls pure reason but in moral philosophy names "pure practical reason." This pure practical reason is equivalent to the maxim or injunction to "[a]ct only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law" (xviii). This maxim is practical because in Kant's view, humans are rational beings with dignity. Hence, we can assume a base of human goodwill; in other words, people will follow the maxim or principle to act in accordance with the universal law. Kant's assumption of a positive human nature, though morally good, is too vague, and overlooks the powerful influence of social and political environment. Hence, later rational philosophers, such as Rawls and Ayer, bring in concrete content to interpret the universal law of pure reason. In Rawls's theory of political autonomy, he conceives that Kant's pure reason is similar to constitutional law, which requires a politician to bracket his/her original position, (i.e.,

his/her personal bias) and focuses on establishing fair procedure. For Rawls, since the fair procedure is preserved from the encroachment of personal interests, it is identical to Kant's pure reason, which is free from personal desire.

Ayer, on the other hand, uses mathematical logic to interpret Kant's pure reason, because similar to pure reason, mathematical logic only concentrates on the logical relationship between different objects, not the empirical social and political conditions of the objects. Ayer believes that reasoning in such a way, an individual's thought will be purified from personal interests. However, both Ayer's and Rawls's views have received a lot of criticism. The major deficiencies of these two views, which apply to both, are at least twofold. First, they separate subjectivity from objectivity, and assume that the constitutional procedure or logical reasoning is like a mechanical rule, which would work as the rule prescribes regardless of who applies it—when in reality, of course human agents are fallible. Second, the emphasis on using abstraction and universalization to characterize human reality not only is insufficient to fully represent it, but also may muddle the knowledge and verification of ethical practice. Accordingly, it may cause problems, both epistemologically and practically.

Epistemologically, the single, fixed rule employed in mathematical/pure logical reasoning model confines students' views only to a very narrow kind, i.e. the logical consistency and a clear-cut normative true or false judgment. As such, each student's worldview is developed in a very narrow way, which does not have the capacity and flexibility to accept the complexity, diversity and plurality of social realities and human empirical conditions. In a society that emphasizes liberal democracy, multi-cultures and globalization as the inevitable trend, people's lives are diversified. We need to adopt an ethical philosophy that is both more inclusive and flexible than the model constructed by the mathematical reasoning to articulate the human ethical

life. Both Wittgenstein and Goodman say that words, sentences and language-game of defining, labeling, naming, description, depiction and the like, are linguistic instruments or verbal notational systems employed to describe, categorize, organize, judge and represent human reality and experiences. Different ways of naming, defining, ordering, categorizing, judging and so forth, will construct different worldviews. Hence, reflective thinking which teaches students to ponder an issue in relation to a particular problem contextually is a better way to prepare students to live in a diversified world, and face different kinds of challenges.

Empirically, if the view of logical reasoning goes too far, it will result not merely in anti-human nature but also in de-humanization. For this mathematical reasoning model is extracted out of a particular context. As Kant indicates, the pure logical reasoning is a pure speculation isolated from a particular temporal, spatial and physical condition. Specifically, the purely moral reasoning formula based on the rule of mathematical reasoning is different from human empirical life, and the diverse, relational social network of human reality. Originally, the goal of such pure logical reasoning aims to help human being to think and see things beyond the confinement of a particular event or daily empirical life. However, its application goes so far, as Wittgenstein points out, that it becomes *the only exclusive rule* to select, organize, arrange and determine the complex reality of human existence. As such, the mathematical reasoning is believed to be the exclusive rule that can direct and justify human ethical life. The paradoxical problem of this belief is that it is a rule taken out of the conditions of temporality, spaciality and physicality. Yet, being a human, our existence by its very nature is conditioned by temporality, spaciality, and physicality, because we have a particular body, mind-set and social relational network. Applying a formula without temporality, spaciality and physicality to order, arrange, organize and represent a human's life is equivalent to treating a human being as a being who

lives in a society where there are no other human beings around and whose life has no physical contact with and no sensible feeling toward his/her environing world and fellow beings. This obviously is not the case of human life. When we walk out of an apartment, we need to go through a door in order not to bump into a wall physically and thus suffer from physical pain. Also, when we encounter a happy, smiling face, we feel more pleasant compared to meeting an angry face. These cases show that the temporality, spaciality and physicality are all essential factual components of human life. One cannot live without these components. Although finding a way to transcend the limitation of particularity and empirical confinement provisionally is a noble goal everyone may think to fulfill, we should not entirely ignore these constitutive components and apply a rule to design a life that does not exist in the human realm. In particular, the modern education has to adopt a moral theory which is more capable of nourishing and educating our citizens to face the complex social reality in which the diverse cultures, pluralistic racial, sexual and other social realities as well as globalized factors of human reality, all come together in the same space and at the same period of time.

After comparing and examining the meanings of the three key components of Kant's vision of moral autonomy and those of the caring theorists, I here propose three tasks for constructing a neocaring theory of autonomy. The first is combining the three components of autonomy mentioned by Noddings, Meyers, Clement, and other caring theorists to form a comprehensive conceptual framework for the theory of autonomy. The three components are personal choice, reflective thinking and interconnection between individuals, and sociopolitical activity. The next task is using this conceptual framework to integrate Kant's three components of autonomy (freedom of choice, rational thinking, and universal law). This would be done by first expanding the scale of freedom of choice to include both personal and political freedom, the

latter including not just the political structures that protect personal right of choice but also the political freedom, the right to capacity, including the capacity for reflective thinking and contextualizing a particular issue in relation to social and political factors, and the right to access to basic material utilities. To put this in a different way, constitutional law should not only protect a citizen's political rights of freedom to speak and act responsibly but also ensure that the goal of freedom is not merely defined in economic terms, as by neoliberalism. At this point, I rename the first factor to "an agent's effective power of personal and political freedom."

For its part, reflective thinking should also embrace logical reasoning to contextualize issues in relation to other corresponding factors, such as in the case of Ellen's choice of career, where she needs to ponder whether her fear of blood can be overcome. Finally, the universal law should not be fixed and without grounding in any empirical reality, which is a problem with logical reasoning. Rather, it should be founded on an enhanced relational ontology that uses not only the focus on interconnection and interdependence nature to contextualize an issue with respect to its social, political and other empirical conditions, but also embraces the three elements of human existence as presented by Merleau-Ponty and Nāgārjuna.

Hence, my theory of autonomy consists of three primary components: an agent's effective power of personal and political freedom, reflective thinking, and the three elements of human existence. We see that these do not match the four components of the integrated neocaring theory— relational ontology, contextuality, caring as an activity, and a caring nature. Contextual thinking can be achieved by an autonomous agent engaging in reflective thinking with an awareness of interdependence, as discussed above. Yet the components of a caring nature and caring as an activity are still missing.

Hence, I propose to add one more component to my theory of autonomy, that is, a caring mind of loving-kindness. I use this term rather than “a caring nature,” as in Noddings, in order to avoid two sorts of confusion. The first is that traditionally, scholars, including educators and philosophers, have tended to believe that human nature is either rational or caring, not both. For instance, whereas Kant and Rawls assume that human nature is rational, Noddings and Held hold that human nature is caring. However, many empirical studies show that human nature incorporates both rational and empathetic elements, and can be influenced and shaped by social and educational environment to become pro- or anti-social. Kohlberg’s work on moral development is a case in point. Hence, I deliberately choose the term to emphasize that a caring mind of loving-kindness needs to be nurtured by parents’ love and a caring social and educational environment. It is not an in-born feature that an individual naturally possesses. By taking this approach, I want to avoid the error that both rational philosophy and caring theory often commit when discussing moral issues, that is, they take either a rational or caring mind for granted without considering how to nurture and cultivate it.

The second confusion that I intend to avoid involves the meaning of the term “caring”. In my view, “caring” indicates a caring mind based upon loving-kindness, or the will to respond to, attend to, and care for others as well as engage in social and political activities. It shares the basic meaning of Noddings’s vision of care, encompassing responsiveness, relatedness, and responsibility. Yet the caring mind is grounded upon loving-kindness rather than any kind of emotion. Hence, my theory of autonomy consists of four components: an agent’s effective power of personal and political freedom, reflective thinking, interconnection and interdependence, and a caring mind.

One may ask why the theory of autonomy needs to encompass a caring mind? After all, autonomy is a personal matter, not a public affair. I add this component, not only because the fabric of human reality is a synthesized field of affectivity and rationality, but also because if we really care about our quality of life and establishing a caring society, a caring and kind heart is a prerequisite component that our citizens will have to cultivate. On this issue and the differences that neocaring theory of autonomy will make compared to rational moral philosophy will be discussed further in next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION—DIFFERENCES, RECAP, CONTRIBUTION, AND FUTURE STUDY

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way to form a theory of autonomy based on the unified neocaring theory and Kant's moral autonomy. I used the three characteristics of the enhanced relational ontology (or relational foundation) evident in human existence as presented by Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies as a conceptual framework to advance my discussion. Using the first characteristic, the concept that the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the private and the public, as well as affectivity and rationality, my thesis proposes a new theory of autonomy with four major components. They are: effective power of personal and political freedom, reflective thinking, relational ontology and a caring mind of lovingkindness.

In this chapter, I will conclude my thesis by showing the differences that my theory of autonomy will make, compared to that of Kant with respect to the problems emerging from the modern information technologies age (or digital age). I will also demonstrate the difference the neocaring theory of autonomy will make compared to that of neoliberalism regarding administering higher education. First, I will use the other two characteristics of human existence: life is an ongoing process of synthesizing and becoming, and that human agent and sociopolitical activity are mutually conditioned and interdependent on each other, as the conceptual frameworks to discuss these two issues. Then, I will summarize the gist of my thesis. Lastly, I will briefly articulate the contributions of my thesis, and my future plan of study.

Human life is an Ongoing Process of Synthesizing and Becoming

The second characteristic of human existence is that human life is an ongoing process of synthesizing and becoming. This means that an individual is moving forward as (s)he ages. Similarly, the society we inhabit is forever changing. Accordingly, we will face different challenges in different phases of life. Nowadays the most noticeable challenge comes from the utilization of information technologies, including computers, cell phones, and other digital devices. Kate Williams and Abdul Alkalimat's⁴⁸ research shows that in 1993, the percentage of students between ages 3-18 using computers at school was only 60.6%, but in 1997, it increased to 70.8%. Now almost every student uses computers at home or school or both.

As sociology professor Manuel Castells (1999) notices, the material foundations of human life, time, and space are altered by information technologies.⁴⁹ These changes mentioned by Castells can be detected in our daily life. For instance, very few people now still use traditional mail to send a letter to a friend. Instead, they use email, which is faster and cheaper. Also, people do not just go to the mall to buy clothes and other things. They do online shopping. For our research, we use more and more electronic resources, such as e-books, e-journals, online databases and so forth. People even make friends through chat rooms, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and other online social networks. The far reaching influence of information technologies is, as Williams and Alkalimat point out, that now if one can't send an email or browse the web, (s)he is like "the person in the age of print who had to sign their name with an

⁴⁸ See Castells, Manuel, *Shaping the Network Society: the New Role of Civil society in Cyberspace*. ed. By Douglas Schuler and Peter Day (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004), 87.

⁴⁹ I use the term information technologies in a broad sense. The knowledge and skill to access and utilize the information technologies, including the acquisition, processing, and storage of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information created by digital technology (such as computer, or electronic database and repertoire), not only can shape and define the development of an individual's life and career, but also affect the creation and distribution of resources.

X.”⁵⁰ Moreover, a lot of new terminology has created thanks to the popularity of using information technologies in our daily life. This terminology consists of words like “cyberspace,” “cyberpower,” “cyberbully,” “cyber-cafe,” “e-school,” “e-learning,” “e-banking” and more. We even have a new word for citizens who go online frequently, that is, “netizens”.

Sending email, shopping online, and making friends through Facebook not only save time, but also take place in a new space that goes beyond geographical boundaries, and spans across nations and the globe. This space is either called “cyberspace” or “space of flows” (Castells’ term). “Cyberspace” indicates “the global network of interdependent information technology infrastructures, telecommunications networks and computer processing systems.”⁵¹ It is called space because it provides a place for individuals “to interact, exchange ideas, share information, provide social support, conduct business, direct actions, create artistic media, play games, engage in political discussion, and so on”(ibid.). With the emergence of cyberspace, a new form of power named cyberpower is born. Cyberpower, according to Williams and Alkalimat,⁵² is similar to e-commerce, which indicates what businesses, coders and consumers are doing online, and the way in which many more people are directed to go online to shop or do business. Accordingly, “millions are now buying and selling online, with the goods delivered in the real world” (ibid.). Williams and Alkalimat say that the online power that directs and mobilizes us to shop online is called cyberpower, which is analogous to e-commerce, because “when we wield cyberpower, the ‘goods,’ i.e., ‘powers’, are delivered in the real world, in a

⁵⁰ See Kate Williams, Alkalimat and Abdul Alkalimat, “Cyberpower,” Public Sphere Project, accessed November 2011, <http://publicsphereproject.org/drupal/node/224>.

⁵¹ See “Cyberspace”, *Cyberculture: the Key Concepts*, ed. David bell, Brian D. Loader, Nicholans Pleace and Douglas Schuler, (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵² See Kate Williams, Alkalimat and Abdul Alkalimat, “Cyberpower.” Public Sphere Project, accessed November 2011, <http://publicsphereproject.org/drupal/node/224>.

cycle from actual to virtual to actual” (ibid.). This shows that although cyberspace is a virtual space, it has the power to move people to act, to do business, express political opinion, build social networks and so forth. Consequently, many new social and political problems appear, such as the digital divide, computer illiteracy and so on; and particularly, freedom of autonomous expression on the Internet.

As Castells (1999, 364) observes, the emergence of the space of flows (cyberspace is one of the elements) give more spaces, tools and powers to an individual and people in general for autonomous expression.⁵³ This autonomous expression can be seen in five dimensions. First, people use the net for personal interaction via electronic mail, joining chat groups, participating in multidimensional communication, delivering cultural expressions of all kinds, or building their own websites. Second, people go online for purposive and horizontal communication, which is not just for the casual expression of personal feelings and communication as the first expression. Rather, this communication occurs “among people and across countries, and establishes information systems.” This type of expression also includes gossiping and spreading irresponsible information. Third, people bring together their resources to live and to survive. Castells says that the senior net in the United States does not merely gather information (e.g., medical information to counter the monopoly of medical information by doctors) and resources for senior citizens, it also develops ties between seniors, and reinforces a group to which all of us belong or will belong. Fourth, people use the net to rally social movements. Occupy Wall Street

⁵³ The space of flows is defined as the material arrangements which “allow for simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity.” It is made up of not only “a technological infrastructure of information systems, telecommunications, and transportation lines,” but also nodes and hubs of network as well as those who operate the networks and electronic spaces such as website, spaces of interaction, and spaces of one-directional communication. The capacity and characteristics of the infrastructure, the location and technician and other elements would determine the functions of the space of flows, and its relationship to other spatial forms and processes (Castells, 364).

is a case in point.⁵⁴ This movement gathered people from across America to spread the news, thanks to the use of the Internet, media, cell phones and the like. Fifth, people use the net to create a connection between citizens and an institution. The example given by Castells is the 1986 Santa Monica's PEN (the Public Electronic Network)⁵⁵ program, which allowed public debate between citizens; the debates usually focus on major issues, such as homelessness, in Santa Monica (366-389).

However, these autonomous expressions posted on the Internet are not always positive. Sometimes irresponsible posting may cause social problems or crime. The instance that catches a lot of attention is teenagers' cyberbullying because it takes bullying to a new level, one that has never before occurred in history.⁵⁶ The cases are many, so I will present just one. Several years ago, a group of teenagers posted a violent video on YouTube, which in turn, caused other teenagers to violently bully their classmates simply for the sake of videotaping the scene and post it on YouTube.⁵⁷ Another problem is the posting of irresponsible messages. A website named "Campus juice", "urges college students nationwide to 'give us the juice.'"⁵⁸ This caused a lot of problems because of irresponsible rumors started by anonymous authors who gossiped about classmates' sexual lives. Later, this website was closed down. Child pornography is

⁵⁴ See "New York city general assembly," Occupy Wall Street, accessed April 2, 2012, <http://www.nycga.net/>; and "Occupy and Anarchism's Gift of Democracy," *the Guardian*, posted on November 15, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/nov/15/occupy-anarchism-gift-democracy>.

⁵⁵ Details of the PEN project can be found in "The PEN Project in Santa Monica: Interactive communication, Equality, and Political Action." by Everett M. Rogers, Lori Collins-Jarvis and Joseph Schmitz.

⁵⁶ "Violent Videos on Youtube: Has it gone Too Far?" *The Daily Mind*, accessed November 16, 2011. <http://www.thedailymind.com/deeper-thinking/violent-videos-on-youtube-has-it-gone-too-far/>.

⁵⁷ Mathew Jaffe, "Group Looks to 'Cyberarmy' to Stop Violent Videos." Last modified April 15, 2008. <http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/story?id=4650695&page=1#.TrgcvWHLnfk>.

⁵⁸ Raw Fisher, "The Campus Juice On Juicycampus.com," *The Washington Post*. Accessed November, 2011. http://voices.washingtonpost.com/rawfisher/2008/03/the_campus_juice_on_juicycampu_1.html.

another controversial issue. Some people suggest shutting it down, whereas others say that it is not a crime. These are some of the social and political problems that have emerged in the digital age regarding the issue of autonomy, including autonomous expression, and the problems that come along accordingly.

The Difference the Neocaring Theory of Autonomy Can Make on Both the Personal and the Community Level

How should we face these challenges, and what difference will the neocaring theory of autonomy make in solving problems compared to rational notions of autonomy? Should we just do as neoliberals say and withhold interference, or, as Rawls' autonomy of procedure implies, control the web, or, as Kant's moral autonomy proposes—let the human agents think rationally and follow universal law? Both neoliberalism and Rawls' web-control are out of question, because the former maintains that we should turn a blind eye to emerging social problems by non-interference; whereas the latter proposes to stop an unstoppable trend, i.e., the development of technologies. Nor does Kant's moral autonomy effectively solve the problem. I would contend that nurturing a caring mind and reflective thinking, grounded in the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence, is a more effective approach than Kant's moral autonomy as we face challenges and turn technology into a positive resource for human development.

Differences compared to Kant's rational philosophy

A person using reflective thinking with a caring mind approaches a problem differently than someone with a rational mind simply based on logical reasoning. Although in ordinary

language, people may use reflective thinking as an interchangeable term for rational thinking, according to my study, these two terms connote different meanings. Reflective thinking indicates a reasoning process that contextualizes a particular issue according to personal conditions as well as the interconnection and interdependent relations between an individual and surrounding social and political activity. Kant's rational thinking, on the other hand, refers to a reasoning process that follows a rule or principle set up by practical pure reason, which "[a]cts only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law" (xviii). These two are different in terms of practical implications for our daily practice. For example, Noddings indicates that if a student complains that learning mathematics is boring and difficult, a teacher might take notice and ask what makes it boring, helping the student to learn in a different way. The teacher's reaction to the student's complaint is a process of a reflective thinking with a caring mind. A teacher who takes the rational thinking approach would follow pre-set rules or principles to tackle the problem, and would most likely ignore the student's complaint by asking the student to work harder to make him/herself familiar with the subject. From the above example, we can see a teacher thinking reflectively with a caring mind acts differently from a teacher who simply thinks rationally and acts on a pre-set rule.

These different ways of solving a problem are particularly relevant to the age of information technologies. In this digital age, information can be out of the state or government control because different places possess different rules to supervise the web. Take child pornography as an example. As Castells points out, in many countries, posting child pornography on the web may be illegal, but this is not the case in Spain and France. Also, many scholars are inclined to propose a loose policy for supervising information posted online. These scholars, including Castells, conceive that what needs to be done is to control one's self rather than control

the net. The question is, then, in what way people can control themselves? Reflective thinking with a caring mind could provide a solution if students have developed an ability to reflect on the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence with a caring mind, they will be more careful about the messages and images that they post online. Yet, this is not the case with Kant's maxim of logical reasoning, because the opponent can argue that this is not a logical problem but a human need. The opponent may also contend that he posts pornography because he thinks that someone like him may also enjoy watching it. That is, posting a pornographic picture aligns with Kant's law of doing things that can make it universal. However, in view of neocaring theory, this argument is paradoxical and avoids the question, because this is not simply an issue of whether one thinks that something can be a universal law. Rather, it is related to the effect that websites may have on many people's lives. Hence, Kant's theory has difficulty solving the problem with logical reasoning. On the other hand, reflective thinking grounded in neocaring theory has to take relational ontology (or relational foundation) into account, and ponder the fact that the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, as well as the public and the private. By so doing, one will become more conscious of this effect, and will be self-guarded and not to display images or messages that may cause a negative effect on others. Consequently, many educational and social problems would be improved. This is because those who think reflectively with a caring mind about the interdependent nature of human existence will understand that the social networking effect is as Nan Lin explicates—even if one sits in a private room alone to design a website, post a picture or a message on the Internet, (s)he is not computing alone. Hundreds and thousands of people are on the web at the same time and may be affected by his/her posting.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Kate Williams, Alkalimat and Abdul Alkalimat, "Cyberpower." Public Sphere Project, accessed November 2011,

Alternatively put, the usage of information technologies enables individuals who know how to utilize it to possess more power, spaces, and resources with which to wield their freedom of choice. People's autonomy, thereby, is increased greatly. However, accompanying this increase in power and resources, the boundary between the public and the private, as well as subjectivity and objectivity, has become very thin. One can sit in his/her private room and support a reformative social and political event happening in another country. Or when one goes online shopping, and sends out his/her credit card number through the web, the card number may secretly be stolen by a credit card thief. So what should we do to maintain our autonomy and not be overwhelmed by the information posted online? Self-awareness and self-guardedness are two of the most important keys to solve this problem. Yet, as my thesis demonstrated before, rationality based upon logical reasoning is insufficient to make one conscious enough and willing enough to self-guard. Rather, it is a caring mind with reflective thinking, grounded in the interconnected and interdependent nature of human life that can provide a better solution. Why? Is there any evidence that supports this theory?

Many empirical researchers who study the development of children's prosocial personalities support my view, although they do not provide the direct evidence. These studies found that parents' and teachers' warm support and care can help a student to develop a prosocial personality. This personality, including a caring mind, will lead to prosocial behaviors, such as being friendly, willing to help others, and acting as a volunteer or giving donations to a charity. Alternatively put, a child who has been nurtured in a caring environment, be it a family or a school, will also grow up with a caring mind and do good things for society. A collective

research paper entitled “Effects of a Social-Emotional and Character Development Program on the Trajectory of Behaviors Associated with Social-Emotional and Character Development: Findings from Three Randomized Trials” reveals that the positive action (PA) program provides new insights on preventive interventions that can affect “the development of positive cognitive, emotional and behavioral characteristic in school-aged children.” The PA program is a school-based social-emotional and character development program, which indicates that “[c]hildren begin a cycle of reinforcement in which positive thoughts lead to positive behaviors that generate positive feelings about self, which, in turn, lead to more positive thoughts and behaviors.” The study is used to evaluate effects on the developmental trajectory of social-emotional and character-related behaviors by using data from three school-based randomized trials in elementary schools. The data consist of: (1) 4 years of data from students in 20 Hawai’i schools; (2) 3 years of data from students in 14 schools in Chicago; and (3) 3 years of data from students in 8 schools in a southeastern state. The results are derived from the analysis of random intercept, multilevel, and growth-curve analyses. They show that although students in both control and PA schools exhibited a general decline in the number of positive behaviors associated with social-emotional and character development that were endorsed, schools using the PA intervention significantly reduced these declines in all three trials.⁶⁰ Moreover, the decrease in positive behaviors, according to the researchers’ observation, may be caused by the fact that these schools are located in a high risk area (a poverty zone). These findings indicate that the positive action of intervention, at the very least, helps to reduce negative behaviors in those PA program schools.

⁶⁰ See Isaac J. Washburn , Alan Acock, Sam Vuchinich, Frank Snyder, Kin-Kit Li, Peter Ji, Joseph Day, David DuBois, Brian R. Flay, “Effects of a Social-Emotional and Character Development Program on the Trajectory of Behaviors Associated with Social-Emotional and Character Development: Findings from Three Randomized Trials” *Prev Sci* no. 12, (July 2011):314–323 .

At best, this may show positive intervention improving students' behavior, pro-social character and academic achievement, as other empirical studies reveal (ibid.).

Another article entitled “Turning It Around for All Youth; From Risk to Resilience” presented by ERIC Development Team⁶¹ also presents similar positive evidence regarding those students who grow up in a disadvantaged family or social environment. This article summarizes a growing body of international, cross-cultural, and longitudinal studies (some of these studies follow individuals over the course of a lifespan), finding that “between half and two-thirds of children growing up in families with mentally ill, alcoholic, abusive, or criminally involved parents or in poverty-stricken or war-torn communities can overcome their hardship and manifest “resilience”⁶² through the support of proper positive, interactive factors, such as caring relationships, expectations, and opportunities for participation. The resilience of these children indicates competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose (2). This example shows that even children who grow up in a disadvantaged family or social environment can be nurtured by loving care to become good citizens because of their development of a prosocial personality.

From the above empirical studies, we can observe similar findings. That is, a child nurtured by loving care to possess a prosocial personality will care for people and society rather than doing things that have a negative impact on others. It is based on these and other similar

⁶¹ See Bonnie Benard, “Turning It Around for All Youth; From Risk to Resilience,” *ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education*, (New York, 1997). A brief summary can be seen at <http://bern.library.nenu.edu.cn/upload/soft/0-article/+024/24141.pdf>. *ERIC*, is the abbreviation of Education Resources Information Center. See <http://www.galileo.usg.edu/scholar/databases/zeri/?Welcome>.

⁶² The term resilience refers to a set of qualities that “foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity.” www.eric.ed.gov, 2.

evidence⁶³ that my thesis argues that an individual with a caring mind when thinking reflectively about the interconnected nature of their behaviors, including how posting a message or image online may influence others, (s)he will be less likely to post violent videos or improper sexual images on the web. In fact, this positive aspect of the neocaring theory of autonomy is not limited to an individual. Rather, it becomes even stronger when the theory is used on the level of community or a society.

Take the influence of community informatics in the digital age as an example. As I mentioned in the previous section, information technologies provide more space, power, tools and resources for citizens to exercise autonomous freedom. Yet, this is only true when social and political policies develop citizens' knowledge and capability to use them. Otherwise, powerful tools and resources not only do not improve citizens' lives but also deepen the gap between the powerful and the powerless as well as the rich and the poor.

Michael Gurtein⁶⁴ observes that community informatics (CI) aims to enable disadvantaged communities to have the advantage of access to the same computing power that a government, military, or big cooperation has in the digital age. Thereby, hundreds and thousands of Community Information Centers (CTCs or Tele Centers) have been established for delivering government services, healthcare services, banking services and so on, to marginalized populations. This aims to empower local community information, communication and technology to go beyond the digital divide and to improve civic participation, social economic development and other social provisions. Yet, Gurstein found that although the primary

⁶³ See also Gustavo Carle et al. "The Longitudinal Relations Among Dimensions of Parenting Styles, Sympathy, Prosocial Moral Reasoning, and Prosocial Behaviors" *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 35(2) 116-124.

⁶⁴ See Michael Gurstein, "Community Informatics," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWpFiebFRDI>. This is a lecture presented at the University of British Columbia in Canada.

provision of Internet access, information management and resources on a grassroots level is very good for local development and enablement, sometimes, it goes the other way around, because those who provide open data resources never ask “who is this data for?” or “how this data be used?” For a technology expert, the use of data may be easy, but it is not so for those citizens who are unfamiliar with technology. Accordingly, open resources are used by the rich to create a bigger gap between the poor and the rich, or between those who have information and those who have not. Gurstein illustrates this point by saying that the process of digitalizing the land data in India became a process of land grasping for the rich. This is because the rich understand technology, or have the money to hire experts to improve their position, but the poor don’t. The result of this divide could be very severe and further widen the gap of the digital divide. In other words, this may lead to what Castell calls a “dual city,” a city where people in the business district take advantage of digital resources and create prosperity, while people in rural areas still live in the poverty and are unaware of these resources. This situation could also lead to what William and Alkalimat point out when they say that digital inequality can affect people as older inequalities have, such as poverty, oppression, discrimination, and exclusion. In fact, “the new tools are so powerful that not using them sets individuals, groups and communities even further back.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, if a government or those who provide open resources can carry out their projects with a caring mind of lovingkindness, and think reflectively about how to help these who are unfamiliar with technologies, the open resources they provide can help the

⁶⁵ Kate Williams, Alkalimat and Abdul Alkalimat, “Cyberpower.” Public Sphere Project, accessed November 2011, <http://publicsphereproject.org/drupal/node/224>.

disadvantaged people greatly. The UCLA Center for Health Policy Research⁶⁶ mentioned by Gurstein is a case in point. This center not only provides resources on asthma, but also posts how to use the factors and statistics that cause asthma in low-income areas. People who live in these areas, therefore, can use these resources to ask for compensation and the improvement of their environment. This example clearly illustrates that a human with a caring mind and ability to reflect will think contextually to provide information technologies resources. By so doing, these resources are more helpful for people using them, particularly for those who are underserved. In this way, the gap between the poor and the rich, or those who have and who have-not, is improved, because open resources can really be used by the public, and technology is used to perform social justice. The core factors that make these differences again are a caring mind and reflective thinking on the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence, that is, the core components of the neocaring theory of autonomy.

Human Social and Political Practices, and Human Agents are Mutually Conditioned and Supplementary

Differences from Neoliberalism's Personal Autonomy

Another difference that the new theory of autonomy can make is by interrogating neoliberalism's theory of autonomy. The autonomy of non-interference regarding social, economic, and political activities is one of the foremost theories of neoliberalism. The reason for

⁶⁶ See Gwendolyn Driscoll, "Asthma disproportionately affects low-income Populations," Building Knowledge, Informing Policy, Improving Health. Last modified on December 16, 2010. <http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/NewsReleaseDetails.aspx?id=71>.

this is as Fernando I Levia⁶⁷ points out that neoliberalism applies the framework of laissez-faire and a circular ideological principle to form social and political theory. This circular principle is that “society does not exist. It exists for individual man and woman” (ibid.). Hence, one is entitled to maximize self-interest. Moreover, “personal freedom leads to economic efficiency, and economic efficiency requires unregulated market” (ibid.). If we allow free trade and free markets, everybody will benefit. Also, the freedom of personal economic decisions should not be interfered with by politics. Alternatively put, neoliberalism’s theory of autonomy is primarily founded on three components: privatization, deregulation, and marketization. That is, the theory aims to deregulate governmental supervision, promote privatizing public institutions and enhance business markets. Originally, neoliberalism’s goals focused on economic development, but as Wendy Brown notices, its political and cultural effects expanded to become “a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship.”⁶⁸ Brown explains that neoliberalism is not confined to the economic sphere. Rather, it depicts free markets, free trade, and entrepreneurial rationality as *achieved and normative*, which maintains that “the state itself must construct and construe itself in market terms, as well as develop policies and promulgate a political culture that figures citizens exhaustively as rational economic actors in every sphere of life.” Accordingly, every area of society employs a “criteria of productivity and profitability,” and “governance talk increasingly becomes market speak, businesspersons replace lawyers as the governing class in liberal

⁶⁷See Wendy Brown, “Save the University: Wendy Brown, Part 6,” accessed March 4, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=aR4xYBGdQgw>. This is a short talk given by Brown at UC Berkeley.

⁶⁸Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare; Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory* (34), (2006): 693.

democracies, and business norms replace juridical principles” (38). The privatization of a university mentioned by Brown clearly illustrates the case in point.

Brown, in her talk “Save the University,” given at UC Berkeley, mentions the factors that contribute to the problems in applying neoliberalism’s theory of autonomy to public practice, such as in the case of privatizing and administrating a university (*ibid.*). Brown says that privatization means many things, including replacing public funding with increasing student fees, the growth of sponsorship of corporations for academic research, reliance more on endorsement of stock and markets and so forth. It essentially transforms a public institution from “its public support for the public service to one that serves its product to consumers,” be they students or investors who purchase research results. In this way, a public university, which was founded to promote the common good, equality, inclusiveness, and the ability of human development is converted to an institution that is tied to entrepreneurship and capital appreciation. Also, it becomes an institute governed by a hierarchical organization and commodifiable ability. Consequently, several phenomena emerge in the privatization of a university. Brown’s talk lists ten. Here I only summarize relevant part.

First, privatization involves a decreasing commitment to education of the best local students, and causes an institution to be increasingly driven by purchasing power. This is a turn away from equal opportunity, it ignoring the people that public education was meant to serve. It also fails to generate social equality and justice through education.

Second, privatization entails increasing inequality in every aspect of the university, and diminishing a sense of shared purpose within the university. This can be seen in the huge unprecedented differences in salary across faculty within and between departments, as well as in

the distribution of departmental financial resources, and graduate funding packages. This overlooks the principles of diverse teaching and the need for all the departments to depend on each other and work within the university as whole. The fact is that some departmental research requires expensive labs or field work whereas others only need a library. It is only when the university apprehends the shared purpose that this balance can be maintained and accommodated. Yet, this purpose is entirely undone by entrepreneurialism across campus.

Third, privatization decreases support for curricula and research that are not applicable and commodifiable, such as those in the humanities, social sciences and physical sciences. Privatization also means research gradually comes to buy and cooperate with state funders. Consequently, academic research is not just geared toward its sponsors, but often risks compromise and corruption due to the need to serve and attract sponsors. Harvard medical school scandal is a case in point.⁶⁹

Fourth, privatization means restricting academic freedom on many levels, from free range of imagination and innovation to literally silencing faculty who are seen as standing in the way of obtaining the financial support of a private donor. Brown says that several years ago, during the British Petroleum Company (BP) controversy, the president of UC Berkeley privately warned a young faculty member that if he continued to object to the BP deal, he would discredit him and harm his future career.

Fifth, privatization means that education increasingly organizes its instructional delivery systems to generate human capital. Yet, this instruction does not aim to nurture students to become develop, widen, or deepen their minds with new perspectives, historical consciousness,

⁶⁹ See John Hilton. "Harvard Medical School in Ethics Quandary," *The New York Times*. Published March 2, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/03/business/03medschool.html?pagewanted=all>.

diverse knowledge and with literacy. Rather, it is designed to produce machine-like human capital that generates new bits and links.

If we apply the four components of autonomy founded on neocaring theory to interrogate these phenomena due to the privatization of a university produced by neoliberalism's theory of autonomy, many differences may be pointed out.

First, the effective power of personal and political freedom: neoliberalism not only restricts academic freedom on personal level but also on administrative (i.e., political) level, including the organization for a university's curriculum, recruitment of students and faculties, an increase in support of marketable subjects and a decrease in support for the humanities, social science, basic research and so forth. Alternatively put, neoliberalism's theory of autonomy exclusively focuses on prioritizing big corporations' freedom of management, organization and decision making, but ignore the rights and freedom of students, faculty and academic research. However, as my previous chapter demonstrated, human autonomy cannot be fulfilled if a theory concentrates exclusively on objective factors, especially only in economic terms. An authentic autonomy requires the development of a human agent's capability, knowledge and caring mind, as well as the freedom of making decisions on a political (i.e., administrative) level. Yet, this is clearly not the case in neoliberalism's privatization of the university. As opposed to neoliberalism, the neocaring theory of autonomy, in my view, would pay attention to fostering students' and faculties' academic freedom and provide room for them to develop critical, reflective thinking and a caring mind. Also, it would respect research freedom, and encourage public education to serve the common good and pay attention to social justice. After all, the wellbeing of humans is one of the foremost concerns of the neocaring theory.

Second, in neocaring theory, reflective thinking is defined as: thinking reflectively with a caring mind of lovingkindness based on the interconnected and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. As Noddings and Gilligan indicate, that personhood in reality is the existence of a social self whose life involves not simply oneself, but also family, friends and other people. Tronto, Hankivsky, and Held also point out that an individual's self-identity is closely related to his/her social status, and to the political organization and activity in which (s)he participates. Hence, a theory of autonomy cannot be formed based on an isolated image of a self-agency. Rather, it has to be situated in relation to the interconnection and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity as well as to the three characteristics of human existence mentioned by both Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies. These three characteristics are: the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, as well as affectivity and rationality; human life as an on-going process of synthesizing and becoming; and human life is a dialectic process of mutually conditioning and defining of human agents and sociopolitical activity. I think this is why Noddings, Clement, Mayers and Sen suggest that a positive sense of the theory of autonomy has to embrace the cultivation of an agent's capacity for autonomous thinking with respect to what (s)he wants to do, and what (s)he considers to be significant and meaningful for both her/him and others. In other words, the theory of autonomy would nurture an individual to become a thinker who can think reflectively with a caring mind based on the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence, specifically, (s)he will think reflectively with a caring mind about the way in which a sociopolitical activity is good for both an individual and the society as a whole.

However, in the aforementioned example of privatizing a university via neoliberal theory, neither human agents, i.e. students, nor the public wellbeing, is a core concern. The core concern lays in marketizing the university and making profit from students and the public. Moreover, the educational goal here does not aim to nurture a thinker or a student who cares about public wellbeing, equality and social justice. Rather, financial support is decreased for those subjects that are not profitable, such as the humanities, arts, social sciences and physical science research. Ironically, these subjects are essential for cultivating students' imagination, creativity, and reflective thinking as well as for developing knowledge and research capability. In addition, instead of promoting the public values of social justice and equality, neoliberalism's management and administration highlights disparities in the salary of faculties, unequal distribution of graduate funding packages and departmental financial resources. Also, the results of research are not used to serve the public good, but rather to help a sponsor's to make money.

Third, a caring mind: a caring mind in my terminology refers to a caring mind of lovingkindness. It is the fountain spring of humanness and humanity, involving not only affectivity but also reflective thinking. This reflective and caring mind would keep a balance between personal freedom of autonomy and the welfare of the public. An individual would think contextually with respect to the way in which his or her behavior contributes positively and constructively to her/himself as well as a society. This is because the individual is conscious of the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence and the mutually conditioned and supplementary nature of personhood and society as a whole. Hence, neocaring theory pays attention to the nurturing of an individual's potential, capability, caring mind, and the development of society. This is not simply because humans are diverse in their talents and

personalities. More importantly, human existence and development need resources for the enhancement of humanity and technology development. The development of technology and scientific research will be greatly confined without agents' capability for imagination, creativity, and conceptualization, which are primarily trained through the humanities, arts education and the social sciences. Some empirical studies show that arts education can nurture not only students' creativity and imagination but also their sense of temporality and spatiality. These capacities, in turn, can either increase a student's IQ or his/her capability to carry out scientific research.⁷⁰ Similarly, in a digital age, video for game design and film creation both require technology, a knowledge of artist design, and a capability for creativity, imagination, conceptualization as well as the rich culture derived from the research carried out within these subjects. Without the help of these subjects, both technological and scientific research would be limited and lose its objective and significance, because they are the tools resources for the improvement of humanity and the public wellbeing. Without the humanities, arts, and the social sciences, research would only be manipulated by a few big corporations to make money, rather than being used for the wellbeing of the public and social justice. The abovementioned BP deal is a case in point. Hence, it is reasonable to say that neoliberalism's educational goal of making profitability and marketization is too narrow to appreciate the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence. The outcome of following neoliberalism's policy can only benefit a few big corporations but not the society as a whole. In the short term, it may look good, but in the long run, as Brown (2005) notices, this policy will deracinate a society, decimate a cultural heritage, deplete resources and destroy the environment (38).

⁷⁰ See Wilfried Gruhn and Frances H. Rauscher (eds.), *Neurosciences in Music Pedagogy*. (New York: Nova Science Press, 2008); and other Rauscher's writings posted at <http://www.uwosh.edu/departments/psychology/rauscher.htm>.

Fourth, the interconnected and interdependent nature of human agents and sociopolitical reality: I have explained the meaning of interconnection and interdependence at the outset of this section. Now, let's take the relation between citizens and a democratic society as example. In America, adult citizens can vote for their ideal political leaders, i.e., the president or the prime minister. Yet, there are countries, such as North Korea and Burma where political leaders are not chosen by citizens. Rather, leadership is inherited from the leader's father (North Korea) or assigned by the political party in power (Burma). This example reveals two implications regarding the relation between citizens and a particular political system: first, different political systems have the power to condition and define to what extent their citizens can exercise their rights, such as whether they can choose their political leader. Second, on the other hand, in a democratic society, adult citizens have elective rights to choose their political leader, that is, they possess the power to shape and define the development of their country. These two implications illustrate the interconnected and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity. In fact, interconnected and interdependent nature is deeper than what I just said. As Nāgārjuna has shown previously, human life cannot function without a reliance on the epistemological and ontological dependence between other people and things that co-exist in the same society. Epistemologically, humans can communicate with each other because we share languages and concepts that are encoded with terms of mutual reference, such as "long" and "short", "parents" and "children". If no term means "short", the term "long" would be meaningless. Ontologically, a child cannot grow up properly without substantial nutrition and proper education and socialization, let alone parents, who give birth to the child. This implies that both the nature and fabric of human life are synthesized fields constituted by components related to both humans and substantial resources in the world. Hence, humans cannot exist without a dependence on the

things and people who co-exist in the same society. Yet, our interdependent nature and interconnection are overlooked by neoliberalism because its political theory claims that there is no society, only men and women as individuals. Consequently, neoliberalism emphasizes personal freedom and conceives that everyone should take care of him/herself but not others. Also, it states that if we let everyone decide and choose what they want to do without interference, we will be able to work effectively.

However, this is a paradoxical view because if one only cares about oneself and indeed does the things one wants to do is a more effective way, why do we need to organize a company, and set up rules for employees? Why can an employee freely choose what (s)he prefers to do? Also, why does a big corporation hire many employees instead of its owner operating the business alone? More importantly, why do big corporations interfere with the administrative affairs of a university which (s)he gives financial support, and restricts the research freedom of students and faculty, if individuals, such as students as professors, are allowed to make choices and their decisions are more productive and effective? If we use these questions to interrogate the social, economic and political activities founded on neoliberalism's theory of autonomy, we can see that the practices of neoliberals rarely follow the rules they have established. Why? Is it because neoliberalism itself is aware that those rules are not valid for the public but only good for deregulating governmental supervision? All these questions reveal the untenable nature of neoliberalism's theory of personal autonomy. On the other hand, these questions also show that a better theory to characterize human existence has to consider interconnection and our interdependent nature. Hence, the social, economic and political theory of autonomy cannot

work effectively without taking the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence into account as the neocaring theory of autonomy does.

In fact, much empirical evidence discloses the downfall of neoliberalism's theory, which ignores the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence. Gar Alperovitz, the author of *America beyond Neoliberalism*, notices that "[t]he 'occupations (of Wall Street)' now building around the country (America) are a necessary and justified response to the outrages of a political-economic system that substitutes posturing for decision-making, and looks the other way as the top 1 percent runs off with almost a fourth of the nation's income and more wealth than the bottom 90 percent together." With 1% of population possessing more financial resources than those of 90% population together, American democracy cannot work well. Alperovitz says that, thanks to the shortcomings of neoliberal theory, more and more people tend to accept shared small ownership, rather than instead of letting a few big corporations dominate the business market.⁷¹ Now more than 50% of young Americans under the age of 30 no longer believe in capitalism (ibid.). Instead, they are seeking to de-construct corporate ownership and adopt the shared ownership of a community. For instance, in the last three decades, "more workers have become owners of their own companies than are members of unions in the private sector."⁷² In fact, the number has increased to more than 5 million people now. In addition, there are more than 4,500 nonprofit community development corporations that operate affordable

⁷¹ See Gar Alperovitz, "Worker-Owners of America, Unite!," last modified December 14, 2011. <http://www.garalperovitz.com/>. Also see "Gar Alperovitz discusses *America Beyond Capitalism*," February 26, 2012, <http://will.illinois.edu/mediamatters>.

⁷² See Gar Alperovitz, "Capitalism Fading in the Evolutionary Revolution," last modified November 7, 2011. <http://www.garalperovitz.com/2011/11/capitalism-fading-in-the-evolutionary-revolution/#more-538>.

housing and other neighborhood programs, and approximately 130 million Americans are members of co-ops (*ibid.*).

Both Brown's criticisms of the privatization of universities proposed by neoliberalism, and Alperovitz's observation of the young Americans' departure away from neoliberalism's policy, and incline toward shared small ownership, verify the deficiency of neoliberalism's theory of autonomy, which underscores individual freedom and ignores the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence. Specifically, those authors' talks and writings reveal that, although a big corporation has the power to condition public life, the public also has the power to shape and define the development of a big corporation, particularly, if the big corporation does not care for the public, the public in return will abandon it accordingly. This is the power of interconnected and our interdependent nature. Hence, a better social, economic and political theory of autonomy has to treat interconnection and interdependence as perquisite factors to the characterization of a theory of autonomy as the neocaring theory did in the previous chapter. This is particularly relevant to a democratic society that promotes freedom, equality and social justice, because in order to implement social, economic and political ideals of human rights, equality, and social justice, citizens must be nurtured to develop these qualities. Otherwise, social and political ideals cannot be actualized. Neoliberalism restricts research freedom and silences faculty who attend to social justice, warning, for example in the against, the young faculty member who argued against the BP deal. This illuminates that in neoliberalism's sociopolitical environment, standing firm for social justice and advocating equality are impossible. People would be forced to ignore these public virtues. In the short run, this seems to be a triumph for neoliberalism. Yet, in the long term, the damage is not limited to public values

or human agents' wellbeing. Many social and political problems would emerge as Brown's talk and Alperovitz's study demonstrated previously.

Conclusion

Recap

My thesis has taken up the debate of the (in)compatibility of caring theory with rational moral philosophy, and the way in which these two can be integrated into a more inclusive moral theory for modern education. My thesis argues and demonstrates that by unifying Noddings' caring theory and Tronto's and Hankivsky's ethic(s) of care, and then enhancing the relational ground of the unified new caring theory, it is not only compatible with rational moral philosophy, but also more inclusive and effective for tackling problems emerging from the age of information technology.

In the first chapter, my thesis reviews the debated issue, identifies the research problem and explains the methodology and philosophical framework used in this thesis. My study unveils that most caring theorists believe that their theories can either co-exist or reconcile with rational moral philosophy except Slote. Slote argues that the foundation of caring theory is incompatible with that of rational moral philosophy, because the former is empathetic caring, whereas the latter is rational thinking. Yet, a close examination of the debate and corresponding literatures reveals that Slote's argument is only partially true, because in the course of the development of this issue, many scholars from different disciplines have participated in the debate. They characterize and define caring theories in various terms. For instance, whereas Noddings and Slote focus on characterizing the subjective experience (or mental phenomena) of

caring nature, empathetic care and caring relation, Gilligan, Tronto, Held, Hankivsky and other scholars from social and political science concentrate on articulating the social and political aspects of caring theory, and define care as an activity or practice with respect to social and political policy, structure, organization and social works. Noddings often calls her theory a caring theory, whereas Tronto and Hankivsky name their theories as ethic(s) of care, although the three of them assert that these two names are interchangeable.⁷³ Hence, at least two different characterizations are presented. Slote's claim as to the incompatible foundations of caring theory and rational moral philosophy, in fact, is in line with Noddings' earlier view, which underscores caring as human nature derived from affectivity or mothering love. Yet, he fails to notice that a deeper implication for relational grounds is presented later by Noddings, Tronto and Hankivsky. This relational ground is named as "caring relation" by Noddings, and called interconnection and interdependent nature by Tronto and Hankivsky. Yet, again, Noddings and Tronto-Hankivsky define relational ground or relational ontology differently. Hence, it is necessary to delve into the contents of caring theory and ethic(s) of care before discussing whether caring theory is compatible with rational moral philosophy.

In the second chapter, my thesis picks up the discussion left by the previous chapter and focuses on two tasks: first, analyzing, and clarifying the core components involved in Noddings's, Tronto's, Hankivsky's and Held's core concepts and characterizations of caring theory; and second, based on this clarification, I identify four core components for combining Noddings's and Tronto-Hankivsky's theories to form a unified new caring theory, which I call neocaring theory. These four components are: caring nature, caring as activity or practice,

⁷³ For convenience of reference, I use caring theory to indicate Noddings' view, and utilize ethic of care to index Tronto and Hankivsky's theory in my thesis.

contextuality or motivation replacement and relational ontology. Except for caring nature, which is only mentioned by Noddings and Slote, the other three are shared among caring theorists. The first three components have been studied to a great extent, but not the fourth one (relational ground). This relational ground is one of the foremost factors that determine whether caring theory/ethic is compatible with rational moral philosophy, but it is defined using various terms. Whereas Noddings conceives it as a caring relation, Tronto and Hankivsky define it as the interconnection and interdependent nature of personhood and socio-political activity. Noddings (1984) maintains that the relational ground is a caring relation that indicates “a set of ordered pairs generated by some rules that describe the affect—or subjective experience—of the members” (3-4). It is “the special relatedness of caring” (173), that involves “[t]o receive and to be received, to care and be cared-for” (ibid). Alternatively put, in Noddings’s view caring relation is a relation in which we do meet the other morally, it arises out of natural caring, and it occurs when “we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination”(4-5). These passages clearly show that Noddings’s relational foundation characterizes the human caring relation as when people interact with each other with caring nature and love. Tronto and Hankivsky, on the other hand, refer the relational ground to the interconnection and interdependent natures, which characterize the intersection and mutual reliance of personhood and sociopolitical activity, specifically, the affect that social any political activity has on humans’ lives. Tronto says that peoples’ identities and interests are greatly shaped by the cultural, social and political societies that they are part of. Hankivsky (2004, 34 and 111-112) also contends that an individual’s identity, social status, and needs are shaped and constructed through their intersection with a range of private and public social and institutional arrangements. But she expands to include the interconnection between people as well. Hankivsky says that at different periods of our lives and

in different contexts, we alternate between the roles of care-provider and the one who is cared-for. Accordingly, “human beings are interdependent and in need of other for their growth and survival” (105). The above says that both Tronto and Hankivsky’s relational grounds indicate the interconnection and interdependence of an individual with others and with social and political activity, rather than a subjective experience of caring relation and love. That is, while characterizing the relational ground of caring theory, Noddings highlights the subjective experience but Tronto and Hankivsky emphasize the interrelatedness of personhood and sociopolitical practice.

Yet, neither Noddings nor Hankivsky notices their differences, let alone mentions how to bridge the gap between these different characterizations. Thereby, in the third chapter, I apply three characteristics of human existence derived from Merleau-Ponty’s and Nāgārjuna’s philosophies to bridge the gap between these two characterizations. These three are: first, the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private as well as affectivity and rationality; second, human life is an ongoing process of synthesizing and becoming; and third, human agents and sociopolitical activity are interconnected with and interdependent on each other. Hence, they are mutually conditioned and supplementary to each other.

Nāgārjuna’s philosophy of dependent co-arising articulates that every existence, including a person, entity or event, depends on the co-emergence of a particular major cause and its corresponding conditions. No one and nothing can exist alone without reliance on corresponding factors. For instance, one’s subjective experience and objects in the world seem to be two separated entities. Yet, Nāgārjuna points out that “[a] seer does not exist either separated or not separated from seeing. When a seer does not exist, whence can there be seeing and the object of

seeing?” (Kalupahana 1986, 137). This means that the action of seeing involves at least three factors: an agent who sees, an object perceived and the sensing faculties. If there is no agent who can see, such as if one is blind, or does not exist, where does the function of seeing come from? Similarly, if no object can be perceived, such as in an empty room, in what sense can we say that a chair is seen? Also, if a seer does not possess healthy sense faculties, such as in the case of a color blind person, how could (s)he perceive color correctly. This example illustrates that there is an interrelated and interdependent relation between the seer, his/her seeing faculty and a perceived object. In a broad sense, it indicates that our world view is formed not solely due to the existence of objective objects in the world, nor does it because we possess seeing faculty. It is rather due to the combination of subjective and objective factors that the experienced world exists. In other words, the formation of our worldview is closely interconnected to and interdependent on both subjective and objective components. This point is even clearer when Nāgārjuna says that a human’s formation of knowledge regarding the world always depends on four means of knowledge—perception, inference, recognition of likeness and testimony. These four not only make objects perceivable and understandable to us but also synthesize objects perceived into our existing knowledge system. Perception enables us to perceive objects and presents a mental image of the objects perceived. Through our inference, we then figure out the possible relation between the object perceived and its function in our lives. After perceiving it, we further make a connection between the perceived object, and those we have known by identifying the likeness between them. Lastly, we will testify on the object recently perceived, and synthesize it into our knowledge system, and mark it as a new or old object. For instance, a new mathematical problem for a child in grade school may not be a new problem for a high school student. This is because the knowledge foundations of these two students are different.

Since the acquisition of our knowledge of the world always precedes in relation to our inference, recognition of likeness and testimony, our knowledge of the world, including cultural, social, political and natural world, is impossible to be separated from one's subjective experience. Moreover, the process of synthesizing old knowledge with new is an ongoing process.

Similar to Nāgārjuna's view, Merleau-Ponty also points out that our sense experience is not an independent, subjective mental state that is separated from the outside world. In fact, the world, one's body and empirical (psychological) self together constitute the whole system of our experienced existence. Merleau-Ponty (1965) says that the social world is "not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence." Even if we may be able to turn away from the social world, we cannot cease to be situated relatively to it. Both our objective and scientific consciousness of the past, and of civilizations, would be impossible had we not learned them through the intermediary of society, our cultural world and their horizons (422). On the other hand, if we did not possess the basic knowledge structures from history relating to our society, and our culture in our experience, we would not be able to know them (422). The reason that we can understand a certain cultural environment along with behavior corresponding to it, and we can interpret the behavior, is because our experience teaches us the significance and intention of perceived gestures, and the action of others. Hence, there always exists an interconnectedness and interdependence in our subjective experience and social and cultural world. In a deeper sense, Merleau-Ponty (410) continues, as far as the others reside in the world, and are perceivable to us, they form a part of my perceptual field. The perceived other is never an Ego who is independent from my existence, and I myself alone constitute the whole world for myself. Merleau-Ponty use the communication and dialogue as an example and says that when we communication and dialogue with others, there is a constituted and shared ground

between the other person and myself. My thought and his/her thought are inter-woven into a single fabric, and our words and those with whom we communicate are called forth by the state of our discussion. These words and thoughts are inserted into a shared operation of which neither is the sole creator. “We have here a dual being, where the other is, for me, no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world” (406).

We can see that the fabric of human existence is not simply constituted by one individual, or objective social and natural factors alone. Rather, it is the participation of both the subjective experience of perceiving, inferring, recognizing and so on and the existing objective social, cultural and political world that human existence are formed. Moreover, the formation of our worldview and knowledge is an ongoing process which synthesizes new perceptions, and knowledge into our existing knowledge system. Accordingly, there is always interconnection and interdependence between an individual and the social, political and natural world, as far as we can see, hear, smell, taste and feel an object. Thereby, it is incomplete only to characterize personhood based on subjective experience alone or to define social and political activity solely based on objective factors. Nor is it correct to think that an individual’s life is always private and social and political activity is constituted only by public practices. By means of these three characteristics of human existence illustrated by Merleau-Ponty and Nāgārjuna, the relational ground for Noddings’ subjective caring relation and Tronto-Hankivsky’s social and political connection and interdependence are connected. A more inclusive relational and ontological ground for neocaring theory, thereby, is formed.

In the fourth chapter, I apply the four core components of unified neocaring theory (i.e., caring nature, care as an activity, contextuality and relational ontology), and the three characteristics of human existence found in Merleau-Ponty's and Nāgārjuna's philosophies to construct a neocaring theory of autonomy. Specifically, I use the first characteristic of human existence to argue that a more complete and inclusive theory of autonomy needs to embrace both subjective experience and objective sociopolitical activities as well as an individual's affectivity and rationality. Through reviewing caring theorists' and Sen's criticisms of rational concepts of autonomy, and a careful analysis and clarification of the different components of Kant's moral autonomy, Rawls' political procedure autonomy and neoliberalism's personal autonomy, I propose a new caring theory of autonomy, which includes four components: effective power of personal and political freedom, reflective thinking, a caring mind of lovingkindness and relational ontology.

The way for me to proceed my argument is that after comparing and examining the meanings of the three key components of Kant's vision of moral autonomy and those of the caring theorists, I propose three tasks for constructing a neocaring theory of autonomy. The first is combining the three components of autonomy mentioned by Noddings, Meyers, Clement, and other caring theorists to form a comprehensive conceptual framework for the theory of autonomy. The three components are personal choice, reflective thinking and interconnection between individuals, and sociopolitical activity. The next task is using this conceptual framework to integrate Kant's three components of autonomy (freedom of choice, rational thinking, and universal law). This was done by first expanding the scale of freedom of choice to include both personal and political freedom, the latter including not just the political structures that protect

personal right of choice but also the political freedom, the right to capacity, including the capacity for reflective thinking and contextualizing a particular issue in relation to social and political factors, and the right to access to basic material utilities. Alternatively put, constitutional law should not only protect a citizen's political rights of freedom to speak and act responsibly but also ensure that the goal of freedom is not merely defined in economic terms, as by neoliberalism. At this, I rename the first factor to "an agent's effective power of personal and political freedom."

Hence, my theory of autonomy consists of three primary components: an agent's effective power of personal and political freedom, reflective thinking, and the three elements of human existence. We see that these do not match the four components of the integrated neocaring theory—relational ontology, contextuality, caring as an activity, and a caring nature. Contextual thinking can be achieved by an autonomous agent engaging in reflective thinking with an awareness of interdependence, as discussed above. Yet the components of a caring nature and caring as an activity are still missing. Hence, I add the caring mind of lovingkindness as the fourth components of the neocaring theory of autonomy. The reason of adding the caring mind is explained in the fifth chapter. I then conclude that with these four components, this theory is not only compatible with Kant's moral autonomy, but also more inclusive and effective in tackling the new problems emerging from a digital age.

In the final chapter, I continue to apply the second characteristic of human existence (human life is an ongoing process of becoming and synthesizing), and the third characteristic (personhood and sociopolitical activity are interconnected and interdependent. Hence, they are mutually conditioned and supplementary to each other) to unveil the differences that a neocaring

theory of autonomy can make in a digital age and in the higher education compared to, first, Kant's moral autonomy, and second, to neoliberalism's personal autonomy. First, my discussion focuses on comparing the differences between applying a caring mind with reflective thinking on interconnected and interdependent nature, and Kant's rational thinking grounded on either logical reasoning or his universal laws with respect to facing emerging problems of the digital age, such as cyberbullying, and the posting of violent videos and other negative messages on the web. My finding is that an individual with a caring mind and reflective thinking, while considering the effects of the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence, would be more conscious of the effects of their online posting, and more willing to control him/herself. Accordingly, many harmful or violent messages and images will be canceled by the individual before being posted online. In addition, a caring mind and reflective thinking also provide a better way to help people to use open resources for the public wellbeing, equality and social justice. This is because if students are nurtured to possess a caring mind with reflective thinking on the interconnected and interdependent nature of personhood and sociopolitical activity, they tend to care for others and care about not doing harmful things in society. This is different from training students by logical formulas or a pre-established universal law to think rationally or abstractly to tackle problems.

Second, in contrast to neoliberalism's personal autonomy regarding administrating higher education, my thesis uses the four components of neocaring theory of autonomy to interrogate phenomena evident in the privatization of universities based upon neoliberalism's theory. The differences are that first, whereas neocaring theory emphasizes both freedom for human agent and politics, neoliberalism exclusively underscores the freedom of economic development even

at the expense of personal and political freedom, such as the restriction of student and faculty research freedom, and intervening in a university's recruitment of new students and faculty. Second, neocaring theory pays attention to nurturing a student's caring mind and reflective thinking with reference to the interconnection and interdependent nature of human existence. Accordingly, the theory suggests that an individual, while solving a problem, has to figure out a solution that is good for both oneself and the society as a whole. Neoliberal theory, conversely, maintains that one only needs to care for him/herself but not others, let alone the society as a whole. Neoliberal theory leads to the expansion of market freedom, such as with free markets, or the deregulation of governmental supervision, but it disregards social equality, justice and the development of the human capacity for creativity, imagination and reflective thinking. Lastly, in neocaring theory, both human agents and social, economic and political practices are equally important for the development of a society. Thereby, developing the human capability for imagination, creativity and reflection with a caring mind and professional knowledge is the core concern of neocaring theory. Yet, neither an ordinary individual nor the public is the concern of neoliberalism. Its chief concern is big corporations' productivity and profit. This is the reason why neoliberalism puts its educational goals only in applicable and profitable subjects, such as science and technology, but decreases support for other subjects, such as arts, humanities, social science and basic research. These three differences reveal that neoliberalism fails to see the interconnection and interdependent nature of personhood and social, economic and political activity. Accordingly, neoliberalism ignores the wellbeing of the public. This ignorance, in turn, backfires. This is as Brown (2005) notices, neoliberalism's policy in the long term leads to "social deracination, cultural decimation, long-term resource depletion, and environmental destruction" (38). Moreover, the recent Occupy Wall Street movement and the distrust of

neoliberalism shown in the majority of young Americans mentioned by Alperovitz are cases in point.

Contribution and Future Study

Through the above presentation, my thesis aims to contribute a new theory of autonomy to modern education, and sociopolitical practices. The most important feature of this new theory is that it embraces the four major components originated from both caring theories and Kant's moral autonomy, and three characteristics derived from both Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies. Different from both Rawls' political autonomy and neoliberals' personal autonomy, the neocaring theory of autonomy emphasizes that a complete, inclusive and effective theory of autonomy needs to embrace the non-dual relationship of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and private, as well as affectivity and rationality. This is because, as Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies reveal, the fabric of human existence is a synthesized field of subjectivity and objectivity, the public and the private, as well as affectivity and rationality. Every individual plays multiple roles in his/her life. An individual may be a caring parent of a child as well as a teacher in a public space. Also, (s)he may argue rationally in a public debate but show affective feelings toward his/her friends. Moreover, since human life is an ongoing process of synthesizing and becoming, a rational person may encounter people with love or hostility in any social setting. Accordingly, (s)he needs to learn how to interact with them. A new component of affectivity, thereby, is synthesized into the individual's life. In addition, there is an interconnected and interdependent nature between personhood and sociopolitical activity. Hence, both human agents and sociopolitical activity, including economic development, are mutually conditioned and supplementary to each other.

The case in point can be illustrated by the open resources and neoliberalism's privatization of a university discussed previously. Even if the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research where open resources aim to empower the public and low-income areas in California, such as resources would not be fully used, had the target populations not been taught how to employ the resources. This is because they are unaware of the availability and modes of utilizing these resources. This implies that when people are not taught to possess corresponding knowledge, they would not have the capacity to improve their social and political environment. Similarly, as Alperovitz reminds us that because of its indifference toward social inequality, neoliberalism's policy leads to a backfire. This backfire, in turn, leads the financially disadvantaged people to participate in the movement such as Occupy Wall Street, or to turn away from the capitalism advocated by neoliberalism. Hence, a complete, inclusive and effective theory, as my thesis presented above, has to be grounded upon the three characteristics of human existence presented in Nāgārjuna's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies. Also, it would be better to define the theory of autonomy in a positive sense, that is, the theory has to care about the development of human agents' knowledge, capability in conjunction with the social, economic and political improvement. That is, if our society wants to become a caring society, our education needs to nurture a citizen's caring mind, and reflective thinking with reference to the interdependent nature of human existence. It is most unlikely to apply a theory which only focuses on economic development (neoliberalism), political procedure (Rawls) or rational reasoning (Kant) to expect at the same time to develop a citizen's caring mind and to actualize the ideal of a caring society.

However, the theory of autonomy presented in my dissertation is a project that focuses more on developing a new moral theory. My next step, I plan to study further relevant issues. Here, I briefly list three: first, analyzing and clarifying the educational relation of personal

morality and public virtue; second, providing empirical examples to illustrate how to implement the neocaring theory of autonomy in education; and third, demonstrating the way in which to apply neocaring theory to tackle the problems emerging in the digital age.

First, the relation between personal morality and public virtue: The reason for me to conceive that it is an important issue because through the study of my thesis, I found that moral theory although is invisible, it affects not solely how an individual thinks, believes, and behaves but also influences the way in which a corporation or a government organizes, distribute and control resources and society. Alternatively put, the theory will shape the social, economic and political practice and the formation of citizenship. This fact can be illustrated by the different ways of administrating higher education proposed by the neocaring theory of autonomy and that of neoliberalism. Whereas neoliberalism emphasizes privatizing higher education, and directs its educational goal and academic research toward productivity and profit-making for a big corporation, neocaring theory underscores the public function of higher education and the use of research result to improve the public wellbeing, equality, social justice and the development of human knowledge, capability and reflective thinking with a caring mind. Hence, it is important to be aware that the moral theory plays a very important role in guiding and shaping our citizen's education and sociopolitical practice. Unfortunately, neither moral theory nor moral education receives enough attention from education nowadays. The core problem is that in America, the moral education is defined in a very narrow sense. That is, moral education, as Noddings' observes, indicates only the education of cultivating personal virtue or character.⁷⁴ Yet, through the demonstration of my dissertation, it is clear that the moral education based on the neocaring

⁷⁴ Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People: a Caring Alternative to Character Education*, (New York: Teacher College, Columbia University, 2002), 1-10.

theory of autonomy would not be confined to nurturing a student's mind or reflective thinking only. These qualities would also show in the individual's behavior when (s)he participates in a social event or an economic and political practice. The social and political behaviors in turn would affect the operation of a democratic society. Hence, it is incomplete to consider that the moral education is an issue of personal matter. A more complete view is that moral education is related to both personal morality and public virtue, which permeates every aspect of human life, including personal development, social, cultural, economic and political activity even if it is a theory of autonomy. Traditionally, civic education is defined in a very narrow sense of the study of civil law, civil code, and the right of citizen, such as voting, free speech and so on. Yet, in my thesis, this term is used in a broad sense. That is, I agree with Amy Gutmann's claim,⁷⁵ which defines civic education as "the cultivation of the [citizen's] virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation" (1987, 287). In this sense, moral education, specifically, the moral theory of autonomy, is closely related to civic education, and becomes one of the central issues that deserves great attention in the digital age.

Second, providing empirical examples to illustrate the way in which neocaring theory is implemented in education. When I tackle this issue, I would like to combine it with the third issue. The third issue is to show how the neocaring theory of autonomy will face the challenges emerging in the modern digital age. The reason is that since a moral theory is closely tied to our personal life and public social, economic and political activity, it becomes even more so than ever before now because of the utility of information technologies or the coming into being of the digital age. This is particularly true for the theory of autonomy.

⁷⁵ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, Princeton, (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

As Castells notices, the digital technologies provide more power, tools, spaces and resources for autonomous expression. Accordingly, citizens, including both children and adults, have more freedom to express themselves through the Internet, such as posting a personal favorite image, sending a funny message, or participating in a revolutionary activity through the Internet, and the like. Jack M. Balkin (2005, 297-354)⁷⁶ also observes that the digital technologies make digital resources easy to be copied, modified, annotated, collated, transmitted, and distributed through its digital form (302). Accordingly, it fundamentally changes not only citizens' social life, but also the way to define citizens' rights of freedom of speech (302). For instance, the digital revolution drastically reduces the costs of copying, and distributing information through weblogs (or blogs). As such, it lowers the costs of publication and distribution. Second, the technologies also makes one's expression online across cultural and beyond geographical borders. An individual now can reach more people, not only in his/her own country, but also across the global. Third, the decrease of costs helps people to innovate with existing information. One can comment on it, and building upon it simply by editing the information. Balkin says that this kind of editing is particularly noticeable when people have a common metric for storing images, music, and text, because "they can copy, cut, and paste images, music and text not only make it easy to copy and distribute content, they also make it easier to appropriate, manipulate, and edit content"(295). Thanks to decreasing cost, the transmission, distribution, appropriation, and alteration of digital information resources not only become easier and faster, but also widespread. Accordingly, Balkin observes, the information technologies create more opportunities to express one's opinions or post a message online. As

⁷⁶ Jack Balkin, "Digital speed and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society" in *Information Ethics: Privacy, Property, and Power*, ed. Adam Moore, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 297-354.

such, it “democratizes speech” because it lets more citizens participate and interact in the cyberspaces. It also lets certain messages spread wider and farther, and has more production and distribution to affect more citizens (298). A democratic culture, Balkins says, is more than “representative institutions of democracy”, and public issues (298). Rather, it is a culture in which “individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning-making that constitute them as individuals. Democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it is about each individual’s ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture” (ibid.). In a democratic society, the digital technologies can strengthen the cultural and participatory features of freedom of expression to promote a democratic culture. However, this freedom also presents new challenges of freedom of speech, and brings out the emerging conflicts, such as the conflicts regarding digital capital and property rights. Hence, it is very important to reconsider the moral or ethical theory of autonomy, which we apply to guide and define the freedom of speech. The reason is, as Balkin explicates, if we define and guide the freedom of speech in a wrong way, they may “erode the system of free expression and undermine much of the promise of the digital age for the realization of a truly participatory culture” (298). Alternatively put, since the social, cultural, economic and political environment have been greatly altered by the utility of the digital information technologies and resources, it is important that we apply a new theory of autonomy to discuss the emerging issues, particularly, the new theory has to place the development of an human’s capability of reflection with a caring mind in relation to the interdependent nature of human existence at the forefront. This is because as Rebecca MacKinnon, an international journalist, and co-founder of the citizen media network Global Voices, and Joseph Turow, a professor at university of Pennsylvania, points out that we need to educate our citizen to be a conscious and autonomous user rather than a passive

consumer in the digital age. This is because, as Mackinnon warns, “a convergence of unchecked government actions and unaccountable company practices threatens the future of democracy and human rights around the world.” Hence, she says that “[i]t is time to stop thinking of ourselves as passive “users” of technology and instead act like citizens of the Internet – as netizens – and take ownership and responsibility for our digital future.”⁷⁷ In other words, “[o]ur freedom in the Internet age depends on whether we defend our rights on digital platforms and networks in the same way that people fight for their rights and accountable governance in physical communities and nations.” Similarly, Turow in his book, *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth*,⁷⁸ reveals that we have been told that the Internet is a means to enhance our consumer’s power. Yet, in reality, Turow points out, the customized media environment which we inhabit today shows the other way round, that is, it diminishes consumer power. This diminishment does not take place only in ads and discounts but also in news and entertainment, because many corporations are collecting our data without our consent and notice. These data then are employed to create our identity in cyberspace. Accordingly, we, as consumers, are unaware of “how is this data being collected and analyzed? And how are our profiles created and used?” Neither do we know if we have “been identified as a ‘target’ or ‘waste’ or placed in one of the industry’s finer-grained marketing niches?”

⁷⁷ See Rebecca MacKinnon. “Consent of the Networked,” *Media Matters*. Last modified March 25, 2012. <http://will.illinois.edu/mediamatters/>; and Rebecca MacKinnon, *Consent of the Networked: the Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom*. (New York: Basic Books, 2012),

⁷⁸ See Joseph Turow. “The Daily Your: How the New Advertising Industry is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth,” *Media Matters*. Last modified March 18, 2012. <http://will.illinois.edu/mediamatters/>; and Joseph Turow, *The Daily You: How the New Advertising Industry Is Defining Your Identity and Your Worth*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

The questions raised above not only are closely related to our daily life but also very relevant to the way in which the digital technologies and resources shape and affect the formation of our citizenship, and democratic culture. Hence, it is important to discuss them through the neocaring theory of autonomy in our education, particularly, higher education.

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