

There is another aspect to satisfactory caring. Sometimes caring means being willing to confront the cared-for, to judge some attitudes, or self-interpretations to be unworthy. Sometimes this kind of caring is called for even though a person is the victim of political oppression.

Iris Murdoch is one of the few moral philosophers I know of who elucidates this more morally demanding stance in relationships.<sup>9</sup> Murdoch's picture is of a fragile psyche continuously trying to defend itself by means of fantasy and consoling wishes. In her view, we frequently want to pin all the blame for our misery on others; we love to indulge in self-pity and to relinquish personal responsibility. If we take Murdoch's view seriously, there will be times when, as carers, we will choose to confront someone we care for with their rationalizations or their excessive self-pity, and to point out their use of defensive strategies. Needless to say this line of approach seems to be antithetical to apprehending a person as a victim of political oppression, for it would seem to be adding to the victim's low self-worth; it would seem to be another way of blaming the victim. So most of us avoid this perspective and either focus, like Noddings, on the the expressed needs, or like Wilson, on the political analysis hoping to reduce the pain and fill the need.

To illustrate this point, I take an example of a friend whose husband, years ago, before the term "sexual harassment" became available, had the habit of fondling her breasts whenever he was in her presence. She objected very strongly to this practice, but he continued relentlessly, ignoring her protests. She systematically tried every response she could think of, including discussing it with him in the presence of a therapist. Nothing worked. One day a friend pointed out to her how threatening she must seem to this man because of her considerable verbal abilities and her assertive way of talking. It had never occurred to her that she might be contributing to the problem by her way of talking. She had only been able to see herself as a victim of aggressive behavior. As soon as she understood how she might be contributing to the situation she was able to modify her behavior and the problem disappeared.

A feminist analysis of the situation would focus on the sexual harassment and its debilitating effects on her. The resolution that I have described would appear to be blaming the victim. I want to be clear here. I am not repudiating a feminist analysis, nor rejecting the concept of sexual harassment. I am only suggesting that within such an approach it is important not to play into a person's inclination for rationalization and self-pity by attending only to the more obvious injustices of the political surround.

Self-respect is built out of political balance of power as well as a capacity for ruthless self-examination to be rid of self-pity and irresponsibility.

#### NOTES

1. Leslie Wilson, "Is a 'Feminine' Ethic Enough?" p. 14.
2. Wilson, p. 12.
3. Nel Noddings, *Caring*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 14.
4. Noddings, p. 14.
5. Noddings, p. 14.
6. Noddings, p. 14.
7. Noddings, p. 15.
8. Wilson, p. 10.
9. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

## Summer Passes & the Autumn Seed

Summer passes, & the autumn seed  
reclaims its due from a resisting earth  
as the sea its territory claims  
from a weary & defeated dyke.

Leaves shrink & crumple, & aware  
on their sure fate, ripen to gold.  
Even clouds billow more, grow thicker fur  
as their ties to earth shorten,

as the radius  
of the nomadic sun dwindles,  
till it barely lifts its weight above  
the brown horizon, like a flickering  
firefly ensnared by early frost,  
as the strings, the ties, the glue of life  
all loosen.

A loosening season: the leaf parts,  
its distance to the ground shortens,  
& the branches bend low, heavy  
with the stinging weight of frost.

Summer passes, & the autumn seed  
returns to its brown earth, to the promise of  
a buoyant sleep, like the hibernation earned  
by a drowsy & well-fattened bear.

Helen Iacovino  
Ontario