

Care as a cultural practice in multi-species niche construction



Prof. Katriina Soini, Natural Resources Institute Finland, Luke



Prof. Carsten Hermann-Pillath, University of Erfurt



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No101084220. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

www.co-evolvers.eu

Care is an emerging concept in transformative sustainability research, and policy

“Transformative change towards sustainability requires a **manifestation of responsibility and care**. More specifically, they propose practices that facilitate the realisation of individual responsibility relational to the vast network including close and distant interconnections” (Tschakert & St. Clair, 2013).

“Hence **nurturing care and imagination** can enhance the transformative potential of the agency” (Moriggi et al., 2020b).

“Care facilitates **the trust and safety** to help such a transformation to get the space to emerge” (Carmeli et al., 2017).

IPBES 2024:

--These transformative shifts can be facilitated...by weaving together different knowledge systems, world views and values that recognize human-nature interdependencies **and ethics of care.**

But what is care?

Care is “everything that is done to maintain, continue and repair ‘world’ so that **all** can live in it as well as possible”

(Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, adapted from Tronto 1993, 3)

- › a situated and vital **everyday maintenance practice**
- › **an affective engagement**
- › as well as an **ethical and political obligation** to challenge unequal power relations in relation to more-than human world (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017)

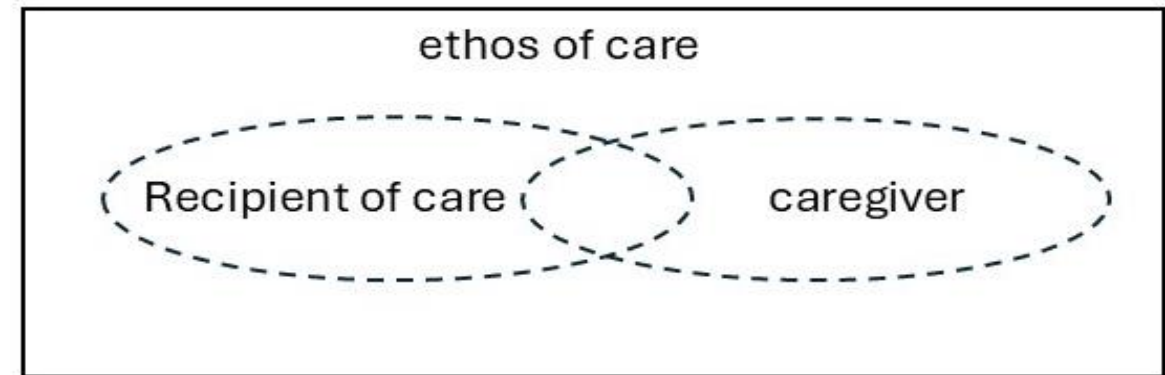
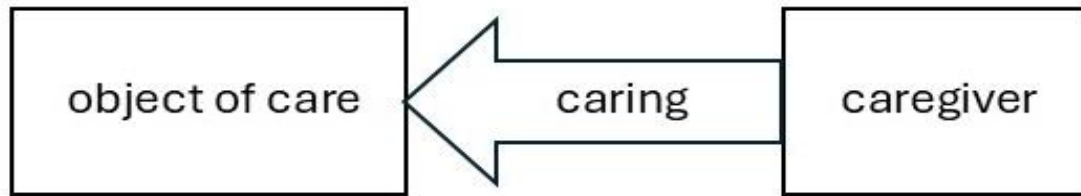


Caring as a practice

- › Caring for something is **more binding than just being concerned**; it requires **active involvement**, e.g. with respect to maintenance or improvement,
- › Caring is about engaging in practical activities ranging from **caring about others to taking care of them**, but also oneself (Tronto 1993)
- › **Response–ability** (instead of individual responsibility): to become familiar with the needs of the others **to be able to respond** to them (Haraway 2008)
- › **Care is non-innocent**: caring for something (A) may be harmful for something else (B) (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) - **caring is full of selections, and power**
- › **Not to care is sometimes also caring** – does not require an action

Ethos of care – how can it be achieved?

Puig de la Bellacasa argues that care is not an individualized relationship (left) but emanates from an ethos of care that is shared by all actors (right) → This corresponds to the transition from Kantian categorical imperative to Hegel's "ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*)
Care is NOT justice!



Reconsidering the relationship between ethical and aesthetic notions of care

Typically, **modern ethical notions** refer to ethical agency in terms of expressing individuals taking responsibility.

In the case of “ethos of care”, we can no longer employ conventional notions of ethical responsibility but need to move to **the aesthetic view of care: embodied, distributed, habitus/habitual** – John Dewey’s view of aesthetics



- › Yuriko Saito: Everyday aesthetics
- › Beauty elicits caring, ugliness rejection
- › Can we change our aesthetic appreciation of the world in terms of a multi-species aesthetics? (Richard Prum)

Care and coevolutionary multi-species niche construction

Multi-species niche construction follows an aesthetics of flourishing – see CHP keynote at this symposium

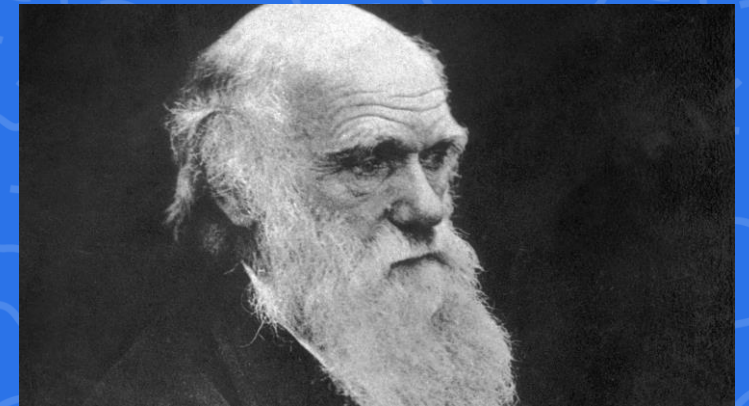
The ethos of care is expressed in all activities that create affordances for creative actions of humans and non-humans

Back to square one: Care is “everything that is done to maintain, continue and repair ‘world’ so that **all** can live in it as well as possible”

→ **Care is beautifying the world for everyone**

"It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection, entailing Divergence of Character and the Extinction of less improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. **There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone circling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.**"

Thank you!



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No101084220. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

www.co-evolvers.eu