Editorial

Feminist Care Ethics Confronts Mainstream Philosophy

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1. Care and the History of Philosophy

The central role of care in human history is beyond questioning. We are vulnerable and needy creatures who require the goodwill and compassionate actions of others to survive. Yet, in the lengthy history of the "queen of the sciences", philosophy, care has only received sporadic attention. Today, mainly to the credit of feminist philosophers, care ethics has matured and received substantial consideration. This Special Issue of *Philosophies* places care theory in dialogue with modern philosophers and philosophical traditions to further that maturation. This volume aims to activate additional exchanges of ideas between care theorists and mainstream philosophical traditions.

The inconsistency of valuing care in philosophy does not mean that there are no historical threads to be found; they simply lack a continuous tradition. Through the voice of Socrates, Plato describes care, or "proper attention", as occurring when something is improved [1] (128b). In works such as *The Fables of Hyginus*, Ancient Romans advanced a Myth of Care around the Goddess Cura, whose name means care. The Goddess both creates humanity and must care for it. Literary scholar Halver Hanisch finds one of the points of the Fables of Hyginus being "the ontological role of care in human life" [2]. Soren Kierkegaard addresses care in terms of "concern" to discuss existential reality without the categorical and abstract methods found in the philosophical tradition [3]. David Hume's emphasis on emotion, particularly sympathy over rationalism, has caused some to identify him as a proto-care philosopher [4]. Similarly, in the American pragmatist tradition, figures such as John Dewey and Jane Addams emphasize sympathetic understanding, which resonates with care theory [5]. Western philosophy is not alone in having a care tradition. Several scholars have found resonance between care and Confucianism [6]. Furthermore, many Indigenous philosophies have manifested strong ties to care [7]. Many of these non-Western traditions far predate Western philosophy and there is much to be humbly learned from them.

2. Contemporary Feminist Care Ethics

Modern care ethics traces back to the field of developmental moral psychology. Before the publication of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* [8], the dominant understanding of moral development in the field of psychology was Lawrence Kohlberg's [9] Kantian-influenced model. Gilligan questions Kohlberg's framework and its masculinist biases towards individualism, abstraction, and rationalism. Noting that morality and moral thinking are conceived of in a very particular way within Kohlberg's model, Gilligan listens for—and hears—alternative conceptions of morality in the answers of her women participants. From these different voices, Gilligan identifies an approach to ethical deliberation that differs from the theoretical–juridical model [10], an approach which she calls an ethic of care. Rationalist approaches to justice conceive of morality as individualist. An ethic of care begins with the notion that relationships are primary and foregrounds the moral salience of connection, activities of care, and the fulfillment of responsibilities "based on a bond of attachment, rather than a contract of agreement" [8] (p. 57). Care theory thus

eschews the idea that morals are principles to be accessed individually through rational thought. Instead, morality consists of the activities and practices of care and relationship maintenance that sustain webs of connections and minimize harm as best as possible.

Since Gilligan's trailblazing work, the ethics of care has ballooned into a fully interdisciplinary research agenda [11] with both theoretical and empirical [12] work on the ethics of care covering a variety of topics, issues, and avenues of inquiry. A related body of work on care practices and care labour in various contexts (see, for example, [13–16]) has also grown alongside the ethics of care literature. Care ethics, as a field, has sought to grapple with, understand, and uncover the diverse and contextually specific epistemological resources that emerge from the central role of care in human moral forms of life.

Of particular concern for this Special Issue, the thoroughgoing critique of rationalism—while important in creating space for a multiplicity of moral voices to be seen and heard as moral voices—also positioned (or seemed to position) care ethics in an adversarial relationship with a variety of dominant theories of justice and mainstream philosophical thought. The relational ontology underpinning a care ethics approach appears at odds with liberal philosophical standpoints, which presume an individualist subject as independent, atomistic, and self-sufficient (see, for example, [17,18]). Care ethics also locates the resources for making, interrogating, and validating knowledge claims in language, symbolisms, and practices that relationally tie us together. Accordingly, knowledge (particularly ethical knowledge) is situated, contextual, and emerges from specific social locations (see, for example, [19–21]). This epistemic position contrasts with theories that valorize objective and abstracted thinking and knowledge claims.

The contributors in this volume illuminate various methods to move beyond the boundary that has mitigated care ethics and care theory engagement with mainstream philosophical discourse. Some scholars demonstrate how the ontological and epistemological premises of care ethics, in fact, aligns with other philosophical theories, including the work of G.W.F. Hegel, Slavoj Žižek, Simone de Beauvoir, Edith Stein, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Hannah Arendt. In establishing such shared ground, these authors also point to fruitful avenues for sustained dialogue that can mutually expand care and mainstream philosophy. Others take a more pragmatic approach, bracketing such meta-theoretical tensions and fruitfully demonstrating how care can expand and be expanded by the thought of notable figures like Bruno Latour, Frantz Fanon, John Locke, Jacques Rancière, and Jacques Derrida. Taken together, and in these different ways, these articles catalyze further intellectual interest and attention to how care enriches philosophy across various subjects.

3. Articles in This Issue

In '*Care Ethics, Bruno Latour, and the Anthropocene*', Michael Flower and Maurice Hamington engage the relational morality, ontology, and epistemology of feminist care ethics with Bruno Latour's actor-network theory [22]. Specifically, these authors focus on fostering dialogue between Latour's recent publications, which focus on the new climate regime of the Anthropocene, and the emerging literature on posthuman approaches to care. In so doing, Flower and Hamington demonstrate that Latourian analysis, in conjunction with a care ethical framework, reinforces the notion that centering and valuing relationality across humans and non-human matter is essential to confronting the Anthropocene, which is perhaps the dire moral challenge of our time.

Thomas Randall's '*A Care Ethical Engagement with John Locke on Toleration*' draws upon care theory and John Locke's corpus on toleration to put forth a novel theory of toleration as care [23]. Arguing that Locke's thought and care ethics can converge by foregrounding the significance of an ethos of trustworthiness and civility, Randall further illustrates that such a convergence has the potential to enable toleration, particularly in contemporary pluralistic societies. This care-ethical toleration, Randall concludes, holds the potential to provide meaningful solutions to moral disagreement within such pluralistic societies—solutions that move us beyond the capacity of the liberal state.

Catherine Chaberty and Christine Noel Lemaitre's article, '*Thinking About the Institutionalization of Care with Hannah Arendt: A Nonsense Filiation?*', examines the controversial partnering of Hannah Arendt's writings and an ethic of care [24]. Noting that feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt are particularly contested, especially given her vital distinction between the private and public spheres, these authors maintain that Arendt's concepts are relevant to feminist and political ethics of care. To support this claim, Chaberty and Lemaitre skillfully show that the most recent analyses developed on the politics of care, especially those concerned with institutionalizing care, are shaped by Arendt's concepts such as power, amor mundi and by her conception of politics as a relationship.

In '*Care Ethics and Paternalism: A Beauvoirian Approach*', Deniz Durmuş draws upon Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics to address one of the most pressing critiques of care ethics today: the problematic Western-centric assumptions and registers underpinning much care ethics scholarship, particularly that work which universalizes care as practiced in the Global North [25]. More exactly, Durmuş argues that given the imperialist and colonial legacies embedded into the unequal distribution of care work across the globe, a Western-centric approach to care ethics may also carry the danger of paternalism. To help counter such Western-centric and paternalistic tendencies, Durmuş presents resources from Beauvoir's ethics, specifically the tenet of treating the Other as freedom, and lays crucial theoretical groundwork for continued engagement between care ethics theory and existentialist ethics.

Sacha Ghandeharian's article, '*Žižek's Hegel, Feminist Theory, and Care Ethics*', presents conceptual bridges between the philosophy of G.W.F Hegel and feminist ethics of care [26]. More precisely, Ghandeharian engages with Slavoj Žižek's contemporary reading of Hegel in concert with existing feminist interpretations of Hegel's thought to demonstrate how such interpretations of Hegel's perspective on the nature of subjectivity foreground vulnerability as a condition of existence. Indeed, these readings of Hegel, Ghandeharian demonstrates, highlight the radical contingency of human subjectivity and the relationship between human subjectivity and the external world, and thus render Hegelian thought compatible with the feminist ethics of care's emphasis on the particularity, fluidity, and interdependency of human relationships. These conceptual bridges, Ghandeharian concludes, provide fruitful lenses for further analyzing the political and ethical significance of ontological vulnerability.

Petr Urban's contribution, '*Care Ethics and the Feminist Personalism of Edith Stein*', asserts that the personalist ethics of Edith Stein and her feminist thought are intrinsically interrelated [27]. Further, Urban contends that Stein's ethical thought positions her well as an alley to care scholarship. His article offers an in-depth discussion of the overlaps and differences between Stein's ethical insights and the core ideas of care ethics, focusing on how both approaches relocate practices, values, and attitudes related to relationality, emotionality, and care from the periphery to the center of ethical reflection. Urban thereby lays crucial theoretical groundwork for sustained engagement between these two literatures, with the goal of mutually expanding both bodies of work in productive ways.

Sophie Bourgault proposes a conversation between Jacques Rancière and feminist care ethicists in her article, '*Jacques Rancière and Care Ethics: Four Lessons in (Feminist) Emancipation*' [28]. Demonstrating that both bodies of work share many common premises, including their indictments of Western hierarchies and binaries, their shared invitation to "blur boundaries" and embrace a politics of "impropriety", and their views on the significance of storytelling/narratives and the ordinary, Bourgault draws upon these shared premises and mobilizes Rancière's work to offer crucial insights for care ethicists related to feminist emancipation. These insights, Bourgault concludes, foreground the importance of attending to desire/hope in research, the inevitability of conflict in social transformation, and the need to think together the transformation of care work/practices and dominant social norms.

Maggie FitzGerald stages a dialogue between the political theory of Frantz Fanon and the ethics of care to rethink the relationship between violence and care in her contribution,

'*Violence and Care: Fanon and the Ethics of Care on Harm, Trauma, and Repair*' [29]. Noting that, at first glance, the ethics of care does not seem to sit well with violence (and thus Fanon's political theory more generally, given his assertion that violence is a necessary response to the colonial project), FitzGerald mobilizes a relational conceptualization of violence that allows for the possibility that specific violences may be justifiable from a care ethics perspective. Ultimately, this productive reading of Fanon's political theory and the ethics of care encourages both postcolonial philosophers and care ethicists alike to examine critically the relation between violence and care and how we cannot a priori draw lines between the two.

Anya Daly's contribution, '*Ontology and Attention: Addressing the Challenge of the Amoralist through Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Care Ethics*', addresses the persistent philosophical problem posed by the amoralist—one who eschews moral values—by drawing on complementary resources within phenomenology and care ethics [30]. Asking, "How is it that the amoralist can reject ethical injunctions that serve the general good and be unpersuaded by ethical intuitions that for most would require neither explanation nor justification? And more generally, what is the basis for ethical motivation?", Daly draws on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and especially his analyses of perceptual attention, to articulate the nature and quality of perceptual attention that underpin our (in) capacities for care. In fostering this dialogue, Daly draws our attention to the compelling nature of care.

Tiina Vaittinen's article, '*An Ethics of Needs: Deconstructing Care Ethics with Derrida and Spivak*', asserts that the body in need of care is the subaltern of the neoliberal epistemic order: it is muted and unheard, partially so even in and from care ethics perspectives [31]. Building on Jacque Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notions of subalternity and epistemic violence, and care theories that emphasize corporeality, Vaittinen develops an ethics of needs that orients us toward the difficult task of attempting to read the world that care needs—that is, needy bodies—write with the relations they enact. This ethics, she ultimately concludes, opens an aporia for an ethical politics of life of needs.

In her article on care theory and liberal constructivism, titled '*Caring for Whom? Racial Practices of Care and Liberal Constructivism*', Asha Bhandary uses three autobiographical examples to draw our attention to a particular social construction that reinforces intersectional inequalities among women [32]. This social construction is related to white women's ready access to narrative positioning as victims, which, as Bhandary illustrates, creates additional burdens for people of color and, more specifically, for women of color. Bhandary defends neo-Rawlsian constructivism that, when combined with an analysis of care practices in the real world, can help us evaluate the fairness of any given arrangement—and particularly those arrangements that are shaped by social construction of white women as victims—from the perspective of a representative person who could occupy any position.

Finally, Sandra Laugier's contribution to this issue, '*Wittgenstein and Care Ethics as a Plea for Realism*', brings together the appeal to the ordinary in the ethics of care and the ordinary language philosophy as represented by Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Stanley Cavell, as read through a feminist perspective [33]. In so doing, Laugier emphasizes that the ethics of care fundamentally asserts a plea for "realism", meaning the necessity of seeing (or attending to) what lies close at hand. Such reflections on care, and this plea for sustained attention on the mundane, immediate, and concrete, brings ethics back to everyday practice. Care ethics, Laugier concludes, therefore shares a common political-ethical goal with Wittgenstein's work: much as Wittgenstein sought to bring language back from the metaphysical level to its everyday use, care ethics relocates ethics in the ordinary.

Of course, this Special Issue only offers a few overlaps between philosophy and care theory. We hope the articles here spark more intellectual dialogues between care theory and mainstream philosophical traditions in the future.

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