

Care as human *Being*: Introducing a new field of study and practice

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Abstract

This paper serves to introduce a new field of theory and practice called an *Ecology of Care*. In briefly describing its history of formation, present status and projected activities, the process of establishing an *Ecology of Care* (EoC) can be seen as laying the groundwork for a robust and complex new field with real and relevant value to many of the most profound issues confronting modern human life. The author proposes that in establishing and promoting an ecology which is based on Care, change can begin to take place in some of the destructive thinking currently shaping a less than optimistic future. An ecology based on Care offers the possibility of a positive and generative mindset that will enable people and organisations to rebuild some of the ecological stewardship that has been eroded by rationalist thinking since the industrial revolution. With stewardship or social and personal responsibility as a core systemic value, it is proposed that this field and the many industrious forms it might take, offers a real panacea for the increasingly moribund institutions of capitalism and other antiquated belief systems that are now negatively impacting on human life. These ponderous institutions, themselves shaped by unrealistic aspirations for growth and greed, combined with ecological short sightedness can by their nature, offer no viable answers. An *Ecology of Care* or a Care-based ecology provides a sound, logical and realistic philosophical/theoretical basis for developing many practical solutions across any field of human endeavour; assuming there is the strength of commitment necessary to apply it. The role of this paper is to provide a record of the formation of this meta-theoretical perspective in terms of its early development as a platform or framework for change; a non-partisan movement designed to provide a focus for the collective efforts of many groups of people with many different interests. This story of the brief history of an *Ecology of Care*, serves to establish a credible foundation for a movement whose future development and application will attempt to address a multitude of challenges facing human beings as a species.

Keywords

Care; Ecology; Model of Care; Myth of Care, Ecology of Care

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Prologue

Figure 1 shows an entry in my work journal marking the date when the *Ecology of Care* project was first mooted.

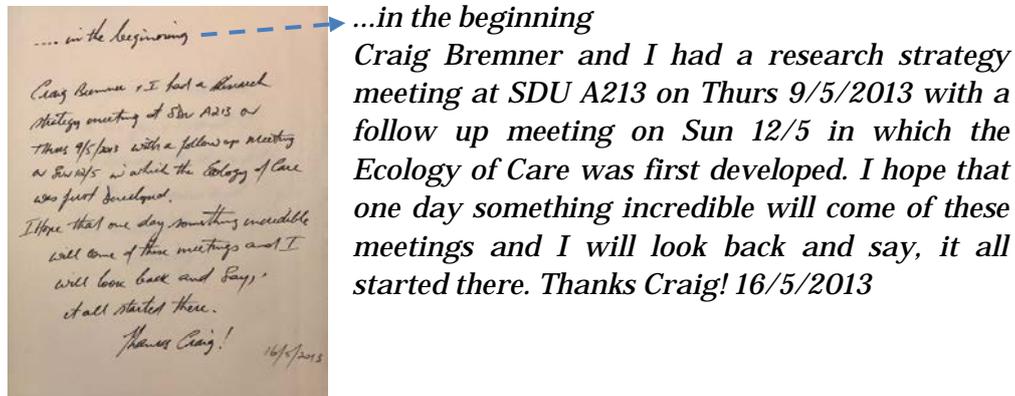


Figure 1. Journal entry.

Introduction

In this paper, I will introduce a new field of theory and practice called an *Ecology of Care* (EoC) [bearing in mind that the ideas expressed here were derived out of the contributions of the many people referred to below]. In briefly describing its history of formation, present status and projected activities, I propose that the process of establishing an *Ecology of Care* has laid the groundwork for a robust and complex new field with real and relevant value to many of the most profound issues confronting modern life. I further propose that in establishing and promoting an ecology which is based on Care, human beings can begin to change some of the destructive thinking currently shaping a less than optimistic future. An ecology based on Care offers the possibility of a positive and generative mindset that will enable people and organisations to rebuild some of the ecological stewardship that has been eroded by rationalist thinking since the industrial revolution.

With stewardship or social and personal responsibility as a core systemic value, the *Ecology of Care* as a research project further proposes that this field and the many industrious forms it might take, offers a real panacea for the increasingly moribund institutions of capitalism and other antiquated belief systems that are now negatively impacting on human life. These ponderous institutions, themselves shaped by unrealistic aspirations for growth and greed in combination with ecological short sightedness, by their nature, can offer no viable answers.

An *Ecology of Care* or a Care-based ecology provides a sound, logical and realistic philosophical/theoretical basis for developing many practical solutions across any field of human endeavour; assuming those who adopt its challenge have the strength of commitment to apply it. The role of this paper is to provide a record of the formation of this meta-theoretical perspective in terms of its early development as a platform or

framework for change; a non-partisan movement designed to provide a focus for the collective efforts of many groups of people with many different interests. This brief history of *an Ecology of Care* serves to establish a credible foundation for its future growth and development so that one day our group (and others) might say ... this is how it all began.

The genesis of “an Ecology of Care”

In 2012 as a small research group within the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Southern Denmark, we were involved in Denmark's largest Health Research project called *Patient@Home* (P@H). This project was strongly focused on the pursuit of efficiencies in the Danish hospital system, mostly through the development and application of new technology solutions. Their primary focus was to move healthcare from a “bricks and mortar” base towards patient self-management. Some pundits had described it as a systematic process of “hospitalising the home”. Within the project, opportunities were plentiful for product developers and at a time of economic downturn in Denmark, it was seen as providing abundant opportunities in design and manufacturing to a struggling economy. It offered an alluring economic boon. Across the P@H project, many R&D activities within partner companies, organisations and research groups had become heavily skewed towards what might be termed *welfare technologies* (activities promoting high-tech solutions, agile innovation and profit driven invention). Because of this bias toward artificial solutions, the P@H project had largely stopped looking for opportunities to create *technologies of welfare* or systems that focused on the life-enhancing aspects of health treatments for individuals that also encompassed a notion of home which valued the support systems provided by friends and family.

In 2013 our research group began to notice that Care (actions that improve the experience of humans in their processes of living) appeared to be lacking in or even missing from many of the projects being undertaken. Over the following year we confirmed our suspicions and began a project to better understand the notion of Care that we were proposing as an additive to the welfare/technology mix, or even an alternative approach to the popular technological direction that thinking in the P@H project was taking. In delving into the history of the notion of Care we quickly realised that some of the most influential philosophical and theoretical minds of the last two centuries had attached significant (and significantly different) importance to this relatively simple semantic metaphor *Care*. Influential thinkers such as Heidegger (1962), Mayeroff (1971), Reich (1995), Boff (2008), Bateson (1972), Bronfenbrenner (1979) and many others had discussed differing interpretations and connotations of Care with one notable commonality; none of them were referring to it as belonging exclusively to the domain of healthcare and all attributed significantly more substance to its meaning than its current usage conveyed.

We began to realise that the notion of *Care* had a more universal significance in relation to understanding humanity than its adoption and popular usage as a catch-all, health-related term. The phenomenon of the term Care in its ordinary, “abducted” form is only very recent and has tended to significantly underrepresent its true value as

communicating the foundation for all human action described by generations of theorists. We began to see this as a valuable concept missing in many fields. This universal form of the word and meaning of Care has for hundreds of years carried a deeper, more fundamental meaning for human beings. Following Heidegger and many others, we elevated the importance of this more universal notion of “Care”, adopting the protocol of a capital C in all our communications. We did this to differentiate *Care* as we now understood it from the popularised and banal forms of ordinary care (day-care, car-care, health-care, take care). Within our research group, some suggested we should distance our project from the term Care because of these associations, however we had come to realise that the heritage of the universal form of Care (originally Greek: *Sorge*; see also German usage in Dye, 2009) was so undeniable that there was no need to shy away from it simply because of its popular usage that was largely trend-based. The undeniable gravitas of the term Care is so fundamental to human self-understanding that it cannot and should not be trivialised. Our group felt a responsibility to support a universal connotation of Care which would revive a meaning that reflected the complexity and wonder of humanity as a species.

Heidegger, in his complex linguistic style, refers to Care in the following way:

The formal existential totality of the ontological structural whole of Da-sein must thus be formulated in the following structure: The being of Da-sein means being-ahead-of-oneself-already-in (the world) as being together-with (inner-worldly beings encountered). This being fills in the significance of the term care, which is used in a purely ontological and existential way ... being-in-the-world is essentially care. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 193)

Simply stated, *Care* is essentially and essential to who human beings are. It is the way they are caught up in life (being-in-the-world) and the way in which they choose to act in their life (*Being* or *Da-Sein* as Heidegger refers to it) and the way they live it (their ontological/existential stance).

A universal notion of Care

The following statements represent an attempt to synthesise a universal notion of Care drawn from the ideas and propositions developed over many centuries by many minds including those mentioned briefly above. Philosophers, theoreticians² and many unnamed others have perhaps described universal Care in different terms to these but essentially, they contain the same messages.

- To Care is what it means to be human, to be humane, to have humanity (Humans cannot, not Care or else they would not be human).
- Care is a human in the process of Being (Living) – Not simply a human being but a human, *Being*.

² To mention a few: Gregory Bateston; Leonardo Boff; Urie Bronfenbrenner; Fritjof Capra; Pope Francis; Martin Heidegger; Milton Mayeroff; Warren Reich; John Thackara; Francisco Varela; and many others.

- Care is the meaning humans make in and out of life.
- Experiences shape the nature of Care that humans show to their self, others and the world in the form of their actions (responses).
- Care shows human response-ability (practical ability to respond) and the nature of response-ibility (moral and ethical nature of our response) that they direct towards their self, others and the world through their actions.
- Care is therefore who humans are, and they are defined by *how* they do what they do – how they Care.
- Care is much more than just another word for being nice.

From this standpoint, Care can be seen to be a vitally important part of understanding every living human being. It can be said all people are human and therefore all *Care*, but in different ways. The character of human responses or actions illustrates how each individual's Care is expressed. In this way, each person's response to the world is a measure of their *Care* and conversely the nature of their *Care* is described in the character (ethos) of their actions. Reflecting on Care offers a critical way of looking at the way people are acting in the world; it prompts them to ask, *what is my Care like?*

To summarise this: if a person is to say that they truly Care, then this requires a conscious self-examination of what their Care means to their *self*, which in turn directs attention towards how they are enacting their Care with others and their interconnecting worlds. People cannot Care in isolation but this also means that individual Care (*my Care*) starts and ends with the individual.

The importance of oikos, ecology and home

When we (the EoC research team) were initially formulating the project *An Ecology of Care* in 2013, we adopted the term ecology as a way of reflecting and supporting the scale of meaning inherent in the universal form of Care that was beginning to emerge from our research. The universal notion of Care has a foundational value in the human world and can also be recognised (perhaps with different values) in the animal, plant and geological worlds. It is as difficult (though not impossible) to separate the term Care from its place in the wider ecology as it is to separate the global ecology from the presence of Care (human living). These two terms go hand-in-hand with considerations of a world in which people live in harmony with the planet and each other. An Ecology of Care as we would have it.

The Greek term *oikos* has been variously interpreted but is most commonly accepted to infer notions of home (interestingly, *oikos* provides the same root for the English terms economy and economics, meaning: the management of home). The term ecology is a reminder that human beings are always and essentially just a small (but significant) part of the wider ecological system bounded by the planet that all humans live on (Bateson, 1972). In our group's research, the use of the term ecology also reflects the primordial relationship that human beings have with the notion of home and the way in

which it is different for all individuals; the way in which humans can “make home” anywhere that they happen to be and the way that they manage or show Care for themselves and others within what they call home. Home is where the heart is, as the saying goes, meaning that home (the meaningful context of Care) and heart (the spiritual form of Care) are inextricably linked.

Phenomenologists Gadamer (1975) and van Manen (1997) refer to the space that people share with others and things as the *life world*. These are “worlds” that intersect as people interact with each other and the wider ecology. Seen in this way, the term ecology is a very valuable way of communicating the scale of the project that is in front of all of humankind and the inseparable relationship that exists between people and planet.

In the context of globalization, there are two relevant communities to which we all belong. We are all members of humanity, and we all belong to the global biosphere. As members of oikos, the Earth Household. (Capra and Luisi, 2014, p. 390)

Oikos is the basic institution of human coexistence, in which the ‘necessities of life’ are produced and provided, without which people can neither live nor live well. (Praetorius, 2015, p. 9)

Both of these words – *Ecology* and *Care* – have become diluted and distorted by differing fields of interest over many years and this has created barriers to clearly communicating the relatively simple message that an Ecology of Care carries.

Care is intrinsic to everyone. All people are human and therefore all Care, but in different ways. How people express Care illustrates the character of their response or actions.

Putting this another way, each person's responses to the world are a measure of their Care and conversely the nature of their Care is described in the character (ethos) of their actions.

These are foundational concepts underpinning the terms used as the project of an *Ecology of Care* is being built. They help to highlight what is missing in the destructive forces currently undermining the ecology that supports humankind as a species – this is why, the species group, humans, needs to revisit and revive the notion of Care that they know they already have, one that will provide the soundest foundation for the changes that are necessary for immediate survival and for their long-term (symbiotic) future on this planet.

(Re)forming an Ecology of Care: The first international symposium in 2015

Armed with the developmental work described above, in February 2015 we held our first international *Ecology of Care* event to discuss the formulations of *Care* that had

been emerging. Twenty people from seven countries and 14 unconnected disciplines gathered in Copenhagen to discuss our various, partially formed proposals. The University of Southern Denmark hosted this symposium of contributors specially selected from many institutions to bring diverse disciplinary perspectives to bear on a very important task: the process of re-formulating a revised conceptual notion of Care. By re-establishing the importance of this fundamentally human building block, which had lost much of its currency to synthetic interests, we could develop a sound basis for future practical actions under the banner of an *Ecology of Care*. Our aim was to develop a cohesive meta-theoretical platform, which would assist a very broad spectrum of disciplines to better coordinate actions that would advance human interests of the highest order and importance.

Key outcomes from the 2015 symposium

1. A working model of Care

This gathering made three major recommendations. First, the *Model of Care* (see Figure 2) developed in the lead-up to the symposium and presented to the group for discussion, could be useful in understanding and communicating an abstract conceptualisation of the universal notion of Care (described above). The model of Care could be applied as a practical means of structuring understanding within situations involving any form of human engagement across many fields of activity and should not be limited to those within the health industry.

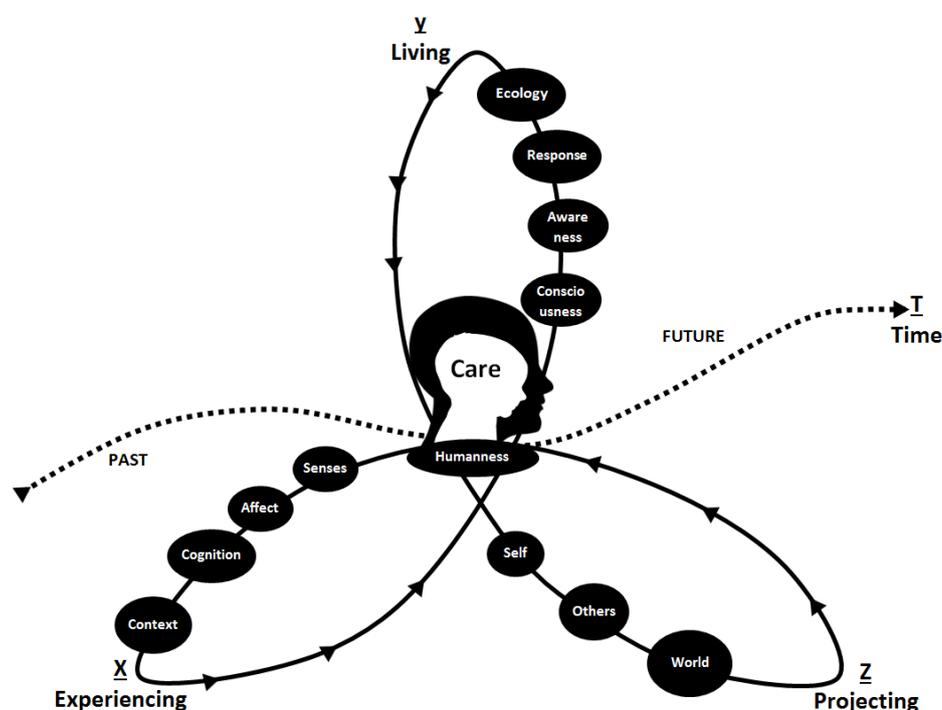


Figure 2. The 2015 Model of Care.

The Model of Care (Figure 2) can be summarised in the following way:

Care is a product of everyday experience; it is constituted over time in consciously aware responses that impact on the individual self, others and the worlds they share in ways that change the earth's ecology.

Care therefore, is first originated in and projected at a self, then at others (including objects) within an immediate world.

Care takes place and is made intentional within a time continuum based on a past that shapes a present; that in turn projects a future.

2. An Ecology of Care, as a new field of study

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the 2015 symposium contributors found that the notion of Care proposed within the *Ecology of Care* project was significant and would benefit from being developed further as a new field of study and practice. While based upon an older notion of Care than is currently being used within health and other fields, it was nevertheless a concept that had a substantial heritage of previous study and brought with it a body of knowledge that could be built upon and further developed in many different and useful directions. Many of the very concrete and foundational elements of Care (as seen in the Model of Care above) were still largely unexplored and highlighted the potential complexity of the field as well as the many opportunities that further development would offer.

3. New streams of theory and practice

Third, a new field of study referred to as an *Ecology of Care* was worthy of development along two principle streams: as a theoretical framework to guide further exploration of the constituent elements contained within the Model of Care and as a structural methodology for advancing Care as a platform for change.

This would be accomplished instrumentally through researched application within education, industry and governance as well as within society by raising awareness of the benefits of critical engagement with everyday life (as a mode of self-reflective practice and self-management). Studying the instrumental application of the platform would also provide opportunities for additional theoretical development as well as practical methodological improvements that researching new forms of professional practice would bring.

(In)forming an Ecology of Care: An EoC International transdisciplinary Congress in 2016

Following the 2015 symposium we immediately started work on a larger meeting of minds, a congress called *(In)forming an Ecology of Care* designed to build on the ideas generated during the 2015 event. We realised very quickly that we were still hampered by a significant level of misunderstanding around our two key concepts, namely: that

ecology was largely seen as a “green thing” and that *Care* was more or less owned by the health industry. We were still being regularly asked: “What is the *Ecology of Care* about? What is it for? What are its goals and how do I apply it?”. We could easily see from the work we had done thus far that *Care* was a complex concept with a very sound philosophical basis but without a singular, powerful and consistent, easily communicable (marketable) form. So, the 2016 Congress, (In)forming an *Ecology of Care* was largely about finding a more substantive form for *Care*. The event was described as, “A gathering of experts with a vision for Care” with 12 specially selected leaders from 12 different fields of research and industry who were invited to present their practical visions for *Care*, focusing on innovation opportunities within some of the biggest challenges facing contemporary societies. As well as their insights, and as a counterpoint to their views, an audience of “collaborators” was invited to discuss and debate each of the speaker perspectives in forum so as to further develop their ideas into actionable pathways.

A key goal of the congress was to reconsider Care in terms of the fundamental reasons why and how people do what they do in relation to the many challenges they face as a species within a finite and fragile human ecology. This provides many new opportunities for innovation and the advancement of science and culture. Technologies that have exponentially enhanced communication systems worldwide have also resulted in unprecedented levels of individual social isolation and community disconnection. The world’s economic systems in most cases are built on inequality in terms of quality of life, education and material comfort. The human world is dealing with epidemics of domestic and international violence producing unprecedented numbers of displaced and traumatised people. Globally, an aging population is acting as a driver for often hidden psychological issues such as loneliness, depression and suicide, as well as physical health concerns such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. In the natural world some of the greatest challenges humans face include unrenowable resource depletion, air and water quality, habitat degradation, catastrophic loss of biodiversity and the unpredictable effects of climate change. These are all symptoms of the state and nature of the human world’s collective Care.

Many of the biggest contemporary issues (described above) can be directly linked to the Care with which the *artificial* (human interventions in an otherwise natural world) in its multitude of forms has been applied by people during what has been an outstanding but very short period of human development (roughly the past 250 years). Human beings have certainly developed complex answers to many of the world’s greatest questions but in the process and as a result, have given birth to many almost insurmountable problems. They have made a human world that changes so rapidly, so significantly and in such complex ways that they have seldom taken the time to carefully consider the reasons why they develop and implement their interventions (inventions); nor to properly evaluate the future consequences of their actions; nor to fully respond to the unintended impacts (side-effects) that these actions have brought with them (Jackson, 2013). Major social innovation on a global scale is needed to address the scale of issues that confront human beings in the artificial and natural worlds that they have developed but fortunately, they are well equipped and more than capable of achieving what is needed. The technological know-how needed to make

these changes is already available. The secret to making the scale of change that is required lies within *humans themselves*.

Technology (the artificial world) is neither good nor bad – it has no agency but that which human beings give it. People can continue to be the architects of their own demise or begin to build a better world. This can only happen if they Care.

The opportunities and inescapable need to make important changes in social attitudes and behaviour have never been more obvious than they are now. So the most urgent imperative is for realistic and practical guidelines (frameworks, platforms, systems, networks) that can help initiatives that capitalise on the opportunities for real and urgent change that are present in the world right now – this was the genesis for the *Ecology of Care* project.

Findings from the Ecology of Care Congress

At the Copenhagen Congress in 2016, the attendees wrestled with questions such as What does an *Ecology of Care* stand for? What is important in an *Ecology of Care*? What does an *Ecology of Care* believe in? What does an *Ecology of Care* need to achieve?

The passages below present summarised findings from written material generated by all of the contributors, from diverse disciplines, organisations, fields of research and practice who attended the congress. This material was subjected to a rigorous open-coding analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and further scrutinised by the congress committee. It should be read as a qualitative synthesis of the thoughts and ideas expressed by all of the contributors and collected in many forms during the event (van Manen, 1997). This material was also gathered with the intention of developing an *Ecology of Care Charter*, a reference point for future activities under the EoC banner.

An Ecology of Care is about...

Guidance and processes

An Ecology of Care offers guidance across fields of industry and academia with strategic tools promoting holistic ecological thinking (Care) directed towards a socially just and ecologically sound way of helping organisations, society, communities, families and individuals to help themselves. With this guidance, new systems, new economic goals, new business models, new policy options can be developed that support sustainable, flourishing people in sustainable socio-spatial ecosystems at habitat and planetary levels.

Networking with networks

An Ecology of Care provides a framework upon which a network of networks can be built. The network brings the collective knowledge of like-minded (Caring) individuals

and communities together to provide new perspectives on common problems. Also, by joining interrelated networks, connecting people who Care about different but related topics, it provides a platform for sharing ideas and practical knowledge.

Sense-making and conflict resolution

An Ecology of Care enables individual and collective sense-making. It takes a leadership role in understanding, interpreting and representing human needs in fields like health, industry, business and conflict to better address issues they have in common from a human perspective. In this way, an Ecology of Care provides protection against manipulation by vested interests that would showcase their lack of Care for people and places by taking unjust and unscrupulous advantage; using convenience, ease of use or efficiency as a justification.

Response-ability and response-ibility

An Ecology of Care encourages people to reconsider and re-evaluate their ability to respond (response-ability) and to also recognise that response-ibility comes with all of their actions. It promotes doing what is *good* for people while at the same time encouraging them to take ownership of the form or shape that this *good* takes. It promotes awareness of “my care”; i.e. the meaning intrinsically formed in that person through their individual actions and how those actions impact on others.

Supporting new thinking

An Ecology of Care provides a positive and purposeful framework for the kind of mindful, complex thinking and social behaviour that is required in the 21st century for all people to survive and thrive in long term sustainability and equality. It promotes a socially just and ecologically sound framework for being, doing and organising at a personal, political and planetary level.

Embracing others

An Ecology of Care embraces and fosters a community of people who Care. It is comprised of people from diverse fields of interest who wish to share knowledge, collaboration and learning; building on what has been accomplished about Care and to move this thinking forward together.

Providing new ideas for change

An Ecology of Care represents an opportunity to make integrative and transformative change (responses) in economics, health, education, governance and other fields effecting social capital by reconsidering these institutions through the lens of Care.

Practical solutions

An Ecology of Care develops research and practical projects that disseminate useful solutions to a broad array of problems through examples, pilot studies, tools and practice guidelines. Quality of Care metrics provide a basis for measures of ecological progress, guidelines or principles for developing healthy business cultures, structures for projects and programs which help to balance community and economic interests while empowering people.

Critical leadership

An Ecology of Care provides a way to critically evaluate and understand the health of each person's personal Care profile by reflecting on what their form of Care looks like in the leadership relationships they have developed with their *self*, others and the world. Through self-reflection, considering an Ecology of Care helps leaders to directly confront the difficult problems of modern times. Reflecting on Care makes the existence (or lack of) Care more visible, so that individual leaders can clearly demonstrate the value of their Care through their executive actions. By raising consciousness and awareness of what really matters to people, decisions considered through the filter of an Ecology of Care enable leaders to adjust the priorities they set to better align with their own responsibility (*my Care*).

Summary

The thoughts and ideas presented above are in no way exhaustive nor do they fully define what an Ecology of Care is or stands for. They are a work-in-progress; a way of understanding an organic concept; one that will undoubtedly grow and be more clearly understood over time and certainly be improved through retrospection. They are, however, important starting points for focusing our group's efforts towards building an Ecology of Care; a meta-theoretical framework which has as its sole intention to help make a better world for everyone and every-thing within it.

The future: (Trans)forming an Ecology of Care: Internationalisation

Turning Care into action

To this point our research about Care emerged from philosophical/theoretical investigations but to make the scalable social transformations needed, Care has to be translated into concrete, useful and actionable forms. The very idea of building an ecology based on Care inherently means significant change across large sections of society, as well as within the megastructures of economics, education, health and many of the largest institutions of wealth and power. These all contain very strong and resistant private interests and institutional inertia.

To address this, we developed a mission statement for an *Ecology of Care*:

To find practical, applicable and humanly meaningful ways to explore and understand common [human] higher order needs; to interpret these into and merge them with an artificial world that human beings have already built and by doing so to re-establish ecologically resilient patterns of behaviour that can become a 'new 'normal' for future generations.

This statement highlights a call to action and ethos for the actions (or responses) that an Ecology of Care as a movement will strive to achieve in terms of its response-ability (practical ways of responding) and response-ibility (the moral and ethical stance inherent in its responses). Thus, our guiding proposition is soundly based in consciousness of each person's individual responsibility through personal reflection.

The Ecology of Care holds as a first principle that, by considering human actions through the lens of Care, people are all brought back to their undeniable responsibility for everything they do in relation to their self, others and the worlds they share. This concept redefines the role of human beings in the earth's ecology over time.

Strategic focus: A network of networks

Early in 2017 the Ecology of Care Network was registered as a non-profit Community Interest Company (CIC) in the United Kingdom. As well as developing its own programs of research and practice, a key strategy in building an Ecology of Care lies in linking the multitude of different organisations and groups who are currently doing work that might be considered Caring as we understand it. So that the power of a collective understanding of Care might be better realised, we will work towards bringing together these many groups working in economics, education, health, design, architecture, engineering, business and industry, food and agriculture, marketing, fashion, peace and conflict and many other fields. We propose to facilitate the aggregation of many of these Care groups and cooperatives into a network of networks, adopting a systems thinking approach directed towards nurturing a healthier human ecology.

I believe that to meet the challenges of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for oneself, one's own family or nation, but for the benefit of all humankind. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace. (Gyatso [14th Dalai Lama] in Keown, Prebish and Husted, 1998, p. xx)

A common aim linking all of these networks of ecological stewardship (responsibility) is that they bring together activities that promote true human happiness, quality and equality of life for people, and the reduction of harm caused by human interventions in the global ecology.

Our mission in promoting the Ecology of Care Network (EoC Network) is to raise conscious awareness of individual forms of Care at the core of all motivations.

'My Care' (The quality and form of Care individual to who I am) is what shapes every action that each person takes within the communities they live in and contribute to as part of a larger society (ecology).

The tactical process of building a network of networks will begin within education and the economic/corporate worlds. Studying and disseminating research and practice outcomes that feed back into each other will build a healthy and organically productive cycle of growth in the Ecology of Care platform. Building a global Ecology of Care will eventually require a very broad base of activities, so initially at least, not all areas in which Care is needed can be planted at the same time nor can they all be advanced equally. Applying Care theory will require pilot activities that can be built upon. The early years of this process will need to focus resources and intent within a number of key tactical arenas, namely education, economics and governance. We take the view that these foci will provide the most solid basis for establishing the Ecology of Care as a global entity and also that these foci will open pathways for other branches of activities to be seeded and develop. In the short term, they will provide us with the best return on our investment of resources and effort. We also anticipate that capillary understanding of our work will spread via various media channels to a broader public audience through the visibility and presence that EoC activities and events generate.

Primary tactical arenas (education, economics, governance)

Care in education: Care studies

Within institutions of learning, the EoC Network will provide education, training and research in aspects of Care for self, others and the world.

Initially developing university courses under the rubric of *Care Studies* will enable us to investigate the most effective means of delivery and develop new forms of adoption/adaption so that we begin a process of continuous improvement. Learnings here will enable further dissemination of Care Studies through basic courses in general education as well as undergraduate level and non-educational institutional opportunities such as corporate and government groups. At a point in the near future we see Care Studies providing a strong foundational base at the beginning of a student's life in any discipline; shepherding learning within those disciplines towards a positive and productive notion of Care.

A common avenue for knowledge exchange in education is the conference format. Starting with the first general conference, we will promote a series of international public events in many countries that will enable participation by the broadest possible range of disciplines, interest groups and social strata. At the first international conference we will begin the development of dual streams of history/theory, research

and practice. Over time, we expect understandings of an Ecology of Care will mature as Care evolves to become a more normalised mode of practice.

Care economics: Care in business and industry – Care corporations

For people in commercial, government and non-government organisations, an Ecology of Care Network will provide programs that promote self-reflection, self-realisation and self-actualisation in the workplace. We will assist organisations (companies and institutions) to develop and implement programs that help their employees to embrace a stronger sense of purpose as they become not simply “cogs in a machine” but people who take an active role in designing a more fruitful and fulfilling work/life balance. This will increase the levels of satisfaction they derive from their time spent contributing to the success of a business in which they are personally invested.

For organisations this will facilitate change in behaviour towards Caring and sustainable business practices which foster loyalty, ownership, cooperation and a sense of belonging across all members of the work community.

The shift from quantitative to qualitative growth will require deep changes ... at the individual level. It will mean overcoming ... materialism and turning from finding satisfaction in material consumption to finding it in human relationships and community. (Capra and Luisi, 2014, p. 372)

Strategically, the business and industry sectors are crucial to developing and adopting new forms of business practice and organisational structures which promote *Care based Economics* as a fundamental operating system for a more sustainable future (Praetorius, 2015; Hinton and MacLurcan, 2016).

Care in business is about shifting towards a generative culture; one that supports people and planet while reducing inherently destructive aspects of production and a harmful focus on profit to the exclusion of all else. Business can no longer operate on the basis of limitless material inputs nor can it simply take its workforce for granted as a production resource.

Care in governance and community

The Ecology of Care Network is a non-profit, non-partisan organisation with no political ties or financial affiliations; this is the basis of its charter. This neutrality does not mean that it cannot or should not participate in helping government organisations or groups to achieve goals that are consistent with the ethos of an Ecology of Care. Within areas of policy and governance we will provide consultancy services as well as training and guidance that advance the adoption and application of the primary principles of Care as outlined in the EoC charter. We will actively contribute to deliberations and debates that influence decision making, policy and the social impact of proposed changes in community amenity and our response will remain in keeping with the ethos of Care.

In places where there are already the beginnings of legislative and social change, such as Bhutan, Equator and Bolivia, even though they are small in comparison to the larger more dominant countries, we will study advances they have made in the legislative process. The ideals of *Sumak Kawsay* or *Buen Vivir*, meaning good living/living well, as well as the National Happiness Index, are good starting points for new forms of legislation that foster ecological thinking and support the nurturing of human wellbeing (Praetorius, 2015; Thackara, 2015). We will continue this process with a view to building better guidelines for transforming social attitudes towards Care within local and global communities.

Conclusion

All of the work undertaken thus far and the proposed Ecology of Care activities described above have been designed to enable the concept of Care to grow, to evolve, to develop in the organic ways it needs to do in order to foster a central vision; that is, an ecology that Cares for people as much as people Care for it. Craig Bremner (Director of the Ecology of Care CIC) summarises the task ahead of us succinctly when he says, “we aren’t saving the environment, the planet has always determined what lives and what does not; all we are doing is re-learning to be together” (Bremner, 2016).

In this paper, I set out to introduce a new field of theory and practice called an *Ecology of Care*. By outlining the sequence of events and actions that have led to its current state of development, I have exposed the foundations of this new field and the moral/ethical stance to which it aspires. An Ecology of Care is a meta-theoretical project designed to provide a starting point for addressing many of the issues facing people of any economic strata or geo-political orientation throughout the human world. An Ecology of Care offers an alternative way of considering human-based activities; an antidote for many of the synthetic maladies effecting the natural world that are well entrenched and have become increasingly destructive over the past 250 years. The project of Care offers a way of rethinking the role of people in the planetary system of systems if they are to regain an optimistic future. An Ecology based on Care suggests a practical way forward; one that provides logical, desirable and viable alternatives to many of the moribund social, economic and political institutions that are struggling to cope with the complexity of human needs in the 21st century. We therefore urge our readers and leaders to support the project of an Ecology of Care in whatever form they care about. Whether it is in the economic world, the health field, the education sphere or any field of human endeavour, Care needs to be at the heart of all of our efforts ... if people Care, human beings will not only survive, they will thrive.

| *An Ecology of Care means Caring for our Home and everyone within it.*

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About the author

Dr Ian Coxon is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia. After a career in marketing and project management, mainly within the services sector, he re-engaged in academic life with a degree in industrial design. His subsequent research into the structure and epistemology of human experience formed the basis of his doctorate. His current research and teaching centres on the development and dissemination of an Ecology of Care as a field of study and practice across all disciplines and fields of economic endeavour.