1. Care and Vulnerability

The ethics of care has contributed to this transformation of ethics. By proposing to valorize moral values like caring, attention to others, solicitude, the ethics of care has contributed to modifying a dominant conception of ethics, and changed deeply the way we look at ethics, or how ethics should look like. It has introduced ethical stakes into politics, weakening, through its critique of theories of justice, the seemingly obvious link between an ethics of justice and political liberalism. Care is a fundamental aspect of human life and consists of “everything we do to continue, repair, and maintain ourselves so that we can live in the world as well as possible” (Joan Tronto).

Care corresponds to a quite ordinary reality: the fact that people look after one another, take care of one another, and thus are attentive to the functioning of the world, which depends on this kind of care. Ethics of care affirms the importance of care and attention given to others, in particular to those whose lives and wellbeing depend on particularized, continual, and daily attention: ordinary vulnerable others. Ethics of care draw our attention to the ordinary, to what we are unable to see, but is right before our eyes. An ethics that gives voice and attention to humans that are undervalued precisely because they accomplish unnoticed, invisible tasks, and take care of the basic needs.

These ethics are based on an analysis of the historical conditions that have favored a division of moral labor such that activities of care have been socially and morally devalorized. The assignment of women to the domestic sphere has reinforced the exclusion of these activities and preoccupations from the moral domain and the public sphere, reducing them to the rank of private sentiments devoid of moral and political import. The perspectives of care carry with them a fundamental claim concerning the importance of care for human life, for the relations that organize it, and the social and moral position of caregivers. To recognize this means recognizing that dependence and vulnerability are traits of a condition common to all, not of a special category – the “vulnerable”. This sort of “ordinary” realism (in the sense of
“realistic” proposed by Diamond) is absent from the majority of social and moral theories, which have a tendency to reduce the activities and preoccupations of care to a concern for victims and for the weak on the part of selfless mothers, and a mere affective fact. Hence the importance of acknowledging the first import of the ethics of care: the human is vulnerable. Vulnerability defines ordinariness.

We can connect the ethics of care to the idea of the vulnerability of the human, as it is developed in the ethics inspired by Wittgenstein. Cavell, Diamond, and Veena Das work to connect the very idea of the vulnerability of the human to a vulnerability of, if I may say, our life form(s). Lebensformen in Wittgenstein, Cavell stresses, should be translated not by the phrase forms of life, but life forms. This idea of a life form is connected, for Cavell and Das, to Wittgenstein’s anthropological sensitivity or sensibility, to his attention to everyday language forms, as being both obvious and strange, foreign.

To ask a question of the form “In what circumstances would you say…?” is precisely Wittgenstein’s most obvious (ordinary language) procedure directed to and about us, about us as philosophers when we are, as we inevitably are, variously tempted to force our ordinary words to do what they, as they stand, will not do, disappointed by finitude. (Cavell, preface to Das 2007)

The uncanniness of the ordinary, for Cavell, is then not resolved in the return to everyday life and words; the human is not a given, it is defined by the permanent threat of denial of the human, of dehumanization. Attention to the everyday, to what Veena Das calls the everyday life of the human, the ordinary other, is the first step of caring. The definition of care by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher has to be taken seriously:

In the most general sense, care is a species of 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. That world includes our bodies, our selves, our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web. (Fisher and Tronto, Towards a feminist theory of caring” in Circles of Care, E. Abel and M. Nelson 1990)

The perspective of care, by calling our attention on our general situation of dependence and on the danger of denying these connections, is thus inseparably political and ethical; it develops an analysis of social relations organized around dependence and vulnerability – blind spots of the ethics of justice. In response to the “original position” described by Rawls, the particular kind of realism lauded by the perspective of care would tend to set this “original condition” of vulnerability as the anchor point of moral and political thought. Not a position to
build an ideal theory or set principles, but the mere fact of vulnerability. Thus the approaches of care target the theory of justice as it has developed and taken the dominant position in both political and moral fields of reflection over the course of the second half of the last century. This is not only because, as the controversies between the partisans of care and those of justice illustrate, these approaches call into question the universality of Rawls’ conception of justice, but also because they transform the very nature of moral questioning and the concept of justice itself – expressing not a mere, submissive criticism of justice but rather the positive need for “more than justice” (Baier).

This transformation is made possible because care is a practice, hard work, not a moral feeling or disposition. Care is everywhere, and it is so pervasive a part of human life that it is never seen for what it is: activities by which we act to organize our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. When we get down to the ways that we actually live our lives, care activities are central and pervasive. See how different the world looks when we begin to take these activities seriously: “The world will look different if we place care, and its related values and concerns, closer to the center of human life” (Tronto, pref. to French transl. of Moral Boundaries).

Care is defined by attention to differences (Wittgenstein: “I’ll teach you differences”). A main difficulty of the ethics of care, then, as a way of thinking about the world, is that: “This caring attitude requires us to reconcile the universal needs for care with the circumstances of what seems to be the best form of care in every individual case” (Tronto, id.).

What is at stake here is the validity of general moral principles, hence, the relationship between the general and the particular. By bringing ethics back to the “rough ground of the ordinary” (Wittgenstein), the level of everyday life, care aims at a practical response to specific needs, which are always those of singular ordinary others (whether close to us or not); it is work carried out just as much in the private sphere as in public; it a commitment not to treat anyone as negligible, and it is a sensibility to the details that matter in lived situations. What is the relevance, the importance of the particular, of individual sensibility? What can the singular claim? It is by giving back a voice to the individual sensibility, hence to vulnerability, that one ensures the conversation/conservation (entretien/entertaining) of a human world; it is also a way to root subjectivity and voice, not only in power and action, but in precariousness.
This is something that is obvious in the contexts Life and Words accounts for, when violence destroys the everyday and the sense of life as defining the human (Das 89):

Her recognition that in the gender-determined division of the work of mourning the results of violence, the role of women is to attend, in a torn world, to the details of everyday life that allow a household to function, collecting supplies, cooking, washing and straightening up, seeing to children, and so on, that allow life to knit itself back into some viable rhythm. Part of her task is to make us ponder how it is that such evidently small things (whose bravery within tumultuous circumstances is, however, not small) are a match for the consequences of unspeakable horror. (Cavell, preface to Das 2007)

2. Care: Subverting Autonomy

The subject of care is a sensible, passive individual inasmuch as he or she is affected, is caught in a context of relations, in a form of life that is social and biological, relations and hierarchies of power that pervade our lives – what Foucault defines in terms of a biopolitics. Measuring the importance of care for human life means recognizing the possibility of a subjectivity defined not by agency or self-assertion, but by dependence and vulnerability as ordinary. Going against the grain of the ideal of autonomy animating most moral and political theories, including feminist theories, the ethics of care reminds us that we need others in order to satisfy our primordial needs even (and even more) when we display obvious autonomy. This unpleasant reminder may well be at the source of the misrecognition of care, reduced to a vacuous or condescending version of charity. We are unable to acknowledge that we need care.

The center of gravity of ethics is then shifted, from the “just” to the “important”, from freedom to capabilities. The ideal of autonomy, foremost for women, has defined a way of emancipation. The problem with autonomy is that it is made possible for actual individuals, through care by others. Care is not only for the sick and the elderly: for a woman or a man to appear as autonomous now means that one, or several, other people take care of her/him. We do not like the idea; especially because it reminds us that the emancipation of the Western woman is at the cost of the further subalternization of other women, from the South or the East, who have taken over the tasks of care, which are still invisible. Here, following Tronto, we can see that the political problem of care lies in a actual contempt for the activities linked to care,
and that only a reconsideration of the status of such activities would open a theoretical way to a philosophy of care. We will go back to this point.

A basis of the ethics of care is particularism. Not only attention to the particular other, but a principle of immanence that is a turn in moral thought: against what Wittgenstein in the Blue Book called the “craving for generality”—the desire to pronounce general rules of thought and action to be applied top-down—it is the attempt to describe and valorize, within morality, attention to the particular(s), to the ordinary neglected details of human life. So here we have an actual bottom-up conception of ethics (except that it still remained to be asked why the top is the top etc.) Analyses in terms of care are inscribed within a critique of standard moral theory, which claims the primacy of the description of actual moral practices in ethical reflection. If, as Bernard Williams said, “ethical theories are abstract schemas supposed to guide the judgment of each and every one in such or such a particular problem,” they aim at conceiving and dealing with the particular on the basis of general rules or conceptions. Practical ethics of care, on the other hand, start from concrete moral problems and see how we cope—not in order to abstract from these particular solutions (which would be to fall back into the craving for generality), but in order to perceive the value of (in) the particular. Conceiving morality on the model of justice and rights leads to neglecting some of the most important aspects of moral life—our proximities, our motivations, our relations—in favor of concepts that are far removed from our ordinary questionings and uses of language, disembedded from our everyday lives: like obligation, rationality, choice. Qualities such as generosity, or kindness seem to escape available moral theories’ capacities for description or appreciation. Michael Stocker, in a 1976 article, noted that “modern ethical theory has come to promote a petty and stunted moral life.” Focusing on notions of rational action or moral choice leaves out an important part of ordinary moral questioning and activities.

A properly political, and not only moral, stake of care is introducing a political dimension into family relations, into the private—into the intimate, where claims for equality seem inadequate. Care allows for taking into account the particularity of the relations of proximity that form within the family, and for re-examining the familial universe as an arena within which relations are shaped by tensions between justice and care. The perspective of care then leads us to explore the ways in which we—in practice and in theory—treat the demarcation between the spheres of personal relations (familial relations, but also love,
friendship) and the so-called impersonal spheres of public relations, with of course a hierarchy involved: so the political stakes in the ethics of care is again the ethical enablement of populations and categories that are assumed as morally inferior.

The traditional association of caring with women rested on a social order that excluded women from many parts (or all) of the public sphere. Women (and for that matter slaves, servants, and often working-class people) as well as care activities were relegated outside of public life. One of the great accomplishments of the second wave of feminism was to break the caste barriers that excluded women from the public sphere. (Tronto, “Care as the work of citizens”)

Viewing care as socially, morally, and politically important thus implies a reference to “women” as a category to which the labor associated with care has been specifically restricted and assigned. Since speaking of “women” means introducing a category (as is any theory assuming that such a category does exist), Gilligan’s approach was dismissed as “essentialist.” The ethics of care is, however, a claim for more realism, in the sense given to this word in Cora Diamond’s *The Realistic Spirit*, meaning the necessity to see what lies just under one’s eyes: the reality of inequalities. If something like morals exist, then they can be seen not in a set of preexisting numerable rules nor in a moral reality but in the mere immanence of situations, affects and practices. No “care” without the expression of everyone’s voice: here lies the importance of a different voice. What Gilligan did establish is that the language of justice cannot account for the pertinence of women’s experiences and points of view—these experiences and the moral perspectives they produce being disqualified as deficient or marginal. If the possibility that women might be morally deficient is excluded, then the hypotheses that there exists a “different voice” must be taken seriously, along with that of a moral orientation identifying and treating moral problems in another way, different from that implied by the language of justice. Analyses of things in terms of care are devoted to such an objective of articulation and clarification.

Gilligan has clearly shown the generality of her approach: justice and care are two different tonalities, or rival voices, existing inside each of us, the care voice being less inhibited in girls than in boys. The notion of “care,” in as much as it covers very practical activities and a form of sensitivity, a sustained attention to others and a sense of responsibility and dependence, breaks with theories of impartial justice. The theory of care does not aim at installing pity, compassion, solicitude and benevolence as subsidiary values that would lessen the hardness of
a cold conception of social relations, an impartial conception of justice based on the primacy of rights attributed to autonomous, separated, rational individuals. Such description would better suit what is called solicitude, that is to say, care from the perspective of justice or as it appears in that political discourse whose the target it has been since its appearance.

The reason why questions related to the ethics of care become part of the “public debate” today has to do with the crisis undergone by traditional ways of “taking care” due to a massive irruption of women in the labor market. In any case, whether provided inside the domestic sphere or by public institutions or by the market, care is nowadays effected by women whose social status is insecure: nurses, girls helping at home, social workers, etc., not to mention all these jobs related to care that are all the more devaluated insofar as they are being occupied by women, like teachers, doctors, etc. The crisis in care and the care drain affects at the same time the traditional care givers, those whose working conditions are more and more arduous due to cuts in social politics and the geographical redistribution of care facilities, in favor of rich countries and to the expense of poor ones. The social (and global) division of labor related to care being as it is, it is tempting to divide activities related to care in two parts: “emotional care”-- affectionate care given to particular others, an activity for white bourgeois women; and “care as a service,” to be bought and delegated, dirty work to be left to subalterns. The generalization of the concept of vulnerability is here to be questioned. Almost nobody would choose to give that second kind (devalued) of care if he (or she) can avoid it; certainly not the intellectuals who praise a caring society and emotional work without bothering who is going to provide such a care that they claim to be a right due to (rich) citizens. One should question the meaning of such a vulnerability that everybody ought to feel as a care-receiver, the protection everybody feels entitled to, but often denies to care-givers. These are questions that have not yet reached the level of public debate. The voice that ethics of care has made audible is not only women’s voice; it is the voice of all subalterns, all socially disadvantaged categories, ethnicized and racialized, to which the labor of care has been attributed.

The ethics of care makes it clear that we depend on others in a world that values autonomy so highly. The notion of care does not refer only to a type of attention to others and a set of practical activities; it also implies a sense of one’s dependence and responsibility. The ethics of care does not aim at enlisting compassion and solicitude in the category of subaltern virtues dedicated to soothing an unsympathetic conception of social relations, or (which
amounts to the same) installing domination under the cover of protection. The ethics of care aims at the acknowledgment of a whole portion of common life systematically ignored in political discourse. Care is what makes a common life possible. Ethics, then, is not about how to live better lives, but how, simply, to live an ordinary life in the world.

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. (Thoreau, Civil Disobedience)

Standard ethics, and political analysis, when they deal with social contract do not enquiry on how such a society is made sustainable, carefully expulsing out of ethics the world of fundamental care, and more generally speaking, all those actions that make ordinary social relations possible and alive. Ignoring the care issue in theoretical ethics and politics amounts to ignoring the origin of what makes a society exist and perpetuate.

In order to legitimate the care approach it is thus necessary to return to an ordinary sense of justice, and to see sensibility as a necessary condition of justice. Tronto notes that the care justice debate has been really “one sided”: as if it were always the burden of the ethics of care to prove that it is compatible with justice. But shouldn’t our standard theories of justice prove that they can take into account the needs of everyone? To account for “the ordinary other?”

According to Annette Baier, the legalist paradigm perverts moral reflection: “Those who object to analytic methods most often reject not only the comparison of philosophical thought to mathematical computation, but also the legalist paradigm, the tyranny of the argument. (Baier 1985, 241). Baier, like Murdoch, criticizes the idea that moral philosophy can be reduced to questions of obligation and choice—as if a moral problem, since it can be formulated in these terms, can also be treated thus. Baier takes up Ian Hacking’s (1984) observations on moral philosophy’s obsession with the model of game theory. For Baier, this is a masculine syndrome (“a big boy’s game, and a pretty silly one too”). Certainly, ordinary moral life is full of decision-making. But what leads up to decisions is just as much the work of improvisation as one of reasoning or the application of principles. Tronto beautifully puts it: “Care requires justice, but it also requires that we think of justice in concrete cases and circumstances, not just as a general set of principles that are left to courts, politicians, or philosophers, to apply” (Tronto, id.)
Care, by suggesting a new attention to the unexplored or neglected details of life, confronts us with our own inabilities and inattentions, but also shows us how they are then expressed and translated into moral theory. What is at stake in ethics of care is epistemological and political inseparably: it seeks to bring to light the connection between our lack of attention to neglected realities and the lack of political account of social realities, rendered invisible.

From this perspective one may take up certain critiques brought against care ethics. Joan Tronto has suggested that the dyadic image of care (the amorous or maternal face-to-face) to which Gilligan remains attached is too narrow to allow the ensemble of social activities having to do with attentive care for others to be thought. She considers that the philosophical valorization of care must base itself not so much in a particularist ethics but rather in an enlargement of the concept of action. This obliges one to give up on one part of the ethics of care, the idea of a feminine ethics, and to join Tronto in moving towards an anthropology of vulnerability. Against a sexed anthropology, Tronto proposes an anthropology of needs, in order to found the social dignity of care: not only do certain of our needs (and among the most important ones) call directly for care, but care defines the (political) space in which tending to human needs becomes possible, as a veritable attention to others. An anthropology of vulnerability needs a desaffectivization of care. For Tronto the idea that women have special moral qualities is quite misleading:

As long as women’s morality is categorized as a special kind of morality, then any argument made from “women’s morality” can be dismissed as irrelevant to the genuine concerns of “real” or “universal” morality. (…)

One of my main targets in this book is a position that was current at the time, that there might be an alternative moral theory to adapt that grows out of women’s experience, a position to signify that women occupy a moral “high ground”. To me this argument is as one sides as the argument that women are incapable of moral thought. (Tronto, preface to the French transl. of Moral Boundaries)

We see that it is only in going from ethics to politics that ethics of care can be given their critical power, and caregivers, their empowerment. By calling for a society in which caregivers would have their voice, their relevance, and in which the tasks of care would not be structurally invisible or inconspicuous.

Recognizing the importance of care would thus allow us to revalue the contributions made to human societies by the outcasts, by women, by the humble people who work everyday. Once we commit ourselves to remap the world so that their contributions count, then we are able to change the world. (Tronto, id.)
As Tronto puts it, the valorization of care passes through its politicization and voice. The ethical affirmation of the importance and dignity of care cannot go without a political reflection on the allocation of resources and the social distribution of tasks this allocation defines:

As a type of activity, care requires a moral disposition and a type of moral conduct. We can express some of these qualities in the form of a universalist moral principle, such as: one should care for those around or in one’s society. Nevertheless, in order for these qualities to become a part of moral conduct, people must engage in both private and public practices that teach them, and reinforce their senses of, these moral concerns. In order to be created and sustained, then, an ethic of care relies upon a political commitment to value care and to reshape institutions to reflect that changed value. (Tronto, 1993, 177-178).

3. Care and Citizenship

Dominant liberal ethics is, in its political articulation, the product and expression of a social practice that devalorizes both the attitude and work of care. The heterodox ethics of care gives ordinary questions—*who is taking care of whom, and how?*—the force and relevance necessary for critically examining our political and moral judgments, understand the narrowness of a vision of justice defined by rights. The critical import of such questions is huge and makes care an issue of citizenship and humanity.

Care is a fundamental aspect of human life. In its broadest meanings, care is complex and multidimensional: it refers both to the dispositional qualities we need to care for ourselves and others, such as being attentive to human needs and taking responsibility to meet such needs, as well as to the concrete work of caring. To care well requires that both of these elements be present: a disposition to care and care work.

Care is “a perspective from which to think about human life”; Tronto reminds us. It is also a political guideline. Not only, as Tronto as shown in *Moral Boundaries*, to set a new agenda for public policies and moral priorities. But also, now, to define the priority of the local, as a new definition of citizenship as humanity.

Despite the burgeoning literature on care, and especially on its usefulness as a framework to guide moral, political, and policy decisions, though, critics of the care perspective persist in insisting that there are some questions that require a more universal perspective from which to think about broader political and moral questions. To such critics, since care is always (to use Nel Noddings’ (Noddings) book title) “starting at home,” it is necessarily limited in its ability to make arguments beyond the most intimate and local level. As a perspective from which to think about social and political life, a care perspective demands that, as we try to make moral and political judgments, we use the concrete and contextual to support our more general political, social, and moral judgments. (Tronto, “Care as the work of citizens”)
There are critical moral and political questions for us to ask in determining who is responsible for the ways that care work is done, and what caring work is done and what caring work is left undone. For Tronto, we should think of care as a ground for conferring citizenship: this is what she means by “care is the work of citizens”. In a world in which we took the centrality of care more seriously, we would define citizens as people engaged in relationships of care with one another.

If we adopt such a seemingly modest definition of citizenship, it would require a radical rethinking of political values.

The issue of care today is made more urgent with both the crisis of care, and the situation of deep vulnerability of populations “cumulating” as it were various risks (social, environmental, geographical) and proportionally neglected, as in catastrophe situations (Katrina, Fukushima). Both facts are connected to the radical injustice of global poverty: by focusing on and valuing care in the North, we insulate people in the North from the harm that their actions inflict upon others. Ordinary citizens in the Anglo-American world, says Tronto, lack determinate knowledge about their complicity in global poverty. “They do not see global poverty and inequality as morally important issues for us” (Relational Responsibilities, Partiality, and an Ethics of Care: Thinking About Global Ethics).

Sociologist Kari Norgaard recently reported on the ways in which Norwegians, well aware of the problem, declined to participate in a social movement aimed at addressing global warming. When asked why she did not do more, one of her informants responded, “‘People want to protect themselves a little bit.’” (Norgaard 2006).

Such protection, just as “security” as promoted in the Western world, seems one-sided. So there is a strong connection between care and global justice, a connection that seems to empty the classical care/justice debate, for only the care perspective enables us to really take care of the problem of global injustice. The main inequalities, today, are in the area of care. It is the basis of the theory of capabilities.

Women are the world’s primary, and usually only, caregivers for people in a condition of extreme dependency: Young children, the elderly, and those whose physical or mental handicaps make them incapable of the relative (and often temporary) independence that characterizes so-called ‘normal’ human lives. Women perform this crucial work, often, without pay and without recognition that it is work. At the same time, the fact that they need to spend long hours caring for the physical needs of others makes it more difficult for them to do
what they want to do in other areas of life, including employment, citizenship, play and self-expression. (Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*)

Nussbaum adds that women lack essential support for leading lives that are fully human. And even when they live in a constitutional democracy such as India, where they are equals in theory, they are second-class citizens in reality. So issues of care and insecurity are the most urgent issues of justice: by articulating Care and Citizenship, we see that what is at issue is not the warranting of universal (and unavailable) human rights, or (in the capabilities approach) the possibility to live a full life, or at least to lead a safe human life. What is at issue is political citizenship in a world where it is denied to a majority of humans, hence denied humanity. Citizenship signifies political membership, having a voice in your history. But today citizenship becomes an exclusionary practice (and this is the source of many mobilizations and revolts today) even, and utmost, in democracies.

Citizenship is determined by the people who live in a nation state who set the rules for membership. Like a private club that understands the value of its exclusionary rules for inclusion, citizenship can function as a kind of barrier that reflects and protects the political power of those who are already insiders. Citizenship is not always determined, then, by what is moral and just. The question of citizenship is quintessentially a political question, and political questions call for political solutions. (Tronto, « Care as a Work of Citizens »)

Questions about citizenship are also close to care issues because they are always local questions. They concern the decisions about membership that are made by the closed circle of those who are already members. “Discussions about citizenship must always then be local and political, and cannot only be made in universal and moral terms”. Societies conceive of citizens in terms of the contributions that they make to the society. Definitions of citizenship change when there is a political movement by non-citizens, who consider their contribution important, that sufficiently threatens existing members into changing their definitions of citizenship.

But the important issue here is to define citizenship by vulnerability, by needs instead of contribution. Here security, or better, radical insecurity can become the basis of a new, inclusive definition of citizenship, a citizenship not defined (just as security) by the protection of a particular state (just as human security has been defined in terms of claim to security that belongs primarily to individuals and societies, and only secondarily to States) – but by a protection of the human as such, the human including its fellow inhabitants of the Earth.
As Amartya Sen says in defense of his capabilities approach for thinking Human Security:

We are asking the world community to look particularly at the interconnections that have to be taken into account in developing a fuller and more integrated approach to the insecurities that plague the lives of so much of humanity. We believe that the effectiveness of our battle against human insecurity requires collaboration at different levels. First of all, focusing on the concern with vulnerability and insecurity can itself be valuable in bringing an important perspective to the attention of the world.

The concept of human security seems to indicate, therefore, both the need of being protected (from above) and the need of being enabled (from below, or horizontally) to pursue one’s own vital interests: interests related to health, sexuality, environment, body, membership in a community, work, and so on. But it is also a democratic challenge.

The concept of human security provides a reformulation and enactment of the capability approach. It harks back, therefore, to this long history of normative claims to protection and promotion of the vital interests of singular human beings. But chiefly, as appears in The Idea of Justice (2009), the point of view of human security is a bottom-up normative (philosophical, political, social) conception. A bottom-up conception reconstructs from below the ordinary demands of justice, welfare, interests, etc., rather than accounting for such demands from above – that is, from a description of perfect institutions that is applied only in later stages to concrete circumstances. So the Human Security approach can contribute to the heterodox view of ethics we are calling for, by appealing to the bottom-up approach, which emphasizes the role of social and individual grounds rather than the outlining of institutions; and by appealing to the bottom-up perspective to the dimension of human needs, vulnerabilities, necessities, etc. The concept of human security is essential to a development of bottom-up normative perspectives, bottom being human vulnerability.

Bottom-up perspectives do not derive normative criteria from above, through a description of a society perfectly governed by morally justified principles and institutions: normative criteria are derived, instead, through an examination of specific situations which appear, from different points of view, unjust or immoral or simply unbearable. Following Sen’s account in The Idea of Justice, we need to find alternatives to transcendental institutionalism – the approach that confines the issue of justice within the description of institutions and principles, thus obscuring the description of concrete societies and actual conducts,
circumstances and situations. As Sen shows, when it comes to these critical and reflexive practices, a theory developed from the top-down is neither necessary nor sufficient: ordinary practices do not require a perfect theory, nor provide it.

Adopting a bottom-up model based on vulnerability can shed light on the importance of political relations that are not perceivable within a top-down approach, or with classical and conformist bottom-top approaches of liberal democracies. Political relations must be left open to the questioning of a wide range of human relations, such as: care, trust, familiarity, and community that are generated in globalized societies, where people that are and remain stranger are living together, and where one can encounter people in further circles. These relations of trust and reliance among strangers are vital to the creation of a texture of security.

We need therefore to attend to those horizontal networks of relations and communities that, while not being strictly speaking political, have an expressive political relevance through the acknowledgement of vulnerability or precariousness. The notion of vulnerability, indicates contexts of ordinary life, in which human beings find their needs, interests, and fragilities, totally exposed. These contexts of ordinary life are governed by relations that cannot be made even perceptible, visible, through the orthodox or liberal concepts of ethics (justice, impartiality, catalogue of duties, rational choice etc.). Global change aggravates the exposition of the human populations to situations of disaster in industrial societies (tsunami, flooding, fire disaster, earthquake, health hazard, and industrial contamination…) in a context of vulnerability to various and cumulated risks. The question of human security is enhanced by the addition of vulnerabilities created by the cumulative carelessness toward some “invisible” humans. Here again, the ethics of care, conceived (cosmo)politically, can lead towards a renewed attention to the precariousness of human situations.

It is hence difficult to believe in the solutions promoted by Sen to support the cause of greater human security in the world – "protection" (when people are too vulnerable, in too many ways, vulnerabilities reinforcing each other) and "empowerment" (when people, with the help of each other, can enhance their ability to withstand threatening developments), in other words: “our ability to look after ourselves and others”. Still his aim – the disconnecting of citizenship and possession of rights, in favor of a citizenship based on vulnerability and care, is the main challenge, in dark times, for a new Enlightenment. A new version of cosmopolitanism, or citizenship of a vulnerable world.
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