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▶ To cite this version:

Sandra Laugier. Introduction: Care and Life. Politics of the Ordinary: Care, Ethics, and Forms of Life, Peeters Publishers, pp.1 - 8, 2020, 10.2307/j.ctv1q26kzr.4 . hal-03741442v2

HAL Id: hal-03741442

https://paris1.hal.science/hal-03741442v2

Submitted on 2 Aug 2022

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Source: Sandra Laugier. *Politics of the Ordinary: Care, Ethics, and Forms of Life*. Peeters Publishers, 2020
https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1q26kzr
DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv1q26kzr.4

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Introduction: Care and Life

To Frans Vosman

> 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*)

The ordinary has been variously denied, undervalued, or neglected—not taken into account—in theoretical thought. Such negligence, I propose, has to do with widespread contempt for ordinary life inasmuch as it is domestic and female. The disdain stems from the gendered hierarchy of objects deemed worthy of intellectual research. One important aspect of ordinary language philosophy, as I see it, is its capacity to call our attention to human expressiveness as embodied in women's voices. Ordinary language philosophy (OLP) thus provides the basis for a redefinition of ethics as attention to ordinary life, and care for moral expression.

The idea of an ethics formulated in a "different voice"—a woman's voice—follows from these explorations of OLP, with the further incorporation of Carol Gilligan's approach as a developmental psychologist. Care is at once a practical response to specific needs and a sensitivity to the ordinary details of human life that *matter*. Hence, care is a concrete matter that ensures maintenance (for example, as conversation and conservation) and continuity of the human world and form of life. This is nothing less than a paradigm shift in ethics, with a reorientation toward vulnerability and a shift from the "just" to the "important." Measuring the importance of care for human life requires first acknowledging the truth that we arrived at in the last chapter, following Austin: that human life forms are fundamentally vulnerable, subject to failure, and even defined by the possibility of error. To pay attention to ordinary life is to become aware of its

vulnerability—it is constantly threatening to dissolve or else to reveal itself to have been unreal all along, a mere fantasy.

Human vulnerability is the "original condition" of the need for care—what needs to be taken care of and cared about. I want to add here a connection between security/safety, vulnerability (Laugier 2016ab), and care, of which I became aware when I encountered the reality of the Fukushima human disaster. The situation in post-catastrophic Japan raises the issue of human security, in a very basic way (Laugier 2013b).

Various humanitarian programs that promote security, and human security, aim to give a list of positive items that would define security, as preservation of basic vital interests: interests related to health, environment, body, sexuality, membership in a political community, work, gender, sexuality. The concept of security thus provides a reformulation of the capability approach, introduced by authors such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. (It is not an accident that Sen served as President of the Commission of Human Security of UN.) But Sen himself reminds us, in "Human Security Now" (2003), that the basic reality is *insecurity*: what he calls "the intense problem of human insecurity". Our problem is, more, insecurity, or precariousness, than security. This is why the paradigm of care is so powerful, after having been neglected since the second wave of feminism. Precariousness (not related etymologically to care!) and vulnerability are conditions of the human life form today.

It is not about living a "good" life, but just about living a life. This notion of *human life* is connected to Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life/life form (a form taken by life, as Cavell, 1979 and Das, 2007 say), which also defines a texture of life. "Texture" thus refers to an unstable reality that cannot be fixed by concepts, or by determinate particular objects, but only by the recognition of gestures, manners, details and styles. We can connect the ethics of care to the idea of the vulnerability of the human and of life. Cavell, Diamond, and Das work to connect the very idea of the vulnerability of the human to a vulnerability of our life form(s). *Lebensformen* in Wittgenstein, Cavell stresses, should be translated not by the phrase forms of life,

but life forms (1979). This idea of a life form is connected, for Cavell and Das, to Wittgenstein's anthropological sensitivity, to his attention to everyday language forms, as being both obvious and strange, foreign, and vulnerable (Das 2007). The uncanniness of the ordinary, for Cavell, is thus not resolved in the return to everyday life and words; the human, or life, is not a given; it is defined by the permanent threat of denial of the human, of dehumanization or even "devitalization," loss of form of life.

Attention to what Veena Das calls *the everyday life of the human* (2007) is the first step of caring: care is attention, and the ethics of care calls our attention to phenomena commonly unseen, but which stand right before our eyes. Das (2007) and Cavell (1979) draw our attention to the ordinary by making us attentive to human expressiveness. This is attention to what is right before our eyes (the visible) and to human capacities for expression as connected to capacities for suffering. The idea of the vulnerable is connected to the idea of expression and to the human body as carrying expression, fated to expressivity but also refusing it ("us victims of expression," says Emerson (1977).

The perspective of *care*, by calling our attention to our general situation of dependence, is thus indissociably 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 (1971), 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 on which to build an ideal theory or set principles, but the mere fact of vulnerability that appears in "the difficulty of reality." This is something that is obvious in the contexts *Life and Words* (2007; see also Laugier 2015) accounts for, when violence destroys the everyday and the sense of life as defining the human.

In Swapan's story, as told by Das in *Affliction* (2015), care is care for the preservation of form of life, life being threatened by madness. The threat to normality (normal family life) becomes a threat to reality itself. We can use here what Goffman says, in "The

Insanity of Place" (1969), about the unreality of life as it is remembered (as a dream) after the crisis created by the occurrence of madness in a family. But this unreality appears in ordinary incidents.

> Whether crucial or picayune, all encounters present occasions when the individual can become spontaneously involved in the proceedings and derive from this a firm sense of reality. When an incident occurs and spontaneous involvement is threatened, then reality is threatened.... The minute social system that is brought into being with each encounter will be disorganized, and the participants will feel unruled, unreal, and anomic. (Goffman, 2005, p. 135)

Care is "a perspective from which to think about human life," Tronto reminds us. It is also a political guideline. Not only, as Tronto has shown in *Moral Boundaries*, to set a new agenda for public policies and moral priorities. The critical import of such questions is huge and makes *care* an issue of citizenship and humanity. But also, now, as a new definition of citizenship as humanity and bounds of care.

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" (1993, 2005). 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. *Citizens* equates with *people engaged in relations 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 by the crisis of care and the global injustice of global poverty: by focusing on and valuing care in the North, we insulate people in the North from the harm their actions inflict upon others. Ordinary citizens in the Anglo-American world, says Tronto, lack determinate knowledge about their complicity in global poverty. So there is a strong connection between care and global justice, a connection that seems to hollow out 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.

> Women are the world's primary, and usually only, care-givers 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, 2000b, p. 222)

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 of living 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 has become an exclusionary practice (and this is the source of many mobilizations and revolts) even, and most prominently, in democracies. Citizenship is determined by the people who live in a nation state that sets 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, in Marilyn Friedman (ed.), 2005)

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" (Tronto, 2005, p. 144). Models of citizenship define the boundaries between public and private life and determine which activities, attitudes, possessions, etc., are to be considered worthy in any given state. In previous historical eras, property or arms were conditions of citizenship. Through inclusion and exclusion of some people, citizenship reflects winners and losers in the political game with the highest stakes.

Societies conceive of citizens in terms of the contributions they make to society. Definitions of citizenship change when there is a political movement by non-citizens, who consider their contribution important, one which 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 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. 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. (Sen 2003)

The concept of human security seems to indicate 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, 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 Sen's *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 which 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, from 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.

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: the various forms of care, trust, familiarity, and community that are generated in globalized societies, where people who are and remain strangers 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. In order to build up a safer society 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 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.). The disconnection of citizenship and possession of rights in favor of a citizenship based on vulnerability and networks of care is probably the first challenge, in times of disaster, for a care ethics, made more urgent both by the fragilization and the plasticity of human forms of life.

Funding acknowledgment: This publication has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement N° 834759)