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# Book Review of, Emotions and Care: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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BOOK REVIEW

## Emotions and Care: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Sophie Bourgault and Elena Pulcini (editors). Leuven: Peeters, 2018 (ISBN 978-90-429-3711-6)

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Academic publishers are wary of anthologies. Concerns over marketing appeal, consistent quality across submissions, and clarity of unified theme make single-authored volumes a preferred publication. Those concerns do not apply to the introduction and eleven chapters that make up *Emotions and Care: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Sophie Bourgault and Elena Pulcini. Bourgault, a political theorist from the University of Ottawa, and Pulcini, a social philosopher at the University of Florence, have curated a volume of consistently high-quality explorations of the role of emotion in care. This is a unique project because, although theorists have persistently argued for the role of emotion in care ethics, there has been no sustained book-length work on the subject.

For American audiences, this volume is an important reminder that some of the most innovative work being done in care theory is taking place outside of the United States. With figures such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and Joan Tronto, it is understandable that Americans might feel parochial about care ethics. However, for some time, sophisticated and provocative literature on care ethics has been produced around the world. The chapters in *Emotions and Care* feature six Italian scholars, two French scholars, and one scholar each from Canada, Germany, and The Netherlands. This book is an English and slightly modified version of the Italian book *Cura ed emozioni* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018). The publisher, Peeters, has, as of this writing, the only book series on care ethics in the world, totally eight volumes so far. The series editorial board is led by Chief Editor Frans Vosman (The Netherlands), Hellen Kohlen (Germany), and Sandra Laugier (France). *Emotions and Care* is another example of how care scholarship is truly an international intellectual phenomenon on the rise.

In the introduction, Bourgault and Pulcini offer three aims for the volume: to look back on what extant ethics of care literature has to say about emotion's connection to moral knowledge and care work; to integrate new approaches to and different philosophical lenses for thinking about care and emotion by introducing the work of thinkers not typically connected to care theory; and finally, to move across disciplines including social anthropology, literature, developmental psychology, gender studies, political science, paleo-anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. Ultimately, Bourgault and Pulcini argue for the significance of this study by contending that “care is the testimony *par excellence* of the ethical potential of the emotions, and it is by developing a finer-grained

analysis of the emotions involved in care—both positive and negative—that we might be able to find new tools for distinguishing between *merely adequate* care and *good* care” (16).

The quality is so consistently high across the chapters of this volume that I will briefly discuss each chapter rather than just a few highlights. Following the introduction, Pulcini offers a slightly modified version of an article that appeared in *Emotion Review*, “What Emotions Motivate Care?” (Pulcini 2017). Pulcini acknowledges that many theorists have discussed emotion’s role in care ethics, but she finds that these treatments largely lack differentiation among affective responses. By contrast, she aims to “emphasize *the distinction between various emotions that inspire care*” (15). One distinction is between positive and negative emotions. Citing the tendency of moral sentimentalists to focus on positive emotions, Pulcini indicates that both positive and negative emotions can motivate care. For example, we might act out of fear for someone. In an intriguing response to moral sentimentalists like Michael Slote (Slote 2007), Pulcini describes empathy as a morally neutral affective state that gives rise to a variety of emotions (20). She usefully delineates three types of caring relationships—care out of love, care work, and care toward the unknown other—each of which invokes different passions and affective states.

Next, in “The Work of Emotions,” Fabienne Brugère offers a sweeping analysis of the Western philosophical tradition whereby the ethics of care’s concern for relationships and the attending emotions “questions a philosophical tradition that has largely been structured around the endorsement of universalist and corrective morality” (38). She finds vulnerability to be the state of both caregiver and care receiver (42). Addressing figures such as Kant, Hume, and Rawls with a feminist analysis, Brugère views care as describing a relational moral maturity eschewed by the philosophical tradition. This relational maturity has emotional intelligence as an indispensable element, provided the emotions are properly deconstructed and undergo a feminist reconstruction in light of power relations: “The moral voices of care are thus voices of resistance that call for a morality that is invested by a kind of authenticity in the emotional modes of relating to others and to oneself” (55).

Complementing the first two contributions, sociologist Patricia Paperman, in “Love, Gender and Moral Sensibility: A Political (His)story,” views care ethics as properly valorizing care work in a world (and among theorists) that often devalues it. Like Pulcini, she is concerned about discussions of emotion that lack nuance, and like Brugère, she finds feminist analysis central to understanding care. Paperman is particularly critical of theoretical dualisms that permeate Western narratives, such as the reason versus emotion dichotomy: “in contrast to such dualistic theorizing, the perspective of care ethics brings sentiments and sensibility back to the only regions where they can be regarded as having social meaning, legitimacy and intelligibility: namely, within practical activities” (69). Without stating it so crudely, Paperman argues that care ethics is much more realistic about the human condition than analytic positions that break down experience into categorical forms. She argues, “Care ethics refuses this compartmentalization and invites us to consider sentiments and moral sensibility always with an eye to the concrete affairs of daily life, always with an eye to what is *important*, what matters to create and sustain a common world” (70).

In recent years and various publications, Caterina Botti has endeavored to reexamine Carol Gilligan’s work in order to establish care ethics as an alternative moral paradigm rather than a complement to rationalist approaches (Botti 2014; 2015). She begins the chapter by reviewing Gilligan’s formulation of care ethics, concluding that it requires

“caring for the relation between oneself and others, caring for oneself and others in relations, and caring for the network of relations that sustain life or our world at various levels” (80). Botti turns to sentimental readings of care through Annette Baier (via Hume) and Slote. She finds the ideas of imagination and humility to be central. Ultimately, individuals must transform the self (88), which requires imaginative outreach and an openness to questioning oneself found in a humble approach. Botti recognizes the messiness and liminality of care in that it values “laying oneself open, listening to others and transforming oneself, while being aware that one can never completely escape oneself and one’s own limits” (90). Botti has laid the groundwork for further study of sentimental communication that integrates imagination and humility.

In “Rethinking the Moral Importance of Empathy,” Monika Betzler takes up the connection between morality and empathy but approaches the subject differently from Slote or Pulcini. Betzler begins by describing four possible connections between empathy and morality: 1) Empathy can be a motivation for morality; 2) Both empathy and morality are other-directed; 3) What is morally right is what an ideal empathizer would empathize with; 4) Empathy provides the normative value that drives action. Betzler favors the fourth connection: empathy can provide “access to emotional information that can serve as a morally relevant epistemic reason” (96) such as another person suffering. To explain empathy, Betzler turns to the novel *Days of Abandonment* by Elena Ferrante (Ferrante 2005), using the dialog to suggest, among other things, that empathy is more than emotional contagion and that it is possible to empathize with experiences that we have not had ourselves. For Betzler, “empathy establishes a valuable relation as it manifests an intimate bond that is at the core of our close relationships” (101). However, to have this value, the empathy must be sincere, accurate, and reasonably represent the originating experience (102). Betzler makes a number of provocative claims about empathy, including that sometimes it is morally required that we abstain from empathizing (109), empathy can be tempered by impartial considerations (111), and it needs to be matched to the circumstance (110).

Inge van Nistelrooij has previously explored the relationship of care to sacrifice (van Nistelrooij 2014; 2015). In “Affective Coexistence. Pity as a Connection between Emotion and Ethical Knowledge,” van Nistelrooij begins by reviewing four positions taken by care theorists: 1) Caring rejects self-sacrifice; 2) Caring values self-effacing involvement but rejects self-sacrifice; 3) Caring acknowledges the risk of self-sacrifice but connects it to power; 4) Caring values self-sacrifice but does not think it through fully. Van Nistelrooij takes up the role of emotion in the relation of care to self-sacrifice and intriguingly finds pity to be a useful emotion. She defines it as “the primary abandonment of the self without which one cannot really pay attention to the good, because pity is given from the exterior and opens the self-enclosed subject by affecting it. Pity is a bodily feeling, affecting and decentering the subject, thereby opening the way to ethics” (122). This is the first defense of pity I have ever read (although Bourgaault also addresses pity in this volume), and Nistelrooij makes a compelling case for its positive role.

As with the other authors in this volume, Guido Cusinato offers unique intellectual provocations to existing care theory. In “Care and Birth: Emotional Sharing as the Foundation of Care Relationships,” Cusinato applies a philosophy of birth to explore the notion that every encounter with another is a rebirth. Noting that humans are the only mammals that cry at birth, he views the birth cry as instantiating the foundational need for care that in some senses extend the birth beyond the moment of egress.

He relates “care” and “cure” as enriching each other by “converging and embracing the applications of the other” (143). This convergence is made possible by emotional sharing, of which empathy is a particular form. Cusinato suggests that emotional sharing is indicative of our relational ontology but can be cultivated to a position beyond envy: profound respect.

Luigina Mortari’s “Affective Self-Understanding: A Way to Care for the Self” interestingly contrasts with van Nistelrooij’s discussion of self-sacrifice. Mortari views self-care as essential to care for others. She defines care of the self in epistemological terms: “*caring for oneself means knowing how we think and how we feel*. . . . To care for oneself, therefore, is an essentially noetic activity, one that is, that uses thought” (171–72). Using a phenomenological method, Mortari advocates “affective self-understanding,” a method of reflective thinking and feeling. This is the key notion: care is really thinking *and* feeling, which is consistent with the Socratic method (170) even if contemporary analytic approaches eschew the emotions. According to Mortari, we need to live the “affective life,” which is an extension of the examined life.

Sophie Bourgault comes to a conclusion similar to Mortari’s in regard to the integration of thinking and feeling in “Care as Attentiveness: Weilian reflections on the Affective and Cognitive Dimension of Care.” Bourgault’s emphasis is on the role of attention, and for this she draws upon Simone Weil. Like van Nistelrooij’s abandonment of the self, Bourgault finds that Weil’s framing of attention is rooted in desire promoting “unselfing” (197). That desire, according to Weil, is directed toward understanding. The implications of this analysis are many. The drive to understand is a kind of mitigated emotion, or what Weil refers to as “cool emotion” (202), implying a reflective distance. Bourgault speculates, “by modulating the role that strong emotional investment plays (or ought to play?) in attentiveness and in caring for others at large, we might nevertheless open up new avenues for thinking the extent to which vast state institutions (or the employees who work within them) can attend to needs and attend to particulars in any meaningful sense, without risking emotional exhaustion” (203). Accordingly, rather than an unreasonable demand, caring attentiveness can be a structured aspect of professionalism.

Demonstrating the high level of thematic integration in this volume, Vincenzo Sorrentino’s “Existence, Care, and Emotions” explores the notion of emotional modulation found in Bourgault’s chapter. After defining care as an ethical practice in which “the self opens up towards the other” (212), Sorrentino makes an existential observation about the pervasive need for care. Agreeing with Mortari, he claims that care is correlated with “different tonalities” (221) that are adapted to the context and best described by a “continuum of emotions” (222). Thus, attunement to particular others is essential to good care (225). Sorrentino concludes with the notion that empathy is ethically neutral and requires a desire for the good of the other (225). He reinforces the idea that care is both a practice and a disposition requiring some level of emotional involvement with the other.

In the most empirically driven chapter, Rosanna Trifiletti examines the affective experiences of migrant home care workers in “Emerging Emotions and Empathy Maps amongst Migrant Care Workers in Three Cities in Central Italy.” Trifiletti begins by describing the circumstances of home care workers in Italy: driven by market forces, care workers spend fewer hours with each person and take on more clients (236). Many migrants thus become trapped by taking on a large number of temporary clients with frequent turnover (239). Trifiletti provides observations on gender differences in care attitudes and behavior. For example, she finds male care workers are less likely to

engage in physical comforting activities. Nevertheless, all care workers have some level of discomfort with the contractually obligated level of care and the level of intimacy and compassion often called for by the circumstances. She concludes by viewing care as a common good that can circulate across distance (in terms of migration) and time (across generations) (247).

Those with an interest in care as an ethical theory or as a practice will find value in this well-conceived volume. Bourgault and Pulcini introduce readers to scholars they may not have previously read in regard to care, and in turn the contributors utilize figures such as Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein who are not typically referenced in the care literature. My only qualm with the collection is that it does not have a subject index, which I think is crucial for a collected volume. Otherwise, I think *Emotions and Care: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* is a must-read for those engaging in care research today.

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