



DEEP DIVE!

WHO DO WE CARE TO BE? THE ETHICS OF CARE REVISITED FOR THE COACHING PROFESSION

Are we ready to choose to care? **Hetty Einzig** explores care, kinship and how an ethics of care – standing for courage, attention, regeneration, equity – could provide a framework for cherishing our fragile world and for valuing and giving purpose to our time here.

'When humans investigate and see through their layers of anthropocentric self-cherishing a most profound change in consciousness begins to take place. Alienation subsides. The human is no longer a stranger, apart... What humankind is capable of loving from mere duty... is very limited... The requisite care flows naturally if the self is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is felt and conceived of as protection of our very selves.'
Thinking Like a Mountain, Joanna Macy et al

OPEN TO CARE

Feeling grim and hopeless one summer Sunday, I walked down through our local park to the river. A tall iron gate, normally closed, was propped open with an A-frame chalkboard on which was written: *Community Garden, Open day, All welcome, Come in and look around.* So I did.

I met friendly smiles, a welcome, an offer to be shown around and a cup of tea. I was asked no questions beyond my name. Wandering around this modest, even scruffy, piece of land, I began to take in its semi-cultivated wildness: cherry, walnut, apple and plum trees, rough beds for salad, some vegetables, herbs and other plants that no one could quite name, dandelion, burdock and love-in-the-mist rampant. A shed tucked into the fence, stocked with tools cleaned and hung in neat rows, a compost heap, an old garden table and Bunsen burner for making tea. The unkempt air of gentle wilderness mixed with some enthusiastic but casual gardening was unthreatening. This was

not an allotment. It was a place to enjoy flexing one's gardening skills – if you had them – to plant what you loved, or to potter, help out or just hang out.

I joined the WhatsApp group. I now follow notifications from regulars about making basil pesto and muscle salve from the garden's plants, of unusual butterflies, of lettuces birthed in the garden growing on kitchen sills, of wormeries and manure. I go when I can, watering, weeding a bit, asking what needs doing and doing it. I try to bring attention to the task. I was struck one Sunday to see a woman I'd previously seen vigorously planting then sitting reading on a bench. No pressure. This was a place to feel regenerated, a place of care and kinship.

We care for what we value – our loved ones, our work, our community or nation. But the converse carries a truth less considered: we come to value what we care for. It is in the daily actions of caring – of tending, planting, watering, fixing, mending, building – that we expand our sense of self.

The literary academic Christina Lupton tells us that fiction 'rarely does justice to the quality of days and weeks and years spent together, to the rhythms that comfort, the agreed-upon ways of folding laundry, roasting potatoes, running a bath.'¹ Care is ordinary: a primary instinct we take for granted. But stories tend to focus on heroes. It is the singular, the wild, the extraordinary that grabs our attention and dominates our media. Do we need to re-fall in love with the intimacy and beauty of ordinary? The Japanese recognise this more subtle beauty in a range of words and phrases – *shibui*,

*wabi-sabi, mono no aware, kintsugi** – that capture the simple, unobtrusive, often cracked, broken or transient nature of what is most precious.

Often repetitive, sometimes boring, arduous or unpleasant, the daily actions of care can also be meditative, soothing, deeply satisfying. Either way, caring in action alters us. It is in caring that we mature from the ‘little emperors’ of our babyhood to consider and take into ourselves the wellbeing of others, of our environment and places we call home. This expands our sense of self: it reminds our beingness that there is no such thing as ‘I’, only ‘I-in-relationship’.

Care goes deeper than actions – it is a core value encapsulated in the simple affirmation ‘I care’. Caring is the route through which we shift our ‘allegiance from the abstractions of *known relationship* to the presence of *felt relationship*’ as Phillip Shepherd puts it in *Radical Wholeness*, an elegy to our interconnectedness and how we might recultivate this in a world fenced and defended.

As I discovered, and intuitively felt, that Sunday in the community garden, being a part of another’s flourishing – whether child, plant, animal, idea, community or nation – reconnects us, within as much as without. It swells our hearts and brings a sense to being alive.

MAKING SENSE OF CONTEXT

I need to begin with where I am – where we are. To speak about care and the ethics that flow from adopting care as a foundational principle I need to ask: what are the waters we swim in? Because context is a determining factor in how we perceive, conceive and enable new ideas. Care though, is far from being a new idea. It is as ancient as life itself. So how have we strayed so far from its centrality to existence?

Every year the compilers of the Oxford English Dictionary choose a word of the year. In 2016 the word they chose was *post-truth*. Defined as an adjective ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’² We might view the term as a neat signifier of the inflexion point our contemporary WEIRD world (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic) has reached. Enmeshed in culture wars³ while some very real facts are pressing: in recent times, the 2007-9 financial crash, two years of global pandemic and now the war in Ukraine (the latest reminder of a thriving worldwide warfare industry) have lodged in our imaginariums as undeniable demonstrations of a world in trouble.

The acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous), coined in 1985 by economists to describe the post-Cold-War era, has recently been nudged aside by BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible), suggested by the futurist Jamais Cascio as a more accurate descriptor of the turmoil of the post-pandemic world. Brittle refers to the fragility of businesses and organisations, exacerbated by just-in-time manufacturing, ‘lean’ staffing and other efforts to maximise efficiency, leaving no slack or resilience in the system. These brittle systems could snap at any moment, more fuel to the widespread climate of anxiety. Anxiety makes us edgy and reactive: we take hasty decisions in a haze of urgency. Behaviours are by turn frenetic or paralysed for fear of making things worse, sliding for many into depression. In a non-linear world there is a ‘disconnection between cause and effect in time, proportion, perception’⁴ What was once complex now has multiple causes, meanings and destinations, as we witnessed during the pandemic.

At the same time, a dark ghost hovering yet pressing evermore into the foreground, is our awareness of global heating, climate disruption and the destruction of ecosystems. The IPCC and others warn that there is now but an eight-year window in which to act to avert total systems breakdown.⁵ And yet our governments do little to nothing. They seem insouciant. The combination of urgency and fear with the feelings of impotence felt by many further fuels anxiety – often in a cocktail of disillusion, cynicism or despair. These feelings are too widespread to be partitioned off under the neat label of mental health problems.

One current indicator of this anomie has been dubbed the ‘Great Resignation’: record numbers of people leaving their jobs post-pandemic. The trends are highest in those who are mid-career, and in those working in the tech and healthcare industries.⁶ Thirty-six per cent of those polled in a recent McKinsey report had left their job without another to go to. The top reasons they cited were not feeling valued by their organisation or their managers, and not feeling a sense of belonging at work. This last factor was strongest among non-white or multi-racial employees.⁷

Since all data depends on the questions you ask, could it be that workplaces are not only unable to respond to our need to feel valued and to belong, but are also out of touch with our need to find value *in* our work – and further, to feel our work adds value to the world we live in?

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As I try to understand the cataracts threatening to rush us downstream I identify three broad streams of enquiry, which seem to me enmeshed, mutually reinforcing. I see these streams as part of a push-back against our ways of living and working on a planet in danger, a challenge sometimes referred to as the Great Turning,⁸ the Great Transformation⁹ or the Great Transition.¹⁰

Firstly, the precepts of empire and the Enlightenment values (of scientific rationalism, of liberation from superstition and expansionism) that fuelled it are being contested: the realities of violence, cover-ups and breath-taking arrogance behind the narratives of progress, science and logic are being exposed.^{11,12}

Second, there is a widespread awakening to the imperative of listening to and truly hearing other voices. The recent mass movements #MeToo¹³ and #BlackLivesMatter¹⁴ brought to the fore the experiences of women and of people of colour in that same patriarchal world that reached its apotheosis in empire. They are rejecting those norms and demanding visibility, respect and justice. In the process they are attuning us to be more alert to, and less tolerant of, suppression and ‘wilful blindness’.¹⁵

The third stream I observe is a searching for alternative ontologies. The Establishment, those institutions of government, law and order, finance, healthcare and education that frame and give foundation to our daily lives, is fraying at best, fraudulent and unfit at worst. In this post-truth world, the yearning for an ethical framework to live by, to re-find truths we can build on, is expressing itself strongly.

The environmental movement has long championed the voices of indigenous people. From being a fringe interest, their worldviews are now seen to offer relevant insights into how to live. In our secular world we could say that people are seeking to rediscover goodness outside our individual efforts, and to re-find meaning and purpose where the gods of neoliberalism are, if not yet toppled, found increasingly wanting. Our understanding of identity is morphing: from me to us; from mine to ours; from separate to interconnected; from bounded to porous.

Identifying these distinct but intertwining discourses is helping me see beyond the confusion, distress and complexity to signs of emergence. It would seem our identities are on the line. How do we care to see ourselves now? Revisionist histories are being written¹⁶, indigenous cultures revisited for wisdoms we have lost in our scientific focus on linear logic and our love affair with technology.¹⁷ In coaching there is a growing appetite for new action-logics that embrace more ecosystemic approaches, and which look to promote collaboration and contribution over individual winning.¹⁸

Post-truth, VUCA and BANI are reductive terms of course, but we reach for them as way markers when our world feels overwhelming. The provision of guidelines, social codes to help us through this messy complexity, is precisely what ethics are meant to provide. Ethics can't tell us which choice to make or path to take but they can provide lights along the journey. They provide points of reference for our individual and collective deliberations. But our ethical codes too need revisiting...

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UNHEARD VOICES NEED TO BE HEARD

In this time of scrutiny it is only right that we should re-examine the foundational precepts of coaching. Coaching, I have written elsewhere, is a mongrel profession – and this is a strength.¹⁹ Education, psychology, philosophy, sports science, economics, spiritual traditions from East and West, the social sciences and politics have all contributed to its roots and development.

However, to point out the hitherto 'unthought known',²⁰ all the major theories in these various disciplines were created by men: white, of a certain age, from the West. These theories, founded in the male point of view, were presented and still are generally accepted as the norm and the standard by which all humans should be compared, measured and judged.

In developmental psychology all key models of human development are deduced from observation of boys' play (seen as 'the crucible of social development'²¹), behaviours and choices. Women are seen as deviating from the norm, failing to conform to the rules of the game and failing to achieve the standards of excellence that boys and men strive for, and which underpin the legal structures that characterise an orderly society. It is these models that have shaped our view of the world, what it means to be human, our understanding of

morality and ethics – and of course, in turn, the development of coaching heuristics.

*'It is difficult to appreciate the enormity of the exclusion of women from the history of ethics' writes Lawrence Hinman, a major contemporary authority on ethics. 'If one looks at the history of moral thought, it is as if women hardly existed.'*²²

WOMEN CARING

Spurred on by this blind spot, Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan based her longitudinal research on exploring women's points of view, listening to women talk about their experience. She interviewed girls and women between roughly 12-30 years old on the topics of self, morality, will, choice and conflict, using standard written scenarios from psychology research to elicit their take on what characters should do in the face of a range of moral dilemmas. Her groundbreaking 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*²³, gives us women's distinctive ways of seeing the world. Neither better nor worse, but different.

Not (or no longer) exclusively associated with women, I want to highlight these diverse ways of looking at the world as signposting the potential for change towards more interdependent ways of being – as more fit for purpose in our complex and beleaguered world.

Reading Gilligan's book again some 30 years after I first read it, I am arrested by a passage in which she hints at Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget's dismay on observing girls' 'more "pragmatic" attitude towards rules'.²⁴ She notes how 'innovative' girls are: rather than stick to the rules they find ways to preserve the relationships within the group, to the point even of stopping the game. This incapacity for 'law-making', surmised Piaget, is what makes women unfit to lead. In the light of a post-#MeToo era, and of the emphatic need for new ways to work, live and inhabit our planet – for innovative solutions that disrupt our faulty business-as-usual habits in all spheres – Piaget's dismissal of the innovative skills of girls seems particularly misguided and unfortunate.

Gilligan instead puts a positive psychological and philosophical emphasis on girls' turn-taking approach and relationship orientation, and argues for this as a valid ontological position. She expands on the damage done by our valorisation of separateness.

*'Theories of psychological development and conceptions of self and morality that have linked progress or goodness with disconnection or detachment and advocated separation from women in the names of psychological growth or health are dangerous because they cloak an illusion in the trappings of science: the illusion that disconnection or dissociation from women is good.'*²⁵

Given the conceptualisation of our planet as Mother Earth, it is easy to extrapolate and see the extensive damage caused by the privileging of hyper-masculinised, dominator styles of being over female partnering styles.²⁶

None of this is new. Indigenous peoples have always celebrated and cared for our interdependence with our natural worlds. And critiques of Western models of leadership are growing. One arresting analysis is the forensic unpicking by Ladkin and Bridges Patrick of Bernard Bass's transformational leadership theory – still the most widely accepted and used leadership model.²⁷ The unconscious assumptions that underpin the discourse have made their way into coaching too: a totalising and essentialising norm of white, male, hierarchical, individual, separated, able-bodied and cisgendered; above all, a self-evident imperative to transform followers to fit this elevated norm.

Pulling together the strands of a number of ancient and modern philosophical traditions in their magisterial book *Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions*²⁸, Michael Carroll and Elizabeth Shaw note that Gilligan's work has been crucial in shifting our understanding of moral reasoning and decision making, breaking apart linear or unilateral models, requiring us instead to combine and integrate situational, relational, emotional, communicative, contextual and ecological considerations. As several of Gilligan's interviewees replied when addressing the moral dilemma scenarios: 'It all depends.'

ETHICAL MATURITY

Carroll and Shaw describe ethical maturity thus:

*'Having the reflective, rational, emotional and intuitive capacity to decide actions are right and wrong or good and better, having the resilience and courage to implement those decisions, being accountable for ethical decisions made... and being able to live with the decisions made and integrating this learning into our moral character and future actions.'*²⁹

Ethical maturity includes components – like reflexivity and emotional intelligence – that are prominent in the moral reasoning of the women interviewed by Gilligan. As our understanding grows that rationality and thinking are not separate from feelings, that the body-mind is an integrated whole and that we are interconnected with our context, culture and wider ecosystems, so our views of ethics are shifting too.

Gilligan's work showed that far from being lesser than the reasoning of boys and men, women's inclusion of empathy in their discourse demonstrated a tolerance for ambiguity and a capacity to engage with complexity that we would now consider admirable and impressive. The women's approach to ethics sought innovative approaches to problem solving while also safeguarding and maintaining relationships. This instinctive and mature ethical stance is better attuned to the realities of interdependence, constant change and fluidity of identity than the more rigid, rule-bound binaries of right-wrong employed by boys when presented with the same moral dilemmas in parallel studies.

Increasingly the concepts of empathy and compassion are moving from nice-to-have to being understood as essential for a healthy and effective workplace – especially in light of the mounting studies showing high levels of overwhelm, disaffection and feeling undervalued at work.³⁰ *Compassionate Leadership*³¹ (Michael West), *Intelligent Compassion*³² (Amy Bradley), *Compassion Practices*³³ (Andy Bradley) and *Compassionate Resilience* (Laurence Cassøe Halsted)³⁴ are now part of current discourse in the health and care services, sport and some enlightened workplaces (see Frederic Laloux).³⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic was seismic in so many ways. It proved a watershed in accelerating understanding of compassion as vital and foregrounding the primacy of care to our human lives – and to living well. This is gaining further ground as we adapt to living-with-Covid. While we might automatically associate the word 'care' with healthcare, the caring professions or with the care we devote to our personal relationships, we need to now make the leap to understanding deeply that the concept of care – not just caring for, but caring about, caring with, being care-full – is fundamental to a decent, well-functioning society and to a viable human presence on Earth. Care has been defined as 'a form of close attention, an intense form of connection' – a first principle of living.³⁶

To some readers the value of caring is common sense. But in the context of neoliberal exceptionalism and winner-takes-all culture – or the 'uncare' that it systematically built from the 1940s on (as described by Sally Weintrobe in her excoriating account of neoliberalism³⁷) – Gilligan felt she had to make the case for it, just as we still need to do around self-care: to shift the frame from self-indulgence to self-respect.

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It is worth reminding ourselves how we – as coaches, psychologists, educators and leaders – have, like our clients and alongside more sensitive or pluralist models, unconsciously introjected a phalanx of psychological theories that valorise separation, independence, achievement, winning, rule-making and rule-following as norms – especially in the workplace. These privilege individuation over intimacy; the hero who leaves home to follow his destiny over the hearth-holder; dominance of the few over collegiality of the many. These theories also accept violence and cruelty as governing principles rather than incidental deviations from being 'humankind'. Formulated by a patriarchal world, these models have been presented as proxies for all humans. While this simplification may sound savage, those at the receiving end, including the other-than-human and our natural world, feel the exclusion, the hurt and the damage that such worldviews engender. I confess I want to prod us to imagine better, and I see a viable alternative in Gilligan's work.

THE ETHICS OF CARE

In contrast to prevailing ethical models derived largely from philosophical, religious or rational traditions, Gilligan proposes The Ethics of Care:

*'... an ethic grounded in voice and relationships, in the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully (in their own right and on their own terms) and heard with respect. An ethics of care directs our attention to the need for responsiveness in relationships (paying attention, listening, responding) and to the costs of losing connection with oneself or with others. Its logic is inductive, contextual, psychological, rather than deductive or mathematical.'*³⁸

Care is about relationships. This is the same principle that drives quantum theory, as professor of physics Carlo Rovelli reminds us: 'it pushes us to rethink reality in terms of relations instead of objects, entities or substances... what quantum phenomena are is evidence that all properties are relational.' As Rovelli admits: nothing new here. Plato said it, the Buddhists have said it. 'Nothing has independent existence' – everything is in relation to something else. This is mainstream stuff. Should we not therefore prioritise our attention to those links, relations, effects and influences? Should we not give our relationships – all of which sustain each other – our utmost care? Since – as we are constantly reminded – we, like the rest of life, win only through collaboration.³⁹ Instead it is the individual, the object and entity that continue to fix our attention. We valorise heroes and celebrities, we covet the car, device or dress, we talk in terms of good and bad organisations, as discrete entities – as if all had magical

powers, *dei ex machina*, unattached, with no obligations or ties. Are we stupid? Or are we afraid to care?

In *Intelligent Kindness: Rehabilitating the Welfare State*, John Ballatt, Penelope Campling and Chris Maloney make the case for caring as an intelligence, based on the recognition that the welfare of one depends on the welfare of all.⁴⁰ Kindness has its roots in kin, and acknowledges our kinship with others. It begins with connection with another person, and allowing their needs, experience and personality to influence us. Kinship is a mark of respect; without this sense of kinship equity, diversity and inclusion agendas remain worthy but often lifeless exercises. In my own life, I value and attend to not only my immediate and extended family but also our local farmers' market, the community garden, friends and neighbours, our cat, my garden, certain places in London, Suffolk, Wales, France – I feel how all these knit together and hold me in an expansive web. I experience the pleasures and responsibilities as part of who I am – who I care to be.

Kinship is a way of describing that sense of identity as embedded within a wider network. Kin is not limited to family or those in our 'tribe' – those genealogically connected, or those we feel are like us, sharing affiliations and cultural norms. In their ground-breaking book *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow garner recent research showing that humans have always, at least since the era of early cave paintings, been able to extend their sense of kin across territories and cultures – and perhaps also across species, judging by the beauty and grace of these early paintings of animals.

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VISION, VALUES AND THE RISKS OF CARE

Graeber and Wengrow reference Elias Canetti's contention that cities begin in the imagination: seeing oneself as a Londoner, a Parisian or a Carioca we can feel part of an idea beyond the number of people we can directly relate to, which according to the Dunbar rule is limited to 150.⁴¹ This reminds us that the world is how we envision it: we can choose to imagine ourselves as interconnected, or separate, as belonging to wider kinship groups or narrow tribes. Which we choose will shape our behaviours in the world.

It seems to me we consistently undervalue and underestimate the power of the human imagination – and of the human spirit. For many an awareness of being planetary citizens was kicked into life on seeing the first unforgettable colour images from space of our blue globe in the mid-1960s. Seeing that exquisite globe wreathed in gossamer cloud imprinted on us the extraordinary fragility of Earth balanced in space. In that moment many of us fell in love; an urge to care was aroused and has remained, piqued and tortured by the mounting threats to the planet's – and therefore to our own – wellbeing.

So, caring is risky. When we care we risk heartbreak. Covid-19 kindled a worldwide fear but it also broke open our hearts. Forced to stop the busy-busy of everyday business-as-usual meant looking around us – and starting to care about what was happening. The murder of

George Floyd in May 2020 happened in this context of awakening, igniting worldwide outrage at the callousness of the world we see evermore clearly. Righteous fury, demonstrations for justice and equity, calls for the fundamental uprooting of racism in every institution. Change felt possible.

But when outrage does not bring a response, when social institutions shrug their shoulders and change for the better does not follow, it boils down into chronic anxiety. Stress can make us narrow-minded. Fear can force a retreat from civic sensibility; it encourages us to cultivate self-protective behaviours. We see how many reduce their focus to taking care of their own. Fear is not conducive to empathy, to the expansiveness, the care and generosity that enable kinship. We see the splitting, partisanship, divisiveness and cruelties in social policy and politics everywhere.

In *Humankind*, however, Rutger Bregman urges us to eschew the newsfeed and its continuous, inflammatory reinforcement of how terrible things are, and instead consider the evidence for kindness – everywhere if we care to look.⁴² This is a different diet for the imagination. Kindness, born of a sense of kinship, has the power to shape more enabling frameworks for our existence and endeavours if we care to orient towards it, and allow its energies to enter our bloodstream and its rhythms to shape our actions. When we choose – against our primal instincts to fight or flee – to instead approach what scares us with open eyes and a curious heart, we get different results. Bregman's numerous case studies include a compelling insight into the Norwegian prison system. "The tranquility. The trust. The way inmates and guards interact, noted one visitor in a contingent of prison officials from North Dakota, USA. The impact was profound. On their return the team formulated a plan to 'implement our humanity.'⁴³

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EMBODIED REASONING: CARE AS INCLUSIONARY ONTOLOGY

Neuroscience tells us there are two types of reasoning (typically but loosely associated with left and right brain): analytic and empathic. One supports the making of lists and blueprints, the other emotional regulation and perspective shifts. However, in a quest for dominance, Western culture has incrementally promoted the scientific over the artistic, rules over relationships, and thereby become increasingly exclusionary. The scientific principle aims to exclude externalities, we construct fences and defences to separate ourselves from others and claim ownership, we designate the head as controller and ruler of the body. This tendency to separation and dominance has privileged the analytic network in our brain over the empathic network: while the healthy brain constantly toggles, the Western trend has been to overuse analytic types of reasoning. It is a symptom of our times that this approach is now wearing thin – as neuroscientist Amanda Blake vividly puts it, like car tyres that show uneven wear from constantly steering to the left.

Indigenous cultures by contrast are radically inclusionary. Australian social scientist Mishel McMahon of the Yorta Yorta nation describes the richness and vitality of First Nations ontology: a worldview where everything is equal, everything has meaning and everything has

agency. Human beings are just one element of a deeply intertwined ecosystem, where emphasis is placed on *garraba* ('waiting a little'), the better to be in deep listening, and on relational forms of decision making that include consulting ancestors, yet-to-be-born grandchildren and the trees, rocks and rivers that make up their world. As kinship is a broad and deep-lived experience, so care of kin is its daily practice.⁴⁴ I am reminded of how, when I entered psychotherapy many decades ago, I saw myself as a thread connecting past and future, and I held very clearly in mind my role in healing wounds of my inherited past as part of enabling a healthy future for my young children.

The Western universalising normative – an insistence on the domination of the rational, logical and technical, of a narrow definition of what constitutes data and information – has impoverished our lived lives. We miss out on the particular, the diverse ways of knowing, being and doing innate to indigenous cultures. I am especially struck by Mishel's description of the expansiveness and joyfulness that come with living as part of life. Listening to her I am deeply saddened by our goal-directed lives and Westernised arrogance that places humans separate and aloof from life – observing, extracting, controlling – but rarely enjoying, it seems, the deep satisfaction of being a part of the whole that an ethics of care can bring.

Care and kindness are not synonymous with tidy garden beds, nor with niceness, empathy or gentleness – although these are behaviours often elicited by cultures of care. Care work can be tough, as anyone who has worked in a hospital, hospice or care home will attest – and I don't just mean the physical side of their work. The dilemmas, painful choices, the witnessing and the sensitive conversations that constitute the work of care are psychologically demanding, requiring skill and mutual support – and kinship. Care demands we face into the volatility and the ambiguities of life with courage and engage in the work of reflection and dialogue around the moral complexities of real life. Intelligent kindness requires choice and deliberate practice embedded in cultural structures of care. The introduction of compassion practices into the UK National Health Service aims to provide exactly such structures, to help frame and normalise the practice of caring for each other by linking compassion with connection, care for others and community with care for self.⁴⁵

The same willingness to embrace complexity is found in successful creativity. Brett Macfarlane's INSEAD PhD research on innovation leaders working mostly in corporates explored how they dealt with anxiety, authority and frustration in tackling overwhelming challenges.⁴⁶ Broadly they occupied one of three states: euphoric (high energy), cynical (low energy) or hopeful (in the middle). Macfarlane observed how leaders trapped in the traditional concept of creativity as solo heroics fell into the defences of splitting and omnipotence in their attempts to deal with overwhelm. Psychoanalysis identifies these as primitive defences since they belong to early childhood: a fantasy of control, or attempts to make meaning by simplifying complex reality through splitting things into good and bad, right or wrong, with the bad out there – the not-me.

Macfarlane discovered that only those who could sustain a hopeful outlook 'were concerned with doing the work of regeneration' – the 'productivity zone', as he called it. Significantly these leaders demonstrated their hopeful mindset through tolerance, empowerment, composure, ambivalence and humility.

In contrast to conventional heuristics of innovative courage manifested in bold action, ambivalence and humility are important

findings. Macfarlane relates them to Melanie Klein's concept of what she termed the depressive position – when the developing child confronts the reality of paradox and imperfection. Klein thought this phase was a prerequisite for creativity, for engaging with real work.

Far from being a weakness, ambivalence is an important element of a relational approach – a recognition of interdependence and the realities of holding multiple and competing priorities in mind. Maturity is to be creative despite the limitations of the real world, to move forward with humility, in relationship and with care.

We know as coaches that the work of engaged, careful enquiry is exciting and revitalising, and can lead to creative actions when – and this is critical – grounded in a collective ethic that prioritises this approach. It's a question of choosing our ethical framework.

ETHICS OF JUSTICE AND OF EARTH

The #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements foregrounded the fundamental justice of the right to be heard. Systemic racism and the predominance of whiteness in the coaching profession are explored by Charmaine Roche and Jonathan Passmore in their groundbreaking 2021 report on racial justice, equity and belonging:

*'Without a critical consciousness of race and racialisation and the often hidden dynamics of power and privilege that come with them, the professional identity and practices of coaching remain fused with norms that are embedded in what scholars have defined as "whiteness". This can happen whether one is light or dark skinned. Whiteness in this context is not a skin colour or a personal identity. It is a performance of privilege that comes from the embodiment of a set of beliefs and cultural norms and the practices based on them.'*⁴⁷

It is clear that whiteness is also about separateness – superiority requires distance. Counter to this, the ethics of care privilege interdependence: the care and wellbeing of others. Innovative solutions to conflicts, dilemmas and disputes are sought to preserve relationship rather than dominance.

Gilligan talks of generativity as rooted in 'its earthy redolence'⁴⁸ of intimacy as an uninterrupted flow. There are also longstanding campaigns to add the voices of the Earth and the more-than-human to this call for justice.⁴⁹

Preparing for his solo show *The Encounter* – a chronicle of National Geographic photographer Loren McIntyre's journey to the Javari valley in the remote heart of the vast Amazon basin in 1969 and his encounter with the Mayoruna – actor/director Simon McBurney visited these indigenous people. He asked them where they located consciousness, tapping his chest, heart and head to encourage their reply. Out there, they said, pointing towards the rainforest. Thinking they had misunderstood he repeated the question and received the same answer. After several attempts McBurney realised it was he who had misunderstood: the Mayoruna knew that their inner world was not separate from the world around them.⁵⁰ Their sense of consciousness was rooted in the fabric of the whole rainforest.

A sense of place as both without and within us links to an alternative concept of time and place. As McBurney recounts, and others have also experienced in encounters with indigenous peoples, the Western sense of time as linear and moving ever onwards is overturned. 'The main feature of time, by Western definition, is its passage', writes McBurney, 'but for the Mayoruna... time is at once mobile and static... It is not the implacable judge, condemning man to a tragically

brief life. Time is a shelter, an escape into safety and regeneration, a repository whose chief function is not piling up the past, intact yet dead, but rather keeping it alive and available.⁵¹

he essence of these ways of experiencing, being in and interacting with the world is that everything is relational. This offers a contrast and a reprieve from the tyranny of individuality and its ever-present burden of choice, and therefore personal responsibility, that is inherent in Abrahamic religions, Western culture and our socio-economic systems.

The African philosophy of ubuntu encapsulates this. In her article on ubuntu-inspired leadership, Joy Ntetha Siphokazi cites John Mbiti's description of ubuntu as a consciousness that 'what happens to the individual happens to the whole, and what happens to the whole happens to the individual.'⁵²

'I am because you are' is the popularisation of the ubuntu concept. Siphokazi adds that context is critical. So 'I am' also because I am *located* – here in North London, or in my study, or my garden, or in the nation we call the United Kingdom, or within the landscapes that are dear to me. Sociologist Bruno Latour prefers the term terrestrial to human as a reminder of our earthly location and of our parity with all other life on Earth.⁵³ And Robin Wall Kimmerer, a scientist and founder/director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, exposes the depersonalising of the English language in referring to anything other than human as an 'it', which absolves us of moral responsibility and makes exploitation easy.⁵⁴

This is an issue of moral inclusion. The language we use creates our thinking, our cultures and our ways of being in the world. Diversity, equity and inclusion must also look beyond the human to all life.

In ubuntu, the values of dignity, respect, solidarity, compassion and thriving are central. Ubuntu emphasises the fostering of 'symbiotic relationships' – the very opposite of the independence and authoritarianism of the typical Western leadership model.⁵⁵ Ubuntu is about 'a post-heroic view of leadership... conceived as a group quality, a set of functions to be carried by the collective.'⁵⁶

A different morality flows from these priorities. Gilligan again:

*'...the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract.'*⁵⁷

We need to recognise the cost today of this missing line of development: 'a failure to describe the progression of relationships toward a maturity of interdependence.'⁵⁸ It is not overstating things to assert that this failure has provided the psychological underpinnings – and thereby, albeit inadvertently, the legitimacy for – the growth of the culture of uncared, the consequences of which we see today.⁵⁹ The relevance for coaching is clear: if we continue to follow models that valorise success, winning, goal-setting and independence we fail to do justice to other ways of seeing, being and creating. We foster the singular, linear and dominant over the inclusive and interconnected.

For ethics to gain purchase on society and enable deep change they need to be enshrined in its laws and its codes of accountability. The late lawyer and activist Polly Higgins proposed the concept of ecocide (extensive loss or damage or destruction of ecosystem(s) of a given territory) and that this be inscribed in international law.

When we care to think about it, expanding our consciousness and

accountabilities beyond our physical body, embracing the more-than-human, the soils, waters and trees of our landscapes, as part of who we are is wholly to our advantage. 'Imagine,' says Kimmerer, 'the wisdom that surrounds us. We don't have to figure out everything by ourselves: there are intelligences other than our own... Imagine how less lonely the world would be.'⁶⁰

The relevance for coaching is clear: if we continue to follow models that valorise success, winning, goal setting and independence we fail to do justice to other ways of seeing, being and creating. We foster the singular, linear and dominant over the inclusive and interconnected

COURAGE, ATTENTION, REGENERATION, EQUITY

I began this essay reviewing the acronyms VUCA and BANI as capturing the shift from instability and confusion to brittleness and incomprehensibility. I want to suggest we coin a new acronym for our times: one that, rather than distilling our fears, galvanises our energies. CARE might also stand for courage, attention, regeneration and equity – not a bad banner to champion and guide our efforts.

Returning to the concept of post-truth, what if we were to reclaim the term? Used to describe those who play fast and loose with the facts, we might instead repurpose it to indicate the contesting of the long-cherished notion of The Truth – whether revealed by religious faith or claimed by the dominant power of a particular culture. Pluralism can be unnerving, but while there have always been culture wars we are now living in a time when claims for attention, understanding and justice have mushroomed – aided and fuelled by social media, for good or ill. The challenge to the norms and comfortable certainties of the establishment can be painfully confusing – but I suggest necessary – as we move away from imperialist structures of power held in the hands of the few to explore more equitable ways of living with each other and with the Earth.

Writing this essay over several months I have reflected on how much courage we need – I need – to step away from the dominant narratives that are as comfortable as old slippers. I start with paying attention to where I can extend care in small and larger ways – like in my local community garden. Far from virtue signalling, I am fumbling my way forward. But I find myself greatly sustained by the work of Gilligan and others – the idea of holding my erratic actions within a wider concept of care. An ethics of care can link us across traditions, cultures and geographies. They can guide kinship through the gathering quest to restore and regenerate our wounded world, and to establish equity and equality as norms.

I see the establishment of CARE as a central ethics to live by as key in the push-back against our ways of living and working on a planet in danger – identified at the start of this essay. Part of the Great Turning is the increasing realisation that it is not enough to rely on the personal goodness of the individual. Care, kindness, community, responsibility and justice all spring from love. We care because we love. We listen because we care. And we act because we are responsible. Could we then fall in love with the ethics of care – with the idea that the fundamental forces that tend towards good can be encoded and taught, embraced and lived by us all? The ethics of care necessarily

will also include justice and equity for the land and the more-than-human. Thus they provide a wider context, a container to live our lives as citizens not as mere consumers.

The ethics of care furnishes coaching with a framework to support our clients and ourselves as we navigate a turbocharged pace of change, facing our fears, anxiety and the confusion of meeting both everyday and planet-sized challenges.

The ethics of care is a multi-dimensional concept that can provide us with a strong foundation and a container for the much-needed collective enquiry within not only the helping professions but in all sectors. Personally, I need to believe we are ready for the challenge to determine what kind of world we want to live in. I hope we choose to build a kinder world. I hope we are ready.

**Shibui: simple, subtle, and unobtrusive beauty*

Wabi-sabi: concept that finds beauty and serenity in objects, landscapes, designs and so on that are simple, imperfect and impermanent

Mono no aware: the pathos of things; empathy towards things; sensitivity to ephemera
Kintsugi: the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the cracks with gold

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hetty Einzig brings 25 years of psychology and executive coaching experience to global leadership development. A best-selling author, Hetty's career has spanned the arts, journalism, media, health and policy development in the private, public and voluntary sectors. She designs and delivers leader-coach and global culture change programmes. Key focuses are women's leadership, transpersonal coaching and regenerative approaches for contribution. She works ecosystemically and holistically founded on transpersonal psychology and informed by psychoanalysis and embodiment approaches.

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