

Taking care of the other's image: when the other is beyond a border

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Abstract: It is possible for the philosophy of care to develop the anthropological meaning of face protection in front of menaces in the form of image care. Nevertheless, an image can be more or less faithful to its referent, and the referent can be the objective reality of the person, or the self-knowledge the person has, or the image other people have of the person, or even the artificial image someone wants to offer to people. Due to this ambiguity and not-automaticity, virtues are needed. This is the field of classical virtues like truthfulness, modesty, sincerity and the relative vices; and interpersonal virtues like affability, liberality, gratitude, loyalty, disinterestedness and the relative vices. These virtues configure the person. Interpersonal virtues and vices are relevant because they unfold the relationality that constitutes the person. From human vulnerability one can conclude the human vocation to care on the basis of relationality. In a certain sense people in contact are always beyond a border, which means otherness in itself. For the comprehension of border condition otherness is more decisive than distance. The virtues related to border condition find a reference point in care, which under the name of *epiméleia*, has a very long history and illuminating richness.

Keywords: care, image, politeness, rhetoric, virtues, anthropology.

For a fertile link between Philosophy of Care and Theory of Politeness, the approach offered by the Fundamental Rhetoric of Peter Oesterreich [1] or by other anthropological approaches to Rhetoric [2] is very appropriate.

1. Rhetoric and human condition

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* can be seen as an anthropology; Oesterreich presents his own Rhetoric as a "regional anthropology," [3] and the substantive of the name "Fundamental Rhetoric" becomes adjective in the equivalent name "*fundamentalmrhetorische Anthropologie*", "which is based on the assumption that metaphysics and rhetorics are reconcilable. It considers what is rhetorical not only to be an accidental means of the external self-manifestation of metaphysics, but an element of its own being which has so far been disregarded." [4].

The rhetorical dimension of human being is so essential that it constitutes a central element of human condition. Other two elements to be considered here are the biographical and the relational aspects of that condition. An anthropologically rooted sociology is that of Pierpaolo Donati, characterized by relationality, that is, the assumption that relation constitutes human person. Among many goods in human life, specifically human is the *relational good*, that is, not just the "common good" in the sense that it belongs to several persons, but "a good that can be produced only together, [...] and it is not conceivable as the sum of individual goods." [5]. The biographical character of this condition is a consequence of the diachronic nature of this relationality, the fact that relationships come and are effective along time.

Aftermath characteristics of such a human condition, very pertinent to image, are: a) the constitution of the person in front of a *you* (and this means a plurality); b) the dynamic character of the person, its perpetual becoming, as expressed in well-known Pindar's imperative "learn and become who you are." [6]. This is part of the deep basis of a phenomenon noticed by the analysis of pragmatics, more specifically by theory of politeness. Brown and Levinson, after reminding the frame where their notion of face comes from, [7] say: "In general, people cooperate (and assume *each other's* cooperation) in maintaining face *in interaction*, such cooperation being based on the *mutual* vulnerability of face. That is, normally *everyone's* face depends on *everyone else's* being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten other's face, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain *each other's* face,

that is to act in ways that assure *the other participants* that the agent is heedful of the assumptions concerning face given under (i) above. (Just what this heedfulness consists in is the subject of this paper.)” [8].

The concentration of terms of reciprocity in this paragraph is remarkable and the sentence in parentheses at the end stresses the centrality of the idea in the entire theory of politeness.

2. Politeness and care

Heedfulness can be interpreted as care, creating a link between Theory of Politeness and Philosophy of Care. [9]. One aspect in this gate is the contribution of the notion of face to the rhetorical notion of *ethos*. [10]. Politeness profiles are different configurations of *ethos*, especially in what concerns *areté* (virtue) and *eunoia* (goodwill). (Virtue in the sense of identity rather than moral virtue. This clarification is relevant because later it will be necessary to speak of virtues in the moral-anthropological sense.) Politeness’ studies offer to rhetoric extremely rich elements of discernment in the field of *ethos*. The hermeneutical dimension of rhetoric is equally valid for pragmatics as can be seen in the personal knowledge that is obtained through the profiles of politeness.

Philosophy of Care starts from the consciousness of human vulnerability, which introduces dependence in human life. Specific of this philosophy is the acknowledgement of such dependence as genuinely *human*. This is the sense of MacIntyre’s title *Dependent Rational Animals*: it is not only in case of sickness, elderly, childhood or poverty, since dependence permeates the entire human life. Hence the need to eat, to rest, to be transported, taught, etc. Modern sensitivity has introduced an axiology that strongly opposes dependence and autonomy, so that these evident dependences are now viewed as the non-human in us, with the consequent sense of shame for our corporal dimension. Philosophy of Care breaks a secular tradition of ideal of autonomy and detachment from corporality and animality in human being (and from the non-human animals in themselves), but this secularity means four centuries: before the rationalistic turn there existed clarity about the animal condition of human being, about the unity of body and soul, about the interior richness of irrational animals. However, care, if certainly not totally neglected in ancient and in medieval thought, was not an object of systematic philosophical reflexion either.

A philosophical anticipation, although not developed, is Heidegger’s notion of *Sorge* (care, concern) as the being self of human being. [11]. In his conference “Bauen Wohnen Denken”, where there is another approximation to care through the notion of dwelling, Heidegger describes care as dwelling “near the things” (*bei den Dingen*). [12]. A good reformulation of the idea expressed in that paragraph could be that care means “maintaining things in their essence.” [13].

Philosophy of Care offers a way to develop the anthropological meaning of face protection in front of its menaces [14] in the form of image care. [15]. A definition of care, enough to introduce the notion here, reads as follows: “On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a *species 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 body, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” [16].

That world includes our image. The care perspective could give a more positive approach to managing face that it is usually presented as protection in front of threats. Some linguists have felt the classical theory of politeness too defensive. Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, for example, in addition to the FTA (face threatening acts) proposed the FFA, face-flattering acts. [17]. In this way, the face is the object of care, which is illuminating especially if one has the consciousness that person and image are not two separate things, but on the contrary - caring for the image is immediately caring for the person.

3. Anthropological aspects of image

What politeness protects is face, ours and others’, which is defined as “the public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself.” [18]. Nevertheless, image can be more or less faithful to its referent, and the referent can be the objective reality of the person, or the self-knowledge the person has, or the image other people have of the person, or even the artificial image someone

wants to offer. One can try to offer a stereotyped self-image (intentionally false), but there can be a lack of self-knowledge (unintentionally false image). Knowing oneself is a task for one's entire life. An interaction between self and self-image is quite normal life. An example of this phenomenon in an ancient voice could be the following: "The outward appearance can be a clear image of the inner condition of the soul, and the movement of the limbs is the best indication of inward beauty. If we walk in the market place, let us pass through with such a serene presence that all who meet us turn to look at us. Let us keep our eyes from roving and our feet from rambling. Let our tongue speak calmly, as it should. In a word, let our whole exterior attitude reveal the beauty of the soul which dwells within." [19].

From here it appears clear that faithfulness of image cannot be "pure spontaneity." Managing the image is not necessarily misrepresentation: one has to learn how to express her or himself. The image is the appearance of the self and at the same time has a role in the construction of the self.

This is the field of notions like reputation or fame, good name, honour, image rights (to the protection of one's image, to privacy, to information, to be forgotten...). This is the field of classical virtues like truthfulness, modesty, sincerity, and relative vices like mendacity, meanness, hypocrisy. And also interpersonal virtues like affability, liberality, gratitude, loyalty, disinterestedness, and the relative vices like unfriendliness, miserliness, ingratitude, unfaithfulness, partiality.

4. Virtues: doing the good has to be learned

These virtues configure the person and constitute the anthropological step of this research. Interpersonal virtues and vices are relevant because they unfold the relationality that constitutes the person. [20]. Their relevance to care lies in the fact that doing the good has to be learned. Generosity, for example, could appear like "simply giving" ("it is so simple to give!"), but it involves a cluster of skills. A paragraph by Cicero is meaningful in this sense: "Next in order, as outlined above, let us speak of kindness (*beneficentia*) and generosity (*liberalitas*). Nothing appeals more to the best in human nature than this, but it calls for the exercise of caution in many particulars: we must, in the first place, see to it that our act of kindness shall not prove an injury either to the object of our beneficence or to others; in the second place, that it shall not be beyond our means; and finally, that it shall be proportioned to the worthiness of the recipient; for this is the corner-stone of justice; and by the standard of justice all acts of kindness must be measured. For those who confer a harmful favour upon someone whom they seemingly wish to help are to be accounted not generous benefactors but dangerous sycophants; and likewise those who injure one man, in order to be generous to another, are guilty of the same injustice as if they diverted to their own accounts the property of their neighbours." [21].

Very synthetically MacIntyre explains that generosity has to answer to justice, i.e. has to be a "just generosity." An "uncalculating generosity" is unsustainable. To be generous one needs "industriousness in getting, thrift in saving, and discrimination in giving." [22]. In a wider explanation he writes: "Prudent calculation is not only permitted, but required by just generosity. If I do not work, so as to acquire property, I will have nothing to give. If I do not save, but only consume, then, when the time comes when my help is urgently needed by my neighbor, I may not have the resources to provide that help. If I give to those not really in urgent need, then I may not have enough to give to those who are." [23].

And then he adds that industriousness, thrift and discrimination are aspects of the virtue of temperateness. According to MacIntyre, these are the virtues *to give*. A corresponding set *to receive* is constituted by "such virtues as those of knowing how to exhibit gratitude, without allowing that gratitude to be a burden, courtesy towards the graceless giver, and forbearance towards the inadequate giver." [24].

Also receiving is a dynamic to be learnt and involves its own growth and has even specific duties. [25].

5. Otherness and border condition

Heidegger's above quoted texts clearly describe a human vocation to care. It can be derived also from human vulnerability [26] on the basis of relationality. If caring for the image is caring for the person, what specific features should have such care when the other is beyond a border? First of all one has to consider that, in a certain sense, people in contact are always beyond a border, as every otherness is a border. It introduces a necessity of translation or interpretation in giving and receiving: what would you like, what do you need...

Such distance is always a dimension of fragility (often a very ordinary fragility) and sometimes involves more specific vulnerabilities, for example when there is a geographical border with the consequent physical distance, added obstacles to join, etc. The care that answers to these vulnerabilities is in first place understanding. Giving and helping require previous comprehension.

The deepest understanding here is what after Theodor Lipps and phenomenology has been called empathy. Nel Noddings quotes the Oxford Dictionary to note that the definition provided looks too limited: "The power of projecting one's personality into, and so fully understanding, the object of contemplation." She observes that it is "a peculiarly rational, western, masculine way of looking at 'feeling with'." [27]. One could add that it is also a peculiarly *modern* mindset. Her central objection is that she does not project anything; she feels in herself other's feelings. Absolutely right, and illuminating because it reminds formulations in Ancient and Medieval thought that were not so rational, western and masculine. The well-known Aristotelian conception of friend as another self is eloquent enough, [28] and Thomas Aquinas wrote about mercy (*miser cordia*): "a person is called merciful because he has a heart with misery, and is affected with sadness for another's plight as though it were his own." [29]. In this same direction Noddings writes: "The notion of 'feeling with' that I have outlined does not involve projection but reception. I have called it 'engrossment'." [30].

Beyond such a dictionary definition, empathy (*Einfühlung*) is "the experience (*Erfahrung*) of foreign consciousness in general." [31]. It is not just feeling my sorrow for the other's sorrow, but feeling *the other's sorrow*, [32] as Noddings explains in response to the too rational concept of empathy: "I do not 'put myself in the other's shoes,' so to speak, by analyzing his reality as objective data and then asking, 'How would I feel in such a situation?' On the contrary, I set aside my temptation to analyze and to plan. I do not project; I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel the other." [33].

Edith Stein explicitly refuses the idea of empathy being a projection, which she contrasts in its various formulations, such as imitation, association, inference by analogy, [34] and asserts that Theodor Lipps calls empathy what she considers just "an incomplete, preliminary level of empathy." [35]. For similar reasons she dissociates herself from Max Scheler, who speaks on fellow feeling (sympathy, *Mitfühlen*). [36].

In the same way that dependence is not the non-human in us, this distance, this otherness is part of the essence of humanity; the border condition is an essential aspect of the human condition. [37]. Therefore, to remotely take care of the other's image a special heedfulness is required, but it should be misleading the strategy of focusing in the first place remoteness instead of otherness. The existential (i.e. not purely cognitive) approach to otherness has received the name of *epiméleia*, which can be translated just as *care*. *Epiméleia* is needed to acknowledge the right to be different, to love what is different (maybe because it is different). It is a further step after the gate created by empathy. "The unity of consideration and action is care, which the Greeks named – with larger richness of meaning – *epimeleia*." [38].

What does one gain for the notion of care turning to the same notion under another name? It is the density of the concept through its history. It is present and living in Ancient Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics), in biblical books, from both the ancient and new testament, and in the Greek patristics. [39]. There are other terms with similar meanings, such as *mérimna* (concern, anxiety, diligence), *therapeía* (care, nursing), *episképtomai* (surveillance, thoughtfulness) and *pronoia* (foresight, providence). The history of these terms confirms the relevance of care and explains its secular hiding, its absence among the subjects of philosophical thought (obscured by the notion of service, for example).

6. Conclusion

A particular dimension of human dependence and the answer to it, care, is the fragility of image and its specific care. Besides this essential feature of human condition, the relationality of person (the constitutional relationship *I-you*) and the intrinsic person's growth (to have to become who one is) are at the origin of otherness. Interpersonal knowledge and interaction require specific skills to be learnt, i.e. virtues. The multiplicity and diversity of virtues can be better understood and obtained in a unity through the notion of care, although it could be more fruitful to consider it as *epiméleia*, what is the same thing but with a long history and richness. *Epiméleia* makes the sight on otherness easier, which is the central point in border condition, more than distance.

Epiméleia, in so close a link with empathy, gives to the attention to the other's image the respect of its otherness after reaching it thanks to the interior discovery of the other's life. The modern order and control transform thoughtfulness in administration and care in governance. [40]. *Epiméleia* does not mean control but maintaining things in their essence, which is obtained in total heedfulness of the dynamic nature of the self and its constitution in front of a *you*. When the boy protagonist of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* [41] discovers that his mom had not been absent during his long adventure but, on the contrary, she did know every step of him, he asks "You were snooping on me?", and she answers: "I was searching for you!"

Epiméleia is a living resource that has to be learnt and grows with the virtues. In this way it becomes possible the caring relationship with a personal character even without necessity of being recognizably this or that person. It is the notion of neighbour. From a clinical experience – and therefore from concrete human experience, humanly concrete – comes this assertion about attention, i.e. heedfulness, *epiméleia*: "The attention provided in response to the need is grounded on the proportion of need, not the relationship to the person." [42].

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