

# Caring for our Common Home: Examining Ethical Paradigms for the Environment

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## Abstract

With the worsening condition of the natural environment around the world, anthropocentric ethicists have debated the present ecological crisis. Such is manifested in the Common Earth and Stewardship principles which attempt to find ways of addressing the problem. However, such anthropocentric approach is insufficient. If any new anthropocentric ethics is to be proposed, it must be natural, universal and novel in character. The earth crisis needs more of a care ethics.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism, Ethics of Care, Gilligan, Pope Francis, Environment

## Introduction

The environment is in critical condition. This is manifested in the phenomena such as climate change, global warming, typhoon, floods, drought, and massive species extinction that have affected all of us in one way or another. Why are these environmental disasters happening and escalating? Scientifically, some would attribute it to nature itself. The view is that nature is changeable: Today or this year

maybe hotter, but tomorrow or the following years it will be cooler, and so on. Scientists who advance this natural cause view would refer to solar activity and radiation such as solar flares or sunspots as proofs of how the earth's temperature fluctuates naturally.<sup>1</sup> They likewise point to that large forest fires, volcanic eruptions, among others are natural contributors to the earth's warming condition.

However, a prevailing view in environmental ethics, and supported by scientists as well, would oppose the natural causes view of environmental crisis. Instead, it considers human activities to be the main contributor of such natural disturbances and disasters. The anthropocentric view that regards the natural environment in a mechanistic, utilitarian, and individualistic way is blamed. As an ethical view, anthropocentrism believes that only human beings—in view of their superior intellect—have intrinsic value and that non-humans only have instrumental value. As such, only human species is worthy of consideration; the *only* moral “ground” or basis of any moral law. Applied to the natural environment, anthropocentrism would consider the latter simply like a machine, a group of spare parts “effectively dead, inert, and can be manipulated from without.”<sup>2</sup> It also regards all of nature as mere means, as a mere utility of human interests. Hence, anthropocentrism is charged of being the primary cause of the current environmental crisis. Holmes Rolston, an environmental thinker, writes: The “natural environment is now more un-safe in the hands of humans; humans are the greatest threat and, hence, the fundamental cause of these environmental maladies.”<sup>3</sup> Human rationality has entitled humans to “twist and turn the lions tail [of Mother Nature]” to reveal her secrets, and put her into the service of her children.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the accusations raised against anthropocentrism, efforts to save the environment, philosophically, are also

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<sup>1</sup> “Natural Causes of global warming,” *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Centre*, Internet, available from, noaa.gdfl.org. Date accessed, 17 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of God* (New York: Humanity Books, 2008), 214; as quoted by Reynaldo Raluto in *To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Faculty of Theology, 2010), 75-76.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (1994): 205.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Hacking, *Representing and Inventing: Introductory topics in the philosophy of natural science* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 246.

anthropocentric. The common agreement is that Mother Nature and the human community are in “critical moment,”<sup>5</sup> which has politically brought about various governmental and nongovernmental treaties. These declarations are guided by ethical principles that seek to keep, connect and sustain the human and natural environment. Two of the most well-known of these ethical principles are the Common Earth Principle (also known as The Earth Charter) and the Principle of Stewardship. While these anthropocentric approaches may serve their purpose of saving the environment and, therefore, of the human race, questions are raised as regards their adequacy. The problem lies primarily in the fact that they are still largely anthropocentric, regarding the human being as the center, so that the natural environment is under his/her control. This would imply that the value of the environment is dependent on the value that the human being puts into it. In other words, the relationship between humans and the environment remains to be one way, without giving due respect to the intrinsic value of the latter.

This paper presents the ethics of care to answer the natural world’s [and humans too] critical state. Thus, Carol Gilligan’s the ethics of care in her *In a Different Voice* is ethically useful to answer the environment’s crisis. The ethics of care’s principles of interdependence, interconnection and non-aggression, and its holistic view of the dynamics of life consider the ethics of care morally relevant as regards addressing nature’s critical status.

## Caring for the Environment

As an alternative to the common earth and stewardship principles, a new ethical paradigm will have to consider the interdependence or interconnection of the human and the environment, which, as Rolston claims, is not entirely novel as “for thousands of years...humans and nature were harmonious” and “lived well together.”<sup>6</sup> The distinct or “new” ethical paradigm must consider again the human-environment coherent existence, the moral principles of which must be fundamentally sensitive, kind, gentle, and

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<sup>5</sup> *The Earth Charter*, Internet, available from [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org), 1, date accessed, 06 August 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Does nature need to be redeemed?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (1994): 225.

considerate to all. Yet, is this ethical paradigm possible? Is there a distinct ethics which seeks to interconnect the human and the environment?

In *In A Different Voice* Carol Gilligan introduces this new principle that can potentially unite the human and the environment. Drawn from an innate character of women, she calls such principle as the ethics of care. As Gilligan puts it, “[the ethics of care] unfolds the unique character of women; they are by nature nurturer, a caretaker to the world.”<sup>7</sup> What does “nurturer, caretaker to the world” mean? How is this character connected to the environment-human interrelation? The ethics of care is a natural disposition which perceives and approaches life not in a mechanistic, individualistic, and utilitarian way. Instead, it considers life and reality as integral: Everything is symbiotically interconnected. Every being, human and non-human, mutually assists each other. Both the human and the environment need each other to exist: The environment provides humans everything to live while humans enhance the environment. Both are essential constitutive components of Life as a whole.

Relationship and intimacy are, interestingly, the ethics of care’s moral foundation. This means that the ethics of care considers that profound relationship with everybody as ethically important. It nurtures not only everybody, but also the self. As Gilligan argues “to care for other as it is an expression that in your experience you need care, a symbiosis of care.”<sup>8</sup> To relate and be intimate with others is a humble admission of the simple truth: Everybody is interdependently necessary. Hence, the truth is “I care for you because I also need care – we need to care for each other,”<sup>9</sup> as Gilligan claims it.

In this paper, I will argue that, following Gilligan’s understanding, the ethics of care is an ethical principle which is potentially relevant for responding to the current environmental crisis. I will explore the ways by which the ethics of care can be useful in the ethical analysis of this environmental crisis drawn mainly from its principles of interdependence, non-aggression, and comprehensive view about Life. Although the implications of the ethics of care for environmental ethics are still largely un-explored, such paradigm has

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

its own distinct moral value potentially relevant for the current human and environmental crisis.

The paper proceeds in three steps: Firstly, I will discuss the nature and the dynamics of caring. Is caring a biological or a culturally contracted principle, or both? Secondly, an ethical consideration on the ethics of care is made to answer the current crisis as experienced both by the human and the non-human communities. And thirdly, a summary and conclusion is presented.

## **The Historical Beginning and Nature of the Ethics of Care**

### *Feminine origin*

Gilligan univocally claims that women are “naturally caring” persons. They would always make themselves available for attending to others who are in need of help. They are persons who value “intimacy, relationship, and care.”<sup>10</sup> As caring persons, women are willing to suppress their own thoughts, hide their feelings just to accommodate others’ ideas and feelings. Gilligan adds that “sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgement other points of view.”<sup>11</sup>

However, the classical patriarchal culture has regarded the caring role as a subordinate, weak, and non-essential function. It devalues care because the latter runs contrary to men’s core values of autonomy and economic success. For example, in Reni and New Delhi, Indian, women would practically take care of everything in the house. They nurse the children, tidy up things in the house, and gather firewood (mostly from distant forests without the help of animals or their husbands). At times, they also do heavy works like farming. Women must perform all the labours in the house because men go to cities to look for job.<sup>12</sup> While all these show women’s subjugation, what is clear is that women’s caring works are not duly recognized and valued. As such, according to Gilligan, the classical culture considers the notion of care as an “excessive sense of responsibility

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 5-6.

towards others”; dismissing too much kindness as nonsense because “each one is responsible for his own affairs or destiny.”<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, even if the classical patriarchal culture has disparaged the ethics of care as mere women’s role (to men) and as mere tool for economic and egocentric success, the care ethics had shown its moral resilience. The principle subsists even in an arbitrary culture. Despite cultural misgivings, the ethics of care would demonstratively disclose its intrinsic end as “nurturer, helpmate, caretaker, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which in turn they rely”<sup>14</sup> identity. Thus, Gilligan claims that “[the ethics of care] does not only define women’s identity in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Relationship and interdependence, not independence*

Gilligan contends that “to study women’s moral values, her ethics requires a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative, and not examine women in a formal and abstract way.”<sup>16</sup> The ethics of care revolves around the morality of relationship, of responsibility, of concern.<sup>17</sup> The caring person finds ways to be involved with others, to the world. Gilligan furthers that “women feel responsible, morally responsible to herself, her family, to the world - to do what I can to make the world a better place to live in, no matter how small a scale that maybe on.”<sup>18</sup> Joseph Des Jardins comments that “the care perspective focuses on specific relationships in all their detail seeking to uncover the full nature of these relationships and affiliations.”<sup>19</sup>

The ethics of care is keen on providing the needs of everybody. Thoughts, beliefs, wants, and resources are available always for everybody’s provision. Why would the person demonstrate such caring acts to others? This is how the principle of ethics of intimacy

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<sup>13</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph R. Des Jardins, “Social Ecology and Ecofeminism,” in *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy* (Australia: Wadsworth, 2001), 252.

works; it is the principle's fulfilment, which is precisely to provide care for everybody because everybody needs care.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the caring principle takes full moral responsibility to everybody because it morally and sensitively considers what "someone else is experiencing, and you are in a position and capacity for moral response or to care for what the in-need person needs."<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Gilligan notes that the caring persons "see a world of care and protection, a life lived with others; others whom you may love as much as you can, or even [loving] more than you love yourself."<sup>22</sup> Even if such generosity is criticized as irrational the ethics of care suits itself always in relation to the world, providing all the help it could. Hence, the ethics of care is anchored in an elaborate concern and service towards others in order to keep and maintain a tie with that other. Connection commences from family, then, to others, and finally, to the world.

Meanwhile, the classical patriarchal culture thinks and does things differently. As Gilligan puts it, "moral responsibility for [men] means not doing what he wants because he is thinking of others; it must be self-first, before others – a ratio of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of self [care], and only  $\frac{1}{4}$  [care] for others."<sup>23</sup> This is because the classical ethical framework considers independence as its primary value. Besides, each person or "others are responsible for their own destiny."<sup>24</sup>

However, this is not the case for the ethics of care. Moral responsibility means doing what others are counting on the caring persons to do, regardless of what they themselves want and even if to care is construed by [classical culture] as overly, "selfish, wrong, and dangerous."<sup>25</sup> Of course, such apprehension to the ethics of intimacy by men was perhaps due to some misgivings. As Gilligan puts it: "The danger [men] describe in their stories of care and intimacy is a danger of entrapment, being caught in a smothering relationship or humiliated by rejection and deceit."<sup>26</sup> Consequently, such experiences of humiliation, rejection, betrayal, among others have led men to dismiss and devalue the ethics of care.

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<sup>20</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 57.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 42.

Despite these disabling circumstances, the caring principles have continued to be furthered. Everybody needs care and the caring person is in his/her capacity to provide those in-need of care. The ethics of care believes in the principle that “everybody needs everybody; no one should be left alone.”<sup>27</sup> As Gilligan says: “The self [of the caring person] might openly express the need for care. Nevertheless, other’s need must not be abandoned – the self and others can help together to make everybody happier.”<sup>28</sup>

*Dialogue, not aggression*

The ethics of care is grounded in a non-violence principle, that is, to contract and to not disarray nor to engage in violence. Being morally thoughtful for others discloses the distinct teleology of the ethics of care. The end cannot be calculated by linear or hierarchical method requiring the succession of things or event. The latter implies that if a situation is beneficial (more useful to the predicted outcome) it must be therefore kept, but if it does not really complement the aimed objective, then, it must be discarded. On the contrary, the ethics of care is morally grounded in affection, as such, it is considerate. It makes sure that the connection with everybody is never compromised. In Care ethics manages, the web of relationships is often seamlessly tied. Hence, Gilligan says: [Her] incipient awareness of the “method of truth,” the central tenet of nonviolent conflict resolution, and her belief in the restorative activity of care, lead [her] to see the actors in the dilemma arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend.<sup>29</sup>

This means that the ethics of care considers conflict resolution by networking; the caring person activates communication to secure and strengthen interconnection.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the ethics of care would like to traverse a unique moral path where “moral lives [women especially] teleologically aim at a different narrative of human closeness, stressing continuity and change in configuration, rather than replacement and separation, elucidating a unique response to failure, rejection, humiliation [mostly feared by men], and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 31.



diverting the metaphor of moral and ethical growth” through kindness or being considerate.<sup>31</sup>

Care ethics trusts not in the efficacy of aggression in solving conflicts; the latter, being instinctual to men’s psyche, furthers division and separation from the web of relationships.<sup>32</sup> Instead, care ethics seeks “to show kindness, caring attitude, [and] gentleness” that would connect the web of human relationships.<sup>33</sup> The ethics of care evades or circumvents aggression with much discretion even if the presence of conflict is un-avoidable, weighing the best concrete options to embrace and to execute kind acts for everybody. In opposing situations, therefore, the ethics of care considerably knits well the web of relationships. The latter must be grounded in the principles of sharing and caring, of protecting people from hurt.<sup>34</sup>

As expected, most mothers, for example, are gentle and careful of their words and actions when opposition occurs within the family [father versus son, for instance]. Mothers often consider different voices including their own. They envision to recreate the situation into an atmosphere of dialogue,<sup>35</sup> making sure that everyone involved could come up with an affirmative resolution. Hence, the ethics of care “envisions that web of relationships be kept, by way of a more creative and cooperative mode of life; a life that promotes not inequality and oppression, but of care and connection.”<sup>36</sup>

### *Caring for whole life, not merely its parts*

The family is where the ethics of care originally springs from. Women, particularly mothers, have the experience and the authority to define what caring means. Caring is “to do the housework, to attend the husband and his needs, to bear children, to take care and sustain the growing years of the kids, among others.”<sup>37</sup> In such a milieu, the family [the home] enables the ethics of care to disclose its true character. Yet, this also certainly happens within the context of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 50

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>37</sup> James Rachels, “Feminism and the Ethics of Care,” in James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, editors, *Element of Moral Philosophy*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 2015), 152.

culture which is instrumental in constructing and shaping the identity of persons.<sup>38</sup> This is particularly true in the case of women. In classical patriarchal culture, for example, every member was assigned a certain role, say, women were tasked to do the household matters. In some instances, as well, the ethics of care is not only shared to a few but to relatively huge family members just like in the Philippines.

Oftentimes, the caring person would find herself in a situation where there is “displacement of ordinary self-interest into unselfish concern for another person,”<sup>39</sup> as Michael Slote claims. It is a normal scenario for the caring persons to forego personal needs just to attend the family’s provision. James Rachel puts it concisely: “That is how emphatic the ethics of care is – they are willing to give and even risk everything [for family].”<sup>40</sup> Hence, the ethics of care is “specialized [by women] in the narrow sphere of intimate relationships.”<sup>41</sup> As such, Gilligan claims that “the caring principle, initially, is meant for personal end only.”<sup>42</sup> Ensuring one-self [women] of security and wanting for a parity of identity recognition, the ethics of care was meant for personal interest, especially when culture had ethical misgivings as regards gender function.

However, in *In a Different Voice* Gilligan argues that ethics of care is not fixated only to domestic place. The care ethics is resolved “to see life as dependent on connection, sustained by activities of care, as based on a bond of attachment rather than a contract of agreement, regardless if you like or not that person.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, the ethics of care envisions to actually embrace and care for **everybody**. As such, the personal needs and desires of the caring persons are place

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<sup>38</sup> Renante D. Pilapil, *Recognition: Examining Identity Struggles* (Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 36. Pilapil quoting from Seyla Benhabib’s *Nuos et “les autres”: The politics of complex cultural dialogue in a global civilization* (1999, 60-61), writes that cultural identities are shaped and constructed, which I think includes women (mothers and daughters) identity who are essential component members of that particular culture, through continuous social inter-actions.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy* (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James Rachels, “Feminism and the Ethics of Care,” in James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, editors, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 2015), 151.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 74.

<sup>43</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 57.

alongside with others. They are always “connecting with the world; finding actions that may bring everybody together, and elaborating ties through ...[their] ability in providing help.”<sup>44</sup> As Gilligan claims: “The ethics of care appreciate best its value and honour in its ability of providing care for others.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, the ethics of care aims to serve everybody—to knit family members and stranger together. Gilligan puts it succinctly: “[It] articulates an ethic of responsibility that stems from an awareness of interconnection...everybody is part of that one web of relation with the world.”<sup>46</sup>

### **From Caring for Persons to Caring for the Environment**

Now, given the basic meaning of care ethics, what I would like to do is to explore their relevance for environmental ethics. I would like to propose three ideas namely 1) the interdependence of the human and the environment, 2) non-aggression with nature, and 3) caring for the whole nature, not only its parts.

#### *The interdependence of the human and environmental world*

In his monumental work *The Land Ethic*, Leopold argues for a moral position that includes humans and non-humans, living and non-living beings of the land. This he calls a land ethic which enlarges the boundaries of the community to include not only humans but also soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.<sup>47</sup> Leopold writes: “All ethics so far evolved rest upon single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.”<sup>48</sup> He says that human ethics must co-operate with the rest of non-human members of the biotic community. Both the human and non-human beings are in fact fellow members of one community. Leopold’s holistic view is reinforced by Holmes Rolston III. According to Rolston, all living and non-living beings are interconnected. Although humans possess reason, they are not gods who can manipulate and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (United States of America: Oxford University Press, 1949), 2.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

dispose of the non-human beings as they wish.<sup>49</sup> Rather, human beings should be in communion or in “fellowship at multiple levels: with God, with persons, [and] with the Earth.”<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, “humankind must keep that balanced equilibrium of Life by adhering to a *relational, cooperative, environmental ethics*” (my emphasis).<sup>51</sup> Human beings should not treat the environment merely as a resource for their own benefit. Such utilitarian and hedonistic view—which undermines their interdependent relation—is the cause of our current environmental crisis. Sea levels are rising fast<sup>52</sup> which eventually will wipe-out many low-lying cities around the world. There are also increasing deaths due to air, water and land pollution<sup>53</sup> and global warming due to higher concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.<sup>54</sup> All of these call for an urgent moral and practical action. Indeed, as the human-environment interdependence is undermined, that is, as humans keep on abusing the environment, then the worst environmental events will escalate. The “earth is under threat.”<sup>55</sup>

*The Earth Charter* echoes this ethical urgency to adapt a moral principle that promotes interdependence between humans and nonhuman beings. It states: “The choice is ours: [we must] form a global partnership to care for the Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it adds: “To move forward [to live for future generations] we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a

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<sup>49</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (no. 2, 1994), 226.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Is there an Ecological Ethic?” in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 18 (no.2, 1975): 99.

<sup>52</sup> “Seas are rising way faster than any time in past 2,800 years,” *Manila Bulletin* (24 February 2016).

<sup>53</sup> “Environmental behind nearly quarter of global deaths - WHO,” *Manila Bulletin* (17 March 2016).

<sup>54</sup> “Earth’s temperature up by 1 [degree] Celsius; greenhouse gases on record high,” *Manila Bulletin* (11 November 2015).

<sup>55</sup> *The Earth Charter*, 1, internet available, [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org), date accessed, 22 February 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

common destiny.” As Rolston expresses it: “For the next century, humans may destroy their planet and themselves with it.”<sup>57</sup>

In his *Laudato Si* [a letter *On Care for Our Common Home-Earth*] Pope Francis shares a similar call for a human-environment consideration. He says that there is an “invisible” connection that binds among human and non-human beings. That connection must be kept, after all human and non-human is “one family” living together here in this one planet, “our one common home.”<sup>58</sup> This implies that as a family, there is that symbiosis of relation. Interestingly, *Laudato Si* shares the ethics of care’s principle of interdependence [I suppose Pope Francis is aware of Gilligan’s *The Ethics of Care*]. Nevertheless, the Pope strongly supports the Principle I of *The Earth Charter* [RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF LIFE]<sup>59</sup> that one being [particularly human] cannot exist without the other. Hence, the human and the environment mutually need each other as regards their existence. This human-environment interdependent is evident in our physical world. An atmosphere that is zero or less carbon-sulphur oxide-nitrogen oxide (green-house gases) allows humans to breathe healthily and live longer. Non-denuded mountains and forests provide a carbon-free oxygen and timber and firewood for every household. Pollution-free rivers and oceans insure abundant bounty for everybody.

However, it might be asked: In what sense is the natural world dependent on us—human beings? Left on their own, is it not that the natural world can exist or survive without our intervention or help? Not necessarily. In fact, if we go back to the theory of evolution, left on their own, some species will survive while other will not. Nature operates according to the principle *survival of the fittest*. As such, for some species to survive, they might need active intervention from human beings.

According to Rolston, “culture and nature symbiotically worked-well enough for thousand years, but now no more.”<sup>60</sup> The aggressive modern culture has threatened the symbiotic human-environment relationship.<sup>61</sup> An extremely modernist paradigm,

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<sup>57</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Does nature need to be redeemed?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (1994): 225.

<sup>58</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (Philippines: Paulines, 2015), 61 and 8.

<sup>59</sup> *The Earth Charter*, [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org), 2.

<sup>60</sup> Holmes Rolston III, “Does nature need to be redeemed?” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 29 (1994): 225.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

anthropocentrism contributed to the exploitation of the environment to a cumulative level, creating a gap and estrangement between the once harmonious human-environment relationship. The challenge now is for humans to connect once again with the environment, to be in-touched again with non-human communities and realize that human-environment are interconnected. Both can live harmoniously again under the “one common home.”<sup>62</sup>

*Interconnection, not aggression*

According to Gilligan, “the ideal of care is...an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone.”<sup>63</sup> The caring person knits seamlessly activities of care that will connect everybody. Thus, the caring person feels responsible for everybody; cares for everybody, because “everyone is a part of that giant collection of everybody – everyone is part of the world.”<sup>64</sup> The ethics of care, thus, envisions equal treatment of everybody. “No one should be left alone, no one should be hurt.”<sup>65</sup> The ethics of care rejects inflicting violence: “The inflicting of hurt or violence is considered selfish and immoral in its reflection of unconcern, while the expression of care is seen as the fulfilment of moral responsibility.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the ethics of care rejects those acts that destroy the self and others. But who are these others? While Gilligan obviously refers to the human beings including family members, neighbors, and strangers, I would argue that it also necessarily includes the *environment*.

Unfortunately, the natural environment has been a victim of violence and aggression perpetrated by the human being’s mechanistic, individualistic, and utilitarian views towards the environment, disregarding their interconnectedness to the latter. For example, the mechanistic attitude treats the natural world like a piece of machine, a combination of lifeless spare parts that could be manipulated and exploited by any “thinking and self-conscious

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<sup>62</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 108.

<sup>63</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

being.”<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, this mechanical perspective has influenced modernist thinkers’ treatment of the natural world as a mere piece of material which science can control and manipulate.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, the utilitarian attitude reduces the natural world into an object for the use or consumption of human beings based on their interests without due regard for the intrinsic value of the natural environment. As Katie McShane puts it: “Utility to the human interests” is the only “connection” the human being has to the nonhuman natural world.<sup>69</sup> Utility is the only “ethical norm” or reason why moral agents should extend its moral consideration to the natural environment.<sup>70</sup>

In such context, the human beings simply consider the natural world as *a stranger, an other* who is not related or connected at all to them. There is no emphatic care for the environment which is not simply brought about by the potential benefits they can get from such a relationship. This is not the case with the Chipko Movement<sup>71</sup> in which the persons [women] who were behind the latter movement daringly demonstrated such passionate care not simply because forests and trees are so closely connected to their household affairs.<sup>72</sup>

Therefore, the challenge now is to promote the principle of interconnection and non-aggression towards the natural environment. According to Gilligan, “the principle of interconnection and non-aggression is a deep reflection about what really life caring can do; a moral commitment which resolves to outline a distinct path not only to a less violent life, but also to a maturity realized through

<sup>67</sup> Reynaldo D. Raluto, *To Struggle for Human and Ecological Liberation: Towards an Ecological Theology of Liberation in the Philippine Context* (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Faculty of Theology, 2010), 73-74.

<sup>68</sup> Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (Toronto: Bantam, 1983), 61.

<sup>69</sup> Katie McShane, “Anthropocentrism vs. Nonanthropocentrism: Why Should We Care?” *Environmental Values* 16, (2007): 172-173.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3. Chipko (Hindi word for “to care by hugging or embracing”) movement proved that women has an ethics of their own. In 1974, several women of Reni Northern India took a daring step of stopping their forests indigenous old trees from falling by the loggers. These women gathered altogether to protect the trees which they cared for years. If loggers would really pursue their profit motives by cutting century old trees of that forests, then the women would embrace the trees to prevent it from falling. Seeing the women’s passionate act, a 12,000 square kilometres of sensitive watershed was saved. Hence, such caring act has become one the best-known examples for environmental activism.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

interconnection – *being one with everybody, and taking care*”<sup>73</sup> [my emphases]. This means that the principle of interconnection and non-aggression is about living a life of non-violence to and being one especially with the natural environment. Concretely, it may involve acts that appreciate the intrinsic value of plants, animals, and non-living things or creatures, so acts like killing of birds or cutting down of trees are not allowed. It could also involve preserving and respecting the integrity of nature so that waters, rivers, and mountains, among other non-living creatures are protected from destruction, pollution, or devastation.

Aggression to the environment creates a rippling effect which is really disadvantageous to human and non-human world. In *Silent Spring* Rachel Carson (1962) talks about the environmental hazard which DDT, a synthetic organic compound used as an insecticide, brought about. Like other chlorinated aromatic hydrocarbons used in that time, DDT and other chemical pesticides are “elixirs of death.”<sup>74</sup> Continued usage of these chemicals would “lead us to a time when death and poisoning would silence the voices of the spring.”<sup>75</sup> This is because DDT and other pesticides would persist in the environment and become concentrated in animals at the head of the food chain. Meanwhile, some pests may be controlled by these chemicals and increased grain productivity. Nevertheless, those non-targeted by these chemicals may not be killed but they become potential carriers of these deadly chemicals, and be part of the food chain, which are hazardous to both environment and humans.

Interestingly, aggression or violence may be morally permissible or justifiable in some instances: firstly, *as a principle of human defense*. James Sterba justifies violence when “an action that defend oneself and other human beings against harmful aggression when they necessitate killing or harming animals and plants.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, when there is a threat to life and it is un-escapable, aggression is the only way to defend oneself, then aggression is morally supported. Secondly, the principle of human preservation justifies “actions that are necessary for meeting one’s basic needs or the basic needs of other

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<sup>73</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 172.

<sup>74</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, as quoted by Joseph Des Jardins in *Environmental Ethics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Australia: Wadsworth, 2001), 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> James P. Sterba, “Reconciling Anthropocentric and Nonanthropocentric Environmental Ethics” in *Environmental Values* 3 (1994): 231.



human beings.”<sup>77</sup> So, aggression is permissible against animals or plants when basic needs of humans are not satisfied or human basic needs are threatened. In fact, “hunting or culling wild animals like birds or rabbits or squirrel, for example, are advised especially when these animals grow in large number [rabbits and rats copiously multiplied], and threatened the basic needs of humans like food or shelter.”<sup>78</sup> Hence, Sterba says “our human survival requires a principle of preservation that permits aggressing against another living beings whenever it is necessary to meet our own basic needs or other human being’s basic needs.”<sup>79</sup>

However, akin to the ethics of care or the principle of non-aggression and interconnection, the principle of human preservation is challenged to go beyond satisfying human needs. Animals and other living beings’ basic needs, that is the right to life or to exist, must be respected by humans. Consequently, there should be “no killing or harming of non-human living beings for non-basic needs or luxury purposes.”<sup>80</sup> As Sterba says “aggression to non-human beings must be avoided, after all, each one of us in this world is equal and holistically valuable.”<sup>81</sup>

### *From parts to whole caring for life dynamics*

The ethics of care starts from specific person and context most particularly “from the experiences of women especially that of child bearing and mothering.”<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, “the caring person, initially, is meant for personal end only.”<sup>83</sup> Ensuring women of security and wanting for a parity of identity recognition, the ethics of care was meant for the satisfaction of personal interest.

However, according to Gilligan, the ethics of care is not resolved for personal and domestic ends only. As a moral principle, the principle of care seeks to unfold its potential beyond concerns for self-fulfilment. As Gilligan describes it: As a “self-chosen principle of a

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph Des Jardines, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Australia: Wadsworth, 2001), 251-252.

<sup>83</sup> Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 74.

judgement” care “remains psychological in its concern with relationships and response, but [it] becomes universal in its condemnation of exploitation and hurt....[It leads us to have] a progressively more adequate understanding of the psychology of human relationship, an increasing differentiation of self and other, and a growing comprehension of the dynamics of social interaction.”<sup>84</sup> As such, the caring principle embraces the dynamics of life and grows to a “central insight that the self is always connected and interdependent with others.”<sup>85</sup> Now, how is this applicable to the natural environment?

Although the activities of caring for the environment may be concrete and specific, say, caring for this watershed, river, or tree, the ethics of care envisions to be inclusive as it seeks “to do more what we can do to make the world a better place to live in no matter how small a scale that maybe.”<sup>86</sup> The principle of caring intimately envisions to make the world one big household or a “one common home,”<sup>87</sup> as Pope Francis calls it. The caring persons considers the environment as truly part of the web of relations as humans and environment live symbiotically in their day to day experiences—living, needing and caring for each other like the symphony<sup>88</sup> in which every member is inseparably essential.

The Chipko movement is a concrete example of this. As caring persons who are morally resolved to give and even risk everything for the one they love, that is, the natural environment, the women of Reni, Southern India defended the trees, the forests, and the communities.<sup>89</sup> They are willing to give their lives by hugging or embracing the trees in order to prevent the loggers from cutting the trees and destroying the vast forests. Through such passionate act, the 12, 000 square kilometres of sensitive watershed was saved.<sup>90</sup> Risking their lives for the forests does not simply mean that women of Reni, India care only the trees and the vast and verdant forests for household purposes:

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on the care for our common home* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 108.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> Karen J. Warren, “Taking Empirical Data Seriously” in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen J. warren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 5.

firewood, timber for house repairs and other building support, medicinal herbs and plants found in the forests, among others. Nevertheless, trees and the forests is a “home.”<sup>91</sup> This means the trees and forests become places of “refuge” and “sanctuary” [of the culturally un-recognised] people, like the women of Reni, India. Thus, the latter people consider the forests and trees as their refuge; the only living being that understands, absorbs, and heals their life’s despair, aside from their children who are with them left in the house. With the overwhelming everyday concerns of [mothering] and household tasks, trees and forests are always there “witnessing, accompanying, caring, and calming” the heavily burdened lives [of women].<sup>92</sup> In addition, [women] care the trees and forests because the latter serve as the former’s only and steady “companion and friend.” It is because men would go to towns, cities, or any place that could provide them job. Meanwhile, the men are gone for longer period of days, trees and forests are their accompanying and caring the ones left at home. Hence, the principle of caring does not only attend to personal interests; but, it morally considers everybody, like trees and forests, among others as part of the one “common home.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, the ethics of care honestly considers the environment as a “homeland for the one family of people.”<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

I have discussed the ethics of care as an alternative framework to classical ethics principles that are mechanistic, individualistic, and utilitarian. While the ethics of care can be traced back to the experiences of women who are by nature nurturer and caretaker, I have argued that the principle of care can be a useful and relevant ethical framework in explaining and addressing the current environmental issue that humanity is facing. This is especially evident in its emphasis on the symbiosis of humans and the natural world firstly, the interdependence of human and the environment. That when humans seriously care for the well-being of non-human beings

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis on care for our common home* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 108.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

or communities, humans symbiotically is cared by the environment too – benefits in all aspects. Secondly, the ethics of care promotes the principle of interconnection and non-aggression towards the environment. That as Gilligan says “the ideal of care is...an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is hurt, and no one is left alone.”<sup>95</sup> Hence, the caring person feels responsible for everybody; cares for everybody, because “everyone is a part of that giant collection of everybody – everyone is part of the world.”<sup>96</sup> Thirdly, the ethics of care embraces everybody. That the principle of caring and intimacy takes responsibility of everybody: from a concrete and particular needs, and then to the world – from concrete and particular acts of caring and to the universal demands of care and intimacy. Unlike the mechanistic, individualistic, and utilitarian ethics which these principles really separate the human and the non-human natural world, the ethics of care morally considers the interdependence, the interconnection or the harmonious symbiosis of both natural-human world. After all, the earth is a “homeland” for the one family of everybody – environment, humans live in a “one common home,” as Pope Francis calls it.

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<sup>95</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 62.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

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