

Book forum

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On Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of care: practice in everyday life*

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Précis of Aesthetics of care: practice in everyday life

The relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical has always interested me. My previous work on everyday aesthetics, *Everyday aesthetics* (2008) and *Aesthetics of the familiar* (2017), addressed the moral, social, environmental, and political dimensions of our everyday aesthetic life. The first book focused on the environmental ramifications of our everyday aesthetic tastes and preferences, as well as the aesthetic expression of moral qualities by artifacts. The second book continued this trajectory by exploring the role of aesthetics in social practices, political discourse, and environmental issues of our time. Underlying this direction of inquiry is my conviction that the aesthetic in our lives is intimately and intricately intertwined with the management and experience of everyday life and we are empowered, as well as have a responsibility, to participate in the collective project of world-making. It is an activist-oriented aesthetics, so to speak, an implicit departure from the typical characterization of aesthetics as a disinterested experience gained from a spectator's point of view.

This conviction continues to inform my most recent attempt, *Aesthetics of care: practice in everyday life* (2022). This work further develops my interest in the intersection between the aesthetic and the ethical with the notion of 'care' as its site. In the popular imagination, care conjures up the image of the vulnerable population needing care by others, such as

the young, the old, the sick, and the troubled, as well as non-human creatures who rely on human care for their survival and well-being. In these cases, the relationship between the carer and the cared-for is generally not equal, one being a giver and the other being a receiver of care. However, the care relationship is not limited to such cases. In our life, we develop care relationships with many beings and things with whom we maintain reciprocity, not in the transactional sense of *quid pro quo*, but rather in the sense of supporting mutual flourishing.

First proposed by feminist ethics, care is often regarded as an alternative, or complement, to justice-centric ethics. The latter emphasizes impartiality and neutrality, generally considered to be male traits, in its deliberation and practice, while the former argues for the importance of personal and intimate relationships and the emotional investment we make for the other party's well-being, generally regarded as feminine traits. Dissatisfied with the relative dominance of justice ethics in the Western philosophical tradition as well as being truthful to our lived experience, feminist ethics encourages inclusion of such emotional investment in various forms of care relationships.

What I found remarkable is the structural parallel between care relationship and aesthetic experience. First, both require attentiveness to the singularity of the other, whether it be a friend or a work of art. We cannot have a care relationship with a generic other and our aesthetic experience is directed toward this particular painting, not an example of impressionist painting. Second, both respond to the other party's needs or invitation with an open mind. My care relationship with a friend does not necessarily presuppose like-mindedness; we may have different worldviews or even conflicting aesthetic tastes. But I respect the way in which my friend experiences the world or art and make an effort to understand it, even if I personally do not share such a view. Similarly, aesthetically appreciating something which may at first strike me as strange, trivial, or disagreeable requires a willingness to experience it on its own terms, which often means an effort on my part to get outside of my comfort zone. Finally, both care relationship and aesthetic experience are facilitated by a proactive engagement with the other, which activates sympathetic imagination. I imagine how my friend's predicament feels like from *her* perspective and I also let the object of my aesthetic appreciation speak to me *on its own terms*.

If the usual mode of human experience is self-centric by bringing our own perspective and interest to bear upon the experience of the world around us, both care relationship and aesthetic experience encourage us

to overcome this mode of experience. Both task us to cultivate the relational and interdependent way of relating to the world around us in which we are fully present to the other party, whether the immediate focus be another person or a thing. Both *take time* by working *with* the focus of our attention. Detachment, distancing, and neutrality which are emphasized in justice-centric ethics and the disinterested, spectator-driven, and judgment-oriented aesthetics are replaced by engagement, emotional investment, and personal involvement.

At the same time, our effort in care ethics and aesthetic experience does not always result in a successful and fulfilling result if the focus of our attention turns out to be unworthy of our effort. It is questionable whether a genuine care relationship can be, and should be, developed with an evil person whose carer may very well be implicated in his evil deeds by default. Furthermore, if the recipient of care takes it for granted and remains indifferent to the care given with no acknowledgement and appreciation, it does not bode well for the care relationship. Continuing care in such a case degenerates into a form of self-sacrifice, traditionally performed by women in a patriarchal society. Self-care in this regard is a necessary aspect of care ethics in that one takes care of oneself as a way of ensuring and promoting one's well-being and good life.

Similarly, not every thing is worthy of aesthetic experience. Everyday aesthetics advocates, including myself, have worked on expanding the arena of what is aesthetically appreciable. However, such an effort does not imply that everything whatsoever is worthy of aesthetic appreciation. If we work at tending to the singularity of the focus of experience with an open-minded receptivity and activation of imagination, the reciprocity by the said object is needed for a successful aesthetic experience.

I do not believe that this structural similarity between care relationship and aesthetic experience is a coincidence. Instead, there is an intimate relationship between them. First, care relationship necessitates aesthetic manifestations. While my care for a friend normally results in doing something, even if it is simply giving her encouraging words or a hug, the way in which my care is expressed needs aesthetic embodiment. It is not sufficient that I do something for her; it must be done in a certain manner, which concerns body aesthetics: tone of voice, facial expression, body posture, bodily movement, and the like. In general, expression of care takes on a gentle and kind demeanor, although it is context- and person-specific so at times the appropriate expression of care for the person may require a stern manner. Even if the act accomplishes the task

intended for care, such as driving my friend to a doctor's office, the spiteful, indifferent, or even hostile manner of execution can nullify the goal of care accomplished.

Beyond body aesthetics, our care can be expressed by handling, designing, or arranging of things. Inanimate things are often regarded as lacking agency. However, insofar as they affect our lives and shape our actions through their very existence or design, they can be considered to exercise agency, some providing consideration, thoughtfulness, and care, and others their opposite, such as indifference or hostility. The former includes those things in our daily lives that make our management of daily lives easier, more comfortable, or even delightful. The latter includes those artifacts that are designed so thoughtlessly and frustrate our daily lives and those which perpetuate unjust social and political agenda, such as racism, either specifically intended or by default. Since their moral attributes are made possible by their design features, our appreciation (or depreciation) is not merely practical but also aesthetic in nature. We appreciate the thoughtful design of manhole covers in some municipalities which quietly welcome us with images laden with a sense of place and at times stunning visual delights, while at the same time protecting vehicles and strollers as well as providing an opening for utility workers. In a contrary case, we are disturbed by the otherwise innocuous or sometimes even elegant-looking urban furniture, such as a bench with dividers or curved shape, which is meant to prevent unhoused people from sleeping on it.

Artifacts can thus function as a vehicle for conveying care, lack thereof, or even hostility, toward people. Within a long-held Western worldview, humans enjoy membership in a moral community. With the advent of environmental ethics, living beings, inanimate things in nature, and even nature at large joined the rank. But such is not the case with artifacts, except for special objects, such as prized works of art, built structures of historical significance, and religious items, which require protection from vandalism and destruction. The second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative that we should never treat other humans merely as a means to our end can be interpreted as implying that it is acceptable to treat artifacts in this way. But I propose to re-examine this view regarding artifacts, particularly in light of what I consider to be a dysfunctional relationship that has developed from today's consumerism and disposable culture. Although artifacts owe their existence to our designing and making, after they come into existence and exert their agency in shaping lives, why not consider them as our companions who share

lives and grow together with us (unless they are specifically designed and made to sabotage human flourishing, such as the urban furniture mentioned above, torture devices, and weapons of mass destruction)? The ontology that distinguishes humans (and possibly nature) and artifacts may be specific to the Western tradition, as other cultural traditions and practices do not share such a distinction, often ascribing a soul or a spirit to things. Without recommending a cultural conversion to animism, we can shift from a Western paradigm of determining one's attitude and action toward the world based upon the ontological status of things and beings to one of practicing a way of relating to and working with them proactively.

If we consider artifacts as not simply serving our needs but doing so as willing and faithful partners, they cease to be mere 'stuff' that can be used and thrown away when they no longer serve our needs, or more problematically today when they no longer satisfy our propensity toward the novel, the fashionable, and the new. As they care for us, we reciprocate by taking 'care' of them not only by using them carefully and gently but also through various forms of maintenance and repair. While motivated by practical considerations, such as ensuring functionality, maintaining hygiene, and preserving their appearance, our acts of maintenance and care of artifacts are aesthetically charged. Various acts of cleaning, such as vacuuming, mopping, wiping, sweeping, dusting, washing, and scrubbing, are predominantly aesthetic acts insofar as we cherish their original appearance. At the same time, aesthetic sensibility is called for when deciding whether to erase the signs of aging and wear and tear or to appreciate them rather as a sign of their evolution as they live with us and share the process of growth and aging. When repairing their damages, we also attend to their specific damaged state and the kind of thing it is to inform our aesthetic decision whether to engage in invisible repair, typically practiced, or visible repair, favored by today's repair activists and some contemporary artists. In short, the mutually supportive care relationship guides our care act motivated by aesthetic engagement with them.

This exploration of care relationship with the world and aesthetic experience illuminates our mode of being in the world. We are sustained by and in turn sustain the world around us, whether other human beings, nature, or artifacts. Interdependence characterizes our relationships with the world, and humility, gratefulness, and collaborative attitude facilitate

our working *with* the world. Our concerns for living an ethical life motivated by care and enriching our aesthetic life guide us to negotiate the social landscape and the world around us with which we are deeply entangled.

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Saito's social aesthetics of care

One cannot help but be impressed by the imaginative vision and far-reaching scholarship that inform *Aesthetics of care*. Outstanding in its scope and detail, Yuriko Saito's most recent work introduces new dimensions into both ethics and aesthetics.

It may at first seem odd to include care as part of aesthetics. While this may be unexpected, Saito expands the scope of care to include the conservation and repair of artefacts. Yet Saito secures her case for the sociality of care aesthetics by incorporating relational aesthetics, that domain of aesthetic thought that locates perceptual sensibility in the social realm. The comments that follow are intended to contribute to further securing care a place in the realm of social aesthetics.

The *Aesthetics of care*, like Saito's earlier books, challenges one of the dogmas of traditional aesthetic thought. While those books bridged the false barriers that separated the fine arts from the pedestrian domain of ordinary life, this work exhibits the continuities that in many ways bind the aesthetic to the ethical.

What makes care aesthetic? The theme that pervades this book is that both care ethics and aesthetic experience involve personal reciprocity: "a reciprocal and collaborative relationship with the other", "attention to the particularity of the other and [an] open-minded stance" that "activates the imagination" (Saito 2022: 39). Both employ open-ended acceptance and appropriation (Saito 2022: 39). This incorporates both ethics and aesthetics as social practices: Saito's ethics of care is a social ethics and her aesthetics of care is a social aesthetics. What binds them into pairs is relationality: the perception of relation is the binding fact of experience and this is what makes both care and aesthetics social.

Central in Saito's argument is "the fundamental relationality of our self and the world, as well as the interdependent nature of our existence" (Saito 2022: 5). Moreover, the caring relation, by its personal character, possesses an aesthetic dimension in the prominence of perceptual experience. As in the experience of theater, the highly sensory, tactile, kinesthetic, olfactory and, of course, visual aspects of care dominate the qualitative experience

of social relations. The dimensions of personal relations are fore-grounded: feeling, concern, empathetic bonding, and sharing, of course. But the human relation in caring goes beyond these connections to embrace sensory, perceptual intimacy. This is a far wider aesthetic domain than is customarily admitted: it is intimacy that is grounded in perceptual experience. The comments that follow are intended to extend this insight.

1. The stimulus of Saito's new book is surprisingly cumulative. From what would seem to be a straightforward moral issue that is given an unexpected slant in the direction of aesthetics, Saito opens up a complex domain of philosophical import. In following her far-reaching exploration of the aesthetics of care, one comes to appreciate how care manifests not only a relation with humans and with material objects, but more: a condition of the human world, the world of human activity striving toward preservation and, still more, toward the enhancement of life. The care relation exemplifies this, much as the erotic relation does, but unlike the latter, the bond is basic human empathy rather than desire. The social aesthetics of care is humane in character, centering on the recipient in a transformation that embraces all the participants. This is a true social aesthetics.

Is there a problem that comes of this stretching of the boundaries of the aesthetic? Does the expansion of the aesthetic object into the world of the everyday and of aesthetic relations into care and other relationships come at the cost of weakening the force of the aesthetic and the loss of aesthetic purity? We should not lose sight of the intensity of aesthetic focus in the highest manifestations of art: the music of Bach, Brahms, and Berg; the self-portraits of the late Rembrandt and the abstract self-revelations of Rothko's last works; the place-enhancing architecture of Aalto. In the arts at their highest reach, the aesthetic force is both revealing and humbling. Yet it does not lower the heights the arts can reach to see them set squarely on the ground of common life. Deep sensitivity and cherishing inhabit the caring relation, and acknowledging their presence is an additional richness.

2. In her *Aesthetics of care*, Yuriko Saito carries philosophical illumination to yet another forbidden region of thought traditionally separated from its vision – ethics. As a realm of human value, aesthetics is not isolated from other areas of normative experience despite the philosophical tradition that divides them. In *Everyday aesthetics* she expanded the scope of aesthetic experience to include objects and situations customarily considered too mundane for aesthetic consideration. In *Aesthetics of care*, she has ex-

tended the scope of philosophical understanding to recognize the normative commonality of the ethical and the aesthetic. Both are realms of experience and, inevitably, they coalesce in human life, for experience does not come in separate compartments. Occurrences of care are infused with aesthetic overtones. The touch of a mother's hand on her child's smooth forehead brings her tactile gratification as well as peace to her fretting child. Similarly, the qualitative presence of maternal love exercises its own magical influence. Moreover, the perceptual intimacy of care may have a dramatic effect. Together with love and compassion, care is one of the intimate modes of human relationship. If there is an aesthetics of hate, it would be on a different order.

One might not expect, at first, that care would have such a wide range of applicability, going from a concern for the wellbeing of others to respect for the integrity of objects. Care extends from the safeguarding of living things to preserving an object's physical and functional integrity, from actions concerned with protecting human well-being and safety and, in the most fraught sense, to efforts to preserve a habitable environment. In each of these situations care may mean something different and its moral manifestation something distinctive. Moreover, care shares with aesthetic values a certain impersonality in its obligation. Honoring the claim to care devolves on us, not only as parents, friends, and exercisers of authority, but on our basic humanity.

There is, then, more to be done. Once the basic configuration of the landscape of care aesthetics is clear, we need to explore its particular features. It is for social ethics to identify kinds and degrees of social relation that appear in different situations of care. And it is for social aesthetics to discern the distinctive perceptual qualities that infiltrate different social relations and color their aesthetic experiences. What can aesthetics tell us of the nuances of the perceptual experiences that characterize different social relations of care: maternal care, paternal care, human empathy, the ineradicable impulse toward life-enhancement that lies at the heart of sympathy and basic generosity? Saito has given us a further charge to undertake.

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The inseparability of ethics and aesthetics

A central claim made by Yuriko Saito in her important new book, *Aesthetics of care*, is that there is “an intimate, and indeed, inseparable relationship between the ethical and aesthetic modes of being in the world”. The ethics of care that she defends “requires aesthetic sensibility”, she argues, while aesthetic experience is in turn “grounded in the ethical practice of care” (Saito 2022: 165): the two are “ultimately interdependent” (Saito 2022: 18). The bulk of Saito’s book consists of sensitive and acute explorations of the ways in which ethical practice and aesthetic experience inflect, foster or otherwise intersect with one another. A conversation, for example, that displays care will also “make for an aesthetic experience” of its “texture and form” (Saito 2022: 79). Again, the artistic design in Japan of devices for protecting trees “exudes a gentle and caring attitude” that then encourages conservationist practices (Saito 2022: 124).

Interesting as such examples are, they do not secure the large and contentious claim of inseparability. An elegant and amusing conversation might be a vicious and combative one, while devices for protecting trees might be devoid of aesthetic appeal. So why, more generally, shouldn’t moral and aesthetic values come apart? Saito bases her case for the “ultimate interdependence” of care ethics and aesthetic experience on the “remarkable structural” similarities or “parallels” between the two. These are “attention to the particularity” of something, “open-minded responsiveness” to it, and “imaginative engagement” with it (Saito 2022: 5).

But these parallels, important as they are, do not entail the inseparability of ethical and aesthetic practice or attention. Both a dry-as-dust academic archaeologist and a romantic poet may attend to, respond to and engage with a ruined abbey, but in very distinct ways. The poet experiences the beauty of the weathered stones, a sense of the ephemerality of human creations, a pleasure tinged with pathos. None of this enters into the archaeologist’s experience, even though he may, for scientific reasons, be equally attentive to and engaged with the ruin.

What is missing or at any rate recessive, it seems to me, in Saito’s discussion is an emphasis on the affective dimension of aesthetic experience – on the pleasure, delight, pathos, nostalgia, longing or other feelings that typically belong to our (positive) aesthetic perceptions of or engagements with the world. Perhaps she simply assumes this dimension of aesthetic experience: the book is, after all, peppered with passing references to joy,

delight and other emotions, including negative ones. The problem, however, is that, once this affective dimension is made salient, it is no longer obvious that ethical and aesthetic practices or concerns are inseparable and interdependent.

It is not obvious, that is, that moral sensibility cannot exist in isolation from affectively charged aesthetic experience – and vice-versa. The possibility is not excluded, it seems, of a community of “pure aesthetes” – people able to enjoy and cultivate beauty, elegance, delicacy and so on, but who are devoid of any moral sense. Perhaps, as Walter Pater recommended, their lives are devoted to accumulating “delicious sensations”. Equally, it seems, there could be a community of “pure moralists” – people who strive to do what is right, but who are entirely insensitive to beauty and other aesthetic qualities.

If these are genuine possibilities, then, despite the similarities and contingent connections in real life between ethical and aesthetic experience, it cannot be right to refer to their “inseparability” and to their being “grounded” in a single relationship to the world (Saito 2022: 2). The “radical autonomists” (Saito 2022: 15) whom Saito criticises may be wrong to ignore the close connections between moral practice and aesthetic experience found in everyday life, but not to maintain that the two might be found apart and to insist, in effect, that the relation between them is not a deep conceptual one.

Still, we need to ask whether the possibilities I just sketched are genuine ones. *Could* there exist communities of “pure aesthetes” and “pure moralists” respectively? There are good reasons, in my judgement, for rejecting the possibility of pure aesthetes – reasons that are at least implicitly endorsed by Saito. First, when she writes that the virtue of humility is required for engaging with nature aesthetically (Saito 2022: 64), she is giving an example of a general, and compelling, claim to the effect that intelligent, reflective aesthetic appreciation necessarily involves the exercise of various virtues. As Charles Baudelaire urged in connection with the Chinese architecture on display at the 1855 Universal Exhibition in Paris, to appreciate the beauty of a style that is new and strange to one, humility, empathy, objectivity, and patience are required.

Second, when she agrees that certain buildings are aesthetically admired because they are characterised by humility, friendliness, and generosity, Saito is endorsing the “virtue-centric” claim that things are found beautiful through expressing and exemplifying moral virtues (Saito 2022: 108). If these two claims are right, then a mature, reflective aesthetic sensibility is impossible without an accompanying moral sensibility. Without

the latter, there will be faces, buildings and landscapes, say, whose beauty remains unrecognised. For, we would lack both the virtues necessary to appreciating it and the ability to identify the virtues expressed and exemplified by these things. The aesthetic appeal of Baudelaire's Chinese buildings is lost on xenophobes and arch-conservatives incapable of being open to it. The unconventional beauty of certain faces goes unappreciated by people unable to discern the compassion and honesty they express – or unable, at least, to see these as virtues.

It is more difficult, however, to rule out the possibility of pure moralists – of a moral community blind and deaf to aesthetic qualities. There have, after all, been plenty of moral teachers – Calvin, for example, and the Buddha – who, on the surface at least, have been hostile to any concern with sensory beauty and aesthetic pleasure. These are distractions, such teachers insist, from the religious and moral life, so that men and women should be educated to ignore them.

To dismiss this possibility, it is insufficient to draw attention, as Saito often does, to the Japanese ways and practices – the tea ceremony, gardening, and much else – that are at once arts and forms of ethical self-cultivation. We may, like her, agree with Robert Carter's observation (Saito 2022: 38) that, in Japan, "ethics is primarily taught through the various arts", but without concluding that this is how ethics must be taught. Japan, perhaps, is special in this respect. It is hard to imagine, for example, that the Vikings made similar use of artistic practices in acculturating the young to their moral code of honour and bravery.

Saito might reply that her point about the inseparability of ethics and aesthetics is confined to an ethics of *care*, and is not intended to extend to Viking or Mafia morality, or indeed to modern duty- and justice-based moral systems. But this restriction does not, at face value, save the inseparability claim. While Saito may well be right to deny that people who act solely out of duty or a sense of justice are exercising genuine care (Saito 2022: 27), she doesn't say anything to exclude the possibility of aesthetically stunted people who nevertheless naturally manifest sympathy and compassion, or of ones who become caring through an education that is without any aesthetic component. We are left, so it seems, with the possibility of people whose lives are informed, even shaped, by an ethics of care but who are nevertheless aesthetically insensible.

So it seems ... but I now want to suggest that this is not, finally, a real possibility, and to conclude that a community of pure moralists is as much a fiction as that of a community of pure aesthetes. My point can be traced back at least to Plato's *Phaedrus*. "The earthly likenesses of the Forms of

justice and self-discipline”, he writes, “have no lustre”, while by contrast beauty “still gleams clearest” and is found “lovely”. Because of this, beauty may serve to – indeed, is needed to – attract us towards the good. In other words, it is beauty that converts mere knowledge of what is good and right into an embrace of it, into a desire to practice it. Plato’s point was, in fact, anticipated by Confucius and, despite some hostile comments on sensory beauty, by the Buddha. The good monk must, through his clean robes, appealing demeanour and graceful comportment, emulate the beauty of the Buddha himself, so as to “attract the heart” of lay persons and potential disciples.

The point can be made in terms of the virtues. For the exercise of virtues to be sustainable, these must show up, in how people look, sound and move, in ways that give pleasure, even joy. That they do show up in this manner was the thrust of the “virtue-centric” claim alluded to earlier. For, according to this claim, beautiful faces, gestures and comportment are beautiful precisely through expressing and exemplifying virtues. For example, humility – to speak with Plato – may in itself have “no lustre”, but we are drawn to it through its manifestation in faces, speech or actions that we find “lovely”. It is the “lovely” sight of a mother tending to her baby, a man looking after his old dog, or volunteers protecting cherry trees from an impending snow storm that attracts us to, and sustains, an ethics of care.

Pure moralists or puritans who purport to dispense altogether with aesthetic enjoyment fail for one of two reasons. One reason is that their dispensation is found too dour – their prescriptions too harsh – for what they preach to take hold and, over the long term, to be maintained as a way of life. One thinks of the fate of the Puritan interregnum in 1650s England, or, very possibly, that of the Ayatollahs’ regime in contemporary Iran. Alternatively, and more interestingly, pure moralists may turn out to be less pure than their rhetoric and official doctrines suggest. Against their own intentions, perhaps, their community produces works of austere and simple beauty, while their manners, dress, etiquette and general comportment display a correspondingly modest elegance and grace. One thinks, for example, of Amish furniture and barns, and of the gentle decorum that impresses visitors to Amish homesteads.

In sum, one cannot, in the end, imagine a morally shaped form of life – not, certainly, one shaped by an ethics of care and compassion – in which beauty and other aesthetic aspects go unrecognised and unappreciated. This is one important reason indeed – beyond the joys that aesthetic experience brings – why the aesthetic dimension of life should be

cultivated and honoured. If this is so, then Yuriko Saito is right, after all, to maintain that practices of care and aesthetic experience are “inseparable” and “ultimately interdependent”.

It is an interesting question whether forms of moral thought and practice distinct from an ethics of care are sufficiently inflected by aesthetic experience to “attract the hearts” of people. Purely moralistic or puritan ones, we’ve seen, are not. But what of the ‘justice-based’ ethics – with its emphasis on abstract rights and principles – with which, Saito proposes, a care ethics needs to operate in conjunction (Saito 2022: 60). Her answer, it seems to me, should be that a justice-based ethics could not be self-sufficient and self-sustaining. She would, I like to think, endorse the spirit of Plato’s judgement that justice in itself has “no lustre” since, unlike compassion, sympathy and solicitude, it does not “gleam” in ways that people find “lovely”.

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Homo (pro)curans*¹ or the art of shaping the world in the everyday life. On Yuriko Saito’s *Aesthetics of care

Yuriko Saito detected similarities between care activities and the aesthetic experience in smaller studies (e.g. Saito 2020) before exploring them systematically in *Aesthetics of care: practice in everyday life* (2022). Although the latter pays, in Saito’s view, more attention to art than her investigations of the aesthetics of everyday life, continuities with her previous work are obvious. One of them regards the “interdependence and mutual enhancement” (Saito 2022: 9) between the aesthetic and the ethical, which is analysed in the present publication using the example of care.

¹ After writing this text, I found out that “Homo curans” is the title of Agustín Domingo Moratalla’s recent book about “the courage of caring” (2022).

1. *Care, concern, worry*. From the outset, the translation of ‘care’ poses specific difficulties. Saito’s concept of care covers a semantic field that ranges in German between *Sorge um etwas* (care/concern about something), *Fürsorge für jemanden* (care for someone) and *Sorfalt/Sorgfältigkeit* (careful handling, precision, thoroughness). While the German word for care activities directed toward persons (*Pflege*) tends to be replaced nowadays by its English equivalent, the philosophy of *Sorge* cannot abstract from Heidegger’s *Being and time*. When Saito mentions that Heidegger’s “notion of ‘care’ as a mode of *Da-sein* suggests relationality as its mode of being-in-the-world” (Saito 2022: 48), she seems to be willing to minimise the differences from her own approach². A similar complexity is inherent to the French *soin*, *soigner*, and *soigné* or to the Romanian word family of *grijă* (care/concern/worry): *a îngriji* (to take care of someone), *îngrijitor* (caretaker), *îngrijit* (cared for, but also neat, trim). In all of these cases (and the list could continue), the semantics of ‘care’ links supportive behaviour with attention and responsibility. Moreover, worry, trouble and torment underlie care: to care means to assume the negativity of existence and – by *taking* care – to alleviate it.

The English etymology of the word ‘care’ confirms this original negativity: the noun ‘care’, that has a Proto-Germanic origin, primarily referred to ‘sorrow’, ‘anxiety’, ‘inward grief’, ‘concern’ and ‘burdens of mind’. The corresponding verb meant to ‘be anxious or solicitous; grieve; feel concern or interest’. The positive meanings of ‘having an inclination or fondness for’ “seem to have developed later as mirrors to the earlier negative ones” (Online etymological dictionary). In Saito’s aesthetics of care, it is the positive, constructive dimension of care that (deliberately?) prevails: instead of focusing on problems, as the “reactive”, “defensive” (and, in fact, exclusionary) design does, we should concentrate on the objects’ “agency in *proactively* exhibiting care for others” (Saito 2022: 115). Vulnerability is assumed, but only in order to *repair* it.

Finally, if we consider that the Latin equivalents of ‘care’ are *curo* (‘to manage, care, trouble, pay attention, tend’) and *praecuro* (‘to look after, tend, nurse’), then the *Aesthetics of care* is a book about our being *homo*

² In contrast to Saito’s relational understanding of the self and her optimism regarding the power to shape the world, *Being and time* was criticised for its individualism and pessimism (probably mirroring the atmosphere in Germany during the Republic in Weimar). Heidegger’s *Miteinandersein* (being-with-others) attracted controversies, given that the authentic *Dasein* seems to be more concerned about his own finitude than to care for others.

(*pro*)curans. Care is a way of being in the world that pays attention to others by procuring (*besorgen*) for them that which they need.

Yet etymological archaeology is, admittedly, not Saito's method, who prefers to analyse experiences (including her own). Regarding its content, care cannot be reduced to a single feature, as the following similarities between care activities and the aesthetic experience show: "attentiveness, open-mindedness, receptivity, respect, collaborative spirit, and activation of imagination" (Saito 2022: 18). Care – a virtue which Saito borrows from feminist ethics – involves emotions (empathy, respect), attitudes and skills that must be cultivated and practiced. Cognitive elements are present as well, for one must know the others' needs in order to appropriately care for them, but, depending on the "object" of care, this knowledge is practical (attending to bodily needs, repairing skills), intuitive (the holistic grasp of the other, be it a person or a work of art), and imbued with imagination. The volitional dimension is evident when the caretaker makes decisions about how to care for someone/something and establishes priorities in providing care. Finally, taking care requires wisdom and a sense of discrimination, since not everything and everyone can and deserve to be cared for. *Aesthetics of care* does not avoid dilemmas, such as purely formal care, unidirectional care ("unsuccessful relationality", Saito 2022: 59), harmful "recipients" of care, or the aforementioned impossibility of practising a universal care.

2. (*S*)elective affinities. There is, however, one thing care is certainly not: theoretical knowledge about an abstract object. Care involves a "direct and lived experience of interaction" (Saito 2022: 69) that needs practice in specific situations and thus "attentiveness to the particularity of the other and situation and tailoring our response accordingly" (Saito 2022: 29). The primacy of practice connects the aesthetics of care with the performative turn and opposes it to the logocentric tradition, according to which aesthetic experience culminates in understanding, judgment, and communication.

Aesthetics of care also echoes other aesthetic theories, some of which may complete its comprehensive list of references. The claim that the object of care must be grasped in its unique individuality corresponds with Hartmann's (1966) view of the intrinsic necessity of a work of art and with Dufrenne's (1953) characterisation of the work of art as a "quasi-subject". The requirements of open-mindedness and valuing the object in itself recall Geiger's "outer concentration" (1986) and Ricoeur's "being toward

text” (1986: 53). Although the sources of the aesthetics of care are predominantly Anglo-Saxon and Japanese, its affinities with continental aesthetics would deserve special analysis.

In contrast, the affinities with Berleant’s aesthetics of engagement are explicit. The broadening of the scope of aesthetics beyond art, the primacy of experience over judgment, a phenomenological dimension in the sense of cultivating the first-person approach, the rejection of general rules, the conviction about the convergence between the aesthetic and the ethical, and an ambivalent relation to Kantian disinterestedness – all these testify to the continuity with Berleant’s aesthetics. The aesthetics of care sets forth Berleant’s critique of mere spectatorship and of Kantian disinterestedness, although it embraces Kant’s requirement to treat the other (person or work of art) as an end in itself. In the first place, care is synonymous with “engaging in care activities” (Saito 2022: 17); moreover, Saito transcends the moral perspective of the virtue theory of aesthetics and conceives care similarly to Berleant’s engagement – as a way of being in the world.

At the same time, Saito sets specific accents and goes further than Berleant in emphasising awareness, attentiveness, and the continuity between art and life. Engagement suggests initiative, while care is more “reactive”: the caretaker engages with something extant that deserves to be protected. Even when care is presented as pro-active, the focus lies on anticipating, accommodating and adapting to one’s needs and not on producing something new: care demands an “open-minded *responsiveness* to the other” (Saito 2022: 34, my emphasis). Creativity appears to be subordinated to continuity and enhances the respect for tradition (which is evident in the “aesthetics of repair(ing)”, Saito 2022: 147-64).

Regarding the caretaker, the self-effacement, devotion or “unselfing” (Iris Murdoch, *apud* Saito 2022: 36) – in Levinas’ words, the “deaconry” in the service of the other – is stronger than in Berleant’s engagement and in sheer opposition to both the Romantic quasi-natural surge of creativity and the late modern ideal of personal self-fulfilment through creation. As for the “recipient” of care, this is *per definitionem* in need and vulnerable. Therefore, compared to Berleant, Saito takes a step further from the Western liberal tradition of autonomy: if Berleant’s subject cannot step out of the environment even if s/he would want to, Saito outrightly proclaims the relational nature of the self. The prevalence of interdependency is rooted not only in Japanese thinking – Saito refers to Tetsurō Watsuji’s definition of human existence as *aidagara*, betweenness (Saito 2022: 56) –, but also in feminist philosophy. The embeddedness of

the self in a web of relations and the intersubjective origin of care confers to this practice *in all its forms* an intrinsic political dimension in the broad sense of belonging to a community. This goes beyond Saito's commitment to democracy when discussing "social aesthetics", for "we are sustained by, and in turn sustain, others, whether other humans, natural world, or material world" (Saito 2022: 50). The self is, so to speak, a citizen of the universe, and care, a form of "cosmopolitanism" that keeps this web functioning on a daily basis. In Saito's words: the aesthetics of care operates on the "micro-level" (Saito 2022: 117) and supports the discreet accretion of the effects of small acts of maintenance, repairing, and gently attending to the other's needs. As in her everyday aesthetics, Saito reiterates in *Aesthetics of care* her conviction about the incredible power of inconspicuous gestures and of personal example to shape the world. Therefore, her book is not only about aesthetics, but also about learning how to make the world better and, *by that*, also personally achieve a good life.

Optimism does not exclude realism: Saito is not insensitive to moral and aesthetic evil, yet believes that kindness can be contagious – and, conversely, that the ugliness of urban environments betrays the authorities' indifference and triggers residents' carelessness in the maintenance of their environment. Far from being marginal, negative examples are acknowledged only to be corrected. This distinguishes Saito's approach from Dieter Mersch's post-hermeneutics (2012); although the latter highlights the efficacy of aesthetic practices that are materially performed by a responsive, fragile, and embodied subject, it is confined to contemporary art and spreads an atmosphere of meaninglessness and negativity. Whereas Saito occasionally mentions that contemporary art projects show how material repair can also heal *traumata* (Saito 2022: 162), for Mersch it is the fractures and leftovers of meaning that come to the fore. If post-hermeneutics still suffers from having lost trust in rationality and humanism, Saito's caretaking subject manifests the power of acting in the present and concentrating on what can and must be done for the future. For her, care is less protective than prospective and proactive. Therefore, *Aesthetics of care* is a precious lesson of empowerment and resilience, associated with modesty and a profound sense of responsibility in engaging with the world *as it is*, devoid of projections and utopianism. Saito's subject is likely to draw her strength precisely from being with others, which is not the case with Mersch's rather "lonely" and disoriented subject.

The same gift of seeing the silver lining in a cloud manifests Saito with respect to the power of material culture on our life. The author ascribes

moral agency to artifacts and built environments irrespective of their authors' motivations or skills, simply given that objects "*shape* our actions" (Saito 2022: 108) by inviting us to act in a certain manner (which echoes James Gibson's affordances). This argument may, on one hand, enforce the designers' self-confidence and, on the other, nourish a critique of the alienated subject in capitalism, who is driven by things. Neither of these is the case in *Aesthetics of care*: first, because proportionally with the designers' power also increases their responsibility; and, second, given that care is the opposite of uncritical consumption. Nonetheless, the power of things and the power of the caring subject remain susceptible to distortion.

3. *Deviations and developments.* Saito neither ignores pseudo-care – professional role-played care, as in politics or business – nor disequibrated or unilateral care. She warns of misunderstanding her aesthetics as a eulogy of self-sacrifice, which would perpetuate traditional gender roles in patriarchal societies; moreover, the caretaker's self-exploitation would transform her in the long run into a person who needs assistance. Caring for other(s) and self-care must be kept in balance, claims Saito. However, a "care act [that] is in danger of being patronizing and even oppressive" (Saito 2022: 40) is mentioned only sporadically. Therefore, it is worth recalling that Heidegger (1927: 159) distinguished between "two extremes of positive solicitude: that which leaps in and dominates (*einspringend-beherrschende Fürsorge*), and that which leaps forth and liberates (*vorspringend-befreiende Fürsorge*)". Only the latter enables the assisted persons to become themselves; the excessive care of the *einspringende Fürsorge* completely relieves them, but by that it chains them to their caretaker, perverting her dedication into a subtle form of domination. According to Gion Condrau (2000), the *einspringende Fürsorge* is not only the most frequent form in psychotherapy, but it also "corresponds to our consumer society and to the modern *Zeitgeist*". In Saito's view, this danger is banned by developing "tact, sensitivity, flexibility, nimbleness" (Saito 2022: 86) and an "open-minded responsiveness" (Saito 2022: 34) that experiences the others as they are and value them for who they are. On another occasion, she left no doubt regarding the liberating dimension of *real* care, when she claimed: "I should nurture and help develop the child's and the student's own potential" (Saito 2020: 188).

As for the relation to the material world, care may degenerate into fetishism. Art, brands, fashion, sport, media, and other practices of collecting and consuming are prone to generating fetishistic behaviour in a secularised society. Hartmut Böhme (2006) rediscovered the notion of

fetish in reaction to the oblivion of material culture and emotions in (German) cultural studies and philosophy. Once a critique of economic, religious, or psychosexual alienation, the theory of fetishism is considered a useful analytic tool for understanding our present culture (Böhme, Endres 2010). Both this theory and Saito's aesthetics of care ascribe agency to artifacts and seek alternatives to consumerism, yet hold different aims: Böhme urges the subject to gain control over her passion for a thing, while Saito calls for developing attachment to it. Obviously, attachment is a special passion: instead of relying on the power of critical, enlightened reflection to liberate the self from things and develop autonomy, the aesthetics of care strives for binding the subject to an artifact, so that she cannot but take care of it instead of discarding and replacing it. However, this "takes time" (Saito 2022: 45) and patience. The attachment that slowly grows through everyday use differs from fascination and object fixation and implies a double temporality: taking care of an object is future-oriented (its maintenance enables to inherit it and lays the basis for an intergenerational aesthetics), but care is also retrospective (an object I have been using for decades connects me with my past). Old objects inspire respect, which is the opposite of worshipping novelty. At the same time, the emphasis on the *use* of objects contrasts with their ritualisation and musealisation (although their conservation is itself a form of care). To sum up, the aesthetics of care is a manifest against consumerism, not by falling into an ideological critique of capitalism, but by stressing the inconspicuous, yet efficient politics of everydayness.

Although Saito carefully anticipates objections, the limited space of the book could not allow her to pursue all of its implications. Some of them, such as the negative impact of technology and media on care practices and authentic communication (Saito 2022: 91), are briefly mentioned, others must be imagined. For example, it would be interesting to compare Saito's aesthetics of care, which is mainly oriented toward the other, to Richard Shusterman's (primarily self-centred) somaesthetics, or to consider whether Saito's fine-grained psychological analyses of care acts directed toward other living beings may inspire a phenomenological analysis of intercorporeality beyond mimetism (as for Merleau-Ponty) and including the familiarity with another (human or animal) body. Finally, the issue whether the sharpening of sensibility is indeed a *universal* solution for making the world better would deserve closer inspection. The claim that "cultivating aesthetic sensibility is [...] an indispensable dimension for care ethics" (Saito 2022: 77) is convincing, and the idea that "a successful aesthetic experience" depends on "an ethically grounded relationship

with the other” (Saito 2022: 18) banishes the risk of cultivating aesthetic sensibility extracted from the subject’s web of social and moral relations (otherwise put, aestheticism). Yet hyper-sensibility can also backfire when the subject is confronted with injustice and racism, violence and war, disaster, poverty, or terrible strokes of fate, under which pressure sensitive people are more likely to collapse. And still, it may be precisely the imperative of care that could lend strength to the individual and help her overcome sensitivity or, even better, convert it into a social and environmental resource by putting the *homo (pro)curans* at the service of others. Once again, Yuriko Saito’s *Aesthetics of care* proves to be coherent and inspiring.

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Yuriko Saito

Responses

I am very grateful for the care Arnold Berleant, David Cooper, and Mădălina Diaconu took in reading my book and sharing generous comments. In particular, I am humbled by the ways in which each of them suggested further explorations of some of the issues that arose from their reading. I take their suggestions to heart as a way of developing my thinking further and in this response paper I hope to do some justice to the gifts of insight they offered.

1. Arnold Berleant considers my vision of the aesthetics of care as social aesthetics. He is too humble to credit his work as an inspiration that directed my inquiry. His long-standing work, starting with the notions of aesthetic field and aesthetic engagement, which further developed into social aesthetics, already laid the groundwork for my project. His social aesthetics expands the field of aesthetic inquiry to include our social relationships and interactions, a ubiquitous presence in our lived experience, as an integral part of environmental aesthetics, because our environment is constituted not only by spaces and material things surrounding us but also by social relationships. If material things, namely art and nature, have been the focus of aesthetics, Berleant's social aesthetics provides a much-needed broadening scope of our aesthetic life that faithfully reflects our mode of being in the world.

Berleant poses the question, "Does the expansion of the aesthetic object into the world of the everyday and of aesthetic relations into care and other relationships come at the cost of weakening the force of the aesthetic and the loss of aesthetic purity?" His own answer is "no", and I agree. One commitment I maintain in everyday aesthetics is inclusivity. That is, our aesthetic life should not be limited to Bach, Rothko, and Aalto, and including other things from our everyday life by no means diminishes the incomparable aesthetic power of these artists' creations to ennoble our lives. These pinnacles of the aesthetic world help cultivate and sharpen our aesthetic sensibility with important contributions to our life: to highlight the normally neglected aesthetic dimensions of our lives and enrich our aesthetic lives, to help us become discriminating with what

surrounds us, and, perhaps most important for my care aesthetics project, to promote discerning perception, sympathetic imagination, and aesthetic skills, all necessary for our ethical life.

Berleant is correct in pointing out the wide-ranging applicability of the notion of aesthetics of care that I discuss in the book: concerns for the well-being of others, social relationships and interactions, care and maintenance of things we use, and respectful management of natural environment, among others. He suggests that further work be done on particular features of care aesthetics regarding these areas of concern. I agree that care aesthetics is context- and case- specific. At the same time, I think of these diverse modes of care aesthetics to be different manifestations of the same basic considerations: respect for that with which I am practicing a care relationship; attentiveness to its singularity; imaginative engagement; and tangible expression.

My care relationship can be characterized by the nature of the other party or the kind and vehicle of care. Let me first address the first issue. Particularly from the perspective of care ethics, the most prominent party to the relationship is other humans, ranging from the loved ones with whom we are intimately connected, such as family members and friends, and those for whom we perform a specific role, for example as a teacher or as a medical professional, to those who are total strangers. Then there are non-human creatures who share their lives with us, namely our animal companions. There are also members of nature, including non-human creatures in the wild, plants, inanimate members such as rocks and mountains, and arguably nature as a whole. These sets of entities are familiar subjects of environmental ethics. What is not often addressed by care ethics is something I highlight in this book: the artifactual world.

It may appear that the differences between and among these entities as a party to care relationship inform the nature of care relationship and their treatment. For example, the biggest difference may be considered to exist between humans and nature on the one side and artifacts on the other side. The former entities demand a specific ethical relationship because we don't 'own' them and they are not 'ours', while artifacts' existence is only made possible by human design and creation, hence they are 'ours' in the general sense. One may claim that if there is a moral guidance for handling and using artifacts, it is because of the possible impact on the other humans and nature by our actions, such as when neglecting their care endangers human well-being or wantonly using nature for human gain causes irreparable damage which ultimately harms humanity.

However, I argue that this presumed gap between the artifactual world and the other entities should be overcome and we should accord the same kind of regard as we pay to humans and nature. This divided worldview, I believe, is a version of the anthropocentric framework that has supported Western philosophical thought made particularly prominent since the seventeenth century. It is true that respecting nature as we respect other humans is one step toward overcoming anthropocentrism, but relegating the artifactual world to an ontological and ethical second-class citizens' status still adheres to the anthropocentric thinking by considering them merely as human creation and property, thereby according supremacy to human power. But once created and released to the world, they help us manage our daily affairs, and such functioning can be considered as them exercising their own agency. They shape our actions. When they serve us well, they become our companions and deserve our gratitude and respect.

One could still point out that the anthropocentric attitude remains because, in developing a care relationship with the artifactual world, we make a distinction between those which are worthy of our care and those which are not, such as weapons of mass destruction and torture devices. However, pursuing a good life is anthropocentric to the extent that it aims to promote human well-being, and such a pursuit cannot be dissociated from peaceful co-existence and cooperative relationship with the world. Ultimately, I believe that our ethical life should be guided by a proactive mode of acting on the vision of what kind of person we want to be and how we want to act in this world, instead of operating in a reactive manner by first sizing up the status of the other party.

I am thus inclined to emphasize the commonality shared between the care relationships between us humans and the rest of the world. However, this by no means denies the context-dependent character of care relationships. Even when dealing with the same person or the same situation, there are subtle ways in which we need to adjust our care act, and this requires sharpened sensibility as well as aesthetic skills. As a parent, we may sometimes exercise tough love in support of our child, while at other times what is most appropriate is gentle reassurance and encouragement. Depending upon a particular climatic condition and other factors, caring for a natural environment may require extensive intervention while at other times it may be better to let nature take its course. The important thing to note for my purpose is that all these situation-specific care acts require aesthetic expression: tone of voice, body movement, the resulting appearance of the protected landscape, and the like. This

individuated aesthetics of care is prominent in our care for artifacts, ranging from cleaning, washing, arranging, and repairing. True care act of a singular thing involves individually tailored method rather than indiscriminately applying a general rule of thumb. Thus, care relationships require perceptual acuity, fine sensibility, and imaginative engagement, which are all aesthetic assets.

Besides the nature of the other party to the care relationship, there is another dimension to consider: the vehicle of expressing care. The social relationships between humans, and sometimes between humans and their companion animals, are often regarded to consist not only of what our action achieves, such as driving a person to her doctor or taking the dog for a nice long walk, but also of *the manner in which* the goal gets achieved: gently, cheerfully, roughly, indifferently, and so on. This belongs to the realm of body aesthetics, which seems to be receiving increasing attention today. Body aesthetics as a way of conducting ourselves has recently become controversial because of the politics of so-called 'respectability', a culturally and socially constructed behavioral norm used to oppress various social minority groups. But I think it is safe to assume that there is also a widely shared standard of bodily behavior which makes a rough and violent handling of the other person or a condescending tone of voice both morally and aesthetically unacceptable.

However, the vehicle of expressing care is not limited to one's body. Here, again, I emphasize the role of artifacts. We express our care for the other person through choosing, handling, and arranging artifacts. Such expression amounts to non-verbal communication of our care, or lack thereof. Those who design and/or create artifacts can also express care for the indefinite users or dwellers. Their care act may be more challenging than the care act for a specific person, insofar as they have to anticipate indefinite needs, desires, and propensities. For example, designing a signage system in a public space must take into account that some users want as many cues and directions as possible while more independent-minded and adventurous people may prefer minimum guidance so that they can fully utilize their resourcefulness and exercise self-reliance. As much as I frequently feature Japanese examples of care expression found in public spaces, I have to admit that it sometimes becomes excessive and obtrusive. Despite these differences, however, I don't think there is any denying that artifacts act as powerful care vehicles. Thoughtful, considerate, user-friendly, and at times purely delightful artifactual world cannot but affect the quality of life positively, while the opposite is the case if it

expresses indifference or even disdain and hostility for the users and dwellers.

Further explorations of particular features of different care situations, as suggested by Berleant, can determine to what extent the general framework of care aesthetics outlined above is applicable to a variety of situations. Yes, there is more work to be done.

2. David Cooper raises serious challenges to my discussion regarding the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical, for which I am most grateful. In particular, I appreciate the way in which he helps me answer his challenges. He sets the stage for challenging my claim about the inseparability of the ethical and aesthetic mode of being in the world through care as its site by raising examples that lack one or the other concern, such as an elegant conversation that is vicious and combative and a tree protection devise devoid of aesthetic appeal. As I explore in my following discussion, I question whether the seemingly positive aesthetic value of an elegant form of conversation can be genuinely beautiful. Of course I don't want to be overly moralistic here and flatly deny a positive aesthetic value of any thing or activity that has a questionable moral content or consequence. But ultimately the genuine beauty in our life resides not only in the said object's or activity's form but also in its placement in a larger context of life and the role it plays. The malevolent content or intent of a beautifully orchestrated conversation cannot but compromise its aesthetic integrity, as it were. The aesthetic attractiveness of this activity with an ill will toward the other person would not compare to the beauty created by an activity also with an elegant form that promotes the well-being of the other party. If anything, we may be disturbed by the abuse of aesthetics to enhance one's malice toward the other. The case is similar to an elegant-looking hostile architecture, such as a bench with a curved shape, intended to alienate a certain segment of a society. I would like to think that beauty ennobles us, promotes our well-being, and enriches our life, which is damaged by moral vices, such as ill will, malevolence, and malice, involved in the performance of an act or an intention behind a creative act.

A tree protection without any aesthetic appeal and another gear with an aesthetic appeal may both accomplish the same goal of offering care to the tree. As my subsequent discussion suggests, I think it is possible to perform a morally appropriate act of care without involving aesthetics. However, with the involvement of aesthetics, the expression of care becomes tangible and facilitates experiencing the joy of care for both the

tree carers and the passersby. Such a palpable expression of care makes the world a better place and our life richer, illuminating the potential for a care act to be a source of an aesthetic pleasure, as well as suggesting that the thoughtfulness regarding non-human entities can be conveyed not only practically but also aesthetically.

Cooper also points out that my discussion has a major omission: “the affective dimension of aesthetic experience – on the pleasure, delight, pathos, nostalgia, longing or other feelings that typically belong to our (positive) aesthetic perceptions of or engagement with the world”. Looking back at my discussion, I admit that I did not emphasize this dimension by assuming its presence in our aesthetic experience. His comparison between a poet and an archaeologist when experiencing a ruined abbey is well-taken to point out the poet’s affective experience. My limited reading of archaeologists’ writings suggests that some do betray affective engagement with the object of their investigation, but I think their experience *as* scientists and historians can be distinguished from a more poetic experience. At any rate, he is right in suggesting that this affective dimension needs to be highlighted more particularly in arguing for the critical role aesthetics plays in our ethical life.

These examples lead to Cooper’s central challenge: the possibility of an aesthetic life without moral dimensions and a moral life without aesthetic dimensions, asking whether there could exist “communities of ‘pure aesthetes’ and ‘pure moralists’”. He helps me reject the first possibility by referencing Baudelaire’s criticism of “a modern Winckelmann” to whom Chinese objects and buildings appear “weird, strange, distorted in form” (cited by Carrier 2014: 295). It reminds me of a passage from Dewey’s *Art as experience* that left an indelible impression on me many years ago which has guided my subsequent aesthetic inquiry. In the chapter on “Art and civilization”, he states that experiencing art from a culture or a historical period not familiar to us takes us out of our comfort zone and helps us “enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own” (Dewey 1934: 333). Insofar as the aesthetic experience happens when we open ourselves up to the object and make an effort to understand and appreciate it on *its*, not *our*, own terms, the same attitude of humility and respect that underlies our moral life is required. Without such a moral stance and capacity, it is doubtful whether one’s aesthetic life is genuine or fulfilling.

In addition, if our aesthetic life is separate from moral concerns, consisting of a more formalism-oriented or aesthetic autonomism-inclined

aesthetics that is protective of aesthetic concerns from other life considerations, a brilliantly designed torture device would be experienced as aesthetically positive based upon its functional beauty. Similarly, the rubbles caused by a terrorist attack would appear picturesque due to their complex, irregular, and rough features. Such judgments are arguably consistent with the extreme form of Kantian disinterestedness which excludes our interest in the object's existence; furthermore, one may argue for the heuristic value of cultivating complete impartiality and open-mindedness involved in such judgments. However, such judgments are anathema to our lived experience. Such an aesthetic life divorced from moral concerns exasperates a self-centered perspective by only considering how the object positively affects *me* with *my* interest in maximizing *my* pleasurable experience. If we regard the most general function of artifacts to be to promote human welfare and help us flourish, we would have to deny the functional beauty to those objects specifically made to harm us. I believe that the experience of true beauty and its cognates presupposes liberation from a self-centric orientation, what Iris Murdoch calls 'unselfing', which is indispensable in our moral life.

But a more difficult challenge is to examine whether a moral life without aesthetic dimensions is possible. Why can't we cultivate moral virtues and practice an ethical life without any reference to aesthetic considerations? Cooper points out that for some classical figures who pursued moral life, such as Calvin and Buddha, aesthetic pleasures were considered distractions or, worse, detrimental to the cultivation of virtues and achievement of a good life. There are several possible responses, although they may not provide an argument for the *necessity* of aesthetics in moral life.

First, Buddha's pursuit of a virtuous life was in response to his realization that life is full of misery and suffering. His firsthand experience of seeing people outside of the palace suffer affected him profoundly, which required capacities for sympathy, imagination, and compassion, all aesthetic capacities in the sense of being affected through sensibility. Here, I can't help wondering whether an advanced AI will ever develop the capacity for cultivating compassion and sympathy, even if it goes through rational deliberations to come up with an action that is morally correct.

Furthermore, without the involvement of any aesthetic sensibility, it is uncertain whether one's act is truly morally appropriate, as one may miss cues about the situation, the state of the other person's predicament, and her feelings, all of which are subtly expressed in her body aesthetics, atmosphere, and the like. Reading them requires aesthetic skills.

In addition, the way in which I act may lack the appropriate expression suitable for the specifics of the occasion and person, again, which calls for aesthetic skills.

However, these considerations may not be a problem when following justice ethics, as it requires impartiality and fairness by putting aside one's personal relationships and emotional investment. But even for justice ethics, Elaine Scarry (1999) argues for the role beauty plays. She characterizes the experience of beauty as a kind of wake-up call to recognize the reciprocal relationship that develops between us and the object of beauty initiated by what she calls its welcoming salute to invite us into its world. We are taken away from our usual mode of experiencing the world, which is from the center of self-preoccupation, and thus prompting a distribution of our attention toward others, which ultimately leads to and supports fairness justice demands. Although I don't think it is theoretically impossible for a person without any aesthetic life to carry out what justice ethics requires, Scarry would probably argue that such a person is at a significant disadvantage in not having any aesthetic experience which would help him gain a sure footing into a lifeworld that is not centered around one's self.

For Friedrich Schiller, aesthetic education is crucial in leading a moral life and a good life overall. Such education "plead[s] the cause of Beauty before a heart that perceives and exercises her whole power, and, in an enquiry where one is compelled to appeal as often to feelings as to principles" (Schiller 1795: 23). His vision of a virtuous person is very similar to a Confucian sage: someone whose sensuous and emotive parts harmonize with the rational part so following one's affections naturally results in a moral act, without causing discord with the rational will. This of course requires practice and cultivation, but for both Schiller and Confucius, such a person embodies grace and beauty. These aesthetic qualities are manifested in the spontaneous way in which a virtuous person acts morally for Schiller, and in the beautiful bodily comportment of such a person for Confucius and his followers.

We humans are sensible and emotive, as well as rational, creatures, and if our moral education is dominated by overcoming or suppressing the non-rational aspects of our being, as Cooper points out, there will be no joy and one's disposition will be "too dour", or, to borrow Marcia Eaton's expression, one always acts to do the morally right thing "as if with clenched fists" (Eaton 2001: 84). I think we will feel as if we are always punishing ourselves. So, even if such a strict mode of living is possible, the important question is whether such a way of conducting one's

moral life leads to a good and fulfilling life. How does such a life compare with the one whose moral life is guided by joy by following a beacon of “lustre” as suggested by Cooper with reference to Plato’s *Phaedrus*?

In my previous work, I explored the implications of this point in the context of today’s environmental education, inspired by David Orr’s observation that “we are moved to act more often, more consistently, and more profoundly by the experience of beauty in all of its forms than by intellectual arguments, abstract appeals to duty or even by fear” (Orr 2002: 178-9). He continues that “we must be inspired to act by examples that we can see, touch, and experience”, toward which we can develop an “emotional attachment” and a “deep affection” (Orr 2002: 181, 25, 26). Our environmental responsibility is often characterized as acting contrary to our desire for using nature, purchasing things in pursuit of fashionableness and novelty, and consuming food that was produced by an environmentally harmful process. We are made to feel we have to *put up with* living with less and foregoing various forms of pleasure. Rather than leading a “dour” life with clenched fists and gnashed teeth, however, it is more effective to develop what one thinker calls “alternative hedonism” through an aesthetic paradigm shift to find beauty in those objects and activities that better serve our environmental responsibility (Soper 2008). A good life certainly has to follow moral guidance in practice, but I believe such a life is made much more meaningful and fulfilling when accompanied by a joyful experience typically associated with aesthetic life.

This is why I take Japanese artistic training to be a good illustration, if not the sole means, of practicing cultivating a virtuous character. Although artistic training is arduous and often accompanied by struggles and at times pain, in its pursuit of beauty and artistic excellence, it cannot but bring joy and delight as one’s craft matures. I don’t think such a training is confined to what is considered fine arts. So-called crafts and any activities aiming for excellence provide a path toward a virtuous life and good life by teaching us the importance of humility, commitment, and collaborative mode of living which is possible only with our grateful recognition of the world around us and the interdependent relationship with things and people.

Thus, although I admit that it is theoretically possible to lead a moral life without aesthetic dimensions, I believe that, in the context of our actual lived experience, it is difficult to practice and sustain such a life. More importantly, it is doubtful whether practicing moral life in this way constitutes a good life.

3. Mădălina Diaconu's comments help uncover many points that have been implied or not made clear in my discussion. In addition, I am grateful for her generous reference to works in continental aesthetics, with which I admit I am not as familiar as I should be. I also appreciate her discussion of the etymology of the term, care, in German, French, and Latin. In light of the extensive references I make to the Japanese examples of care, it is ironic that there is no equivalent term in the Japanese language, although there are quite a number of cognates that refer to aspects of care, ranging from consideration and worry to attentiveness and protection. In fact, we often use the English term, care, with the same pronunciation and written in the Japanese alphabet that specifies the term's foreign origin. This may indicate that what I consider to fall under the rubric of 'care', identified by Diaconu as "less protective than prospective and proactive", is variously understood in the Japanese tradition, allowing diverse expressions and practices.

Diaconu highlights my overarching thesis that the ultimate upshot of care aesthetics is how to live a good life in a community consisting of other people, nature, and artifacts with which I enjoy relational interdependence and reciprocal collaboration. Implied is an attempt to move away from today's neoliberal ideology which privileges personal autonomy, self-reliance, and individual responsibility. Such a view exasperates both a self-centered and anthropocentric worldview which de-emphasizes the importance of co-existence, cooperation, and collaboration as the fundamental mode of living in this world. I believe relationships precede and define individual self. The aesthetics of care is one means of reclaiming a mode of living supported by a sense of gratefulness for the care provided by others, as well as reminding us that we are empowered to care for others. Reclaiming this mode of living in the world is not only a moral and political but also an aesthetic matter, because aesthetic sensibility, sympathetic imagination, and aesthetic skills are needed to recognize and feel our relationship with the world and work with its members for mutual fulfillment.

Today's environmental problems shed a harsh light on what happens if we humans live without developing a reciprocal care relationship with the world, both natural and artifactual. The personal is political, as often stated by feminists, and the way in which we conduct our personal life, in particular as we live in relationship with the people and the world around us, contributes to defining the character of the society, not to mention the literal state of the world. It is not enough for a society to ensure its

members' life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness with various social welfare programs, educational and job opportunities, justice system, and healthy environment, if the nature of the relationships and interactions between and among its members and the world around them are not motivated by care.

Here, I may note that my care aesthetics does share something in common with virtue aesthetics, despite the difference I stressed in the book. I distinguished my care aesthetics from virtue aesthetics because the latter is judgment-oriented while my care aesthetics is more practice-oriented. However, the two are similar in that virtue aesthetics also emphasizes the virtuous attitudes and motivations behind both creative acts and art criticism, regardless of the end product, whether a work of art or a critical judgment. If the process is guided by indifference, self-aggrandizement, or misplaced pride, it compromises the aesthetic value of the work of art or a piece of art criticism, according to virtue aesthetics.

This brings me back to the issue of the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical. Even if the members of a society perform moral duties toward each other satisfactorily, life there is far from being good if everyone performs duty motivated purely by a sense of duty. It is obviously preferable to the Hobbesian state of nature, but without the feeling that others care about my well-being, the world still feels like a cold place, not conducive to human flourishing. Furthermore, if our aesthetic life is compromised by artifacts and built structures that seem to be thrown together without any thoughts on how the users and dwellers experience them, or no care is given to protecting aesthetic gems in nature, our life will not be fulfilling. If my take on the structural analogy between care relationship and aesthetic experience is right, and if my previous discussion in response to Cooper's challenge is on the right track, our aesthetic life and ethical life have a mutually enhancing relationship so that cultivating aesthetic sensibility and morally sensitive interactions with others effectively empower each other. A life without one or the other seems deficient.

I put particular emphasis on our dealing with the artifactual world precisely because, compared to the way in which we relate to and live with other humans and nature, it tends to be neglected both in philosophical discourse and common practice. Today there is an urgency to re-examine our aesthetic and ethical relationships with the artifactual world because consumerist aesthetics is the guiding force behind over-production and disposable culture, which create various forms of environmental harm,

ranging from excessive resource extraction and over-consumption of water and energy to various forms of environmental pollution and human rights violation.

The industry strategy of planned obsolescence used to target functionality of products by making them break in a short period of time, forcing consumers to buy newer products. But it is an open secret today that obsolescence now almost exclusively regards the products' appearance to satisfy consumer preference for the new, the perfect, the fashionable, and the up-to-date, a preference engineered by the industry in the first place. Easy disposability of fast fashion products is made possible by an ethos that regards them as mere "stuff" or Buberian "It".

As mentioned previously, instead of reacting to the presumed ontological/moral status of things, we should rather shift our focus on the way in which we should relate to them, making our relationships and actions with them proactive. I suggested that we consider things of daily use to be our faithful companions who humbly serve our needs who deserve our gratitude and affection expressed in their care and maintenance. We live together, we work together, and we grow old together, all the while supporting each other. In comparison with this kind of mutually supportive relationship, a fetish preoccupation with a thing happens when it dominates and controls a person, as diagnosed by Marx as one of the ills of capitalism. If a throw-away culture indicates a dysfunctional relationship with the material world, fetish preoccupation is the other side of the coin of this relationship. Neither is healthy.

In addition, while I argue for promoting longevity of material things through care, it does not mean that everything whatsoever should be saved indiscriminately, which would create the problem of hoarding. Just as I argue against universal care regarding other humans, we should exercise discrimination and practical wisdom to determine which things are worthy of our care act for developing a long-term relationship, particularly at the beginning when inviting them into our lives to share lives together. Inevitably there comes a time when it is appropriate to retire them, but I believe there is a difference between wantonly tossing them in the garbage and gently bidding them farewell, even if the end result may be the same. The care attitude toward them encourages us to find ways of utilizing them in their afterlife, such as repurposing, recycling, or harvesting parts for reusing. We become a kind of curator of things in our lives, the same way citizens, preservationists, and planners decide which

buildings and landmarks to protect and save. Judicious and carefully deliberated selections are called for, rather than indiscriminately saving every structure.

Like Berleant, Diaconu suggests avenues for further exploration: comparison with somaesthetics developed by Richard Shusterman, phenomenological analyses of care aesthetics regarding other living beings, and questioning the wisdom of sharpening our sensibility toward better world-making particularly when faced with dire situations, which unfortunately continue to be all-too-common. Each issue deserves full discussion but here let me address this last point. I am writing this piece, in late 2023, in the middle of a potentially explosive regional conflict in the Middle East, while the Russo-Ukrainian war is ongoing. The lives devastated by the recent earthquakes in Morocco and Afghanistan have not been restored. For that matter, many Japanese families displaced by the 2011 tsunami and the nuclear meltdown are still living in temporary housing. We can also add to this list of people living in precarity those families affected by the pandemic that swept the globe in the last few years. In the face of these impossible predicaments, one may wonder what role, if at all, cultivating the aesthetics of care can play. It seems rather powerless, or worse, as Diaconu speculates, by possibly crushing those who develop fine sensibility and sensitivity with the weight of unbearable burden.

Many of these situations are beyond individuals' or even collective efforts to change. At the same time, we have some control over how we deal with such dire circumstances. We can find comfort in aesthetic gems hidden in the crevices of horrendous situations and devastated environments, which instill a sense of respite, dignity, and resilience, as related by my Gazan architect colleague who used to work on rebuilding his home country after each destruction (see Al Qudwa, forthcoming). I myself have not experienced firsthand an utter desperation brought about by a natural disaster, a war, violence, injustice, or poverty, so I hesitate to speculate what the experience will be like. But, at the risk of possibly appearing presumptuous, patronizing, or condescending, let me imagine that the aesthetics of care does have a role to play, if not to change the situation, in facilitating mutual support among those similarly affected as well as working with what is still available. Such dire circumstances make even more prominent and powerful the manifestation of care, such as a subtle gesture, a kind word, or a thoughtful placement of things like flowers. One of the moving scenes from Lucy Walker's 2011 documentary film, *The tsunami and the cherry blossom*, captures the victims of the tsunami taking comfort in and deriving a healing power from the cherry blossoms

which bloomed soon after the March disaster. I would like to interpret their experience as appreciating the care offered by the blossoms through their fragile but radiant beauty, a symbol of rebirth and resilience.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate my deep appreciation for the three critics' insights and gentle challenges for further thinking. I feel humbled by the care they extended in reading my book and I hope I was able to reciprocate it, even in part, by thinking further about the points they offered.

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