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Sketching A Politics of Care

We find the notion of care discussed in several places in the early Platonic dialogues, dialogues which we assume to be more closely and directly associated with the thought of Socrates than those of Plato's middle and later periods. In these early dialogues, more specifically in the *Euthyphro*, the *Apology*, and the *Crito*, we find the discussion revolve around those who do not seem to really know what care is. In the *Euthyphro*, for example, the rattled priest, in an attempt to rescue the assertion that his knowledge is superior to that of other men, maintains that piety is that part of justice concerned with care of the gods and the rest of justice is concerned with the care of men (12e). Just so and subtly, we are transported toward a politics of care. Consequently, Socrates' ignorance constitutes an injunction for care in a backdoor manner when he contends, "My ignorance would no longer cause me to be careless and inventive about such things, and I would be better for the rest of my life" (trans. Grube, 16a). Thus, Socrates enjoins us to be careful, in other words full of care, in our pronouncements; Socrates clearly indicates our attachment to care. Still later, we find other issues of care in the *Apology* as we encounter a criticism of Meletus as someone who never really had concern or care for the young. In the third of this trilogy of dialogues we find an anxious Crito being gently chided by Socrates for caring so much for what the majority think. "The most reasonable people," Socrates avers, "to whom one should pay more attention, will believe that things were done as they were done" (trans. Grube, 44c). Now, we may or may not be directly concerned with the nature and meaning of piety, or with who was or was not responsible for corrupting the youth of Athens, or to what extent Crito feels sorrow at Socrates' refusal of escaping though the means provided, however, given Socrates' particular penchants and inclinations, we should be concerned that the notion of care as it emerges as a central issue of that which is social and political. We engage instances of those who do not care enough or who do not care in the right way. We care millennia later about the fate of Socrates and whether his death was timely.

Not all of Socrates' injunctions about care are negative, however. Throughout these early dialogues we see an indication of care concerned with that which causes improvement. Though the consequences are devastating to Euthyphro, we find that care constitutes doing good to and benefitting the object of one's care. This follows from the schema of the common characteristic found in the performance of some craft: horse breeders care for horses, hunters care for their dogs, etc. Despite the particular cast of his hubris, Euthyphro does not want to maintain that the object of his care, the gods, is made better by his care. The

discussion shifts to care as a kind of service, a service which attempts to achieve some goal: doctors try to gain health, shipbuilders try to achieve shipbuilding, etc. In every instance, however, we are anxious that the object of care be improved.

In the *Apology*, we discover that Socrates himself is a person of care in several places. Socrates himself exhibits care in the form of what counts as legitimate human actions and concludes that a good person only cares about being good. Thus, a good person only asks of herself "are my actions right or wrong." A good person cares that her actions are good. This aspect of care is consistent with the kind of care that a craftsman has with regard to the object of the craft. In Socrates' case the object and the craftsman are one and the same. Thus, in caring for his soul (psyche) Socrates acts in accord with those things that benefit the soul. Consonant with a regard for the soul's improvement, Socrates proclaims that "he cares for the city like a brother or a father, neglecting his own affairs" (trans. Grube, 31b). Socrates' care for the health of the state that so generously, like a parent, cared for him. We are shown simultaneously the private and social nature of care. Toward the end of the dialogue Socrates indicates that he is often instructed by the call of his daimonion. We interpret this admonition of his daimonion as the sting of conscience. The daimonion never tells Socrates what he must do, only when he is about to do wrong. He speaks to his jury as to whether the course of the action he is following is correct. In the *Apology*, he insists on maintaining his principles in the face of death. He intimates that "At all previous times my usual mantic sign frequently opposed me, even in small matters, when I was about to do something wrong, but now that, as you can see for yourselves, I was faced with what one might think, and what is generally thought to be, the worst of evils, my divine sign has not opposed me ... it has opposed no word or deed of mine" (40a). Thus, Socrates is anxious in his care and regard for his own action. Throughout his life he is not apprehensive about his actions, nor is he apprehensive during his trial.

The *Crito*, too, shows its concern with care. The *Crito* opens with the concern over whose opinions should be valued and it is fairly quickly concluded that a person should care about the good opinions of good people. Hence, he says that a person should fear blame and welcome praise of an expert in an area, and not others. Failure to take the advice of those who know best causes self harm, and this is particularly true of the matters of good and bad, as well as justice and injustice. "The most important thing in life is not life, but the good life." One should care for one's city more than one cares for one's parents.

Now we might ask ourselves why we should even care about care, but we do care. Socrates' efforts and inquiries kindle the fires of our discussion and become fuel for our own care. Articulated in this characterization of care, but perhaps not explicit, is the conception of care as guide and a dynamic process which informs not only our private life, but our public life as well. Also, we are shown simultaneously the private and social nature of care. It is with care thus

conceived with which this exposition is itself concerned. It is through our involvement with care that we find a clue and the key to social and political life.

Heidegger's well-known notion of care is developed in *Being and Time* (1962), and there is much from it that is instructive. Though there is much, too, that is problematic in Heidegger's discussion of care, his profound and rigorous approach to questions opens many possibilities to us. Care is a primordial event in the mode of human be-ing and Heidegger's care evolves within the draw of Being. Care (*Sorge*) is defined as an ontological condition of the being of Dasein. Dasein, a now well-known conceptualization familiar to non-Heideggereans and the faithful, is the there-being of a consciousness aware of its being. Heidegger gives a descriptive account of the type of world this being inhabits, the world within which this being dwells. His is a description of that which constitutes human be-ing, the activity of being. Life itself, he claims, is a basic ontological problem in its own right, a problem which can only be grappled with reductively and privatively in terms of the ontology of Dasein. Thus, as an ontological condition, Heidegger does not attempt to justify care. His efforts are not the activities of an epistemological justification. Heidegger gives a phenomenological description. There is the sheer is-ness of the existence of care as an activity constitutive of our being. As part of the ontological condition of human being, Dasein is a being that already cares.

Heidegger articulates the structure of Dasein's existence in the world and, consequently shows that the structure of care itself is intelligible through the structure of temporality. Heidegger's move to reveal the structure and operations of Dasein demonstrates a rejection the metaphysics of substance. Dasein moves continuously toward the future out of its past and into its present, a process exceeding any kind of fixity. Traditional substance metaphysics attempts to circumscribe the being of a human in terms of a thing among all the other things in the world. However, there are significant differences between things and human be-ing. The particular kind of consciousness involved in Dasein's being is marked by its movement in time and an awareness of the particular kind of being it is in relation to other beings, aware of its own being and, Heidegger avers, aware of its relationship to Being. Temporality is a primordial structure of human be-ing. Thus, by comparison, we can say that there is no time for a rock or a blade of grass. These things are fixed by their is-ness. Lacking consciousness, these beings are not directed toward their future. They are incapable of an awareness of their being and are thus incapable of transporting themselves into a something else. Additionally, other types of consciousness are not the kind of beings that regard an awareness of their own being and most certainly not an awareness of a relationship to Being. Moreover, they are incapable of transforming or determining what their being is. It is otherwise with Dasein. Dasein's be-ing, in its relationship to Being, envelops an awareness of its past, how that past becomes manifest in the present, and its movement toward the future. Thus, unlike a substance, Dasein is not a fixed entity. Dasein is aware

of what it was and what it might become. In a profound awareness of inestimable resonance, Heidegger indicates that Dasein is the being that can transform its is-ness into a that which it could become.

In connection with the question of the Being of Dasein Heidegger says that Dasein's, "existential meaning is care" (ibid., 65). This awareness of one's own being represents the primordial structure of care itself. As a temporal entity aware of its own being, Dasein's care is marked by what Heidegger terms possibility, facticity, and falling, which enfold elements of temporality within their expression. Care embodies these elements of temporality in the following fashion: as the structural elements of possibility care is the projecting of what is to come, as facticity care is the taking over of that which has been, and as falling care represents the concern with the present (a concern surrounded in a foreboding sense of that which has deteriorated). In deference to my audience, I do not intend to examine the intricate multiplicity of the paths of Heidegger's thought, however, care sketched in this fashion reveals a care as the potentiality-of-itself of Dasein. Because Dasein cares, Dasein can become other than what it is.

Care, representing Dasein's possibility of itself, designates the place where a politics of care can be developed. Heidegger's Dasein is a being that is simultaneously coming into itself and going out of itself. As beings aware of their own being, human beings are entities that, in a concern for their own being, are interested in their own nature, the nature of its coming into being, and the where-toward of its future. Thus, Dasein's being is a 'Being ahead of itself' as a projection toward the future. Dasein has a stake in what it is to become and also has the capacity to influence what it is to become. This interest itself is this capacity to influence. However, human being often is uncertain where it is going and what it is to become, with the exception of the finitude of one's death. Thus, in its projecting forward of itself, human being is characterized by the uncertainty of what one is to become as a self-fashioning being and also characterized by the certainty of one's ultimate and inescapable passing into nothingness. Thus, Heidegger maintains that the revelation of one's radical finitude conjures the basic affect of care which is anxiety. Dasein is anxious because its future is at stake, for Heidegger, in terms of Dasein's authentic existence; and Dasein experiences anxiety because death represents its own-most possibility and imposes a particular urgency in the struggle for authentic being. Dasein always lags behind its potentialities. This lagging behind of Dasein's possibilities is reminiscent of Hegel's Philosophy painting its grey on grey becoming the awareness of the time of an age grown old. Heidegger goes on to say that, "Thus 'Being-a-basis' means *never* to have power over one's own-most being from the ground up," (ibid., 330) and this entails for Heidegger that this lagging-behind-one's potentialities is a not, a sheer negative. One is always positioned toward one's potentialities and possibilities. Still, he continues, "Care, itself, in its very essence, is permeated with nullity through and through" (331). This anxiety in

the center of one's being Heidegger depicts as the call of care. Care is, therefore, the anxiety of one's is-ness to become one's other possibilities.

We can look at care from an angle other than the sheer existential condition of Dasein. Heidegger declares "That very potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which Dasein is, has Being-in-the-world as its kind of Being" (ibid., 238). Part of Dasein's being in the world is its being in a world with others. Heidegger respects that the being-in-the-world of Dasein includes the other and reaches out to community. Thus, this being-in-the-world with others in some sense determines the being of Dasein. Heidegger goes to great lengths discussing Dasein's historicity and the relationship to community. Yet, community becomes problematic for Heidegger on the basis of two aspects from which it is the outgrowth: 1) Heidegger is always primarily involved and engaged in Dasein's existential, we might suggest solitary, existence; and 2) Community acts as an impairment to Dasein's own-most potentialities. He feels the presence of the community as part of the constitution of Dasein, but the community can also represent the conditions of inauthenticity. For Heidegger when a person is not aware of their ontological condition, of the stretch and ecstatic nature of one's possibilities, they become caught up in what they think, or put another way, in what they do not think. Rather than take charge and responsibility for one's own existence, these people look to the larger conventions of society, community, or state to be prompted for how they should be in the world. So, instead of being-in-the-world and wrestling with the possibilities of one's own being and embracing the finitude of one's existence, these people defer their being to what is expected of them. Being as expected is not taking charge of one's responsibility for one's being. This abrogation of one's responsibility for one's own conduct and turning away from awareness of one's basic state as human being is inauthenticity.

What emerges in this approach to the problem of being is that one develops a conscience both with regard to one's self and with others because one grows anxious about what one is to become. The anxiety evoked as the basic affect of care Heidegger refers to as the "call of care". A primordial impulse of human being is this tug that occurs within one's being toward and being other. Care is this call. The call of care as conscience indicates that one can make an appeal to someone else. That the someone else is susceptible to one's appeal indicates a desire for conscience on the part of the person to whom the appeal is made. When we feel and understand the claims made upon us by others and by ourselves, we care. Heidegger claims, "*Understanding the appeal means wanting to have a conscience*" (ibid., 334). As a result, not only is care a primordial element within the descriptive account of our being, Dasein wants to have this care. Heidegger makes this assertion in the context of an explication of guilt. He declares "*Wanting to have a conscience is rather the most primordial existentiell presupposition for the possibility of factically coming to owe something.*" But the focus of this essay is not upon an analysis of guilt; rather it is a focus on conscience as a basic element in a politics of care. However, Heidegger rightly

indicates that "This does not mean that one wants to have a 'good conscience', still less that one cultivates the call voluntarily; it means solely that one is ready to be appealed to." Does this leave us the problem of justification? Is justification itself the issue? Because people have conscience does not mean that they have a good conscience and so we ask whether our relationship to other constitutes a public call to reconstitute our being. Would a public call be an abrogation of our responsibility to our own being? Would we be inauthentic?

Heidegger would argue against a public call of care because he maintains that the conscience had "is in each case mine—not only in the sense that in each case the appeal is to one's own-most potentiality-for-Being, but because the call comes from that entity which in each case I myself am" (ibid., 323). Of course, on Heidegger's analysis, despite his allusions to community and historicity, the call of conscience is the isolated call of Dasein's being. He is profoundly influenced in this matter by Kierkegaard's belief that institutions of government, religion, ethical systems, etc., are of no help when it comes to individual private behavior and ethical decisions, which for Heidegger is exhibited in the facticity of thrown-ness. This is certainly true. It is only the individual who is confronted with ethical and moral dilemmas to which she must respond. However, the facticity of thrownness is not merely the isolation of Dasein, but Dasein in, among, and constituted by, the they—as a being-among or otherwise.

It is at this place then where we need to steer a different course than that offered to us with Heidegger as our guide. Human being is not an isolated purely self-determined being. Dasein is and is always defined by the they, too. Can it really be the case that "Dasein's own-most-potentiality-for-being—an attestation that lies in Dasein itself," (ibid., 324) lies solely in Dasein? There is also everywhere and always a not-merely-me that is essential in the constitution of any being, and this is the value of Hegel's insight. The pure possibility of an own-most being constituted from its own ground up is no more possible than a pure eidetic reduction of consciousness. Care as self-articulation must necessarily be concerned with the other, and the other is not only the other as another existential possibility but another writ large, as well. It is my care as a being-before-itself as an articulation of my possibilities that constitutes care for others. We project before ourselves the beings we want to be. But part of our projecting ourselves as what we want to be is intimately tied up with the other and how it is we want to be with others and want others to be with us. Heidegger says, "Only so far as one's own Dasein has the essential structure of Being-with, is it Dasein-with as encounterable for Others" (157). We are already in a condition of a being with others. This is part of the ontological articulation of the being of Dasein. In our being with others they are necessarily part of our care. Communities large and small have an inestimable influence on the construction and continuous becoming of our being and bear, at least in part, some of the responsibility for who we are; and if not responsibility, then at least they are engaged in part of our explanation to ourselves. To have the other, as another

individual or as communities large or small, is part of the ontological description of human being. Socrates possessed this sagacity. It is even so that Aristotle designates human being as a zoon politikon. And, as part of our ontological condition, others are constitutive of our ontological condition of care. In so far as they are already part of our care our concern becomes the concern of a we, a social being and becomes projected toward the future. This sociality of our being indicates that we care who we become and what the society in which we find ourselves becomes. This awareness is implicit in Socrates' injunction to "Persuade or obey".

As a social being care exists as the disquieting element in our comportment toward others which forces us to remain open to others and we care what the other of our communities are to become. Care indicates the aspect of that which is as yet undecided and causes the disquietude of a troubled or an engrossed state of mind. But it is impossible to remain in a state of the undecided though we never escape this undecidability. One must choose. One cannot help but choose. Care forces us into an openness-toward decision. We must choose and we choose because we care. In this openness toward others we are compelled, with a magnetic attraction, to experience a great responsibility, a responsibility beyond the existential conditions merely of my own-most being. Thus, there is an openness toward the other as my care and responsibility to other and to myself. Human beings attempt to make themselves at home in the world and in making themselves at home they are called. Cares encounter other cares and are challenged and modified in a dynamic process of a development toward. The toward in this instance is the potentiality of one's being, the being-ahead-of-itself of humanity itself. We care, not only about our own-most being, but also about the general being of human beings. Human beings are joined in a community of care. Thus there is the project of what the care of humanity wants itself to be defined and determined as, and this determined as is never a fixity but rather a being-ahead-of-itself as projection.

Care belongs to human being. The undecided and anxious nature of our care steers us and acts as a guide without always having an explicit and completely transparent consciousness of the awareness of the end or direction. Care brings into the open that which has remained obscure to our thinking and forces us toward that which can be further revealed. In this movement we are guided and we are inclined because we care. To be with others evokes in us a politics of care. Dasein exists multiply as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be both as projection and as an expectation imposed by both oneself and other. By casting before ourselves a project for our thinking we circumscribe our search and bring into control a movement of our thought. We influence and direct our care and our thinking. By actively intervening in our care, by navigating actively the movement of our care we channel what we care about into defined networks. We speak to ourselves in ways which guide us, but in ways that are not always clear to us. In the pursuit of our care we are often guided by the that-which-is-

not-yet-known. We guide ourselves and direct ourselves in a course which is a making familiar of ourselves to ourselves, and thereby toward others.

Heidegger claims care in our Being as an ontological condition of Dasein. This care awakens us to the possibilities and potentialities of our being. But to claim one has potentialities is to claim the possibility of achieving at least some of those possibilities. This inclination, as a matter of conscience, drives us to seek a resolution of our care. We are simultaneously driven and drawn toward that which remains undefined by us in its very nature. We care that the our-own-most possibilities are only enacted through our activity. Our care is often opaque and obscured by its distance in a projected future. Thus, we are guided in our pursuit of that which recedes from us. This pursuit leaves its mark on us because our cares are the cares we have taken up from our history and our past. We are forged with the encounter of our search. Thus, we are in-formed about that which we seek. We are informed both as a bringing of the content of our possibilities and a being shaped by its content and projections. The in-forming is already part of the constitution of a human being, takes up the dual character of both informing and stamping simultaneously. As we transmute the course toward which we are guided, we are transported in a metamorphosing fashion which directs us to specific actions and inclination. The past, present, and future make a politics of care possible, a possibility defined by its ecstatic nature beyond the mere individual and even beyond the reach of mere community. The ecstasis of care is temporal in nature. We care about our future. But this future does not exist as some made up otherness which is a mere beyond. This care of the future is born out of our care of the past and our cares in the present. A politics of care defines human being multiply as an individual, as social, and as political, which does not mean defined at all, but rather a process in being. The ecstasis of political care embraces the structural elements of possibility (the projecting of what is to come), facticity (the taking over of what has been) and falling (the concern with the present).

Heidegger failed to make care a political concern of humanity. Rather, driven by his own cares, he opted for a description of historical destiny. Perhaps this explains Heidegger's troubling Nazi connections, but this topic is a concern of other papers. However, without a more pronounced embrace of the community of others and a profound insistence on the mere existential condition of Dasein, Heidegger bears at least some responsibility for the fractured and severed disappearance of the self as articulated in the post-modern mind. This disappearance of the self has made a post-modern politics obscure, if it has not already vanished. Rather than determining a politics of direction we get the dilution of a program of concern for the avoidance of cruelty, as with Derrida's disconnected interest for justice. So much so cleverly done in Derrida seems to be an isolated narcissistic exposition of the simultaneity of his won being and its disappearance, a merely personal exposition.

Thus part of the project of our care is the overcoming or modifying of the problem of inauthenticity as a recoil away from our larger communities. With an overwhelming sense of our concern with authenticity we are driven into an isolated position of our existential condition. However, we need note that when Heidegger speaks of authentic and inauthentic existence, he is no longer doing a descriptive ontology. Rather, he is making normative determination. Therefore, we must not be bewitched or tranquilized or mesmerized by the terms authenticity or inauthenticity. We should care to overcome the riven nature of our being. Naturally, such a project is muddy, opaque and fraught with struggle. Such a project is not some idle wish that I want to happen and thus this comes about. A politics of care does not entail a fairy land of morality as a mere wish it were thus and so. A projection of a politics of care, as a being ahead of itself, requires active participation, effort and conflict. Human beings exists multiply as entities which have to be as they are and as they can be both as a projection and as the expectation of themselves and the other with whom they must make account, but this existence is neither if it does not involve this active participation in the self-overcoming effort to become these other projected possibilities of itself. We must recover the Socratic sense of the intimate and necessary connection of individual and community. Perhaps a politics of care is the dialectical overcoming of the rift in life seemingly caused by consciousness itself.

#### Reference Cited

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