Caring for Being and Caring for the Other

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Taking care mostly is related to a range of specific activities which belong to the sphere of health and family care or to relations of philanthropy and social support. However, in a more philosophical and general approach, we may consider caring as an underlying attitude of *all* human activities. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger developed in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) an ontological analysis of *Sorge* (care) as the basic structure of our being-in-the world (*Dasein*). Confronted with the threat of death, human beings are driven by anxiety and worry. Hence, their first act of caring is about their survival and the meaning of their own threatened existence. In the first section of this paper, we challenge this Heideggerian concept of *Sorge*. The French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas interprets caring as a non-chosen *responsibility* for the other. In his view, caring for the other is a more genuine starting point than concern about one's own existence. The second section of the paper explores the notion of vulnerability and differentiates

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between negative and positive forms of vulnerability. The Heidegger–Levinas controversy again comes to the fore when we address the question which and whose vulnerability has to be given priority. The third section of the paper applies caring to the sphere of economics and brings out the contrast between philanthropy and relational economics as two different forms of economic care. The last section illustrates the implications of the Heidegger–Levinas dilemma with a business case taken from Goethe's *Faust*. As a successful entrepreneur, Faust is confronted with the choice between entrepreneurial success and caring for the other.

1   Heidegger and Levinas: Two Interpretations of Caring

According to Heidegger (1927), *Sorge* (care) is the basic feature of the human Self as a being embedded in the world (*Dasein*). *Sorge* is not just one of the characteristics of human beings, it is the full and primary expression of it. It relates the Self to other beings and, most of all, to time as the awareness of human finitude. Yet, the translation of *Sorge* into 'care' runs the risk to stress too much the sense of concrete solicitude (*Fürsorge*). Although this anxious concern is indeed part of *Sorge*, Heidegger's analysis entails something more fundamental. *Sorge* in his view is primarily the expression of a deeper form of anxiety which is generated by the fact that human beings are—in a conscious or non-conscious way—aware of being destined to die (*Sein zum Tode*). Confronted with the perspective of its own ending, the Self (*Dasein*) comes under pressure to safeguard his existence and to create a future. By delaying our death, we create a space of freedom. Hence, caring is the way we disclose and safeguard our being as a temporary project in this world. In a similar way, entrepreneurship has to be understood as an effort to overcome our destiny to die and to create some meaning beyond death.

To escape the angst for our ontological finitude, we can try to be involved as much as possible in concrete activities and be swayed by the issues and the hypes of the day. This escapism which Heidegger calls

fallenness (das Verfallen) is characterized by much idle talk, curiosity as a relentless seeking of novelty, and failure to distinguish genuine insight from conformity to what *they* say. The tendency to get lost in the fascination of daily hypes and social talk is not just an accident, it is part of our being-in-the-world. However, we can break out from this way of non-authentic presence in the world by realizing our condition of finitude in a more appropriate way. Being aware of our limited space of freedom, we connect to our own, personal time of being with its possibilities and limits. This connection to time as inner and personal space of development makes it possible to lead an authentic life and to take distance from a life directed by what *they* say and do.

What we can learn from Heidegger's analysis of *Sorge* is twofold: (1) Self-care is the basic reaction of a being-in-the-world that is confronted with the possibility of its own end and (2) caring can be realized in either an authentic or a non-authentic way. The authentic form of care transforms the angst for death into a self-directed search for meaning in life. The non-authentic form tries to escape the angst for death in an other-directed life of social conformity and activism.

Some ten years after *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger made a shift in his thinking which he called *die Kehre* (the turn). This turn is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but an effort to reinterpret his earlier work from a non-explored perspective. Being-in-the-world has now to be understood as part of a process of Being that precedes our subjective conception and analysis of the Self. As Heidegger explains in *Letter on Humanism* in 1947: "This turning is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in it, the thinking that was sought first arrives at the location of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced from the fundamental experience of the oblivion of Being" (Heidegger 1993: 231–232).

While the earlier Heidegger stressed angst for death as the key to understanding the nature of our being-in-the-world, the later Heidegger is focusing on Being as a *process of unconcealment*. Our being-in-the-world and our creation of meaning are only temporary expressions of Being which in itself is a permanent process of disclosing new worlds. Although this latter view tempers the angst for death, it does not remove our finitude. We are not able to master the world. At best, we

are the guardians of something that happens in an irresistible and hidden way. Caring is transformed into the mindful attention to the enigmatic presence of Being. Poets such as Holderlin, Rilke or Elliot are the privileged 'observers' of the *unconcealedness* of Being which is completely eclipsed in a civilization that is enclosed in a technological concept of life.

Levinas has deeply criticized Heidegger's concept of *Sorge* (Levinas 1961, 1974).[1] Levinas' main criticism is that the primary concern for one's own being makes the Self blind to the otherness of other beings. Prioritizing the self over the other always ends up in instrumentalizing the other for ideological or other purposes. He recaptures the same criticism against the later Heidegger. The celebration of Being as an overwhelming happening once again makes us blind for the concreteness and the suffering of other humans. According to Levinas, it is not pure coincidence that Heidegger compromised himself with the Nazi creation of a new world as he saw it as a new *Seinsgeschick* that would enable the German people to overcome their restricted freedom. For Levinas, the original meaning of care is not generated by the angst to die nor by the *unconcealedness* of Being, but by the non-chosen confrontation with the vulnerability and concreteness of a human face. To be personally exposed to the vulnerability of a human face is very different from the exposure to the condition of one's own finitude or to the power of Being.

When exposed to the vulnerability of another human being, I am not confronted with something that threatens my existence or has the power to destroy my freedom. On the contrary, the vulnerable other is powerless and defenseless (otherwise his or her vulnerability would be fake and deceptive). Think of the paradigmatic case of 'the Samaritan' in the well-known Biblical story. The Samaritan is confronted with a wounded traveler alongside the road. The wounded victim can't help himself and is completely dependent on the goodwill of those who are passing by. For Levinas, this situation of complete dependence on the other can engender an ethical commitment. The wounded traveler has no means to destroy the freedom of the Samaritan, yet he has the power to awaken in the free person a *non-chosen ethical imperative* of moral solidarity and responsibility. By begging for help, he challenges the free person. Of course, the Samaritan could have disregarded the ethical appeal for

various reasons (as did the priest and the Levite in the story). However, some lingering feelings of guilt, discomfort and disconnectedness may point to an earlier non-chosen relational dependence. Only by taking charge of the wounded person and paying for his recovery, the Samaritan redeems his Self as a truly human being. At a deeper existential level, there is a kind of reciprocity at work. The Samaritan gives the wounded traveler the material support for recovery, whereas the wounded traveler gives the Samaritan a sense of interconnected identity.

Although the Samaritan case of caring is very different from Heidegger's original interpretation of *Sorge*, there are also similarities. Both interpret care as a response to a traumatic experience of human vulnerability. Heidegger analyzes the *ontological fact* that we are exposed to death and to Being and defines caring as the human effort to overcome the pain of our finitude and to safeguard our being-in-the-world. For Levinas, the experience of vulnerability starts with the *ethical fact* that we are exposed to the helplessness of a human face and to the appeal for support. Care is the way we respond to this plea by reducing the negative vulnerability of the other. Simplifying, we could say that Heidegger's caring is driven by the ego-centric concern to overcome one's own finitude while Levinas represents the other-centric position of responding to the need of people. However, we must not exaggerate the difference between these two interpretations. The later Heidegger transformed the ego-centric notion of *Sorge* into an attention for Being as an open and transcendental horizon while Levinas integrated self-care as part of a reasonable attitude of responsibility for the other. Nonetheless, *caring for Being* and *caring for the other* remain different. The paper discusses the implications of this difference for management in Sects. 3 and 4.

2   Negative and Positive Forms of Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability is rather marginal in modern philosophy because of its negative connotations. Modern philosophy is driven by the full exploitation of human autonomy. Vulnerability implies a loss of autonomy and is seen as something that must be reduced as much

as possible. Today, vulnerability gets more positive attention due to its potential to create relations of solidarity, co-responsibility and co-creation.[2] Many of us feel that we need a positive philosophy of inter-dependence rather than a further celebration of human agency and sovereignty. If we continue to master the world while prioritizing our own autonomy, we will never succeed in saving our planet. At best, we will do things a bit greener and slower than before, but our basic attitude will remain one of instrumentalization and dominance. A spirituality of caring in its different forms cannot be realized without a deep awareness of the vulnerability of all living beings and of the planet itself. In order to develop an inspiring ecological ethic, we need a philosophical reflection on the nature of vulnerability to which humans are exposed.

Generally speaking, vulnerability is a consequence of our dependence on other beings. We depend on nature for food, shelter, light, energy, etc. To realize our material and spiritual needs, we must trust other people who might cheat us. But most of all, the *fact* that we are exposed to death makes everyone very vulnerable as Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* explains. Undeniable facts as death and human dependence explain that vulnerability is foremost a descriptive statement about our *factual condition*. Vulnerability can be defined as the human condition of being exposed to and dependent from the unpredictable in its many forms, positive as well as negative.

Science, technology and management are instruments to reduce our dependence and to enlarge our space of free choice and agency. In this modern perspective, vulnerability is not a moral virtue to be praised but an obstacle to be overcome. In modern economics, we do not speak about vulnerability but of problems of scarcity. By translating vulnerability in terms of scarcity, we suggest that we can reduce our dependence on nature by re-allocating our means to optimize our aims. In a similar way, we manage vulnerability in politics. In modern politics, we are not confronted with scarcity problems. Our vulnerability follows from the fact that my freedom is dependent on the freedom of other people. To overcome the clash of freedoms, modern society organizes a space of equal freedom for all. Modern philosophers such as Kant, Rousseau and Rawls develop different contractual theories of society to

promote the idea of universal rights/obligations and equal opportunities. A modern societal contract aims at providing maximum individual freedom for all as well as minimizing non-chosen dependence. It promotes the idea of a free society.

I will not elaborate here on the intellectual debates about the limits of these modern theories of social contract and economic scarcity. It suffices to refer to the ecological crisis in the face of unending struggle over scarce resources to get an immediate sense of the limits of modern social contracts and the illusions of overcoming scarcity by an unlimited economic growth. Instead of looking at dependence as a loss of autonomy and at vulnerability as something that must be reduced in order to strengthen our autonomy, we should transform this negative and ego-centric view of dependence by a more positive one. An other-centric outlook on vulnerability can empower our mind with a positive sense of inter-dependence.

The experience of positive inter-dependence is not confined to the traumatic experience of being confronted with the wounds of the other, as is the case in the philosophy of Levinas. Reciprocal giving generates relations of positive inter-dependence in an enjoyable way. However, gift relations as such can also engender negative forms of dependence. The more gifts are pure and gratuitous, the more they can generate an asymmetric relation of dependence and paternalism. It is not always easy to accept a gratuitous gift because it may create a loss of autonomy. Although we may feel grateful for the gift, we feel at the same time inevitably indebted to the giver and obliged to do something to return the favor. On the other side, the giver always runs the risk that his or her gesture of gift will be disregarded or abused. The reciprocal vulnerability created by gift relations can only be overcome by enjoying and sharing our gifts with others. This is the case when we feel indebted to our parents for the gifts of life and education. We can only overcome this asymmetry by in turn giving the goods of life and culture to the next generation. In this way, we can create a positive sense of inter-dependence.

The basic intuition behind gift relations as well as in traumatic experiences of vulnerability is that the moral existence of the other precedes my autonomy. This is admirably expressed by the Indian social

philosopher and activist Satish Kumar (2010), in his book "You are, therefore I am. A declaration of dependence." "You are, therefore I am" is the translation of the Hindu expression *So Hum*.

My conclusion at this point is that the ecological crisis has a lot to do with the modern disregard in economics of both gratuitousness and shared vulnerability. Our interaction with nature and future generations has been dominated by the logic of commercial exchange and functional calculations. If we want to overcome this shortcoming, we will need a positive theory of moral inter-dependence that integrates relations of reciprocal gift.

3   Philanthropy Versus Relational Economics

Caring entrepreneurship can be interpreted in different ways. But a common characteristic of all forms of caring in the economic realm is a sense of reciprocal gift. Caring has its own "modus operandi" which is different from the *quid pro quo* logic in economic exchange.

The purpose of the gift can be threefold. It can be a restitution: the relief of a previous obligation. Or it can be a means to strengthen our commitment in existing relations. Finally, it can express our will to cooperate in the future. Hence, the logic of gift is to restore, to strengthen or to create relations of reciprocity and cooperation between human actors. The transfer of a gift fulfills not only some human need, but also affects the intrinsic quality of the human relations. It may create relations of paternalism, dependence and envy, but ideally of cooperation and reciprocity.

Philanthropy has a tendency to foster relations of paternalism and does not question the underlying system of inequality between the giver and the receiver. Philanthropy which is well established in the US and part of its natural generosity, does not call into question American capitalism, its structure of property rights and its unequal distribution of income and opportunities. It is seen as an addendum to the capitalist system to heal the wounds of the system. In a similar way, the Catholic practice of charity in the Middle Ages did not question the feudal system but aimed to reduce the wounds of this system. The replacement of

Charity and Philanthropy by a legal system of social security in Europe changed the structure of society toward a more just distribution of national wealth. Its aim was to create relations of increased equality. Yet, social security systems often result in undermining the personal sense of caring since now the government is supposed to care for everyone and everything. By contrast, caring entrepreneurship is a *new form* and *genuine expression of caring* that must be distinguished from philanthropy.

Italian economists Stefano Zamagni and Luigino Bruni introduced the idea of civil or relational economics and the foundational role of the logic of gift in economics (Bruni and Zamagni 2007). They developed the notion of *relational goods* in economics via the analysis of the so-called happiness or Easterlin paradox (Bruni and Zamagni 2007: 232–252; Bouckaert 2017).[3] In their work, they explain how the disconnect between happiness and growth of income as it is observed in the Easterlin paradox is the result of a systemic decrease of 'relational goods': what is gained in well-being thanks to earned income is less than what is surrendered due to the diminishment of relational goods (Bruni and Zamagni 2007: 93). By *relational* goods, they refer to goods generated by and generating relations of cooperation, trust and reciprocity in contrast to *positional* goods which foster competition, envy and distrust. What is interesting here is that Bruni and Zamagni introduce a notion of economic development that integrates the philosophy and practice of *relational* goods.

While modern economics is based on the assumption of autonomous actors making freely their choices and individually controlling their environment, today's context is characterized by a growing interdependency and therefore an increased vulnerability of the economic actors. If we want to reduce the negative side of vulnerability, we should develop indicators that measure our capacity *to grow in interconnectedness*. Some of those indicators already exist such as the ecological footprint, human development index, performance for future generations, and gross national happiness. But their impact on our economic and social behavior and public policy remains limited. To really empower these new indicators in social and economic life, a cultural change has to be fostered. We should focus on how to enjoy life by consuming less. It is the task of relational economics to align economic development

with the vulnerability of our environment. We need genuine leadership to transform our vulnerabilities into opportunities for a relational economy. Philanthropy will not suffice.

4   The Heidegger–Levinas Dilemma in Business

The concepts of caring as introduced by Heidegger and Levinas go far beyond the practice of philanthropy. Their reflections aim to transform individuals and society by an ontological or ethical awareness of the vulnerability of human existence. For Heidegger, caring aims primarily to overcome our own finitude by creating a new and meaningful world. By contrast, for Levinas, the starting point is the confrontation with the powerlessness of a concrete human being. Prioritizing the vulnerable person implies the ideas of servant leadership and of willingness to constrain one's own individual freedom and identity.

From a theoretical point of view, we may try to integrate both perspectives in a kind of synthesis. But such theoretical construct too easily escapes the real-world confrontations. Literature can be more illuminating. Thanks to Rita Ghesquiere, I found a paradigmatic illustration of the Heidegger–Levinas dilemma in the last act of Goethe's *Faust* (Bouckaert and Ghesquiere 2010). The aged Faust has one foot in the grave when he is confronted with a difficult challenge. Allegorical characters 'Want,' 'Need,' 'Guilt' and 'Care'[4] surround him but only Care really disturbs him. Care demonstrates that the autonomy and power of a human being are always restricted. But to the ambitious Faust, this is unacceptable. The sky is his limit. By means of his colonization project, he has created a new world, a small kingdom that he has recovered from the sea by building dikes and draining the marshlands. He got the first funds for this project from the emperor after the war. It is a visionary, future-oriented project that causes collateral damages.

At first, Faust is satisfied with his project. The technological subjugation of nature gives him some satisfaction, because his deed "will transcend finite impossibility and his own mortal existence" (Sahni 2001: 428). But there is still disquiet. He is unsatisfied. He remains the

striving man. From the Heidegger point of view, Care incarnates the anxiety that in the end his project might fail and that he will not leave any visible traces to the world.

The more he achieves, the more suspicious he becomes. The small dwelling of two old villagers Philemon and Baucis is a thorn in his flesh. They are happy in their modest cottage, but Faust wants to get rid of them. He wants the elderly couple to move and Mephistopheles, his devilish companion and advisor, turns the relocating activity into a mess. He advances their death by his rough approach and with the help of his violent assistants. It is Care that makes the elderly Faust blind, although he never realizes that he is blind.

This literary episode is a clear example of dramatic irony. There is a disparity of awareness: the audience and the surrounding characters understand that Faust has been blinded, but Faust himself does not. Faust is blind to the dignity and fate of Philemon and Baucis who live by their own values and stand for a 'small is beautiful' philosophy, the wisdom in traditions. He is blind to what Levinas calls the concrete otherness of people. He feels almost no remorse and hence Guilt cannot disturb him. Faust is blind to the consequences of his interference in the natural environment; he is blind to the mercilessness of Mephistopheles. He is blind to, or rather death, for the bell that could point the way to God.

Faust's entrepreneurial care was spurred by a utopian dream to master the world and to transcend his mortal being-in-the-world. Yet, Goethe who was well aware of the megalomania of the modern ideas of entrepreneurship and human progress, at the same time recognized their value. Faust did not end, as would be the case in a classical tragedy, with a catharsis, madness or suicide. In the last act, Faust is guilty of hubris and lack of mercy. Yet, he will not be destroyed. His boundless zeal and sheer hard labor to create a better future earn him salvation and confirm his nobility. Faust as a character can be described by the word 'striving' or 'self-transcendence.' He is a visionary person who keeps the future open and has the will to overcome his limits. His motto can be summarized with the well-known verse of Goethe: *In the beginning was the Deed* (Goethe 2007: verse 1.237). Because of Faust's neverending striving to transform the world by concrete and visionary activities, Mephistopheles at the end lost his grip on him. In the final scene,

Faust's ascension turns the announced tragic end into a happy outcome. Mephistopheles loses the wager. Faust's soul is taken to heaven by the angels (Goethe 2007: verses 11.934–11.941).

> This noble spirit is released
> From evil and damnation
> For those whose striving never ceased
> We can lead to salvation.
> And if from highest heaven love
> And mercy should reprieve him,
> Then all the blessed host above
> Will joyfully receive him

Goethe's Faust is sometimes presented as the voice of the Bourgeois culture and the capitalist strive to modernization. To some extent, this is true but the Faustian idea of entrepreneurship is not a naïve celebration of capitalism. It contains a lot of intrinsic criticisms on the capitalist ethos, especially on the utilitarian and hedonistic anthropology behind it. The ambiguity of capitalism is visible from the beginning by the antagonism between Faust and Mephistopheles. Both are capitalists and protagonists of the industrialization process, but their ultimate ends are different. The aim of Mephistopheles is the search for a hedonistic life without longing for higher and self-transcendent values. Faust, by contrast, wants to keep alive the spiritual drive within human action.

The debate between Faust and Mephistopheles just before starting the land drainage project illustrates very well the conflict between the two forces within capitalism: the utilitarian and the idealistic. The former is striving for utility while the latter is striving for self-transcendence (Goethe 2007: verses 10.187–10.198).

Mephistopheles does not represent the conventional devil seen as the incarnation of the bad. He is far removed from the medieval image of the Satan. He has many faces. He is flexible and adapts his strategies to the ambitions of his victim. He is a subtle figure operating *sub specie boni* exploiting the naiveté and short time expectations of people. He tries to reduce the aspirations of Faust into a worldly and utilitarian horizon but simultaneously stimulates Faust's willy-nilly to reach a higher level of

consciousness. As a result, Mephistopheles' presence is 'a necessary and powerful force in human and social evolution' (Sahni 2001: 429).

As we have seen, the result of Faust's megalomania is the tragic death of Philemon and Baucis. Although Faust wants to give the elder couple a new dwelling, the intervention of Mephistopheles causes their death and at the same time, announces the death of Faust himself. Faust is no longer able to bear the burden of the project and becomes blind. Mephistopheles loses his grip on Faust. Faust will not see the results of his engineering project. Faust, as an entrepreneur has failed even if he is not fully aware of his failure. But, for Goethe, each failure is an opportunity to reach a higher level of consciousness and human action. It opens the door for spiritual rebirth which reaches its full meaning in the ascension of Faust into heaven.

5   Conclusion

The story of Faust gives us a dramatic visualization of the Heidegger–Levinas dilemma and its implications for management. How can we combine the industrial utopia of mastering the world with a concern for the vulnerability of people? Goethe's solution is a happy ending with the ascension of the purified Faust into heaven. Goethe, after all, represents the ethos of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. His celebration of action and work coincides with the growing industrialization process in Europe during that period. Marx celebrated the proletarian labor force pushed forward by the historical law of irresistible productive power and co-changing social relations. Goethe's celebration of human action is not based on the emancipation of proletarian labor force but on the creativity of genuine entrepreneurship driven by a mix of personal ambition (fostered by Mephistopheles) and a restless search for self-transcendence stimulated by the spiritual forces of life (symbolized by the eternal feminine).

But can this suffice as an ethos for our post-industrial area? I believe we need a much stronger focus on the vulnerability of our planet and of people. Our notion of progress must *not* be primarily embedded in a notion of mastering the world. We need a type of caring entrepreneurship

inspired by a deep understanding of our human condition and the vulnerability of our planet. Despite their differences, Heidegger as well as Levinas can stimulate such a reflective journey. But to remind Goethe, in the beginning is the deed. Reflection has to be embedded in a concrete practice of relational economics, servant leadership and sustainability. To avoid escapism, future managers need the concrete confrontation with the most vulnerable forms of life upon our planet. Philemon and Baucis and other stakeholders deserve a better future.

Notes

1. For an overview of Levinas criticism on Heidegger, see Bouckaert, L. (1970), Ontology and Ethics: Reflections on Levinas' Critique of Heidegger, *International Philosophical Quarterly, X*(3), 402–419.
2. For a positive philosophy of vulnerability, I am heavily indebted to the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Albert Schweitzer, Satish Kumar and Mahatma Gandhi. Luigi Bruni (2012) has been among the pioneers to apply the positive notion of vulnerability to the field of economics.
3. Easterlin was the first economist to put into question the assumed correlation between growth of income and happiness. In 1974, *Easterlin* found that in international comparisons, the average reported level of happiness did not vary much with national income per person, at least for countries with income sufficient to meet basic needs. Similarly, although income per person rose steadily in the United States (between 1946 and 1970), average reported happiness showed no long-term trend and declined between 1960 and 1970. The self-evident correlation between economic growth and happiness was broken. The Easterlin paradox was the start of an ongoing body of empirical research, called happiness economics.
4. The German 'Sorgenlast' has been translated as "care." Worry would be a better translation. Colins Cobuild *English Language Dictionary* defines worry as 'the state or feeling of anxiety and unhappiness caused by the problems that you have or by thinking about unpleasant things that might happen.' That is exactly what this allegorical character does with Faust: create a state of anxiety.

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