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Caring for Nature: A Discussion on the Ethics of Nature

Melih Can Kızmaz¹

ORCID: 0000-0003-1518-5880

İbrahim Halil Polat²

ORCID: 0000-0001-7034-3429

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Abstract

Care ethics is essential for establishing a relationship with nature rooted in care, love, and respect. Considering these relationships care ethics mainly considers them in related to human beings but instead of this view, in this paper, we will examine these relationships through the lens of Aldo Leopold's Land Ethics. Accordingly, in this paper, we aim to explore the idea that how can we extend that relationship through non-human beings such as animals, soils, et cetera. Furthermore, regarding Nel Nodding's ecofeminist perspective as distinguishing ethical perspectives as female and male ethical perspectives, firstly, we will argue female ethical perspectives alongside of care ethics and Aldo Leopold's land ethics and thus we will discuss the ethical relationship between human beings and nature. On the other hand, we will discuss male ethical perspectives by taking deontological ethics into account as a complementary view for the application of care ethics in the practical sphere. Therefore, in this paper, we contend that combining female and male ethical perspectives will provide as a complete account of an ethics of nature.

Keywords: Care Ethics, Nature, Aldo Leopold, Ecofeminist Perspective, Male Ethical Perspective, Female Ethical Perspective.

Doğayı Sevmek: Doğa Etiği Üzerine Bir Tartışma

Öz

Aşk etiği, doğayla aşk, sevgi ve saygıya dayalı bir ilişki kurmak için elzemdir. Bu ilişkiler genellikle insanlarla ilgili olarak ele alınırken, bu çalışmada bu ilişkileri Aldo Leopold'ün Toprak Etiği perspektifinden inceleyeceğiz. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışmada hayvanlar, topraklar gibi insan dışındaki varlıklarla olan ilişkimizi nasıl genişletebileceğimizi keşfetmeyi amaçlıyoruz. Ayrıca, Nel Nodding'in ekofeminist perspektifi çerçevesinde kadın ve erkek etik perspektiflerini ayıran bir yaklaşım olarak, önce bakım etiği ve Aldo Leopold'ün arazi etiği ile birlikte kadın etik perspektiflerini tartışacağız ve böylece insanlarla doğa arasındaki etik ilişkiyi ele alacağız. Öte yandan, erkek etik perspektiflerini deontolojik etiği dikkate alarak tartışacak ve böylece bakım etiğinin pratik alandaki uygulaması için tamamlayıcı bir görüş sunacağız. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada, kadın ve erkek etik perspektiflerinin birleştirilmesinin doğa etiği konusunda eksiksiz bir anlayış sağlayacağını savunacağız.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aşk Etiği, Doğa, Aldo Leopold, Ekofeminist Perspektif, Erkek Etik Perspektifi, Kadın Etik Perspektifi.

¹ PhD Student, Istanbul Technical University, Social and Political Thoughts. melihcankizmaz@gmail.com

² PhD Student, Sakarya University, Department of Philosophy. ibrahim.polat5@ogr.sakarya.edu.tr

Introduction

In recent years, the adverse effects of climate change have impacted the lives of countless living beings. While it may be considered a natural process, it is primarily the consequence of human exploitation and consumption of natural resources.³ Consequently, it leads to the loss of biodiversity, extinction of species, and drought.⁴In this context, the experience of climate change demonstrates that human beings inflict severe consequences on nature through the excessive use of natural resources. However, this paper will not focus on how to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, as that is beyond its scope. Instead, it will explore this issue as a matter of ethical conduct, examining human behavior toward Mother Nature and other living beings.

On that account, this paper will be based on the idea that *care ethics*⁵ is essential for establishing a relationship with nature rooted in care, love, and respect. As Nel Noddings argued in *Caring*, human beings are interconnected, and this relatedness and mutual recognition form the foundation of care ethics.⁶This aims to extend the sphere of care from human beings to “Mother Nature.” By emphasizing the term *Mother Nature*, this paper seeks to explore the connection between care ethics and feminist thought, along with the ecofeminist argument that women are inherently closer to nature than men. Consequently, it advocates for the adoption of care ethics in discussions of environmental ethics.⁷

However, since care ethics primarily focus on relationships among human beings, this paper will draw on Aldo Leopold’s *Land Ethics* and his emphasis on the ethical relationship between humans and other elements of nature. In *Land Ethics*, Leopold extends the concept of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, collectively referred to as “land.” In Leopold’s ethical framework, the role of Homo sapiens shifts from conqueror of nature to one of respect and love for it. Thus, we can assert that a connection exists between care ethics and Aldo Leopold’s land ethics.⁸

In her studies during the 1970s, Carol Gilligan contrasted female ethical perspectives with male ethical perspectives, describing the former as personal, partial, relational, and natural, while characterizing the latter as impersonal, impartial, individual, and contractual.⁹According to this view, the female ethical perspective tends to foster attachment to specific loved ones and demonstrates a strong inclination to care for and protect them from harm.¹⁰In contrast, the male ethical perspective does not view people as being connected through particularistic relationships but instead envisions a broader sphere of interaction based on impartial justice. For instance, in *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls outlines the basic structure of society by arguing that free and rational individuals, from the standpoint of the “original position,” operate in a hypothetical state of nature. This perspective disregards individuals’ specific social positions or the generations to which they belong¹¹, which stands in stark contrast to the view of care ethics. However, we should not overlook the valuable contributions that deontological ethics can offer to an ethical theory of nature. Therefore, as a main thesis, this paper will propose the idea of combining female ethical perspectives with male ethical perspectives to establish a comprehensive ethical framework for nature.

Furthermore, to clarify possible conceptual misunderstandings for some key concepts discussed in the paper, we briefly explain how we will examine some key concepts in this paper. So, throughout the paper, we aim to adopt

³ Darrell Moellendorf, “Climate Change Justice,” *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 3 (2015): 173.

⁴ Will R. Turner et al., “Climate Change: Helping Nature Survive the Human Response,” *Policy Perspective* 3 (5), (2010): 305.

⁵ Since Care ethics is an academic field that interrogates interpersonal relationships of women and their relationships love, respect and caring, in its Turkish translation we chose to use “Aşk Etiği” instead of its earlier usings of “Bakım Etiği” and “İhtimam Etiği”.

⁶ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (London, England: University of California Press, 2013), 6.

⁷ Roger J. King, “Caring About Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment,” *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991): 76.

⁸ Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” in *A Sound County Almanac*, ed. Aldo Leopold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

⁹ Carol Gilligan, “In a different voice: Women’s conceptions of self and of morality,” *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (4), (1977).

¹⁰ Barbara MacKinnon and Andrew Fiala, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 174-175.

¹¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1999).

a relational perspective on nature and ethics, which will be proposed in later parts by Aldo Leopold's land ethics and Nel Noddings' conception of care ethics. Besides, in this paper, we do not aim to establish a definite boundary between human beings and nature or redefine nature as a boundary concept. In contrast, aligning with land ethics and care ethics, we aim to challenge the anthropocentric understanding of ethics and emphasize relational ethics and an interconnected nature.

Therefore, the concept of nature is regarded as an interrelated ecological community, while what is "natural" will signify the intrinsic value of all living beings in this ecological community. Also, although the concept of nature is more related to the Aristotelian sense of nature regarding the motion of nature, it is different from this view since it directly opposes the human-centred understanding of Aristotle. There is no hierarchical relationship between human beings and nature; all are part of the same ecological community.¹² On that account, about the general framework of the paper, we aim to develop a broad account for "ethics" by combining male and female perspectives, firstly by regarding the intrinsic value of all living beings and later focusing the deontological ethics to implement this view in the practical realm.

The first part of this paper will provide a comprehensive account of care ethics to illustrate the significance of love, care, and respect in leading an ethical life. The second part will examine Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethics*, comparing and contrasting it with the main ideas of care ethics, while also addressing key arguments from the ecofeminist perspective and Nel Noddings's account of care ethics. The third section will serve as a complementary segment, presenting the main thesis by integrating care ethics with deontological ethics, as an example of the male ethical perspective. This paper will argue that to develop a nuanced ethical understanding of nature, we should not differentiate or dismiss ethical perspectives as male or female; rather, we can cultivate a robust ethics of nature by synthesizing both perspectives. The fourth part will offer concluding remarks for the paper.

1. Understanding Care Ethics

Care ethics, as a relational ethic, focuses on the relationships between individuals. The discipline of care ethics emerged in the 1970s through the work of Carol Gilligan. In her studies, Gilligan specifically examined male and female ethical perspectives in various ethical dilemmas. According to her findings, she determined that males were more inclined to respond to ethical dilemmas from individualistic, neutral, and impartial perspectives. In contrast, females approached the same ethical dilemmas through their feelings, sense of responsibility, and partial perspectives.¹³ While one might easily critique the female moral perspective as being entirely subjectivist, thereby challenging the predictability of such ethical judgments, care ethics offers a holistic account of ethical views. In *In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality*, Carol Gilligan especially referred to that attitude as a *characteristic of feminine voice* by depicting that "in a social world which is reflected in the understanding and the resolution of conflicts that arise between self and others."¹⁴ By criticizing Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory which claims that morality occurred from different stages and women are not adaptable to the highest stage of the morality since cannot often reach the capacity of impartiality and universality, women are morally inferior to men.¹⁵ Gilligan responded to Kohlberg by claiming that women's insistence on care brings a sense of responsibility which recognizes the troubles of the world. Thus, women, unlike Kohlberg claimed earlier, can develop moral judgments about ethical dilemmas and they can take responsibility for these troubles.

¹² Gregor Schiemann, "Contexts of Nature according to Aristotle and Descartes," *The Proceedings of the Twenty-First World Congress of Philosophy*, vol. 5, eds. Stephen Voss, Berna Kılınç and Gürol Irzik (Ankara: Philosophical Society of Turkey, 2007), 66.

¹³ MacKinnona and Fiala, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, 174.

¹⁴ Gilligan, "In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality," 483.

¹⁵ Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

Another critique of the male ethical perspective comes from Annette Baier. In her essay “The Need for More than Justice,” Baier begins by explicitly challenging John Rawls’s conception of justice and his assertion that justice is “the first virtue of social institutions.”¹⁶ According to Baier, care represents a challenge to the concept of justice. Here, we argue that Baier’s criticism of justice is rooted in her critique of the male ethical perspective. She explicitly states in her paper that care ethics offers not the “cold, jealous virtue of justice,” but rather “warmer” communitarian virtues and social ideals.¹⁷ In this sense, Baier critiques the Rawlsian conception of justice, which perceives the social structure as composed of rational agents who are independent in their moral judgments. In contrast, care ethics presents an interrelated social structure in which individual agents are concerned with one another in their moral judgments.

In her paper, Baier questions the differences between the care perspective and the justice perspective. Referencing Carol Gilligan, Baier argues that women perceive social reality differently than men. According to Baier, while men view social reality through the lens of autonomy and control, women emphasize interconnection and the activities of care.¹⁸ In summary, Baier distinguishes Gilligan’s warmer account of care ethics from the “cold, jealous” justice perspective by highlighting their differing emphasis on individuality. While justice underscores the significance of individuality, Gilligan views it as alienating and isolating, instead emphasizing the moral dependence of agents on one another. Baier also critiques the patriarchal tradition of Kantian/liberal thought, acknowledging that care ethics recognizes the essential role of women in social reality.

Another key difference between the two views lies in their focus on discourses of choice and responsibility. The liberal tradition centers on the moral individual agent who possesses the capacity for free choice, whereas care ethics asserts that an agent may not always be in a position to exercise free choice, a concept Gilligan refers to as “the unchosen nature of responsibilities.” Finally, care ethics diverges from the liberal tradition by rejecting its emphasis on rationalism. In this regard, Baier critiques the notion of rational control over emotions, such as parents controlling their children’s emotions. She argues that children require love and care rather than control, marking a significant distinction between the two views.¹⁹

At the end of this section, we would like to provide brief remarks on Nel Noddings’s account of care ethics. In her book *Caring*, Noddings seeks to develop a feminist approach to caring. While care ethics has always been associated with the feminist tradition, as evidenced in Carol Gilligan’s study of the distinctions between male and female ethical perspectives, Noddings’ work attempts to locate the ethical attitude within the concept of “eros,” which she describes as the epicenter of the feminine spirit, contrasting it with “logos,” which she associates with a male-oriented concept.²⁰ To realize the ethical ideal of care ethics, Noddings does not propose to divide male and female perspectives; rather, she advocates for entering into a dialogue that transcends traditional notions of masculinity and femininity in moral issues. She defines the ethics of caring as a realistic and feminine conception, asserting that the foundation of this view relies on the idea that: “How good I can be is partly a function of how you –the other- receive and respond to me. Whatever virtue I exercise is completed, fulfilled, in you.”²¹

So far, we have examined care ethics and the concept of caring in opposition to the male-dominated liberal tradition, highlighting their differences in emphasis on concepts such as rationality, love, interrelatedness, and autonomy. In this regard, we have established that while the liberal moral tradition, from the perspective of care ethics, portrays an isolated, independent ethical agent, care ethics rejects this notion. Instead, it presents an image

¹⁶ Annette Baier, “The Need for More than Justice,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 13, (1987): 41.

¹⁷ Baier, “The Need for More than Justice,” 43.

¹⁸ Baier, “The Need for More than Justice,” 46.

¹⁹ Baier, “The Need for More than Justice,” 48-56.

²⁰ Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 1.

²¹ Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 6.

of the ethical agent as dependent on others within an interconnected realm. This reveals a fundamental distinction between the two traditions of thought, which this paper will specifically explore in the third section.

In the next section, the discussion will build on Nel Noddings' views regarding the care of animals, plants, and objects, providing a brief overview of ecofeminist perspectives. The final part of the section will examine Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethics* and assess the compatibility of ecofeminist arguments with the idea of caring for nature.

2. Considering Care Ethics in Caring for Nature and Leopold's Land Ethics

In the seventh chapter of *Caring*, Nel Noddings specifically addresses the issue of caring for non-human animals. Noddings begins the chapter by asserting that there is no value hierarchy between human beings and non-human animals. Unlike male ethical perspectives, such as Kantian liberal thought and Kohlberg's moral development theory, Noddings's ethics of caring does not establish a hierarchical relationship among living beings. Moreover, in the context of human relationships, Noddings emphasizes that the principle of reciprocity is fundamental to the relationship of caring. Caring, in her view, is a two-sided relationship; if one party fails to fulfill their responsibilities, it cannot be considered a caring relationship. However, Noddings argues that non-human animals do not meet this principle of reciprocity, leading to the question of whether we can truly enter into a relationship of caring with them?²²

In her discussion of relationships with sentient non-human animals, Noddings establishes a human-ecosystem-based relationship. To elaborate on this, she first references Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, which is grounded in utilitarian premises based on the principle of harm as a moral ideal. Briefly stated, according to Singer, all animals possess the capacity to suffer, and this capacity for suffering is a precondition for having interests. Therefore, it is morally wrong to harm animals.²³ Noddings partially agrees with Singer's view. However, she disagrees with Singer's assertion that we can kill animals if it serves the greater interests of the majority in cases of conflict between human and non-human animals.^{24,25} Instead, she offers a more restricted account of caring in relation to non-human animals. As noted earlier, Noddings clearly establishes a two-sided ethical relationship in her account of caring, which involves a cared-for being and a caring person; however, animals do not fulfill this necessity. She navigates this moral dilemma by proposing that we can enter into an ethical relationship with non-human animals we encounter. For example, she cites the responsiveness of cats, which she argues sustains our capacity to care. Conversely, if we do not have any relationship with a non-human animal, Noddings's care ethics does not require me to form an ethical bond with them.²⁶ In this sense, Noddings's human-centred framework is more closed to the Aristotelian account in this regard and also Noddings draws us a Cartesian duality between human beings and nature on the account of fulfilling responsibility.²⁷ So, we will argue later in the paper that this limitation within care ethics does not provide a fully developed account of our responsibilities toward non-human animals.

When it comes to our relationship with plants, the dynamic remains one-sided due to their lack of engagement in a reciprocal relationship. To understand the logic of caring, it is essential for both parties to possess the capacities for caring and being cared for. However, for Noddings, this condition can also apply to rational agents. Here, we recognize that caring for someone or something is conditional. If I care for someone, I want assurance that I will also be cared for in return.

²² Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 148-149.

²³ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 7.

²⁴ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 36.

²⁵ Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 152.

²⁶ Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 152-158.

²⁷ Schiemann, "Contexts of Nature according to Aristotle and Descartes," 66-67.

In this one-sided relationship with plants, Noddings offers a very restricted perspective. She suggests that we can care for plants because of their aesthetic values; they provide us with amusement, joy, and happiness. Again, Noddings explicitly refers to plants that we can encounter. She raises the question of how one might care for deserts, admitting that this is a challenging question for her to address.²⁸ Her argument regarding non-sentient living beings is thus confined to their aesthetic value, and she cannot provide more substantial insights into their significance. On this basis, we argue that Noddings encounters a paradox in her ethical view of non-human beings by situating them within the human ecosphere. If plants and non-sentient beings have no chance of encountering humans, why should we care about them? What compels us to care about rainforests or non-human animals that are under threat of extinction? Noddings's ethics of caring does not provide answers to these pressing questions.

2. 1. Ecofeminist Arguments

Ecofeminists assert that environmental ethics can be derived from the ethics of care.²⁹ They are more inclined to the ethics of care in their argument that women are generally more likely to care for nature in contrast to men.³⁰ However, in light of Noddings' account of care, how can we assert that a female ethical perspective is more predisposed to care than a male perspective?

Some ecofeminists, as Roger King noted, perceive both the experiences of women and nature similarly, arguing that patriarchy and industrialization oppress both.³¹ However, this view does not resolve Noddings' paradox. It remains an anthropocentric understanding of nature, suggesting that we can care for nature only to the extent that we equate it with ourselves. This perspective confines nature within the realm of anthropocentrism, making it contingent on human recognition. If human beings do not care for nature, it could lead to the extinction of species, the loss of habitats, and other detrimental consequences.³² Nonetheless, care ethics and ecofeminism do not provide solutions to these pressing issues.

For instance, Peter Martin's study, "Caring for Environment: Challenges from Notions of Caring," seeks to provide a proper answer to the main concern of this paper: how to escape anthropocentrism. Martin emphasizes the importance of educating future generations about caring for nature so that students can emotionally and rationally recognize this issue. He proposes fostering a sense of friendship between students and nature, particularly with animals, to strengthen their emotional bonds. Additionally, this approach aims to enhance direct personal experiences, thereby shaping the relationship between humans and nature.³³ However, Martin still understands the relationship between human beings and nature from an anthropocentric perspective.

2. 2. Land Ethics

Rather than the ecofeminist account, Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethics" expands our understanding of our relationship with nature. The land ethic introduces a new sense of community by broadening the boundaries of community from a human-centered perspective to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, which he collectively refers to as "the land" which is a consistent view of Aristotelian sense of nature through interconnectedness of nature and its emphasis on self-movement but it distinguishes from this account by rejecting any dominion over non-human beings and nature from human beings.³⁴ In this context, what he calls the land encompasses not only his active

²⁸ Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, 159-160.

²⁹ King, "Caring About Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment," 75.

³⁰ King, "Caring About Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment," 76.

³¹ King, "Caring About Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment," 82.

³² King, "Caring About Nature: Feminist Ethics and the Environment," 86.

³³ Peter Martin, "Caring for the Environment: Challenges from Notions of Caring," *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* 23, (2007): 62.

³⁴ Leopold, "The Land Ethic," 204.

political co-citizens but also their surroundings, whether he has encountered them or not.

So, he states that: “This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter downriver. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of the “resources,” but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state”.³⁵

If we compare this perspective with that of care ethics, we find ourselves in an ambiguous position regarding the determination of rights for non-human beings. However, Leopold’s conception of land ethics, first and foremost, acknowledges the moral value of non-human beings as being equal to that of human beings. Unlike care ethics, which emphasizes the necessity of reciprocity between the caring and the cared-for, Leopold does not argue that both parties must fulfill these requirements to engage in a fully-fledged caring relationship. Instead, he criticizes *Homo sapiens* as the conquerors of the land, aiming to save the land through human action rather than from human dominance.³⁶

Furthermore, Leopold advocates for an ecological conscience to establish a state of harmony between humans and the land. This harmony reveals that Leopold rejects any sense of duality between human beings and non-human beings; so, he directly opposes the Cartesian sense of dualism. He also objects to a system that is solely based on economic self-interest, which views nature only through the lens of its use value. According to this perspective, if profit can be gained from activities like deforestation, even at the expense of habitat loss, such actions are justified in the name of self-interest. In contrast, Leopold’s land ethics acknowledges the intrinsic value of non-human beings and emphasizes the necessity of respecting the lives of other beings.³⁷

Ultimately, while care ethics depicts community through relational bonds, Leopold’s land ethics emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings in his discourse. In his concept of the land pyramid, the relationship begins with the sun, whose light is absorbed by plants. This creates a flow of energy from plants to soil, from soil to insects, and from insects to animals, et cetera.³⁸ This sense of relatedness, distinct from the relational emphasis of care ethics, fosters an ethical consciousness toward nature by understanding it within a vertical relationship. In this framework, every entity within the land is perceived as a necessary component of life. In other words, this perspective encourages viewing non-human beings as integral members of the community.

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³⁵ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 204.

³⁶ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 204.

³⁷ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 207-210.

³⁸ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 215-216.

³⁹ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 215-216.

3. Arguing the Possibility of Complete Perspective of Caring for Nature: Combining Male and Female Ethical Perspectives

Carol Gilligan's account of care ethics explicitly distinguishes between two ethical perspectives: male and female. Ethical perspectives typically relate to concepts that are impersonal, impartial, individual, universal, and rational. In contrast, female ethical perspectives emphasize the personal, partial, solidaristic, compassionate, and relational. Annette Baier critiques the male ethical perspective, particularly within Kantian and Rawlsian frameworks, for undermining the role of women in political thought. I argue that this criticism is valid. However, can we engage in a meaningful discussion about distinguishing these two traditions? In this sense, Baier suggests that these moral theories not only exclude certain individuals but also empower them to advocate for more.⁴⁰ Care ethics does not deny the significance of what is often labeled the male ethical perspective. Yet, as previously discussed, care ethics falls short in providing a comprehensive view regarding non-human beings. Firstly, since it focuses on the principle of reciprocity, Noddings asserts that non-human beings do not meet this criterion, preventing the establishment of a fully developed caring relationship with them. Secondly, even if we accept Noddings's requirement for encounter, it remains unclear how to concretely establish this ethical relationship in everyday political life.

Baier claimed the "need for more than justice," a claim that we believe is controversial. If we accept this premise, we can highlight the significance of rights movements throughout the history of women's movements. It is essential to establish solidarity-based communities to demand more from society; however, we cannot overlook the necessity of justice for fostering a more predictable life within that political community. We do not need to prioritize one over the other. Therefore, in this section, we aim to develop a comprehensive account of caring relationships with nature. As argued in both care ethics and Leopold's land ethics, it is crucial to cultivate a sense of relatedness, love, and compassion while respecting the intrinsic values of each living being. Simultaneously, we must advocate for the rights of non-human beings.

However, in deontological tradition, non-human beings cannot be recognized as ethical agents since they lack the capacity of reasoning. As Kant stated that:

"Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. He must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end... Accordingly, the value of any object obtainable by our action is always conditioned. Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature have, nevertheless, if they are not rational beings, only a relative as means and therefore called things."⁴¹

This statement from Kant illustrates that, in his deontological framework, non-human beings hold inferior significance compared to rational human beings. Similarly, Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, defines the basic structure as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage.⁴² This characterization also excludes non-human beings, as well as human beings who lack the capacity to contribute to the mutual advantage of the basic structure. However, to foster an understanding of caring for nature, it is not necessary for deontological ethics to align with the notion of non-human beings as morally equal to humans. Instead, we require a deontological framework to establish a rights-based approach for non-human beings.

Thus, if we approach our relationship with nature solely through the lens of care ethics, we risk adopting a wholly subjectivist stance. This perspective implies that we care only for what we encounter, leading to no obligation toward living beings with whom we have no connection. Consequently, this understanding of relatedness can

⁴⁰ Baier, "The Need for More than Justice," 50.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals" in *Classics of Moral and Political Theory*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Indiana, Hackett Publishing, 2011), 966.

⁴² Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 73-74.

be perilous, as it allows for the possibility of disregarding the extinction of habitats we have never experienced, rendering them irrelevant to me. Therefore, we need Leopold's land ethics in this context, which establishes a vertical relationship between human beings and non-human living beings within the circuit of life and energy. This framework recognizes that each entity has intrinsic value and is an integral part of social life. Furthermore, if we consider Kant's notion of a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, we can expand the boundaries of this venture to include non-human beings.

In our society, we engage in intersubjective relationships with non-human animals, sharing a social life that integrates them into our communities.⁴³ However, this logic implies that we often care only for those beings we encounter directly, leading to a lack of concern for other living beings. In Leopold's land ethics, every living being possesses intrinsic value, which serves as a fundamental precondition. They have the capacity to flourish, pursue their own lives, and enjoy their existence independently of humans. Donaldson and Kymlicka characterize non-human beings as sovereign agents in light of these traits.⁴⁴ While we will not delve into the principle of rationality in this paper, it is essential to recognize that non-human beings can fulfill various conditions from both ethical perspectives. They are self-sufficient entities, capable of enjoying their partiality and making limited choices—not necessarily political decisions—while remaining in relation to other living beings.

In this context, we might debate how climate change impacts biodiversity if we would like to expand our knowledge with a specific example. In this sense, the escalation in the severity and frequency of fires, storms, or droughts is one of the main effects of climate change on biodiversity. For example, fires in Australia may have contributed to a 14% increase in the number of vulnerable species.⁴⁵ Aside from the fact that climate change poses a threat to marine biodiversity and the environment, one of the main causes of the decline in marine biodiversity is human-induced fishing. The primary effect of fishing on the marine ecosystem is a decrease in fish species and density, which also raises carbon dioxide levels and seawater pH. Because biodiversity is nature's insurance policy against catastrophic calamities, marine biologists argue that it is imperative to conserve it.⁴⁶

Therefore, to ensure the lives of all living beings, we need to integrate both male and female ethical perspectives. This means combining an impartial concern for every living being with the acknowledgment of our responsibilities toward nature, which includes respecting the sovereignty of each being and incorporating them into the social contract. Here, deontological ethics play a crucial role in avoiding arbitrary decision-making processes regarding the rights of non-human beings. In Rawls' theory, social institutions serve as the fundamental structure of society, shaping and regulating the interests of individual agents.⁴⁷ By recognizing non-human beings as moral equals to humans, we can extend the scope of social institutions to include non-human entities as well. This extension would impose duties on humans to support and protect the livelihoods of non-human beings. Consequently, this framework would guarantee respect for the basic rights of all living beings by safeguarding their rights within social institutions, ensuring that no human can act arbitrarily concerning non-human beings and that they must adhere to the principle of respecting the fundamental rights of these beings.⁴⁸

In conclusion, it is essential to recognize that an ethics of care alone is inadequate for fostering a comprehensive approach to caring for nature. To create equitable foundations for caring for the natural world, we must

⁴³ Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, "Interspecies Politics: Reply to Hinchcliffe and Ladwig," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2015): 322.

⁴⁴ Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Interspecies Politics: Reply to Hinchcliffe and Ladwig," 335.

⁴⁵ The Royal Society, "Climate Change and Biodiversity," *The Royal Society* accessed November 11, 2024. <https://royalsociety.org/news-resources/projects/biodiversity/climate-change-and-biodiversity/>

⁴⁶ Sadguru Prakash, "Impact of Climate Change on Aquatic Ecosystem and Its Biodiversity: An Overview," *International Journal of Biological Innovations* 3 (2), (2021): 315-316.

⁴⁷ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 131.

⁴⁸ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 293.

integrate this perspective with male ethical viewpoints, particularly deontological ethics. This combination will help ensure impartial, universal rights for all living beings, thereby establishing a more robust and inclusive framework for ethical relationships with nature.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper sought to establish a comprehensive understanding of caring for nature. In the first section, we outlined the primary arguments of care ethics. Drawing on the works of Carol Gilligan, Annette Baier, and Nel Noddings, we highlighted that care ethics distinguishes between two different ethical perspectives: male and female. The male ethical perspective tends to emphasize autonomy, impartiality, and universality, while the female ethical perspective focuses on solidarity, compassion, relationality, and partiality.

In this context, care ethics primarily critiques dominant moral theories for neglecting the importance of the female ethical perspective, often portraying women as morally inferior to men. However, care ethics rejects this notion, emphasizing the value of relationships grounded in love and care. This approach prioritizes emotional connections and relational dynamics over what they term the “cold, jealous justice” often associated with traditional moral frameworks.

In the second section, we initially explored Nel Noddings’ views on caring for non-human beings. Noddings bases her framework on the principle of reciprocity in caring relationships, asserting that to establish a fully realized caring connection, both parties must possess the capacity to care and to be cared for. However, she argues that non-human beings lack this capacity, as they cannot engage in caring for others. This leads Noddings into a paradox within her ethical framework: while she critiques male ethical perspectives for favoring reason over love and care, she simultaneously dismisses non-human animals for failing to meet the reciprocity requirement. Moreover, Noddings introduces another contentious aspect by confining the caring relationship to non-human beings that we can directly encounter. This implies that we bear no moral obligation toward living beings that are outside our immediate experience. Consequently, care ethics, as articulated by Noddings, does not offer a comprehensive ethical framework for engaging with non-human beings.

Later in that section, ecofeminist arguments revealed that they do not approach the issue of caring from the perspective of care ethics; instead, they maintain an anthropocentric lens regarding nature as well. This paper finds its non-anthropocentric foundation in Aldo Leopold’s land ethics. In “Land Ethics,” Leopold presents a comprehensive vision of interrelatedness between human beings and non-human beings, viewing them as moral equals who possess intrinsic value. He emphasizes their connections through the circuit of life and the flow of energy, fostering a deeper understanding of the ethical relationship between all living beings.

This perspective builds a bridge between male and female ethical perspectives, suggesting that our caring for nature should not be limited to compassion for non-human beings; rather, they possess intrinsic value regardless of our feelings towards them. While care ethics and Leopold’s land ethics emphasize the importance of love, care, and respect in our social lives, the male ethical perspective is essential for establishing a fair foundation to protect the basic rights of non-human beings. Thus, we can achieve a comprehensive understanding of caring for nature by integrating both male and female ethical perspectives.

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