



# Care Ethics and Poetry

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## Dream of Following

*with a nod to David Romtvedt*



I am following my father and mother,  
following them although I don't much like  
the idea, and I don't much like

that the distance to them grows smaller,  
so small I'm catching up to them. You'd think  
we'd have much to say to one another.

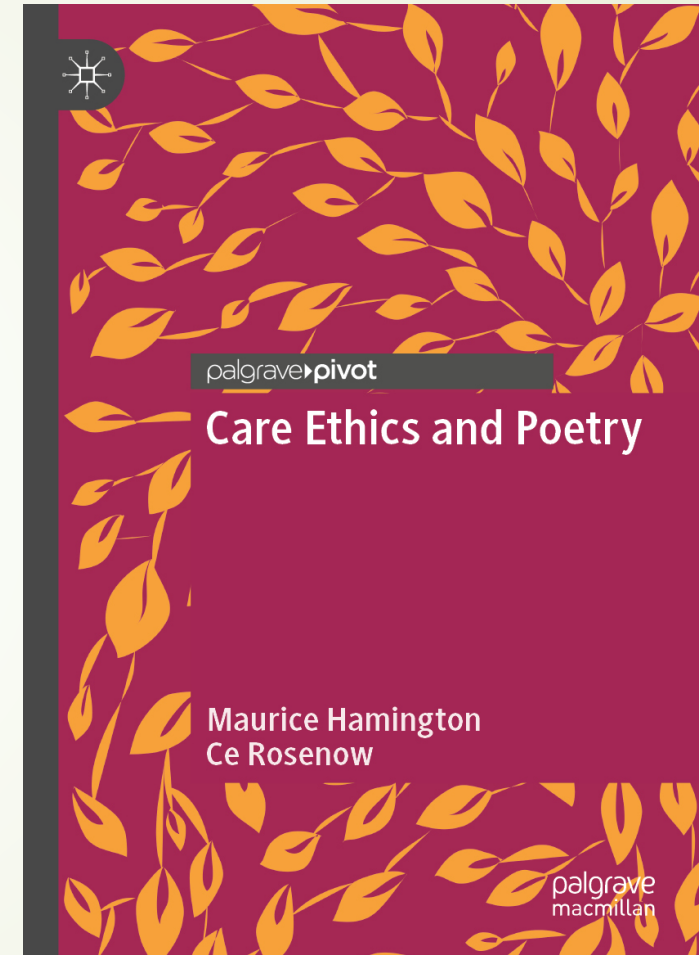
We don't. My father motions me  
to look back over my shoulder.  
There's my daughter following me.

That's mean of him. I want to hail her,  
tell her to slow down.  
But I don't. I turn back, they're gone.

*Peter Sears*

## A Humble Book

- Poetry is a humble art form.
- Authentic care requires humility.
- Poetry does not need a function, but people need poetry.
- This presentation will
  - Address a theory of care that is embodied, performative, and aesthetic.
  - Discuss the habits of good care.
  - Explore the relationship of poetry and the habits of good care.
  - Conclude with remarks about poetry, care, and moral progress.





# A Theory of Care

- A theory of care versus an ethic of care
- Care as grounded in the body
- Care as performative

*Care describes an approach to personal and social morality that shifts ethical considerations to context, relationships, and affective knowledge in a manner that can only be fully understood if its embodied [and performative] dimension is recognized. Care is committed to the flourishing and growth of individuals; yet acknowledges our interconnectedness and interdependence. (2005)*

## John Dewey on Habit

- Habits as open ended structures of experience.
- Habits can be simple and complex
- Habits involve mind and body.
- Negotiation between our will and the environment.
- Our identity is made up of habits.
- Care consists of a complex array of habits.
- Poetry can help us strengthen our habits of caring.

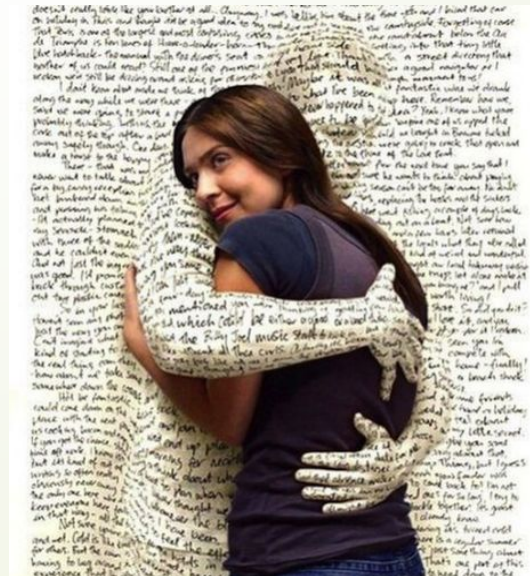


## Habits of Caring Knowledge (Chapter 1)

- Care is knowledge work.
  - A form of inquiry writ large.
  - Generalized and concrete knowledge
  - Tacit knowledge
- Poetry is knowledge work.
  - Inquiry beyond propositional knowledge
  - From particular to the thematic
  - Tacit knowledge in form and metaphor
- Engaging poetry as expansive habit formation for inquiry.

- Poetry, I hope to show, has its own varieties of knowledge, but knowledge which may be better conceived as a verb rather than a noun, a process rather than a destination, a way of 'knowing' rather than an object known. Poetry's knowing will always, in the end, still be asking: so, what do we know?

--Angela Leighton







The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary.

--Ursula K LeGuin

## Habits of Caring Imagination (Chapter 2)

- Care relies on imagination
  - For making the empathetic connection (although this must be attuned)
  - In choosing the caring action
  - Care lacks an *a priori* set of rules
- Poetry is a richly imaginative artform
  - Metaphor
  - Playfulness leads to freedom
- Modern origin of feminist care ethics began with an imaginative response to the Heinz Dilemma
- Poetry can develop habits of imaginative identification.
- An example of a habit or skill of caring is tact.

## Habits of Encountering Singularity (Chapter 3)

- Singularity as an event whether it be
  - The performance of a poem, or
  - An encounter with a person
- The singularity of poetry as attention training for caring *disponibilité*
  - Poetry as attention training
  - Openness and self authorship
- The emergent normativity of care

I cherish the other, not in spite of but because of its otherness, since its otherness is precisely what makes it valuable to me, and, without any guarantees, I undertake to realize and sustain this otherness as fully and enduringly as possible—which means being prepared to start all over again with each fresh encounter.

--Derek Attridge





Poetry can be more ethical than philosophy because it speaks with a language that does not try to control, judge, know, or totalize the Other.

—G. Matthew Jenkins



## Care, Poetry, and Moral Progress (Chapter 4)


- Moral progress, a contested idea
  - Normative, deontological ethics have built-in inertia.
  - Care's particularist nature diminishes the inertia.
- Caring Moral Progress: Growth in the practices of the heart (sympathetic understanding) and mind (inquiry into particular and generalized knowledge) reflected in respect, understanding, and action in response to the need of others.
- Avant-garde poetry as a case study in imagining a different world.
- Moral progress requires both heart and mind, reason and emotion.

# Valuing Humility





## Simile



What did we say to each other  
that now we are as the deer  
who walk in single file  
with heads high  
with ears forward  
with eyes watchful  
with hooves always placed on firm ground  
in whose limbs there is latent flight.

N. Scott Momaday



**GRAZIE!**