Caring makes the world go ‘round: A fundamental human motivation

Ofra Mayseless
University of Haifa
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to the force of life that pulsates in our world and to our creation and creativity;

for me, this has a deep and fresh emerald color, like the budding leaves in spring, which then become lush and plentiful.

May we unleash this capacity in our lives!
Relatedness Constructs: Love Attachment

- Most constructs focused on our motivation to **receive** (appreciation, love, recognition, help)

- Very little on our motivation to **give** (to help, to care, to nurture and to love)
In his famous book on human motivation, David McClelland (1987) offered the following conclusion:

**A natural incentive to nurture may not exist.** It is impossible to know on the basis of present evidence, despite the large number of studies of helping behavior. Little work has been done on measuring a motive like the need for nurturance which might arise out of such a natural incentives as the joy-happiness-pleasure that comes from holding and helping babies. (p. 161)
Human Nature

Self-centered and egoistic or prosocial and altruistic
Caring is all around us
How is Caring Manifested in Your Life?
The Caring Motivation

A universal motivation to care, tend, nurture and help other entities grow, thrive, heal and develop.
What am I going to talk about?

- Evolutionary and biological basis
- Are children innately prosocial?
- Prevalence and diversity of caring
- Why do we care?
- Caring, wellbeing and health
- Caring, spirituality and our human nature
Evolutionary Basis

- Natural selection (survival of the fittest)
- Inclusive fitness Hamilton, 1964
- Reciprocal altruism Trivers, 1971
- Group selection models Wilson & Sober 1994
- Strong reciprocity Fehr & Fischbacher 2003
- Gene-culture co-evolutionary models
- Selective investment theory Brown & Brown 2006
We developed genetic and cultural mechanisms to create and sustain caring societies

- Nuanced perception of decency, cheating, authenticity
- Morality, importance of equity, justice
- Centrality of reputation
- Gloating, moral aggression, righteousness
Evolutionary Speaking...
Caring Is Conceived as Fundamental

• Universal
• Vital for survival
• Encompassing (family, friends, strangers)
• Biological roots
• Genetically encoded
A Little About Biology

Innate Empathic responses

• Emotional contagion
• Emotional empathy
• Perspective taking
Cognitive perspective taking and empathy in the brain

A mental representation of other people socially.

Empathy in response to pain and disgust.

MPC, medial prefrontal cortex; ACC, anterior cingulate cortex; AI, anterior insula; STS, superior temporal sulcus; SII, secondary somatosensory cortex; TPF, temporo-parietal junction; TP, temporal poles;

Oxytocin – The “Love Hormone”

- Neuro-hormone
- Secreted in birth and lactation
- During joint parent-child play
- During intimate moments and touch in romantic encounters
- Affects closeness, intimacy, helpfulness with familiar others, trust and generosity with strangers
Are Children Innately Prosocial?
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Starts spontaneously very early in life (probably universally)

Experiments with altruism in children and chimps.mp4

PBS - The Human Spark - Kids Are Naturally Altruistic.mp4
To Recap

• Caring is evolutionary-based
• Has biological basis
• Is innate and starts early in life

But is it prevalent?
Prevalence of Care

- **Volunteering**
  - USA 26% (40% in Canada, Sweden France)

- **Mentoring at work**
  - 50%-85% report being a mentor at least once

- **Money donation**
  - 47% report donating at least once in past year

- **Adopting a pet**
  - 70% of household with young children

- **Competitive games**
  - 60%-80% prosocial responding (altruistic, cooperative vs. competitive or aggressive)
Diverse Provisions

Anything that contributes to the other entity's sustenance, physical wellbeing, mental and psychological wellbeing (if applicable), helping growth and thriving

- Comforting
- Consulting
- Sharing in successes
- Teaching

Instrumental aid
Cooperating
Physical tending
Defending
Caring is Not Only Rose-colored Limitless Sweetness

- Fighting aggressors who threaten those dear to you
- Preventing a child from harming others
- Punishing selfish others who exploit generosity
Psychological Mechanisms

- Multifinality
- Reactive and proactive
- Direct causes and unintended outcomes
Why Do We Care?

- Emotional empathy
- Perspective taking – mentalizing
- Caring bonds
- Love
Morality

Fast affect laden moral intuitions
(harm/care, fairness/reciprocity)

+ Moral values and guidelines

• **Heroism in emergencies** (Carnegie heroes fund)

• **Righteous among nations:**
  
  • “I could not comprehend that innocent persons should be persecuted just because of race”; “every person is equal; we all have the right to live.”.
Morality

Proactive caring

- **Kidney Donors**: “rich in health”
- **Money donations, blood donations**
- **Volunteering**
- **Mentoring**
Another Major Reason Why We Care
Life Meaning, Purpose and Self-actualization

Volunteering  Donations  Parenting  Generativity  Gardening  Adopting pets
intrinsically (mostly proactively) chosen

All have been strongly associated with a deep sense of meaning in life, self-actualization and happiness
Two Kinds of Happiness

• **Hedonic happiness**
  More positive emotions + less negative ones

• **Eudemonic happiness**
  Experiencing meaning, self-realization and fully living according to one’s values and who one really is
Meaning and Purpose

4 major sources of life’s meaning and purpose

- **Work/career, vocation** (not universal across cultures)
- **Caring in close relations**
- **Service and self-transcendence**
- **Religiosity/spirituality**
Caring – a Fundamental Source of Life Meaning and Self Actualization

In caring in close relations, in service and in spirituality we extend ourselves beyond our personal selves to something greater—the intimate intersubjective space, the community or universe at large, and the transcendent.
Unintended Positive Consequences that sustain caring

- Positive affect and happiness – hedonic wellbeing (*warm glow, oxytocin*)
- Health benefits
- Individual worth (reputation, self esteem)

- Meaningfulness, mattering and eudemonic well-being (part intended and part unintended)
Good Optimal Care

Care that addresses the overt and covert specific needs of the recipient/target in a responsive and sensitive manner at the same time as it respects major concerns (e.g., for experiencing autonomy, competence and meaning) in both the caregiver and the care receiver.
Positive Affect and Happiness

Volunteer in a sport and youth development program:
“If you ever see a kid that throws a rock and it goes right to the button and you see the smile on their face and they are jumping up and down. It is great to see the development, it is better than getting it myself. I like their enthusiasm, it makes me feel young. I like to think that I am helping to improve young kids and get them involved in sport.” (Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010, p. 276.)
Health Benefits – largest for older adults

• Meta-analysis of the effects of volunteering by older adults (at least 55 years of age)
• 12 samples with around 50,000 participants followed for an average of six years (Okun, Yeung, & Brown, 2013).
• Controlling for age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, work status, marital status, religious faith, emotional health, health behaviors, social connection, social interaction, and physical health

• 25% reduction in the risk of death for volunteers compared with non-volunteers.
The Importance of Motivation

Longitudinal study a random sample of over 10,000 male and female Wisconsin high school graduates since their graduation in 1957.

At age 70 respondents who volunteered (about half of the sample) especially if they did it regularly were at a lower risk for mortality, but especially if they volunteered from altruistic motives (e.g., “I feel it is important to help others”).
The Development of the Caring Motivation
Kinds of Care Most Prevalent in Older Adults

• **Major arenas**: Generativity: community, future generations, caring across differences and distances, grandchildren, and also own parents or spouse.

• **Main motives**: meaning in life, self actualization, love

• Care as the capacity to enjoy receiving care from others thus giving them the opportunity to care
Caring as Pivotal to our Eudemonic Happiness

We engage in caring because it fulfils our inner self, our will to meaning and purpose and expresses some of the best qualities of our nature.
We actualize our true selves when we help others thrive and help make the world a better place but through such engagement we also thrive and find a deep meaning and purpose to our own lives.

A non-trivial conclusion: Everyone should have the opportunity to care
Why Do We Care?

**Evolutionary accounts**
- It is good (necessary) for our survival and the survival of our genes

**Spiritual and humanistic accounts**
- It reflects our humanistic (spiritual) core.
- It expresses the best in us and hence provides us with happiness and meaning.
Caring as “Divine”

In compassion and caring we are “divine” because through care we extend ourselves beyond our distinct and limited existence and we create—we give and sustain life and help it heal, grow, and thrive.
Our Human Nature

Caring, benevolent, prosocial

But what about cruelty?
Human Nature

• We are multifaceted and holistic and possess opposing innate predispositions
• We are flexible in our capacity to enact them
• We have some measure of free will
• We can correct our mistakes
Concluding Remarks

• This view has clear ramifications with regard to the conception of our species as innately prosocial and caring and helps put the caring motivation in the pivotal place it deserves as part of our core nature.

• This is an optimistic perspective on human nature because there is a lot that we can do to change things if we want to.
Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have

Margaret Mead
Back to each of us
With love and thanks to you and to my friends, colleagues, students and teachers here and in parallel worlds