

## CHAPTER 8 - CARING AND CARRYING CAPACITY

From the outset, clear acceptance of change in paradigm, in what concerns two major assumptions: a finite, limited world - humans as interdependent.

From the perspective of a human-centered development, caring and carrying capacity are not two independent axes. Rather, caring is at the core, giving human direction to the interdependence between population/development/environment.

Indeed, caring takes place in the context of the environment and of development. Caring it expresses itself within the carrying capacity of the earth and the carrying capacity of society. .

As to the CARING CAPACITY:

Relationships among human in society in modern times are contained in the democratic ideals, firmly established on equality and on the dignity of the human person as expressed in human rights.

Crucial to this thinking: human beings are always autonomous and self-supporting. Conviction is that if they are not it is because their human rights are not respected (main line of the 'human rights' advocacy) - therefore "progress" will change that. In the philosophical basis of this conviction the 'human person' is always an abstract (and neutral) entity. Human persons are not situated. They are not men and women. They are not in need.

New thinking, coming from various disciplines, blends political sciences with social sciences. Human beings are situated. They are men or women. They are of different ethnic backgrounds, etc.. Moreover, each of them goes through a life-cycle with periods of dependent, non-autonomous situations. Not only childhood, but also sickness, situation of want, old age, etc.. There is not only difference among humans but difference as well in the various stages of a human life.

As a consequence: new philosophical, ethical categories are needed. Care is one of them. It can be considered as the value, attitude, which responds adequately to the fact that human beings are interdependent and have to express active concern for each other in all structures of society.

"Caring ... a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our 'world' so that we can live it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Moral Boundaries - A political argument for an ethic of care", by Joan c. Tronto, 1993, Routledge, New York



"By focussing on caring, we focus on the process by which life is sustained, we focus on human actors acting."<sup>2</sup>

A key element in the dynamism of caring is the concept of needs. Caring in political terms involves:

- deciding priorities among needs;
  - finding ways out of conflicting needs;
  - establishing strategies for achieving needs;
  - eliciting popular participation in the determination of needs.
- (eg, not enough to say that there is in country x a certain level of unmet needs in family planning; it is indispensable participation of the people concerned; otherwise, the action is not an expression of care, it doesn't enter the real field of needs)

If caring is somehow related to goodness and justice, a good and just society must provide care for its members and for the environment in which they live.

"Caring" is not a central category of social analysis - and yet it is fundamental for our culture to think in a more systematic way about the needs people have.

Consider several stages of "care": caring about, taking care, care-giving, care-receiving. "Caring about" as culturally shaped - on a political level, this is in contradiction with universality of needs. "Taking care" of something as determining how to respond to concrete needs - it involves responsibility and agency of means. "Care-giving" involves the "direct meeting of needs". In common situations of care, it is important that "care-receivers" express what they feel about "care", which needs they consider fundamental - likewise, a care-oriented policy demands a democratic process of consultation of people. (The link between 'democracy' and 'population programs' was very clearly stated at the expert meeting Oct. 93.)

The analysis of care indicates four levels which can be transposed to different kinds of processes (both natural and social or political). The actions of care require"

- attentiveness - to notice, not to ignore (ignorance jeopardizing care), to single out not only because there is an imperative of justice but also because the recipient is in a vulnerable condition and asks for care. E.g. maternity leave: not only because the "work" of reproduction needs to be compensated by a sense of justice but also because needs are different in this situation and they demand a special, differentiated action, done by caring. (Would this help to get out of the difficult point raised by Eleanor H.-Norton concerning rights?)

- responsibility - if taking care of is imbedded in cultural traditions, responsibility has to be exercised taking into account the diversified expression of needs. The concept permeates all moral theories; distinctive tone here is the flexibility arising from sensitivity to cultural practices, to

<sup>2</sup> in Joan Tronto, ibidem, pg154





distinct psychologies, to political goals; very different from responsibility as counterpoint of rights.

- competence - commitment not to any action for caring but to the adequate action that can respond to that particular unmet need. Though fundamental in all professional ethics, it acquires new overtones in actions and policies that are by essence multidisciplinary as those the Com. is concerned with.

- responsiveness - signal most difficult problem in care: how to elicit always the expression of the need by the needy??

There are two ways through which power appears in the question of "care". As care responds to a situation of "need" it deals with the powerless - and may then be an opportunity for abuse of power (it happens in authoritarian regimes who "take care" of the people). Another aspect is the fact that the powerful have access to forms of care that constitute a sign of a privilege.

"... a society that took caring seriously would engage in a discussion of the issues of public life from a vision not of autonomous, equal, rational actors each pursuing separate ends but from a vision of interdependent actors, each of whom needs and provides care in a variety of ways and each of whom has other interests and pursuits that exist outside the realm of care."<sup>3</sup>

### As to CARRYING CAPACITY: Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

Industrial civilization gave shape to the (still) dominant conviction that there is an endless progress. In this view, there are no limits - in the resources of the earth, in knowledge, in scientific and technological achievements. Still present in the way experimentation goes on. If there are limits, they are only temporary.

Crucial to this thinking: "natural" processes can be always guided by men; if they have bad consequences now, they can be redirected; all that has been done can be undone by new perspectives in science; permanence of old Lavoisier principle "nothing is created nor lost, everything transforms itself".

New thinking: coming again from various disciplines the acknowledgement of limits in the ideas of progress, growth. It started being discussed some 20 years ago, but never reached the level of its implications. Not only space is limited, but there are limits to material resources, to growth of cities - in spite of human behaviour doing as if everything could be limitless.

Crucial to this concept: firm conviction among Physical sciences about irreversibility of most natural phenomena:

"Au début du siècle, les physiciens étaient presque unanimes à admettre que les lois de l'univers étaient déterministes et

<sup>3</sup> Joan Tronton, ibidem, pg 168

réversibles. (...) Parvenus à la fin du siècle, nous sommes de plus en plus nombreux à penser que nombre de processus fondamentaux qui modèlent la nature sont irréversibles et stochastiques; (...) C'est ce qui nous conduit à une nouvelle vision de la matière; n'étant plus passive comme la décrivait le point de vue du monde mécanique, elle serait au contraire associée à une activité spontanée. Un tel changement est si profond que nous croyons en vérité qu'il est maintenant possible de parler d'un nouveau dialogue de l'homme avec la nature".<sup>4</sup>

As a consequence: all physical processes have to be checked and monitored against the carrying capacity of the planet - air, water, oceans, soil.

By analogy, the same can be said about social processes - defined and carried on from the point of view of care, they have to be analysed within the framework of the carrying capacity of each society.

## Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

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<sup>4</sup>"A la rencontre du complexe", Grégoire Nicolis et Ilya Prigogine, PUF 1989, Paris (English title: Exploring complexity: An introduction") - in the same line, cf. "Le contract naturel", by Michel Serres, 1993, Paris