

## Careful Thinking Episode 4 Transcript

[00:10] **Martin Robb:** Hello and welcome to this episode of *Careful Thinking*, a new podcast exploring ideas about care. I'm Martin Robb, and I'm the host of the podcast. *Careful Thinking* is inspired by a belief that thinking critically about care can both deepen our understanding and improve the day-to-day practice and experience of care. In each episode, you'll hear an in-depth conversation with a researcher, writer, or practitioner at the cutting edge of current thinking about care. My guest for this episode is Petr Urban. Petr is a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. He's been the principal investigator and coordinator of several national and international research projects in the fields of continental philosophy, the political theory of care, and administrative ethics, and he's published books and journal articles on a wide variety of topics, impressively in Czech, German, and English. Perhaps most relevant to the concerns of this podcast have been, firstly, Petr's co-edited book on *Care Ethics, Democratic Citizenship and the State*, which was published in 2020, also a number of papers proposing a link between care ethics and the theory of enactivism, as well as articles connecting ideas of care with theories about play. Finally, papers on the relevance of the philosophy of Edith Stein for care ethics. Petr's most recent book, *Social Cohesion Contested: Living Together Beyond the Neoliberal Regime*, which he co-wrote with Dan Swain, was published by Rowman and Littlefield in January this year, and I'll put links to Petr's publications in the show notes for this episode. I first came across Petr's work a few years ago in the course of my research on gender and care, and when I was just beginning to be interested in care ethics. As an admirer of the philosopher Edith Stein, I was interested to learn that Petr had written about the connections between her ideas and those of feminist care ethicists. Petr and I corresponded via email, and we then met in person at the inaugural conference of the Care Ethics Research Consortium in Portland, Oregon, in 2018. Our conversation on that occasion was quite brief, so I'm really pleased to have this opportunity to talk with Petr at greater length, not just about his work on Stein, but also about his broader involvement in the field of care ethics. So, Petr, a very warm welcome to the podcast.

[02:45] **Petr Urban:** Thank you, Martin, and thanks for having me.

[02:48] **Martin Robb:** So, to start off our conversation, I wonder if you could tell us something about your current role at the Institute of Philosophy in Prague. What does it involve, and what have you been working on most recently?

[03:00] **Petr Urban:** So currently my role is the project coordinator of a Horizon Europe funded project, which we were awarded last year. And this is a five years project which aims to establish a centre for environmental and technology ethics in Prague. And I have the pleasure to collaborate with Mark Coeckelbergh, who is a Belgian philosopher based at the University of Vienna. And Mark is our ERA chair holder. So he's someone who is mentoring the entire project and helping us with establishing the centre. And besides this, I'm the deputy head of department of Applied Philosophy and Ethics, which was established in 2022 as a kind of aim of the Institute of Philosophy of Czech Academy of Science is to focus more on research and philosophy, which has some societal impact, and where we can do things that are visible and that have some impact for the broader audience and public in the Czech Republic and internationally.

[04:19] **Martin Robb:** Thanks. You've obviously got a very wide range of philosophical interests, so that's really interesting. But focusing now on your interest in care ethics, I wonder if you could say something about how you became interested in care ethics in the first place and how your academic career led you to that interest in care theory.

[04:40] **Petr Urban:** So I actually started as someone interested in continental philosophy, and my PhD research was focused on the founder of phenomenological philosophy, Edmund Husserl, the German philosopher. And I wrote my PhD on philosophy of language in his early thought. And this was also my first book. And as I studied the phenomenological tradition more and more, so I was more interested in phenomenology of intersubjectivity. So topics such as empathy, intercorporeality, affectivity, or inter-animality. And this was also related to my interest in the difference between human and non-human animals. And this was a moment where my research became more involved in the field of ethics. And I taught ethics and applied ethics at the University of South Bohemia here in the Czech Republic. So I was wondering, so how is it possible to build some ethical, ethical thinking on the grounds of phenomenology of intersubjectivity and inter-animality? And this was the moment where I came across feminist interpretations of, especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. So, the French phenomenologist. And I realized that there is a wonderful book out there, which was Maurice Hamington's *Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau Ponty, and Feminist Ethics*, which is actually now, exactly 20 years ago when it was published. And this book is a book which is doing what I was trying to do, which is combining a phenomenology of intersubjectivity and these feminist interpretations. And that was my entry point to care ethics. And then I was working on a Czech translation of Virginia Held's *The Ethics of Care*, which was actually the first book in Czech language available, introducing into this current of contemporary moral philosophy. And I also had a chance to collaborate with Virginia Held during my Fulbright scholarship at the graduate center CUNY in New York. And this was kind of transformative experience for me because Virginia Held was promoting strongly the political, global dimension of care ethics. So going beyond the original part of care ethics, where it was more focused on a kind of dyadic personal issues, and I was let into this political theory of care thinking. And it was also the reason that I was interested in organizing a conference, which we did in 2017 in Prague. And that conference featured John Tronto as a keynote speaker. So that was the moment where I met with Joan, and we discussed her at that time, quite recent book on *Caring Democracy*. And the title of that conference was 'Caring Democracy: current topics in the political field of care'. And that was the beginning of my beautiful collaboration with Lizzie Ward on that edited collection that you mentioned. So that was the *Care Ethics, Democratic Citizenship and the State*. And that was my main motivation then, to work on further topics and some applied stuff that we will probably discuss later on.

[08:53] **Martin Robb:** That's really interesting. And interesting that Maurice Hamington was your entry point.

[08:58] **Petr Urban:** Yes.

[08:58] **Martin Robb:** So Maurice is the professor of philosophy, I forget his full title, at Portland in Oregon. And he organized that conference where we met, that inaugural conference of the consortium.

[09:10] **Petr Urban:** Yeah, exactly.

[09:11] **Martin Robb:** Yeah. I suppose he was kind of entry point for me to care ethics as well. It was more his writing about masculinity and his very personal account of caring for his daughter. But it brought in that same sense of embodiment and the influence of Merleau-Ponty, which I found really interesting. And of course, you know, I was very interested as well, and privileged to meet Joan Tronto as well, at that conference in Oregon. And she's obviously been a huge influence on feminist care ethics, and particularly, as you say, on sort of political aspects of it. This, this may be a difficult question, it sounds quite simple, but I think some people listening to this, this might be the first time they've heard the term 'care ethics' or 'the ethics of care', but it's become a huge area, and particularly feminist care ethics, as you say. Is it possible to define what care ethics is in a few sentences? I found it very hard in writing about it to actually find a definition in the writers that we've mentioned. Yeah, have a go.

[10:16] **Petr Urban:** So, in general, Martin, I'm quite sceptical about definitions of any important current in philosophy and moral thinking. So what I'm more sympathetic with is kind of Wittgensteinian, let's say, approach. So to think even about currents in philosophy and moral theory as kind of sharing some family resemblances. And I would tend to say that care ethics, to me, at least in my understanding, is a kind of umbrella term which refers to a family of moral and political theories. And these have some core things in common. And so, in my view, the main thing is that there is this strong focus, focus on caring as a human practice, which is fundamental to the human condition, and at the same time, which has historically been marginalized and devalued in the dominant western political and moral philosophy. And so, based on the analysis of this practice of caring, so the care ethics comes to that idea of transformative potential of care as both moral and political concept. So then I would highlight relationality. So there is this core idea of all these philosophers and ethicists who are considered as care ethicists, that the central feature of human condition is interdependence. So that we are intent, interdependent beings. And that goes hand in hand with vulnerability. So the acceptance of vulnerability as something which is not an issue in terms of something that we should avoid, but something which is so fundamental that we need to think the human being based on that. And that comes together with other aspects, such as participation, solidarity, are core concepts to think about what is maybe something like living well together, so that we are thinking about these interdependent features, and finally, so based on these relational traits of human condition. So there is this focus on relational values and ideals, let's say, that are inherent in good caring. And I'm emphasizing good caring here. And to me, what I found quite as a kind of red line going through the writing of these care theorists, is that there is a focus on non-dominating, supporting relationships, focus on the values of attentiveness and responsiveness. And maybe surprisingly to some people who are not familiar with the literature, that there is emphasis on justice and autonomy. But importantly, this is a relational justice and relational autonomy. So there is a kind of rethinking of the notion of justice and autonomy. But my reading of care ethics is

that it's extremely important to see the relationship between care and justice as mutually supportive and actually a core relation for any political thinking in terms of care ethics.

[14:15] **Martin Robb:** That's interesting, because obviously, a lot of feminist care ethics arises out of the initial work of Carol Gilligan, who was a psychologist. And she makes that opposition, doesn't she, between justice, which is associated with a male or masculine way of relating to the world and care and relationality, which is related to a more feminine way of working the world. But I think you're relating to the world. But I think you're saying that feminist care ethicists have kind of re-evaluated that connection between justice and care. They're not opposed or separate.

[14:50] **Petr Urban:** Yeah, exactly. And I have to say that I struggled with the reading and interpretation of Carol Gilligan's work, and in an introductory chapter that we wrote with Lizzie Ward for that edited collection, so there is a section that we devoted to what we think is the beginning of that story of care ethics. And we highlighted the importance of Sarah Ruddick, the American philosopher, who actually published an important paper on 'Maternal Thinking' two years before the publication of 'In a Different Voice' of Carol Gilligan. And I think that this paper of Sarah Ruddick is important also because it already at the beginning of the formulation of the first ideas of care ethics. So it has this political, institutional dimension in it. And it also does not - it's not that closely linked to that idea of a dyadic relationship between, let's say, mother and child, though it starts with maternal thinking as a practice that is kind of important one to reflect on. So Carol Gilligan, to me, definitely is a fundamental writer and theorist in care ethics tradition. But at the same time, I think that, unfortunately, the work she's famous of mainly includes these unfortunate binaries between justice and care, and between male and female, female or feminine and masculine, let's say, moral thinking, which at the end, I would say that even if you read closely, 'In a Different Voice', so you see all these passages where Carol Gilligan herself already in 1982, was saying that these two approaches are complementary, that they are not excluding each other, and that we should be able to let them do their work together. And I think that she moved in her own thinking later on to even more the idea of kind of combining these two perspectives even more closely than at the beginning.

[17:21] **Martin Robb:** Yeah, interesting. And we'll certainly come back to this issue of gender and care, I'm sure, when we talk about Edith Stein later, and also want to talk to you about your work on institutions and care later. So the political dimension will come back into our conversation. So you've mentioned a number of care ethicists. You've mentioned Maurice Hamington, Joan Tronto, Virginia Held, and just mentioned Sarah Ruddick. Are we leaving anybody out? Is there anybody else who's been influential, a key influence on your own thinking about care ethics that we haven't talked about?

[17:52] **Petr Urban:** Yeah, I think I could mention Dan Engster's work on the welfare state policies and care ethics. So that was very important to me as an example of a very detailed work on how the particular state policies might look like when we take the political theory of care as the point of departure in political theory. And Dan Engster is also an author who published, interestingly, on public administration and the topic of implementation of policies. So not just the content of policies, but also the way that the state and government is implementing policies. And that was very influential to me in my thinking about

institutions, as you mentioned. And another colleague who I worked or collaborated in a way, by sharing our ideas and exchanging our papers is Canadian political theorist Sophie Burgault, and especially her recent work on the idea of 'caring bureaucracy', which is this interesting approach, which tries to show that the old ideal of bureaucratic institutions as impartial and promoting justice and fairness is something which is not against the ideals and values of care ethics, but in the opposite, it is actually something which we should probably seek when we think of caring institutions in current situations. So that we, we are really not trying to go beyond the fairness and impartiality of institutions, but try to think how even these central governmental agencies that are extremely hierarchical and bureaucratic sometimes, so, how they might incorporate caring values and caring principles in their practice.

[20:12] **Martin Robb:** Interesting. And I'll try to provide links in the show notes to this episode, to some of the people we're talking about and some of the publications. So if we could take a dive into some aspects of your own writing on care ethics, Petr, and I said in my introduction that you've written in a few places, I think, four papers you've published on the relationship between care ethics and enactivism. So, firstly, for the non-philosophers listening to this, among whom I include myself, can you explain what enactivism is and how you see the connection with care ethics?

[20:50] **Petr Urban:** All right, so, first of all, my interest in enactivism came from the interest in phenomenological philosophy, because enactivism was formulated in 1980, eighties, and developed later on as a current in philosophy of mind and philosophy of action, which draws on late phenomenological philosophy. But at the same time, it's usually presented as a naturalistic paradigm in philosophy, but they emphasize that it's a non-reductive naturalistic paradigm. So what's so interesting to me there is that there is, the core account of subjectivity is relational, so it's relational in terms of how we think of subject as interacting with environment and both physical and social environment, with the social, sorry, with the physical environment, so that's basically our core ideas about what is cognition and what is action. Enactivists, they emphasize that subjectivity, or agent, is always related to environment. And to think action means to think, this interaction with the environment. So there is this agent within the interaction with the environment. And this is also the case with the social environment. So that if we think the way that we relate to other people, so it's not about having the self and the subjectivity first, and then to think, how does the subjectivity relate to the others. But it's, from the very start, fundamentally, always relation. So we are the self, which is in relation to others, and any sense making, which is the way that we understand the world and we understand others, is relational. So they talk about, for example, participatory sense making, which is that in the social realm, any sense making is co constituted. So it's done together to say, and why I was interested in combining in activism and care ethics, that's because they have this striking convergence on their understanding of the relational subject. So that was my first point where I thought, wow, this is really interesting, that no one did research on how these two traditions came to this emphasis on the relational subjectivity, and what I was struggling with, and I never solved, I think that issue. Was there different views on normativity? Because the normativity in the enactivist framework, which is naturalistic, is a normativity which comes from the interaction with the environment. And whereas normativity in care ethics comes from kind of idea of good caring. And I remember wonderful chats and discussions that I had with

Virginia Held in New York, where I shared my drafts of these papers. And she was sort of disappointed because she wrote a paper, I think at that time, it was like ten years before that, which argued for the impossibility of combining naturalistic philosophy, or naturalistic view of the self with care ethics. So we had a kind of disagreement about the value of this. But I remember that she was also very happy to see that there are these different currents of thinking about the self that are not related to care ethics originally, but they are very close to it. And just to add on this, so that the last five years, I was quite surprised that a lot of people in philosophy and ethics have been interested in this relation between enactivism and care ethics. And my colleague Geoffrey Dierckxsens, Belgian philosopher, who works with us in Prague, so he prepared a special issue of *Topoi*, of the journal *Topoi*, which is devoted to the moral and political dimension of enactivism. And I was very pleased to see that people were reading my previous work as kind of pioneering idea about this connection.

[26:17] **Martin Robb:** So you started a trend, obviously.

[26:21] **Petr Urban:** Of course.

[26:22] **Martin Robb:** Yes. When I read your papers, I mean, obviously I'm not a philosopher, but I was struck by - you highlighted that relational view of the human subject and also embodiment, as well, as important to both traditions. That was interesting. And I was also very interested to read the work that you've done with your colleague, Alice Koubová on play, not least because it referenced the work of my former Open University colleague, Professor Wendy Hollway, who's been a key influence on my own thinking about care, particularly her book *The Capacity to Care*, and also the writings of the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. So I wonder if you could say something about the connections you make in those papers between Winnicott's theory of play and the ethics of care.

[27:15] **Petr Urban:** Yeah. So this interest in Winnicott's psychoanalysis and thinking is something which I owe to my colleague Alice Koubová, which you mentioned, and I was invited to think with her together about what she found so interesting in Winnicott's thinking, which is this focus on play as a fundamental transitional phenomenon which is crucial for a healthy development of human subjectivity. And at the same time, Winnicott's emphasis on care and facilitating environment, which he conceptualises in this idea of good enough. Good enough care, which is a necessary stage of healthy human development. So we were wondering how these ideas, Winnicott's ideas from the psychoanalytic perspective, might maybe match with some ideas in care ethics. And again, obviously, there is a lot of shared interest in the relational view of subjectivity, so that there is this famous Winnicottian idea that if we analyse or if we observe a baby, so we always observe a baby interacting with the caring person, and there is no such thing as a baby in terms of this isolated individual. But this was just the first thing to observe when comparing these two worlds. But then we realized that with play, it's more complicated than we thought at the beginning. So at least in care ethics, as far as I am aware, there is no real research so far on play and playing as a phenomenon which would be closely connected to that caring practice, let's say. And I think that it's something which, where Winnicott is offering care ethics, this important observation where I would say that it would be very interesting for care ethics to focus more on how play and playing plays an important role in both these

interpersonal relationships that we are describing, when we are describing caring practice within more intimate relationships. But at the same time - and that's where I find it even more interesting, what is this political dimension of play and performance in Winnicott's thinking? Where Winnicott famously does not consider play as a phenomenon which is left somewhere in our childhood, but this is something which goes through what he calls cultural phenomena. So art - art is basically a play phenomenon, and all the artistic and cultural world offers similar experience of transitional phenomena for adult human beings. And I think that this interest in art play is simply missing in the mainstream care ethics literature, and I would love to see more research on that. And second, there is another line where, on the other hand, those people who are developing Winnicottian psychoanalytical theories, so I think that they might benefit from some ideas from care ethics, which is especially the emphasis on political dimension and the emphasis on the political structures and institutions, where we found that Winnicott's own political thinking, his paper on democracy, is, in a way, very naive attempt to say something about democracy and the political from the perspective of what was his psychological theory. So I think that if you read his own political writing, so it's really not convincing. But there is a big potential in Winnicott's account of subjectivity and healthy human development, which we believe can be used in political theory. So where maybe political theory of care and Winnicott's thinking might be mutually inspiring. And that's also why we did a paper which is focusing on this political potential of Winnicott's thinking and comparing it with Martha Nussbaum's way of using Winnicott, where we believe that Martha Nussbaum is using Winnicott for the purpose of her own project in political theory, and that she is missing some interesting ideas about aggression and about play in Winnicott. So that's our most recent common project with Alice Koubová on that.

[33:08] **Martin Robb:** Thank you. Yeah, I thought it was really interesting, the commonality you identified in terms of the emphasis, emphasis on vulnerability and dependence, but also it's really interesting that Winnicott writes about the interplay between connection and separateness in play, which I hadn't really sort of thought about before. So that was really interesting. But maybe sticking with that political point that you ended on, I noticed that your most - in your most recent chapter on play, you argue that play matters for democracy, so you broadened the scope to the political realm. Can you say a bit more about why play matters for democracy? It's not, so -they're not two concepts that people would normally bring together.

[33:47] **Petr Urban:** Yeah. So this chapter that you mentioned is part of an edited collection that we put together with Alice Koubová and with two other co-editors, English colleagues. And it's based on conference that we had in Prague in 2019, which was called 'Play and Democracy'. And to me, this was also a new area. So I was really happy to participate in that conference and to listen to all these different approaches tackling the question of how play and democracy relate. I think that there are - so it's good to distinguish several different dimensions of this thinking about democracy and play. So, first, there is this big field of thinking about performative action and democracy, so that we can think of social movements, for example, and demonstrations, the ways that people prepare their protests, and the way that people go to the industry to demonstrate their ideas. So this is a kind of theatre, this is a kind of performance, which is done in a playful way, and it has a very important role, the way that it's done. So it's not a kind of serious way of writing a

manifesto and going to the minister or prime minister, but it's a way of doing a performance. And this performative aspect is part of the transformative potential of that event. And then you have, for example, the domain of play as a tool for education. So, in education of children and youth, there is the awareness of the role of playing within education is out there for long, but at the same time, there are different approaches. So you can have play as a sort of instrument. So that you say, yeah, we need to teach kids something, so let's do it in a playful way. But then you are instrumentalising play, or you can go in a different direction, which is, let's let the kids play as they want, as they like. And let's observe what the creativity and what the free, spontaneous activity of kids will create. And let's base education maybe on some of these aspects where we are leaving space and room for kids and youth to have this creative, spontaneous moments of interaction. And I think that this is something which then you can cultivate that by using some artistic methods. So that's where it touches another dimension, and that's art. So the role of the art for democracy. And again, interestingly, there are different layers of that. We know the cases where the art was serving some systems and regimes that were definitely non-democratic, so where the art was used for propaganda. So there is the question, so how is it possible that art is doing this work of being misused for propaganda? But at the same time, you have artists that are opening minds with people and facilitating this type of open mindedness and democratic thinking, democratic mentality. So this is where Alice Koubová was focusing a lot on what are the conditions for this non-abusive way of using art in democracy. And she there also created a link between the Winnicottian views of play, so that there are some characterisations that must be fulfilled, otherwise the art can go into that instrument being used by the system as a propaganda thing.

[38:27] **Martin Robb:** Really interesting. Thank you. And yeah, a pioneering area, I think, and I think what you said earlier about the scope for research, bringing together art and creativity and the ethics of care is right, there is a gap there, isn't there, in the research, and it'll be interesting to see that sort of relationship being developed further. Just sticking with the idea of the political dimension of care. And I mentioned in my introduction that you gave a presentation at that conference in Portland on caring institutions, and you've contributed a chapter on 'Organising the caring society: toward a care ethical perspective on institutions' to the book I mentioned earlier on care ethics, democratic, citizenship in the state. So what role do you think institutions have to play in the caring society? And can we speak, can we really speak about caring institutions? Can institutions care?

[39:23] **Petr Urban:** Okay, difficult questions. So the first one is perhaps less difficult, which is the question whether there isn't any important role for institutions to play in caring society. So I would argue, yes, of course. And this is something that's a consequence of the thinking in line of care as a political concept. So once we take it seriously that care is a political concept, and when we seriously start thinking about what transformation or change of our structures, meaning social and political structures, is needed to get closer to the ideal of care being central value in our polities and in our societies. So you can't avoid thinking about transformation of institutions. So there always will be institutions that are helping to organise these big societal entities that we live in. And also the global society is sort of institutionalised nowadays, so we have different levels of institutions going from the regional up to, to these supranational institutions. So it's important, I think, from the care ethical perspective, to really think about what change is needed and what change is also



realistic. So that there are some big ideals in the political theory of care sometimes, which the critics can easily say, okay, so these are nice thoughts, but how do you want to achieve that in the real life? And I think that this is exactly about thinking of institutions as the place that we need to incorporate the impulses from political theory of care and start changing situation. And the second question, so whether it's possible whether institutions can care, so whether that's a kind of maybe contradiction in that idea. So in the chapter that I wrote on this topic, I provided a quite detailed reading of Nell Noddings' work, because Nell Noddings is sometimes read as the author, which offered a very narrow view of care ethics based on her reflection on the relationship between caring and cared for person. And it's this dyadic relationship. It can be mother and child, or it can be teacher and student, but it's always the two of them. And based on this very narrow view, it would be really difficult to think of something like caring institutions. So how would you have something like an institution being in the role of the caring sort of person related to one other person? But Nell Noddings, in her more recent writing, makes an important distinction between caring about and caring for. And she claims that what this dyadic caring is caring for, and this is something, according to Noddings, which institutions cannot do. But then there is caring about, and that's the way that institutions are, for example, attentive to the needs of citizens, or that they are responsive, so that they prepare their policies in the way that it's responding to the needs of populations and citizens. And she claims that this is the type of caring which institutions can do. But in my own argument in that chapter, I was trying to show that caring institutions is definitely not a contradiction, and that we can think of institutions having some qualities that are related to these core values of care ethics. So attentiveness, responsivity, etcetera. And this is the way that I believe we can think of even the bureaucratic governmental institutions, and as being open to transformation in a caring way, so that we can have more caring or less caring bureaucratic institutions. And I believe that it makes sense. And I try to show in detail how this would even be possible in the real life. So, for example, based on some ideas in organizational culture and organizational structure, so that you can promote by hiring public officials that are even educated to particular listening skills or dialogical communicative skills, or when you promote public officials, so then you look at the qualities of that person. So is the person able to be the ethical leader? And that ethical leadership in the context of care ethics is always relational leadership. So do we have a person who is a real ethical relational leader? Do we want to promote that person to lead a bigger unit, for example? Yeah.

[45:35] **Martin Robb:** Interesting. Thank you. That's a really helpful explanation. So I do want to spend a bit of time talking about your writings on Edith Stein, which is what alerted me to your work in the first place. So I know you've written a number of papers on her work. So just to begin with, for those who are unfamiliar with Stein, she was a German Jewish philosopher, student and associate of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, who we mentioned earlier. And following her conversion to Catholicism, she became a Carmelite nun and was murdered by the Nazis at Auschwitz. So, firstly, Petr, I wanted to ask you about the origins of your interest in Edith Stein. Did it arise from your PhD work on Husserl? And you mentioned empathy earlier. Obviously, her PhD was on empathy or *Empföhlung*. So I'm guessing maybe that was how your interest in her work arose.

[46:30] **Petr Urban:** Yeah, you're right. Interest in phenomenology of intersubjectivity was connected to this reading and interpreting of early Edith Stein's phenomenological work. And it was exactly her PhD thesis on the problem of empathy, which I was interested in in particular. And on the top of that, I was invited to translate that book from German to Czech. So it was the first translation of *The Problem of Empathy* into Czech. And then I realised that she has other aspects that are very interesting from my perspective. And that was that she, especially later, 1920s and then early 1930s, she was involved in the German movement, in social and political movement, which had the feminist backgrounds, basically. So it was about the rights of women and it was about the work conditions of women. And Edith Stein was very active, also socially, politically. So she lectured across Germany and she talked to audiences, non-academic audiences, about these topics. And one of her core questions was the question of woman. So what does it mean to be woman? And what are maybe the specific values and some specific possibilities of leading the life of a woman of that time? And I found this extremely interesting because I think that Stein was - she was proposing something which I tend to call feminist personalism. So she's a personalist philosopher. Human person is the utmost value in her thinking of that time. And it was common in that environment of early phenomenologists, but at the same time, she's the only of that group who added this feminist dimension to it. And she was proposing a really interesting account of feminine values that are something which was, and similarly to what care ethicists say, so something which was marginalised, devalued. So the values of love and the values of mutual support, care, caring, and that these values, according to Stein, of that time, are something that should be inserted in the modern society, so that the modern society is lacking the values that are present and inherent in these female practices. And of course, as you can feel from what I'm saying already, so there is this aspect which was criticised a lot heavily with respect to Edith Stein, that Stein is proposing essentialism when we think of gender, so that she thinks of female essence as opposed to masculine or feminine essence as opposed to masculine essence. And she indeed proposed something like a dual ontology or anthropology of the human essence being expressed in two different, typically two different ways. And this is the feminine and the masculine one. And this is where I believe that even Stein's work allows a slightly more constructive interpretation, not necessarily categorising her as essentialist in terms of gender. And I took a lot of inspiration here from Finnish phenomenologist Sara Heinämaa. She also reads Stein, but she does that like something which is on the margin of her work. But the discussion between constructivism and essentialism in feminist literature is something which Sara Heinämaa says couldn't be dealt with from a third perspective. And that might be thinking of a sexual identity or gender identity in terms of a personal style or something like the phenomenological point of view. So that would be the way of practices and the way of some core values that are inherited in these practices, and something which is like a constant style of living. And here I would say that this is a clue how to maybe read Stein as proposing this dual anthropology in a non-essentialist way. And I think that this would be compatible with care ethics in a way, because this feminist aspect, to go beyond the feminine values and to talk about care as something which is not related to experience of women. So this is something which I would say we can find in Stein, too. So that she's really talking about these practices and values as open to being practiced by anybody. So you can have men practising and promoting the values of love, attentiveness, and empathy and care. But at the same time, she says, that's why women are so valuable also in our society. And I think that this was anticipation of the second wave of feminism, so revaluing the uniqueness and

particularity of, or this peculiarity of female experience as something which is now considered as a positive value and positive thing.

[53:28] **Martin Robb:** You've anticipated my next question, Peter, which was going to be about the critique of, or the criticism of Edith Stein is that she is an essentialist. And I think it's possible to read her work superficially, her essays on women, and to think that she's saying, that all she's saying is that women are, because of female embodiment, are physically and psychologically built for care, whereas men are built for more instrumental ways of relating to the world. But I think the way that you've explained it, and, you know, thank you in the past for introducing me to the work of Sara Heinämaa, I think is, you know, I'd recommend her book on Simon de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty and sexual difference, really interesting. I found it quite challenging to get my head around that idea, but I think it's - I think you're right, it's useful to get away from that superficial reading of Edith Stein as a gender essentialist, really. So thank you for that. So, more broadly, what do you think is her value for, leaving aside the sort of the gender issue, her value, what contribution can her philosophy make to feminist or care ethics more generally, do you think? Is it about empathy? Is it something about that writing on empathy, do you think?

[54:52] **Petr Urban:** Yeah. So I would say that mainly her detailed phenomenological analysis of empathy is one thing which is valuable, so that for phenomenologists, there is this imperative of providing a very detailed description of the phenomenon and of the practice that we have in mind. So here I think that still the entire phenomenological tradition with the analyses of intersubjectivity and sociality, is still quite relevant and offers sometimes much more nuanced insights into how we are related to each other and what are the different aspects of sociality and social life. So I think that that might be something where it's still very relevant. But at the same time, I think that there are at least some care ethicists who might find Edith Stein's religious background and her, especially the late Stein's work in theology. So that's where, you know, we are entering into the domain which at least in care ethics and political theory of care so far, is, I would say, rather underdeveloped. So maybe there was even a very critical stance to something like connecting care ethics to any type of religious experience and religious frameworks. But I think that it's changing, and I know that there are some interesting books now on the religious experience and care ethics. So here I think that Stein is a philosopher who did this connection and worked on this connection between the religious life and spirituality and care as the value of social and political life. So I think that maybe returning to these aspects of her writing, which would be still beyond what I did when I showed the connection. So that might be very interesting. And the fact that Stein is even trying to remain a philosopher and going into this theological work. She wrote several books in her latest stages of her development, which were on theological topics from a theological perspective. So here again, I think that, at least to some care ethicists, this might be some inspiration and maybe a good point of departure when they try to do similar work.

[58:11] **Martin Robb:** Yes, I agree. And that gives me the opportunity to plug the book that I was happy to contribute to on care ethics, religion and spiritual traditions, which Maurice Harrington was also involved in as well as one of the editors. So, okay, I think we've almost come to the end of our conversation, you'll be pleased to hear, Petr. Just a final question. I mentioned at the beginning, you've recently published your co-written book with Dan

Swain. So what are you planning to work on next? What - is there going to be more research and writing on care from you?

[58:44] **Petr Urban:** Yeah. So there is one chapter draft currently on my table on my desk, and that's, again, on care ethics and public administration for a handbook, *Bloomsbury Handbook of Care Ethics*, which is edited by Matilda Carter from Glasgow. And in this chapter, I was quite happy to go in more detail into some under-researched domains of care ethics and public administration, namely looking at the digitalised public administration, and currently all these issues around the use of artificial intelligence in public administration and how to reflect on that from care ethics perspective. And then I was also interested in the topic of crisis management and management, or governance for sustainability. So the dimension of environmental governance within public administration nowadays, the crisis management, as we have witnessed that with the pandemic and actually all the ongoing sad crises that we are having. So that's something which will hopefully be published by the end of this year. And I'm planning to publish again together with Dan Swain, something which will be a Czech version of this book on social cohesion. But this will include some new chapters on the Czech context, which we did not include in the thing, which was published with Roman and Littlefield, Dan Swain and I, we also work on the topic of socio-political *akrasia*, which, which is a technical term, but *akrasia*, as you may know, that's the issue of behaving against our better beliefs, so that we have all the knowledge necessary for good moral action, and we are not acting accordingly. And in the, in tradition, there was a strong account of individual *akrasia*. So when this happens with the human, individual agent - so, you know, how it, how is it possible? How to explain that? And we think that there is, there is something like 'akratic action', akratic acting on the social and political level, too. So, for example, we conceptualize the action of governments in the context of climate crisis, so that the governments are committing themselves to particular agreements, international agreements, and they profess the values of pro-climate action. And then you see the reality, which is the real life action of these governments. So sometimes they really act against these professed beliefs. And so what we try to offer is an account of socio-political *akrasia*. And the last thing that I would like to mention is that Alice Koubová, myself, and Gal Gerson from Israel, we are preparing a special issue of the journal *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, and that will be on Donald Winnicott and political theory. Alice and I, we have this paper on Martha Nussbaum's misuse, as we call it, of Winnicott there. And there are some wonderful scholars with us. So Frédéric Worms, for example, the French philosopher and care theorist and other great scholars. So that's something which hopefully will be also completed by the end of this year.

[01:03:06] **Martin Robb:** Thank you. I shall look forward to those publications with interest, the ones in English, anyway....yeah....reading your Czech publications. So I'd like to conclude then, Petr, by thanking you, really, thank you really warmly for this really interesting conversation. It's given me a much deeper insight into your work and your ideas about care and care ethics. So just want to wish you all the best for your future work, and let's keep in touch.

[01:03:33] **Petr Urban:** Thank you again for inviting me, and it was a real pleasure. Thank you.

[01:03:38] **Martin Robb:** Okay, so that's all we have time for on this episode of *Careful Thinking*. If you've enjoyed the episode, please consider subscribing wherever you get your podcasts. And if you'd like to send feedback about this episode or suggest a guest or a topic for a future episode, you can email the podcast at [carefulthinkingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:carefulthinkingpodcast@gmail.com). And now there's a new way of interacting with the podcast. I've recently launched a Substack where I link to the podcast and discuss individual episodes, and you can leave your own comments and thoughts there, too. You can find that at [carefulthinking.substack.com](https://carefulthinking.substack.com). See you next time.