

What is care?

“The key to living well, for all people, is to live a care-filled life, a life in which one is well cared for by others when one needs it, cares well for oneself, and has room to provide for the caring—for other people, animals, institutions, and ideals—that gives one’s life its particular meaning. A truly free society makes people free to care.” **Joan Tronto**²

Our work is inspired by an ethics of care. This is both a philosophy for understanding humans as in relation to others and an approach to assess the supportive practices that are necessary in society. What this means is that care is something that we do. There is no doubt that care is complex and here are some key characteristics to help you think about what care is and what it does.

Care as philosophy

Care is needed by all life



Care understands the world as made up of relationships

Care highlights our interdependence

Care reminds us of our shared vulnerability

Care can be motivated by emotions



Care is an active entering into relations with other

Care emphasises everyday acts of maintenance

Care requires attention to the quality of relationships

Care asks who is responsible for supporting those in need

Care involves taking others’ knowledge seriously

Care is a learned practice

Care involves fairly distributing responsibility across society

Care is often hidden and undervalued in our society

Care should not be idealised or romanticised

Care attends to changing needs over time



Care as something we do

Care is messy



Care is often mundane yet consequential

Care is grounded in everyday life



Care is achieved in a network with others also involved in care

Care is not one thing

Care requires physical and emotional competencies

Care is not received by all who need it

Care giving takes time and resources



Care requires observing, listening and responding to those receiving it

Care involves ongoing adjustment and change

Care must be supported by wider societal institutions

Care can generate emotional responses

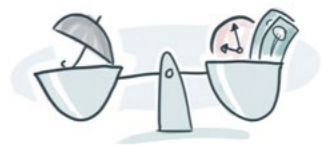


Care involves recognising and responding to the powerlessness of others



Care is always partial and individuals can’t care for everything

Care can fail



Further Reading

- Care Collective, The (2020) *Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence*. London: Verso Publishers.
- Tronto, Joan (2013) *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*. London: New York University Press.
- Hamington, Maurice (2024) *Revolutionary Care: Commitment and Ethos*. London: Routledge.

² Tronto, Joan (2013) *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*. London: New York University Press. P.170