

*Care is not one way; the cared for coforms the carer too.*

- Maria Puig de la Bellacasa

# Towards living ethics

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*One afternoon, my to-do list and the number of unanswered e-mails was just too much. I escaped from my office and headed to the university cafeteria. I saw Veera sitting there and joined her. Soon, we found ourselves discussing ethics. We reflected upon a recent PhD course on corporeal ethics that we had had at our university. It definitely was a different kind of PhD course – one that made a corporeal impact. We then switched to talking about articles and books on ethics that we had read lately, feeling jealous and astonished at the same time – how can others think and write so nicely? We touched upon Veera's dissertation scrutinizing the issue of ethics of things and her recent study on composts focusing on the invisible labour of microbes. From microbes, we switched to mosquitoes: why killing mosquitoes is not considered as an ethical act? Then again, the idea of mosquitoes sucking our blood led us to think how the blood is filled with microplastics, and that there is not much you can do about it, is there? We saw plastic bottles on the tables around us, and I was wearing a fleece jacket (which I liked) which spreads microplastics when washed in a machine. And when the domestic waste is burned, as often is the case in the city where we live, they go up in the air and spread in the form of ashes. From the sky, we jumped to discuss the Finnish bedrock and felt fearful about the national plan to store nuclear waste in it.*

*While talking, we found ourselves laughing, even though the issues we were discussing were far from funny. Perhaps laughter helped us cope with the anxiety aroused in our bodies. We were also laughing at ourselves, at our floating, messy, unanticipated and bodily way of talking, which was far from the conventional academic discussion based on logic and predictability. One idea just led to another, and another, without any control, nor predetermined purpose; from the tiniest invisible issues to large-scale ones. We gradually felt our bodies filling with ethical energy and that energy wanted to come out and be shared. One of us said it aloud: how about organising something around all this, a seminar or something?*

This story describes a serendipitous, unanticipated encounter, which happened in the middle of everyday work in the academia. As is widely known, serendipitous moments – happy accidents

– have a vital role in the generation of novel ideas (Merton & Barber, 2004). In recognising and appreciating the flow of unexpected ideas and making connections between them is actually a prerequisite of any creative act. Hold on, creativity and ethics, they are not thought together too often, are they? Yet, in the above story, it was the very topic of ethics that glued the issues of different scales together. Why ethics, why now? How has ethics acquired such power that it shapes the content of coffee talks in one of the northernmost universities in Europe?

Perhaps the idea of situated knowing provides an apt starting point for pondering the question (Haraway, 1991). We – two female academics, one with a background in sociology, other in critical business studies – have been accustomed to think of ethics in terms of moral rules and codes of conduct. Thus, in terms of brain and mind. However, we both have had corporeal experiences that ethics in everyday life as well as in academic research processes cannot be reduced into a “tick box” approach of following normative codes of conduct (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 131; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014: 2). For instance, when doing ethnographic fieldwork on moving house, the first author was struggling with the question of whether it’s correct to hide behind the camera or if she should rather help her “research subjects” in their tasks (Kinnunen, 2017). The second author felt uneasy when observing sleeping bodies when doing her ethnographic fieldwork on sleeping cultures. (Valtonen et al., 2017). Some, and indeed many, ethical questions just do not fit in boxes. For instance, Karen Dale and Yvonne Latham (2014) describe an incident during their fieldwork in which Yvonne is installing a technological device in a disabled client’s home, and whilst doing that, the client’s catheter bag begins to leak. Yvonne has to make a quick decision whether to risk embarrassing the client and point out what had happened or pretend not to have noticed the leakage. She ends up saying nothing, which feels like the most humane and least embarrassing action for all the parties at the time (Dale & Latham 2014, 1-17). This uncomfortable ethical encounter reveals that questions of ethics are entangled with multiple materialities and that they escape easy categorisations and tick-box solutions. Even if I wanted to tick ‘ethics, done’ on my to-do list, I could not. The world is full of uncertainties, vulnerabilities, and irregularities that are far too complex to be tackled by regulative frameworks. We have started to think of ethics not as a problem to be solved or rules to be followed, but rather as a mode to live with and through. We both had experienced this fundamental struggle – what is ethics all about? – in our bodies, and when our bodies encountered, the struggle burst out in our lively and generative conversation.

Furthermore, we are thrown to live our lives during an epoch that situates our human bodies in a very particular way. Namely, during the last two decades, human activities have reached such a level that they are altering life systems of the planet and even its atmosphere at an ever accelerating rate and extent. Recently, this human effect has been widely discussed and recognised as a new geo-historical epoch that marks significant and irreversible human influence upon the geo- and biosphere via processes such as farming, deforestation, mining, and urbanisation (Zylinska, 2014: 65). The epoch has been called “Anthropocene” (the age of the human), and while it is a contested concept, it has rapidly spread across natural and social sciences.

Whatever the epoch is chosen to be called, there is no denying that the humans (some part of the population, not everyone everywhere) have affected even the deepest layers of the

Earth. The microscopic pieces of man-made plastics are running in the veins of the Earth, the space debris is floating all over the aerospace, hazardous wastes lie buried in deep sea beds, the carbon dioxides are constantly being evaporated into the atmosphere... and the list goes on. There is no turning back nor denying human responsibility.

Following Joanna Zylinska (2014: 65) and many others (e.g. Grusin, 2017; Heikkurinen, 2017), we take the controversial concept of Anthropocene not so much as a scientific descriptor, but more as “an ethical pointer, outlining our human obligation towards the universe – of which we are only a tiny part.” (Zylinska, 2014: 65-67.) We take seriously the challenge which the epoch poses to humankind, and hence, to social sciences. It urges us to reassess the basis of our intellectual foundations. Paradoxically the “age of the humans” finally forces humans to face the fact that humankind does not have lordship over the Earth, nor command over its earthly processes. The “we” of the world are not humans, but all the critters and creatures of the living world (Grusin, 2015; Haraway, 2008; 2017; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2016). We are the tissue of the organism as a whole.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop novel forms of ethics that capture this earthly situation and to help to work toward new ethical foundations for co-existing in the world. It is not a surprise, then, that the issue of ethics is gaining increasing attention in academic and public debates. Ethics is at the heart of the discussions of the social and ecological crises the world is facing; academics are more and more concerned about ethics and politics of doing research; and consumers, citizens, and business people encounter new complex ethical questions in their everyday life. It has even been suggested (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 130) that our times is an age of ethics. We can witness an ever-growing “market for virtue”: the organisations are practising ethics by measuring and showing off their high level of ethicality with all kinds of tools, metrics, and audits (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). As noted earlier, however, today’s ethical questions are too complex to be put in the boxes.

How to pursue an ethics that neither takes human scale and human interests at its core nor denies human responsibility? Anthropocene urges us to rethink the often Eurocentric and rationalistic assumptions inscribed in ethical theories and to seek for an ethics that takes into account not only other people and animals but all kinds of nonhuman entities and materialities. Yet, the Anthropocene is a paralysing concept – perhaps too wide to be tackled. How, then, to make the ethics of our times livable?

In this book, we offer the concept of Living Ethics as a fertile ground for developing a more-than-human stance on ethics at the everyday level. In so doing, we follow earlier endeavours to develop a novel intake on ethics. That is, a view on ethics that does not derive from the masculine, rational thinking and does not offer normative human-centred virtues or codes of conduct, but instead takes the corporeal and emotional aspects of humans as well as other species into account. With the concept of Living ethics, we want to bring together different attempts to develop ethics that decenter human, to overcome the burden of classical bifurcations, and to take into account the becoming nature of ethics in practice. By offering yet another concept to the lively discussion on ethics, we do not wish to dismiss the value of the earlier approaches, but, instead, offer a fertile common ground for these approaches to flourish, transform, crossbreed and find strength from each other. Living ethics is an inclusive concept, which stays open for approaching ethics from various theoretical and philosophical

perspectives, including for instance ethics of care, corporeal ethics, human-animal ethics, Foucauldian ethics, and business ethics. It invites novel and innovative ways of thinking of ethics and re-imagining ethical forms of living and relating to others in the more-than-human world. Living ethics places ethics firmly within lived praxis that is performed in and of the everyday. Academic praxis is no exception. Our times challenge scholars not only to think differently but also to live differently. As Donna Haraway puts it (2003), research is not only about thinking with but about living with. To live with necessitates acknowledging that research is an ethical act which reciprocally affects those involved in the research.

Ethical acts manifest in the encounters. In theorising the encounters, we draw on the feminist discussion on corporeal ethics (Diprose, 2002; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). Thus, we work towards an ethics which does not derive from rational calculation and normative thinking, but instead from affective, pre-reflective engagement of sensible bodies. (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). Accordingly, to be open and generous towards the other, albeit different bodies, is to be open to other ways of thinking and doing. These corporeal encounters are often disturbing, but it is exactly this disturbance that goes under one's skin and makes one think (Diprose, 2002). Hence, corporeal encounters, as well as the generosity and radical openness towards difference and other ways of being, are prerequisites for ethicality.

To illustrate corporeal ethics at play in our own academic encounters, let us offer a few examples. In addition to the already mentioned sleeping bodies and stuff to be carried, we have struggled with domestic plants left out of care, stinky compost heaps, bloodsucking mosquitoes, not to mention poorly functioning technological devices that we are supposed to use as part of our fieldwork. Naturally, we encounter a wide range of human bodies in different spaces when performing our scholarly duties, from students to deans, and cleaners to clerks. We also encounter material objects from chairs to plastic bottles and cars as well as material forms that we do not necessarily consider material, such as the air we breathe. Some of these encounters may be 'sticky', ones that do not leave us in peace but keep haunting us. They can be thought of as ethical moments that are most valuable in academic knowledge production.

To spread the potentiality of these ethical moments to other researchers and outside academia requires an act of storytelling. By way of providing verbal, experiential or aesthetical accounts of these encounters (Zylinska, 2014: 65), a new set of encounters is facilitated, this time with the audience. The importance of storytelling is widely emphasised in today's academic discourse, and storytelling is, indeed, an ethical "practice of poesis that mediates between the desire to know and the desire to be open, the dynamics of knowing and not knowing" (Rhodes, 2009: 654). Radical openness in storytelling invites us to be open to different ways of being, doing and knowing, highlighting that openness rather than closure.

What we have begun to learn during this process, is to be open to the ethical potentialities of fleeing serendipities, disturbing moments, and affective fleshy encounters. We also have learned to notice our own vulnerability and the difficulty in detaching from our human-centric ways of thinking. Above, we have been discussing 'living' without giving much thought that there is, perhaps, life also outside Earth – even though the 'life' 'there' escapes our understanding, it is not outside the scope of ethics. Currently, the ethical questions involved in utilising space are on the to-do list of many politicians and lawyers (Viikari, 2012; 2015). How, for instance, are space activities such as space tourism or extraction of planets' minerals reg-

ulated, and how does this affect space? This leads us to ponder whether the current Anthropocene debate is, after all, too narrow in its focus on Earth. Does it hinder us from thinking of other possible 'earths' and modes of living?

We hope that the collection of accounts of ethics in this publication invites you to pose open and radical questions about the messiness of living and thinking together on Earth – and beyond. During the past two years, the University of Lapland has, with the help of ESF funding, run a HaiLa-project, which seeks to internationalise and develop doctoral education in Lapland. We have been able to organise doctoral courses taught by highly-recognised scholars representing different fields and seminars like the one we are referring to here. This has enabled a series of corporeal encounters between established academics, PhD students, and lecturers across the globe. This collection of texts is the fruit of these encounters.

*The seminar will start within an hour. We are in the auditorium, checking that everything is all right. Technology, check, microphones, check, water for the speakers, check, lights, check, coffee, check! We still feel a bit nervous. Our hearts are beating faster than usual, our sweating hands try to find something to do. Nevertheless, we try to keep smiling, pretending to be fully in control and relaxed, as the true academic professionals are supposed to be. The question that makes us nervous is: will there be audience? Will people come? All the keynote speakers have safely arrived in Rovaniemi, and we met them the evening before. And how heartfelt and nice people they all were, these world-class intellectuals! It was the first time we met in person, and yet we had the feeling as if we had known each other before. Quarter to ten. People come, phew. Relief! Ten o'clock, the auditorium is full. I cough once and say: "Dear all, I have the honour and pleasure to welcome you to the Living ethics seminar." And to me, this welcome is perhaps the sincerest ever.*

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