Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity and the Ethics of Care
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Aim
My main aim is to open up a debate on the possibility of “mutual enlightenment” between phenomenology of intersubjectivity and the ethics of care. A dialogue between the two approaches might on the one hand provide better understanding of some of the fundamental concepts in the ethics of care, and on the other hand it might enforce interest in an ethical interpretation of interactive views of social understanding.

Key notions
Phenomenology of intersubjectivity: I am interested in the legacy of phenomenological philosophy that can be found at the heart of what has been called the “interactive turn” in current social cognition research - our primary and everyday encounters with others are not solitary observations but interactions in the second-person perspective.
The ethics of care: I mean the newly coined and distinct current in the normative ethics that has been developed since the mid-1980s as a substantial alternative to the dominant justice theory, virtue ethics, and the liberal rights theory.

Enacting intersubjectivity
Whereas perception–action cycles have been traditionally seen as individual processes, Fuchs and De Jaegher propose that these processes can extend beyond one individual to include the other, resulting in a two-way process of perceiving and being perceived, acting and being acted upon. They emphasize that in social interaction, our body’s operative intentionality becomes partially decentered and this may be experienced as the process gaining its own ‘center of gravity’.

The ethics of care
The ethics of care sees persons as fundamentally relational and interdependent beings. Autonomy in caring relation requires both mutual respect (to the otherness of the other) and mutual concern (attending to and meeting needs of the particular other). Care as a practice builds trust and mutual concern and connectedness between persons. Trust is a relation between persons, not a value achievable by persons in isolation. The value of trust cannot be divided into the value of the dispositions of the persons in the relation, or to the value of the relation to the individuals involve.

Points of convergence
Both approaches emphasize certain autonomy of the relational domain. For the ethics of care, a caring relationship is never reducible to the individual projects of its members but requires mutuality that essentially transcends what could be achieved by the individuals alone. We find strikingly similar insights in the phenomenological-enactive view of e.g. the birth of attachment and trust in social interaction between infant and mother.

Conclusion
The dynamics of mutual concern which is central for the ethics of might be well analyzed in terms of the phenomenological-enactive view of interplay between the autonomy of the social interaction process and that of the individual interactors. This could be extremely fruitful for further elaboration of some often vaguely introduced basic concepts in the ethics of care. On the other hand, the ethics of care offers promising tools for a prospective ethical interpretation of the current findings in phenomenology of intersubjectivity.

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