

# Enactivism and Care Ethics: Foregrounding the Relational Domain

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# Outline

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## 1. The enactive approach to life, mind and society

- 1.1 Enactive account of cognition
- 1.2 Enactive account of social life
- 1.3 Enactive ethics

## 2. Care ethics and the relational domain

- 2.1 Relational ontology and epistemology of care
- 2.2 Care ethics and enactivism

# Main claims

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- ❖ A common ground of enactivism and care ethics - their relational ontologies
- ❖ Both reveal the irreducibility of the relational and interactional dimension of autonomy, individuality and agency
- ❖ On both views, agents are conceived as essentially embodied, situated and embedded in multiple relational networks

1.

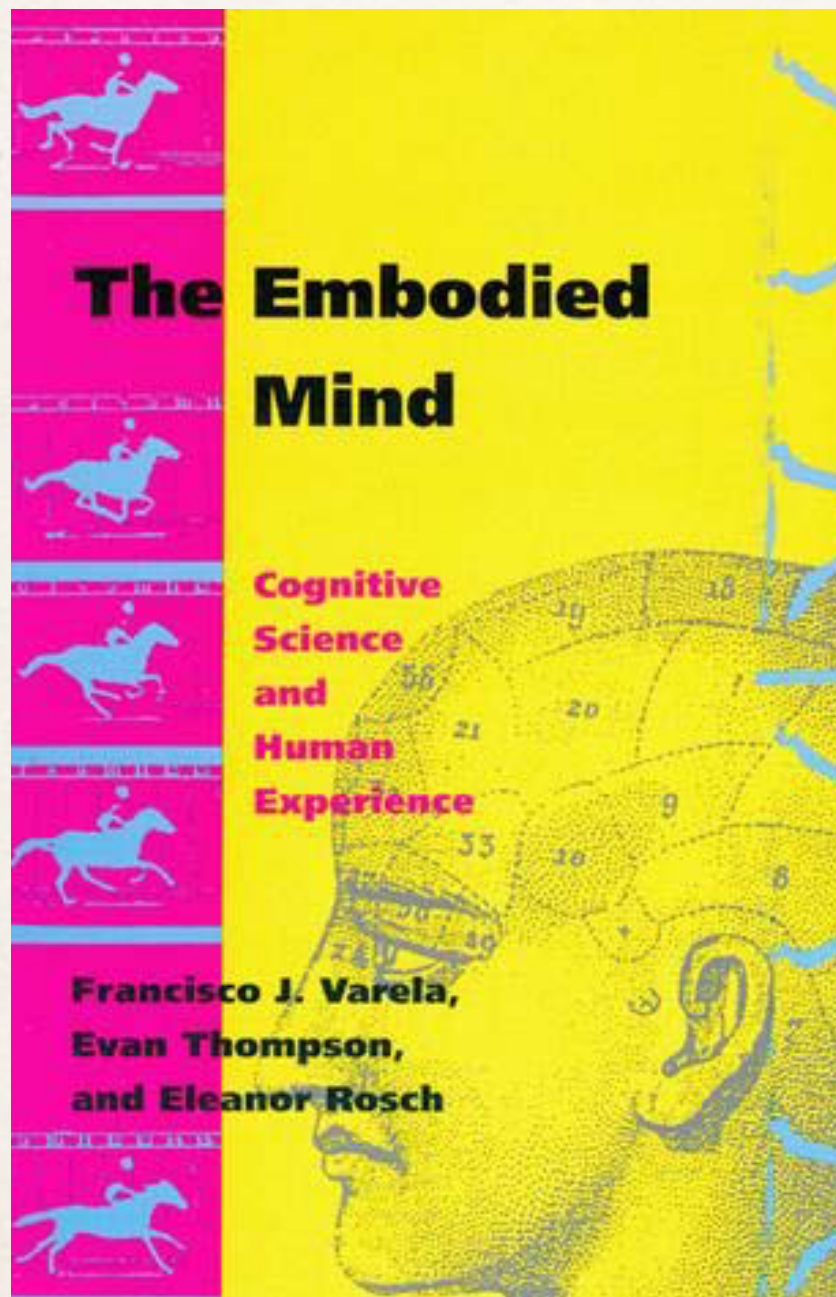
# The enactive approach to life, mind and society

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# The Embodied Mind 1991

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further developed by:

Evan Thompson

Ezequiel di Paolo

Hanne De Jaegher

Tom Froese

et al.

# Enactivism as a trans-disciplinary program

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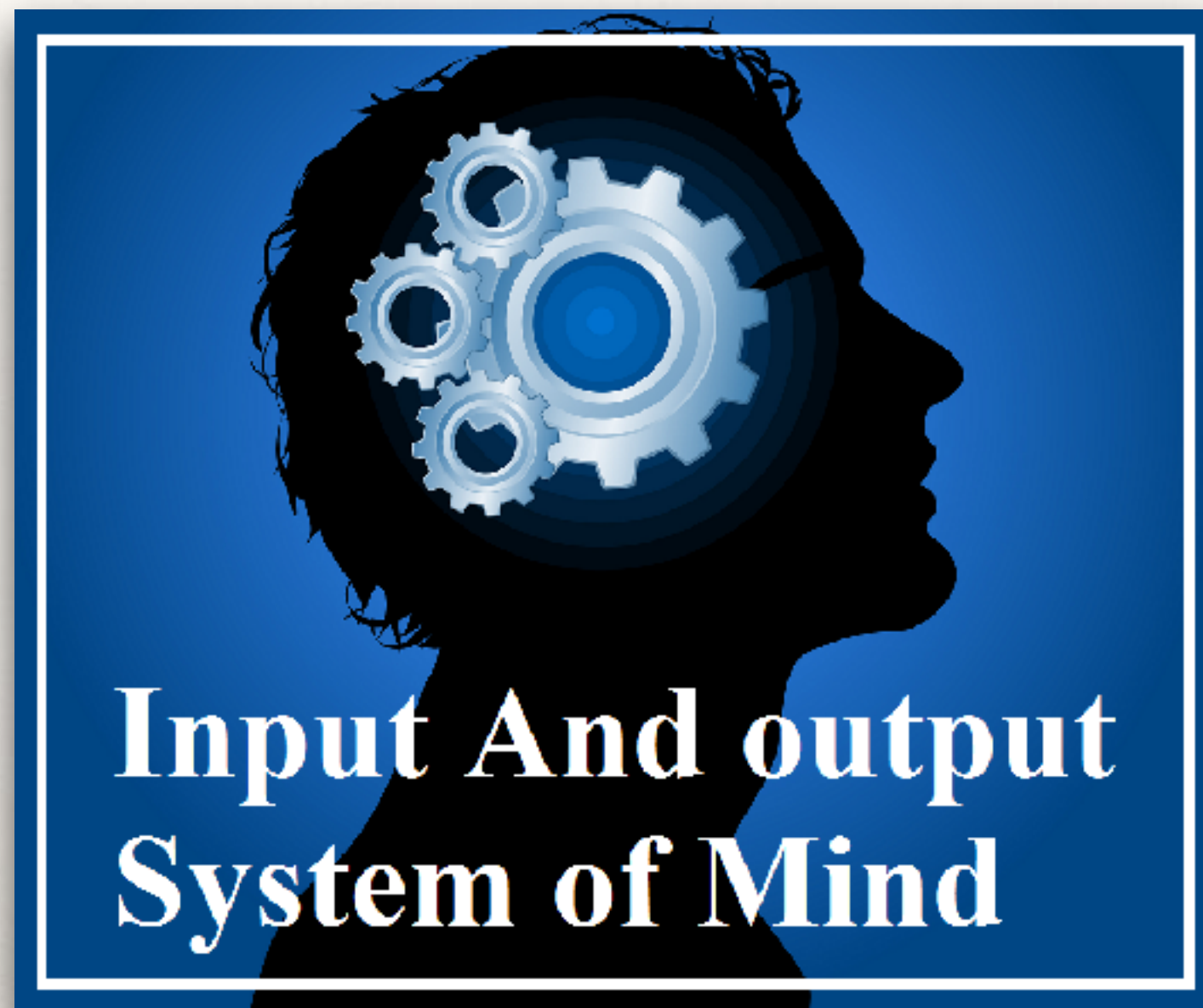
## A definition of enactivism:

“a non-reductive naturalistic approach that proposes a deep continuity between the processes of living and those of cognition. It is a scientific program that explores several phases along this life-mind continuum, based on the mutually supporting concepts of autonomy, sense-making, embodiment, emergence, experience, and participatory sense-making” (De Jaegher 2013, 5)



# Enactivism as an alternative in CogSc

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# Enactivism as an alternative in CogSc

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# Sense-making

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Sense-making = the interaction between an adaptive autonomous system and its environment by which the environment takes on a significance or meaning for the system

Autonomous system = a system composed of several processes that actively generate and sustain an identity under precarious conditions



# Implications of the enactive account of cogn.

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Cognition (sense-making) is:

- a value-laden process
- an affect-laden process
- an embodied and situated process

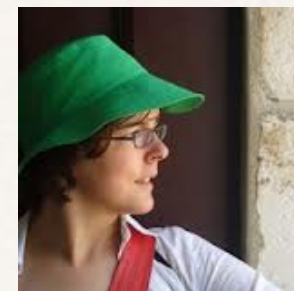
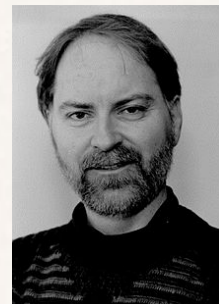
# Interactionist turn in Soc.Cog. research

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Second-person approach (Hutto, Reddy)



Interaction theory (Gallagher)



Enactive approach (De Jaegher, Di Paolo)



Phenom Cogn Sci (2007) 6:485–507  
DOI 10.1007/s11097-007-9076-9

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## **Participatory sense-making**

### **An enactive approach to social cognition**

**Hanne De Jaegher • Ezequiel Di Paolo**



# Social Interaction

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“the regulated coupling between at least two autonomous agents, where the regulation is aimed at aspects of the coupling itself so that it constitutes an emergent autonomous organization in the domain of relational dynamics, without destroying in the process the autonomy of the agents involved” (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007, 493)



# Participatory sense-making

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“the coordination of intentional activity in interaction, whereby individual sense-making processes are affected and new domains of social sense-making can be generated that were not available to each individual on her own” (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007, 497)

# Properly social interaction

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“a cognitive agent’s regulation of sensorimotor coupling is complemented by the coordinated regulation of at least one other cognitive agent”  
(Froese & Di Paolo 2011, 23)





# Properly human social interaction

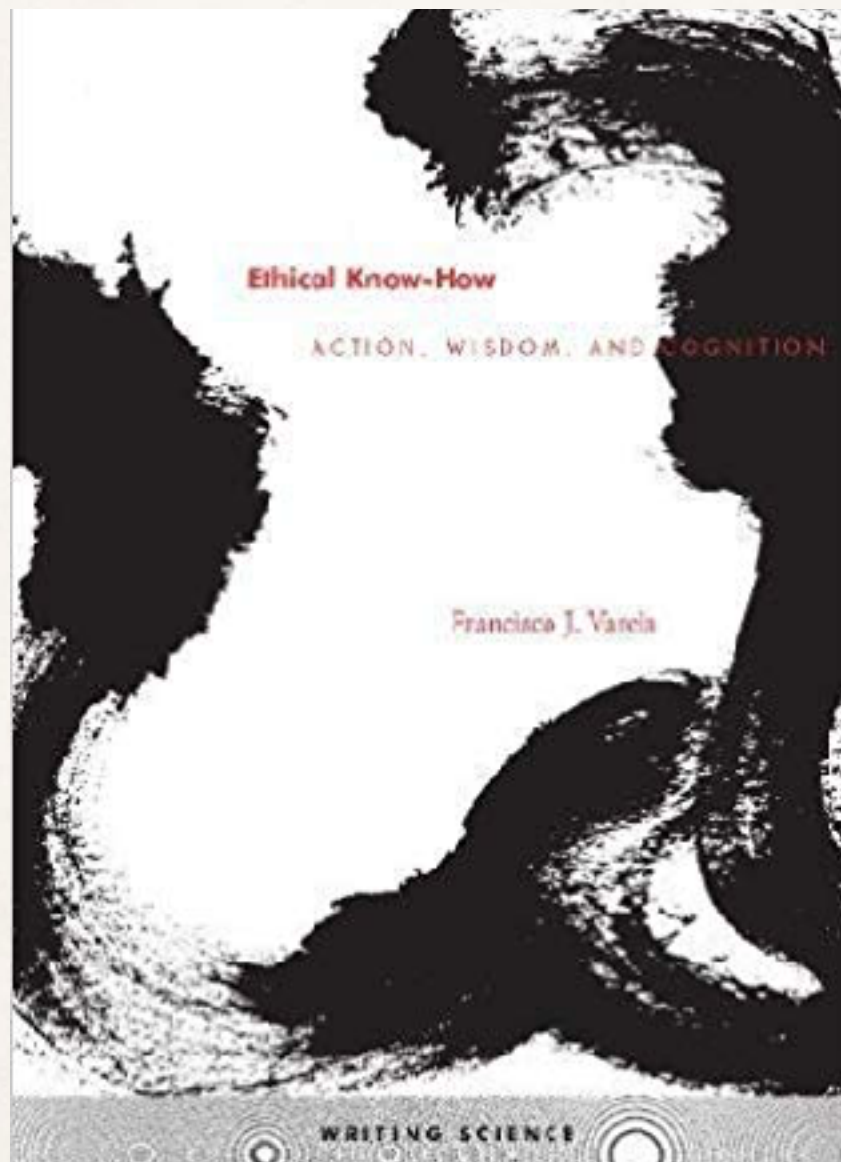
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- ❖ What makes the human kinds of socio-cognitive interactions special within the entire realm of animal life?
- ❖ Human kinds of social interaction unfold within a cultural context, within an array of social ‘givens’
- ❖ Entwinement of autonomy and dependence



# Towards an enactive ethics

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Varela 1992 / 1999



Phenom Cogn Sci (2009) 8:505–526  
DOI 10.1007/s11097-009-9137-3

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## **Emotion and ethics: An inter-(en)active approach**

**Giovanna Colombetti • Steve Torrance**





# An enactive ethics

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- ❖ making sense of the moral domain is to be seen as a cognitive-affective process, not as an enterprise of some more limited ratio-cognitive sort
- ❖ the ethical character of a given situation arises, at least in part, from the meanings which emerge ... out of the inter-relations between the participants in that situation

# Shifts in thinking about morality

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An enactive ethics invites us:

- to see the ethical content or valuation of a given situation as emerging from the interaction of the participants
- to de-emphasize the notions of individual autonomy
- to accept a “co-ownership” of morally relevant aspects of agency and situation



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# Care ethics and the relational domain

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Sara Ruddick



Carol Gilligan



Virginia Held



Nel Noddings



Joan Tronto



# Care ethics

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a moral theory which builds on a fundamentally relational view of human beings and puts care at the centre of human life and society as a core moral value and practice

# Care

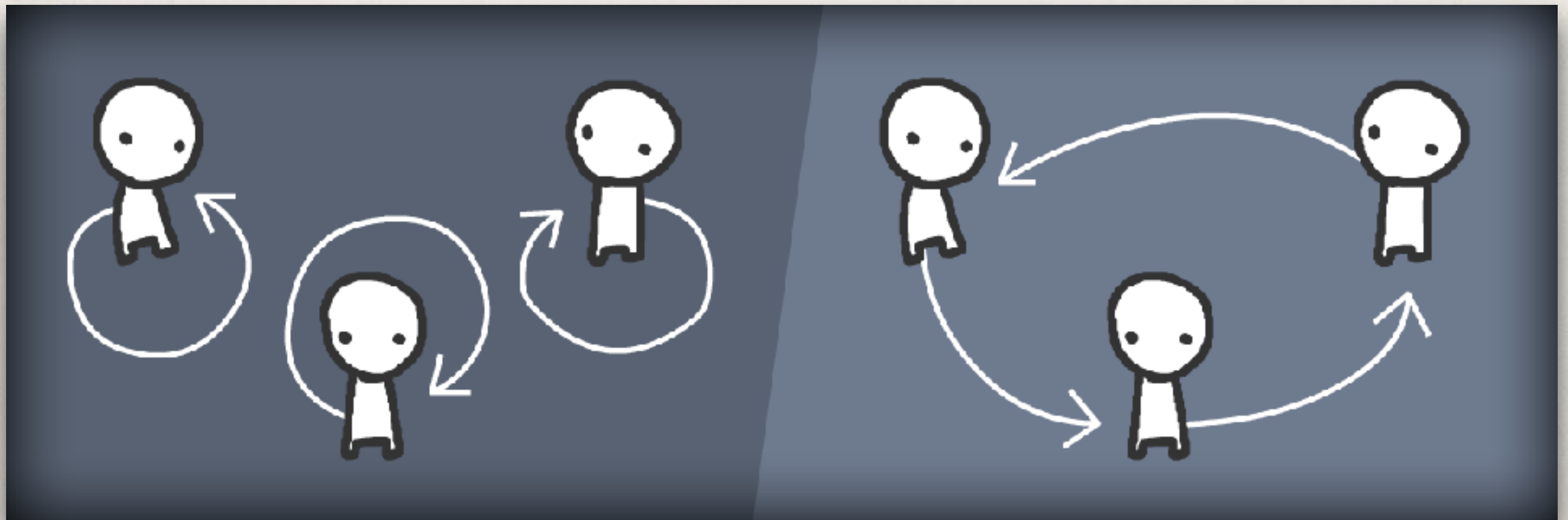
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“On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.” (Fisher & Tronto 1991)



# Relational view of human beings

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# Embodied, emotional and situated morality

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- ❖ ‘Moral understanding’ (Ruddick 1989) - based on practical experience of embodied, situated agents who are engaged in inter-individual interactions. Moral judgments produced in the ‘concrete thinking’ are essentially sensitive to particular contextual differences.
- ❖ Care ethics shifts our ethical considerations to context, relationships, and affective knowledge



# Relationality of care

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- ❖ What we mean by care and caring cannot be reduced to projects, properties, and intentions of the individual agents who are involved in care or caring relationship
- ❖ Care, thus understood, is never a mono-directional (altruistic) activity of giving something from caring person to the one cared for

# Trust

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“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” (Held 2006, 56f)



# Trust

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“Trust arises, as it were, from the ‘in-between’ or from the over-arching process ... Such phenomena cannot be reduced to mere individual, private mental acts or properties.” (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009)

# Conlusions 1

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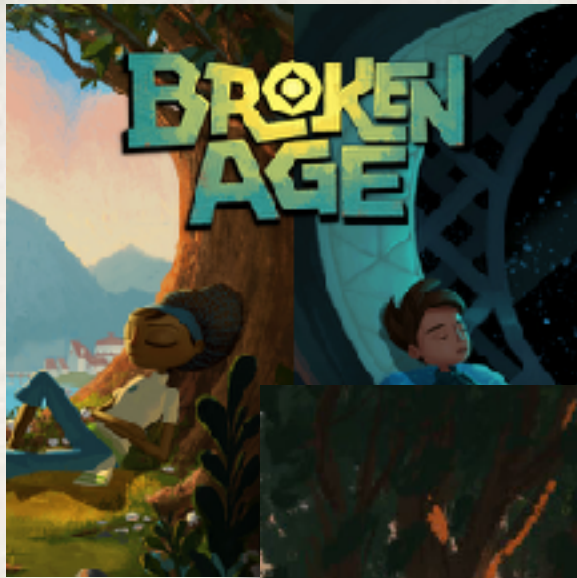
- ❖ A common ground of enactivism and care ethics can be localized in their relational ontologies.
- ❖ Both re-think the concepts of human autonomy, individuality and agency in a way that stresses the irreducibility of the relational and interactional domain
- ❖ Concern and emotionality are on both accounts considered as part and parcel of agent's making sense of the world and others



# Conlusions 2

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- ❖ The enactive analyses of the relational interactional dynamics offer useful analytic tools for further developing the relational ontology and epistemology of care
- ❖ In turn, the conceptual and methodological toolkit of care ethics, its elaborated account of human interdependence, as well as the account of social and political institutions can serve as a well-suited means of arriving at an expanded enactive view of moral phenomena





# Vielen Dank!

I very much appreciate your feedback  
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