

Frans Vosman (1952-2020) – a concise sketch of his life and work¹

To our dismay, Frans Vosman eventually succumbed in June 2020 to the cancer that had reappeared a year earlier. He leaves an enormous void, but we will try to go on without him as good as it gets. Frans Vosman, our intensely good, sweet, learned, gentle friend, with his inimitable sense of humour, his astonishing erudition, his fabled language skills, and his oversized floppy trousers. He is gone, our dear friend, our wonderful colleague and fellow traveller who blazed many hitherto untrodden trails. Who was Frans Vosman?

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Frans Vosman (1952-2020) was from Brabant and wasn't shy about it: he never missed an opportunity to switch to the Brabant dialect or to use some expression from his youth. He was born in Helmond, where his father worked as a legal consultant for the municipality and his mother was the principal of a secondary school for vocational training. His parents were already of a certain age when they had their two children. Frans Vosman attended secondary school in Deurne, taking the *gymnasium alpha* course. They were a traditional Catholic family – his father was very fond of Saint Francis and the classical Catholic devotions; Frans regularly used expressions he learned from his father and also inherited his devotional slant from him. His mother was above all a woman of resolute action – Frans Vosman also had something of this trait. The family was culturally well-versed and educated, a little posh and with a taste for the arts. Frans Vosman had one sister, Mieke, who became a legal aid lawyer (in the disadvantaged neighbourhood of De Pijp, Amsterdam), but who died of cancer at a young age in 1990, leaving behind a husband and two young children. Frans never fully recovered from this blow. He long kept the black shoes she used to wear during her gowned court appearances as a relic on a cabinet at home

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Frans Vosman was trained as a theologian, specifically as a moral theologian, at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (1971-1977; currently Radboud University Nijmegen), and his mentors were Theo Beemer and Arend van Leeuwen. They were strong mentors whom he held in high esteem. The former taught him to think *politically* about moral issues and practices, and the latter to analyse in a Marxist sense, materialistically and in terms of power, capital and labour. Frans received a thorough philosophical training.

He subsequently went to Paris and Rome (1978-1982) for doctoral studies under the French Redemptorist Professor Louis Vereecke, and was awarded a doctorate by the Alphonsianum in Rome in 1985 on a dissertation – in Italian – on the economic moral theory of Giovanni Maior or John Mair (1467-1550), a Scottish theologian who was world famous and highly regarded in his day. It is characteristic of the orientation that Frans Vosman had acquired in Nijmegen, and of how he regarded his discipline, that his doctoral research was on an economic topic in moral theology. But it would be practically his last foray into the strictly historical field, although by no means his last into French and Italian scholarly literature.

From 1982-1986 Frans Vosman worked as a staff member for 'Church and Society' at the 's-Hertogenbosch diocesan service centre: he held the portfolio on the church's service of charity and wrote a critical-radical, but at the same time orthodox Catholic brochure on the nature of *diakonia*.

¹ Simultaneously, also on ethicsofcare.org, a bibliography compiled by Guus Timmerman is published: <https://ethicsofcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Bibliography-Frans-Vosman.pdf>
In the biographical sketch itself, the publications mentioned are listed in endnotes.

His recent Roman training left clear traces in this text, and this ambiguity was long to characterise Frans Vosman: socially radical and doctrinally orthodox. In these years he looked increasingly for ways to accommodate his homosexuality and homosexuality in general: in his private life, in research and publications, in the church, in associational life, in theology. In some circles this was not without risk.

Frans Vosman worked together with many people, sometimes for long periods. He and I worked together very closely from 1984 up to the end of his life (like him, I held the diakonia portfolio in 1984, but in the archdiocese of Utrecht, and this is how we met). It is only fair that I mention the interwovenness of our careers, as much of what I have to say about him is also about me and vice versa. I hope the reader will pardon this lack of modesty, which is however difficult to avoid.

His career took an important new turn when Frans Vosman was appointed a lecturer (*Universitair Docent*) in moral theology and medical ethics (1986-1990) at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (currently Radboud University). He began to focus more emphatically on the work of doctors, nurses and other care providers. Given the climate at the time, it was expected of him that he would articulate the Catholic view on medical ethical decisions – it is clear from his work that he tried to live up to this expectation, but also that he was uninterested in simply applying Roman Catholic moral principles to complex cases. Instead he preferred to try to unfold practices and their meaning.

At the same time (1989-1990) he was a part-time lecturer in ethics at the Agrarian College of Higher Education (*Hogere Agrarische School*) in 's-Hertogenbosch – a job which was frankly a disaster: interest in ethics at this college was minimal. Frans Vosman omitted this post from all his public CVs.

Much changed when he became the first secretary of studies at the Thomas More Academy, an organisation that operated nationally. This job suited him perfectly: taking initiatives, making inquiries, studying current affairs, addressing urgent issues in society and subjecting them to thorough, open and critical thought, partly from a Catholic perspective. He and I (I had also moved to a national organisation) explored a plethora of such issues, drafted conceptual explorations – what aspects of the issue are truly interesting, urgent or neglected? – and transformed the most promising aspects into seminars, as well as into eight televised philosophical conversations, chaired by Dr Pieter van Hoof and aired by KRO (1990-1991). In 1991, Frans Vosman edited the first volume to emerge from his work at the Thomas More Academy (*God en de obsessies van de twintigste eeuw; 'God and the obsessions of the twentieth century'*)¹, and in 1992 Van Hoof and we published a book based on the TV conversations: *Onderstromen en tegenliggers: Wijsgerige reflecties bij het nieuws* ('Subcurrents and swimming against the flow: philosophical reflections on current affairs')². One of the contributions was an excellent piece by Frans Vosman entitled '*Dicht op de huid: een interpretatie van historische en hedendaagse veranderingen van het lichaam*' ('Under the skin: an interpretation of historical and contemporary changes of the body')³.

Frans Vosman had a life-long fascination with the bodiliness and corporeality – this instrument you can cut, tattoo, perfume, scar, pierce, embellish to claim your place in the public space, the locus also where you experience and undergo life, sex, suffering and longing, and finally the position from which you observe and see or miss the other. In these years Frans Vosman's main focus was on beauty and youth(fulness) and on the irreducible primeval forces of lust and sex, but gradually he became more phenomenological and developed an epistemological interest in the body. It must be added here that Frans Vosman had a troubled relationship with his own body: his weight fluctuated tremendously, from a certain age he adopted a rigid old man's walk, and he could be seen cycling through Utrecht apparently nervously, or at any rate very slowly.

This fascination with the body was certainly enhanced by what was going on in the gay world in the 1980s: the disastrous, incurable and demeaning AIDS epidemic had appeared, and on top of the horrors that it entailed, the illness was associated with a punishment for the dissolute and promiscuous lives that gays were thought to be leading – regardless of whether or not they actually did. Although Frans Vosman frequently thematised the callousness of the gay world, he never bought into the idea that lust is pernicious and that the body must be subjugated.

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In 1991, Frans Vosman was appointed lecturer in moral theology at the Catholic Theological University in Utrecht that was then in the process of being established or had just been established; shortly afterwards I was appointed to an endowed chair at the same institution and so we became colleagues, albeit in different departments. We both stayed there until the university became the Faculty of Catholic Theology (2006/2007). Frans Vosman was successively a lecturer (*Universitair Docent*) and a senior lecturer (*Universitair Hoofddocent*) and after nine years, in 2000, became a professor.

His teaching and research brief fell within the remit of the Department of Systematic Theology, which was dominated in Utrecht by classical Thomism. This also influenced his thinking. He still focused in those years on medical ethics, both in a limited sense (what is possible, what is fitting and what is defensible?) and in a wider sense (developments in health care), and he continued to occupy himself with urgent issues in society (such as tolerance and multiculturalism, youth cultures, the world of labour and trade unionism, and the degradation of the elderly), but there was also a clearly ecclesiastical and doctrinal aspect to his work (reflections on encyclicals, dogmatic, catechetical and pastoral theological issues), as well as an interest in alluring studies that verged on the theological, for instance by Gianni Vattimo, Paul Ricoeur, Francis Fukuyama and Charles Taylor.

In my view, his studies of the Thomistic doctrine of the passions are of particular interest. They contain the first indications of how intrepidly Frans Vosman was beginning to think about emotions and passions, and their (epistemological) importance for ethics. Closely linked to this (and to Aristotle), his work at the time explored the nature of friendship (wanting what is good for each other and having care for each other), happiness as the ultimate frame of reference for a good life and for sound morality, and desire and honour. The resulting insights, which he also used to critique existing viewpoints in care and on homosexuality, breathe a different ethos than his previous studies: earthlier, more ordinary, more passionate. This is true even when he tried to remain within the confines of orthodoxy set by the Roman magisterium. Sometimes he was very obedient; sometimes less so. He later applied the description of friendship just quoted to long-term and respectable loving relationships between gay people, and this would ultimately prove to be his undoing. He gave a striking University Foundation Day lecture at the time (1995) on the 'dishonouring of the elderly' in postmodern society: a sharp, shocking *j'accuse* that he pronounced in the presence of his elderly parents, who were in the audience in the first row: society ultimately does not esteem the elderly.

At the same time (1991-2001) I was gradually developing my theory of presence, on the basis of a series of rigorous, long-running empirical studies; as well as on empirical research, this theory is founded on theories from practical theology and the social sciences, on philosophical analysis and on a very specific ethical approach: the ethics of care. We spoke about this and exchanged relevant texts and literature. By the time I published the fully developed presence theory (2001), Frans Vosman had become a professor (2000) and again he made a number of great turns which would lead us to even closer collaboration.

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What were the turns that were taking place in these years? (a) In the first place Frans Vosman argued in his inaugural lecture that morally 'good' is that which manifests itself as good and beneficial in practice. This was a sharp shift in respect of the locus of the good: he no longer reasoned from doctrine to practice, but talked back to doctrine from what is good and beneficial in practice. (b) He subsequently began to take a greater part in my empirical case studies and in the hermeneutical analysis of these: how can texts and corresponding social, quotidian practices be 'unfolded' without moralising about them from outside or from above? We published the results of these analyses in a jointly edited volume: *Present: Theologische reflecties op verhalen van Utrechtse buurtpastores* ('Present: Theological reflections on stories of Utrecht neighbourhood chaplains' (2003))⁴. (c) Then, in 2001 (up to 2011) Guus Timmerman began his doctoral research project, which we jointly supervised and which involved substantial empirical qualitative research at the intersecting point between ethics and practice: Frans Vosman closely followed the complex questions and conundrums that after a number of years presented themselves in the context of this study and that had to be resolved. (d) He also began to (critically) adopt my explorations of new forms of reflexive and normative professionalisation in pastoral ministry, health care and the social domain. (e) At the same time (from 2004 onwards), the moral theologian Professor Annelies van Heijst, who had, like Frans Vosman, been educated in Nijmegen and was then working at Tilburg University, made a radical turn to care ethics, inspired in a certain degree by the presence theory published in 2001 (see her *Menslievende zorg. Een ethische kijk op professionaliteit*. Kampen: Klement 2005, pp. 121-210, 'Professional loving care. An ethical view of the healthcare sector')⁵. Together with her I wrote a number of articles in the early 2000s that strongly appealed to Frans Vosman: he began to focus on the ethics of care. He became increasingly open to what practice has to say, to show, to offer. He did this very radically – without abandoning his previous interests.

This development was motivated by a shared concern: a fainthearted way of doing theology which smacks of neo-Thomism seemed irrelevant to modern people, to important institutions (such as health care, education, the economy and the law) and to the great issues in society. The reactionary direction in which the Dutch church province was moving and that was expressed in unwelcome episcopal appointments, strongly aggravated the stultifying manner in which the church was dealing with late modernity. In those years at the Catholic Theological University, we participated in a policy committee with the mandate to explore how the practice of academic theology in the Netherlands could be modernised. When the committee's recommendations were published as a discussion paper (2004), the many stimulating ideas, innovations and proposed partnerships that this process generated were a bridge too far: to our disillusionment, our policy document was binned. Frans Vosman was one of the most important sources for these creative proposals.

We developed new directions for empirical research (focused mainly on developing the theory of presence and on chaplaincy care in social institutions), together began to supervise Master students and a number of PhD candidates, and mapped the fields we were planning to cover, as well as the underlying theoretical requirements. I was reading like a madman, Frans Vosman like a maniac. Moreover, he knew where funds were to be had, spent hours and hours networking, and became more and more convinced of the importance of thorough, in-depth research that was conducive to theory formation. In conjunction with the research we were supervising (including Guus Timmerman's) we made plans to strengthen the ties between the social sciences and ethics, and to bring these two disciplines together in a productive interchange. Our efforts were to result in a large-scale joint field study in a regional hospital, see below.

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Plans were afoot in 2005-2006 to merge the Catholic institutes of theology in Utrecht and Tilburg into a single new faculty whose formation programme for church ministry would have Rome's seal of approval, and which would therefore also be authorised to award canonical degrees. This was to become the Faculty of Catholic Theology (FKT) of Tilburg University. Bishop Dr Wim Eijk (at the time bishop of Groningen) became Vice Chancellor, and on behalf of the bishops' conference kept a close eye on moral theology: his criteria were neo-Thomist and Frans Vosman came under heavy fire. If Frans Vosman wished to join the new faculty, he would have to publicly retract his written views on homosexuality, and especially on gay marriage (*retractationes*). Although his views on these subjects were nothing but respectable and were internationally accepted, and although he was a declared opponent of gay marriage (but a supporter of the recognition of lasting and loving relationships between gay people), his retractions were on two occasions deemed to be insufficient by Bishop Eijk. He was also denounced for living with another man. Frans Vosman was refused the *nihil obstat* (the church's declaration of no objection), decided not to fight back, and lost his job (2006). He was offered a transfer to the Department of Religious Studies and Theology (DRT) at the Faculty of Humanities at Tilburg University, where he was appointed professor of Christian Ethics and Spirituality. Although I did receive the *nihil obstat* (despite the fact that my own personal life provided ample grounds for a refusal), I felt compromised by Frans Vosman's removal. I felt I could not in good conscience stay, and I openly distanced myself from the treatment that had been meted out to Vosman. I resigned my job and also joined the Department in Tilburg, which was not subject to supervision by the bishops (2007).

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Much changed from that moment on: more or less by coincidence we were now in the same department – what had previously been the department of practical theology – together with the care ethicist Annelies van Heijst, and we had cast off the constraints of theology and of episcopal supervision. Frans Vosman was in charge and he made optimal use of the new possibilities. It was to be his heyday (2007-2013). The existing curriculum was transformed in the space of two years into a Master's programme in *Care Ethics and Policy*, including, naturally, introductions to care ethics and women's studies, a modest course on presence (casuistics), field explorations in health care, empirical qualitative research, with (variable) lectures on current affairs, political ethics, the multicultural society, with theories on policy formation in health care and wellbeing, and theories on suffering and death. We attracted many PhD candidates and succeeded in giving their themes, basic theories and formation a consistent orientation. The idea of including policy in the Master's programme was Frans Vosman's and it truly broadened our perspective.

He was also an important force behind the launch of a newly designed research group (*Care and Contested Coherence*, CCC) that brought together academic researchers, both established scholars and doctoral candidates, and interested people from social organisations. This group permitted people from Tilburg to meet researchers from other universities, hosted renowned speakers and fostered international contacts, and had its own secretariat. Frans Vosman organised all of it. We drew up the programme and managed the group together: our aim was to foster a multidisciplinary approach. Frans Vosman introduced the idea of 'fellow travellers': colleagues from outside care ethics who had a similar interest or approach. It gave a strong boost to our idea of interdisciplinarity (Klaver, Van Elst & Baart 2014)⁶.

In 2008 we held our joint inaugural lecture (*Aannemelijke zorg: over het uitzieden en verdringen van praktische wijsheid*; 'Acceptable care: on the distilling and suppression of practical wisdom')⁷. Our aim was to start with practices (of care), to let these 'speak' through high-end empirical-qualitative

research, and thus to serve these practices. We wanted to excavate the embodied knowledge and the practical wisdom that care givers have, and make them fruitful.

In our inaugural address, we announced the launch of a major project of the kind that I had become acquainted with over the preceding years: the transition of an integral, mainstream organisation to loving and present care in the sense of care ethics. After two years of preparation (2007-2008) we signed a contract with St. Elisabeth's Hospital, a large regional general hospital in Tilburg, for the 2009-2014 years. Four established scholars from Tilburg University were involved (Annelies van Heijst was unable to continue due to health reasons) as well as a total of five PhD candidates. It was a huge project, and Frans Vosman bore the final responsibility. He organised everything, including the financial aspects and the legal structures. We now had a care ethical field project that was operational, exploratory and oriented to theory formation.

In interchange with this large and complex project, new issues constantly presented themselves that we studied rigorously. We were not just following our personal interests, but issues were emerging from the practices we were researching. This led to continuous expansion and enrichment of the foundational care ethical theory from which we were working. Frans Vosman and I had partly overlapping, partly differing lists of subjects and issues that required further attention. Let me mention the most important issues on Frans Vosman's list: institutional theory (on the ultimate purpose and decline of societal institutions, particularly health care; Frans Vosman later associated this subject with institutional ethnography), practical wisdom (the ability to identify and pursue the good in practices in which the good is obscured through bureaucracy, routine and technology), the body and *passibilité* (undergoing disease and care), and a phenomenology of bodiliness (how does a disease like MS appear to the patient and what does this mean for their self-understanding and for suitable care?).

I was further developing the intense connection between qualitative empirical research and care ethics, and Frans Vosman continuously participated in this. In the meantime, all our PhD candidates in care ethics were doing empirical qualitative research, and all the research done in the hospital project was connected to thorough empirical qualitative research (for an overview of the twelve studies done in this project, see *De patiënt terug van weggeweest*, 'The return of the patient', 2015, p. 34ff)⁸. Separately from the hospital project, Guus Timmerman defended his doctoral thesis in 2011, under Frans Vosman's and my supervision. This dissertation contained a strongly developed empirical-qualitative research aspect in which Frans Vosman had been involved and which gradually familiarised him with this type of research in relation to ethics. It was Frans Vosman's first PhD candidate who focused both methodologically and theoretically on this specific connection.

Our aim to bring about transitions inspired us to acquaint ourselves with a number of issues: at Frans Vosman's behest: models of governance, philosophies of citizenship and participation, and political ethics; at my behest: learning processes in change management (*Communities of Practice*), drawing up an inventory of frequently used philosophies of care, views of professionalism, and care-based models of consultation and dialogue. I had worked to expand the Chair in *Presence and Care* and in this context, Anne Goossensen was appointed (2011), with presence and mental health care as her primary remit.

Moreover, Frans Vosman took the initiative to establish an international academic series of books entitled *Ethics of Care*, published by Peeters in Leuven (Belgium). Currently (2020) ten volumes have appeared in this series, authored by a wide range of European scholars, and two further titles are in preparation. Although he was not a member of the editorial board, Frans Vosman sat on the Advisory Board and as such was the main protagonist behind the series, attracting authors and even designing

the covers. The latter all feature the work of Felix Nussbaum (1904), the German Jewish painter who never found a home anywhere, emigrated just before the Second World War, constantly moved house and went on the run, was betrayed, fled, was caught again and escaped again, but was eventually deported to the extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where he was murdered in 1944. Frans Vosman insisted on having this man's work on the cover of a series on care.

In line with these developments and initiatives, we began a (successful) series of debates under the name of *Zorgdebatten* ('Debates on Care'). Once a year we organised a conversation with renowned guests on some topical but controversial issue in care, and this from a care ethical perspective. Our aim was to foster name awareness, attention for presence and the ethics of care, and above all, to develop our own distinct voice and contribution.

Finally, it was again Frans Vosman who took the initiative to develop our own website (www.zorgethiek.nu) with an independent editorial board, a newsletter, a series of interviews with international care ethicists, reports and columns and a link to the CCC research group.

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Frans Vosman was a member of the Humanities Faculty Board, and he soon understood that the current was changing and that a department or Master's programme dedicated to care ethics would no longer be welcome at the faculty as it was developing. The new emphasis was on hardcore philosophy (logic and artificial intelligence) and international prestige, even though the motto of the university was *Understanding society*. The vestiges of the old theology department would have to go and even though care ethics was very successful, including in terms of student numbers and PhDs, it simply did not fit the new profile. We began to explore alternative locations and found one at the University for Humanistic Studies in Utrecht. This university was interested in creating a new Master's degree course for care ethics alongside the degree in humanistic studies. The move was agreed (2011), I switched to Utrecht immediately and Frans Vosman gradually transferred over the two following years (until 2013). He was appointed professor of the ethics of care. We brought everything with us: the degree programme, the students, the debates on care, the website, the research group, the PhD candidates, the series of books.

Initially we continued the 'Tilburg approach' at the new university, also because our large-scale project in St. Elisabeth's Hospital was still ongoing (up to 2014). We expanded the curriculum with a pre-Master's programme in care ethics (to facilitate graduates of universities of applied sciences, who had a practical orientation), giving students the option of doing a double Master's degree (in humanistic studies and care ethics). Frans Vosman and I continued to develop our thinking and, in doing so, the ethics of care. New subjects and theoretical perspectives included (for Frans Vosman:) theories on practices, on the ordinary, on liminality, forms of life, intersectionality and autoethnographic research, and (for me:) theories on quality of care, relationality (we published a lot on this in 2011), perception, recognition (inspired by Annelies van Heijst), epistemic injustice, and particularly a substantial expansion of the repertoire of qualitative empirical research designs.

Frans Vosman had advocated expanding the programme by establishing three new endowed chairs (Carlo Leget – palliative care; Arko Oderwald – literature and medicine; Leo Visser – MS patients). We wanted to create greater research and supervisory capacity. As it turned out, this was not an undivided success: the new recruits were far from being 'care ethics minded' at the time, felt little affinity with the rather specific research and degree programme, the organisation was (chaotic and) in flux, we were still working at two different locations, and the University of Humanistic Studies appointed a new rector.

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As was possibly to be expected, this created tensions: we had lost our relative independence and had to adapt to the requirements and customs of our new surroundings. The new rector favoured New Public Management, in part because the university needed to put its financial house in order, and because it wanted greater control over the departments, the (formation of) PhD candidates and the endowed chairs. The 'old guard' had to go (in this case: Vosman and Baart, but elsewhere also Kunneman and Dohmen), and a new, younger chair of the department was appointed in 2012 (Carlo Leget). Vosman watched in dismay as – in his view – initiatives and innovations were halted and a certain vitality was lost. He also believed that the philosophy of the ethics of care was being watered down and was increasingly being mixed with alien elements (romanticism, talk of communication, spiritual care, personal hobbyhorses, a vague kind of spirituality and art, a 'humanistic belief' in the art of living, autonomy and self-reliance, undeveloped references to Levinas etc.). And he was convinced that the focus on political ethics and institutional policy was being abandoned.

The debates on care were held one last time and then abolished. Frans Vosman protested openly against the lack of serious study and against lazy conformism to mainstream discourse in health care and to the demands of research funding institutions.

The department had to surrender its budget, its website, its series of books (Frans Vosman refused this), its own formation programme for PhD candidates, and even the Zorgethiek.nu association had to be liquidated and merged with the University for Humanistic Studies. Frans Vosman did not agree with any of this but ultimately backed away from a fight.

The new head claimed the de facto exercise of his post in 2014 and Frans Vosman was actually stripped of all management duties and powers (he was no longer head of department, nor of the research group nor coordinator of studies). It caused considerable commotion among fellow lecturers, students and colleagues. There were complaints at the way Frans Vosman was being treated, but he refused to comment publicly. Partly as a result of this, the protests petered out and the reform of the management and the curriculum pressed on. The department, including the four recently established endowed chairs, chose the side of the new regime and distanced itself from Frans Vosman and me. Frans Vosman was nonetheless by far the most popular and respected lecturer in the department among students and, due to his ceaseless studying, was increasingly becoming the expert par excellence in the field of the (international) ethics of care.

In the autumn of 2014, we organised a series of eight seminars in Oxford on core issues in care ethics (*Care practices: towards a recasting of ethics*) together with Professor Jaco Hoffman. This gave Frans Vosman a new impetus and he was back in his element; we travelled weekly from the Netherlands to Oxford and on the basis of the lectures discussed dozens of ideas, all kinds of new literature and interesting possibilities. We were glad to be working on substance again.

Back at the university I was warned to back down or leave. When our research group CCC was dissolved in late 2014 and stripped of its embeddedness in society, its interdisciplinary character and its links with other universities, so that it could be transformed into an internal educational forum for PhD candidates, I decided that enough was enough. I protested strongly and publicly, as I had done when Frans Vosman's functions were taken away, and I was told it was time for me to go. And so I went, albeit with a heavy heart (2015).

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Frans Vosman stayed behind alone and had to move to an office away from the department, in the attic. It was a difficult time for him. He believed he was being marginalised in the department (not outside it!) and found this hard to accept, especially because he thought the Master's programme was rapidly diminishing in quality. He felt that his and my ideas about the basic features of the care ethics of the future were being adopted and accepted (although without referencing their source), but that they lacked substance, body and depth.

In the meantime, a new research network of scholars had been established outside the university, including colleagues from universities of applied sciences (2016: *Critical Ethics of Care*; CEC): a strongly improved version of the older CCC. The English-language website www.ethicsofcare.org, established by Frans Vosman when he was still at Tilburg University was linked to the CEC. After initial hesitations, Frans Vosman decided to participate in both initiatives and our PhD candidates also joined. We subsequently established the Critical Ethics of Care Foundation with a board of its own. Day-to-day management was in the hands of two former doctoral students of Frans's and mine: Dr Sabrina Keinemans and Dr Guus Timmerman. It was in our blood to have a productive research network of our own, even if we had to take it outside the university.

In 2014 we concluded the care ethical project in St Elisabeth's Hospital, and Frans Vosman and I worked on a synthesis of the experiences, insights and perspectives that this had generated, including the (empirical) research by our PhD and other students, a number of hospital staff members and our own research. But Frans Vosman fell ill and I had to complete our book. This volume, *De patiënt terug van weggeweest* ('The return of the patient')⁹ was presented in Frans Vosman's absence at CEC's first master class, that is, outside the university. The book contains some of the 'mantras' that Frans Vosman had developed and that all had programmatic purport: 'develop care from care' (and not, for instance, from the hospitality ideology of theme parks) and 'think with – think against – think differently' (a formulation of the dynamic of our relationships with practitioners in the field). He also stressed the importance of 'abandoning morality in order to find it' (postponing moralising thought as long as possible), and elsewhere of the necessity of focusing care ethics on 'burning issues' – issues that really matter in society rather than private interests. In the same year, the first PhD student (Hanneke van der Meide) who participated in this project successfully defended her dissertation under the supervision of Carlo Leget and Frans Vosman; the second and third candidates were to follow suit in 2017 (Archie de Ceuninck van Capelle and Marcel Boonen).

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As has been seen, Frans Vosman became seriously ill in 2015 and he had to undergo chemo and radiotherapy as well as major surgery. He lost his health, his energy and initially his morale, and dreaded going back to work after a year, believing that the university was disappointed that he had survived. He increasingly became an old man, tired and pessimistic – and this had less to do with his illness than with developments at the university.

He focused on what he was able to do outside the department and the university: the publication of a number of major works in the *Ethics of Care* series at Peeters. He accepted a tiny and temporary professorship in Vienna, expended a lot of energy on his manifold international contacts (Italy, France, Germany, Scandinavia etc.) who held him in high esteem, and he never stopped studying. I was not the only one to be beleaguered by him with tips and cuttings. He wanted to move away from Anglo-Saxon literature and focus more on French philosophy, Italian ethics and German sociology. The gap between him and the department widened visibly, although students, former students and PhD candidates frequently consulted him and could count on his attention and advice. Frans Vosman and I (I had accepted an appointment elsewhere) continued our conversations, constantly

exchanging books and reading experiences, and continued our joint supervision of the various PhD candidates. Dr Guus Timmerman began to play an increasingly large role as a postdoctoral researcher linked to the Chair in Presence and Care. We tackled the difficult issues surrounding empirical ethics together with him: our duumvirate evolved into a triumvirate.

In 2016 Frans Vosman and Elisabeth Conradi published a 500-page overview in German of developments in the ethics of care (*Praxis der Achtsamkeit: Schlüsselbegriffe der Care-Ethik*; 'The practice of attentiveness: key concepts in care ethics')¹⁰. In this book, Frans Vosman ably and eruditely mapped the scene of European care ethics, as he had done in Oxford. Another overview to which he contributed was written together with Timmerman and Baart (2018): the development of care ethics in the Netherlands and Flanders.¹¹ He was our cartographer.

At Frans Vosman's instigation, the CEC research network developed a clearer understanding and more acute critique of neo-liberalism – the object of much criticism in the health care sector – on the basis of Thomas Biebricher's work: under Timmerman's direction the network published a selection of his (translated) texts together with an introduction and a bibliography (2017). This again highlights the extent to which the ethics of care is developing outside the academy as a variant of political ethics – an old wish and a constant goal of Frans Vosman's: he was the one who introduced Biebricher.

In 2018 we began working on the book that had been postponed due to his illness: a collected volume containing the care ethical lectures in Oxford, expanded, complemented and updated. Progress was slow and because Frans Vosman fell ill again (2019) he had to leave completion of the book to others. It was published in 2020 under the title *The Ethics of Care: the State of the Art*.¹² In this book, like a cartographer, he presented a comprehensive, sublime and extremely well-informed 'world map' of care ethics (and its lacunae and occlusions): he was at this stage clearly an outstanding care ethicist of international allure. His endless reading and studying were evident on every page. But he was gradually also becoming more critical: the ethics of care had to confront its limitations, blind spots and challenges and do something about them. He was clearly annoyed by the prevailing provincialism: self-satisfied care ethical bubbles dotted across the world that were oblivious to each other.

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He gave his valedictory lecture in June 2018. He was in bad physical condition but pronounced a wonderful, innovative and sharply critical speech in which, as a cancer patient, he gave short shrift to the fashionable concept of 'quality of life'. He pointed out that it is often a huge effort merely to survive and develop a form of life that makes this possible; forms of life to which all-too-proper people with all-too-proper schematic concepts fail to do justice. He challenged the ethics of care to become more critical and to free itself of docility to all kinds of lazy and fashionable concepts. This lecture was published under the title *Overleven als levensvorm: Zorgethiek als kritiek op het ideaal van het 'geslaagde leven'* ('Survival as a form of life: Care ethics as a critique of the ideal of the "successful life"'); 2018)¹³, and the prospects are that an English translation will be published posthumously.

In the same year (September 2018), we attended an international conference on 'Care Ethics and Precarity' in Portland together with Guus Timmerman. Frans Vosman's erudition was once again clearly in evidence and he was critical of the quality of many contributions. His fear was that the critical and indispensable concept was losing its edge: essentially, he feared depoliticisation. During the conference he was astute and witty as usual, a language prodigy as he switched, seemingly

effortlessly, from Italian to English or from French to German during his chats ('beppen') with people, all the while speaking to us in Dutch, but physically he was not in good shape.

Back home he pushed on with the PhD students he was supervising (together with others), especially Marij Bontemps-Hommen (practical wisdom of medical specialists), Jeannet van de Kamp (vulnerability and suffering in an experience-economy frame), and Henk den Uijl (on watchdogs in health care). Although these projects have already resulted in publications, he would not live to see the defence of the dissertations.

In 2019, his cancer recurred and Frans Vosman entered a gruelling phase that would last until he died in 2020. He nevertheless succeeded in overseeing the publication of two books as editor that he had long envisaged: one with Per Nortvedt on care ethics and phenomenology (2020)¹⁴ and the second with Sophie Bourgault, providing a forum to French-speaking care ethicists (2020)¹⁵. Moreover, he was actively involved in the publication of two other books: one by Sandra Laugier (on care ethics and the ordinary; ready by the time of his death) and one by Susanne Pohlmann and Christina Schües (published in the month he died). With one exception he never wrote a monograph himself.

In the space of fifteen years he became a brilliant care ethicist, ultimately despite the academic frameworks in which he worked and which became a painful memory for him.

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Andries Baart,

18 June 2020

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See for a comprehensive list the [bibliography](https://ethicsofcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Bibliography-Frans-Vosman.pdf) compiled by Guus Timmerman, published on ethicsofcare.org simultaneously with the biographical sketch here above <https://ethicsofcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Bibliography-Frans-Vosman.pdf>

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